Wellbeing education in initial teacher education: Influences on teacher quality, transition, retention and student achievement

Faye McCallum (Southern Cross University)
Debbie Price & Anne Morrison (University of South Australia)
Maureen Glackin, Anna Lise Gordon, Jane Chambers, Jane Renowden
(St Mary’s University, London)
DON’T TOUCH THAT COFFEE MUG!!

Excitedly I packed my belongings from home and university and I was off.

Degree in hand, resources to call upon, umpteen lesson plans, a good pair of sneakers and a hat. What else would I need to survive a new life, living and working in a large town in the rural hinterland?

I hadn’t been to this spot before but I did do a ‘self-help’ map which meant I researched the town, community, school and people. I felt assured all was going to be great.

The drive was long, dusty and strange. I hadn’t lived out of home before so those comforts were behind me, but I have my most treasured belongings from home and I would be fine.

Four hours from city life and I arrived and settled in – shopping sorted and I prepared for the next day.

On my first day, I was warmly welcomed by the school principal, met some staff; the kids were great, and the parents awesome.

Recess break comes and goes and I get a chance to sit in the staff room at lunch time and meet some colleagues. Invited to have coffee, I grabbed for a mug and was told – ‘No, not that one, that’s for visitors, you’re on staff now’.

This took me back to my last practicum experience while a student at university; being shot down for using the teacher’s mug, sitting in the wrong place in the staff room, being put down for exciting the children in a mathematics lesson because I used a constructivist approach, being over-planned, getting to school too early, staying too late, getting on with the parents, being male and meeting deadlines.

I nearly lost my desire to teach after that experience but somehow and thanks to my university mentors, I managed to hang in there and finish.
WELLBEING - What’s the issue?

• Research shows:
  - Graduates are not always ‘classroom ready’
  - ITE does not adequately address: WB, resilience, stress management ....
  - Transition (from uni-work) is a ‘shock’, challenging, stressful
  - Employers do not always ‘induct’ early career teachers well
  - Employment is erratic, unpredictable, disruptive
  - ECT’s are leaving the profession within the first 5 years; the “B&B” in 3 yrs
  - Increasing accountability on teachers eg LANTITE; TEMAG; Selectivity; AITSL (Standards)
Teachers have been identified as being pivotal in shaping young people’s lives (Wyn 2009; McCallum & Price 2015; 2016) & therefore promote student WB, satisfaction, achievement, aspirations, hope...

Price and McCallum (2016) define wellbeing as ...diverse & fluid respecting individual, family and community beliefs, experiences, cultures, opportunities & contexts across time & change. It encompasses individual, collective and environmental elements which continually interact across the lifespan.

Wellbeing is something we all aim for, underpinned by positive notions, yet is unique to each of us and provides us with a sense of who we are which needs to be respected.

Our role with wellbeing education is to provide the opportunity, access, choices, resources and capacities for individuals and communities to aspire to their unique sense of wellbeing, whilst contributing to a sense of community wellbeing.
Teacher wellbeing

- Workplace stress and reduced wellbeing is a major reason identified by teachers that leave the profession.
- Teachers are considered to be the biggest in-school influence on student achievement and rather than being seen as an asset, they are often blamed for student poor performance (Dinham 2013).
- Teachers in rural and regional areas experience greater challenges with adverse influences on their health & wellbeing.
- Early career teachers experience additional challenges in the transition to work, and their resilience is tested.
- McCallum and Price (2014) acknowledge that teaching is a highly socialised and interactive profession, yet teachers often feel their work is more complex and demanding than others perceive.
Teacher Quality

- Teacher quality is confirmed as one of the most influential factors in relation to student achievement (e.g. Darling-Hammond 1999, 2003; Santiago 2002) around the world. The most important factor in determining how well children do is the quality of teachers and teaching.
- Education Reform from 2000’s have placed increased emphasis on TQ as the key to educational improvement (Kelly, 2012; Kennedy 2010).
- Initiatives have had a 30yr focus & include:
  - ITE
  - HE provision (TEQSA)
  - Teacher standards (AITSL)
  - National Curriculum (ACARA)
  - Professional Learning
  - TEMAG
- Measured by student achievement to meet benchmarks, league tables, standards etc.
Attraction

- Between the 1950’s & 2000’s the academic achievement of teachers declined (whether measured by SAT scores or college selectivity) Kelly & Northrop, 2015, 626

- Greater efforts should be made to recruit the ‘B&B’ who might otherwise pursue engineering, sciences, health

- Entry requirements (Band 5’s; top 30% literacy; non-academic)

- In US, factors influencing those that choose teaching include: pay; size of the profession; limited career ladder; decreased organizational authority

- Teachers, like doctors and other professionals, are not often attracted to rural areas for employment despite many lifestyle, early career progression and economic advantages. And of those professionals that do seek employment in rural areas early in their careers, few stay beyond three to five years as they see it as a short-term arrangement.
Transition

• It’s a tough time to be a teacher!
• Teaching challenges are magnified for ECT’s.
• The reasons impacting a teachers decision to leave, is both personal and professional.
• Poor induction or lack of professional development; isolation from friends or family; increased workload compared to their pre-service teaching experiences; lack of support from school leadership or structures; and pre-service programmes that do not sufficiently prepare them for the realities of the classroom.
• Conditions that supported early career teacher resilience: (a) relationships; (b) school culture; (c) teacher identity; (d) teachers’ work; and (e) system policies and practices. Johnson et al (2010).
Retention

• WB is one factor contributing to why some teachers leave (Hugo 2007; McKenzie et al 2011; Price & McCallum 2015)
• Emotional burnout
• Health (mental) (Vesely, Saklofske, Nordstokke 2014)
• Greater than 1/3 leave within 5 yrs (ABS 2011)
• Teacher attrition is greater than 20% in last 5 yrs (Kelly 2014)
• Induction increased retention (Smith & Ingersoll 2014) but Glazerman et al (2010) found it had no effect on retention
• Additional school support creates a reduction in burnout (Kelly & Northrop 2015)
Sustainability

• Looming teacher shortage eg 18m by 2015 (UNESCO)
• Aging workforce
• Worse in rural areas & hard to staff
• STEM has greater needs/shortages
• Induction allows ECT’s to start career with greater sense of efficacy due to increased support & mentoring; while higher salaries signaled greater sense of worth & appreciation (Kelly & Northrop 2015, 649)
• Selective college graduates (those at the top of their game) report lower levels of job satisfaction because they perceive more school problems & less school support (630)
Joint project

✓ St Mary’s University PGCE Secondary: resilience for ECT is embedded in the General Professional Studies program
✓ UniSA: explicit course (unit) in final year just before completion
✓ Mixed method – anonymous, iterative, online survey of ECTs & focus groups
✓ Target up to 5 yrs from graduation
✓ Qualitative questions addressing ITE Teacher wellbeing
✓ Ethics clearance across both institutions
Project Aims

1. To inform teacher WB research in ITE & its impact on teacher quality, transition & retention
2. Explore the relationship between teacher WB, student WB & achievement
3. Respond to ITE program design to integrate a teacher WB curriculum
4. Establish international research collaboration in the emergent field of teacher WB, embedding mentoring, promoting a teaching/research nexus across institutions
5. Advance high impact/quality publications in WB
Online survey: Impact on ECT quality, transition, retention and ultimately student achievement.

- What does WB mean to you?
- What are the work patterns post graduation
- Transition – how well prepared for work; feelings about the early days; strategies employed to manage
- Career ambitions/intentions/aspiration in the teaching profession
- ITE – how effective/important was WB education on the application of knowledge, practices & strategies
- Perceptions of their work: TQ & how WB influences this
- Links of WB & practice – achievement, learner WB, own WB
- Advancing WB in ITE & the workplace
Other research to address the problem suggests that what is needed is:

- A more highly professionalized teaching profession which requires a knowledgeable & highly regarded workforce that has some organizational authority & control of resources.
- Staffing reforms (ie changing the composition of the workforce) that may improve the status of teaching but would not necessarily professionalize it.
- Addressing teacher knowledge by strengthened entry requirements, induction, PD.
- A more pronounced career ladder & greater pay.
Two Stars and a Wish

Identify two areas of teacher’s wellbeing where you believe we are faring well.

Identify one wish to improve an area of wellbeing.
All teachers face common challenges (eg finding ways to reinvigorate disengaged students in learning) & they need extensive training, ongoing professional development to equip them with knowledge & skills, as well as a school-wide setting that supports classroom instruction ...

Our work aims to highlight the need to advance teacher wellbeing, globally, both within ITE and the workplace, especially during transition ... and this is what is needed to have a positive impact on TQ, attraction, retention & sustainability in the teaching profession.
References


