

## TEACHER CLIMATE SUPERPOWERS

DR. KATITZA MARINKOVIC CHAVEZ, PHOEBE QUINN, NATHANIEL BARKER AND PROF. LISA GIBBS

*Dr. Katitza Marinkovic Chavez, Phoebe Quinn, Nathaniel Barker and Prof. Lisa Gibbs discuss new research and co-designed resources to support teacher wellbeing in the face of climate change...*

Climate change is a wellbeing issue for students and teachers. In this article, we share insights from research into the challenges teachers face and what can help support their 'climate wellbeing', while also supporting student wellbeing and learning. We also introduce the Teacher Climate Superpowers resources, which have been co-developed with Australian teachers, to support them, their students and the planet in the face of climate change.

### CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WELLBEING ISSUE FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

There is growing awareness of climate distress among students, with teachers playing a vital role in helping them navigate it. However, teachers' own climate wellbeing is often overlooked, with limited research and resources to promote it.

We approach the notion of 'climate wellbeing' from a holistic perspective to better understand how people experience their wellbeing in the face of the various challenges presented by climate change. Teacher climate wellbeing is important in its own right, as well as being necessary for teachers' ability to support students and promote sustainable practices in schools.

### BUILDING ON A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH: YOUR CLIMATE SUPERPOWERS

In 2022, we collaborated with over 70 young people to develop a resource to support young people's climate well-being (Marinkovic Chavez et al, 2023). The resulting website, [www.climatesuperpowers.org](http://www.climatesuperpowers.org), centres on the idea of 'climate superpowers' that enhance personal and collective resilience.

There are seven superpowers: social, natural, cultural, political, built, financial, and human (Quinn & Marinkovic Chavez, 2022). The website includes a fun quiz to help students discover their main superpowers. Based on their personal strengths and interests (superpowers),

students are invited to engage in different actions for climate learning, self-care, and social transformation. The website's content and its design, including the interactive quiz and striking illustrations, were all shaped by co-designers aged between 12 and 25 years over a series of workshops (Marinkovic Chavez et al, 2023).

### CLIMATE SUPERPOWERS IN THE CLASSROOM

After the Climate Superpowers website launched, we heard from many teachers interested in using it to support their conversations with students about climate change. However, given the many demands on teachers' time, there was a clear need for classroom-ready resources to facilitate this uptake.

So, along with teacher and student co-designers, we created lesson plans, curriculum guides, and activity materials to discuss climate change in the classroom. These resources were aligned with the Australian Curriculum and made freely accessible via the existing website (see the [Classroom Resources](#) section of the website). This is an evolving set of resources, which is being refined and grown as passionate teachers and students experiment with activity formats in classrooms.

Throughout this process, we have encountered many dedicated teachers going above and beyond in their efforts to support students and sustainability in schools, often with very little recognition or resourcing. This highlighted an important area for further attention and support: teacher climate wellbeing.

### NEW INSIGHTS ON THE EMOTIONAL WEIGHT OF CLIMATE CHANGE FOR TEACHERS

Previous research has shown evidence of teachers dealing with their personal concerns about climate change and experiencing feelings of anxiety, helplessness, guilt, and frustration (Hermans, 2016; Pihkala, 2020). Many have reported feeling unsure or underprepared to manage climate discussions without distressing students

(Bleazby et al., 2023; Hopman, 2022) due to a lack of knowledge or access to information about the topic. However, research on teacher climate-related experiences is scant, and often narrowly focused on impacts on student learning.

With support of the Teachers Health Foundation and the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, we have been conducting further research to deepen understandings of current experiences of teachers in Australia, including challenges they are facing, strategies they find helpful, and changes they want to see in relation to climate wellbeing (students' and their own). This project, called Teacher Climate Superpowers, aims to develop strategies to support teachers, school leaders, and the education system in holistically supporting climate wellbeing.

Across 14 qualitative interviews and four workshops with 56 teachers, we have heard about a wide range of wellbeing challenges, relating to teachers' own thoughts and feelings relating to climate change, difficulties relating to student climate distress (e.g. anxiety, anger, hopelessness) or disengagement, systemic and resourcing issues, (e.g. curriculum and time constraints), tensions within some school communities (e.g. interactions with colleagues or parents, political disagreements), and environmental events such as bushfires, floods, storms, drought and extreme heat.

### TEACHER CLIMATE SUPERPOWERS: A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE CO-DEVELOPED WITH AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS

Through the workshops and interviews described above, we have also been collaborating with Australian teachers to create a strengths-based, practically useful online resource. This [Teacher Climate Superpowers](#) professional development resource is specifically designed to support teacher climate wellbeing while continuing to develop the student-focused resources. The aim is to empower teachers by providing a structured space to explore, plan, and act on their climate wellbeing alongside their efforts to support students and the environment.

The Teacher Climate Superpowers resource is being piloted from May 2025. It is a choose-your-own-adventure kind of resource, with multiple possible modes of

engaging with the content depending on each teacher's preferences. This includes:

- **webinars** (live and recorded)
- a **quiz**, teachers can discover their personal strengths (superpowers) relevant to climate action and well-being.
- a **guided reflection 'action plan' tool** to help teachers promote their wellbeing, student wellbeing and learning, and planetary health. For each one of these three topics, teachers are invited to explore their personal challenges, existing strengths/resources/practices/successes, and plans for action going forward.
- interactive, **self-paced modules** that provide evidence-based strategies for addressing climate anxiety and stress, and opportunities for connecting with other teachers.

Teacher Climate Superpowers aims to be a useful professional development resource for teachers to connect to the latest evidence on student and teacher climate wellbeing. It is meant to serve as a practical tool to deal with everyday challenges and promote in-depth reflection.

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE TEACHER CLIMATE SUPERPOWERS PILOT

We invite teachers working across Australia to join the Teacher Climate Superpowers pilot study between Terms 2 and 3, 2025. Participation is open to individuals as well as groups of teachers who want to engage as part of a school or teacher network.

Based on your feedback, we will continue refining the platform as a living and growing resource so it can effectively help teachers feel confident to discuss climate change with students and manage the impacts of climate change on their wellbeing. Listening to teachers is crucial for this resource to meet the needs of both teachers and students effectively. Tailoring resources to teachers' needs is essential to foster resilience and wellbeing within the education sector amid growing environmental challenges.

For more information about the Teacher Climate Superpowers 2025 Pilot, please contact Dr Katitza Marinkovic Chavez, [marinkovick@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:marinkovick@unimelb.edu.au), or Phoebe Quinn [phoebeg@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:phoebeg@unimelb.edu.au).

Follow this link to access Teacher Climate Superpowers:

<https://climatesuperpowers.org/teachers>

***The Teacher Climate Superpowers has components based on the Australian Curriculum, which can be used directly by a number of States and Territories. The NSW Teachers Federation and the Centre for Professional Learning are in discussions with the University of Melbourne to develop a NSW curriculum focus. The program is up and running but certain parts of the platform are still under construction.***

## REFERENCES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Katitza Marinkovic Chavez](#) is a psychologist and Research Fellow in Participatory Methods at the Disaster, Climate and Adversity Unit in [Melbourne School of Population and Global Health](#). Her research focuses on empowering children and young adults to articulate their strengths in advocating for climate action, and has co-developed with young people the [Your Climate Superpowers](#) website. With Phoebe Quinn, Katitza led the [Young People's Climate Superpowers project](#), and co-leads the Intergenerational Justice Stream of the Climate Collaborative Action for Transformative Change in Health and Healthcare (CATCH) Lab.



[Phoebe Quinn](#) is a Research Fellow in Disaster Recovery at the [Melbourne School of Population and Global Health](#). Her work focuses on disaster resilience, community wellbeing and social justice, and the development of strengths-based resources relating to disasters and climate change. Phoebe's research is firmly oriented towards informing policy and practice, and exploring how democratic innovations using digital technologies can support community decision-making around disasters and climate change. With Katitza Marinkovic Chavez, Phoebe led the [Young People's Climate Superpowers project](#), and co-leads the Intergenerational Justice Stream of the Climate Collaborative Action for Transformative Change in Health and Healthcare (CATCH) Lab.



[Lisa Gibbs](#) is a Professor of Public Health and Director of the Disaster, Climate and Adversity Unit in [Melbourne School of Population and Global Health](#) and Academic Lead for Community Resilience and Public Health in the Centre for Disaster Management and Public Safety. Her research focuses on disaster recovery and resilience particularly relating to the interplay between individual and community level outcomes. Professor Gibbs also leads a range of research studies relating to child health, wellbeing, and citizenship. Prof Gibbs also leads the Teachers Climate Superpowers project, to co-develop resources with and for teachers to promote teacher wellbeing in the context of climate change.



Nathaniel Barker, MPH is an educator and holder of a Master's in Public Health, is deeply committed to climate education. In his role, he has been part of the Climate Superpowers project, collaborating with fellow educators to co-create effective and tailored resources informed by evidence and lived experiences. Nate's research has focused on exploring teachers' experiences of well-being in the face of climate change, a crucial aspect of equipping educators to address this pressing issue.

