

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI)
New Professionalism and the Future of Teaching

An introduction to the teacher personas tool

What this looks like and how it could be used



A structured process to develop a shared vision for the future of the teaching profession

The CERI's New Professionalism and the Future of Teaching provides countries the opportunity to participate in a multi-national stakeholder study in 2023-24. Together with participating countries, the project team will adapt and tailor two research-based tools. This document provides an overview of one of these: the **teacher personas** tool.

The overall benefits of the teacher personas tool are that it:

- Provides a way to think about motivations and job satisfaction at different stages of the teaching career.
- Provokes thinking about who the future teachers may be and which features would make the teaching profession attractive to them.
- Illuminates how a variety of teachers may respond to a given policy, which can inform smarter policy design and implementation choices.
- Supports anticipatory thinking about the mid to long term.

Why use the teacher personas tool?

CERI argues the need to create space for the teacher profession to flourish in the future. It is all too easy for present policy implications and situations to cloud the debate. Specific focus on the mid -and long term is recommended to mitigate future surprises (Burns and Köster, 2016^[1]). In many education systems, the teaching profession is under pressure from higher demand than supply due to an ageing workforce, high teacher attrition and lack of interest for the profession from young people (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas, 2019^[2]; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021^[3]) This is currently happening within a context of tight labour markets, meaning teachers have different options to leave the profession when not satisfied (OECD, 2022^[4]).

Who may be the future teachers? Perceptions of professional life are changing. A new generation of teachers might have different ambitions and seek different career paths to those currently offered in teaching. Life work balance, finding meaning in what you do and contributing to a sustainable world, matters more to young people today (Deloitte, n.d.^[5]; OECD, 2022^[6]; PwC, 2022^[7]; Ro, 2022^[8]). We can use research to produce personas for possible new recruits to the teaching profession in 2035. This is a way to anticipate evolving motivations and what would make teaching an attractive profession to potential future teachers.

How do we retain talented and motivated teachers? Personas can be used as a tool to illuminate how various teachers may respond to a given policy. When engaging in educational reform, respecting teacher autonomy and teachers' possibility to influence decisions affecting them is vital in many contexts (OECD, 2019^[9]); the development of teacher professionalism is no exception. Mezza (2022^[10]), for example, argues for an active involvement of teachers in a bottom-up rather than a top-down development of teacher professionalism, to ensure change initiatives resonate with the realities of teachers, promote a sense of agency and reduce the risk of failure to achieve the intended goals. In addition, data from the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) in 2018 showed that "keeping up with changing

requirements from local, municipal/regional, state or national/federal authorities” (OECD, 2020, p. 95^[11]) was one of the greatest sources of stress for teachers.

What does the teacher personas tool look like?

First, what are “personas”? They have primarily been used in design processes, such as in user-interface design to match the software to the needs of the intended users (Madsen et al., 2014^[12]). Huynh et al. (2021^[13]) note that they provide a set of user archetypes that are “lifelike characters that are driven by potential or real users’ personal goals and embody their experiences when using products” (Cooper, 1999^[14]; Blomkvist, 2007^[15]). In this way they are a useful tool to help consider how to best align a product with users’ needs.

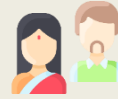
Why not apply this way of thinking when designing education policy? What do we know about our teachers and how would they react to the proposed policy? To illustrate the potential of this tool, an OECD working paper (Nilsson Brodén, 2022^[16]) develops and presents an initial set of six teacher personas (Box 1). These are informed by teacher reports on collaboration (in the TALIS 2018 survey) (OECD, 2020^[11]); information on generational characteristics including distinct features of generations X (adults in their 40s to mid-50s), Millennials (adults in their mid-20s to 30s), Z (teenagers to adults in their mid-20s) and Alpha (young people born from 2010 on) (Deloitte, n.d.^[5]; Generation Y, n.d.^[17]; McCrindle, 2020^[18]; My Business, n.d.^[19]); and research on teacher burnout (Gómez-Domínguez et al., 2022^[20]; Madigan and Kim, 2021^[21]).

Five of the six teacher personas are informed by TALIS findings (Nilsson Brodén, 2022^[16]). The analysis of teacher reports reveals how collaborative activities relate to job satisfaction, school culture and stress levels and whether these vary based on demographic factors. Gender was found to not be an important factor in deeper forms of collaborative behaviour, for example, teaching in teams. As such, the personas are constructed in pairs (one male, one female) which share the same description. Each pair works at the same school, as deeper forms of professional collaboration are related to school culture factors, specifically a collaborative school culture, teachers relying on each other and providing impactful feedback.

In the multi-national stakeholder study, the New Professionalism and the Future of Teaching project team will work with participating countries to develop a set of specific national teacher personas, drawing on the TALIS 2018 data and other national and international research. The persona categories/ types can also be expanded to focus on country specific research questions.

Box 1. Meet the teacher personas

Kim and Bill, the opportunity-seeking confident problem solvers



Kim and Bill are in their late 40's. They come from a family of teachers. Currently, they have a desire to seek out diverse opportunities that provide challenge in both their personal and professional lives. They work full time in a school with a collaborative culture where they can rely on their colleagues. They receive feedback which they value as something that improves their teaching. They enjoy working with peers on topics of interest. They have strong self-efficacy, low stress levels, and are seen as a problem solver amongst their peers.

Sam and Beatrice, the unheard middle-aged seekers



Sam and Beatrice are in their early 50's. Recently, they have been questioning whether they are making a difference at work and in their personal lives. They have been working full time in their current school for many years, are confident in their teaching skills and are often sought out as a problem solver. They feel like their voice has not been heard during a period of extensive change at both the school and system levels. They are open to professional collaboration but have few opportunities relevant to their needs. They perceive the feedback they receive to be irrelevant to their teaching practices. Despite changes and increase in workload, they are able to manage their stress levels most of the time.

Robin and Florian, the time-stressed family-builders



Robin and Florian are in their 30's. They work part time at a school with limited time and opportunities for professional development during the school day. Family responsibilities conflict with the opportunities for professional development they receive. They are often stressed and feel dissatisfied with the life-work balance. The feedback they receive is useful to their teaching but they would prefer more opportunities for discussions that develop their work.

Eden and José, the networked and ambitious collaborators



Eden and José are in their early 30's. They work full time and are ambitious at work and in their personal lives. They have a strong connection with broad networks in person and online, which they use to lead new projects at the school and connect with other teachers and professionals beyond their school. Even though their peers in other professions have greater flexibility, they appreciate working in a school with a collaborative mindset and opportunities for professional collaboration. They aren't as stressed as their friends working in schools with less of a collaborative environment. They seek out, and receive, impactful feedback on their teaching from a variety of sources.

Cinders and Phoenix, the exhausted doubters



Cinders and Phoenix taught throughout the years of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have noticed a negative change in themselves compared to the pre-pandemic era. They often feel emotionally exhausted, and a lack of motivation. They have missed out on social events with friends and family because of a need to complete teaching tasks after work, which has left them feeling lonelier. At work, they are finding increasing work demands exacerbated by high levels of uncertainty and a lack of resources. Their self-efficacy is low, and they question their competence. Their school provides

good communication and is improving their support processes in response to an identified need. They have taken opportunities to be involved in creative projects at the school which they have enjoyed.

Ciel and Spacey, the hyperconnected, well-being centred professionals of the future



Ciel and Spacey enter the teaching profession 2035. Similar to their peers across other professions, they recognise they will be working longer than any other generation before them and place great importance for well-being in life and at the workplace, along with salary levels. They look forward to adaptable and personalised work opportunities. They see teaching as one of several professions they will pursue in their career. They are hyperconnected and expect extensive and flexible professional collaboration within and outside the school. They thrive from having mentoring leaders who actively facilitate their empowerment.

Source: (Nilsson Brodén, 2022_[16]).

Example of how to use the teacher personas tool

Let's have a look at an example of how we could use the tool. Here we apply it to a fictional policy setting: introducing teaching assistants to help teachers with administrative and social matters (Figure 1).

The main purpose of teacher personas is to provoke thinking among policy- and decision makers at various levels regarding how they can make smarter policy design and implementation choices, tending to the needs of different teachers.

The tool is used in a three-step process:

1. A description of a fictional situation explaining policy- and implementation-related choices is provided to give context (see "Situation" in Figure 1).
2. A consideration is made to how the six personas' willingness to remain in the teaching profession could be affected based on the change described in the fictional situation. This is plotted on a continuum spanning from a negative (left) to a positive (right) effect.
3. An analysis of how the policy- and implementation related choices could be done differently to get a different expected effect on the personas is provided.

In this example, the fictional situation is to introduce teaching assistants for the purpose of alleviating teachers from administrative and social tasks. How would this policy and implementation choices affect each of the teacher personas and their willingness to stay in the profession? As shown in Figure 1, it is expected to have a positive impact on most personas' willingness to stay in the profession. This is, however, expected for different reasons.

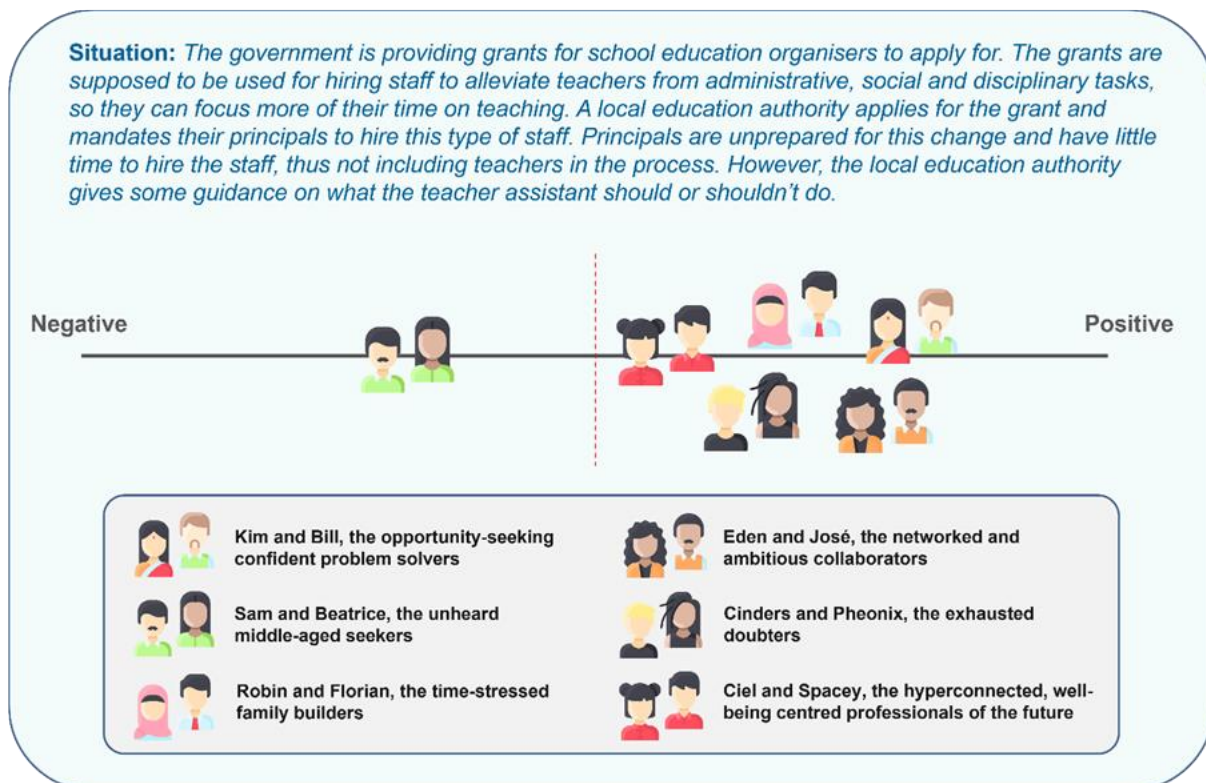
- Eden and José, the networked and ambitious collaborators, who are placed furthest to the right, are expected to appreciate the change because of their ambitious traits – they realise that the change will give them more time to focus on teaching-related tasks. They like to collaborate and see great potential in benefits for the students from the new

role. Since they are not as stressed as other teachers, the redistribution of tasks, roles and responsibilities will not be as emotionally hard on them as some other teachers.

- Cinders and Phoenix, the exhausted doubters, are expected to experience the change positively despite their exhaustion. Since they are experiencing increasing work demands, they acknowledge that the introduction of teaching assistants to alleviate them from certain tasks would be beneficial and the opportunity to have closer contact with another adult can reduce feelings of isolation. However, they already experience high levels of uncertainty, so the non-inclusion of the teachers in the process is demanding for them.
- Sam and Beatrice, the unheard middle-aged seekers, have been placed on the negative side mostly because of their history of experiencing extensive change without being heard. Once again, a policy change is imposed on them, without the opportunity to have a say, despite that the change will entail a very tangible change to their roles, responsibilities, and day-to-day tasks. Furthermore, they have found ways to handle their stress, so they would not see great benefits from the change to their workload.

Figure 1. Example of how to use the teacher personas tool

Introducing teacher assistants to help with administrative and social matters



Source: (Nilsson Brodén, 2022_[16]).

We can use the teacher personas to think about how this would change if something in the policy or its implementation changes. What would happen with the different persona if principals had the time to involve teachers in the process? Is there something we could change

that would put Sam and Beatrice further to the right? How would that affect the others? These and similar questions can be asked to fine tune the policy- and implementation related choices.

The policy initiative would likely yield increased benefits if it would have been implemented differently. A general shift to the right would likely occur if the principal had had the time to involve teachers and other staff members in the discussion about roles and responsibilities, and how the collaboration between teachers and the assistant would take place.

When implemented as described in the fictional situation, initial resistance is likely to take place due to an uncertainty related to what the change will entail. The guidance from the education authority regarding what the teaching assistants should do is likely to reduce some of this feeling of uncertainty, but an involvement of teachers at the school level in the shaping of the roles would have been better.

As time goes by, more teachers are expected to perceive the change positively. Reduced administrative work, and the feeling that they can focus more on tasks related to planning, conducting, evaluating and collaboratively developing their teaching practices, is very likely to affect teachers' willingness to stay in the profession positively in the long run, since they will get more time to do what they are trained for, and gain increased job satisfaction from deeper collaboration with colleagues.

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