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## Teacher Wellbeing in Neoliberal Contexts: A Review of the Literature

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*Abstract: There is an increasing awareness that the wellbeing of a workforce is an important consideration in any organisation. Within the context of education, possibilities for supporting teacher wellbeing are mediated by neoliberal policy technologies that are incongruent with key aspects of wellness. Reviewing the literature, it appears there is value in prioritising teacher wellbeing as an intentional inclusion in both the professional development of practising teachers and within pre-service teacher education programs. This inclusion will empower teachers to better negotiate these imposed systemic constraints. Education for teachers regarding key facets of wellbeing - including managing emotional labour and the importance of professional social networks - is found to be essential in retaining and sustaining the teaching profession, thus enabling greater possibilities for professional flourishing.*

### Introduction

The wellbeing of teachers has emerged as especially significant in recent years given that teacher attrition is an ongoing issue in education contexts. Some reports suggest up to 40% of teachers leave the profession in under five years of service (see, Kilgallon, Malonely & Lock, 2008; Le Cornu, 2013; Pillay, Goddard & Wilss, 2005). The cost of this turnover is significant, ranging from “disrupted continuity of the instructional program, to a constant need to mentor and assist new teachers” (Lambert, McCarthy, O’Donnell, & Wang, 2009, p. 973). Those that remain face continuing pressures, often having trouble coping (Kilgallon, Malonely & Lock, 2008) which leads to a situation where burned out and disengaged teachers teach with reduced levels of personal involvement (Brown & Roloff, 2011; Hastings & Bham, 2003; Pillay, Goddard & Wills, 2005). Others have argued that the implications of teacher burnout are extensive, and are associated with absenteeism, increased healthcare costs, poor job performance and mental health claims (Naghieh, Montgomery, Bonell, Thompson & Aber, 2013; Ross, Romer & Horner, 2011; Vesely, Saklofske & Nordstokke, 2014). This has also been evident in the media, with reports that payouts for stressed teachers are the highest they have been in years (Caldwell, 2011). This trend appears to be continuing, with details released including that in Queensland over \$10 million has been paid in five years to stressed teachers (Chilcott, 2013) and that teachers are Queensland’s most stressed workers, making more mental stress claims than in any other industry (Worksafe Queensland, 2014).

Reducing these impacts of work stress in the teaching profession has been the focus of much research in education. Teacher wellbeing has frequently been studied from the perspective of models of burnout, with the exploration of salient risk factors seen as a way of

potentially reducing consequences of absenteeism and stress in education organisations (Hastings & Bham, 2003). Although historically resilience to stress has been the main focus of studies, research in the area has recently shifted towards an approach that foregrounds positive aspects of wellbeing, with Huppert (2009, p. 137) arguing that “[f]uture developments in the science of well-being and its application require a fresh approach – beyond targeting the alleviation of disorder to a focus on personal and interpersonal flourishing.” Similarly, “Positive functioning is not simply surviving stress; it also entails thriving physically, mentally, socially, and professionally” (Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2014, p. 501). Compiling knowledge on the factors that support and enhance teachers’ wellbeing is important in encouraging greater sustainability within the profession.

Positioning teacher wellbeing within the wider social and professional contexts that teachers operate in is necessary to gain an understanding of the complex interplay between individual, relational and external factors that affect, constrain and mediate the wellbeing of teachers. Current educational contexts are dominated by neoliberal ideologies that favour and privilege individual competition, accountability, performativity and management (Angus, 2012; Apple, 2006; Ball, 2003; Hursh & Henderson, 2001; Doecke, Kostogriz & Illesca, 2010; Mockler, 2011). McCallum and Price (2010, p.19) argue that contextual changes related to the introduction of standards, increased regulation and competition, significantly affect teachers and that “the retention of teachers is dependent on having a wellbeing strategy in place that clearly identifies inhibiting and enabling strategies.” These politics are evident in Queensland policy, such as the *Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategic Plan 2011-2015* (DETE, 2011), which simultaneously prioritises wellbeing and wellbeing education for school staff, but is underpinned by a focus on ensuring staff are productive. Understanding the ways economic business principles may affect wellness is essential to support and enhance teacher wellbeing in schools.

This literature review seeks to systematically synthesise studies that relate to teacher wellbeing and compare that with literature on teachers’ work in neoliberal contexts. Consolidating work across the two fields aims to identify and articulate key factors that may contribute to sustaining teachers in their work and better support flourishing within the profession. In order to create a clear and explicit focus to the collection of articles, three guiding research questions were used to frame the review:

1. How has teacher wellbeing been articulated, explained and investigated in research literature?
2. Can any significant recurring themes be identified across wellbeing literature?
3. How do these themes compare to literature on the effects of neoliberal policy in educational contexts?

## Method

### Search Methods

Relevant literature was identified using A+ Education, ERIC and Google Scholar. While there is a substantial amount of literature relating to wellbeing, much of the focus is on enhancing and measuring student wellbeing. To ensure literature related specifically to teachers, search terms “teacher wellbeing”, “teacher well-being”, and “teacher well being” were initially used. Subsequent searches added varieties of wellbeing with “teacher\*” with abstracts being read for relevance: only articles relating specifically to teachers were chosen for inclusion. Initially conducted in 2012 as part of a post-graduate research project, an

original date range of 2002-2012 was included to gain an in-depth understanding of notions and investigations of wellbeing in teachers. This literature set has since been supplemented with and complemented by the inclusion of more recent studies to ascertain whether the findings from the original study were contradicted or reinforced by subsequent investigations. Several articles were also added through attention to reference lists. Inclusions needed to make a direct comment about the wellbeing of teachers in their work.

### **Selection and Appraisal of Studies**

Studies were purposively selected according to their primary focus being on teachers, their wellbeing and their experiences, particularly as they worked within neoliberal contexts. Studies that engaged with teachers' wellbeing directly using qualitative or quantitative methods were included. Studies of student wellbeing unrelated to teacher wellbeing were excluded. In addition, articles that focused on 'resilience' or 'burnout' without reference to wellbeing were also excluded, as while these are important aspects of wellbeing, this review was concerned with capturing holistic notions of teacher wellbeing, with a particular aim to identify those aspects that most enabled teachers to flourish and sustain themselves in their work rather than focus only on reducing disorder. Results from database searches were analysed for inclusion according to several criteria, including a focus on teachers' perceptions or experiences, comment on teachers' work with reference to current policy, and the presentation of empirical data. The original literature set from 2002-2012 comprised 25 articles, with another five added more recently covering the years 2013-2015.

### **Analysis**

The compiled literature was analysed thematically and recurrent patterns identified with the aim of developing rich descriptions of the predominant themes in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Intersections between studies of teacher wellbeing and teachers' work were readily identified, including relationships with students, colleagues and leaders, self-efficacy, autonomy, trust, status, values, beliefs, purpose, professionalism, individualism, collegiality and the effects of educational change. Each article was then re-analysed for statements and ideas related to the key themes. These ideas were then consolidated, with common elements and contradictions identified and described. These are reconciled here within three overarching themes - emotional awareness and intelligence, professional relationships and contextual influences.

### **Presenting the Literature**

#### **Articulating Wellbeing**

Clearly defining wellbeing is problematic, given the diversity of explanations and understandings present in the literature. Many studies that use the term lack an explicit explanation of the concept, meaning that an understanding of wellness must be inferred from the project design. From the review however it was possible to identify the recurrent understanding that one's sense of wellbeing is informed by individual, relational and contextual factors. Individual factors relate to cognitive and affective domains (Pillay,

Goddard, & Wilss, 2005), including the need for autonomy and a sense of competence (Pillay, Goddard, & Wilss, 2005; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010), positive attitude, pedagogic practice and a healthy work-life balance (Kilgallon, Mahoney & Lock, 2008), the capacity for emotional intelligence (Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008; Van Petegem, Aelterman, Rosseel & Creemers, 2006; Vesely, Saklofske & Nordstokke, 2014) and emotions of happiness and satisfaction (Sturmfels, 2006). Relational factors affecting wellbeing, including the quality of staff and student interactions and professional working relationships, are identified as essential in many studies (e.g Brown & Roloff, 2011; Hastings & Bham, 2003; Konu, Viitanen, & Lintonen, 2010; McCallum & Price, 2010; Ross, Romer & Horner, 2012; Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011; Van Petegem, Aelterman, Rosseel & Creemers, 2006; Van Petegem, Creemers, Rossel & Aelterman, 2005; Wei & Chen, 2010) and are premised on the understanding that connectedness and belonging in the workplace are central to maintaining wellbeing (Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010). External factors, such as policy initiatives, work intensification and school culture further work to mediate the possibilities for managing emotions, establishing autonomy, developing self-efficacy and establishing positive working relationships that contribute to a working climate that values each individual's wellbeing (Doecke, Kostogriz & Illesca, 2010).

To summarise, teacher wellbeing may be defined as an individual sense of personal professional fulfilment, satisfaction, purposefulness and happiness, constructed in a collaborative process with colleagues and students (Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010). This process is further supported (or constrained) by contextual factors which enable teachers to realise their purpose and goals in teaching, provide realistic and manageable work demands that allow for autonomy, and which value, respect and celebrate teachers' professional expertise and work practice. Ideally, to foster and enhance professional flourishing, these three areas complement each other harmoniously (Engels, Aelterman, Van Petegem, & Schepens, 2004, cited in Van Petegem, Creemers, Rossel, & Aelterman, 2005) to result in a feeling of positive professional wellness.

### **Investigating Wellbeing**

Approaches to research in the field of teacher wellbeing are diverse. Methodologies and topic foci are disparate, with a changing focus on demographic characteristics, or interpersonal behaviour, others on coping mechanisms, attitudes, or leadership styles, or relationships with students and colleagues. Comparability is limited by the diversity of topics for investigation. From the compiled literature relating to teacher wellbeing, sixteen of the studies took a quantitative methodological approach, while nine were qualitative. Quantitative approaches used questionnaires and/or surveys as the data collection method while qualitative studies used a variety of approaches.

Within the included quantitative studies topic emphases are varied. These included the role of school leadership (Brown & Roloff, 2011; Konu, Viitanen & Lintonen, 2010), student-teacher relationships including student (mis)behavior (Hastings & Bham, 2003; Ross, Romer & Horner, 2012; Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011), teacher wellbeing as a contributor to students' wellbeing or attachment to school (Van Petegem, Aelterman, Rosseel & Creemers, 2006; Wei & Chen, 2010), coping processes (Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009; Parker, Martin, Colmar & Liem, 2012; Parker & Martin, 2009), interpersonal behavior styles (Van Petegem, Creemers, Rossel & Aelterman, 2005), measures of wellbeing that include occupational motivation and satisfaction as opposed to simply focusing on 'stress' (Scott & Dinham, 2003), relationships between burnout and competence (Pillay, Goddard & Wilss, 2005), power quality in the classroom environment (Havas & Olstad, 2008), students'

performance (Briner & Dewberry, 2007) and the influence of a second degree on burnout levels (Goddard & O'Brien, 2004).

While these at first seem eclectic, it is worth noting that out of these sixteen studies, eight take an approach that explicitly foregrounds social relationships within the school context as a key contributing element to teacher wellness, whether focused on relationships between teachers and administrative leaders (Brown & Roloff, 2011; Konu, Viitanen & Lintonen, 2010) or teachers and students (Hastings & Bham, 2003; Ross, Romer & Horner, 2012; Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011; Van Petegem, Aelterman, Rosseel & Creemers, 2007; Van Petegem, Creemers, Rossel & Aelterman, 2005; Wei & Chen, 2010). These studies are underpinned by an understanding of wellbeing as socially influenced. While other studies may not specifically focus on social relationships, they often consider relational elements within their project designs or analysis, such as 'collegiality' and 'school leadership' (Scott & Dinham, 2003), "difficult human interactions" (Pillay, Godddard & Wilss, 2005, p. 28), 'participation' (Parker & Martin, 2009) and teacher-child interactions (Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009). A noticeable absence from the qualitative data set is a targeted consideration of the relationship between colleagues as an influence on individual wellbeing.

Topic foci for qualitative studies are similarly varied. Butt and Retallick (2002) question the ways professional wellbeing and learning is influenced by relationships between administrative leadership and teachers in schools and subsequently investigate collaborative relationships between colleagues (Retallick & Butt, 2004). Also contemplating collegial interactions, Webb, Vulliamy, Sarja, Hämäläinen and Poikonen (2009), compare England's and Finland's approaches to implementing professional learning communities (PLCs), and the possibilities of these contributing to a positive, collaborative workplace. Sturmfels (2006; 2009) focuses on teachers' understandings of stress, morale and wellbeing, and whether they were conceived of as individual or group phenomena. Teachers' moments of experienced professional happiness ('eudaimonia') in teaching is the focus of Bullough and Pinnegar's (2009) study, while Kilgallon, Maloney and Lock (2008) focus on those factors which sustain teachers in their professional work. McCallum & Price (2010) investigate beginning teachers' enabling strategies for creating a sense of wellbeing and the factors described as inhibiting wellness. Investigating teachers' pedagogical wellbeing is the aim of Soini, Pyhältö and Pietarinen's (2010) work, which is described as occupational well-being, as it is constructed in teaching-learning processes within school communities.

Qualitative studies take a variety of approaches to data collection and analysis. An overarching case study strategy illuminates the interplay between context, school relationships and individual factors on wellbeing with interviews often the primary data collection method (Kilgallon, Mahoney & Lock, 2008; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010; Sturmfels 2009; 2006). Kilgallon, Mahoney and Lock (2008) complement this with focus-group data building on an open-ended survey, compiling cases that detail strategies that enable them to cope with the implementation of mandated educational change. Semi-structured interview data is also collected in Webb, Vulliamy, Sarja, Hämäläinen and Poikonen's (2009) study, which captures teachers' perspectives on collaborative work and wellbeing in times of educational reform. Bullough and Pennigar (2009) use drawings as a method for capturing moments of professional happiness in teaching, with an accompanying dialogic analysis with other educators to uncover themes. Butt and Retallick (2002) and Retallick and Butt (2004) take an approach that uses collaboratively constructed teacher autobiographies that detail their working realities and professional knowledge. Narratives as a data collection tool are also employed by McCallum and Price (2010) as stories, "bring together a range of work, ideas and strategies on ways of knowing, telling and enacting caring relationships" (p. 25).

### **Synthesising Wellbeing Studies**

A thematic analysis was conducted of the literature to identify the key aspects that affect teacher wellbeing, either enabling or constraining the possibilities for professional flourishing. Three overarching elements were identified: the awareness and effective management of emotions in teaching, professional relationships and systemic work contexts. These were consistent themes within wellbeing studies, and provided a structure for synthesising the research. While these are described as categories for the ease of identifying and presenting commonalities in the literature set, they are interdependent with each aspect affecting and informing the other.

### ***Emotions at Work***

Wellbeing refers to feelings of happiness, satisfaction, competence and enacted purpose. This focus on the affective domain and the effective management of emotions and emotional situations is frequently conceptualised as integral to wellbeing in teachers, with many studies foregrounding this dimension of wellness (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2009; Butt & Retallick, 2002; Goddard & O'Brien, 2004; Kilgalon, Maloney & Lock, 2008; McCallum & Price, 2010; Parker, Martin, Colmar & Liem, 2012; Pillay, Goddard & Wills, 2005; Scott & Dinham, 2003; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010; Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011; Sturmfels, 2009; Sturmfels, 2006; Retallick & Butt, 2004; Ross, Romer & Horner, 2012). Key findings in the literature set related to emotions and sustaining wellbeing for teachers include that:

- teachers with higher reported rates of wellbeing demonstrate 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 that may arise in working closely with children and adults (Hastings & Bham, 2003; Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2014; Kilgalon, Maloney & Lock, 2008; Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009; McCallum & Price, 2010; Parker, Martin, Colmar & Liem, 2012; Pillay, Goddard & Wilss, 2005; Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011; Sturmfels, 2009; Ross, Romer & Horner, 2012; Vesely, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2014)
- thriving teachers had confidence regarding their self-efficacy (Butt & Retallick, 2002; Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009; Scott & Dinham, 2003), which can be supported by community environments (Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010) or threatened by classroom misbehaviour (Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009)
- a sense of professional competence is essential to wellbeing and is often linked to the achievement of pedagogic goals for students (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2014; Pillay, Goddard & Wilss, 2005; Scott & Dinham, 2003; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010)
- feeling valued, respected, supported and cared for in the workplace enhanced wellbeing (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Butt & Retallick, 2002; McCallum & Price, 2010; Retallick & Butt, 2004; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010; Webb et al, 2009)
- enjoyment and happiness in working with students is central to professional happiness and sustaining wellness (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2009; Kilgalon, Maloney & Lock, 2008; McCallum & Price, 2010; Parker, Martin, Colmar, Liem & 2012; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010; Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011; Sturmfels, 2009 & 2006)

One vital recommendation from the findings related to emotional aspects of teacher wellbeing was that the provision of additional training in effective emotional coping strategies may raise awareness of the role of emotions in teaching and help support teachers to implement practices that develop and maintain wellbeing in the profession (Hastings & Bham, 2003; Ross, Romer & Horner, 2012; Vesely, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2014). This is particularly useful when the affective aspect of teachers' professional work is devalued and underestimated within the current political climate; as Mockler (2011) argues, technical-rational approaches to teachers' work, such as NAPLAN testing, work to marginalise personal emotions in the workplace. This targeted training is additionally supported by Queensland Government policy, which states that all staff should be equipped with "the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively manage health, safety and wellbeing" (DETE, 2011, p. 3). While there are currently many programs being used in schools, it appears that few are theoretically grounded or empirically evaluated, providing a clear rationale for a systematic research agenda that can identify and evaluate the potential efficiency of intervention strategies for teachers (Vesely, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2014).

### *Professional Relationships*

Emotions, emotional responses and emotional intelligence appear inseparable from teachers' working relationships, whether with students, colleagues or school leadership. Relational work that supports, invigorates, connects and encourages positive emotions is foundational in establishing and sustaining professional flourishing. Professional working relationships provide networks of emotional support that promote and enhance positive emotional states (Le Cornu, 2013; McCallum and Price, 2010; Retallick & Butt, 2004; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010; Webb et al, 2009). Findings in the literature related to supporting wellbeing through establishing positive professional relationships included that:

- the development of a working community enables demands to be shared among colleagues, challenging problems to be discussed, potential solutions considered collaboratively, and a healthy work-life balance to be encouraged which greatly improves work happiness, facilitating feelings of self-confidence and success (Butt & Retallick, 2002; Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2014; Le Cornu, 2013; McCallum & Price, 2010; Retallick & Butt, 2004; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010; Sturmfels, 2006; Webb et al, 2009)
- opportunities and support for career development and professional learning, often through implementing collaborative teams or mentor relationships enabled professional growth and satisfaction (Konu, Viitanen & Lintonen, 2010; Le Cornu, 2013; Scott & Dinham, 2003; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010; Retallick & Butt, 2004; Webb et al, 2009)
- ideally, administrators and school leadership will demonstrate the ability to help, empathise with and advocate for teachers in difficult times (Brown & Roloff, 2011; Butt & Retallick, 2002; Konu, Viitanen & Lintonen, 2010; Le Cornu, 2013; Pillay, Goddard & Wilss, 2005)
- a sense of trust in learning communities is a necessity for supportive collegial relationships capable of enhancing wellbeing (Le Cornu, 2013; Retallick & Butt, 2004; Scott & Dinham, 2003; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010; Webb et al, 2009), with a negative school culture particularly undermining collaborative possibilities and therefore the ability to maintain wellbeing (McCallum & Price, 2010)
- the implementation of whole school wellness plans that target both staff and students can be an important strategy in developing a positive collegial school culture (Briner



& Dewberry, 2007; Naghieh et al, 2013; Ross, Romer & Horner, 2012; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010; Waters & White, 2015) and is a necessary part of Queensland policy (DETE, 2011)

- open, two-way communication with school leaders that included demonstrating respect for teachers' professional judgments, recognising and celebrating professional expertise and achievements, allowing autonomy and trusting professional decisions made by teaching staff is essential in enhancing wellbeing (Brown & Roloff, 2011; Butt & Retallick, 2002; Le Cornu, 2013)
- a sense of belonging is necessary, with isolation indicated as an inhibiting factor (Butt & Retallick, 2002; Le Cornu, 2013; McCallum & Price, 2010; Pillay, Goddard & Wilss, 2005)

These findings demonstrate that establishing a positive overarching school climate that fosters and encourages professional, mutually-supportive collegial relationships between teachers and administrators is of utmost importance in sustaining teachers and enhancing their wellbeing. Foundational to this is a commitment to establish a learning community, "where workplace relationships based on collegiality and trust rather than hierarchy, are paramount" (Retallick & Butt, 2004, p. 85). School leaders were pivotal in creating this positive climate, and a willingness to engage in open, two-way communication is instrumental, needing a 'horizontal' rather than 'vertical' approach, "where power and expertise are shared" (Butt & Retallick, 2002, p. 23).

### *Systemic Contexts*

Teachers' work is inherently shaped by systemic requirements, which are politically and socially driven and based on particular ideological premises. Mockler (2011, p. 521) states "[t]he domain of the external political environment comprises the discourses, attitudes and understandings surrounding education that exist external to the profession, experienced by teachers... through the development of government policy which relates to their work and the ways in which political ideology impacts upon their work as a result of government policy." The ways systemic policy can be implemented at a school level and mediate wellbeing of teachers is evident within the literature. Repeated findings include:

- work intensification greatly affects teachers' ability to maintain a positive sense of wellbeing with increased workloads, additional administrative requirements and extra role-time identified as particularly detrimental to fostering workplace wellness (Brown & Roloff, 2011; Hastings & Bham, 2003; Konu, Viitanen & Lintonen, 2010; Lambert McCarthy O'Donnell & Wang, 2009; McCallum & Price, 2010)
- educational contexts are of crucial importance to constructing wellbeing, offering different possibilities for action, agency and workplace relationships (Scott & Dinham, 2003; Le Cornu, 2013; Soini et al, 2010; Webb et al, 2009)
- it is apparent that "striving to maintain high levels of achievement created its own particular pressure... especially on newer teachers" (Sturmfels, 2006, p. 29). This was reinforced in other studies (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2009; Parker, Martin, Colmar & Liem, 2012) although Briner and Dewberry (2007) found that higher achievement of students was correlated with improved teacher wellbeing.
- lack of a voice, agency, autonomy or respect for the professional knowledges of teachers impacted significantly on wellbeing (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2009; Butt & Retallick, 2002; Kilgalon, Moloney & Lock, 2008; McCallum & Prince, 2010; Retallick & Butt, 2004; Scott & Dinham, 2003; Webb et al, 2009)

In these ways, contextual factors work to inform the possibilities for enhancing wellbeing. While they may be mediated within localities by proactive school leaders who prioritise wellbeing, establishing equal relationships based on trust, respecting their professional autonomy or recognising the emotional facets of their work, this is complicated by external pressure to compete. Essentially, contexts which support teachers' wellbeing will allow sufficient time to manage administrative workloads; provide possibilities for action, agency and autonomy and will balance the requirements to perform with appropriate support to mediate the pressure that may be associated with these external demands. For optimal wellbeing, teachers need to be doing well in multiple domains of emotions, relationships and professional accomplishment (Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2014) and this is best supported by systemic and localised contexts that allow for the implementation of a multifaceted approach.

### **Comparing Wellbeing with Teachers' Work in Neoliberal Contexts**

The themes of emotional work, professional relationships and contextual factors were then related to literature on the ideology of neoliberalism currently operating in education. A neoliberal political regime privileges market-driven practices and beliefs of competition, management, and efficiency, with school systems increasingly putting into policy and practice these ethics of performance, accountability and responsibility for students' academic outcomes (Keddie, Mills & Pendergast, 2011). The technologies of neoliberalism continue to shape the work of teachers, which in turn affects teachers' possibilities to establish a sense of wellbeing in their working environments. The common themes across the literature relating to teachers' experiences of work within an educational context that is underpinned by neoliberal values are closely tied to those factors that sustain or threaten one's sense of wellbeing. The ways each of these areas are constructed in neoliberal discourse and rhetoric have implications for teachers' wellbeing, and their longevity in the profession.

#### ***Emotions: Affection - Rationality***

Recognising and successfully managing the emotional work of teaching is an essential component of supporting professional flourishing. This is substantiated by literature on teachers' work which identifies emotional work as a central component of effective educational practice (Ball, 2003; Connell, 2009; Hebson, Earnshaw & Marchington, 2007) and is understandably linked to the concept of teaching as a caring profession. Although these findings clearly demonstrate the necessity of recognising emotional work and the affective domain in sustaining teacher wellbeing, this aspect of teachers' lives can be marginalised in neoliberal times that prioritise a narrow range of measurable outputs above holistic human endeavours and feelings (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2009; Hebson, Earnshaw & Marchington, 2007). Holistic conceptions of teachers and their work that include emotional labour are often limited in neoliberal doctrine due to the inherent difficulty in mandating and measuring such aspects (Mockler, 2011). It is further argued by Bullough & Pinnegar (2009) that neoliberal ideology, when imposed on the domain of emotive work in good teaching, could lead to attempts to manage and measure these positive feelings in order to maximise student outcomes, which would be both counterproductive and inauthentic. Doecke, Kostogriz and Illesca (2010) describe technical, rationalist, 'scientific' classifications and representations of teachers and schools by 'measurement experts' that effectively decontextualise school data and dehumanise the people working within these institutions as incompatible with a richer, holistic vision of teaching and education. This argument is parallel to Mockler's (2011)

assertion that technical-rational understandings of teachers' work often subjugate more personal aspects, including morals, purpose, emotions and values.

*Relationships: Collegiality - Competition*

Literature on teachers' work echoes the understanding of the inherently collaborative and collegial nature of the profession (Apple, 2006; Connell, 2009; Doecke, Kostogriz & Illesca, 2010; Mockler, 2011). However, the development of cohesive and mutually supportive relationships also appears problematic in the context of neoliberal policies. The kinds of reflexive, two-way, horizontal relationships between staff, school leaders and students that are identified as essential in wellbeing research are threatened by the silencing of teachers' voices. It is difficult to cultivate positive, equal relationships with administrators responsible for ensuring performance and teachers under surveillance, judged against a narrow range of measurable indicators and required to be compliant with systemic necessities or face sanctions to control behaviour (Ball, 2003; Angus, 2012). Doecke Kostogriz and Illesca (2010) state that within this ideology, which seems impervious to critique, teachers' voices are not included in policy making as they "find themselves outside the ideological space in which these reforms are located" (p. 83). A neoliberal focus on individualism, competition, managerialism and performativity contrasts starkly with a vision of collegial teacher relationships as based on shared values, professional interests and non-hierarchical support detailed in literature on teacher wellbeing. The comparison and judgment of teachers' performance that is encouraged through the introduction of league tables and NAPLAN testing have been found to be "excessively demanding and produced undue pressure that generated a sense of fear, [and] anxiety" (Keddie, Mills & Pendergast, 2011, p. 83). This climate of pressure, performativity and fear is oppositional to the kind positive shared learning environments indicated as necessary in supporting teacher flourishing.

Neoliberal policies limit the opportunities to create cohesion between peoples by focusing on scores, which effectively dehumanises the people working in schools (Doecke, Kostogriz & Illesca, 2010). Describing My School as "a world of reified statistical data that has been stripped of any trace of the human activity that produced it", Doecke, Kostogriz and Illesca (2010, p. 90) suggest that the practices that these requirements impose on schools and the presentation of decontextualised data "reflect a form technical rationality that increasingly mediates the social relationships that constitute schooling, compromising people's capacity to recognise and respond to the needs of others who share this social setting with them." This deliberate fragmentation of social connections by institutionalising individualism and competition, creating 'atomised' societies where people feel disengaged and socially powerless, is often part of a neoliberal reform agenda (Apple, 2006). While ensuring a positive school climate that supports teachers' working relationships in neoliberal environments seems challenging, the strategies outlined, such as implementing wellness plans, professional learning teams and open communication with school leaders, may be proactive ways of fostering a school culture that mediates the impact of these potentially divisive policies.

*Contexts: Professionalism - Performativity*

In the area of contextual factors, it seems that a systemic culture of performativity, resulting in judgements of teachers and their measurable outputs, works against establishing a climate that values a work-life balance or outcomes that may be emotional or social and therefore not as amenable to quantification. Angus (2012) recounts Ball's (2003) assertion

that the strategies of surveillance used to ‘enhance’ performativity (including the ranking of schools and the publication of test scores), “consolidate a culture of compliance within the education profession”, where teachers’ actions are effectively constrained resulting in a ‘politics of blame’. The underpinning logic of policies that focus on narrow understandings of accountability, market competition within and between schools and the use of league tables is one that “assumes that individual teachers and students are to blame for ‘poor performance’ ” (Angus, 2012, p. 46). Although there is an explicit understanding in Queensland policy that “wellbeing is a core business activity, not an optional extra” the underpinning rationale is also that “healthy workers are productive workers” (DETE, 2011, p. 3). This vision of the new performative worker often “portends inner conflicts, inauthenticity and resistance” (Ball, 2003, p. 215) which may be counter to flourishing professionally. Ensuring leaders and teachers are able to manage this environment to foster and sustain professional wellness may require ongoing education of strategies that can support teachers, including initiatives such as implementing professional learning communities.

One of the key difficulties in comparing the findings on sustaining wellbeing with neoliberal ideology was the recurrent discord between the underlying values of each area. The disjuncture between the corporate ethos that is validated in policy and the requirements of the system, with the integrated social, emotional, professional and personal focus of wellbeing is difficult to reconcile. Teachers value their work holistically. In becoming educators they are likely to be committed to the social purposes of schooling. Often teachers’ reasons for entering the profession are based on nurturing children and seeing them develop (Le Cornu, 2013; Pillay, Goddard & Wilss, 2005; Ross, Romer & Horner, 2012), with this core relationship central to teachers’ self-worth and wellbeing (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2009; Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008; Le Cornu, 2013; McCallum & Price, 2010; Parker, Martin, Colmar, Liem & 2012; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010; Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011; Sturmfels, 2009 & 2006). Teachers aim to work with students to make a difference in their lives and help them achieve beyond what was previously possible - academically, socially and emotionally (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2009; Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008; Spilt, Koomen & Thijs, 2011; Sturmfels, 2009, 2006). This requires relating to and valuing students as whole beings, who are “feelings, they’re emotions... and they’re not just scores” (Sally, school principal, in Doecke, Kostogriz & Illesca, 2010, p. 93). This is devalued in a systemic context which prioritises a narrow range of measurable student outputs and scores. McCallum and Price (2010, p. 25) detail findings that show “emotional tiredness caused by professional conflicts between their values and beliefs and those of the school community” is a substantial inhibitor in creating and maintaining wellbeing in beginning teachers. It seems that while teachers have in some ways become habituated to the technical and rationalist routines associated with NAPLAN testing, “they remain deeply alienated by what they are obliged to do” (Doecke, Kostogriz & Illesca, 2010, p. 90). Trying to negotiate how to honour their value for students while also fulfilling the imposed requirements of the role results in a ‘values schizophrenia’ (Ball, 2003), which may need to be harmonised in order to ensure teachers are able to enact their deeper purposes, values and beliefs in their work and flourish professionally (Mockler, 2011). This continued compromising of professional identity and values may be a factor in ongoing teacher attrition.

## Conclusion

This review of selected literature sought to evaluate studies of teacher wellbeing, considering them in conjunction with literature on teachers' work in neoliberal contexts. In addressing three research questions, the review firstly captured how wellbeing has been articulated and investigated. Secondly, through identifying themes in the literature set, three key areas essential to fostering professional wellness were presented and explained: emotional awareness and intelligence, collegial social relationships and external contextual influences that affect teachers' working lives. While these are organised into categories for explaining patterns in the literature set, they are inherently interrelated and reflexive. Ideally, each factor is aligned with and supported by the other elements to sustain flourishing within the teaching profession. These themes were subsequently compared with literature on teacher's work in neoliberal contexts, demonstrating the difficulties in maintaining wellbeing in political times that foreground performativity and competition.

Strategies for supporting the emotional and social elements of wellbeing are identified in the literature. Programs that provide education for teachers and administrators in the area of emotional intelligence, centring on developing awareness of the role emotions play in teaching and providing practical approaches for managing emotions in their work is indicated as foundational. This is also strongly supported by policy in Queensland which supports the wellbeing of teachers and school staff. Ensuring programs enable teachers to negotiate their feelings, providing practical strategies to improve satisfaction and happiness and to effectively deal with challenging emotions would be advantageous. In a similar way, educating school leaders on the positive effects of professional learning communities and how to create a school climate that fosters social cohesion, rather than creating division and competition in a neoliberal context will also be useful. Integral to this is establishing non-hierarchical relationships, where teachers feel heard, valued and supported. From this review, we would suggest that a holistic education program that incorporates elements of emotional intelligence learning with the development of socially and professionally supportive learning communities would be most beneficial in building a school culture that supports teacher wellbeing. Further research is needed to both identify suitable programs and to collect data on the effects of implementing such initiatives.

In comparing elements that support the development of wellbeing with literature related to teachers' work in a neoliberal context, it seems that neoliberal policy regimes are deeply problematic for establishing a sense of professional wellbeing in teachers. These ideologies are enacted through policies of accountability and managerialism and performativity technologies such as NAPLAN and MySchool; the resulting work intensification and exclusion of the emotional labour of teachers opposes what is indicated as necessary for supporting wellness and professional flourishing. These impositions shape teachers' work and can be seen as incompatible with the themes identified in wellbeing literature of valuing emotional work, collegiality and collaboration and establishing a workplace climate that respects teachers' professional decisions and encourages a healthy work-life balance. In order to enhance teacher wellbeing, educating teachers, school leaders and pre-service teachers on proactive strategies they can implement within current systemic constraints, such as emotional intelligence tools and establishing supportive professional relationships, would be beneficial in reducing attrition and enabling improved professional flourishing in schools.

Defining what wellbeing is and understanding the factors that contribute to teacher wellbeing is necessary to better support flourishing within educational contexts. Wellbeing, and the unique challenges teachers face in ensuring wellness in a neoliberal political environment, remains an important consideration in attempts to better retain and sustain

teachers in their professional work. Ensuring a focus that goes beyond views of managing stress, burnout or resilience and instead looks to foster an approach that promotes happiness and positive functioning is one that has the potential to improve and enrich teachers' working lives into the future.

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