

Making Your Wellbeing a Priority: Language Teacher Wellbeing

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This paper summarizes the author's contribution to the LLL SIG-sponsored forum "From Burnout to Burning Rubber" that was presented at the JALT PanSIG 2022 in Nagano, co-presented with Andrew Reiman, Alen Mitsue Tamai, Catherine Takasugi, David Laheist, Joseph Dias, Nena Hosokawa, and Paul Nanton.

Introduction and Rationale

As cases of COVID-19 surged globally in 2020, research and discussions began to emerge which considered the implications of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) on student learning, engagement, achievement, and wellbeing (Dabrowski, 2020). Educators also started seeking how to facilitate the best learning environments online for students through various faculty development meetings and their own investigations. Consequently, educators' workloads increased drastically and the learning curve for ERT and stress levels got higher and higher. Under such unprecedented circumstances, Mercer and Gregersen (2020) asserted that students were not the only ones who needed help adjusting to the new learning conditions. While prioritizing learners' learning outcomes and well-being might be an essential part of a dedicated language educator job, it should not come at the expense of one's own well-being. In order to maintain or boost their physical and mental wellbeing, educators should reexamine, reconsider, and improve their work-life balance (Balica, 2020).

Language Teacher Wellbeing

Teaching in class means that educators' responsibilities go beyond just merely teaching the subject. They also deal with numerous

aspects of students' lives. Keltchtermans (1996) claims that teaching means being vulnerable. Teacher vulnerability is a feeling that emerges from a stressful environment where a particular teacher may be exposed to constant reminders of his or her limitations as reflected in the eyes of judging students or stakeholders such as parents (Bullough, 2005). Teachers not only face constant stressful working conditions but also that their particular moods can be highly influential to their learners (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). In this respect, teacher well-being is important and can be defined as the sense of overall life satisfaction including positive perspectives toward one's social, professional, and private life (Diener et al., 2003). Mercer and Gregersen (2020) also address a dedicated teacher's tendency to prioritize learners' wellbeing and consequently neglect their own mental and physical health. However, it can be argued that there is a serious lack of consideration or discussion of teachers' well-being in educational institutions in Japan. Enhancing the awareness of the importance of teacher well-being and stimulating discussions among educators and institutions is one of my main motives for the presentation at PanSIG 2022.

Activities to Enhance Teacher Wellbeing

Among personal and professional suggestions for enhancing one's well-being, in the presentation, three core activities and questions were shared:

1. Learning from the drawbacks or crises that can occur by reflecting on the events. Balica (2020) suggests that teachers can develop their perseverance and professional skills by reflecting on challenging events and learning from them.
2. Becoming comfortable with uncertainty by finding a flow or passion of one's own. Csikszentmihályi (1990) claims that finding an activity or activities to immerse oneself in outside of work will enhance one's happiness and overall satisfaction in life. This positive sentiment can provide a foundation of

resilience under such unprecedented circumstances as the pandemic.

3. Investing time in a well-being routine such as writing a gratitude journal or thinking about things to appreciate. Regular expression of gratitude by recording something you are thankful for can lead to increased feelings of happiness (Dickens, 2017), as well as higher life satisfaction, meaningfulness, and productivity (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000).

Conclusion

Teacher well-being is one of the critical factors in facilitating an inspiring learning space for students, yet it is often one of the most neglected topics in our profession (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). In the rapid advance of the science of happiness, numerous benefits of feeling a sense of well-being or life satisfaction have been discovered. It has been recognized as extremely useful interventions to implement in everyday life for teachers as well. After experiencing the stress of emergency remote teaching, in 2020, it might be time for us to start prioritizing teacher wellbeing.

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