Teacher Mental Health and Wellbeing: What, Why and How

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Teacher mental health and wellbeing is neglected in policy relative to student mental health and wellbeing. Yet there are ongoing concerns around teachers' stress levels and their impact on students and teacher shortages. Through a desk-based literature review relevant literature, current reports and statistics were examined to ascertain definitions and understandings of wellbeing and mental health suitable for teachers. The study then examined the importance of teacher mental health and wellbeing, rates and causes of teacher stress and burnout and factors that could support enhancing teacher mental health and wellbeing. Mental health and wellbeing are both complex concepts to define, but the current state of teacher mental health and wellbeing in Australia is of concern. There are protective factors that can support teachers' mental health and wellbeing, especially whole school approaches that embed the mental health and wellbeing of students, staff and community.

Background and Purpose

Student mental health and wellbeing has been the focus of educational policy for a number of years (Powell & Graham, 2017; Western Australian Department of Education, 2019a; Western Australian Department of Education, 2019b; Western Australian Department of Education, 2021), with considerable resources devoted to supporting the policies (e.g., The Australian Student Wellbeing Framework: Australian Government, 2020a; Student Wellbeing Hub: Australian Government, 2020b).

This focus on student mental health and wellbeing draws a sharp contrast with the lack of attention regarding teacher mental health and wellbeing. There is an abundance of research on teacher stress and burnout, but little commensurate research or policy pertaining to teacher mental health and

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wellbeing. Teacher stress matters, not only for the negative outcomes for the teacher, because it is also associated with poor student wellbeing (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016) and achievement at school (Arens & Morin, 2016). In addition, it is connected with turnover intent (Heffernan et al., 2022; Rajendran et al., 2020) and Australia is facing a growing teacher workforce shortage (Australian Government, 2022). Estimates of teacher stress and burnout vary depending on country and phase of learning. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020, p. 24) reported that worldwide, lower secondary teachers reporting "a lot" or "quite a bit" of stress in their work ranged from 30% to approximately 87%, with 58% of Australian teachers experiencing these stress levels. Initial reports on teacher stress since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that stress levels have risen even higher (Brooks et al., 2022; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Phillips et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2021; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2022). Mitigating teacher stress is an important, but complex, issue as there are multiple, interrelated causes. Identifying those that can be controlled and mitigated in the primary school environment is one of the purposes of this study.

Although 'wellbeing' is commonly linked, fused or used interchangeably with 'mental health', the relationship between the two terms is not clear. Additionally, definitions as to what exactly constitutes mental health or wellbeing are elusive and can be ambiguous or have different emphases within different professions (Cumming & Wong, 2018; Jones et al., 2019). Identifying suitable definitions of mental health and wellbeing for primary school teachers is crucial for finding appropriate strategies for enhancing that wellbeing.

This paper has three aims. First, to explore concepts and definitions of mental health and wellbeing to identify understandings of mental health and wellbeing that are suitable for teachers in the Australian school context. Second, to identify and analyse causes of teachers' stress in the Australian school context. Third, to identify ways teacher mental health and wellbeing can be enhanced and embedded in the Australian school context. The paper was guided by four research questions, all relating to the Australian context:

- What is an appropriate understanding of positive mental health for teachers?
- What is an appropriate understanding of 'wellbeing' for teachers?
- What are the main causes of teacher stress?
- What are the factors that enhance teacher mental health and wellbeing at a school level?

Defining Mental Health and Wellbeing

In recent times, mental health has been associated with a positive state, however, traditional understandings and common usage have more negative connotations. For example, mental health is still frequently used as a euphemism for mental illness (Manwell et al., 2015) and the primary focus of legislation such as Mental Health Acts is on mental illness and mental disorders (Government of Western Australia, 2014). To further complicate matters, mental health definitions frequently refer to wellbeing interchangeably with the term mental health. This is problematic as there is also a lack of clarity on the definition of wellbeing and thus there is considerable debate as to the level of overlap between the concept of positive mental health and the concept of wellbeing (Galderisi et al., 2015; Palumbo & Galderisi, 2020; Wren-Lewis & Alexandrova, 2021;). There are cogent arguments that individuals can have wellbeing without mental health and vice versa. Understanding what is meant by the terms "mental health" and "wellbeing" is important for this study because it has implications for how they are supported at a practical level in a primary school context.

Concepts and definitions of mental health

In their most recent report on mental health, The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2022) describes mental health as existing "on a complex continuum, with experiences ranging from an optimal state of well-being to debilitating states of great suffering and emotional pain" (p. xiv). Despite the word 'complex', this description views mental health as a spectrum with "positive mental health as wellbeing at one end and negative mental health as mental illness or psychiatric disorder at the

other end" (Norwich et al. 2022, p. 808). An alternative view of this is the dual-continua model of mental health and mental illness (Keyes et al., 2014). In this, mental illness and mental health are separate, but related concepts. Mental illness belongs on the continuum of one dimension and mental health belongs on the other, but correlated dimension. The terms flourishing and languishing are used to describe high and low mental health respectively and both can exist with or without mental illness (see Figure 1). A difficulty with both of these models is that the concept of wellbeing is used as equivalent to positive or high mental health (the term "flourishing" is also a synonym for high wellbeing [Huppert et al., 2013]). Wellbeing is a complex concept in its own right and its relationship to positive mental health is still debated (Galderisis et al., 2015; Keller, 2020; Wren-Lewis & Alexandrova, 2021). Wellbeing is explored more thoroughly in the following section.

In a multidisciplinary survey of mental health professionals, Manwell et al. (2015) found little consensus for a definition of mental health, but some consensus for core concepts. These were focused on the individual and related to choice in interacting with society (agency, autonomy and control) as well as social connection through meaningful participation in valued roles.

There is broad agreement that mental health is more than the absence of illness (Galderisi et al., 2015; Manwell et al., 2015; Palumbo & Galderisi, 2020; Wren-Lewis & Alexandrova, 2021). However, debate arises as to the degree that positive feelings and functioning have a role to play. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has produced several iterations of a mental health definition (WHO, 2004; WHO, 2013; WHO, 2022) and these are widely referred to and used in the research and practitioner arenas. However, the emphasis on positive emotions and functions has been questioned (Galderisis et al., 2015; Huber et al., 2011; Manwell et al., 2015; Palumbo & Galderisi, 2020; Wren-Lewis & Alexandrova, 2021) as to whether the emotions and functions identified are influenced by variable cultural, temporal or contextual norms or values rather than universal elements for mental health.

Figure 1.
The dual continua model of mental health and mental illness

Note. From Mental health as a complete state: How the salutogenic perspective completes the picture by C. L. M. Keyes (2014. p.182).

Wren-Lewis and Alexandrova (2021) argue that the WHO definition is incredibly demanding and that it is better to identify mental health with particular psychological capabilities that support individuals to engage with, and live a life they value, whatever that may be. This holds that mental health is a necessary condition for wellbeing and is consistent with the dual continua model of mental health and mental illness.

Within the scope of this present study, it is only possible to capture a fraction of the complexity of factors that influence the mental health of individuals in different circumstances and a definition that holds true in

all circumstances remains elusive. However, it is possible to delineate a conception of mental health that works for teachers in the Australian school context, namely:

- Mental health is a positive concept and is more than an absence of mental illness.
- Wellbeing can be a component of positive mental health, however, a substantial degree of positive mental health is necessary for wellbeing to flourish.
- Mental health is individual and includes attributes and capacities that allow individuals to function successfully in their lives.

Concepts and definitions of wellbeing

Defining wellbeing encounters many of the same issues as defining mental health. Even an agreed spelling of the word seems to be elusive, for example, 'wellbeing', 'well-being' and 'well being'. (Bache et al., 2016, p. 894 - 895) argue that wellbeing is a 'wicked' problem (after Rittel & Webber, 1973), in that it is "difficult to define and there are no definitive and objective answers". Further, wellbeing definitions are often multidimensional (Svane et al., 2019), in that they contain concepts of health, satisfaction and flourishing, they refer to personal and community aspects as well as concepts of resilience, such as having psychological and social resources to meet challenges. Keller (2020) identifies that some of the problems with conceptions of wellbeing are that the term can be used either broadly, to indicate how well life may be going or narrowly, to describe a particular aspect of life such as economic wellbeing, physical wellbeing or cultural wellbeing. The point being made that the term 'wellbeing' is not always associated with mental health and that its exact nature is complex and disputed.

Traditionally, wellbeing as a state of mind has arisen out of, and been defined as, part of a philosophical tradition and falls into two approaches, hedonia or subjective wellbeing, often equated with happiness, and eudaimonia or being psychologically well, concerned with living well (Deci & Ryan, 2006). Related to this, positive psychology has made a

distinction between subjective wellbeing, corresponding to personal experiences of wellbeing and objective wellbeing, such as having the resources to meet basic needs, according to cultural norms and values (Norwich et al., 2022).

Criticisms of some frameworks of wellbeing such as the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011), which identifies and integrates five elements of wellbeing from both the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches: Positive emotion, Engagement, positive Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishments, stem from their focus on the individual rather than the society and communities to which they belong (Norwich et al., 2022). This is echoed by Smith and Reid (2018), who argue that the philosophical distinctions between hedonic and eudaimonic approaches have led to a neglect of the role of place, space and context in wellbeing.

As with mental health, within the scope of this study, it is only possible to distil wellbeing down to an understanding of what this may mean for teachers in the Australian school context:

- Both approaches of hedonia, particularly engagement, and eudaimonia, especially autonomy, meaning and positive relationships have a place.
- The context of the school, specifically school culture, prioritises support for flourishing wellbeing aspects such as positive relationships, agency, meaning, community contribution and engagement.
- Aspects of wellbeing that are highly individual, such as personal affect or negative personal circumstances cannot be influenced directly.

Measures of mental health and wellbeing

Given the complexities of defining and understanding the concepts of 'mental health' and 'wellbeing', measuring either can be challenging. According to Diener (2009a, p. 1), "To be able to measure something we must have a good theory about that phenomenon". The research literature has identified a range of key difficulties associated with measuring mental health and wellbeing, including:

- Elements/concepts to include and/or exclude;
- How to link or separate elements/concepts to some factors – for example, the questions used to measure subjective wellbeing can be interpreted differently by people from different cultures (Cummins, 2018);
- Reliability and validity of the measures – many measures/instruments rely on self-reports. Individual responses to wellbeing measures can vary significantly depending on the memory, bias, judgement and attentional processes of the subject (Diener, 2009b). Additionally, this raises further confounding issues because the person who is being assessed can affect the instrument and the instrument can affect the psychological makeup of those being measured (Kempf, 2018).

A range of instruments that can be used to measure mental health and wellbeing have been developed (see Table 1). This list is by no means exhaustive, and a more comprehensive list can be found on the Australian Centre on Quality of Life (2017) website. Several of the instruments listed in Table1 have been used to measure school staff mental health and wellbeing and there are multiple companies and charities who provide customisable surveys, analyses, training and strategies, for schools.

Table 1. Examples of Measures of Mental Health and Wellbeing

Measuring Instrument	Description	Other information
General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) (Goldberg et al., 1997)	• Self-completed questionnaire • 12, 28, 30 or 60 question versions • Measures psychological distress and general mental wellbeing	In a recent study the GHQ was successfully investigated as to internal consistency when measuring the mental health of teachers in Germany (Lütke Lanfer et al., 2022)
Self-Reporting Questionnaire 20 (SRQ-20)	• Self-completed questionnaire • 20 questions	The internal consistency of the SRQ-20 was successfully tested in various occupational

(Harding et al., 1980)	• Measures psychological distress and general mental wellbeing	groups including teachers in Brazil (Santos et al., 2016)
The WHO-5 Wellbeing Index (WHO-5) (WHO, 1998, pp. 5 – 11)	• Self-completed questionnaire • 5 questions • Measures wellbeing and screens for depression	A review of the literature found that the WHO-5 was a useful tool to screen for depression, to assess wellbeing over time or to compare wellbeing between groups (Topp et al., 2015)
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen et al., 1983)	• Self-completed questionnaire • 10 questions (originally 14) • Measures perceptions of stress	The PSS-10 was found to be a valid and reliable measure to assess perceived stress in a sample of early childhood teachers in South Korea (Lee & Jeong, 2019)
Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010)	• Self-completed questionnaire • 8 questions • Measures perceptions of success in relationships, self-esteem, purpose and optimism	In a Portuguese study of 911 adults, the Flourishing Scale showed very good reliability and validity and was judged adequate to assess psychological wellbeing (Silva and Caetano, 2013).
Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF) (Keyes, 2005)	• Self-completed questionnaire • 14 questions • Measures three dimensions of wellbeing: emotional, social and psychological	A large-scale Canadian study validated the three-factor model of wellbeing in the MHC-SF. However, the social wellbeing scale did not function as well as the emotional and psychological factors (Orpana et al., 2017).

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMBS) (Tennant et al., 2007) and Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMBS) (Stewart-Brown et al., 2009)	• Self-completed questionnaire • 14 questions (short version has 7) • Measures thoughts, feelings and an individual's functioning	The WEMBS was tested in a large Australian sample finding item redundancy in the 14-item scale. However, further analysis kept additional items to the 7-item scale as this resulted in a more holistic measure of overall wellbeing. The final 10-item WEMBS was concluded to be a strong measure for monitoring wellbeing. (Houghton et al., 2017)
PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016)	• Self-completed questionnaire • 23 questions • Measures the five aspects of the PERMA framework along with negative emotion and health	In a study of the psychometric properties of the PERMA-Profiler in Australian Adults, Ryan et al. (2019) reported mixed results, with good support for internal consistency, but insufficient support for the psychometric properties of the measure.
Teacher Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (TSWQ) (Renshaw et al., 2015)	• Self-completed questionnaire • 8 questions • Measures two dimensions of teacher's positive psychological functioning (school connectedness and teaching efficacy)	An examination of the validity of the TSWQ in the United States supported its use for identifying teachers in need of support interventions, monitoring the effectiveness of interventions and for screening purposes (Mankin et al., 2018)

The salient points when considering measuring the mental health and wellbeing of school staff are:

- To choose an instrument or instruments that cover key elements of mental health and wellbeing accurately as well as broadly;
- By measuring, the school will have baseline data that will help target interventions in areas of most need; and
- Once any interventions or programs are in place, measures will help monitor their effectiveness over time.

Importance of Teacher Mental Health and Wellbeing

Teacher mental health and wellbeing has been of concern for a long time. Research into teacher stress first started appearing in the 1970s (Kyriaco & Sutcliffe, 1977, as cited in Kyriaco, 2001) and have continued to proliferate since, generating a host of theories and measurement instruments. Recent studies (e.g., Carroll et al., 2022; Heffernan et al., 2022; OECD, 2020; Stapleton et al., 2022) continue to find that Australian teachers have symptoms of adverse mental health.

The most common area of research for adverse mental health and wellbeing outcomes for teachers relates to occupational stress and burnout. Occupational stress can be defined as an imbalance between work demands and the resources available, both personal and environmental at work that results in social, emotional and physical disturbances (OECD, 2020). Ongoing and untreated stress can lead to teacher burnout (Mearns & Cain, 2003; Rajendran et al., 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Burnout is a more serious problem and is defined as "a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job" (Maslach & Leiter, 2016, p. 103). It includes feelings of being depleted of one's emotional and physical resources (Maslach et al., 2001) and has three main dimensions: overwhelming exhaustion, lack of engagement with the job and feelings of cynicism, and a lack of accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Although much of education policy focuses on student wellbeing (Powell & Graham, 2017), the interconnectedness of teachers, their students and their school communities cannot be ignored. It is therefore important to focus on all aspects of mental health and wellbeing that can impact the school as a whole. As argued by Kempf (2018 p. 12), there is "interdependence between students, teachers and school wellbeing".

Effects of teacher mental health and wellbeing on students' learning

Student learning is at the core of schools' purpose as outlined in the Early Years Learning Framework (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009) and the Principles of Teaching Learning and Assessment (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2018), and student academic outcomes are one of the ways school success is measured. Multiple studies have detailed how teacher mental health and wellbeing can impact on student learning. An analysis of a large data set from German primary school aged children and their teachers (Arens & Morin, 2016) examined the associations between teachers' emotional exhaustion, one of the symptoms of burnout, and student learning outcomes. Their results showed that "classes taught by teachers reporting higher levels of emotional exhaustion tended to present lower average levels of academic achievement" (Arens & Morin, 2016, p. 807) as well as students' reduced perceptions of support and satisfaction with school. Two studies in the United States of America also found negative relationships between student achievement and teachers' mental health. Third Grade teachers reporting symptoms of depression were less likely to maintain quality learning environments; their students also demonstrated weaker achievement in mathematics than teachers with no depressive symptoms (McLean & Connor, 2015). Prewett and Whitney (2021) examined the relationship between early adolescent students' achievement with teachers' negative affect and found it to be a significant negative predictor for students' reading and mathematics scores. A review of 14 studies on the effects of teacher burnout on students (Madigan & Kim, 2021a) also found evidence that teacher burnout is related to worse academic achievement and lower quality motivation for students.

Effects of teacher mental health and wellbeing on students' mental health and wellbeing

Students' mental health and wellbeing, as well as being a focus for various current policy documents is also important for student learning (O'Connor et al., 2019). Adverse mental health in students is associated with significant school absences and can affect students' ongoing development (Lawrence et al., 2016). Although some aspects of students' mental health and wellbeing is beyond the reach of schools, teachers' mental health and wellbeing has been linked to various aspects of student wellbeing.

In a study of primary school children, Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016) found higher levels of classroom teachers' burnout was linked with higher cortisol levels in their students. In the UK, teachers' depressive symptoms were associated with secondary school students' psychological distress (Harding et al., 2019). Also in the UK, Glazzard and Rose (2020) found that primary school students were aware of their teacher's mood and could identify teacher stress despite efforts by the teacher to hide it. This had the effect of students modifying their behaviour so as not to upset their teacher further. Teachers were also able to identify the negative impact their mental health had on their teaching, student-teacher relationships and the way they managed their classes. Other research has identified that teacher emotional exhaustion may result in a lower threshold for disruptive behaviours. Teachers are then more likely to use stronger sanctions such as referring to the school office for disciplinary measures such as suspension (Eddy et al., 2020). This is significant as there is a negative association between student academic achievement and school suspensions (Noltemyer et al., 2015).

Conversely, teaching practice and student learning can be impacted positively when teachers have positive wellbeing (Turner & Thielking, 2019; O'Connor, 2019). Harding et al. (2019) found that student positive wellbeing and lower psychological distress was associated with better teacher wellbeing.

Effects of teacher mental health and wellbeing on attrition rates and teacher turnover intent

Teacher workforce shortages have been identified as "one of the single biggest issues facing teacher employers in all school sectors and early childhood settings across Australia" (Australian Government, 2022, p. 3). This workforce shortage results from multiple causes, including teacher attrition. Teacher attrition is when teachers permanently leave the profession, as opposed to retiring or moving to another school (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Turnover intent or intention is when an employee intends to voluntarily change jobs (Schyns et al., 2007). Teacher attrition is a global phenomenon (Viac & Fraser, 2020) and there is an abundance of literature on the subject. Borman and Dowling (2008) in their meta-analysis of teacher attrition found that teachers' work conditions were important factors for predicting attrition. These are also factors quoted as sources of teacher stress (OECD, 2020) and in studies on teacher burnout (Carroll et al., 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021a; Rajendran et al., 2020) environmental factors such as high workloads, student misbehaviour, time pressures and organisational factors all play a part.

In Australia, much of the data on teacher attrition is outdated, inadequate and variable between career stages (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2022). However, the most recent information from the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2021) found consistency about turnover intent across most of the teacher workforce with 14% of teachers indicating their intention to leave the profession in the next 10 years for reasons other than retirement. Four of the five main reasons given for turnover intent related to mental health and burnout (heavy workload, work/life balance, stress and the demands of professional regulation being too heavy) (AITSL, 2021). A large-scale study of Australian teachers found only 41% of participants intended to stay within the profession. Of the teachers who intended to leave, 62% quoted workload pressures and the effects on their health and wellbeing, whereas a further 21% referred to issues around their health and wellbeing directly, including "relationships, exhaustion, stress and burnout" (Heffernan et al., 2022).

Although not the only reason for attrition and turnover intent, there is a distinct relationship between teachers leaving, or who want to leave the profession, and their mental health and burnout (Madigan & Kim, 2021b; Rajendran et al., 2020).

Rates of Teacher Mental Illness, Stress and Burnout

Rates of specific negative mental health in teachers are difficult to quantify accurately as many of the instruments and questionnaires have been used to measure different aspects of mental health and illness. Additionally, it is not always easy to separate factors other than work that may be influencing mental health difficulties such as personal affect or general life stress. There are also wide discrepancies of reported teacher stress between countries (OECD, 2020). Despite this, there is evidence that teachers are more at risk of mental illness, stress and burnout than the general population.

In Australia, recent figures show that in 2020 – 2021, 15% of the adult population aged 16-85 experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2022). In teachers, these figures seem to be significantly worse. In a study of 166 Australian teachers, Stapleton et al. (2020, p. 134) found that "18% of respondents scored in the moderately severe to severe depressive symptom range, 62% met criteria for moderate to severe anxiety, 56% met criteria for medium to high somatic severity and 17% screened positive for possible alcohol abuse or dependence". According to Safe Work Australia (2015) around 7,820 Australians per year are compensated for a work related mental condition. Of these, school teachers were the second most highly ranked occupation group for mental disorder claims.

In the OECD (2020, p. 92) report, Australian teachers were above the OECD average for experiencing either "a lot" or "quite a bit" of stress in their work (58%). This correlates with another Australian study (Carroll et al., 2022), where more than half the sample reported that their jobs were very or extremely stressful.

Current, accurate figures for rates of burnout in Australian teachers are elusive. Although media reports suggest it is high (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2022; The Guardian, 2022), they do not give specific evidence. Much of the current research literature is focused on causes and mitigation of burnout, without giving specific rates. It may also be difficult to obtain accurate information because teachers experiencing emotional exhaustion, cynicism and a lack of accomplishment are less willing to participate in research studies. However, as chronic stress is a precursor to burnout, rates of stress, attrition and turnover intent rates can give insight into rates of burnout.

Causes of Poor Mental Health and Wellbeing in Teachers

There are numerous causes of poor mental health and wellbeing in the general population, including genetic and environmental factors; teachers are no exception to these. Additionally, teachers are more prone to mental and psychosomatic symptoms such as sleep and concentration disorders, headaches, irritability and listlessness (Scheuch et al., 2015). However, there are factors directly related to their occupation that affect them, particularly in relation to job satisfaction, occupational stress and burnout, which may be susceptible to influence at a school and a personal level.

Multiple studies have attempted to identify the main causes of teacher stress and burnout. The factors identified remain fairly consistent apart from some differences in nomenclature. In a global, large-scale survey of teachers, the OECD (2020) categorised teacher stress into three main areas, namely workload stress, managing classroom stress and responsiveness to stakeholder stress. Other research has identified additional factors such as emotional labour (Kariou et al., 2021) and value dissonance (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). McCormick and Barnett (2011) categorised teacher stress into four domains dependent on teacher attributions for their stress: personal (self-efficacy), student (misbehavior), school (whether the environment is supportive or not) and external (related to education departments and government policies). Over 20 years ago, Kyriacou (2001) in a review on teacher stress cited

10 main sources of teacher stress that could all be allocated within those categories. Part of the difficulty with categorising sources of teacher stress involves the varied and interconnected nature of teacher work. For example, student misbehaviour is frequently cited as a source of teacher stress, but this could be because it is adding to teacher workload, it is interfering with the teacher's self-efficacy, the leadership of the school is not supportive enough or the teacher does not agree with the department policy on how to deal with the type of behaviour.

Workload stress

Workload stress involves multiple areas of teacher work and can also be understood as time pressure; too much to do and not enough time to do it in, resulting in poor life-work balance. Much of the current, publicly available information on teacher workload is based on pre-COVID-19 data and there are suggestions that the pandemic has exacerbated workload issues. The NTWD (AITSL, 2021) found that 95% of full-time teachers worked unpaid overtime during a typical week, working between 139 – 152% of their contracted hours. Australian teacher perspectives on their workload in 2019 indicated that 75% of teachers found their workload unmanageable (Heffernan et al., 2019).

Although teacher workload has always been high, there is evidence it has increased in both quantity and complexity in recent years (Gallop et al., 2021). In a report to the NSW Teachers Federation, in which 18,234 teachers were surveyed, McGrath-Champ (2018) found changes in teacher workload indicating both longer working hours and intricacy of work since 2013. The complexity of teacher work adds to teacher stress. Beck (2017, p.631) described some of this stress as "heavy hours" in that what teachers are expected to accomplish within each teaching hour is 'ever-increasing'. Working longer hours is not possible as students are only at school for a specified time, so teachers are left with a sense of failure for not achieving their goals.

Some of the changes in workload have involved the individualisation of teaching: personalising and differentiating the curriculum for students; the cognitive complexity of integrating curriculum requirements,

involving the use of evidence based teaching requirements and ensuring compliance with policy; the collecting, analysing and using of data; and the duty of care requirements of being responsible for the wellbeing (physical, mental and educational) of students (Gallop et al., 2021).

Other parts of the workload complexity involve emotional labour (although this can also be involved in several domains of teacher stress). Emotional labour is the effort needed to express work-desired emotions when interacting with others (Kariou et al., 2021). This is true of most occupations, however, it is particularly intense in teaching (Näring et al., 2006). Multiple, constant, daily interactions are a work requirement of teaching and teachers make continual decisions to express or hide their true emotions based on the situation in order to either comply with the code of conduct or to achieve the goals of teaching and learning. According to Kariou et al. (2021, p. 2) "It is a complex combination of decision making and emotional regulation". Emotional labour requires considerable effort and there are significant associations with teacher burnout and aspects of emotional labour (Kariou et al., 2021; Park et al., 2014).

Managing classrooms stress

This type of stress, particularly via student misbehaviour, has one of the strongest positive correlations with emotional exhaustion and burnout (McCormick & Barnett, 2011). It involves teaching effectively to achieve the required learning outcomes, including differentiating the curriculum to meet student needs, maintaining classroom discipline, keeping students motivated and engaged, as well as dealing with student misbehaviour. Factors relating to the classroom were cited by 48% of teachers planning to leave teaching in the NTWD (AITSL, 2021) and difficulties managing student behaviour was a significant part of that. Other factors included a lack of support staff and the size of classes.

The domain of student misbehaviour is complicated as it involves disruption to the teaching-learning process and includes different types of misbehaviour, as well as their frequency, intensity and duration. Low-level disruptions, such as calling out, can be stressful depending on how

often and when they occur, whereas verbal and physical aggression may always be stressful. Aggression towards teachers is surprisingly common and can involve verbal abuse, intimidation, theft and/or damage of property as well as physical attacks (Berlanda et al., 2019; McMahon et al., 2014). Although the majority of teachers in these studies had experienced aggression directed towards them within the previous year, its incidence on an individual level was usually infrequent and of a low-level. Despite this, the findings of Berlanda et al. (2019) suggested that the occurrence of even infrequent and low-level aggression still impacted heavily on teachers.

Student misbehaviour in general correlates significantly with teacher burnout (e.g., Aloe et al., 2014a; McCormick & Barnett, 2011). Although Rajendran et al. (2020) only found a weak correlation in their study, a quantitative meta-analysis of the relationship between teacher burnout and student misbehaviour found a statistically significant correlation between the three dimensions of teacher burnout and student misbehaviour (Aloe et al., 2014a).

Disruptive students have an impact on teacher stress levels and burnout, and this has been attributed to the strengths of teachers' self-efficacy (Aloe et al., 2014b). Teacher self-efficacy involves teachers' beliefs about their ability to influence student learning, and difficulty managing disruptive students is likely to affect a teacher's sense of accomplishment (McCormick & Barnett, 2011). Teachers who have high levels of cognitive empathy have been found to have lower levels of burnout as they are able to better understand disruptive students' behaviour. This has been related to increased perception of teacher competence and problem solving skills (Wink et al., 2021) and matches an Australian qualitative study that found high levels of emotional competence in teachers improved relationships with disruptive students and acted as a potential protective factor against emotional exhaustion (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2019).

Although the OECD (2020) placed meeting the needs of special needs students under responsiveness to stakeholders' stress, this also aligns under managing classroom stress and is associated with higher levels of

teacher burnout (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). The level of burnout increases as the number of special needs students increases and is associated with the depersonalisation element of burnout in classroom teachers. This is of concern for both the students and the teachers, especially given the increasing number of students in schools with additional support needs.

Responsiveness to stakeholders

The OECD (2020) discussed this in terms of the changing requirements from various educational authorities at a local, state and national level that added to extra work pressure, as well as the stresses associated with addressing parent/guardian concerns. The NTWD (AITSL, 2021, p.109) also found that "changes imposed on schools from outside (e.g., by government)" was a source of dissatisfaction among teachers. Some of those requirements are accountability measures, such as monitoring student performance data. This can be used to make judgements about school and teacher effectiveness and can increase teacher workloads (Jerrim & Sims, 2021), thereby increasing teacher stress. Countries that have a stronger focus on school accountability measures have teachers who report feeling more stressed in their employment (Jerrim & Sims, 2021).

Teaching is an integrated, collaborative profession, and relationships are key components of this, especially positive partnerships with parents. These can be affected when students have academic and/or behavioural difficulties in the classroom (Gwernan-Jones et al., 2015) and when issues arise such as conflict with parents; this can cause stress (Ross et al., 2012).

Other factors

Although not necessarily a source of stress, the negative public perceptions of the teaching profession and the feeling of being undervalued frequently occur as reasons for teacher dissatisfaction with the profession and are associated with turnover intent (AITSL, 2021; Australian Government, 2022; Heffernan et al., 2019). Teachers have

expressed that portrayals of them in the media and by politicians contribute to a lack of trust and respect that can be reflected in the way they are treated by parents and students (Heffernan et al., 2022).

School leadership, particularly in terms of seeing it as unsupportive and ineffectual, contributes to teacher burnout (Whiteoak, 2021). The way school leaders communicate has been found to either increase or decrease job satisfaction in teachers. Supportive, open communication is positively associated with both job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation, whereas too little or too much communication is associated with decreased job satisfaction (De Nobile, 2016).

One other important factor identified by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) relates to value dissonance, where teachers do not feel they share the same norms or values as their colleagues or other aspects of the school culture. This can affect teachers' sense of belonging, goal setting and relationships at a school. Teachers who experience value dissonance at their school report higher levels of all three dimensions of burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Effects of COVID-19 on teacher mental health and wellbeing

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 added a range of additional pressures to the teaching professions as well as exacerbating stressors already in place. Negative consequences to school communities were apparent on a global scale (UNESCO, 2020; UNESCO, 2022, p. xvii-xviii), with declines in student and teacher mental health being reported. New health regulations in schools, parent and teacher confusion, as well as changes to professional responsibilities meant that teachers had to respond quickly and adapt (Brooks et al., 2022; Ozamiz-Extebarria et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2021).

Reviews of anxiety, depression and stress in teachers during 2020 revealed that rates of these conditions were high and negatively impacting educators (Ozamiz-Extebarria et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2021). The return to face-to-face teaching was associated with high levels of anxiety and depression (Silva et al., 2021) and some teachers felt fearful

and disenfranchised (Baker et al., 2021). In Ireland, Minihan et al. (2022) found high degrees of individual and occupational burnout in teachers were elevated compared to pre-pandemic levels. Of the 245 teachers surveyed, 67% reported a decline in their mental health and 62% a decline in the mental health of a family member.

In Australia, there was variation between the states and territories in terms of the number and durations of lockdowns, however, themes affecting teachers seen internationally were echoed in Australia. These themes included uncertainty, the fear of the unknown presented by the pandemic (Brooks et al., 2022); the transition to online learning, which involved rapid up-skilling as well as inequity in access to resources (McDonough & Lemon, 2022); increased workload and concerns for the quality of their teaching (Phillips et al., 2021); and changes in their occupational relationships, particularly in relation to communication with parents and students (McDonough & Lemon, 2022; Phillips et al., 2021). Teaching is fundamentally a social activity in which relationships are vitally important and the changes associated with the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many of those relationships.

Another theme that emerged was the negative impact on the morale and self-efficacy of Australian teachers according to how the COVID-19 pandemic was managed. A lack of clarity and late communication on policy changes by the government left many teachers feeling unappreciated and gave them little time to plan for, and respond to, the actions needed due to the changes (Fray et al., 2023). McDonough and Lemon (2022) also highlighted factors relating to teacher morale, such as a lack of recognition for their work. One statement was "Degrading. The Prime Minister painted us as glorified babysitters" (McDonough & Lemon, 2022, p. 9). The negative impacts were compounded by portrayals in the media with no recourse or agency to change the narrative and added to feelings of being undervalued by the public. The perspective was "Everyone enjoys bashing teachers. The media is rarely kind to us" (McDonough & Lemon, 2022, p.10).

Many of the stressors identified as impacting negatively on teacher mental health and wellbeing as result of COVID-19 measures echo with

previously identified long standing stressors. Several authors commented on how the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed existing problems to teachers' wellbeing (McDonough & Lemon, 2022) and morale (Fray et al., 2023), and recommended monitoring and supporting teachers' mental health and wellbeing in the future (Baker et al., 2021; Fray et al., 2023).

Factors that Support Mental Health and Wellbeing in Teachers

Creating conditions that support teachers' mental health and wellbeing at school is not necessarily a simple matter of removing or changing the factors that cause poor mental health and wellbeing. This is especially the case with teacher workload and complexity, as well as public perceptions of teachers. These are not directly under the control of school level initiatives. There is a large body of literature exploring and examining causes of poor teacher mental health, stress and burnout, however, a smaller body of research into positive teacher wellbeing reveals the intricate interdependence of factors that affect teachers' mental health and wellbeing. From an analysis of 16 studies concentrating on teacher wellbeing, Acton and Glasgow (2015) identified three overarching themes that were important in fostering teacher mental health and wellbeing. These were personal, an awareness and effective management of emotions; social, relationships with students, colleagues and the community; and contextual, the work environment and its pressures.

Emotions and wellbeing

The development of an awareness and management of one's own emotions has been shown in several studies to impact on multiple areas of a teacher's professional wellbeing. Examinations of student perceptions of teachers' social-emotional competence (SEC) were found to be associated with level of burnout, in that the higher the level of teacher self-reported burnout, the lower the student perception of teacher SEC (Oberle et al., 2020). The main findings of Acton and Glasgow's (2015) analysis of wellbeing studies with regard to emotions found that

"teachers with higher reported rates of wellbeing demonstrated an emotional intelligence that allows them to think positively about the demands of the job and apply realistic coping strategies to effectively manage demanding emotional situations" (p.104). Additionally, other emotional attributes such as strong self-efficacy, feeling valued and supported at work and the joy of working with students all promoted positive wellbeing.

Relationships and wellbeing

Relationships at school are incredibly important to teacher mental health and wellbeing. Relationships with others, both in and out of the workplace, have been identified as central in maintaining a work-life balance (Price & McCallum, 2015).

Teacher-student relationships: These are integral to the work of a teacher, especially in primary schools, where teachers and students spend most of the day together. Positive, close teacher-student relationships are significant sources of teacher wellbeing and can protect against burnout (Milatz et al., 2015). The reciprocal relationship between students and teachers found by Harding et al. (2019) suggests that improving the teacher-student relationship may have a positive impact on both of their wellbeing. However, the teacher-student relationship is complex, and various aspects of this impact on different elements of teacher wellbeing. Split et al. (2011) found teachers benefited and achieved greater job satisfaction from positive relationships with students and experienced stress when the teacher-student relationships were perceived as disrespectful. The impact is related to theories of motivation, such as Ryan and Deci's (2000) social determination theory of motivation in that it meets a basic psychological need for belonging, and to attachment theory in that teachers maintain deep understandings of relationships in the classroom which involve beliefs about their role, self-efficacy and student behaviour. This can mediate the effort teachers put into building rapport with disruptive students. It also relates to the need for relatedness, a basic human requirement that prompts teachers to develop close relationships with students. In this regard, one of the factors that influences better teacher-student relationships is self-efficacy. Higher

levels of teacher self-efficacy are associated with better teacher-student relationships, both in increasing the closeness of the relationships and in decreasing conflict in the classroom (Hajovsky et al., 2020). Teacher self-efficacy is not a fixed attribute and can be grown and increased through professional learning activities (Thorn & Brasche, 2020) and is therefore subject to influence at the school level.

Professional relationships: The relationships teachers have with their colleagues at school are also essential to their wellbeing. This includes support, motivation, trust, collaboration, and open communication (see Acton & Glasgow, 2015). School climate and culture is highly significant in this regard. When teachers felt that they had supportive connections with their colleagues it was associated with lower levels of stress, depression and anxiety (Lester et al., 2020). Respect between teachers and the school leadership is also of significance. This respect is characterised by open two-way communication, trusting teachers' professional expertise and providing autonomy (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). The role and actions of the school principal has been established as vital in advancing the goals of schools, particularly in relation to the influence they have on teachers and how they develop teacher capacity (Tan et al., 2022). The school principal can create shared goals, purpose and engagement in their teachers, provide support and resources, and protect them from disruptive elements (Gu & Day, 2013). Additionally, a closer relationship with the principal can reduce the strain of teacher workload demands and therefore reduce burnout (Perrone et al., 2019).

Community relationships: Parent-teacher relationships are important as they have the students' education and wellbeing as their common goal and can be mutually supportive. Lower stress, anxiety and depression has been found to be related to teachers feeling engaged with their school community (Lester et al., 2020) and a greater sense of belonging at school and job satisfaction ensues with positive relationships with parents (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Context and wellbeing

When teachers perceived that the school climate is positive and supportive this was associated with lower stress, depression and anxiety than negative perceptions of school climate (Lester et al., 2020). School leadership practices can strongly impact on the culture and impact on teachers' emotional wellbeing. These include the development of policies and procedures that promote teacher wellbeing by looking after their health and reducing stresses and encouraging teacher development. Another helpful factor is the creation of policies and practices that supported challenging students and provided professional advice, support and assistance (Lester et al., 2020).

Whole-school approaches to wellbeing

In recent years, there have been several studies that examined individual strategies, such as mindfulness, that may improve teacher wellbeing and student connection (Hwang et al., 2019). However, although these can provide support, they put the onus on the individual to identify their needs and then act. A program with a wider wellbeing base, the Resilience in Schools and Educators (RISE) program, targets teachers' SEC, resilience and wellbeing. An initial evaluation of the program showed that teachers increased their SEC, had significantly improved positive emotions and reduced negative emotions during the day, as well as reducing teacher-student conflict (Fitzgerald et al., 2022).

Other more systemic approaches such as whole-school approaches to wellbeing have the advantage of integrating their methods so that wellbeing is at the centre of the school's ethos and climate. This facilitates the use of proactive rather than reactive approaches (Ruttledge, 2022). The interdependence of wellbeing in the school means that many of the policies, practices and supports related to wellbeing can be implemented for the benefit of all members of the school community, including teachers.

In developing a whole-school approach to promoting staff wellbeing, Lester at al. (2020) adapted a conceptual framework (Cefai & Cavioni,

2014) for whole school wellbeing (see Figure 2). Cefai and Cavioni's (2014) rationale for proposing the framework was that when all members of the school community are involved and supported, the social and emotional education and wellbeing practices of the school are more likely to be sustained. The four main characteristics of the model have indicators to support the school to measure all parts of their school's social and emotional education and support. The results of the measures can inform the school on how to strengthen and develop their wellbeing practices. Lester et al. (2020) emphasised how, by using an integrated whole-school approach to wellbeing practices such as Cefai and Cavioni's (2014) framework, the context of the school can significantly improve staff mental health and wellbeing.

An Irish study involving a co-educational secondary school documented a whole-school approach to developing positive relationships (see Ruttledge, 2022). All staff took part in professional learning workshops about understanding students, building relationships, promoting positive behaviour, classroom management, supporting behaviour change in challenging students and self-care. The participants found that this enhanced their ability to build relationships and promote positive behaviour. Additionally, it also improved teachers' confidence in dealing with challenging behaviour, enhanced their feeling of being supported and reduced teacher stress. This study aligns well with the theories of teacher-student relationships and self-efficacy posited by Split et al. (2011).

Several Australian schools have adopted whole-school approaches related to positive psychology, termed 'positive education' approaches, and most notably Geelong Grammar school. Their positive education model (Geelong Grammar, 2022) incorporates aspects of the PERMA Framework (Kern, 2022; Seligman, 2011) with character strengths, and staff learn about, and are encouraged to live and model the tenets of positive education (Norrish, 2015). Turner and Thielking (2019) picked out four strategies that aligned with PERMA research and qualitatively evaluated teachers after they had used them. Teachers felt more positive and calmer, felt greater engagement in their teaching, and had improved relationships and understanding of their students. The SEARCH

framework (Waters, 2019) uses elements of positive education such as "Strengths, Emotional Management, Attention and Awareness, Relationships, Coping and Habits and goals" (Waters, 2019, p. 3) to achieve wellbeing. The SEARCH framework has been embedded in the education of students in one Sydney secondary school for girls since 2016 and includes a staff wellbeing program (Waters & Johnstone, 2022). In a case study of the school examining the reach of the SEARCH framework before and during COVID-19 lockdowns, Waters and Johnstone (2019) found SEARCH facilitated whole school approaches that benefited both students and staff. Teachers described the advantages of having an integrated approach to positive education and a common language. The study also highlighted the benefits of a positive education approach during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2.
Conceptual framework of a caring school community
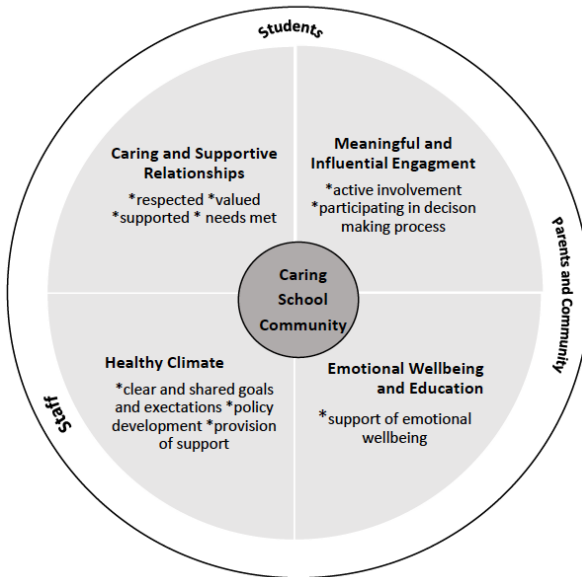
Note. From *Social and Emotional Education in Primary School Integrating Theory and Research into Practice* by C. Cefai & V. Cavioni (2014)

In Western Australia, the Mentally Healthy Schools Framework (MHSF) was developed as part of a broader campaign to inspire people to be more proactive about their mental health. It encourages a whole-school approach to mental health through teaching and learning activities, creating policies and guidelines to influence the school climate and environment, and developing links with the broader community (Anwar-McHenry et al., 2016). In an initial evaluation of the program on school staff found it had potential to positively affect their mental health and improve their protective factors to stress (Anwar-McHenry et al., 2020).

Discussion and conclusions

The aims of this study were to examine concepts of mental health and wellbeing; causes of poor mental health and wellbeing in teachers; and then from a pragmatic viewpoint, to discover how teacher mental health and wellbeing could be supported at a school level. The study set out some clear questions to guide the inquiry. The answers to these questions have not been quite so clear-cut.

What is an appropriate understanding of positive mental health for primary school teachers?

Mental health as a concept was much more complex and difficult to define than expected. Terminology and common usage of the term is not consistent and adds to a lack of clarity, there is more than one conceptual model of mental health describing the relationship between mental health and mental illness (Keyes et al., 2014; Norwich et al., 2022) and the use of the term wellbeing as a defining aspect of mental health further complicates an understanding of mental health. This is mainly because wellbeing is a complex concept in itself and some authors debate the relationship between mental health and wellbeing (Wren-Lewis & Alexandrova, 2021). However, it was possible to develop an understanding of what this might mean to teachers, namely:

- Mental health is a positive concept and is more than an absence of mental illness.

- Wellbeing can be a component of positive mental health, however, a substantial degree of positive mental health is necessary for wellbeing to flourish.
- Mental health is individual and includes attributes and capacities that allow individuals to function successfully in their lives.

What is an appropriate understanding of 'wellbeing' for primary school educators?

Wellbeing was also more difficult to define than expected. It is a complex and multidimensional concept and the term can be used to describe multiple personal and community aspects of individuals' lives (Svane et al., 2019). Additionally, it is not always associated with aspects of mental health, for example economic wellbeing. Wellbeing as a state of mind has customarily been defined as encompassing two approaches, hedonia (subjective wellbeing) and eudaimonia (being psychologically well). However, some authors argue that these approaches also need to consider contextual factors (Smith & Reid, 2018). This seems logical, particularly for teachers, as contextual factors can impact on states of wellbeing. From an examination of the literature, it was possible to develop an understanding of wellbeing for teachers in schools.

Both approaches of hedonia, particularly engagement, and eudaimonia, especially autonomy, meaning and positive relationships are relevant. The context of the school, specifically school culture, prioritises support for flourishing wellbeing aspects such as positive relationships, agency, meaning, community contribution and engagement. Aspects of wellbeing that are highly individual, such as personal affect or negative personal circumstances cannot be influenced directly.

Measurement of mental health and wellbeing was also explored, as it is prudent for schools wishing to implement strategies to improve teachers' mental health and wellbeing to establish areas to focus on, to ascertain base level data and then to monitor effectiveness of any interventions. However, the complexities of defining mental health and wellbeing are matched by the challenges of measuring them. There are multiple

measuring instruments available that cover various and different aspects of mental health and wellbeing. Schools need to consider their purposes for measurement within their context.

What are the main causes of teacher stress?

Before examining causes of teacher stress, this study attempted to establish whether this was indeed a significant problem. There is a lot of rhetoric, media discussion and anecdotal reports about teacher stress, but hard figures were difficult to establish. Some of the reasons behind this may relate to the effects of poor mental health and wellbeing in that teachers who are stressed and burned out are less likely to have the energy to participate in surveys about it. What was clear, and concerning, was that rates of psychological distress and mental health problems in teachers seem to be higher than the general population (Safe Work Australia, 2015; Stapleton et al., 2020) and these problems are related to teacher attrition rates and turnover intent.

Many of the main causes of teacher stress were unsurprising, these related to workload, managing classrooms, and responding to other demands from various stakeholders, including public perceptions of teachers. Within this there were nuances that were unexpected. The increase in complexity and quantity of workload has been evident for some time at a school level, but the concept of emotional labour had been an unconsidered factor before embarking on this study. Its relationship to teacher burnout (Kariou et al., 2021) is understandable and it may be that as the other workload demands of teaching increase, the effort to express work-desired emotions becomes more difficult to sustain. The concept of value dissonance had also been unconsidered and it emphasised the importance of school culture and the value motivated reasons teachers go into the profession. Teaching is usually driven by ethical or intrinsic motivation and teachers would assume they could teach in accordance to their moral purpose (Sahlberg, 2010). The impact of COVID-19 on teacher stress and morale was pertinent in that it further exposed long-standing stressors on teachers.

What are the factors that enhance teacher mental health and wellbeing at a school level?

At the start of this study, it was assumed that many of the factors that influence teacher mental health and wellbeing were beyond the ability of a school to affect. Some of those assumptions are still true, external pressures, personal affect or life-events are difficult to have an impact on at work. However, the contextual influence of a school appears to have a more protective factor than first assumed. The importance of emotional intelligence as well as relationships to teacher mental health and wellbeing cannot be over-emphasised. Initiatives that support the development of greater teacher social-emotional competence (Fitzgerald et al., 2022), self-efficacy (Hajovsky et al., 2020) and understanding student behaviour (Ruttledge, 2022) may all support teacher mental health and wellbeing through helping to develop stronger relationships at school and greater teacher resilience. Additionally, leadership practices that reduce workload demands, create strong internal structures and governance, and promote teacher wellbeing, as well as creating a supportive school climate that includes the community may all influence teachers' mental health and wellbeing.

Recommendations

Although there are practices that have potential to enhance teacher wellbeing, context and sustainability considerations of those practices should be considered. Integrated, whole-school approaches that put wellbeing at the heart of their practices to support students, staff and the community are suggested as the most effective way to achieve this.

At a government and education department policy level, Powell and Graham (2017) identified that policies pertaining to student wellbeing in Australia have poor definitions around mental health, conflicting priorities and a lack of guidance on how to implement in schools. For teacher mental health and wellbeing to receive attention, it must also be included in education policies with appropriate definitions, accompanying guidelines and support for its implementation.

Despite the complexities and difficulties in aspects of this study, one aspect was abundantly clear, teacher mental health and wellbeing really matters. Schools are communities and the interdependence of the individuals in that context cannot be separated from each other. If education systems and policies are going to make a difference to student mental health and wellbeing as well as to their learning, they must also pay attention to the mental health and wellbeing of the adults who spend a significant portion of the day with those students.

Brief Author Biography

Joanne Dixon is a Deputy Principal in the Department of Education in Western Australia. She completed a Master of Teaching (Primary) in 2011 and a Master of Education (Mental Health and Wellbeing) in 2022, both at the University of Western Australia.

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