

VA Victorian Association for **TE** the Teaching of English

Sample panel abstracts from VATE events

What matters to you as an English teacher? Exploring the connections between teacher identity, agency, wellness, workload and sustainability

In teaching, who you are matters. The personal and the professional are intrinsically entwined. While there are few opportunities to explore teacher identity in schools, research shows that teacher identity can directly influence sense of purpose, agency, growth, wellbeing and ultimately the motivation to remain in the profession (Rushton et al., 2023; Sachs, 2005; Varadharajan & Beauchamp, 2021).

This Dialogue Seminar, the third in a VATE series that brings teachers and researchers together, will examine the notion of teacher identity and its link to maintaining a positive, healthy and thriving workforce. The following key questions will focus the discussion: What sustains English teachers and enables long-term commitment to the profession? What is the relationship between identity development and teacher agency? If teacher identity is situated, relational and dynamic, what contextual factors powerfully shape and shift who we are in schools? What tensions and paradoxes do teachers currently confront as they make decisions about how to act and how to be? Do issues of workload and wellness force teachers to compromise on aspects central to identity? And finally, how can we support teachers to engage in meaningful 'identity work' so that they better understand what they do, feel and believe – and can share this with others? (205 words)

References:

- Rushton, E., Rawlings Smith, E., Steadman, S., & Towers, E. (2023). Understanding teacher identity in teachers' professional lives: A systematic review of the literature. *Review of Education*, 11, e3417. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3417>
- Sachs, J. (2005). Teacher education and the development of professional identity: Learning to be a teacher. In P. Denicolo & M. Kompf (Eds.), *Connecting policy and practice: Challenges for teaching and learning in schools and universities* (pp. 5–21). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203012529>
- Varadharajan, M., & Buchanan, J. (2021). The recruitment, support, retention and attrition of teachers in Australia. In *Career change teachers: Bringing work and life experience to the classroom* (pp. 9–30). Springer. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-16-6038-2>

A place at the table: Literature and representation in the English classroom

'A place at the table' is more than a metaphor for inclusion: it's a call for advocacy, equity, and action. It's not just about being present in the room; it's about having a voice that shapes the conversation. For students, it means seeing themselves reflected in the stories they read, being invited to share their own narratives, and being empowered to speak up and push back against systems that silence or exclude. For educators, it's a reminder that inclusion doesn't happen by accident – it requires intentional choices, courageous conversations, and a deep commitment to building classrooms where every student feels seen, heard, and valued.

In this dynamic panel discussion, two authors will reflect on their own journeys to claim a seat at the table – through storytelling, resilience, and the power of voice. They'll share how literature can act as both mirror and catalyst, sparking empathy, fostering inclusion, and inspiring critical think, and give educators practical ideas for how to include diverse texts on their booklists and celebrate representation in meaningful ways. With a focus on identity, voice, and representation, this conversation will challenge and inspire educators to think deeply about the stories they teach and the voices they centre. (199 words)