Unravelling the wellbeing needs of Australian teachers: a qualitative inquiry

Narelle Lemon[1] · Kristina Turner[2]

Abstract

The declining wellbeing of Australian teachers is a longstanding problem, with much attention on retention, stress, burnout, and poor resourcing and conditions that impact wellbeing. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has further illuminated these challenges. This qualitative study aimed to explore Australian teachers' perceptions of their wellbeing needs with a focus on asking the questions that are often not asked—what is working, what are we learning, and how can we move forward to support teacher wellbeing? The voices of teachers revealed findings that support a much-needed shift in teacher wellbeing rhetoric in Australia. We illuminate five key areas that influence teacher and sector perceptions of wellbeing: (1) school leadership, (2) professional development, (3) workload and work-life balance, (4) relationships, and (5) stress, positive emotions, and accomplishment. These findings contribute to the need for a change in how teacher wellbeing is approached and highlight the possible implications of what is working, needs, barriers, and insights for preservice teacher education and professional development of teachers.

Introduction

In the year 2020, teachers in Australia registered more mental health claims with Work-Cover than any other professional cohort, surpassing even healthcare workers. Notably, the parlous state of teacher wellbeing was officially recognised as a matter of national

✉ Kristina Turner
kcturner@swin.edu.au

Narelle Lemon
n.lemon@ecu.edu.au

[1] Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia

[2] Senior Lecturer Primary Education, School of Social Sciences, Media, Film and Education, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

concern by the Australian Parliament in 2019 (Parliament of Australia, 2019). This endemic problem of suboptimal teacher wellbeing carries pernicious implications for workforce sustainability, manifesting in burnout and attrition, with profound consequences for the nation at large (Carroll et al., 2022; Phillips & Cain, 2020). Despite the alarming statistics and their concomitant repercussions, Australian teacher wellbeing has remained a grievously underexplored domain (Beames et al., 2021). This dearth of attention has significantly contributed to the escalating rates of teacher attrition and shortages, casting a particularly ominous shadow over regions characterised by rural, regional, and remote settings (O'Neil, 2022; Simpson et al., 2023).

In the dynamic and demanding landscape of the Australian education system, the wellbeing of teachers is crucial for fostering a healthy and thriving teaching and learning environment. However, the vocation of teaching in Australia has been identified as one fraught with heightened occupational risk, primarily attributable to a disturbingly elevated incidence of serious work-related mental health claims (Safe Work Australia, 2020). Findings from a comprehensive study conducted in 2019, encompassing 2444 Australian teachers, starkly elucidated that more than half of these professionals expressed their intent to depart from the profession within the ensuing decade. Their motivations for this decision were chiefly rooted in the adverse consequences of burnout, pervasive stress, and a marked deterioration in their overall wellbeing (Heffernan et al., 2019). The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly exacerbated this dire scenario (Minihan et al., 2022). Recent empirical inquiries within the Australian educational context have underscored that educators are grappling with soaring stress levels and a pronounced decline in their wellbeing, marked by heightened experiences of anger and isolation in their work environments (Turner et al., 2022).

This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceptions of Australian teachers concerning their wellbeing needs. Through four pivotal research questions, this investigation uncovered the strategies that have proven successful in supporting Australian teacher wellbeing, as well as those that have proven less effective. Moreover, the study provides insights into the challenges and barriers that teachers face when striving to maintain their wellbeing, as well as identifying the specific wellbeing supports that Australian teachers feel are essential to nurturing their overall professional wellbeing. The purpose of this paper is to make a unique contribution to the teacher wellbeing literature by providing insights into teachers' view of wellbeing for themselves and the sector with a lens of enhancement and fostering a more enriched and supportive educational ecosystem across Australian schools. The paper further aims to raise awareness of some possible implications of what is working, and the needs, barriers, and insights for preservice teacher education and professional development of teachers.

Setting the scene: wellbeing and teachers

The concept of wellbeing is challenging to define and remains elusive, leading to multiple definitions within this field of study (Dodge et al., 2012; Ereaut & Whiting, 2008). Some scholars view wellbeing as encompassing 'family, community,

and society as a whole' (La Placa et al., 2013, p. 116), while others perceive it as either a concept or a description (Dodge et al., 2012). From a positive psychology perspective, wellbeing is the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive and flourish (Lottman et al., 2017). While definitions of wellbeing might be contested, what researchers do agree on, is that wellbeing is complex, and intersects with a number of concepts, can be developed, and is based on a 'combination of feeling good and functioning well' (Lyubomirsky, 2010; Seligman, 2011, 2018). Wellbeing encompasses intertwined individual, collective, and environmental elements which continually interact across the lifespan (McCallum & Price, 2016). It is a collective phenomenon as well as an individual one (Godwin & Truebridge, 2021) and is fluid and dynamic in nature, influenced by relationships, context, productivity, and engagement in life experiences (McCallum & Price, 2010).

But regardless of these inconsistencies and lack of coherence, teacher and staff wellbeing are vitally important to the educational community (Higgins & Goodall, 2021). Research findings consistently highlight the significant impact of teachers' personal wellbeing and satisfaction on various aspects of their profession and day-to-day experience. This includes their teaching practices, decisions regarding their career longevity, and, crucially, the learning outcomes and achievements of their students (Beltman et al., 2011; Lemon, 2021; Lemon & McDonough, 2020, 2023; Mansfield, 2020; Turner & Thielking, 2019a). Teacher stress can lead to reduced wellbeing, burnout and emotional exhaustion (Herman et al., 2018), and has been associated with lower levels of self-efficacy, accomplishment, job satisfaction, and attrition (Longmuir et al., 2022; Zee & Kooman, 2016). In addition, high teacher stress and reduced teacher wellbeing lead to increased student stress levels (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016), reduced academic and behavioural outcomes for students (Flores, 2019; McCallum, 2021; McCallum & Price, 2010; McDonough & Lemon, 2022; Wentzel, 2010), and reduced motivation in students (Shen et al., 2015). Teachers who experience higher levels of stress and burnout and low levels of wellbeing are less effective in teaching and classroom management and feel less connected to their students (Aloe et al., 2014; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Stressors for teachers include excessive workload, poor work-life balance, not feeling safe at work, student behaviour, communicating with parents, and administrative support (Billett et al., 2020; Longmuir et al., 2022; Pressley, 2021). Interestingly, in a study of German in-service teachers, Lauermann and König (2016) revealed that teachers with low general pedagogical knowledge, that is knowledge of student motivation and learning, classroom management, lesson planning and differentiated instruction, were more likely to experience stress and burnout. Teacher wellbeing is an integral part of the profession (McCallum & Price, 2016; McDonough & Lemon, 2022). Therefore, it is important that both initial teacher education and teacher employers build, maintain, and sustain teacher wellbeing (McCallum & Price, 2016; McDonough & Lemon, 2022).

Method

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore Australian teachers' perceptions of their wellbeing needs through the following research questions:

1. What strategies are currently working in schools to support Australian teacher wellbeing?
2. What strategies have been tried and failed in schools to support Australian teacher wellbeing?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of the challenges or barriers to Australian teacher wellbeing?
4. What wellbeing supports do Australian teachers perceive a need for?

Exploratory research seeks to examine a specific phenomenon to identify emergent themes and patterns which can then inform future possibilities and research (Creswell, 2012; Foster, 2023). It enables the researchers to explore participants' views without preconceptions or pre-determined hypotheses, and leads to rich descriptions of phenomenon, which can raise pertinent questions for discussion or future research (Foster, 2023). Therefore, a qualitative exploratory research method was determined to be the most suitable method to address the research questions.

Ethics approval for the research was obtained from the relevant university human research ethics committee and all participants provided informed consent to participate in the study. Australian teacher participants were recruited through the incorporation of a snowball sampling method into social media (Twitter, Mastodon, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn). Participants recruited between November 2022 and January 2023 were invited to complete an online, anonymous, and qualitative survey. In addition to demographic information, participants were asked to provide a written response to four questions which had been adapted from the research questions, for example, 'What's currently working in your school to support teacher wellbeing?'.

Qualitative data for each research question were thematically analysed by both researchers using an inductive approach and descriptive coding (Saldana, 2009) to reveal the emergent themes. The first cycle of coding included themes such as: 'leadership listening to teachers', 'anxiety / stress', 'excessive workload', and 'social support'. A second round of coding was then conducted which identified the themes, 'school leadership', 'professional development', 'workload and work-life balance' 'relationships', and 'stress, positive emotions, and accomplishment'.

Participant demographic information ($n=75$) reveals that most participants identified as female (82.4%), were aged between 41 and 50 (41.9%), had been teaching between 5 and 20 years (60.8%), were from Victoria (62.2%), worked in primary schools (50%), in the government sector (48.6%), and worked full time (59.5%). See Table 1: Participant demographic information.

Table 1 Participant demographic information

Participant demographic information ($n = 75$)	
Gender	82.4% identified as female
	16.2% identified as male
	1.4% did not respond to this question
Age	2.7% aged 21–30 years
	23.0% aged 31–40 years
	41.9% aged 41–50 years
	28.4% aged 51–60 years
	2.7% aged 61–70 years
	1.4% did not respond to this question
Number of years teaching	4.0% teaching less than 4 years
	60.8% teaching 5–20 years
	33.8% teaching more than 20 years
Where participants live (Australian States and territories)	62.2% Victoria
	13.5% Queensland
	12,1% Western Australia
	6.8% New South Wales
	2.7% South Australia
	1.4% Northern Territory
School level	50% primary schools
	36.5% secondary schools
	13,5% kindergarten / early childhood settings
School sector	48.6% government
	27.0% independent
	24.3% Catholic
Work time fraction	59.5% full time
	25.7% part time
	14.8% casual relief teaching

Findings and discussion

Participant demographic information revealed differences in gender, age, number of years teaching, and work time fraction between early childhood / kindergarten teachers and primary and secondary school teachers. All early childhood/kindergarten teachers identified as female were aged 31–40 years (40%), had been teaching 5–20 years (60%), and worked as a casual relief teacher (40%), whereas most primary school teachers identified as female (86.2%) were aged 41–50 years (52.8%), had been teaching 5–20 years (69.4%), and worked full time (50%). In contrast, most secondary school teachers identified as female (74.0%) were aged 51–60 years (40.8%), had been teaching 5–20 years (51.9%), and worked full time (85.2%). See Table 2: Breakdown of participant demographic information.

Table 2 Breakdown of participant demographic information

Early childhood / kindergarten teachers ($n=10$)	
Gender	100.0% identified as female
Age	40.0% aged 31–40 years
	30.0% aged 41–50 years
	30.0% aged 51–60 years
Number of years teaching	10.0% teaching less than 4 years
	60.0% teaching 5–20 years
	30.0% teaching more than 20 years
Work time fraction	30.0% full time
	30.0% part time
	40.0% casual relief teaching
Primary school teachers ($n=36$)	
Gender	86.2% identified as female
	13.8% identified as male
Age	5.6% aged 21–30 years
	22.2% aged 31–40 years
	52.8% aged 41–50 years
	19.4% aged 51–60 years
Number of years teaching	5.6% teaching less than 4 years
	69.4% teaching 5–20 years
	25.0% teaching more than 20 years
Work time fraction	50.0% full time
	36.1% part time
	13.9% casual relief teaching
Secondary school teachers ($n=27$)	
Gender	74.0% identified as female
	26.0% identified as male
Age	18.5% aged 31–40 years
	33.3% aged 41–50 years
	40.8% aged 51–60 years
	7.4% aged 61–70 years
Number of years teaching	51.9% teaching 5–20 years
	48.1% teaching more than 20 years
Work time fraction	85.2% full time
	11.1% part time
	3.7% casual relief teaching

As we engaged with Australian teachers, we observed that all in the study were able to detail the ways in which their schools supported or undermined their wellbeing across policies and practices. Concerningly, seven of the 75 participants reported that nothing had been implemented to support teacher wellbeing in their school. However, the remaining participants reported strategies which had been

implemented in their schools to support teacher wellbeing. This section reports the findings and discussion under the following sub-headings: (1) school leadership, (2) professional development, (3) workload and work-life balance, (4) relationships, and (5) stress, positive emotions, and accomplishment.

School leadership

'Supportive caring leadership who are approachable and try to prioritise teacher wellbeing where possible' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria), who 'listen' (Secondary School Teacher, Queensland), provide 'positive feedback and check-ins' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria), 'support' (Primary School Teacher, Queensland), and 'are consultative' (Secondary School Teacher, New South Wales) were valued as significant contributors to teacher wellbeing. Consultation was noted by participants as being particularly effective in supporting their wellbeing. For example, 'The staff are consulted, and collaborative approaches are taken as much as possible' (Secondary School Teacher, New South Wales). In addition, organisation and communication strategies which value teachers' time was noted as being effective at supporting teacher wellbeing, 'Whole staff meetings are productive and clearly communicated' (Secondary School Teacher, New South Wales). Also, leadership that 'Embeds teacher wellbeing in every decision and supports staff to feel very supported and acknowledged that we have a very taxing and complex job' (Secondary School Teacher, New South Wales). This perceived stepping up, mentoring and transparent leadership, where care is integrated, and embodies support, 'Building a community of trust and respect for the hard work teachers do' (Secondary School Teacher, Queensland). Highlighting the need for leadership to be a part of wellbeing conversations and to model wellbeing as a school priority, 'Our educational leader stepped up during the pandemic to really assist us with our wellbeing' (Early Childhood Teacher, New South Wales) and 'The school supports a work-life balance with the principal often stepping in to fill gaps and sending overwhelmed staff home' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria).

Noted of value in leadership was permission to languish: 'Principal and leadership team are very responsive to the needs of staff. For example, if someone needs to leave work suddenly, they don't have to go through a convoluted HR process, they just have to have a conversation' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria) and 'Allowing people to leave when they have a break down' (Primary School Teacher, South Australia). Although this is supportive, and one could frame as compassionate, this does raise a concern in why wellbeing is addressed only when there is a critical point such as a breakdown, significant stress, or exhaustion?

Participants also reported that a few leadership initiatives were not effective in supporting teacher wellbeing. For example, 'Sending emails inviting staff to talk with the leadership team if they are feeling stressed' (Secondary School Teacher, South Australia), 'Telling teachers they need to work smarter to reduce their workload without any follow up discussion on how they may do this' (Primary School Teacher, Queensland), and 'Displaying positive affirmations in the toilets' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria) although no doubt well intentioned were also perceived

by teachers as not being effective in supporting staff wellbeing. In addition, participants expressed that a 'Lack of time for wellbeing. Mental health is not taken seriously' (Secondary School Teacher, Northern Territory) and that school leadership has a 'Tokenistic view of what wellbeing is and needs to be for educators' (Secondary School Teacher, Queensland) as barriers to staff wellbeing. In fact, the role of leadership in educational contexts was a key theme that illuminated ineffectiveness, lack of presence, and inexperience effecting how wellbeing is enacted and embodied. It was noted that at times leadership withholds information at critical moments of change, raising teachers' anxiety. Participants expressed their preference for continuous improvement and conversations around teacher wellbeing, 'This is an ongoing conversation that needs to have practical action associated with it' (Secondary School Teacher, Queensland), and for consultation during times of change: 'More say about things such as teaching role and less uncertainty and change' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria).

Additionally, a focus on relational support was present as successes in schools to support teacher wellbeing, including staff functions, social events, or time together outside of work. Although some participants reported that celebrations such as 'giving out cupcakes' (Secondary School Teacher, Northern Territory), 'having parties' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria), and 'out of hours get-togethers' (Secondary School Teacher, Victoria) can be viewed as 'band aid' (Secondary School Teacher, Victoria) solutions which don't address the core issues impacting on staff wellbeing.

As identified by the participants, the perceived support of school leadership is critical for teacher wellbeing. Previous research has revealed that school leadership can positively influence teacher wellbeing for example, Cann et al. (2021) in their New Zealand study of the influence of school leadership practices on teacher wellbeing identified that in supporting teacher wellbeing, school leaders must show that they genuinely value teachers, support their personal growth, and value their voice in decision making. Encompassing both individual and societal dimensions, wellbeing is intersecting at a systems level, and we know the role that leaders can play is key, especially in the influence of school culture on wellbeing. On an individual level, it pertains to a sense of satisfaction, positive functioning, and the experience of positive emotions. On a societal level, wellbeing involves the presence of supportive relationships, trust, and a sense of belonging (Day & Gu, 2014). Additionally, there is an expectation that leaders know how to manage their own wellbeing (White & Kern, 2018), however, often revealing that this is an issue in itself, with presumptions made on awareness across the duality of authentic leadership at either group level or individual level (Xu & Yang, 2023).

Participants in this study reported that supporting, caring, and consultative school leaders who prioritise teacher wellbeing were effective in supporting teacher wellbeing. In addition, school leadership who actively build a community of trust and respect were noted by participants as being successful in supporting teacher wellbeing. Affirming the effectiveness of such approaches, in a study of positive school leadership practices in Iranian schools, Kouhsari et al. (2022) found that such practices improve teachers' psychological wellbeing, including increasing teacher self-acceptance, self-esteem, and job satisfaction. Likewise, Cherkowski (2018) recommends that models of school leadership based on positive psychology principals

would be supportive of teacher wellbeing and flourishing. So too, in a study of 1575 Australian school staff, De Nobile and Bilgin (2022) identified significant relationships between organisational communication, such as principal openness and support, and teacher job satisfaction.

Professional development

Some teachers reported that their schools had professional development initiatives that directly supported their wellbeing. For example, 'One staff development day a year focusing on staff wellbeing, and once a term staff meeting with wellbeing focus is embedded in the calendar and that seems to work'. Also, 'Staff professional development about wellbeing' and 'The school recently engaged a wellbeing consultant to address significant staff wellbeing deficits'. However, participants' responses indicated that professional development opportunities focused on wellbeing were lacking in sustained and systematic planning. In addition, some participants expressed that professional development activities which were designed to capacity build staff in self-care and wellbeing were often viewed by staff as 'box-ticking exercises' and that these workshops, 'although informative, don't address the key issues impacting on staff wellbeing'. Participants also noted that these professional development training days were often expensive to attend and of limited value, as the facilitators, for the most part, 'have never actually worked in schools' and are therefore not able to contextualise the workshop in any meaningful way to teachers' work.

Participants reported that professional development activities focused on wellbeing, which do not address the core issues affecting teacher wellbeing, are perceived by teachers as being ineffective. In addition, one-off, mandated professional development which lacked sustained and systematic planning were not deemed by the participants to be effective in supporting their wellbeing. In fact, research demonstrates that these types of 'reactionary initiatives … treat the symptoms of a wellbeing problem, rather than disturb the conditions that may contribute to poor wellbeing in the first place' (Brady & Wilson, 2020, p. 52).

Teachers also indicated a strong preference for professional development activities to be facilitated by educators with lived experience teaching in schools, so that they can effectively contextualise the workshop content to teachers' work and lives. McChesney et al. (2021) also identified that teacher professional development which is not contextualised within the school context leads to poor acceptance of the professional development by teachers. So too, that teachers become frustrated by professional development being delivered by personnel whom their teachers do not perceive to be sufficiently skilled or qualified (McChesney et al., 2021).

Interestingly, Sancar et al. (2021) in their review of teacher professional development articles identified an urgent need for transformation from traditional teacher professional development activities to a focus on teachers' professional practice such as through a coaching, mentoring and professional development communities approach. Further, Korthagen (2017) asserts that professional development in the form of learning communities sustained over a period of time can provide teachers with a safe environment to address their concerns, thus leading to new and effective

teacher behaviours. Such initiatives can focus on system-level implementation and maintenance of wellbeing interventions over time (Fazel et al., 2014) applying a holistic approach (Higgins & Goodall, 2021; McCallum, 2021; Powietrzynska et al., 2021) that clearly 'identifies inhibiting and enabling strategies' (McCallum & Price, 2010, p. 19). Such effective approaches focus on scaffolding reflective practice and the building of relationships (Lemon & McDonough, 2023; McDonough & Lemon, 2022; Murphy et al., 2021).

Workload and work-life balance

The term work-life balance refers to an appropriate balance between one's personal life and professional agenda (Kelliher et al., 2019). Teachers' work often involves long work hours, high work intensity and work overload (Abdulaziz et al., 2022; Lemon & McDonough, 2023). In a study of Saudi Arabian teachers' work-life balance and work overload Abdulaziz et al. (2022) found that poor work-life balance and work overload resulted in teacher fatigue and lower levels of organisational commitment. Poor teacher work-life balance has been shown to have a significant negative impact on teachers' job performance and job satisfaction globally, for example in Nigeria (Ademola et al., 2021), India (Solanki & Mandaviya, 2021), and Malaysia (Johari et al., 2018). So too, participants in this study revealed that poor work-life balance was negatively impacting their wellbeing and they expressed a strong desire for improved work-life balance.

Participants revealed that 'Workload is a challenge, and this is a barrier to a teachers' wellbeing' (Primary School Teacher, New South Wales) with a strong indication of 'Lack of planning time' (Secondary School Teacher, Victoria), 'Too many extra expectations, too many meetings, too much professional development, and not enough time to actually plan, mark and write reports' (Secondary School Teacher, New South Wales) and 'Administrative tasks that take a long time' (Primary School Teacher, Queensland) being reported. Insufficient time being allocated for tasks and increasing workload expectations being a dominate reporting, and that 'Even with the very real demand of additional mental health needs and learning challenges of students, it is solely our responsibility to be well and to reduce the amount of leave we take' (Primary School Teacher, Queensland). Participants also expressed a desire for improved work-life balance, such as 'I would like improved work-life balance and flexibility to accommodate family commitments without needing to use personal leave' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria) and 'I would like to have more work-life balance. Right now, I have no life outside work, and my partner complains I am a workaholic when it's report writing or exam marking time' (Secondary School Teacher, New South Wales). Teachers expounded that they would like to see their work-life balance improved through a reduction in the administrative tasks they were required to complete and also through being allocated more planning time.

Confirming this finding that workload is a key stressor for teachers, some participants noted that reducing teacher workload, such as 'having less meetings' (Secondary School Teacher, Victoria), and 'providing teachers with more time for planning and administration, through the provision of extra time release from the classroom'

(Secondary School Teacher, Queensland) were supportive of their wellbeing. To illustrate, 'Time for teachers to visit medical appointments or attend their children's events and celebrations without docking time' (Secondary School Teacher, Queensland). In addition, teachers reported a desire for a sense of meaning in their work, 'I need to feel that what I am doing has a purpose and is valued. It doesn't feel that way at the moment' (Secondary School Teacher, Northern Territory) and 'to engage with meaningful work' (Secondary School Teacher, Queensland). Supporting this, strategies enabling meaningful workloads were reported as being successful in contributing to teacher wellbeing, for example 'careful consideration of scheduling at key workload stress times (i.e. not having big school events in same week as reports due or parent teacher interviews)' (Primary School Teacher, Queensland) and 'trying to reduce the assessment load and work smarter not harder, simplifying the curriculum' (Primary School Teacher, Queensland). Additional support was also reported in procedural approaches including 'One day a fortnight admin assistant for our faculty' (Secondary School Teacher, New South Wales) and 'at every turn, the school executive tries to minimise unnecessary paperwork within the parameters of the system' (Secondary School Teacher, New South Wales).

It has been widely reported that longer working hours are associated with higher levels of teacher workload stress (see for example: Allen et al., 2021; Arora et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2023; Jerrim & Sims, 2021; Pan et al., 2023). Participants strongly reported this as a significant challenge to their wellbeing. To elaborate, Jerrim and Sims (2021) analysed representative data on more than 10,000 primary and secondary teachers from five English-speaking areas (Australia, England, New Zealand, the United States, and Alberta-Canada). They identified the factors impacting stress of teachers that contributed to low reporting of wellbeing. This included excessive workload requirements such as too many lessons to prepare and teach, too much marking, too much administrative work, and being given extra duties due to absent teachers (Jerrim & Sims, 2021). Likewise, participants in this study often cited factors such as large administrative task load and insufficient time given for planning as negatively impacting their professional wellbeing.

Participants also expressed a desire for a greater sense of meaning at work to improve their professional wellbeing. Finding meaning in work is a well-established route to psychological wellbeing (Peterson et al., 2005). People who find meaning in their work experience increased workplace motivation and wellbeing (Steger et al., 2012) and greater engagement in work (Fourie & Deacon, 2015). In a phenomenological study of teachers' experience of meaning at work, Turner and Thielking (2019b) found that teacher wellbeing was strongly linked to their sense of meaning at work. Further, supporting teachers to find meaning in their work and to engage in meaningful work activities may serve to improve their wellbeing (Turner & Thielking, 2019b).

Relationships

Collaboration and support from teaching colleagues were also championed by teachers as a successful strategy for supporting wellbeing. Teachers valued the actions

of 'supportive colleagues' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria), 'collegiality' (Secondary School Teacher, Victoria), 'collaboration' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria), and 'mentoring' (Secondary School Teacher, Victoria) as significant positives. Specifically illuminated was building and maintaining of trust, 'Teachers working collaboratively (no competition) and leadership providing as much support as they can. This happened due to well-trained and enthusiastic staff being hired' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria) and.

> A collaborative team. It works because we are able to be honest with ourselves and each other and support each other to take time off for mental health. It has happened organically as we have built this trust over time and due to difficult circumstances. (Primary School Teacher, Queensland)

Feeling valued and cared about was a key theme that emerged from the participants' self-reporting in what they considered as evidence that wellbeing support has worked. It was noted with this came from 'a felt sense of being trusted, valued and loved' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria) and 'I will feel as though I am not alone in the school as the only person who cares about providing a good education' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria). Relationships aligned to this especially regarding 'A more cohesive culture where people notice when fellow staff members are absent and show they care' (Secondary School Teacher, Queensland), and 'Relationships between people improve and there is greater connection and care between people' (Secondary School Teacher, Queensland). In fact, participants indicated that a good day at work would include 'respectful interactions with colleagues' (Secondary School Teacher, Northern Territory), 'positive interactions with other teachers' (Secondary School Teacher, Queensland), 'positive interactions between myself, students and the wider community', and 'respect from students and parents' (Secondary School Teacher, Queensland).

Positive relationships and social support in the workplace are core concepts in many wellbeing theories, for example Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and PERMA Wellbeing (Seligman, 2011, 2018). In one study which employed a phenomenological approach, Turner et al. (2022) examined teachers' professional relationships and social support, revealing that when teachers consciously provide social support to their colleagues through acts of altruism and kindness, it supports their own wellbeing, collegial relationships, pedagogical practices, professional development, and whole school operational practices.

Teachers in this study also indicated that positive and respectful interactions with students and parents contributed to their perceptions of 'a good day at work'. Previous research shows that teachers' experience of pleasant or unpleasant emotions is often impacted by their interactions with students and parents. For example, in a study of emotions experienced by primary school teachers in China, Chen (2016) reported that teachers experienced joy in their relationships with students and positive emotions when their relationships with parents were respectful. On the other hand, poor relationships with students and parents can lead to a teacher leaving the profession. In an Australian study which examined poor teacher–student and teacher–parent relationships, Billett et al. (2020) found that of the 1213 teacher participants in their study, 84.5% reported having experienced some form of student

or parent enacted bullying over the last nine to 12-month period. Examples of such behaviours included being yelled at, sworn at, and hit by students and parents. As a result, 65.2% of participants had considered leaving the teaching profession (Billett et al., 2020).

Stress, positive emotions, and accomplishment

Participants also reported that their mental health had been negatively impacted by high levels of work-related stress and that reducing their stress levels was a key priority for them. Current literature supports this finding. To illustrate, in a study of 5500 Australian teachers, Longmuir et al. (2022) found that 72.4% of the teacher participants intended leaving the profession before retirement age, citing exhaustion, stress, burnout, and heavy workload as the reasons for leaving. Teaching is one of the most stressful occupations (Herman et al., 2020) with stress leading to physical and mental fatigue, nervous tension, frustration, and distress (Zhao et al., 2022). In Australia, teaching has been categorised as a high-risk occupation due to an extraordinarily high number of serious work-related mental health claims (Safe Work Australia, 2020). Concerningly, in a study of Canadian teachers and students, Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016) revealed that students' physiological stress regulation was linked to teachers' occupational stress.

In one approach to reducing teacher stress, Turner et al. (2021) revealed that when teachers applied four positive psychology strategies in their professional practice for a period of six weeks, there was a statistically significant positive improvement in their wellbeing. Further, teachers reported feeling less stressed and calmer in the classroom (Turner et al., 2021). Similarly, Kun and Gadanecz (2019), Rahm and Heise (2019), and Dreer (2020) also showed positive relationships between teachers' application of positive psychology strategies and teacher wellbeing. Therefore, the authors recommend, in addition to schools implementing teacher work-life balance and workload policies, that schools support teachers in applying positive psychology strategies to support their wellbeing.

In terms of how they would know that wellbeing support has worked, positive emotions dominated the teachers' responses showcasing terms such as a wanting to feel 'happy' (Early Childhood Teacher, Victoria), 'calm' (Early Childhood Teacher, Western Australia), 'passion' (Primary School Teacher, Queensland), 'play' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria), and 'at peace' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria). It was acknowledged that with these emotions, 'Teachers will be able to have fun in their jobs again, be more playful with their students, and will be brave enough to try new things' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria). Further, that 'Staff morale is higher, student morale is higher, parent morale is higher' (Primary School Teacher, Queensland).

As the teachers reflected upon where they wanted to be, future evidence of wellbeing was associated in their minds with positive emotions. Positive emotions build psychological, social, intellectual, and physical resources, supporting wellbeing and broadening our mindset for the discovery of new information, engagement with others, and exploration of new skills (Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2016;

Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Although there is a growing literature on the role of job demands and job resources in teacher wellbeing, fewer studies have concentrated on the effect of individual variables particularly when it comes to emotions beyond the regulation in association with stress, student behaviour, and job demands (Manasia, et al., 2020).

Another strong throughline of how teachers would like to feel at work included having a sense of accomplishment. For example, 'When I feel like I'm achieving things in my own classroom' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria) and 'I imagine I will feel as though I have completed all of a week's tasks' (Secondary School Teacher, Victoria). Additionally, 'Leaving work feeling exhausted but like I've accomplished something' (Primary School Teacher, Victoria) and 'Leaving with a belief that I have contributed to positive outcomes in the workplace' (Secondary School Teacher, Northern Territory). So too, 'Busy, engaged and working to make a difference in the lives of the students we teach' (Secondary School Teacher, New South Wales). Finally, participants acknowledged that a good day at work included work-life balance. To illustrate, 'Finish the day at a reasonable time, and able to go home without feeling pressured to keep working at home' (Secondary School Teacher, Queensland).

Accomplishment refers to the experience of achievement or success at work and is a well-established element of subjective wellbeing (see, for example Seligman, 2011). Concerningly, Maslach and Jackson (1981) described a lack of a sense of accomplishment in teachers as occurring in the final stages of teacher burnout. Research reveals that teachers often felt a high sense of accomplishment during the COVID pandemic (see, for example Sokal et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2023). However, this often came at the cost of difficulty in maintaining a work-life balance (Turner et al., 2023). In a phenomenological study of teachers' applications of positive psychology strategies to support their workplace wellbeing, Turner and Thielking (2019a), revealed that when teacher wellbeing improved, there was a flow on effect into their teaching practice and sense of accomplishment, with teachers reporting that they became more focused on making their lessons deeper, more meaningful, more engaging, and more enjoyable for students which resulted in improved quality of their lessons.

Due to the single round of data collection, one limitation of this study is that findings could not be triangulated. Thus, this study provides a snapshot of Australian teacher wellbeing needs at one specific point in time. In addition, as this study was conducted in Australia findings cannot be generalised internationally, however, findings may be applicable in other similar contexts. In addition, participants in this study self-reported, which may cause problems with validity as participants may not have been honest or may have misunderstood the questions (Barker et al., 2016).

Conclusion and recommendations

This qualitative study aimed to explore Australian teachers' perceptions of their wellbeing needs. In terms of strategies which are currently working in schools to support teacher wellbeing, participants reported that supporting, caring and

consultative school leadership who prioritise teacher wellbeing and actively build a community of respect and trust is effective in supporting teacher wellbeing. In addition, ongoing professional development initiatives, along with collaboration and support from teaching colleagues, were also identified by the participants as being successful in supporting their wellbeing.

However, this study revealed several strategies which participants perceived as being unsuccessful in supporting their wellbeing at work. This included leadership initiatives that were viewed as tokenistic, along with leadership teams that did not take teacher mental health concerns seriously. Participants also indicated that professional development opportunities which lacked sustained and systematic planning were often viewed by staff as 'box-ticking exercises' and were not considered to be supportive of teacher wellbeing.

We know relationship building to support community formation is important for wellbeing in educational contexts. However, there is a difference between strategic wellbeing initiatives and interventions that are scaffolded to build community, versus assuming all who work in a school are already a community and thus just a focus on socialising-like activities. As one teacher voiced, these approaches do not feel supportive or successful for all. Teacher wellbeing is simultaneously individual and systematic. A clear message coming through is that as we address teacher wellbeing, we need to empower individuals with how their wellbeing looks and feels while also working to address culture, environments, and relationships in the workplace to enable the development of a wellbeing literacy. The capacity and comprehension of and for wellbeing is intersecting and interconnected, we can no longer blame a teacher for not being *well* if a culture does not support, scaffold, and grow wellbeing. The 'I, we and us' is imperative, with a focus on further research examining effective approaches at building relationships, culture and wellbeing in schools is recommended. As psychological safety and legislation continue to change, this is an important time to think, put into action, and understand further the complexities of systems-oriented, evidence-based wellbeing.

Challenges or barriers to teacher wellbeing identified in this study included excessive workload, with participants expressing a strong desire for an improved work-life balance. Considerations for the sector regarding how barriers and blockers to wellbeing in association with workload and time are a sustained issue and require urgent attention (Chung et al., 2023). Indeed, previous researchers have recommended that schools should implement employee work-life balance policies to ensure that teachers have enough time to balance the social, personal, and organisational dimensions of their life and are not overburdened (Abdulaziz et al., 2022). The concept of time featured as an investment in wellbeing across a variety of approaches; however, the focus was more on allowance that contributes to the doing of the job, for example, being allocated more time for planning, administration, and meetings. Indeed, within the teaching sector, there have been steadily increasing expectations of when teachers should be at school, raising concerns that an overwork, do more with less, culture has become engrained and skewed perspectives on the impact this has on wellbeing. Further research examining how time is valued and seen as a part of teacher wellbeing is recommended.

Participants expressed a desire for school leadership to prioritise continuous improvement and conversations around teacher wellbeing. Previous research (see, for example: Cherkowski, 2018; De Nobile & Bilgin, 2022; Kouhsari et al., 2022) has revealed the potential for school leadership practices to improve teachers' wellbeing. Building on this, the authors recommend that further research needs to be conducted to examine the effectiveness of school leadership's application of positive psychology principles and strategies in a variety of school contexts to support teacher wellbeing.

In addition, teachers in this study expressed a strong preference for wellbeing professional development activities which were facilitated by educators with lived experience of teaching in schools, so that they can effectively contextualise the workshop content to teachers' work and lives. The authors recommend schools to implement a planned and ongoing programme of teacher professional development which has been informed by evidence-based strategies demonstrated to support teacher wellbeing and facilitated by educators who have experience working in schools. Further research needs to be conducted to examine the effectiveness of teacher professional development focused on wellbeing through a coaching, mentoring, or learning communities approach facilitated by experienced teachers who have appropriate training and expertise in the field of wellbeing.

Participants also reported that their mental health had been negatively impacted by high levels of work-related stress and that reducing their stress levels was a key priority for them. Teachers also indicated a strong desire to feel more positive emotions at work and experience a greater sense of meaning and accomplishment at work. Further examination of what it means for teachers to draw on multiple diverse areas of wellbeing science to support their wellbeing is recommended.

It is hoped that the findings from this study will contribute to the need for a change in how teacher wellbeing is approached and highlight possible implications of what is working, needs, barriers, and insights for preservice teacher education and professional development of teachers.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Ethical approval Ethics approval for the research was obtained from the relevant university human research ethics committee and all participants provided informed consent to participate in the study.

References

Abdulaziz, A., Bashir, M. & Alfalih, A.A. (2022). The impact of work-life balance and work overload on teacher's organizational commitment: do job engagement and perceived organizational support matter. *Education and Information Technologies, 27*, 9641–9663. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11013-8

Ademola, O. A., Tsotetsi, C., & Gbemisola, O. D. (2021). Work-life balance practices: Rethinking teachers' job performance in Nigeria secondary schools. *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities, 7*(2), 102–114. http://www.jssshonline.com/

Allen, R., Benhenda, A., Jerrim, J., & Sims, S. (2021). New evidence on teachers' working hours in England: An empirical analysis of four datasets. *Research Papers in Education, 36*(6), 657–681. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2020.1736616

Aloe, A. M., Amo, L. C., & Shanahan, M. E. (2014). Classroom management self-efficacy and burnout: A multivariate meta-analysis. *Educational Psychological Review, 26*(1), 101–126. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-013-9244-0

Arora, A., Chakraborty, P., Bhatia, M. P. S., & Mittal, P. (2021). Role of emotion in excessive use of Twitter during COVID-19 imposed lockdown in India. *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science, 6*(2), 370–377. https://doi.org/10.1007/S41347-020-00174-3

Barker, C., Elliott, R. & Pistrang, N. (2016). *Research methods in clinical psychology: An introduction for students and practitioners.* John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Retrieved from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/book/https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119154082

Beames, J. R., Christensen, H., & Werner-Seidler, A. (2021). School teachers: The forgotten frontline workers of Covid-19. *Australasian Psychiatry, 29*(4), 420–422. https://doi.org/10.1177/10398562211006145

Beltman, S., Mansfield, C., & Price, A. (2011). Thriving not just surviving: A review of research on teacher resilience. *Educational Research Review, 6*(2011), 185–207. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2011.09.001

Billett, P., Turner, K., Martin, D., & Fogelgarn, R. (2020). *Teacher targeted bullying and harassment by students and parents: The east coast project.* La Trobe University and Swinburne University of Technology.

Brady, J., & Wilson, E. (2020). Teacher wellbeing in England: Teacher responses to school-level initiatives. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 51*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2020.1775789

Cann, R. F., Riedel-Prabhakar, R., & Powell, D. A. (2021). Model of positive school leadership to improve teacher wellbeing. *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology, 6*, 195–218. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-020-00045-5

Carroll, A., Forrest, K., Sanders-O'Connor, E., et al. (2022). Teacher stress and burnout in Australia: Examining the role of intrapersonal and environmental factors. *Social Psychology of Education, 25*, 441–469. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-022-09686-7

Chen, J. (2016). Understanding teacher emotions: The development of a teacher emotion inventory. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 55*, 68–77. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.01.001

Cherkowski, S. (2018). Positive teacher leadership: Building mindsets and capacities to grow wellbeing. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership, 9*(1), 63–78. Retrieved from https://web.p.ebscohost.com/

Chung, L. W., Lin, C. H., Tian, G., Pan, H. L. W., Chung, C.-H., & Lin, Y.-C. (2023). Exploring the predictors of teacher well-being: An analysis of teacher training preparedness, autonomy, and workload. *Sustainability, 15*(7), 5818. https://doi.org/10.3390/SU15075804

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2014). *Resilient teachers: Building and sustaining quality in testing times*. Routledge.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in Human Behavior*. Plenum.

Dreer, B. (2020). Positive psychological interventions for teachers: A randomised placebo-controlled field experiment investigating the effects of workplace-related positive activities.*International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology, 5*, 77–97. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-020-00027-7

De Nobile, J., & Bilgin, A. A. (2022). Impacts of school communication on job satisfaction in Australian primary schools: A structural equation model. *Frontiers in Education, 2022*, 7. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.832644

Dodge, R., Daly, A., Huyton, J., & Sanders, L. (2012). The challenge of defining wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 2*(3), 222–235. https://doi.org/10.5502/IJW.V2I3.4

Ereaut, G., & Whiting, R. (2008). What do we mean by 'wellbeing'? And why might it matter? *Linguistic Landscapes*. Retrieved from http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8572/1/dcsf-rw073%20v2.pdf

Fazel, M., Hoagwood, K., Stephan, S., & Ford, T. (2014). Mental health interventions in schools 1: Mental health interventions in schools in high-income countries. *The Lancet: Psychiatry, 1*(5), 377. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(14)70312-8

Flores, M. A. (2019). Unpacking teacher quality: Key issues for early career teachers. In A. Sullivan, B. Johnson, & M. Simons (Eds.), *Attracting and keeping the best teachers* (pp. 15–38). Springer.

Foster, C. (2023). Methodological pragmatism in educational research: From qualitative-quantitative to exploratory-confirmatory distinctions. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2023.2210063

Fourie, M., & Deacon, E. (2015). Meaning in work of secondary school teachers: A qualitative study. *South African Journal of Education, 35*(3), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.15700/SAJE.V35N3A1047

Fredrickson, B. (2009). *Positivity*. Random House.

Fredrickson, B., & Joiner, T. (2016). Positive emotions trigger upward spirals toward emotional wellbeing. *Psychological Science, 13*(2), 172–175. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00431

Fredrickson, B., & Losada, M. (2005). Positive affect and the complex dynamics of human flourishing. *American Psychologist, 60*(7), 678–686. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.7.678

Godwin, L. N., & Truebridge, S. (2021). Wellbeing from the outside-in. In M. White & F. McCallum (Eds.), *Wellbeing and resilience education* (pp. 18–32). Routledge.

Heffernan, A., Longmuir, F., Bright, D. & Kim, M. (2019). *Perceptions of teachers and teaching in Australia.* Monash University, Faculty of Education. Retrieved from https://www.monash.edu/perceptions-of-teaching/docs/Perceptions-of-Teachers-and-Teaching-in-Australia-report-Nov-2019.pdf

Herman, K. C., Hickmon-Rosa, J., & Reinke, W. M. (2018). Empirically derived profiles of teacher stress, burnout, self-efficacy, and coping and associated student outcomes. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 20*(2), 90–100. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300717732066

Herman, K. C., Reinke, W. M., & Eddy, C. L. (2020). Advances in understanding and intervening in teacher stress and coping: The coping-competence-context theory. *Journal of School Psychology, 78*, 69–74. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2020.01.001

Higgins, J., & Goodall, S. (2021). Transforming the wellbeing focus in education: A document analysis of policy in Aotearoa New Zealand. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2021.1879370

Jerrim, J., & Sims, S. (2021). When is high workload bad for teacher wellbeing? Accounting for the non-linear contribution of specific teaching tasks. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 105*, 103395. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.TATE.2021.103395

Johari, J., Yean Tan, F., & TjikZulkarnain, Z. I. (2018). Autonomy, workload, work-life balance and job performance among teachers. *International Journal of Educational Management, 32*(1), 107–120. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-10-2016-0226

Kelliher, C., Richardson, J., & Boiarintseva, G. (2019). All of work? All of life? Reconceptualising work-life balance for the 21st century. *Human Resource Management Journal, 29*(2), 97–112. https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12215

Korthagen, F. (2017). Inconvenient truths about teacher learning: Towards professional development 3.0. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 23*(4), 387–405. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540 602.2016.1211523

Kouhsari, M., Navehebrahim, A., Zeinabadi, H., & Abbasian, H. (2022). Exploring positive school leadership practices in Iranian primary schools. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2022.2052759

Kun, A. & Gadanecz, P. (2019). Workplace happiness, well-being and their relationship with psychological capital: A study of Hungarian Teachers. *Current Psychology, 41*(1), 185–199.https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-019-00550-0

La Placa, V., McNaught, A., & Knight, A. (2013). Discourse on wellbeing in research and practice. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 3*(1), 116–125. https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v3i1.7

Lauermann, F., & König, J. (2016). Teachers' professional competence and wellbeing: Understanding the links between general pedagogical knowledge, self-efficacy and burnout. *Learning and Instruction, 45*, 9–19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2016.06.006

Lemon, N. (2021). Holding the space: A teacher educator's poetic representations of pre-service teachers acts of self-care. In M. P. Hall & A. K. Brault (Eds.), *Academia from the Inside* (pp. 169–193). Palgrave Macmillan.

Lemon, N., & McDonough, S. (2020). *Building and sustaining teaching career: Strategies for professional experience wellbeing and mindful practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Lemon, N., & McDonough, S. (2023). "I feel like nothing else will ever be this hard": The dimensions of teacher resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Educational Forum*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2023.2178564

Longmuir, F., Gallo Cordoba, B., Phillips, M., Allen, K. A., & Moharami, M. (2022). *Australian teachers' perceptions of their work in 2022*. Monash University.

Lottman, T. J., Zawaly, S., & Niemiec, R. (2017). Well-being and well-doing: Bringing mindfulness and character strengths to the early childhood classroom and home. In C. Proctor (Ed.), *Positive psychology interventions in practice* (pp. 83–105). Springer.

Lyubomirsky, S. (2010). *The how of happiness: A practical guide to getting the life you want*. Piatkus.

Manasia, L., Pârvan, A., & Macovei, M. (2020). Towards a model of teacher well-being from a positive emotions perspective. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education, 2020*(10), 469–496. https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe10010035

Mansfield, C. F. (Ed.). (2020). *Cultivating teacher resilience* (pp. 3–10). Springer.

Maslach, S. E., & Jackson, C. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. *Journal of Occupational Behaviour, 2*, 99–113. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030020205

McCallum, F. (2021). Teacher and staff wellbeing: Understanding the experiences of school staff. In M. L. Kern & M. L. Wehmeyer (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of positive education* (pp. 715–740). Springer.

McCallum, F., & Price, D. (2010). Well teachers, well students. *The Journal of Student Wellbeing, 4*(1), 19–34. https://doi.org/10.21913/JSW.V4I1.599

McCallum, F., & Price, D. (2016). *Nurturing wellbeing development in education: From little things, big things grow*. Routledge.

McChesney, K., & Aldridge, J. M. (2021). What gets in the way? A new conceptual model for the trajectory from teacher professional development to impact. *Professional Development in Education, 47*(5), 834–852. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1667412

McDonough, S., & Lemon, N. (2022). 'Stretched very thin': the impact of COVID-19 on teachers' work lives and well-being. *Teachers and Teaching*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2022.2103530

Minihan, E., Begley, A., Martin, A., Dunleavy, M., Gavin, B., & McNicholas, F. (2022). Examining COVID-19 related occupational stress in teachers in Ireland through a qualitative study using a thematic analysis approach. *International Journal of Educational Research Open, 3*, 100183–100183. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2022.100183

Murphy, T. R. N., Masterson, M., Mannix-McNamara, P., Tally, P., & McLaughlin, E. (2021). The being of a teacher: Teacher pedagogical well-being and teacher self-care. *Teachers and Teaching, 26*(7–8), 588–601. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2021.1913403

Oberle, E., & Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2016). Stress contagion in the classroom? The link between classroom teacher burnout and morning cortisol in elementary school students. *Social Science and Medicine, 159*, 30–37. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.04.031

O'Neil, C. (2022). *National action plan on teacher shortage*. Retrieved from https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/ClareONeil/Pages/national-action-plan-teacher-shortage.aspx

Pan, H. L. W., Chung, C. H., & Lin, Y. C. (2023). Exploring the predictors of teacher well-being: An analysis of teacher training preparedness, autonomy, and workload. *Sustainability (switzerland), 15*(7), 5804. https://doi.org/10.3390/SU15075804

Parliament of Australia. (2019). *Status of the teaching profession.* Retrieved from https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/TeachingProfession#:~:text=This%20inquiry%20lapsed%20when%20the,issues%20arising%20from%20Public%20Hearings

Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 6*(1), 25–41. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-004-1278-z

Phillips, L. & Cain, M. (2020). *'Exhausted beyond measure': what teachers are saying about COVID-19 and the disruption to education.* The Conversation, 2020. Retrieved from https://theconversation.com/exhausted-beyond-measure-what-teachers-are-saying-about-covid-19-and-the-disruption-to-education-01

Powietrzynska, M., Noble, L., O'loughlin-Boncamper, S., & Azeez, A. (2021). Holding space for uncertainty and vulnerability: Reclaiming humanity in teacher education through contemplative | equity pedagogy. *Cultural Studies of Science Education, 16*(3), 951–964. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-021-10035-x

Pressley, T. (2021). Factors contributing to teacher burnout during COVID-19. *Educational Researcher, 50*(5), 325–327. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X211004138

Rahm, T., & Heise, E. (2019). Teaching happiness to teachers – Development and evaluation of a training in subjective well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 2703. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02703

Safe Work Australia. (2020, Mar 26). Work related mental health. Retrieved from https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1901/mental-health-infographic-v2.pdf

Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.

Sancar, R., Atal, D., & Deryakulu, D. (2021). A new framework for teachers' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103305

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish*. Random House Australia.

Seligman, M. (2018). PERMA and the building blocks of well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 13*(4), 333–335. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2018.1437466

Shen, B., McCaughtry, N., Martin, J., Garn, A., Kulik, N., & Fahlman, M. (2015). The relationship between teacher burnout and student motivation. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 85*(4), 519–532. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12089

Simpson, A., Larsen, E., Clare, J., Sallis, R., & Brandenburg, R. (2023). *Teachers now: Why I left and where I've gone.* Retrieved from https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=16439

Sokal, L., Trudel, L. E., & Babb, J. (2020). Canadian teachers' attitudes toward change, efficacy, and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Educational Research Open, 1*, 100016. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2020.100016

Solanki, S., & Mandaviya, M. (2021). Does gender matter? Job stress, work-life balance, health and job satisfaction among university teachers in India. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *22*(7). Retrieved from https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss7/10

Steger, M. F., Dik, B. J., & Duffy, R. D. (2012). Measuring meaningful work: The work and meaning inventory (WAMI). *Journal of Career Assessment, 20*(3), 322–337. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072711436160

Turner, K., O'Brien, S., Wallström, H., Samuelsson, K., & Uusimäki, L. (2023). Lessons learnt during COVID-19: Making sense of Australian and Swedish university lecturers' experience. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 20*, 25. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-023-00395-5

Turner, K., & Thielking, M. (2019a). Teacher wellbeing: Its effects on teaching practice and student learning. *Issues in Educational Research, 29*(3), 938–960.

Turner, K., & Thielking, M. (2019b). How teachers find meaning in their work and effects on their pedagogical practice. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 4*(9), 70–88. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2019v44n9.5

Turner, K., Thielking, M., & Meyer, D. (2021). Teacher wellbeing, teaching practice and student learning. *Issues in Educational Research, 31*(4), 1293–1311.

Turner, K., Thielking, M., & Prochazka, N. (2022). Teacher wellbeing and social support: a phenomenological study. *Educational Research, 64*(1), 77–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2021.2013126

Wentzel, K. R. (2010). Students' relationships with teachers. In J. L. Meece & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of research on schools, schooling, and human development* (pp. 75–91). Routledge.

White, M., & Kern, M. L. (2018). Positive education: Learning and teaching for wellbeing and academic mastery. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 8*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.5502/IJW.V8I1.588

Xu, Z., & Yang, F. (2023). The dual-level effects of authentic leadership on teacher wellbeing: the mediating role of psychological availability. *Personnel Review*. https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-11-2021-0792

Zee, M., & Kooman, H. M. Y. (2016). Teacher self-efficacy and its effects on classroom processes, student academic adjustment, and teacher well-being: A synthesis of 40 years of research. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(4), 981–1015. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315626801

Zhao, W., Liao, X., Li, Q., Jiang, W., & Ding, W. (2022). The relationship between teacher job stress and burnout: A moderated mediation model. *Frontiers of Psychology, 12*, 784243. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.784243

Narelle Lemon is a Professor and VC Professoriate Research Fellow at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia. Her research expertise is in fostering wellbeing literacy in the contexts of K-12 schools, initial teacher education, and higher education—that is, capacity building in wellbeing and self-care of proactive action across diverse areas of evidence-based wellbeing science in order to flourish.

Kristina Turner is a Senior Lecturer in Primary Education at Swinburne University of Technology. Her research activity is focused on teacher and preservice teacher wellbeing and emotional intelligence. Her pioneering research into the effect of teachers' application of positive psychology strategies on their wellbeing responds to a pressing need identified by industry and the research community and has become the foundation of future research in this area in Australia and internationally.