



A Model of Positive School Leadership to Improve Teacher Wellbeing

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Abstract

Teacher wellbeing is critical for effective implementation of positive education programs (Quinlan 2017; Slemp et al. 2017). Yet, few studies have explored teachers' experiences of wellbeing, and how to enhance their wellbeing, beyond a focus on their individual practices. This case study examines teachers' perceptions of leadership practices that influenced their wellbeing in an urban high-school in New Zealand. Purposive sampling was used to select three 'high wellbeing' and three 'low wellbeing' teachers, who then participated in semi-structured interviews and completed a wellbeing journal. This article focuses on the leadership actions that teachers identified as enhancing their well-being (feeling valued, meaningful professional development, agency in decision making) and the essential skills leaders demonstrated (relationship building, contextual competence, social and emotional competence) that influenced teacher wellbeing. A model of positive school leadership is presented which outlines recommendations for leaders to enhance teacher wellbeing.

Keywords Education · Leadership · Positive leadership · Teacher wellbeing

1 Introduction

1.1 The Impact of Poor Teacher Wellbeing

Teachers are a vital part of our education system; they are responsible for the success of our students, and for ensuring school improvement. Yet, the wellbeing of teachers - a

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critical element of teaching - is often neglected or ignored. Worldwide, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is warning of teacher shortages due to an ageing workforce, increasing student numbers and “in-service teachers and school leaders leaving the profession prematurely, due to dissatisfaction, lack of recognition or burnout” (OECD 2019, p. 47). This is leading to concerns about ensuring a sustainable supply of quality teachers, with the OECD urging policy makers to take action to renew the teaching workforce (OECD 2019), and scholars identifying the need for teacher wellbeing to be taken more seriously for the sustainability of the profession (McCallum and Price 2016).

Despite the rapid increase in the research into teacher wellbeing over the last five years, there is no consensus on its definition. In McCallum et al.’s (2017) review of the literature they note that wellbeing in general has proven difficult to define, is seldom defined specifically in relation to teachers, and any definitions of teacher wellbeing in the literature vary widely. In their work on teacher wellbeing McCallum and Price (2016) acknowledge this diversity in their definition:

Wellbeing is diverse and fluid respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change. It is something we all aim for, underpinned by positive notions, yet is unique to each of us and provides us with a sense of who we are which needs to be respected. (p. 17)

Although there are challenges in defining teacher wellbeing, its importance for the sustainability of the profession, and its impact on student outcomes, has led to work to conceptualize teacher wellbeing in a way that can be used for measurement and analysis. Recently, an OECD working paper explored the research related to teacher wellbeing, proposed a conceptual framework, and recommended instruments that will be included in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2021 teacher questionnaire to measure teachers’ occupational wellbeing (Viac and Fraser 2020). Teachers’ occupational wellbeing is presented as a multidimensional concept, comprising four core dimensions: cognitive wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, physical and mental wellbeing, and social wellbeing (Viac and Fraser 2020). Wellbeing is often conceptualized in a multidimensional way, for example PERMA: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman 2011), Ryff’s six dimensions of wellbeing: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff 1989), and Huppert & So’s 10 features of flourishing: competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive emotion, positive relationships, resilience, self-esteem, and vitality (Huppert and So 2013). However, Viac and Fraser (2020) focus on teacher wellbeing as a work-related concept, and define teachers’ occupational wellbeing as “*teachers’ responses to the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to their work and their profession*” (p. 18, emphasis in original). This focus on the occupational aspect of teacher wellbeing makes explicit the links between teacher wellbeing, teachers’ practice, and the impact of this on the education system and students. For example, the cognitive dimension of teacher wellbeing relates to teacher functioning, encompassing concepts such as self-efficacy which has a large research base positively associating it with teachers’ instructional practices and student achievement (Viac and

Fraser 2020). The distinction between what constitutes a dimension of teacher wellbeing, and a factor that affects teacher wellbeing is blurred. For example, Viac and Fraser (2020) state that “cognitive well-being refers to the set of skills and abilities teachers need to work effectively” (p. 23) which includes self-efficacy, whilst McCallum et al. (2017) list self-efficacy as a factor that impacts on teacher wellbeing. Regardless of how teacher wellbeing and its components are defined, some of its consequences are widely acknowledged.

Much of the research into teacher wellbeing has focused at the negative end of the spectrum – exploring teacher stress. For decades teaching has been considered as one of the most stressful professions (Kyriacou 1987; McCallum et al. 2017). For example, in the United States teachers have the highest rate of stress among all occupational groups (Greenberg 2016), and a number of empirical studies have shown that teachers experience higher stress levels than the national population in the United Kingdom (Kidger et al. 2010; Travers and Cooper 1993), China (Yang et al. 2009) and New Zealand (Milfont et al. 2008). Many of the negative effects of low wellbeing are well publicized, with stress, or burnout, being linked to negative impacts on school performance and attrition (Greenberg 2016; Ingersoll 2001) and the resulting teacher shortages worldwide (OECD 2019). Teachers who do remain in the profession can be negatively affected by stressful working conditions, as stress is associated with reductions in teacher-efficacy, job satisfaction (Collie et al. 2012), optimism and motivation (Desrumaux et al. 2015).

Teacher wellbeing is currently in the public and political spotlight in New Zealand. Concerns have been raised by teachers and their unions about the impact of poor working conditions on teacher wellbeing and the teaching profession (Boyle 2018), including a teacher shortage crisis (Post Primary Teachers’ Association 2018), and led to a nation-wide ‘mega strike’ of primary and secondary teachers in May 2019. A study of New Zealand secondary school teachers show they have higher scores for burnout than the average for the population (Milfont et al. 2008), and one study found that 8% of New Zealand teachers were clinically depressed (Bianchi et al. 2016). Workload is a major contributor to educators’ stress levels in New Zealand. Only 38% of primary school teachers, and 29% of secondary school teachers, felt that their levels of work-related stress were manageable, and many commented this was related to high workloads, intensification of expectations, and not being able to achieve a work-life balance (Bonne and MacDonald 2019; Wylie and MacDonald 2020). Primary principals reported high stress levels, with 59% having high or extremely high stress levels, mainly due to “lack of time to focus on teaching and learning, sheer quantity of work, government initiatives, and resourcing needs” (Wylie and MacDonald 2020, p. 129). Related to this high workload were frustrations about a lack of support, with over half of secondary school teachers feeling they do not receive the support they need from either within or outside of school (Bonne and MacDonald 2019), and primary teachers commenting on insufficient support for curriculum and policy changes (Wylie and MacDonald 2020). Only a minority of primary school principals feel supported by government agencies (Wylie and MacDonald 2020). Within secondary schools, middle leaders, such as a head of department, have been identified as experiencing particularly high workloads and stress, due to factors such as national assessment requirements, performance management and appraisal, new initiatives, and resourcing (Post Primary Teachers’ Association 2018). Other specific circumstances, such as teaching combined

classes and job insecurity, have been associated with teacher stress. For example, language teachers with multi-level classes, where students from two or more different year levels are combined in one class, felt frustrated, stressed and overwhelmed due to factors such as higher workloads and struggling to meet all students' needs, and over 50% reported they did not feel supported by their school (Ashton 2018). Beginning teachers, those in their first two years of teaching in New Zealand, who were on short term job contracts experienced more stress than those in permanent positions, due to their concerns about securing further employment at the end of their contract, and anxiety about moving to a different school (Grudnoff 2011). This paints a poor picture of the general state of teacher wellbeing in New Zealand, and is similar to concerns raised around the globe.

It is not only the impact of poor teacher wellbeing on teachers that is a concern - low teacher wellbeing can negatively affect students. When teachers suffer from poor mental health, burnout or depression, this has been linked to poor performance, absenteeism and attrition (Bianchi et al. 2016; Travers and Cooper 1993). Stressed or burnt-out teachers have poorer relationships with students and the quality of their teaching decreases (Leithwood 2006). In particular, teacher burnout is associated with lower emotional intelligence, and negatively impacts teacher-student relationships, students' behaviour and academic achievement (Hoglund et al. 2015; Reyes et al. 2012). Stressed teachers' report lower self-efficacy (Collie et al. 2012), which in turn has been associated with lower student achievement (Caprara et al. 2006). Stress is often associated with a high workload, which also negatively impact students, for example, around a quarter of primary and secondary teachers in New Zealand agreed with the statement that "my workload is so high I am unable to do justice to the students I teach" (Bonne and MacDonald 2019, p. 117; Wylie and MacDonald 2020, p. 69). Teacher attrition, which has been linked to low wellbeing such as stress and burnout (OECD 2019; Travers and Cooper 1993), also negatively affects students' achievement (Ronfeldt et al. 2013). Conversely, it should be noted that when teachers experience lower levels of stress, they have higher self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Betoret 2009; Collie et al. 2012), which then positively impacts on students. Teacher wellbeing is also linked to teachers' social and emotional competence, which is associated with supportive teacher-student relationships, effective classroom management, and successful social and emotional learning program implementation (Jennings 2015; Jennings et al. 2019; Jennings and Greenberg 2009). When teachers provide emotional support to students, in terms of positive teacher-student interactions and a supportive classroom climate, students' self-efficacy and happiness in class is higher (Blazar and Kraft 2016). Focusing on promoting teacher wellbeing is linked to positive outcomes for students, both in terms of wellbeing and achievement (McCallum 2010; Murphy and Louis 2018).

1.2 Shifting to a Positive Psychology Focus

While studies of depression, or stress, or burnout, among teachers are relatively common, investigations of what enables teachers to flourish are far fewer. Instead of focusing on why teachers are leaving the profession, Day (2008) challenges researchers to explore the reasons why the majority of teachers are able to sustain their motivation and commitment to the profession. This sentiment is similar to the drive behind the

field of positive psychology, the shift away from psychology as a field that focuses on psychopathology, to one that seeks to “understand and build the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish” (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, p. 5). Examples of some of the major research topics in positive psychology include: happiness, optimism, character strengths, and resilience. Positive psychology also recognises that people and their experiences are embedded in a social context, and seeks to understand and learn how to build positive institutions (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000). The idea of building positive institutions has been taken up by schools.

1.3 Positive Education

A widespread interest in developing whole school wellbeing has led to the emergence of the field of positive education over the last two decades. There are several definitions of positive education that position educating students for positive wellbeing outcomes alongside, or integrated with, traditional academic outcomes. Seligman et al. (2009) define positive education as educating students for happiness as well as traditional skills, and White (2016) builds on this by emphasising the integration of the two using a “blend of evidence-based learning from the science of positive psychology and best practices in learning and teaching” (p. 2). This view of educating for purposes beyond merely preparing students to meet academic outcomes, or attain a job, is not new to positive education, but has been espoused by educational scholars for many decades. For example, positive education has been compared with Dewey’s ideas from a century ago about the importance of education in developing community-mindedness and socially connected individuals (Trask-Kerr et al. 2019), and is also compared to Rogers’ person-centered theories of education from the 1960s that emphasized the development of students’ innate desire to actualize their potential (Joseph et al. 2020). In fact, there is some critique that positive education uses education for wellbeing to facilitate academic attainment, rather than viewing wellbeing as an important outcome in its own right (Joseph et al. 2020). Whilst clear links have been shown between student wellbeing and academic performance (White and Kern 2018) both are seen as equally important within positive education, with the International Positive Education Network describing academic achievement and wellbeing as two strands of education that are mutually reinforcing - academic achievement contributes to wellbeing, and vice versa (IPEN 2020).

Positive education applies theories and models from positive psychology, such as Seligman’s (2011) wellbeing theory - a multidimensional construct of wellbeing, comprising five dimensions: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, or “PERMA”. Positive education also draws on other theories that explain the mechanisms through which a person’s wellbeing can be enhanced, such as strengths theory (Peterson and Seligman 2004), the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson 2001) and self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2000). For example, self-determination theory asserts that meeting a persons’ basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy enhances motivation and wellbeing (Ryan and Deci 2000). These theories are applied in the form of interventions, at educational institutions ranging from primary schools to universities (Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar 2011; Waters and Loton 2019). Interventions vary in

their focus, from a single topic area, such as strengths-based teaching and learning (Galloway et al. 2020), to programs that incorporate a number of topics (Bradley et al. 2018). Interventions also vary in their scope, from whole-school approaches to implementation (for example: Waters et al. 2015), to brief interventions that a single teacher can apply in their own class (Shankland and Rosset 2017). A number of empirical studies were used to inform the development of the SEARCH framework that gives an overview of the different types of positive education interventions available through identifying six ‘pathways’ to wellbeing: (1) strengths, (2) emotional management, (3) attention and awareness, (4) relationships, (5) coping, and (6) habits and goals (Waters and Loton 2019). Research into interventions has helped to inform the development of positive education globally.

1.4 Positive Education in Australia and New Zealand

Several schools in Australia were among the first to adopt positive education. Two well-known examples are St Peter’s College in Adelaide, which has been the subject of numerous studies (such as: Kern et al. 2015; Waters et al. 2015; White and Murray 2015), and Geelong Grammar School, near Melbourne (Norrish and Seligman 2015). Case studies of these schools show correlations between wellbeing (of students and teachers) and factors such as hope, gratitude and physical health (Kern et al. 2015), and document the effects of implementing positive education programs, such as increased wellbeing, positive affect, engagement, meaning and strengths use, and decreased instances of negative outcomes such as depression and anxiety (Vella-Brodrick et al. 2014). Since the work of these pioneering schools was publicised there has been a rapid increase in interest about positive education from schools in Australia, and neighbouring New Zealand. Organisations such as the Positive Education Schools Association (the Australian branch of the International Positive Education Network), and the annual conferences held by Positive Education New Zealand since 2017, have motivated many schools to adopt some form of positive education. However, it is notable that despite many schools in New Zealand implementing positive education, there is a paucity of studies published in the academic literature about these programs. For example, in two recent reviews of positive education interventions, Waters and Loton’s (2019) review of 75 studies included 16 from Australia, and Schiavon et al.’s (2020) review of 14 studies included six from Australia, yet neither review included any studies from New Zealand. However, it should be noted that a few studies of strengths-based programs in New Zealand schools have been conducted (Galloway et al. 2020; Quinlan et al. 2019; Quinlan 2017; Quinlan et al. 2015). Overall, this highlights the need for more research into positive education within New Zealand.

1.5 Contextual Factors

Positive education, as an emergent research field, has significant gaps between research and practice that need to be addressed (Halliday et al. 2019). Schools are complex sites which are influenced by a multitude of social, political,

cultural, historic and economic factors (Halliday et al. 2019). Indeed, positive education has been critiqued for “overlooking these contextual factors” that affect the quality of the implementation in the real-life context of a school (Halliday et al. 2019, p. 2) Although positive education has made significant progress over the past decade (Bott et al. 2017; Slemp et al. 2017) there are still few systematic case studies of schools as positive institutions (White 2016). There is some critique that many schools have overlooked the need to adopt a strategic whole-school approach to their implementation of positive education, which overlooks an important aspect of creating a culture of wellbeing (White 2019). For example, in their analysis of 75 studies of positive education interventions in schools, Waters and Loton (2019) found that only 2% of these studies were of whole-school interventions, and noted that this should provide “food for thought” for leaders as “positive education should not only be about student wellbeing, it should also include whole-school approaches that build faculty and staff wellbeing” (p. 40). We also assert that the need to attend to the wellbeing of school staff is an important aspect of a whole-school approach to positive education.

Halliday et al. (2019) have argued for implementation studies in positive education to support an exploration of the contextual factors that enhance or hinder positive education in real-life settings, rather than the controlled conditions of an intervention. In positive education, there are a variety of implementation factors to consider, including: provider (teacher), organization (school), intervention (positive education pilot program), recipient (student) and context (Halliday et al. 2019). Of particular note, provider (teacher) factors include perceived need, self-efficacy, skill and experience level, personal characteristics and understanding of positive education theory (Halliday et al. 2019). Moreover, organization (school) factors include organizational readiness, the social climate, and “alignment between the intervention with organizational goals” (Halliday et al. 2019, p. 3).

While this organizing implementation framework is an important contribution to positive education, we argue for further investigation on the interrelationship between these factors. Although teacher wellbeing has been identified as an important component in the successful implementation of positive education (Quinlan 2017; Slemp et al. 2017), with teachers’ behaviour and attitudes influencing positive outcomes for students (Quinlan et al. 2019), there is a lack of research on how schools can enhance teacher wellbeing. We argue the organization (school) plays a significant role in enhancing or inhibiting teacher wellbeing (provider), which has the potential to affect the quality of the intervention and recipient (student) experience. We focus our attention on the interrelationship between the school and teachers – specifically the role that school leaders can play in enhancing teacher wellbeing.

1.6 The Role of Educational Leadership for Wellbeing

In the last decade governments around the globe have set goals for their education systems that extend beyond the academic focus, to include promoting students “safety and wellbeing” (Department for Education 2016, p. 6), to “prepare students to live, work, and thrive in a highly connected world” (California Department of Education 2014, p. 1) and enable young people to “lead rewarding and fulfilling lives” (Ministry

of Education 2018, p. 4). Educational leaders, such as school principals and their senior leadership teams, are responsible for guiding schools to fulfil these goals, by enabling students to attain academic and wellbeing related outcomes. However, a singular focus on the outcomes for students has been critiqued as “this near-exclusive focus on ends limits attention to the means (or those teachers who provide the means) as valuable in their own right” (Murphy and Louis 2018, p. 24). Like these scholars, and following Cherkowski and Walker (2018), we also “believe that school leaders are a primary instrument, or leveraging factor, in the flourishing of schools and in the assurance of wellbeing for teachers, staff, students, and school families” (p. 129). When schools prioritize teacher wellbeing, and help to ensure teachers can flourish, this can promote better classroom climates and enable high quality teaching that leads to success for students (Cherkowski and Walker 2018; Murphy and Louis 2018). Enabling teacher wellbeing is an important first step in school wide wellbeing programs to promote student wellbeing (Quinlan 2017; Slemm et al. 2017), and is therefore important for educational leaders to address in order to meet education system goals.

1.7 Gaps in the Research

The preceding sections have outlined the need for more research into contextual factors that influence the implementation of positive education, and the need for more research generally into positive education in New Zealand. Few studies inquire into teachers’ perspectives on their wellbeing, and the factors that influence it. Studies that do explore teacher wellbeing often use quantitative measures of teacher wellbeing, such as the PERMA wellbeing framework, that includes: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Kern et al. 2015). Kern et al. (2015) give a detailed overview of how some wellbeing dimensions are positively correlated with factors such as teacher job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Other studies have explored school principals’ understanding and experiences of flourishing (Cherkowski and Walker 2016), or have studied how to enhance teacher wellbeing through interventions, such as yoga and mindfulness (Harris et al. 2016), aimed at changing individual teacher’s habits. Very few studies have explored how interactions between leaders and teachers can affect teacher wellbeing, for example how a school principal’s support can enable a whole school wellbeing intervention that improves teacher wellbeing (Laine et al. 2017).

1.8 Aims of this Study

This study uses a positive psychology lens in seeking to understand the diverse perspectives of ‘low wellbeing’ and ‘high wellbeing’ teachers, in order to identify factors that enable teachers to flourish. The teachers reported a variety of factors that impacted their wellbeing, including personal circumstances, their attitudes and habits, and the school environment. This article focuses on one aspect, the influence of the school environment on teacher wellbeing, and in particular the actions of school leaders that can enable teacher wellbeing, in order to answer the research question: How do educational leadership practices influence teacher wellbeing?

2 Method

2.1 Participants and Procedures

The research site was a large state high-school (students aged 15–18 years) in an urban area in New Zealand, with a roll of approximately 850 students and 65 teachers. The school was chosen due to its interest in promoting teacher wellbeing, such as the decision by school leaders to set aside time during the final school term for teachers to participate in activities that would enhance their own wellbeing. However, the school does not implement a positive education program, or any other type of school-wide wellbeing curriculum. The school's curriculum is organised into three areas: specific subjects aligned with The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education 2007), cross-curricular projects, and multi-year level tutorial groups. This means that full-time teachers are members of a subject department (e.g. science, health and physical education), as well as a cross-curricular team, each with its own middle leader. There were five members of the senior leadership team during the time of this study: the principal, assistant principal, and three deputy principals. The deputy and assistant principals had a tutorial class (a pastoral role), but no other teaching responsibilities. Teachers included classroom teachers with no leadership responsibilities, and also classroom teachers that held a middle leadership position, such as a head of department.

Teachers for the case study ($n = 6$) were selected from a larger sample of teachers ($n = 29$) who had completed a measure of wellbeing: the PERMA-profiler (Butler and Kern 2016). This sampling is explained below. The six teachers in the case study included three men and three women, with three of these teachers holding a middle leadership position and three without a formal leadership position. The teachers' experience ranged from five to 20 years of teaching, with at least one year in the current school, and all but one teacher having taught in other schools.¹

2.2 Comparative Case Study

The main focus of the research was the qualitative phase, but initial quantitative data was needed to identify and select participants. This type of explanatory sequential design is identified by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) as a case-selection variant. This was chosen due to a “need to describe and compare different types of cases” (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018, p. 10), as documenting diverse cases allows for more complete understanding of the research question. Case studies are a preferred methodology for exploring cause and effect (Yin 2009), in this case, how leadership practices influence teacher wellbeing. The research focuses on the experiences of individual teachers, rather than the organisation as a whole, and as such is not defined as a single case study, but an investigation of multiple cases in a single context (Yin 2009). The multiple-case rationale is applicable to the aim of having sub-groups of cases to cover different types of conditions (Yin 2009), in this case, grouping teachers according to high and low levels of wellbeing in order to compare these diverse groups.

¹ Note that this limited demographic information will not be associated with any individual teacher to assist in ensuring the participants cannot be identified.

2.3 Quantitative Analyses and Purposive Sampling

A quantitative measure was used in order to purposefully select ‘low wellbeing’ and ‘high wellbeing’ teachers for the comparative case study. All teachers and leaders within the school ($N=65$) were invited to participate in the survey. An existing instrument was chosen, the PERMA-profiler, as it has been extensively tested and shown to provide “acceptable internal reliability... and good overall model fit across over 30,000 participants worldwide” (Butler and Kern 2016, p. 21). The PERMA-profiler consists of 23 items with an 11 point (zero to 10) Likert scale to rate the response to questions such as: ‘In general, how often do you feel joyful?’ from ‘never’ to ‘always’. A score is generated for nine dimensions (each dimension comprising up to three of the items): positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, health, happiness, loneliness and negative emotions. The instrument was completed by 29 teachers, 20 of whom indicated they would like to be contacted about participation in the qualitative phase of the study. The data were processed to calculate each of the 29 teachers’ average scores out of 10 in each of the nine dimensions, and then descriptive statistics were produced for each dimension to identify the lower quartile and upper quartile of scores.

Decisions on the sample size for the qualitative data collection included both theoretical and practical considerations (Robinson 2014). The practical considerations included timeframe and resources. This was a small scale study, and the timeframe constraints allowed approximately two months for data collection (quantitative and qualitative) and four months for analysis and write up. In terms of resourcing the first author conducted all interviews, then was supported by the second and third authors for coding and analysis of the data. The practical considerations also link to the planned thematic analysis, for which small sample sizes are recommended in order to allow time for familiarisation with the data, and the iterative process of coding, searching for themes and reviewing themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). Robinson (2014) notes a guideline for sample sizes of 3 to 16 which “provides scope for developing cross-case generalities, while preventing the researcher being bogged down in data” (p. 29). Therefore, we decided on a sample size of six people – three ‘high wellbeing’ and three ‘low wellbeing’ teachers.

As the focus of the study was on how leaders within the school influence the wellbeing of the teachers they lead, our sample excluded the principal, and also the deputy principals who report directly to the principal, as the focus of the study was to look more broadly than just the influence of the principal, and examine how any senior leaders and middle leaders may influence teachers’ wellbeing. We decided to include middle leaders (for example heads of department) within our sample, as they work more closely with senior leaders, and may give additional insight into the influence of senior leaders that teachers would not. The final sample of six teachers included three teachers that also held middle leadership positions. The six teachers were selected based on having a high number of their PERMA dimension scores within either the lower quartile or upper quartile of the quantitative sample (see Author 2019 for more detail). This sampling method is similar to the example that Clark (2019) gives to illustrate how ‘connecting procedures’ are used to integrate data in mixed methods studies, where researchers “used their quantitative results to classify teachers and select a subsample of the top 25% scoring teachers for the subsequent qualitative phase” (p.

110). However, we used both the top 25% and the bottom 25% of cases within the quantitative sample in order to apply maximum variation sampling that allows researchers to “look at a subject from all available angles, thereby achieving a greater understanding” (Etikan et al. 2016, p. 3). A total of 20 teachers out of the 29 teachers who completed the PERMA survey indicated they gave consent to be contacted to participate in the qualitative data collection. In total eight teachers were approached by email or telephone (according to the preference they noted on the survey), one declined to participate, one did not reply, and six teachers consented to participate.

2.4 Qualitative Analyses

Each of the six teachers participated in a 30-minute semi-structured interview, where open-ended questions were used to probe teachers' views of their wellbeing and the factors that they perceived as impacting their wellbeing. All interviews were conducted by the first author, a teacher with 15 years of experience teaching in secondary schools (including 9 years in middle leadership positions) and a post graduate qualification in educational leadership. Interviews were conducted in either an empty classroom after school, or a meeting room during the day, at a time and place that the teacher agreed was convenient. Only the first author and the interviewee were present at interviews.

Interviews were used as a way to access individual's perception, meaning making, and to understand their construction of reality (Kvale 1996). A semi-structured interview approach was chosen, using a set of guiding questions, but allowing for follow up of teachers' answers to clarify understanding of the subjects meaning (Kvale 1996). The interview started with a brief explanation of the research project and procedures (such as the audio recording and transcription), and an opportunity for participants to ask questions. Then four questions were asked, that included: ‘What do you do to maintain or enhance your wellbeing?’ and ‘Do leaders at your school do anything that impacts your wellbeing?’ and follow up questions were used to seek clarification and probe for related information, for example ‘can you tell me more about that incident?’ The term leadership was not defined by the interviewer, but rather the interviewer sought to understand how the interviewee interpreted the term leadership, and the interviewer used clarifying questions where necessary to determine whether teachers were referring to a senior leader, a middle leader, or an informal leader. In all cases interviewees referred to either middle leaders or senior leaders. The interviewer took field notes to summarise what the interviewee said, to assist in the interview process by referring back to what a participant said when asking follow up questions. The field notes were not included in the analysis of data as they did not include any additional data that was not in the transcripts. This article focuses on teachers' explanations of how they perceived the school environment and leaders' actions influenced their wellbeing.

After the interview each teacher completed a participant journal, spending 10 minutes each day, over a five working day period, reflecting and making a journal entry. Participants were asked to write about any experiences during the day that they felt impacted on any dimension of wellbeing, either positively or negatively. Using a participant journal allowed events to be recorded in a more natural and spontaneous way and therefore minimised retrospection which is prone to bias (Bolger et al. 2003). The participant journal completion followed the interviews, as this gave the opportunity

for teachers to discuss ideas about their wellbeing before completing the journal. They would then be more likely to notice the factors affecting their wellbeing during the day and record them in the journal.

The interviews and participant journals were transcribed and entered into the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Participants were sent the transcripts to check they accurately represented their views, and make changes if they desired. Two participants sent back transcripts with changes, and these versions were used in the subsequent analysis. The data were then analysed using inductive coding, with the codes based on information in the data, rather than pre-determined themes. During three passes of coding, the initial descriptive codes were refined and combined to produce more analytic codes (Gibbs 2007). The first author conducted two passes of coding, creating a codebook with the list of codes used, a description of the code, inclusion and exclusion notes and examples (see Table 1). In order to avoid ‘definitional drift’, and to refine the codes to reflect the themes, a constant comparison method was used, where the first author regularly viewed all items coded to the same node and compared them to each other and to the codebook (DeCuir-Gunby et al. 2011; Gibbs 2007). The codebook and NVivo coding were then inspected by the second and third authors, and a couple of minor changes suggested to the codes. The changes were incorporated into a third pass of coding which was agreed upon by all authors. The authors then arranged the codes into broader themes, of which three themes related to how leaders influence teacher wellbeing.

This article focuses on the qualitative results from these teachers that informed answers to the question about how leaders actions influence teacher wellbeing.

3 Results

The results presented here relate to the three main themes that emerged about how teachers perceived leadership actions influenced their wellbeing. The three themes are (1) leaders listening to and valuing teachers, (2) leaders facilitating professional development, and (3) feedback to leaders about change. The teachers referred to leaders in the school as either senior leaders or middle leaders. The senior leaders at the time of

Table 1 Example of an entry in the codebook

Code	Description	Inclusion example	Notes on exclusions
Feedback and teacher voice	When leaders seek feedback from teachers or listen to their ideas. How approachable leaders are. Teachers being able (or not) to voice concerns. When leaders inquire into teachers' views.	“I think it seems to feel like everyone’s voices are valued which is quite nice, everyone can have their say and it doesn’t really matter... there seems to be something like there’s very little agenda or right answer and everyone can talk about the things that are plaguing them, and you know, and that’s OK.”	Does not include teachers seeking feedback from students, or teachers seeking feedback from leaders (e.g. on their classroom practice).

the study were the principal, the associate principal, and three deputy principals. The middle leaders included nine heads of department (e.g. the head of English), six associate heads of department (depending on the size of the department), and six leaders of cross-curricular teams. The results below are based on the interviews and participant journals of three ‘low wellbeing’ teachers (Teachers A, B and C) and three ‘high wellbeing’ teachers (Teachers D, E and F).

3.1 Leaders Listening to and Valuing Teachers

When teachers described leaders at the school it was clear that most teachers had good working relationships with at least some of the leaders, for example: “I think that my [team leader], I’ve got a good relationship with her” (Teacher B) and there was a positive working environment: “I feel supported by the school so that’s good” (Teacher E). Teacher A described how the empathy they received from a leader and departmental colleagues was helpful when talking about personal problems: “they listen and show empathy, or sympathy, to me and that really actually does help, it feels like someone’s trying to understand my emotions so that’s really good”, although this same teacher did not feel confident to approach senior leaders. In general, the high wellbeing teachers felt heard by leaders in the school and described senior leaders as being accessible and receptive to their views: “I think they have got it right, in the way that they are approachable, they do listen” (Teacher D). In contrast, however, low wellbeing teachers held a different view, feeling frustrated that leaders would not listen to their opinions: “I think my thoughts around it will just kind of fall on deaf ears” (Teacher B).

Two of the high wellbeing teachers described how being promoted led to a greater sense of achievement. Teacher D saw promotion as a sign that leaders had recognised their hard work: “I kind of really worked hard to make it a wonderful department, we got brilliant results for our students” (Teacher D). Teacher F described the increased workload that came with being promoted: “I do work through my lunch breaks, but that’s my decision to do that”, but at the same time felt a sense of accomplishment from being promoted to this new role, and enjoyed being mentored by a senior leader. However, the low wellbeing teachers were more likely to see senior leaders as a source of unnecessary workload: “the pressure that we’re getting from the top it’s, you know just, it’s really unrealistic... more being added on from here, and here, because they [leaders] don’t talk to each other” (Teacher C). A lack of recognition, or understanding, of the work that teachers did was a cause of negative emotions. For example, at a meeting in which teachers were told they needed to improve student achievement, Teacher B described that their classes had met achievement targets, yet there was no recognition for this, leading to a sense of frustration.

3.2 Leaders Facilitating Professional Development

On the whole, teachers’ comments about professional development were positive, with teachers valuing time for their own learning, and feeling a sense of achievement through improvement and refinement of their practice. High wellbeing teachers were more likely to identify how leaders enabled their professional development. For example, Teacher E talked about the meetings in which leaders challenged teachers thinking: “[the leaders are] really challenging us with that reflective... being reflective

on our own practice, you know, that's stuff's good", and Teacher F described taking up the professional development opportunities offered by the school: "the choice is to take that opportunity... because it's all learning and increasing my knowledge". However, the low wellbeing teachers more frequently described negative aspects about the school's professional development, such as a period of overly directed professional development that did not allow teacher agency: "that was exhausting, it was very, very... everything was structured throughout" (Teacher B). The low wellbeing teachers also voiced a lack of understanding of the purpose, or the content, of some of the professional development: "why do we spend an hour to define, you know, [strand of subject]?" (Teacher C), and "... we are encouraged to just kind of take it step by step, but I don't know if I fully understand the concepts?" (Teacher B).

3.3 Feedback to Leaders about Change

Professional development in the school was often focused on school-wide improvements to practice. Most teachers agreed that there were a lot of changes occurring in the school, but the low wellbeing teachers in the study were of the view there was "too much change" (Teacher C). They talked about the increased workload due to changes, and wanting more time to get used to new initiatives before moving on to the next one. The low wellbeing teachers more frequently voiced disagreement with the changes being implemented "what I've done in the past has worked, why are we changing it?" (Teacher C) but were reluctant to pass on their feedback to leaders as they perceived they would not be heard. In contrast, the high wellbeing teachers were more receptive to change. Teacher F approved of changes the new principal was making at the school: "we have a new principal this year, so lots of changes, but they're all positive changes, I love it", and "I think [the principal's] vision is a really good one". This positive attitude may depend on the degree to which the teachers are listened to and included in decision making. For example, Teacher F, a high wellbeing teacher, described an incident in a meeting where a leader was aggressive and ignored feedback: "it wasn't a telling off, it was like they were directives... our voice wasn't being listened to... and what caused the quietness was when we spoke up about an idea it was put down". However, in contrast to the low wellbeing teachers, this high wellbeing teacher put the interaction into perspective as a one-off, and felt confident to approach that leader with feedback about how they felt.

The qualitative data showed some clear patterns in how teachers described the impact of leadership actions. For example, listening to feedback had a positive influence on teacher wellbeing. By looking for commonalities within each group of teachers - the low wellbeing teachers and the high wellbeing teachers - there is clear evidence of particular leadership practices that influence teacher wellbeing.

4 Discussion

The results of this study were interpreted and used to develop a model of positive school leadership that outlines the actions that school leaders can take to enhance teacher wellbeing. This discussion outlines the model development, and uses the findings of other studies to support the development of the model. We then summarise key strengths and weaknesses of this study, and the model, and suggest further research.

4.1 Leadership Actions that Influence Teacher Wellbeing

Despite the varied wellbeing levels of teachers, and their different experiences of how leadership actions impacted their wellbeing, there were clear trends in leadership practices that the teachers identified as enhancing their wellbeing. While cause and effect cannot be demonstrated in this study, the findings – supported by previous studies - strongly suggests that there are three particular leadership actions that enhance teacher wellbeing:

- (1) Ensuring teachers feel that their voice, work, and effort are valued;
- (2) Facilitating professional development that is meaningful to teachers;
- (3) Enabling teachers to have sufficient agency in decision making and changes.

These actions do not have distinct boundaries; they overlap and influence each other. For example, professional development may be undertaken in relation to broader reforms occurring in schools. Therefore, these leadership actions do not stand alone, but are a set of practices that link to the central idea of positive school leadership: that the role of school leaders is to create an environment in which people can thrive (Cherkowski 2018; Murphy and Louis 2018).

4.2 Actions as Habits

In order for these actions to impact teacher wellbeing they need to occur regularly - the findings showed one off leadership actions were not enough to influence teacher wellbeing. As Teacher F noted, “wellbeing needs to be something that happens on a regular basis.... building it into what we do in our daily lives”. The term ‘habit’ has been chosen to describe this, as a habit requires actions to be repeated regularly. For leaders, this means taking the actions identified above and making them into habits in order to have a positive influence on teacher wellbeing.

4.3 Overview of the Model

A model has been developed (Cann 2019) to represent the three leadership habits and how they interact with other factors to influence teacher wellbeing (see Fig. 1). Each of the habits are grounded in the perceptions of teachers. Actions that make one teacher feel valued may have little impact on another teacher. This is represented in the model by the interaction between the habits and the teachers’ characteristics and competencies (in the black circle). The findings also showed it is essential that leaders have skills in relationship building, social and emotional competence, and responding to context, represented in the model (in the red circle), which all interact with the leadership habits to influence teacher wellbeing. There are also other influences on teacher wellbeing over which school leaders have less control, which are shown in the outer circle of the model – one example is the proposed changes to the nationally mandated assessment policy which are intended to reduce teacher workload (Ministry of Education 2019).

Each of the three habits, and leaders’ relationship building, contextual competence and social and emotional competence are explained in more details in the sections below. An in-depth explanation of individual teachers’ characteristics and

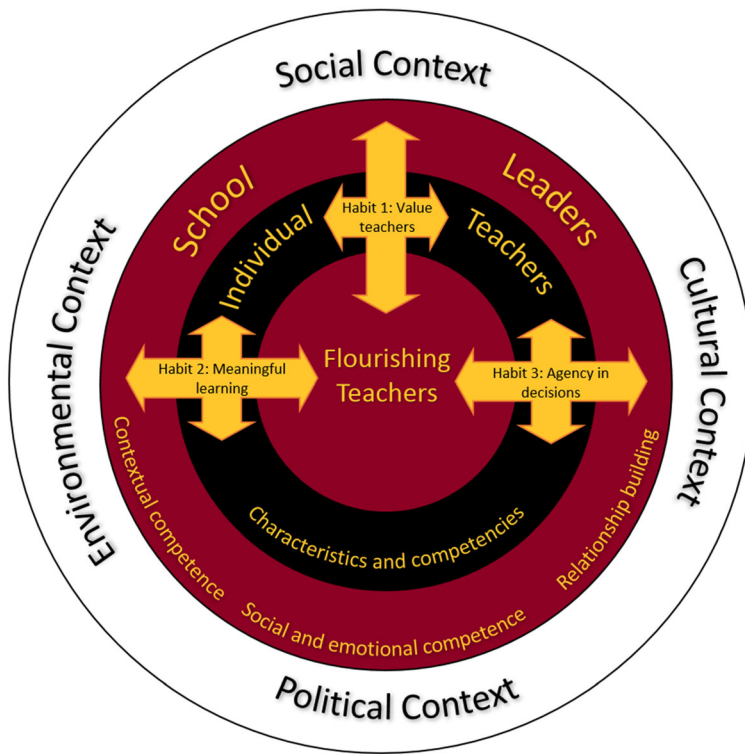


Fig. 1 Model of positive school leadership for flourishing teachers. Note. Reprinted from Cann (2019). Reprinted with permission

competencies, and the political, environmental, social and cultural contexts are beyond the scope of this article. Supplemental information about the model, including a glossary of terms, is provided in Appendix 1.

Habit 1. *The importance of teachers feeling that they are valued*

The teachers in this study talked about appreciation, recognition, and feeling valued as contributing positively to their wellbeing. Other research supports the idea that feeling appreciated is linked to flourishing (Hone et al. 2015). Teachers in this study linked the notion of feeling appreciated to recognition from leaders, such as positive comments or promotions. Teachers who felt their strengths had been recognised through being promoted spoke of the positive impact on their wellbeing through increased meaning and accomplishment. This is consistent with Roffey's (2012) research that demonstrates when leaders recognise teachers' strengths, teachers respond positively. A number of studies also show how a strengths-based approach in the school or workplace increases teacher or employee wellbeing (Cherkowski 2018; Hone et al. 2015; Murphy and Louis 2018). However, promotion may not always have a positive impact on wellbeing, as teachers may be unwilling to take on leadership roles due to seeing leaders overwhelmed by workload, and believing that leadership roles may impair their ability to make a difference in the classroom (e.g. Cameron et al. 2007). Individual's

differ in how they prefer appreciation to be demonstrated, and the degree to which a person feels valued depends on whether a leader's behaviour matches their own preferences (Hamstra et al. 2014). Leaders must therefore consider what kind of recognition is appropriate for each individual.

Teachers also described feeling valued when leaders listened to their opinions and ideas. Indeed, in this study, all of the high wellbeing teachers felt that their voice was heard – at least most of the time. Teacher voice is important in creating an opportunity for teachers to influence their work, and is critical for both self-efficacy and developing teams (Murphy and Louis 2018). Yet, some low wellbeing teachers in this study did not voice feedback to leaders as they felt they would not be listened to. They also commented on leaders' lack of understanding of the effort they were putting into their work, which led to further feelings of frustration. If leaders demonstrate empathy - actively understanding others perspectives and concerns - they can increase teachers' positive emotions and bring out the best in people (Goleman et al. 2002). A key takeaway from this research is that teachers feel valued when they are listened to and feel understood, and leaders need to effectively listen and demonstrate empathy in order to communicate that with teachers.

Habit 2. *The impact of meaningful professional development*

All teachers in the study referred to the positive impact of professional development, with many discussing the sense of achievement they experienced through their own personal and professional growth. This aligns with previous research that meaningful professional development is linked to teacher morale (Leithwood 2006), and job satisfaction (Murphy and Louis 2018). Teachers in this study viewed professional development as meaningful when they perceived it met their own needs for development, as well as enhancing student outcomes. The high wellbeing teachers felt they could take ownership of their learning, and that leaders enabled this when they provided choice in professional development and gave teachers more responsibility. In contrast, the low wellbeing teachers expressed frustration with professional development they perceived as not relevant, too directive, or not meeting their needs. Le Fevre et al. (2016) argue that to avoid the feeling that professional development is being 'done to' teachers, learning needs to be adaptive and responsive to teacher needs. However, in this study some teachers clearly felt their professional development needs were not met. Murphy and Louis (2018) caution against this oversight, and argue that positive school leadership must be concerned with all members in the organisation flourishing, including teachers' needs for growth and development. When leaders facilitate professional development that meets each individual teacher's need for growth the accomplishment aspect of wellbeing increases.

Habit 3. *Consequences of enabling teacher agency in decision making and changes*

High wellbeing teachers in this study were confident to approach leaders to ask questions and felt that they were listened to, which made them feel valued and gave them a sense of agency in the decision-making processes at the school. Teachers value being able to influence decisions and have their voices heard (Laine et al. 2017), and the degree to which teachers are able to influence decisions has been linked to greater

self-efficacy (Leithwood 2006), higher wellbeing (Pisanti et al. 2003) and experiencing more positive emotions about change (Hargreaves 2004). The majority of the teachers in this study commented that there were significant changes occurring at their school, however, the low wellbeing teachers tended to think the pace of change was too fast, and at times did not agree with the way in which change was implemented. A pacesetter style of leadership can lead to teachers feeling overwhelmed (Fullan 2001; Goleman et al. 2002) and exhausted (Laine et al. 2017). Low wellbeing teachers also described negative emotions when they felt that their voices were not heard, thought they could not influence decisions, and experienced less agency in their work. A lack of control over workplace decisions has been shown to increase stress and is linked to poor wellbeing (Marmot 2004). The challenge for leaders is to ensure that teachers buy into the changes being proposed, without being coercive (Fullan 2001) or mandating changes, as that results in negative emotions (Hargreaves 2004). Instead, school leaders must employ an inclusive change process where participants' views are sought and taken into account (Hargreaves 2004) and avoid 'initiative overload' and unrealistic timelines so that leader and teacher energy can be sustained through the changes (Hargreaves and Fink 2006). Positive school leadership advocates avoiding a problem-focused approach to change, and instead listening to the needs and concerns of teachers (Murphy and Louis 2018). If leaders can include all teachers in decision making this will have positive impacts on teacher wellbeing.

4.4 Relationship Building, Contextual Competence and Social and Emotional Competence

In this study the leader-teacher relationships illustrated three key skills that influenced how leaders' actions enhanced teacher wellbeing: relationship building, contextual competence, and social and emotional competence. The first skill, building positive relationships, is at the core of flourishing schools (Cherkowski 2018), and helps leaders to build trust which in turn enables school improvement (Bryk and Schneider 2002). It was clear that high wellbeing teachers in this study had positive relationships with leaders where they felt valued and listened to, which also encouraged those teachers to participate in decision making. The second skill, contextual competence, encompasses leaders' understanding of how teachers perceive the context in which they are working, and leaders' responsiveness to teachers' individual needs. This can be demonstrated by inquiring into teachers' views during the change process (Hargreaves 2004), and ensuring professional development is responsive to teacher needs (Le Fevre et al. 2016). An understanding of contextual factors is also important for the successful implementation of school-wide wellbeing programs (Halliday et al. 2019). Finally, the third skill of social and emotional competence is illustrated by the ways in which teachers experienced positive impacts on their wellbeing when leaders showed understanding, empathy, trust, and openness. A leaders' ability to manage emotions is central to effective leadership, including being able to build positive relationships and respond appropriately to others (Cherkowski 2018; Crawford 2011; Goleman et al. 2002; Hargreaves and Fink 2006; Murphy and Louis 2018). Together these skills are important for school leaders to positively influence teacher wellbeing.

The differing views of leadership within the school in this study also highlight the variable nature of the leader-teacher relationship, and the need for leaders to examine

the nature of their interactions with different teachers. The recommended leadership habits, and accompanying skills, are what many leaders espouse to be doing already - what leader would say they do not value teachers? However, it was clear that teachers in this study did not always perceive they were valued. It is, therefore, worth considering the differences between what people say they do, their espoused theories, and what they actually do - their theories-in-use (Argyris 2010). When dealing with difficult situations, people often end up producing consequences they do not desire, using defensive reasoning such as blaming other people for errors, and they are often unaware they are doing so (Argyris 2010). For leaders to implement the suggested recommendations they may need to examine their own theories-in-use. For example, leaders may intend to involve teachers in decision making, but if the process is potentially threatening for teachers then leaders will not receive genuine feedback.

4.5 Strengths, Limitations and Further Research

This study makes a valuable contribution to understanding how to enhance teacher wellbeing, an area in which there is a paucity of research in New Zealand and globally. The qualitative data gathered provided rich descriptions of teachers' perceptions of the school-based factors that influence their wellbeing. The use of such self-report data is associated with limitations in that it only provides teachers' perspectives on the actions of leaders, and does not inquire into leaders' perspectives, or an objective measure of leaders' actions. However, "as people perceive and experience situations in different ways" people's perspectives are one important aspect of developing an understanding of wellbeing from a systems viewpoint (Kern et al. 2019, p. 5). While this study suggests how leaders can change their actions in response to teachers' beliefs about wellbeing, further research could investigate leaders' perspectives on enhancing teacher wellbeing. There are also limitations to the influence leaders have over some of the factors affecting teacher wellbeing, such as a teacher's family life. If factors such as these dominate a teacher's wellbeing then the recommended actions made here may have limited impact. Another limitation of this study is that qualitative data was only collected from six participants, from one school, and within a short timeframe. The small sample size limits the generalisability of the research, as the sample of six teachers cannot be considered to be representative of all teachers within the school, and a single school is not representative of all schools within New Zealand, let alone globally. Further research is needed to assess the generalisability of the recommendations in other contexts, for example, with differing geographical, socioeconomic and cultural profiles. Research should include a sample of schools large enough to represent this range of contexts, and more teachers in order to assess the generalisability of themes across the whole population of teachers in New Zealand. In particular, given more time and resources than were available in this study, theoretical sampling could be used to select additional participants, and adapt interviews, in order to reach saturation of categories (Draucker et al. 2007). Given the variable nature of teaching, for example with high workload and stress around examination times, and recovery times during school holidays, an investigation into the changes in teacher wellbeing over the course of a school year would be informative. The recommendations highlighted in this study also suggest topics for further research, for example, social-emotional skills within educational leadership development (see also Cherkowski 2018).

The proposed model of positive school leadership that has been presented is supported by the results of this study, and references to other empirical findings. However, the small sample size used in this study is a major limitation in the generalisability of this model. Further research to test whether the model is applicable in other circumstances or contexts should deliberately seek out confirming and disconfirming cases in order to elaborate on this study, and test for any variations or exceptions (Draucker et al. 2007).

4.6 Summary and Conclusions

This study has shown that strong relationships between leaders and teachers, based on care and understanding, are essential to enable teachers to flourish. Leaders must show that they genuinely value teachers, support their personal growth, and value their voice in decision making. The onus for school leaders to improve teacher wellbeing is not an added extra, but needs to be embedded in the everyday interactions between leaders and teachers in schools. Teacher wellbeing is an important part of whole school wellbeing and enabling the goals of positive education: positive academic and wellbeing outcomes for students. As this research shows, when leaders and teachers work together to promote personal growth and collective understanding, they have the power to enhance teacher wellbeing.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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