Wellbeing in initial teacher education: using poetic representation to examine pre-service teachers' understanding of their self-care needs

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Abstract

Creating psychologically safe spaces for pre-service teachers to talk about their hopes, dreams and tensions of becoming teachers is complex work that requires teacher educators to engage with a range of pedagogical practices. A teacher educator must consider how they create this safe space, offering opportunity for vulnerabilities to be revealed. But a teacher educator must also be vulnerable them self; with an awareness for not always knowing what one will be told, will hear or will see. I argue that a mindfulness practice supports being grounded and an ability to hold the space for pre-service teachers as they explore their wellbeing and thus develop, grow, maintain and protect their self-care. In this paper, I draw on reflective and goal setting data to examine pre-service teachers' understandings of their own wellbeing and self-care needs. I use poetic representation to illuminate practices that provide insight into what resources are drawn upon, and what concerns pre-service teachers have as they prepare for their last professional experience placement before graduation. Poetic representation of data provides opportunity to connect with the experiences of pre-service teachers and reveals where there are gaps that can provide us opportunities to consider where we locate pre-service teacher wellbeing in initial teacher education.

Abstrak

Menciptakan ruang yang aman secara psikologis bagi calon guru agar mereka dapat berbicara tentang harapan, impian, dan persoalan yang dihadapi ketika menjadi guru merupakan pekerjaan kompleks yang mengharuskan pendidik untuk terlibat dengan berbagai praktik pedagogis. Seorang pendidik harus mempertimbangkan bagaimana mereka menciptakan ruang aman ini, dan memberikan kesempatan pada calon guru untuk mengungkapkan kerentanan mereka. Tetapi seorang pendidik juga harus sadar bahwa diri mereka sendiri pun rentan, dan sadar bahwa mereka tidak selalu mengetahui apa yang diceritakan, atau apa

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yang didengar dan dilihat. Saya berpendapat bahwa praktik kesadaran harus didukung, sehingga dapat membantu calon guru dalam mengeksplorasi kesejahteraan mereka, dan dapat mengembangkan, menumbuhkan, menjaga, dan melindungi perawatan diri mereka. Dalam makalah ini, saya menggunakan data reflektif untuk meneliti pemahaman calon guru terhadap kebutuhan kesejahteraan dan perawatan diri mereka. Saya menggunakan representasi puitis untuk menjelaskan praktik apa saja yang dilakukan, sumber daya apa saja yang digunakan, dan apa yang menjadi perhatian para calon guru pada saat mereka ditempatkan untuk praktek mengajar sebelum mereka lulus dari pendidikan guru. Representasi puitis data dapat memberikan kesempatan pada kita untuk memahami pengalaman calon guru, menemukan celah yang ada, dan memberi kesempatan pada kita untuk mempertimbangkan pentingnya memasukkan aspek kesejahteraan calon guru ketika mereka sedang dalam pendidikan.

Keywords Self-care · Wellbeing · Pre-service teachers · Initial teacher education · Poetic representation

Locating self-care and wellbeing discussions in initial teacher education

Preparing pre-service teachers in initial teacher education involves a careful curation of theory and practice links to scaffold these future teachers for a sustained career in education. Wellbeing and self-care are crucial aspects to this preparation. A key element and united goal should be to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop skills and strategies to build and cultivate confidence for coping with challenges professionally (Day & Gu, 2014). However, the responsibility for scaffolding pre-service teachers' knowledge, confidence and capacity to build their professional resilience is not always fully or clearly understood (Mansfield et al., 2020). Less attention has typically been focused on addressing pre-service teachers' wellbeing. In the context of Australia, where I am located, the development of initial teacher education degrees is overseen by external accreditation and is often specifically focused on how degrees prepare pre-service teachers to meet and demonstrate teaching standards. These standards neglect to focus on the place of teacher wellbeing in any one of the 37 focus areas across the seven standards. As such, it is not uncommon to find that national initial teacher education degrees abandon this crucial area.

During initial teacher education degrees, work integrated learning or professional experience, as it is more commonly referred to, occurs regularly with pre-service teachers spending time within educational contexts such as schools developing their craft as a teacher and making explicit links to theory and practice. They work intensively with at least one mentor, a teacher who is active within the classroom context and able to support the development of the pre-service teacher as a future member of the profession. This is where pre-service teachers can authentically develop professionally. This is also a time where stress levels rise (Lemon & McDonough, 2020). Pre-service teachers are commonly still negotiating university class expectations and requirements, being assessed for professional experience and are also navigating all other areas in their personal life—part time work, family, caring responsibilities, home duties, caring for children, investing in relationships, maintaining links with friends and/or travel. They are in transition between feeling like a student but thinking like a teacher (Flores, 2020).

During professional experience, pre-service teachers encounter a number of critical moments that require them to navigate their wellbeing and self-care routines. If attention hasn't been paid to these areas, stress levels, exhaustion, physical and mental illness can often be exhibited. It is not uncommon to have revealed that many pre-service teachers have not considered or been prepared sufficiently for these challenges (Caires et al., 2009). This is where self-awareness is often missing for the pre-service teacher (Sharplin et al., 2016). Revealed also are any gaps in initial teacher education training and the location of wellbeing and self-care to support pre-service teachers to effectively cope and develop their resilience in the face of stress (Mansfield, Beltman and Weatherby-Fell, 2020) and for subsequent preparation for their careers as teachers (Weldon, 2018).

Professional learning needs identified: positioning self-care in initial teacher education

No Australian teaching standard specifically addresses wellbeing. Yet, we know teacher wellbeing is a crucial element for sustained fruitful careers and is an issue attached to attrition (e.g. Turner and Thielking, 2019). We do, however, have some creative ways that we can attend to meeting these teaching standards, and in this paper, I connect with one way this has been done to meet external accreditation requirements. The approach shared in this paper also acknowledges that we must talk about teacher wellbeing, and we must draw attention to wellbeing for pre-service teachers during their initial teacher education degrees. In this paper, I share one of these approaches, whereby utilising one of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2017) focus areas as a leverage point to encourage pre-service teachers to think about their professional learning needs in regard to their wellbeing.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers have been established by the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to support teachers to think about and evidence their professional growth across three broad areas: (1) professional knowledge, (2) professional practice and (3) professional engagement. These standards have been designed to support the progression throughout a teacher's career across graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead stages. Within these three broad areas are seven standards, each having multiple focus areas. In the professional engagement standard, one of the focus areas is called 'engage in professional learning'. This focus area requests a demonstration of "understanding of the role of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers in identifying professional learning needs" (AITSL, 2017, para. 30). It is this focus area I saw as being a crucial leverage point to encourage pre-service teachers to draw attention to their self-care needs.

In the university context where this study was carried out, pre-service teachers undertaking their final professional experience placement were required to complete three assessment tasks: (1) formative assessment task focusing on one professional focus area, (2) a portfolio providing evidence of how one professionally meets all 37 of the AITSL Graduate Professional Standards for Teachers and (3) successful completion of 20 days in an educational setting via a mentor teacher assessment report reporting to all 37 AITSL Graduate Professional Standards for Teachers. It is the formative assessment task that I saw as an opportunity to embed a purposeful and meaningful teachable moment for pre-service

6.1 Identify and plan professional learning needs

Demonstrate an understanding of the role of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers in identifying professional learning needs.

TASK OUTLINE

You are required to reflect on focus area 6.1 in light of your current practice, drawing from your experiences in your last professional experience placement.

Refer back to your previous placements and consider your wellbeing and self-care and what requires additional professional learning for you to maintain, protect and develop your health. We know teaching is stressful, and professional experience is as well even more so during COVID-19. Teacher wellbeing and self-care are worthy of our attention and in this formative assessment task you are required to set a goal for your wellbeing. Connect this back to a specific incident from a past placement (you could refer to a mentor comment, an observation in yourself, routines you set up, Instagram posts, etc). Then, reflect upon this focus area in light of your developing practice and then set a relevant, clear and specific goal for your upcoming placement or profession ahead if you have completed placement.

Fig. 1 Formative assessment task brief sample

teachers in relation to their wellbeing. In this formative assessment task, pre-service teachers were required to reflect upon their past professional experience placements and identify key moments where their self-care or wellbeing needed some attention. The brief involved pre-service teachers to write a 200-word reflection that was located in literature and specifically articulated a goal for their self-care with explicit focus on their upcoming professional experience placement (See Fig. 1).

Self-care

The term self-care, as with wellbeing, is elusive to define. For this paper, I draw on the definition whereby self-care involves steps to develop, protect, maintain and improve health, wellbeing or wellness (Self-Care Forum, 2019). In this sense, self-care is a proactive action (Reading, 2018) that is underpinned by self-awareness, balancing of self and other interests (Norcross, 2000) and reflection (Cook-Cottone, 2016). Personal growth is a significant part of self-care in relation to wellbeing (Santana and Fouad, 2017). Self-care is therefore composed of actions within an individual's control to manage health (Narasimhan & Kapila, 2019). It is, however, complex as the practice of self-care involves factors that support change or actions that require modification, while also acknowledging limitations in the individual's ability to take action (Gbhardt Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). Furthermore, although self-care is about individual responsibility (Denyes et al., 2001), it is not an entirely individual act (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019), as it is reliant on relationships with others (e.g. family, dependants, community, workplaces and/or culture, etc.) and also systems such as healthcare (Duggan et al., 2018).

Poetic representation as an illustration of contemplative pedagogy

In examining, the experience of pre-service teachers and the tensions they encounter in their becoming; poetic representation of data provides an entry point for considering the nature of this becoming a teacher and locating self-care. I draw on Laurel Richardson (1997) who argues that “lived experience is lived in a body, and poetic representation can touch us where we live, in our bodies” (p. 143). Poetry, is both a contemplative practice and a research reporting process (Yoo, 2019). Through poetry we can communicate concisely and with intensity to ignite a response from the audience; the poems are representative of both the process and outcome. This approach draws “on poetic representation as a means of displaying and disseminating research data” and provides scope to honour voices “to be heard in ways that move beyond cognitive, intellectual modes” (McDonough, 2018, p. 113).

The vulnerability as a teacher educator, a life-long learner also, to engage with conversations on self-care with pre-service teachers and represent this in poetic form promotes critical moments of being present with suffering, celebrations, worries and anticipation. As a teacher educator, I hold the space for pre-service teachers both in the deep listening and nurturing of “generative dialogue that opens new doors of learning co-constructively” (Laryea 2018, p. 17). Poetry is, thus, seen as an entry point into accessing current reality for the pre-service teachers who have engaged with their self-care needs individually and collectively. Poetry honours the “essence of the how, the why, the what” (Carroll, Dew & Howden-Chapman 2011, p. 624) of becoming a teacher. It is from this perspective that holding this space facilitates a contemplative practice whereby “various approaches, disciplines and methods for developing attentiveness, awareness, compassion, concentration, presence, wisdom and the like” (Komjathy, 2017, p. 312) are embraced. As such “contemplative pedagogy allows space for critical subjectivity and the exploration of a given topic through direct, personal and lived experience” (Komjathy, 2017, p. 167). It promotes “introspection and reflection allowing students [and teacher educators] the opportunity to focus internally and find more of themselves in their courses” (Barbezat & Pingree, 2012, p. 180). It allows me to endeavour to teach the whole person, promoting personal connection and awareness that can lead to insights (Hooks, 2003).

As an initial teacher educator who has encouraged, scaffolded and embraced moments of the individual and collective exploration of self-care, poetry is crafted as a response—whereby the pre-service teachers’ voices from their reflection and goals provide opportunities to bounce off and react to their sharing, insights, worries, ruminations, anger and moments of tension. The poetic representations of critical moments are presented simply but effectively of reflections that interrupted ruminations or moments of what usually would be silenced. In this way, critical moments for pre-service teachers are honoured, and thus, we are invited to “slow down and linger with memories, experiences and emotions” (Leggo, 2018, p. 15). The poems are therefore an artistic expression and representation of the pre-service teacher voice and lived experience. Poetic representation provides a space for us as readers to reframe, pay attention to pre-service teachers’ current realities and to allow them be listened too. We can collectively listen. And we collectively reframe self-care as valuable and a necessity.

Ethically in the generation of the poems, it is, I acknowledge, a risk to work this way. Poetic representation of the pre-service teacher voice is often not engaged with. As I transform individual pre-service teachers’ reflections into poems that represent a collective voice, poetry becomes a creative form of expression and representation

allowing me to ignite reaction in the readers' minds and hearts (McDonough, 2018). Like any form of qualitative data analysis, however, the process of constructing poetic representations involves "sifting through data" to identify words, phrases and extracts that "synthesise meaning" (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxiii). I drew on Tim Ingold's (2011) theory of meshworks and entanglements to reveal patterns aligned to notions of self-care. In Ingold's conceptualisation of meshwork, lines run through space as lines of movement and growth as real lines of life, where they meet and sometimes are bound together or "re-imagined as sites of external contact or adjacency" (Ingold, 2011 p. 63). This is a different conceptualisation of a network of drawn lines with intersections at points *A* and *B*, rather they are an inversion (Ingold, 2011, p.63) of thinking about interaction as a simple meeting of lines of flights (Ingold, 2010). In this conceptualisation of a meshwork, Ingold is describing a complexity that is layered; both connecting and adjacent; external meeting and intersecting "behind the conventional image of a network of interacting entities" (Ingold, 2011, p. 63). It is in this layered, complex space where a formalised notion of self-care is extended with a conceptualisation of a meshwork that layers the space, time and life with intersections of external meetings, connections and adjacent, interwoven lines. As I worked with the data, pre-service teacher reflections and goals for self-care, I followed a thematic approach; searching for patterns and relationships to "find explanations for what is observed" (Boeije, 2010, p. 76) through segmenting and reassembling. Recurrent themes were coded, categorised and analysed using a combination of inductive and deductive approaches guided by literature and Ingold's conceptual framework of lines of meshworks (Ingold, 2011). The complex, tangled and layered meshworks subsequently revealed lines of a shared collective stress, of awareness, of building and maintaining professional relationships and of building a toolbox of wellbeing strategies. These are introduced in the following sections of the paper, following an outline of the method and participants.

Study approach

In this paper, I share a small-scale project, with data collected from 20 Australian pre-service teachers in their final year of a four-year undergraduate initial teacher education degree over a duration of a 12-week face-to-face semester. Findings are presented to provide insights into a particular experience for these pre-service teachers at this moment in time of their studies to become primary school teachers and more importantly provide a provocation within a sector where wellbeing of our future teachers is often forgotten about.

Data were collected from pre-service teachers' written reflections and self-care goal setting for their final professional experience where they specifically were addressing a tension point in regard to self-care from a previous placement. The data were not accessed or analysed until teaching had been completed, and assessment results processed as aligned to ethical clearance from the administering university. All data were de-identified and reference to any specific situation or school removed from data.

As I mentioned in the previous section of this paper, data coding was guided by initial teacher education, teacher wellbeing and self-care literature. As such, the poems are participant-voiced poetry where the poems are constructed from reflections and may contain singular or multiple voices within the one poem (Prendergast, 2009).

Initial themes were identified, then specific statements by the pre-service teachers were pulled out under each of these themes. These themes then formed a framework where intersecting ideas and concepts were identified. Under each theme, text was then arranged to present poems. Specific sentences or phrases from each pre-service teacher were gathered for each theme and were placed, shifted around and re-ordered as the poems were created. All poems were constructed of the collective voice, with exact pre-service teacher phrasing, to represent our co-existence, community and co-learning about wellbeing and self-care from and with one another. This informed the identification of interacting lines of entanglements forming meshworks of lived experiences of the pre-service teachers. The pre-service teacher reflective text then informed the construction of poems. Words were not changed, but they were rearranged to construct sentences or poetic effect. As Sharon McDonough (2018) notes “these choices, are not only choices of writing, but ethical choices about how and why to represent the data in this way... [and] I attempted to convey the emotional nature” (p. 103) of the interweaving experiences of pre-service teachers while also remaining true to their reflections about self-care and wellbeing.

Holding the space in practice

In higher education when contemplative practices, or contemplative teaching is engaged, as I will refer to it in this paper, illuminated is connectedness, inclusion, self-awareness and self-examination (Pizzuto, 2018). This is achieved through a slowing down, accepting ambiguity and imperfection and being comfortable with pauses in our daily routine (Miller, 2013). It is mindfulness, as Malgorzata Powietrzynska, Kenneth Tobin and Konstantinos Alexakos reinforce, that “allows us (and our students) to pause, zoom-in on the microsituations and cancel out the cacophonous noise inside and around us and thus develop a sense of equanimity” (2014, p. 67). Contemplative teaching allows one to cultivate an intentional and reflective learning environment, where understanding and accepting the learning community where they are now is central (Eccles and Roeser, 2011). Contemplative teaching also requires one to be vulnerable as a teacher educator and to “open yourself, contextualise that self in societal constructs and systems, co-learn, admit you do not know and be human” (Brantmeier, 2013, p. 2).

I embody contemplative teaching, centred on mindfulness to cultivate my ability to be present in the moment non-judgementally. As an initial teacher educator and meditator, I took a “step back” and became an “unbiased observer of one’s subjective involvement and of the entire situation” (Analayo, 2004, p. 58), to embrace a deep listening to pre-service teachers as they describe their becoming as a teacher. This enabled the establishment of connection with the pre-service teachers by being authentic, vulnerable, open and fair-minded (Clarke, 2012) as I created a community of ‘us’ as co-curators and learners (hooks, 2003). I embodied these ways of being. They were my intentions, formed by my attitude and brought to the forefront through my attention.

I did not teach any formal mindfulness practices, such as beginning a lesson with a meditation. My contemplative practice was situated in the being, and I modelled this to the pre-service teachers, as a way to support the formation of a community of practice underpinned by mutual respect that appreciated the courage and vulnerability one embraces when sharing openly about the tensions, questions and celebrations of becoming a teacher (Clarke, 2012). It was the work of Brene Brown and specifically the Braving Inventory (B. Brown,

BRAVING INVENTORY	
B	Boundaries Respect of boundaries. Clear communication of what is and is not ok.
R	Reliability You can be counted on and you do what you say you will do.
A	Accountability Own up to mistakes, make amends, and apologise.
V	Vault Confidentiality in action underpinned by a respect of what is shared.
I	Integrity Courage over comfort, and you put into practice your values.
N	Non-judgment All can ask for what is needed right now without fear of judgment. Perspectives are appreciated.
G	Generosity A relationship is only a trusting relationship if you can assume the most generous thing about my words, intentions, and behaviours, and then check in with me. Presume the best in people.

Fig. 2 The Braving Inventory (a representation of B. Brown's, [2020](#) work)

<i>Mindfulness Mechanisms</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Focus</i>
Intention	What I hope to get out of practicing mindfulness. Directing my attention with purpose.	The why we practice.
Attention	Paying attention to the inner and outer experience.	What we practice.
Attitude	Paying attention to certain attitudes, noticing habits of the mind and becoming gentler and more appreciative.	How we practice.

Fig. 3 Mindfulness mechanisms

[2020](#)) that allowed me to place a framework around how I am present with the pre-service teachers I was teaching. Brown uses the acronym of BRAVING to represent elements of boundaries, reliability, accountability, vault, integrity, nonjudgement and generosity (see Fig. 2). These are elements of trust and are used to scaffold a safe community of practice where there is a sense of belonging. It is as Brown notes, that trust that is built up on small moments and when we do this, we are brave as we build this connection.

Table 1 A framework for contemplative pedagogical decisions to support vulnerability and openness in the initial teacher education classroom via intersecting the BRAVING Inventory and the mindfulness mechanisms of intention, attention and attitude (IAA)

	Intention	Attention	Attitude
Boundaries	I am setting the intention to bring my mindfulness practice into my work life as a teacher educator to allow me to be authentic and embrace a way of being that enables me to be the best version of myself	The strength of my attention is in being centred and grounded; having an inner composure and self-assurance, whatever the situation, with a deep inner sense of calm and confidence	My attitude is underpinned by an openness, curiosity and honesty to connect with those I am teaching, to accept differences of perspectives, and to embrace different lived experiences as we co-learn with and from one another
Reliability	I am setting the intention to own my decisions and be held accountable for my promises	I cultivate my attention through a loving kindness mini meditation with mantra to guide me. I inhale for me; I exhale for the pre-service teachers. I repeat this as I listen to difficult stories, or prepare as I ask a tough question and wait for the pre-service teachers' to be courageous in sharing when they are ready	I bring my signature strengths of curiosity and self-awareness to assist me to align my intentions while holding the space. I enact compassion, appreciation, kindness, acceptance, open-mindedness and gratitude
Accountability	I am setting the intention to cultivate a community of practice that models and respects differences of opinion and acknowledges biases, assumptions or any incidents that may hinder sharing	I cultivate my attention through an openness to be accountable with any assumptions or biases I may make	My strength of persistence (achieving success by continuing to keep going particularly when things are difficult) and relationship deepener (forming deep, long lasting relationships) underpin an attitude to learn from failures and connect with pre-service teachers to maintain and develop a true connection
Vault	I am setting the intention of mutual respect, to allow open sharing with confidentiality collectively or individually	I cultivate my attention through the action of what I believe is right; embodying a moral compass	My attitude of authenticity where I am being true to myself, even in the face of pressure from others allows me to embody a genuine interest in pre-service teachers' self-care journey
Integrity	I am setting the intention to create a safe space where we can ask and answer the often unspoken questions about self-care	I cultivate my attention through compassion with an open heart and a caring philosophy for the pre-service teachers I am working with	My strength of courage enables me to acknowledge that sometimes I might feel afraid, but I will never let fear stop me from stepping outside of my comfort zone
Non-judgement	I am setting the intention that all pre-service teachers can ask for what is needed at this moment without fear of judgement. Perspectives are appreciated	I cultivate my attention through a grounded breathing, feeling my feet firm on the ground, inhaling slowly and exhaling slower	My attitude is to be in the moment non-judgementally for the pre-service teachers' scaffolded by curiosity that supports deep listening with empathy
Generosity	I am setting the intention to hold a space for pre-service teachers' non-judgementally and with compassion as I create a space for seeing the best in them, creating a community where we share, and where mutual respect and trust is developed over time	I cultivate my attention through a generosity in my sharing, time and deep listening where I am focused on what pre-service teachers' say; listening to not only what words are used but how they are communicated and what energy comes with the message	My attitude of humility where others are acknowledged for their contradictions fed by a sharing culture modelled by myself, sharing my vulnerability of my own self-care journey as a teacher in order to support pre-service teachers for where they are right now in their journey of paying attention to their own self-care

I've further taken these BRAVING principles and aligned them to the mindfulness mechanisms of intention, attention and attitude (IAA) (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin and Freedman, 2006) (See Fig. 3). Intention is the 'why' of practice (Bishop et al., 2004) and is significant in relation to setting a personal vision in practice that supports self-regulation, self-exploration and self-liberation (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin and Freedman, 2006, pp. 375–376). Attention is the 'core' of mindfulness and involves observing one's moment-to-moment, internal and external experience, non-judgementally (Brach, 2003). In doing this, we open up possibilities to willingly let go of our ideas about how we *should be* and simply accept the way that we are in this present moment (Chang, 2018). One can place attention and be mindfully aware, and this has been associated to attentional control, or capacity to make choices and enhance executive attention in situations requiring self-regulation (K. W. Brown, Ryan and Creswell, 2007). Attitude is the 'how' we attend to mindfulness practice and is connected to the qualities one brings to attention and awareness (Ivtzan, 2016). It is the attitude that can be cultivated to support a practice of being in the moment to attend to your own internal and external experiences with openness, kindness and acceptance, with no judgement (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin and Freedman, 2006). With intentional practice, patience, compassion and non-striving to the attentional practice are developed.

Both BRAVING and IAA have been entangled and intertwined in my practice, meshing together with intersections of action that form my contemplative teaching. This mapping is visualised in Table 1 to share with you key drivers behind my contemplative teaching when working with pre-service teachers who are discovering, resisting and uncovering the layers to their self-care.

In the next section of the paper, I share the intersecting lines of the pre-service teachers' lived experiences of understanding self-care. The complex meshworks and intersections are revealed, underpinned by identifying stressors, development of an awareness in the act of self-care and what this looks like in action, acknowledging the place of relationships, and the need to develop proactive action towards one's wellbeing.

Lines of a shared collective stress

During my last placement
my previous placement
my last placement
throughout my most previous placement
during my current placement

Was a very high-stress and time-consuming event
was a stressful time for me
I found myself getting extremely overwhelmed
self-imposed pressure
stress levels and anxiety were something that plagued me throughout

I may have been tired,
stressed,
or overwhelmed...

*Constant stress of placement
 other university tasks
 high expectations and numerous tasks that had been set by my mentor
 responsibilities of outside life
 my immediate family member that lives interstate had received a Cancer diagnosis
 high-stress levels and anxiety due to personal family circumstances
 a fear of not overcoming the 'final hurdle' in my degree*

*Added stresses
 Corona Virus
 physical routines altering my attitude towards learning
 altering my acceptance of the mistakes made in my learning experiences*

*Affected
 my clarity of mind
 my ability to perform in the classroom
 I experienced this pressure and stressed due to juggling too many balls
 I dropped balls*

*I struggled with maintaining a clear head
 at times walked into school feeling unconfident
 focusing on holding myself together rather than improving my teaching*

*I did not begin communication early enough
 expectations
 my mentor's expectations of me
 my expectations of my mentor
 poor communication continued throughout placement and lead to substandard lessons and stress
 from both me
 and my mentor as she tried to ensure classes ran smoothly*

*Anxiety and stress
 affect the classroom environment
 can determine the success of a learning experience
 affect all aspects of my life
 especially the quality of teaching and learning I can provide in the classroom*

*More professional learning is required
 to improve on my wellbeing
 not only inside of the classroom
 but in all aspects of everyday life*

We know teaching is a stressful career, and it is important that educators look after themselves by focusing on their wellbeing to provide the best learning experience for their students (Turner and Thielking, 2019). We also know that pre-service teachers' stress levels rise especially in relation to the time spent in schools during their studies (Lemon and McDonough, 2020). Lines of a shared collective stress reveal these complexities and most importantly the layers of lived experiences that are encountered and negotiated. Illuminated is the need to build the capacity of pre-service teachers for everyday resilience to

enable them to sustain their commitment and effectiveness to the profession but also to support them to be able to respond positively to the unavoidable uncertainties inherent of their professional lives (Day and Gu, 2014). When teachers “understand their own wellness and actively demonstrate the self-regulatory processes encompassed in living well, [they] are more likely to accurately assess, develop, facilitate and inspire well practices among the youth with whom they work. Furthermore, they may be more resilient to the daily stressors of the education system” (Curry and O’Brien, 2012, p. 182).

Lines of awareness

*It became apparent
I need to work on strategies
to take better care of my wellbeing
my self-care needs*

*It would be beneficial
to discover alternative ways
to take better care of my wellbeing
my self-care needs*

*I have not looked into the free services offered by the university
to take better care of my wellbeing
my self-care needs*

*I need to be taking steps to better support my own wellbeing
I will aim to build a wide variety of tools
to take better care of my wellbeing
my self-care needs*

*We discussed strategies
I now know the importance of continually checking in
to take better care of my wellbeing
my self-care needs*

Initial teacher education does not place self-care at the heart of preparing future teachers. Stigma may play a huge part of this, with judgement centred on a fear of what someone else may think or say. Or it may simply be a case of a crowded curriculum, or it may be that accrediting degrees focus on external requirements and thus, do not value teacher wellbeing. Alternatively, self-care and wellbeing may be viewed as being someone else’s job.

Professional learning needs addressing wellbeing and self-care are imperative. When pre-service teachers are exposed to conversations about their wellbeing revealed are layers of not being aware of what is available to support both the growth of self-care strategies but also the positive outcome that is associated with seeking professional help. Evidence in the poem hints at a lack of awareness of what and who is available to offer support; personal responsibility is not evident for some pre-service teachers.

Too often as teachers, we care for others while forgetting to care for ourselves. We know that we cannot care for others if we cannot care for ourselves. Kristen Neff reminds us, self-compassion is required and “entails being kind and understanding toward oneself in

instances of pain or failure rather than being harshly self-critical” (Neff, 2003, p. 223). As teachers, we must show ourselves self-compassion and address our own needs first before we can effectively care for others without draining ourselves to detrimental levels (Neff, 2011). This poem is a reminder of what happens when pre-service teachers are exposed to conversations about self-care. They become aware. Aware of their own needs, gaps, assumptions and the need to care for oneself, as one would a friend in a time of need or experience of raised stress levels.

Lines of building and maintaining professional relationships

*Developing
forming
establish
maintain
strong professional relationships
with my mentor
with colleagues
as many of the staff members*

*I will aim to build professional relationships
this is not only imperative to my wellbeing
imperative to the early years of a successful teaching career
it is an effective way to nurture my wellbeing*

*My goal is to develop strong professional relationships
where I am comfortable
discuss
seek advice
improve my self-confidence*

*I will achieve this goal
being open and honest in all situations
being open to constructive feedback to support my personal and professional growth*

*If I am successful
I will develop a strong support network
will be invaluable in my future career as a teacher*

Support and sense of belonging are crucial elements for early career teachers (Clandinin et al., 2015) and for pre-service teachers the sense to belong and develop relationships has a strong presence (Weatherby-Fell et al., 2019). This poem reveals such layers—the development, establishment, maintaining and strengthening of the place of relationships is communicated through aims, goals and what achievement could and will look like is evident. The teacher mentor is revealed as the critical influencer of this being a successful intention, with a direct correlation to a pre-service teachers’ perceived state of wellbeing and self-care while engaging in professional experience placements. Illuminated also is the tension

of mentor teachers being both supported and judged as they support in the preparation of these future teachers for the profession (McDonough, 2018).

Pre-service teachers can feel hampered if their relationship with a mentor teacher is not fostered by openness (Gray et al., 2019) ultimately influencing how they perceive professional experience and communicate their level of satisfaction with the professional learning experience. Mentoring a future teacher is hard, complex and time-consuming requiring emotional investment; however, this is also the case for the pre-service teacher, with investment required from both perspectives (Le Cornu and Ewing, 2008).

We can also see that for the final year pre-service teacher acknowledgement is made on the crucial place of relationships made throughout the school especially with teachers other than the mentor, noted by Geert Kelchtermans (2017) as professional core relationships. But these can “operate as ‘double-edged swords’ being sources for positive job outcomes (e.g. satisfaction and motivation) as well as for negative job outcomes (e.g. stress or burn-out)” (Harmsen et al., 2018, p. 638).

Lines of building a toolbox of wellbeing strategies

*Purposeful routines
schedule times for me
to look after my wellbeing and self-care needs*

*Find a balance between planning for my classes
and finding time for myself
planning to have at least one hour to focus on my wellbeing
doing something I enjoy*

*Each morning,
before I begin teaching,
I will write down three things I am grateful for
Ensure I have time within my week where I can relax and fit in things that make
me happy,
 like seeing friends,
 playing sport
 or keeping fit*

*Clearly document and schedule tasks throughout the day
including personal tasks,
exercise,
 work,
 university assignments
 and time for me*

*Go for a walk
take a ‘brain break’ or a ‘breather’
listening to music in the background while discussing the day with my mentor*

*Ensuring my organisation is key
 planning ahead with lessons and classroom activities
 giving yourself time to sit back,
 reflect
 or relax
 allowing the mind to return to a positive state*

*My goal is to develop alternative ways to support teaching needs
 to pay closer attention to the way students learn
 continue to develop as an effective communicator,
 in the classroom with students*

*Asking students to reflect with me
 on their learning
 and my teaching practices*

*More direct feedback on the success of learning
 information that I can implement in subsequent lessons
 concrete feedback from students I will feel that I can act on
 and improve my teaching*

*I will aim to build professional relationships with my mentor,
 adopting open communication strategies
 improving my practice
 build positive relationships with mentors and colleagues
 I want to have at least 2 daily conversations with my mentor
 regarding teaching*

*Reach out not only to my mentor, but to as many of the staff members
 form relationships
 in order to better my teaching practices
 where I am comfortable to discuss
 and seek advice on personal and professional matters*

*I
 AIM
 TO
 IMPLEMENT
 SELF-CARE
 INTERVENTIONS*

Not one self-care strategy works at all times for everyone. A self-care toolbox of strategies is required that covers a variety of multiple intentional activities (Lyubomirsky, 2010) across different areas of wellbeing. This offers a framing of self-care that supports embodiment (Lomas, Hefferon and Ivztan, 2017), and a broaden and build approach that embraces novelty (Fredrickson, 2001). This is where I like to think of the strength of curiosity as a way to approach building and sustaining this self-care toolbox of strategies. Curiosity is a motivator for learning, and it is crucial for healthy development and supports one to focus one's attention with an appreciation of novelty, challenge and uncertainty (Kashdan,

Afram, Brown, Birnbeck and Drvoshanov, 2011). To think about the variety and different strategies, there are various wellbeing frameworks that could be used to scaffold this. PERMAH (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, health) is one such framework (see for example McQuaid and Kern's, 2017 development of this framework with the addition of H from Martin Seligman's (2011) original PERMA framework) or Five Ways of Being (connect, be active, take notice, give, keep learning) (Marks, Cordon, Aked and Thompson, 2008) might be one as well, allowing individuals to build on their talents and what energises them in order to support their wellbeing (Louis and Lopez, 2014). As the pre-service teachers build their self-care toolbox of strategies, and indeed become aware of the need to do this, this poem represents moments in time of awareness of what wellbeing strategies can be accessed to assist one to be able to build, maintain, sustain and protect one's wellness. The ending phrase in capitals signifies a communal voice in this intention.

The need for conversations about self-care and wellbeing is still required

In this paper, I set out to remind us that “poetry can transform our hearts, imaginations, intellects and conversations” (Leggo, 2018, p. 73) and as such, poetry constructed from the words and lived experiences of pre-service teachers is shared as a way to ignite our hearts and minds as we collectively begin to understand how our future teachers navigate self-care. As readers, we are collectively vulnerable, opening our hearts to deeply listen, hear, begin to understand, empathise and consider with a curious stance. By using Ingold's framework (2011) in this paper, I reveal the entanglement of lines and intersections that are present in the realisation of what self-care can look like for pre-service teachers. There is no one start or end point to these lines, rather they are entangled, influencing one another at every stage. The multiple complex layers of this lived experience and the meeting points that exist involve the lines of a shared collective stress, of awareness, of building and maintaining professional relationships and of building a toolbox of wellbeing strategies. It is the use of poetry that highlights subtleties that would not have been recognised otherwise.

Conversations about self-care and wellbeing are worthy of our attention as initial teacher educators with and for pre-service teachers (Lemon and McDonough, 2020). The pre-service teachers and I engaged in hard conversations; they reflected honestly and with a rawness that when their words are presented collectively through poetry illuminate a complexity that is often unsaid, hidden and evaded. When we construct and form a safe place to share and inquire, we open up the intention, attention and attitude that facilitates and honours being vulnerable in order to grow. Although self-care is a personal responsibility, it is also relational. It is contemplative teaching underpinned by mindfulness that I argue supports co-learning as a community; whereby relationships are at the forefront to support connection, processing, reflection, sharing and listening with and to one another. As an initial teacher educator addressing pre-service teachers' wellbeing, it is important to provide the space to be able to talk openly about self-care underpinned by deep listening, non-judgementally with an openness to be vulnerable – we do not know what we are going to hear. This is what Brene Brown (2018) reminds us is a full showing up with our whole selves involving one to be unarmoured, being ready to serve and ready to solve problems. It is here where we create a culture where our pre-service teachers can be safe, seen, heard and respected, whereby, we can co-learn with each other as we grow. You, as the reader,

are also a part of this co-learning. When we hold the space it is this explicit awareness, and explicit creation of time within initial teacher education, that equips pre-service teachers to take responsibility for employing proactive action (Price and McCallum, 2015), to learn with and from one another. As initial teacher educators, we too learn with and from our future teachers; about them and us.

In this paper, I present poetic representations of final year pre-service teachers understanding of self-care. They identify complex layers of stress, and moments of awareness as they recognise the importance of building relationships and the need to pay attention to wellbeing. The need for conversations about self-care and wellbeing is still required in the final year of study. Highlighted is the need to scaffold wellbeing resources early within initial teacher education studies to facilitate growth over time. It is clear that unpacking self-care and what this is, is required, as too the scaffolding of the development of a toolbox of wellbeing strategies that can be utilised during initial teacher education studies and thus taken into the profession. Although the poems reveal lines of stress and lines of awareness, it was the explicit teaching to promote wellbeing that has raised this attention. This reveals the need and benefit of integrating meaningful and explicit teaching to enhance a wellbeing literacy. As the lines of building a toolbox of wellbeing strategies reveals, some of the resources that pre-service teachers accessed are limited in diversity across eudaimonic (achieved through experiences of meaning and purpose) and hedonic (achieved through experiences of pleasure and enjoyment) areas of wellbeing. This illuminates even more so, that curriculum in initial teacher education requires an infusing of teacher wellbeing into degrees if we are to ever interrupt the patterns of sustained stress, burnout and attrition for teachers. As readers of this paper, it is my hope that the importance of making self-care experiences visible is repositioned at the centre of being and becoming a teacher in order to shift understandings of what it means for pre-service teachers to explore, engage with and embody wellbeing as (future) teachers. Through poetry I invite you to engage with these provocations as a beginning point to position self-care and wellbeing as worthy of our attention.

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