AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT TO IMPROVE TEACHER WELLBEING IN A SOUTH AFRICAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

by

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AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT TO IMPROVE TEACHER WELLBEING IN A SOUTH AFRICAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the following individuals:

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my late mother Margaret Wallace Hansjee.

SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to improve teacher wellbeing by means of action research. The conceptual framework comprised the theories of Seligman and the PERMA model, Ryff's model of wellbeing, Lyubomirsky's theory of wellbeing and Bandura's theory of self-efficacy.

The study was conducted in a small independent South African school. The non-probability sample included five teachers at the school who were accessible. Four action research cycles were completed via four intensive workshop sessions focusing on teacher wellbeing in general, interpersonal relationships, workload and time management, as well as teacher support and resilience. The teachers were also given activities to complete at home. Data on teacher wellbeing was collected by means of observation, interviews and a questionnaire.

Through the various techniques employed during the action research project, the teachers' wellbeing was enhanced. Recommendations for further improvement and for follow-up study were made. The limitations of the study were also highlighted.

KEY TERMS

Teacher wellbeing, action research, independent primary school, interpersonal relationships, workload and time management, teacher support and resilience, self-efficacy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACESLM – Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership and Management

CPD – Continuous Professional Development

DoE – Department of Education

IQMS – Integrated Quality Management System

PAR – Participatory Action Research

PERMA – positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment

PPI – Positive Psychological Intervention

SMT – School Management Team

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

Teacher wellbeing is a prerequisite for quality teaching and learning in any school environment and is indicative of the characteristic of resilience (McCallum & Price, 2016:121). Teachers who exhibit psychological wellbeing are independent, experience a sense of control over the external world, maintain positive relationships with others, find meaning in teaching, strive for personal growth, and have self-confidence (Balzarotti, Biassoni, Villani, Prunas & Velotti, 2016:128). Wellbeing also improves teachers' potential and increases production and creativity (Day & Gu, 2010: 37). Teacher wellbeing is important because it influences the wellbeing of learners, and their wellbeing in turn affects how effectively they are able to learn (McCallum & Price, 2016:121).

Teacher wellbeing not only influences the wellbeing of learners and effective learning, but also enables the teacher to handle various challenges within the school environment. Teacher wellbeing is thus indicative of the degree of resilience a teacher has, as noted. Resilience has been defined as the ability to cope with change and challenge and bounce back during difficult times (Kids Helpline, 2014). Being resilient implies that the teacher is able to adapt successfully to the teaching context despite challenging or intimidating circumstances (Price & McCallum, 2014:10). An ability to cope while experiencing adversity and seeking professional development opportunities, are key to improving teacher resilience and wellbeing.

Improving resilience and therefore wellbeing, may involve developing significant relationships and a sense of connectedness or belonging, a sense of personal and teacher efficacy, the ability of social and problem-solving skills; a sense of achievement and a future orientation (Johnson, Down, Le Cornu, Peters, Sullivan,

Pearce & Hunter, 2016:15). From an organisational standpoint, wellbeing and resilience may be encouraged by managers through relevant education policies that ensure teachers are supported.

A school culture and relationships that promote a sense of belonging, empowerment, democratic decision-making and a professional learning community may also improve teacher wellbeing and resilience. Furthermore, enabling teachers to develop their professional identities, autonomy and self-efficacy while providing support, resources and learning opportunities to develop teachers' content knowledge and insight into the curriculum and teaching methods will increase feelings of confidence (McCallum & Price, 2016:124). On an individual level, if teachers consciously recognise their coping ability during stressful times, it may help to alleviate feelings of demotivation and discouragement.

Stressful circumstances arise from four sources namely: (i) teaching context; (ii) workload; (iii) relationships with others and (iv) relationship with themselves. Such stress may manifest on a physical as well as emotional level (Kottler & Kottler, 2013:112). Teaching contexts that are characterised by chaos and dysfunction due to a lack of subject knowledge result in a lack of commitment to teaching, mismanagement of resources, large classes, an unequal education system. Policy documents that reflect dysfunction increase levels of stress that teachers may experience (Moloi, 2019:1).

Workload and contractual problems were also identified as important stressors (Okeke & Dlamini, 2013:1-12). The contractual problems caused a continuous threat of unemployment and therefore a lack of power, poor pay and the fact that the teachers could not afford decent accommodation as well as a shortage of teachers. Work overload and long working hours were related to unreasonable time deadlines, and continuous curriculum changes implemented in an ineffective way, resulting in pressure.

As noted, healthy relationships are also important for teacher wellbeing. Teachers need to ensure they have positive relationships with their managers and colleagues as well as with themselves to alleviate certain stressors. However, when relationships are unsupportive or hostile this will further increase stress levels. Increased stress levels manifest physically by affecting the immune and digestive systems of individuals. Increased blood pressure and cardiovascular illnesses are also stress-related (Roos & Möller, 1998:17). Anxiety, panic and frustration are examples of stress manifesting emotionally. This may lead to unhealthy sleeping and eating habits, which further increase the effects of physical stress. A South African study determined that teachers who were excessively stressed might find that their ability to teach effectively decreased and they could begin to experience feelings of low self-efficacy and lack of job satisfaction leading to an absence of commitment to the teaching profession and negative interpersonal relationships (Schulze & Steyn, 2007:691).

Preventing the effects of excessive amounts of stress may necessitate the adoption of coping mechanisms in order to support resilience and wellbeing. Examples of coping mechanisms include a reframing of the concept of stress, examining secondary gains and learning how to meditate. Other activities may include socialising with colleagues outside of the school context and participating in physical activity or exercise. Recognising that there are stressors that one cannot control such as the socio-economic circumstances of parents, continuous developments by the Department of Education (DoE) and excessive administration is significant in this regard. However, teachers are in control of their reactions to the above stressors, and challenges and attitude play a significant role in the handling of external stressors. For example, if continuous policy and curricula changes in the education system and extreme challenges in the school context cause demotivation and discouragement, then the teachers may consider reflecting on their attitude towards the issue and explore the positive aspects of changes and challenges that may result from the perceived issue.

According to literature, teachers in South Africa do not experience high levels of wellbeing. A narrative research study by Oswald and Perold (2015:1) showed that

uncertain expectations, excessive administrative load and an increase in class size led to demotivation and low self-efficacy. Another study further investigated the stressors that 1181 South African secondary teachers from all provinces experienced (Schulze & Steyn, 2007:691-707). The stressors in rank order were the absence of parental support; lack of learner discipline; negative attitude of learners towards their school work; poor conditions outside the school that impacted on the learners' lives and over which the teachers had no control; learners' negative self-concepts; lack of learner motivation; poor learner achievement and the negative impact of efforts to help learners with their problems.

According to a South African study, the main causes of teacher stress and thus lack of wellbeing, were related to role ambiguity and role conflict; poor relationships between teachers; teachers and parents, as well as teachers and learners; a high workload; an undemocratic leadership style that was used at the school; continuous changes in education policies and curricula; lack of specialist subject knowledge; low professional status and poor remuneration (Ngobeni, 2006).

From the above, it is clear that South African teachers do not experience wellbeing. In light of this, understanding the dynamics of teacher wellbeing and factors that impact on it may assist the process of improving the wellbeing of teachers.

In consideration of the above, the main research question of the study and the aim of the research are addressed in the next sections.

1.2 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

Bearing in mind the significance of a lack of teacher wellbeing, and the advantages of action research to address actual problems in specific contexts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:485), the main research question of the study is:

How can teacher wellbeing in a South African primary school be improved by means of action research?

1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

To improve teacher wellbeing in a South African primary school by means of action research.

The next section provides a brief summary of four models or theories related to (teacher) wellbeing, namely the Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA) model; Carol Ryff's model; Sonja Lyubomirsky's theory; and Bandura's self-efficacy theory as it relates to teacher wellbeing. (These theories are explained in more detail in Chapter 4.)

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.4.1 Martin Seligman: the PERMA model

Seligman (D'raven & Pasha-Zaidi, 2015; Seligman, Rashid & Parks, 2006) is known as the 'father' of positive psychology, which emphasises the importance of the positive aspects in one's life instead of focusing on deficits. The acronym PERMA stands for five pathways by which one can achieve or pursue happiness (Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2017:263).

- The P stands for *positive emotions* and focuses on the hedonic feelings of happiness, for example amusement, hope and joy.

- The E is *engagement* and refers to feeling connected to activities or organisations.
- The R stands for *relationships* and refers to positive interpersonal relationships in one's life.
- The M refers to *meaning* and emphasises feeling connected to something meaningful and the view that life is valuable and purposeful.
- The A stands for *accomplishment* and refers to the feeling that one is achieving one's goals and making progress.

Seligman's (2011) latest model, the PERMA (+) theory includes physical activity, nutrition, sleep and optimism as further pathways to wellbeing (Khaw & Kern, 2014). Although this model has been found to be a useful tool in measuring wellness across cultures, it may be necessary to examine the model in the South African context given the diverse nature of South Africans.

1.4.2 Carol Ryff's model of psychological wellbeing

This model identifies six components that collectively encompass degrees of wellness that exist on a continuum (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

The first component is *self-acceptance*, which is the ability to accept oneself completely and to have a positive attitude towards oneself. On the other hand, people who do not accept themselves may feel dissatisfied with themselves and unable to accept certain personal qualities and wish to be different to what they are.

Personal growth is the second component and defines the positive view as developing continually and seeing oneself as expanding or growing. Such people are open to new experiences and believe that they can realise their potential. They seem to change in ways that reflect greater self-knowledge and they see improvement in themselves, their effectiveness and their behaviour as time progresses. The negative side of this

aspect is a feeling of stagnation and lack of growth; people may feel uninterested or bored with life and that they cannot develop new attitudes or behaviours.

The third component is having a *purpose* in life. On the one side, this relates to having a sense of directedness, goals, and beliefs that give life purpose. People with purpose feel that their lives have meaning, and they have aims and objectives by which they live. The negative side includes people who have few goals or direction, and have no beliefs that give life purpose. These people lack a sense of meaning in their lives and have no real aims or objectives for living.

The fourth component, *positive relations* with others, emphasises warm, satisfying and trusting relationships with others on the affirmative side. People who form positive realtionships are able to empathise, show affection, allow intimacy and understand that relationship dynamics include compromises and negotiation. On the other hand, people on the negative side of the continuum find it difficult to share warm, open and caring relations with others. These people have few close relationships and have difficulties with the give and take of relationships. They end up feeling isolated and frustrated in interpersonal relationships.

Environmental mastery, the fifth component, is the ability to manage everyday affairs competently and to cope well with controlling a range of external activities while making effective use of opportunities. The flipside includes people who have difficulty managing or controlling their environment and feel unable to change or improve their external context. They do not recognise opportunities and lack a sense of control over their external world.

The sixth component, *autonomy*, denotes people who are independent and have a strong sense of self-determination. These people are able to resist social pressures to conform to certain ways of thinking and acting, and they self-regulate their behaviour and evaluate themselves by their own standards. In contrast, individuals who lack

autonomy make decisions based on the judgments of others, and are governed by the evaluation and expectations of others. These people easily conform to social pressures to think and act in certain ways.

The above model is classified as a eudemonic view of wellbeing as it focuses on the degree to which people are fully functional and able to create meaning and purpose in their life.

1.4.3 Sonja Lyubomirsky's theory of wellbeing

This theory of wellbeing emphasises the adoption of strategies to motivate oneself to improve one's cognitive reaction to the external world. Sonja Lyubomirsky believes that people who differ with regard to happiness, also differ in the cognitive and motivational strategies they implement (Lyubomirsky, 2007; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Since happiness or wellbeing is determined by approximately 10% circumstance and 40% activities, this reinforces the idea that one can intentionally engage in strategies to promote one's wellbeing (Harrington, 2013). These strategies consider the physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual factors among others, which may aid wellbeing.

1.4.4 Bandura's theory of wellbeing and its relationship to wellbeing

Bandura (1990:101) defined self-efficacy as people's "beliefs in their capabilities to mobilise motivation, cognitive resources and courses of action needed to exercise control over task demands". Thus, teachers who believe in their own ability to succeed at school tasks and achieve educational goals as well as influence events at school are more likely to feel a strong sense of self-efficacy and wellbeing. Developing teachers' beliefs related to self-efficacy depends on four sources of influence. The first is mastery of experience, which refers to one's own experience of success. This is the most effective way of creating a strong sense of self-efficacy because you believe you

can do something based on past experiences of success. Secondly, vicarious experiences are the observation of others' successful experiences which act as social models or examples of how to achieve the same success. The third source of influence is social persuasion when one is told that one is capable of doing something, which motivates one to exert greater effort and sustain that effort. Thus, it is the feeling of being believed in by others. In the fourth instance, the somatic states of emotional and psychological responses which can influence self-efficacy would include physical feelings of anxiety and stress, for example, an increased heartbeat, when people feel pessimistic about their role at work. Such feelings inhibit a sense of wellbeing. People who have low self-efficacy because of negative feelings towards themselves often do not experience optimal wellbeing.

In the next section, the research design and data collection methods are explained.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Research design, sampling and data collection

This study used action research to improve teacher wellbeing. Action research is the process of using research principles to provide information, in this case that educational professionals can use to improve aspects of day-to-day practice (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:478). In other words, the purpose of action research is to improve the quality of people's organisations, communities and family lives while empowering individuals towards transformation and a new vision within an egalitarian and democratic framework. To summarise, the purpose of all action research is to impart social change, with a specific action (or actions) as the ultimate goal (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). Action research utilises cycles of planning, acting, data collecting and reflecting (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:450).

Since mental healthcare is a social and community problem and its approach places an emphasis on systematic inquiry that contributes towards emancipation and change in our society, participatory action research (PAR) was the research design which was chosen to guide this project. PAR is considered a subset of action research, which is the "systematic collection and analysis of data for the purpose of taking action and making change" by generating practical knowledge (Gillis & Jackson, 2002:264).

PAR has played a pivotal role in educational change, particularly in the development of teachers and teaching (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The role of the researcher is significant in this regard as the researcher is expected to conduct recursive research that is focused on bringing about change and action that will improve teacher wellbeing. It is not only the nature of school systems that are the focus of the research but also the ability of the researcher or practitioner to continuously and recursively reflect upon his or her own role in bringing about fundamental transformation within the education system to improve the lives of the teachers.

Collaboration with participants is emphasised in PAR and open, broad-based involvement of participants drives the decision process. Purposive and convenient sampling were utilised in a targeted setting and participants were seen as equals to enhance their wellbeing. The selected school was the researcher's place of work and the participants were the researcher's colleagues. (More detail about the research design and sampling appears in sections 4.3 and 4.4.)

Quantitative and qualitative methods such as interviews, observations and questionnaires were utilised as the main instruments in the data collection process. Data analyses were primarily narrative and descriptive and the research focused mainly on the extent to which the investigation provided credible data that were used to successfully improve the wellbeing of the teachers (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014: 482-483).

1.5.2 Validity in action research

The validity of the data retrieved from the action research investigation was determined by *democratic validity*, which is concerned with the multiple perspectives of all the individuals who participated in the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014: 482-483). The researcher ensured democratic validity by gathering multiple perspectives on the issue from relevant groups that have a stake in the problem. The researcher also constructed a collaborative research team that included members from various stakeholder groups. The stakeholder groups included the teachers who participated in the study as well as the principal of the school. A second measure is *outcome validity* whereby the extent to which the action plan that was used in the study was viable and effective to improve teacher wellbeing. Thirdly, a determination of *process validity* was ensured by the use of effective and appropriate data collection methods (observation, interviews, and questionnaires) that answered the main research question guiding the study. The researcher also addressed the extent to which participants were compelled to act by ensuring *catalytic validity.* Finally, the researcher discussed the dissemination of the study's findings through some type of public medium such as an article published in an accredited journal (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:485).

1.5.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues that may affect the outcome of findings relates to the collaboration and intimate and open-ended nature of the relationship between the participants and the researcher. The close relationship between the researcher and participants means the data collection process cannot be coercive. In addition, the dual role of the researcher and teacher requires sensitivity towards the nature of the investigation. The research needs to be in the best interests of the participants and participants may opt out of the study without being penalised. The researcher is required, in turn, to continually renegotiate the purpose of the study, to consider how the results will be used, and to involve participants in as many places of the research process as possible. Finally, the consent process also needs attention due to the possible misleading nature of consent

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). All of the before mentioned requirements were addressed in this study.

The detail of the research design and data collection methods is explained in Chapter 4 of this study. In the next section, the study's main concepts are defined and explained.

1.6   DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.6.1   Action research

Action research in education is the process of using research principles to provide information that educational professionals can use to improve aspects of day-to-day practice. In other words, the term 'action research', refers to studies undertaken by practitioners in schools that address an actual problem or issue in the school or classroom (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

Action research is an investigation conducted by the person or the people empowered to act concerning their own actions, for the purpose of improving their future actions (Sagor, 2005:4).

PAR, as discussed previously, is considered a subset of action research, which is the "systematic collection and analysis of data for the purpose of taking action and making change" by generating practical knowledge (Gillis & Jackson, 2002:264). The researcher, as participant, is active in making informed decisions during all phases of the research process for the primary purpose of imparting social change; a specific action (or actions) is the ultimate goal. By using PAR, there may be the formation of public spaces whereby participants and researchers can reshape their knowledge of how political, social, economic and familial contexts in communities may impact daily life (McIntyre, 2002).

1.6.2 Teacher wellbeing

Teacher wellbeing is the individual teacher's positive experiences at work with regard to: pleasant interpersonal relations, thriving at school, feeling competent as a teacher, perceived recognition from others and the desire for being involved in teaching (Dagenais-Desmarais & Savoie, 2012:676).

According to Ryan and Deci (2001: 141), wellbeing is generally viewed from two perspectives, namely a hedonic perspective and a eudemonic perspective. Hedonic wellbeing focuses on happiness and defines wellbeing in terms of attaining pleasure and avoiding pain and features life satisfaction, presence of a positive mood and absence of a negative mood as three components. On the other hand, eudemonic wellbeing defines wellbeing in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functional and focuses on meaning and self-realisation (Ryan & Deci, 2001). A combination of the above two definitions provides a more recent understanding of wellbeing as a balance between the psychological, social and physical demands placed on a person and the psychological, social and physical resources at that person's disposal to deal with those demands (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012: 230).

1.6.3 Resilience

According to Ebersöhn (2017:2), resilience presupposes the presence of significant adversity, together with adaptation, by using available protective resources to attain positive outcomes. In other words, resilience is the capacity to cope with change and challenge and bounce back during difficult times (Kids Helpline, 2014).

Being a resilient teacher means that the teacher is able to adapt successfully to his or her teaching context, despite challenging circumstances (Price & McCallum, 2014:10). Skills can be learnt through specific activities to increase the levels of resilience (and thus of wellbeing) of teachers.

1.6.4 Self-efficacy

Bandura (1990:101) defines self-efficacy as people's "beliefs in their capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over task demands." Thus, the self-efficacy of a teacher is the teacher's belief in his or her own ability to succeed at school tasks, achieve educational goals and influence events at school that affect his or her life and wellbeing. For teachers to accomplish educational goals and experience positive wellbeing, teachers need to be optimistic about their own personal efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy therefore appears to determine teachers' attitude towards themselves, which affect the teachers' attitudes towards work. If teachers believe in themselves, they will feel positively towards work while the opposite is true for low self-efficacy.

In the following section the outline of the study is given.

1.7   CHAPTER OUTLINE

The chapters of this study are as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and overview

In Chapter 1, the study was justified. It was indicated why teacher wellbeing was important, and why there currently seems to be a lack of teacher wellbeing in South Africa. The main research problem and aim of the study were stated; the conceptual framework was summarised, and the research methodology was briefly explained. The main concepts of the study were also defined.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework of the study

Chapter 2 discusses four prominent wellbeing theorists and their models for wellbeing. The first theorist is Martin Seligman and his PERMA model. Secondly, Carol Ryff's model of psychological wellbeing is presented. Sonja Lyubomirsky's theory of wellbeing is the third theory that is explained and lastly, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and its relationship to wellbeing is examined.

Chapter 3: Factors related to teacher wellbeing

In Chapter 3, the causes of wellbeing as well as the effects of a lack of wellbeing are examined. The factors that relate to teacher wellbeing and how teacher wellbeing can be improved are indicated.

Chapter 4: Research design and data collection methods

In Chapter 4, PAR is specified as the chosen method of research design and data collection. This includes a discussion of the use of purposive and convenient sampling at the researcher's place of work. The use of questionnaires, interviews and observation are indicated as the data collection tools. Validity, reliability and ethics are also addressed.

Chapter 5: The findings and a discussion of the findings

In this chapter, the findings of the data collection are analysed quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The findings are interpreted in the light of the conceptual framework, and are also compared to the findings of other researchers on the topic of teacher wellbeing.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, recommendations, and limitations of the study

In the last chapter, conclusions are drawn with regard to the extent that the action research project was able to enhance the wellbeing of the teachers. Recommendations for further improvement of teacher wellbeing are formulated, and the limitations of the study are pointed out.

1.8 SUMMARY

Chapter 1 introduced the study. The chapter gave background to the study as well as a justification of why the research was important. It presented the main research question, as well as the aim of the study. The conceptual framework was briefly explained by summarising four models or theories related to teacher wellbeing, namely the PERMA model, Carol Ryff's model, Sonja Lyubomirsky's theory and Bandura's self-efficacy theory. An overview was given of the research methodology. Key concepts were defined and explained. Finally, the chapter outline of the dissertation was given.

The next chapter is Chapter 2. This chapter addresses the conceptual framework of the study.

Chapter 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 explains four prominent wellbeing theorists and their models of wellbeing. Firstly, Seligman (2011), known as the 'father' of positive psychology', and the PERMA model is discussed. The second theory of wellbeing that is discussed is Ryff's (2014) model of psychological wellbeing. Thirdly, Lyubomirsky's (2007) theory of wellbeing is presented and lastly, Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy and its relationship to wellbeing. Each of the theories is explained within the context of teacher wellbeing. Thus, the models for each theory are highlighted to inform the improvement of teacher wellbeing. For instance, the criteria by which each of these models measures wellbeing is useful in evaluating or measuring the wellbeing of teachers. An evaluation may highlight different aspects that contribute to wellbeing and the reasons for a lack of wellbeing. For example, becoming aware of a lack of wellbeing due to the experience of pressure to complete all the administrative tasks that are required to fulfil the expected roles of a teacher may enable the teacher to take action to explore ways of managing time more effectively.

In the next sections, a discussion of the above-mentioned wellbeing theorists is presented within the context of teacher wellbeing.

2.1.1. Martin Seligman: the PERMA Model

Seligman (2011), known as the 'father' of positive psychology, studied the factors that enable individuals and communities to flourish (Positive Psychology Centre, 2016). Positive psychology is interested in building the positive experiences of individuals while repairing the effects of negative experiences and is concerned with fulfilment in

the lives of normal people while healing the wounds of the distressed (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Seligman's PERMA model is an approach within the framework of Positive Psychology that consists of five building blocks that cultivate a sense of progress namely, (i) Positive Emotions, (ii) Engagement, (iii) Relationships, (iv) Meaning, and (v) Accomplishment.

Positive psychology focuses on three related topics: the study of positive subjective experiences, the study of positive individual traits, and the study of institutions that enable positive experiences and positive traits (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive psychotherapy rests on the hypothesis that depression can be treated effectively by reducing its negative symptoms but also by directly and primarily building positive emotions, character strengths and meaning (Seligman et al. 2006). According to Seligman et al. (2006), it is possible that directly encouraging these positive resources may successfully counteract negative symptoms and may also buffer against future reoccurrence.

Initially, Seligman et al. (2006) proposed that happiness could be decomposed into three scientifically manageable components: positive emotion (the pleasant life), engagement (the engaged life) and meaning (the meaningful life). Exercises designed by positive psychology are expected to further one of the above life paths.

Subsequently, Seligman (2011) advanced the above theory with more components which he referred to as the five building blocks that enable flourishing, namely (i) Positive emotions, (ii) Engagement, (iii) Relationships, (iv) Meaning, and (v) Accomplishment (Positive Psychology Centre, 2016). Research into the factors that enable flourishing can help people make decisions that are more informed. There are differing techniques, as discussed below, to increase each of the five building blocks.

(i)   Positive emotion is a hedonic path that focuses on increasing positive emotions about the past through gratitude and forgiveness; increasing

positive emotions about the present by appreciating physical pleasure and mindfulness; and lastly, increasing positive emotions about the future by building hope and optimism. According to Seligman (2011), positive affectivity is partly heritable, and emotions fluctuate within a range. In other words, the experience of positive emotions is limited by how much an individual can experience positive emotions.

(ii)   Engagement is the feeling of being completely connected to activities by a deep concentration that brings the individual into the present moment, self-awareness disappears, and the perception of time is distorted. Engagement in the activity produces a 'flow' state whereby an individual's skills are sufficient for the challenging activity (Positive Psychology Centre, 2016).

(iii)   Relationships provide connection and support, which are fundamental to wellbeing because they provide purpose and meaning. The drive to connect with and serve others promotes our survival and enables an individual's capacity for love, compassion, kindness and empathy (Positive Psychology Centre, 2016).

(iv)   Meaning develops from a sense of belonging and from serving something bigger than oneself. Individuals create meaning for their lives through various means such as religion, family, science, politics, work and social causes (Positive Psychology Centre, 2016).

(v)   Accomplishment contributes to wellbeing because it engenders a sense of achievement for its own sake. Achievement is sought by individuals in various domains such as the workplace, sports, games and hobbies (Positive Psychology Centre, 2016).

According to research, individuals who experience higher levels of wellbeing encounter beneficial consequences thereof. For example, those individuals performed better at work, had relationships that were more satisfying, were more cooperative and had stronger immune systems (Seligman, 2011). Furthermore, studies have shown that optimism is one of the key contributors to wellbeing. The above building blocks of wellbeing can be taught to improve the sense of wellbeing that teachers experience. For example, school curricula can explicitly educate learners about the importance of long-lasting social relationships, as well as teach skills that nurture supportive and intimate relationships (Adler & Seligman, 2016). Likewise, school policy can institute wellbeing workshops where teachers are taught the building blocks of wellbeing and given information about how this will contribute to greater fulfilment and life-satisfaction.

Seligman suggested that each of the five components are intrinsically rewarding, representing worthwhile ends for doing anything (Goodman, Disabato, Kashdan & Kauffman, 2017). The PERMA model integrated components of hedonia (the experience of positive emotional states and satisfaction of desires) and eudaimonia (the presence of meaning and development of one's potentials). The study by Goodman et al. (2017) measured wellbeing with the use of the PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016). The PERMA-Profiler is a 23-item measure that assesses wellbeing across five domains. The main benefit of this measure is that it assesses wellbeing across multiple domains. The multi-dimensional nature of this measure ensures that interventions may be developed to target a low score on any given variable. This tool was used for people to better understand themselves, to note their strengths and weaknesses, and to find ways to fully flourish in life.

The PERMA model may be a useful tool to measure teacher wellbeing; however, it may be necessary to consider the context within which the model is used. For instance, in South Africa a variety of cultures, religions and economic disparities will affect how the assessments should be conducted. Figure 2.1 is a representation of Seligman's PERMA model and highlights the aspects that positive psychology emphasises as essential for the development of positive psychological wellbeing.

Positive Emotions

Past - gratitude and fogiveness.

Present - appreciating physical pleasure and mindfulness.

Future - hope and optimism.

Engagement

Deep concentration.

'Flow' state.

Relationships

Connection and support.

Purpose and meaning.

Promotes survival

Meaning

Sense of belonging.

Serving something bigger than oneself .

Accomplishment

Sense of achivement for its own sake.

Figure 2.1   Seligman's (2011) PERMA Model

2.1.2. Carol Ryff's model of psychological wellbeing

Ryff's (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) model of psychological wellbeing includes six distinct components of positive psychological functioning. The six components form a multidimensional model of wellbeing that is founded upon a convergence of multiple frameworks of positive functioning. Two primary conceptions of positive functioning are considered. The first conception of positive functioning refers to distinguishing between positive and negative affect and defines happiness as a balance between the two. The second conception emphasises life satisfaction as the key indicator of wellbeing. Life satisfaction is viewed as a cognitive component and complements happiness.

The six components of psychological functioning exist on a continuum of wellbeing from high to low scores. The six components include positive evaluations of oneself

and one's past life (Self-Acceptance); a sense of continued growth and development as a person (Personal Growth); the belief that one's life is purposeful and meaningful (Purpose in Life); the possession of quality relations with others (Positive Relations With Others); the capacity to manage effectively one's life and surrounding world (Environmental Mastery); and a sense of self-determination (Autonomy) (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Ryff's model of psychological functioning has implications for informing a programme of research that addresses the presence of the positive and strengths in individuals' lives. Interventions that bring the person out of negative functioning into a neutral position are one form of success (Ryff & Singer, 1996). The purpose would be to facilitate progression towards a restoration of the positive, for example, possessing mastery, self-regard, purpose and high-quality relations.

Ryff and Singer (1996) emphasise that the route to recovery is not exclusively about alleviating the negative, but about engendering the positive. They stress that the appearance (or reappearance) of healthy goods in life provide a critical impetus in the capacity to rebound from distress, and that a recognition of these positives could also define important protective factors in the face of future challenges and adversity. The data show that among the healthy were individuals who had experienced considerable adversity over the course of their lives. Ryff and Singer (1996) propose that understanding the factors that protected them from becoming mentally or physically ill provides critical preventative knowledge.

Teacher wellbeing may be understood through the above model by taking into account the different components of psychological wellbeing and applying them to the process of analysis with specific teachers who are experiencing a lack of wellbeing. The information could inform a process of positive cognitive interpretation about specific strengths that are available during stressful life events. Figure 2.2 is a breakdown of the six components of psychological wellbeing that Carol Ryff proposes exist on a continuum from positive experience to negative experience.

Self-acceptance	• Positive attitude and acceptance • Dissatisfaction and unacceptance
Personal Growth	• Continous development and improvement • Stagnation and uninterest
Purpose in life	• Direction and goal setting • Lack purpose and meaning
Positive relationships	• Warm, satisfying, trusting relationships • Few close relationships, feelings of isolation and frustration
Environment-al mastery	• Manages day-to-day life competently • Difficulty in managing the environment, feeling unable to improve surrounding contexts
Autonomy	• Independance, a strong sense of self-determination, able to resist social pressures • Makes important decisions based on judgments of others, easily conform to social pressures

Figure 2.2   Ryff's (1995; 2014) six components of psychological wellbeing

2.1.3 Sonja Lyubomirsky's theory of wellbeing

Lyubomirsky's (2001) theory of wellbeing explored the role of cognitive and motivational processes in wellbeing. The construal framework that Lyubomirsky (2001) adopted in the study explored hedonically relevant psychological processes, such as social comparison, self-evaluation, and person perception. Thus, the research attempted to explain how various cognitive and motivational processes account for differences in enduring and transient wellbeing.

Lyubomirsky's (2001) research examined the associations between happiness and a host of diverse proximal and distal factors. The focus of the research is on objective

determinants of happiness in Western cultures for example, the extent to which wellbeing was related to aspects of our environments and to personal aspects not under our control such as gender and age. According to the theory, happy and unhappy individuals differ in the particular cognitive, judgmental and motivational strategies they use and that these processes appear to operate automatically and without awareness. Furthermore, research related to the pursuit of happiness investigated additional cognitive and motivational processes that support the differing worlds of those who experience enduring happiness versus chronic unhappiness. The theory indicates that self-rated happy and unhappy people have been shown to differ systematically and, in a manner, consistent with and supportive of their differing states and temperaments (Lyubomirsky, 2001). In other words, happy individuals interpret naturally occurring life events, as well as situations constructed in the laboratory, in ways that seemed to support and promote their happiness and positive self-views, whereas unhappy individuals interpret experiences in ways that seem to reinforce their unhappiness and negative self-views.

A construal of happiness therefore suggests that alternative perspectives and constructions of reality have different hedonic consequences, and as such, are associated with different levels of enduring happiness and wellbeing. According to Lyubomirsky (2001), objective factors of reality exert a tremendous impact on people's happiness but they do so through the operation of multiple cognitive and motivational processes. Research suggests that variables such as health and wealth have counterintuitively small effects on people's happiness and a diverse set of psychological processes moderates the impact of events, life circumstances and demographic factors on wellbeing. In addition, an important implication of an approach to understanding happiness centres on cognitive and motivational processes in that any psychological process that has hedonic consequences is potentially relevant to illuminating individual differences in enduring happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2001). Several studies have found that exerting high levels of effort to practice a happiness-boosting strategy and continuing to practice it even after the intervention is over, resulted in greater improvements in wellbeing (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). It was recommended that individuals practice and record positive strategies regularly in order to turn the strategies into habits.

Furthermore, members of individualist cultures, whose values and cultural perspectives are highly supportive of the pursuit of individual happiness, have been found to benefit more from Positive Psychological Interventions (PPIs) than members of collectivist cultures (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). PPIs are psychological interventions aimed at cultivating positive feelings, positive behaviours and positive cognitions, for example performing acts of kindness or writing letters of gratitude (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). To consider an individual's cultural background as well as his or her unique inclinations when implementing PPIs, is important. For example, an individual (teacher) from a collectivist culture may experience greater boosts in wellbeing when practicing prosocial and other-focused activities (e.g., performing acts of kindness), compared with individual-focused activities (e.g., reflecting on personal strengths).

A model of happiness developed by Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm and Sheldon (2011) proposes that there are three major factors that contribute to people's level of wellbeing. The first is their happiness set point – in other words, the genetically determined stable level of happiness, which has been shown to account for 50% of the variance in individual differences in wellbeing. The second factor is their life circumstances, for example factors such as income, marital status, or religiosity, which are typically found to account for roughly 10% in individual differences in wellbeing. The third factor is positive cognitive, behavioural and goal-based activities that have the potential to account for 40% of individual differences in wellbeing.

According to research, although genes and personality traits may operate to hold happiness levels relatively constant over time, and although individuals may be predisposed to adapt to positive life experiences relatively swiftly, engaging in happiness-increasing activities such as committing to important goals, meditating, acting kindly towards others, thinking optimistically or expressing gratitude, has the potential to improve levels of happiness for significant periods of time (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Thus, positive activities, when practiced using optimal timing and variation, lead to improvement in wellbeing over time.

This model of wellbeing shows that sustainable increases in happiness are possible, but only if pursued under optimal conditions, such as when people are motivated to perform a positive activity, when they bring to bear effort and persistence, and when the activity is a legitimately efficacious one (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Participants in the study needed both a *will,* such as appropriate expectations and motivation, as well as a proper *way* which would be an effective happiness-enhancing strategy.

Self-selection is an important factor as it has the potential to moderate an intervention's effectiveness. According to research, participants who have a conscious knowledge of the intervention's purpose experience increased motivation to help achieve that purpose (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Effortful pursuit of happiness-enhancing activities was found to be essential for their success. In addition, continued adherence to the happiness-enhancing activities during the course of the intervention influenced the activities' beneficial effects. Continued effortful performance of an 'optimistic thinking' activity predicted greater maintained change in subjective wellbeing. Figure 2.3 shows the psychological wellbeing factors namely set point/genetics, positive activities and life circumstances that Lyubomirsky (2007) theorised to understand how happiness could be enhanced.
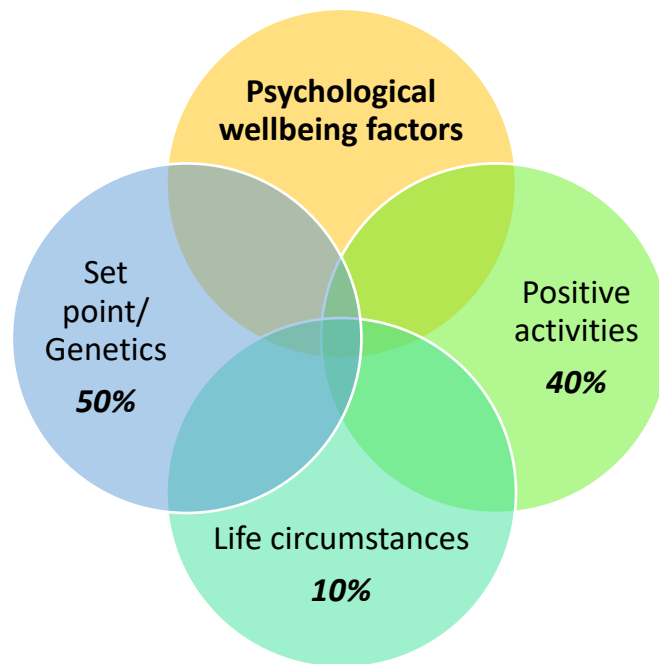
Figure 2.3   Lyubomirsky's (2007) theory of wellbeing

2.1.4. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and its relationship to wellbeing

Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory states that psychological procedures are likely to alter the level and strength of self-efficacy. It was hypothesised that expectations of personal efficacy determined whether coping behaviour would be initiated, how much effort would be expended, and how long it would be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. According to Bandura (1977), persistence in activities that are subjectively threatening but are relatively safe, produces, through experiences of mastery, further enhancement of self-efficacy. The model proposed that expectations of personal efficacy are derived from four principal sources of information, (i) performance accomplishments, (ii) vicarious experience, (iii) verbal persuasion, and (iv) physiological states. Furthermore, the more dependable the experiential sources, the greater are the changes in perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Efficacy expectation is defined as the conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviour required to produce the outcomes. In other words, expectations of personal mastery affect both initiation and persistence of coping

behaviour. On the other hand, those who cease their coping efforts prematurely will retain their fears for a long time.

Mastery expectations influenced performance and were altered by the cumulative effects of one's efforts. In addition, the impact of performance attainments on self-efficacy will vary depending on whether one's accomplishments are ascribed mainly to ability or to effort. For instance, success with minimal effort fostered ability ascriptions that reinforced a strong sense of self-efficacy. However, similar successes achieved through high expenditure of effort implied a lesser ability and were thus likely to have a weaker impact on perceived self-efficacy. Further to this, cognitive evaluations of the difficulty level of tasks would further affect the impact of performance accomplishments on perceived self-efficacy. Mastery of challenging tasks conveyed salient evidence of enhanced competence (Bandura, 1977).

Gibson and Dembo (1984) found that teacher efficacy corresponded to Bandura's two-factor model of self-efficacy. The measures of teacher efficacy identified through different methods converged, while at the same time were differentiated from verbal ability and flexibility. Preliminary classroom observation data suggested that teacher efficacy could influence certain patterns of classroom behaviour known to yield achievement gains. Figure 2.4 illustrates Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy and the sources of self-efficacy.
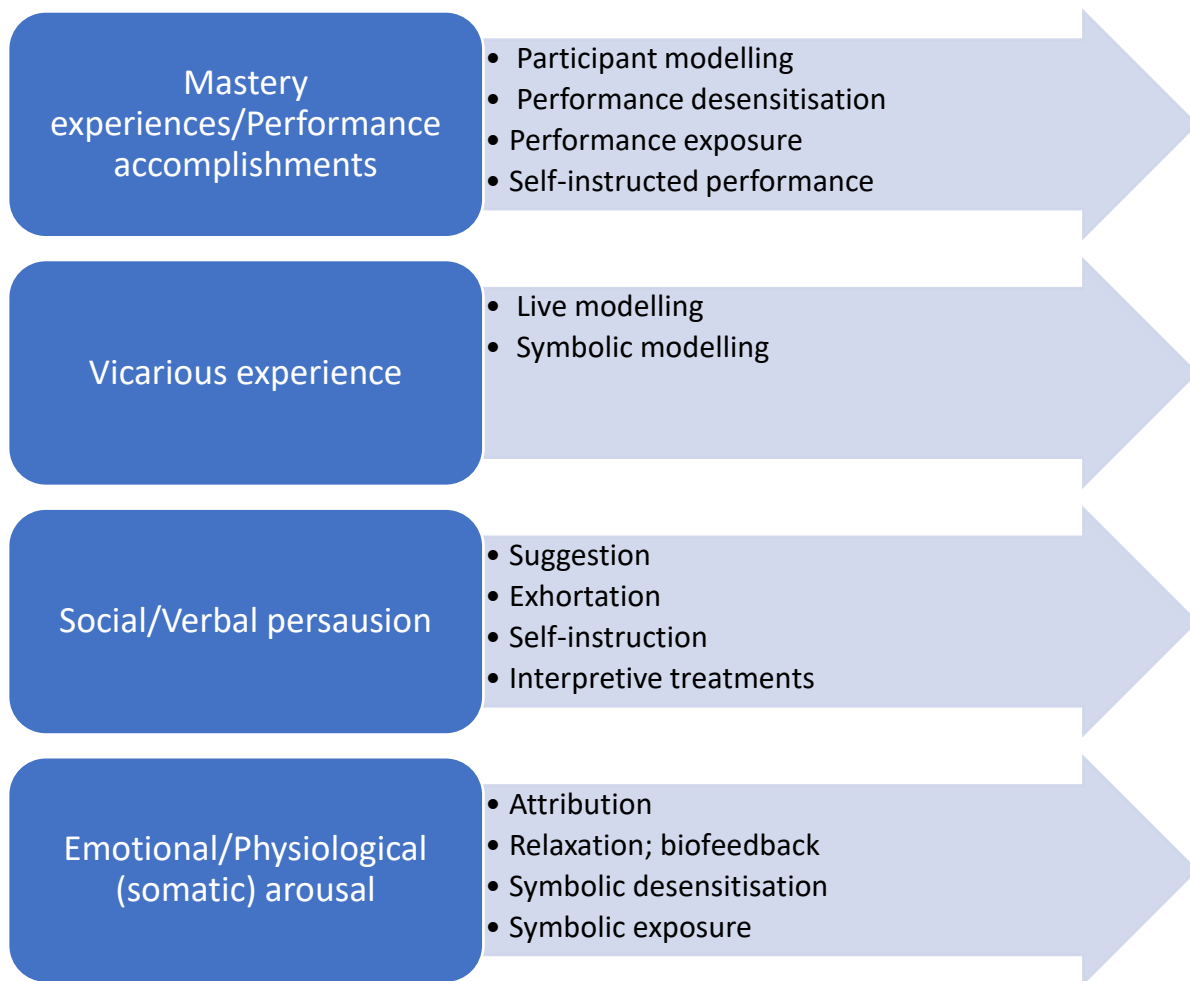
Figure 2.4   Bandura's (1977) sources of self-efficacy

Schunk and Pajares (2016:38) discussed the nature of self-efficacy as applied to teachers and referred to this type of self-efficacy as *teacher (instructional) self-Efficacy.* Teacher self-efficacy is the personal beliefs about one's capabilities to help learners learn. Teacher self-efficacy is said to influence choice of activities, effort, persistence and achievement. The development of challenging activities, helping learners succeed and persisting with learners who have difficulties are characteristics of highly self-efficacious teachers. Bandura's (1977) model of self-efficacy was further developed to include Zimmerman's (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001) model of self-regulation. Thus, self-regulation also includes the self-generated thoughts, behaviours and affects that are systematically orientated towards learning goals (Schunk, 2019). In other words, practicing simple self-regulation skills helps build self-efficacy necessary for success. The model indicates four levels of development namely,

observation, emulation, self-control, and lastly self-regulation (Schunk, & Zimmerman, 2007:12). The first two levels derive motivation from social sources such as modelling while the last two levels originate within self-sources of motivation. Thus, teachers who learn to self-regulate will likely improve their belief systems around competency or self-efficacy and therefore teacher wellbeing.

Maddux (2009) elaborates to include two interacting factors linked to the development of self-efficacy. Thus, prerequisites for the development of self-efficacy include the development of the capacity for symbolic thought and the capacity for self-observation and self-reflection. A discernment of how one's actions produce results and environmental responses to those actions further influences the development of self-efficacy. The development of self-efficacy is fundamental for the expression of psychological adjustment, physical health, self-regulation, psychotherapy and collective efficacy. Teachers who believe they are competent within their educational roles are likely to experience optimal teacher wellbeing which includes sound psychological wellbeing, good physical health and a healthy self-regulatory response. Interventions to improve self-efficacy originate from the ideas expressed in positive psychology which are guided exercises aimed towards changes in behaviour (Maddux, 2009).

A summary of the conceptual framework is shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Summary of conceptual framework

THEORY			
Martin Seligman's PERMA model	**Carol Ryff's model of psychological wellbeing**	**Sonja Lyubomirsky's theory of wellbeing**	**Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy**
5 building blocks of wellbeing	6 dimensions of wellbeing	3 determinants of wellbeing	4 sources of self-efficacy
Positive emotions Engagement Relationships Meaning Accomplishment	Self-acceptance Personal growth Purpose of life Positive relationships Environmental mastery Autonomy	Set point/Genetics Life circumstances Positive activities	Mastery experiences Vicarious experiences Social/verbal persuasion Emotional/physiological (somatic) arousal

Table 2.1 shows that the theories and models differ with regard to their main building blocks: Seligman's (2006) PERMA model is made up of five building blocks and is grounded in positive psychology; Ryff's (1995) model of psychological wellbeing explores six dimensions of wellbeing; while Lyubomirsky's (2007) theory of wellbeing has three determinants. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy has four sources of self-efficacy.

2.2. SUMMARY

Chapter 2 focused on four prominent wellbeing theorists and their models of wellbeing. These are the PERMA model of wellbeing by Seligman (2011), Ryff's (1995) theory, Lyubomirsky's (2001) theory and Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy.

Chapter 3 is the next chapter and presents the causes of wellbeing as well as the effects of a lack of wellbeing. The factors that relate to teacher wellbeing and how teacher wellbeing can be improved are indicated.

Chapter 3

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE TEACHER WELLBEING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 explained the conceptual framework of the study. Chapter 3 is an investigation of the factors that influence teacher wellbeing. In light of this, emphasis is placed on the teacher's interpersonal relationships at school, thriving at school, self-efficacy as a teacher, recognition for work and lastly, engagement in activities at school as illustrated by Figure 3.1.
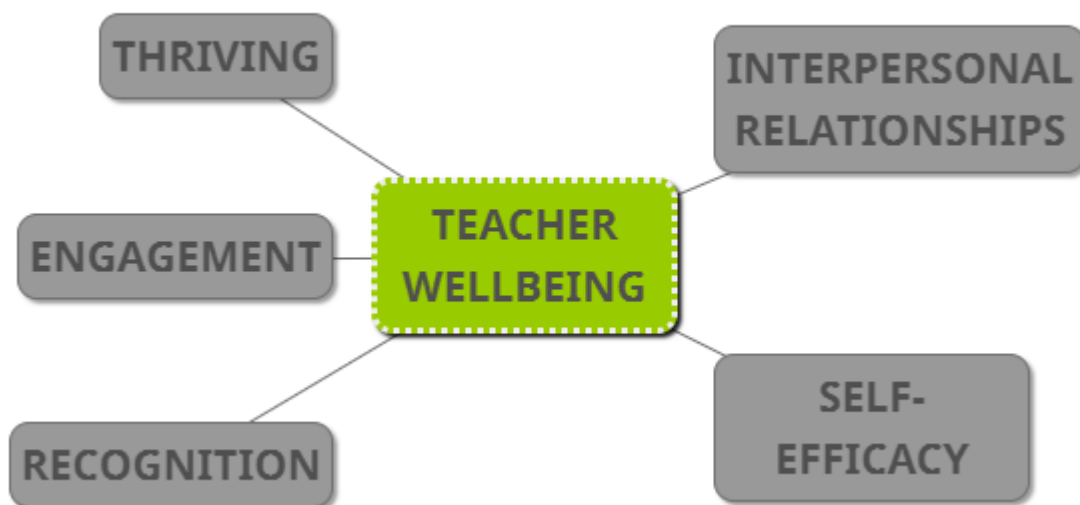
Figure 3.1 Factors that influence the wellbeing of teachers' (own figure)

Teacher wellbeing is influenced by the five factors represented in Figure 3.1. These factors are explained in the next sections.

3.2 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT SCHOOL

According to research, being able to successfully adapt to the demands of the teaching profession, agreeable social networks and human connections are essential (Johnson, Down, Le Cornu, Peters, Sullivan, Pearce, & Hunter, 2014:540). Teacher wellbeing is influenced by the nature of these relationships as data shows that one cause of considerable negative pressure is when poor relationships exist between the teachers and management, or the teachers and their colleagues. (Day & Gu, 2013:28). Figure 3.2 shows the groups of individuals with whom a teacher has interpersonal relations.
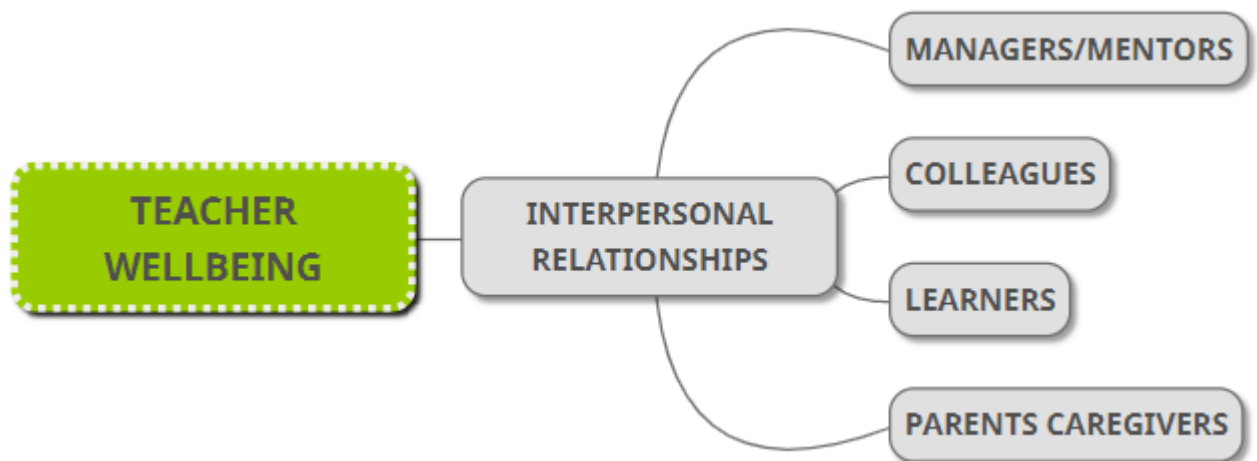
Figure 3.2 Interpersonal relationships that influence teacher wellbeing (own figure)

Figure 3.2 shows that the most important relationships that influence the teachers' wellbeing, are the relationships with the managers and mentors, colleagues, learners and parents or caregivers. Each of these interactions is explained in the next sub-sections.

3.2.1 Relationship with managers

In Figure 3.2, managers/mentors were highlighted to show the significance of this interpersonal relationship. Research that was conducted about the emerging issues related to the recruitment, retention, retraining, and support of secondary teachers and principals in Sub-Saharan Africa showed that involving teachers in decision making in the school could improve teachers' motivation and commitment to teaching (Mulkeen, Chapman, DeJaeghere & Leu, 2007:49). This will require the principal of the school to adopt a democratic leadership style whereby teachers are provided with opportunities for contributions towards decision making involving the school. Advantages of a democratic leadership style include increased teacher motivation to realise the school's aims, increased job satisfaction, and open communication channels (Ngobeni, 2006:36).

A study conducted by Naidoo (2019) on the perceptions of teachers and school management teams of the leadership roles of public-school principals emphasised the need for South African principals to attend Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes. According to Naidoo (2019:2), in South Africa, a comprehensive qualification for principals did not exist. However, the DoE appointed a task team to develop the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership and Management (ACESLM). The research revealed that South African principals who acquired the ACESLM were more capable of managing schools effectively and of fostering school improvement (Naidoo 2019:1). In the light of this, it is fair to assume that the improvement of the school management would lead to an increase in teacher wellbeing.

The various stressors of teachers could be mitigated by improving school leadership in South African schools (Ngobeni, 2006:75). School managers may consider establishing workshops that empower teachers to become resilient and provide the means of coping with work-related stressors that will improve their wellbeing. School managers should organise team-building activities and encourage teachers to meet outside of school to support better collegial relationships. Teacher collaboration has

positive outcomes for learning (Zuze & Juan 2020:462) which could improve teacher wellbeing.

3.2.2 Relationship with mentors

In addition to the above, school managers can enhance the wellbeing of teachers by providing mentorship opportunities to newly appointed teachers. Mentorship should involve checking in with new teachers, reflecting on the performance of new teachers and what kind of support can be provided, setting targets for performance, supporting teachers to enact new policies, providing a nurturing environment, and ensuring a sense of belonging and social connectedness (Johnson et al., 2016: 41, 43, 70). Mentorship involves more than guiding novice teachers through learning standards and skills sets and extends to providing strong and continuous emotional support (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2000:53). Although it is beneficial to match the teacher and mentor according to certain criteria, more salient is that the mentor is motivated, enthusiastic and effective (Bluestein, 2010:129).

Opportunities for mentorship depend on the manager. Supportive structures in the school such as mentoring encourage teachers to engage in collaborative problem-solving (Johnson et al., 2014:539) that could improve their wellbeing. Mentoring, according to Hargreaves and Fullan (2000:54), becomes not just a way of supporting individual teachers but a way to help build strong professional cultures of teaching in schools, dedicated to improving teaching, learning, and caring.

An investigation of the Bachelor of Education students' and mentors' school-based mentoring experiences during a four-week residential practicum in a rural setting in South Africa found that the project produced many positive outcomes (Mukeredzi, 2017:1). Participants reported that the gains included valuable professional knowledge around teaching styles and learner engagement. In addition, emotional support, encouragement and guidance on practical knowledge were also reported as positive

outcomes, However, some participants reported a lack of effective communication and support on the part of mentors. The implications of the research project concerning the negative outcomes experienced emphasise the importance of addressing school-university partnerships such as the role of the mentor, guidelines regarding mentoring time and the collaborative process between the university, the school and the DoE (Mukeredzi, 2017). Teachers profit significantly from an effective mentoring relationship and this suggests an enhancement of measures of teacher wellbeing.

3.2.3 Relationship with colleagues

Increasing the wellbeing of teachers through relationships with colleagues is enacted by developing accepting relationships where the teacher feels a sense of belonging within a nurturing and encouraging relationship (Johnson et al., 2014:540). Day and Gu (2013:277) as well as Johnson et al. (2014:540) highlight the importance of collegial support and trusting relationships between colleagues in fostering resilience. According to Johnson et al. (2014:540), teachers reported coping better when they received support from colleagues such as being asked about their welfare, being offered help and mixing freely with other staff in the staffroom. Affirming and supportive staff relationships lead to a sense of belonging and connectedness within the school community (Johnson et al., 2014:542). Improving relationships between teachers will not only elevate the resiliency of individual teachers but will further teacher wellbeing, which, in turn, will have many benefits with regards to other aspects of learning. Conversely, poor relationships with colleagues will have negative consequences for teacher wellbeing and contribute nothing to alleviate the consistent and persistent pressures teachers feel at work (Day & Gu, 2013:28).

Supporting teacher development within the South African context through professional learning communities was examined by Feldman (2020). He proposed the establishment of a professional learning community aimed at creating networked communities that provide ongoing support for teachers to transform the quality of their pedagogy through systematic enquiry into their current practices (Feldman, 2020:2). Teachers who are supported by their peers and who are learning from their colleagues

within a structured environment such as a professional learning community will likely experience increased teacher wellbeing.

The vital role that collegiality plays in teacher professional growth and development, job satisfaction, organisational and professional commitment as well as school quality and learner performance was highlighted by Shah (2012). Jarzabowski (2003) found that building collegiality among teachers in a rural setting in Australia mitigated some of the challenges experienced by those teachers. For example, the teaching community that they developed helped them to achieve their goals under adverse conditions. Collegiality at this school was demonstrated by teachers working professionally together and supporting one another socially and emotionally (Jarzabowski, 2003:143).

3.2.4 Relationship with learners

Another significant interpersonal relationship that influences teacher wellbeing is the one between the teacher and the learners where the teacher feels appreciated by the learners they teach. Fostering positive relationships with learners means taking steps to create connection with learners resulting in more engagement in learning. Teachers who make learning more meaningful for learners are likely to see increased academic achievement that is not only important regarding educational goals and aims but also rewarding on the part of the teacher (Witmer, 2005:224). Increased academic achievement affects teacher wellbeing positively, which necessarily improves relationships between teachers and learners.

Improving teacher-learner relationships, according to Rogers and Renard (in Witmer, 2005:225), can be accomplished by creating a learning environment which is safe, valuable, successful, participatory, caring and enabling. Teachers can increase participation in the classroom by considering each learner's unique view and by addressing challenges with difficult learners immediately (Johnson et al., 2016:93). Initiating conversations with learners in private and listening attentively to learners will positively influence challenging relationships.

Witmer (2005:226) proposed that providing learners with opportunities that allowed them to take educational risks and to participate in decision-making would make learners feel that they were responsible for their own learning, which, in turn, would foster intrinsic motivation to learn, and a relationship based on mutual respect. These measures were identified as not only the basis for improving academic achievement and discipline but also enhance teacher wellbeing as efforts by teachers were being realised.

One implication drawn from an online survey on learner wellbeing found that friendly and professional interactions between teachers and learners would make teachers feel positive about their work (Roffey, 2012:14). Moreover, the learners highlighted the significance of relationships that were caring, available and positive. Thus, teacher wellbeing may be sought through meaningful relationships with learners.

3.2.5 Relationship with parents/caregivers

Teacher wellbeing is also influenced by the kind of relationships teachers have with parents/caregivers of the learners they teach. Ensuring this relationship is positive and healthy is partly the responsibility of the teacher. Making sure that parents are involved may mean making a positive phone call or sending an encouraging email message to each family at the beginning of the school year (Witmer, 2005:226). This strategy will motivate parents to collaborate with teachers if behavioural or academic problems occur. Secondly, having knowledge of the characteristics of different types of parents/caregivers is useful for maintaining a beneficial relationship.

The four parenting styles indicated by Baumrind's (1991) parenting typology are respectively: 1) authoritarian; 2) authoritative; 3) permissive; and 4) indifferent. According to research conducted by Pellerin (2005:300), responsiveness and demandingness are associated with positive child outcomes. Children whose parents were both responsive and demanding scored best on behaviours such as social

responsibility, independence and achievement orientation. These parents were described as authoritative. Permissive parents were those who did not want to repress their children, and those who evaded responsibility for their children, while children of indifferent-neglecting parents had the worst outcomes on virtually any measure of social or cognitive competence, academic performance, psychological well-being, or problem behaviour (Baumrind, 1991). This research highlighted the importance of involving parents who were permissive or indifferent. Teachers who are knowledgeable about the types of parents of the learners in their class, are in a position to reach out to those parents whose children have low scores on measures of social or cognitive competence. Collaboration between parents and teachers will improve teacher wellbeing as learners improve on the above-mentioned measures.

In a study that explored the perceptions of pre-service teachers in relation to their teacher wellbeing and 'fitness,' the participants highlighted the necessity of parental support, especially as it pertained to challenging learners (Price & McCallum, 2014:202). The participants further highlighted that the engagement of parental expertise and knowledge within the class to develop positive relationships was significant. Another noteworthy point was the interpretation by participants of the economic conditions of the families of the learners they taught. For instance, when parents suffered financial loss which resulted in increased stress at home and challenges with learner behaviour, this affected the teacher's relationship with the learners in the classroom (Price & McCallum, 2014:204).

The following section discusses thriving at school and the influence that joy and meaning, workload and class size respectively have on teacher wellbeing.

3.3 THRIVING AT SCHOOL

Teacher wellbeing is influenced by the perception of one's progress or the perception of thriving at school. Nieto (2009) defines *thriving* in terms of a teacher's self-efficacy, ability to form positive connections with learners, as well as a commitment and engagement with work. Added to that definition is the effective management of stress

and heightened levels of positive engagement with work (Perry, Brenner, Collie, & Hofer, 2015).

Three aspects that are related to thriving at school and thus have consequences for teacher wellbeing are experiences of joy and meaning, workload and class size. This is illustrated by Figure 3.3.
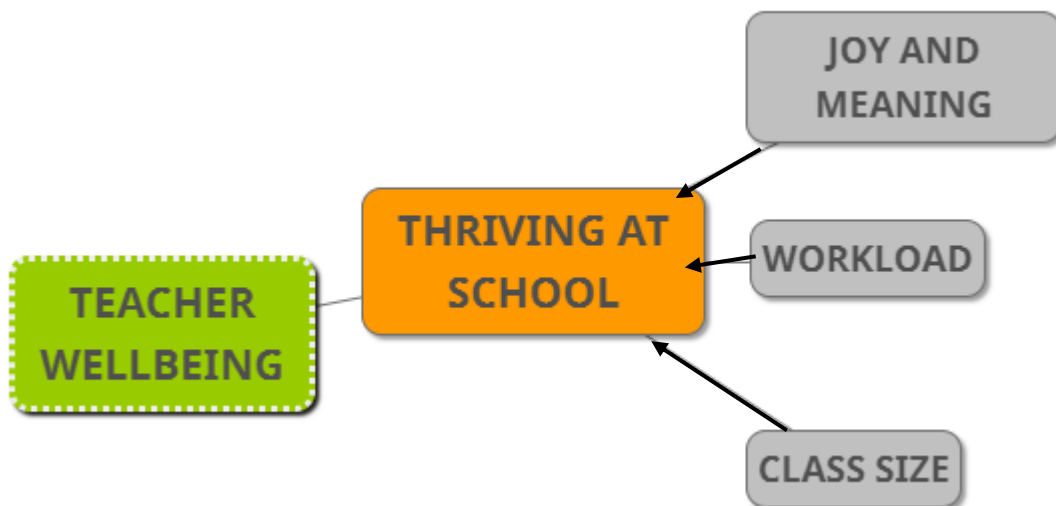
Figure 3.3 Aspects related to thriving at school and teacher wellbeing (own figure)

Thriving at school is influenced by three issues as depicted in Figure 3.3. These issues include the joy and meaning that teachers experience as well as workload and class size. These factors are now discussed.

3.3.1   Joy and meaning

The above mentioned three factors are interrelated. For example, a very demanding workload and an unmanageable class size impact on experiences of joy. Such situations at school require resiliency on the part of the teacher (Beltman, Mansfield & Price, 2011). Discovering ways to find joy and meaning at school especially while attempting to cope with contextual difficulties can be challenging. By finding

significance and purpose in teaching, teachers can enhance the meaningfulness of the work required (Fourie & Deacon, 2015:2). Involvement in meaningful tasks and interactions increase their personal wellbeing (Rothmann & Hamukang'andu 2013:2).

A case study that reported on how one teacher perceived autonomy, belonging and competence as well as thriving within a context that presented many challenges, links enjoyment to a number of factors (Perry et al., 2015). This included measures of success such as being an effective teacher and making a difference as well as remaining optimistic even when success was not immediate or obvious. The feeling of joy was further linked to the participant's elevated internal motivation which assisted in alleviating feelings of frustration during stressful periods (Perry et al., 2015:28). Resiliency was also connected to joy as resilient teachers find deep joy and personal satisfaction from their work. Another factor associated with joy was the belief that the teaching profession was the right occupation for them.

Rothmann and Hamukang'andu (2013:1-16) refer to the concept 'psychological meaningfulness' to describe teachers that are inspired by their experiences and are engaged deeply with their work. The research further outlines what it means to experience a calling orientation and work role 'fit'. Thus, psychological meaningfulness is conceptualised as teaching being viewed as a calling. A calling orientation is finding joy in the experience of teaching rather than teaching for financial reward. Furthermore, a work role 'fit' aligned with an individual's self-concept, values and strengths would enhance meaningfulness at school.

Psychological meaningfulness further enhances a teacher's ability to be resilient which, according to Beltman et al. (2011), is what sustains teachers and enables wellbeing. Research conducted by Fourie and Deacon (2015:1-8) found that teachers derived meaning from facilitation of the construction of knowledge in learners; by positive relationships with learners; contributing to learner achievement; enjoying collegial support; feeling appreciated and being satisfied with work well done.

Joy and meaning contribute to teacher wellbeing as the purpose and significance of being a teacher is enhanced. Fourie and Deacon (2015: 6) found that building positive, trusting relationships with learners and between teachers as colleagues, and by investing effort in their daily tasks, acting conscientiously, preparing well, practising spirituality, and adopting an altruistic attitude appear to enhance the meaning that teachers find in work.

3.3.2 Workload

A factor that is known to affect teacher wellbeing is workload (Bubb & Early, 2004). Job demands can be divided into workload demands and emotional demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004:302). Workload in this sense refers to demanding aspects of the job such as time pressures. For instance, when the demands made on a teacher exceed the time available to execute the demands, this leads to stress which can lead to burnout (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004:308).

Other job demands include discipline problems and low learner motivation (Skaalvik. & Skaalvik, 2018:1252). According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018:1270), teacher wellbeing is greatly affected by the job demands placed on teachers as measures of lower wellbeing led to decreased teacher engagement and increased motivation to leave the teaching profession.

In South Africa, teachers are expected to spend 85% of their time teaching, and the rest of their time on preparation and planning, assessment, extra-mural activities, management and supervision, professional development, pastoral duties, guidance and counselling, and administration (Chisholm, Hoadley, Kivilu, Brookes, Prinsloo, Kgobe, Mosia, Narsee & Rule, 2005). The research conducted by Chisholm et al. (2005) sought to investigate, through a survey of 900 schools, teacher workload in South Africa. The findings highlighted an increase in workload over time. At the time, policy change overload, lack of resources and support, class sizes, the Integrated

Quality Management System (IQMS), Norms and Standards for Educators concerning mainstreaming learners with barriers to learning and numerous departmental requirements all contributed to the increased teacher workload and less wellbeing.

Reducing job demands to improve teacher wellbeing may require job redesign, flexible work schedules and goal setting as well as time management. Increasing job resources such as participative management, increasing social support, and team building are other actions one can take to improve workload pressures (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004:311).

3.3.3 Class size

Creating learning environments where optimal learning is the goal becomes challenging for teachers who are contending with overcrowded classrooms which influence teacher wellbeing. The current learner-teacher ratio is 33:1 in South Africa and in some classrooms this ratio is 50:1 (West & Meier, 2020: 1). The lack of infrastructure is a key contributing factor regarding the issue of overcrowded classrooms.

According to Marais (2016:2-3), overcrowded classrooms led to major disciplinary problems as teachers struggled to provide adequate attention and support to individual learners. Time pressures to complete tasks were increased due to time wasted on disciplinary issues and the participants reported that they could not vary teaching methods and felt discouraged. This study also found that learners became demotivated.

West and Meier (2020:7) suggested possible strategies to handle the issue of overcrowding in class. Firstly, problem-solving initiatives by school management teams were explored and involved three strategies: the appointment of assistant teachers, mentorship programmes and effective in-service training. Approaches by teachers included improved classroom management and discipline. Seating

arrangements and effective utilisation of the available space such as the playground for 'group work' was linked to aspects of classroom management (West & Meier, 2020:8). Moreover, disciplinary strategies included self-discipline, commitment and routine. Consistency, adopting a multi-cultural view when implementing disciplinary strategies, planning and preparation were important. Chaotic learning environments could be prevented by teachers who were prepared and planned well for their own lessons.

A study that researched the effect of overcrowded classrooms in South Africa emphasised the consequences thereof as failure to stimulate learners' interest, and failure to instil critical thinking in learners and promote problem-solving activities i (Cross, Maluleke & Matsepe, 2019). Overcrowding complicated the process of teaching and learning and influenced discipline in the classroom. The study recommended that sufficient funding for the provision of infrastructure would allow teachers to use improved teaching methods thus increasing interest and involvement from learners (Cross et al., 2019:99-100). This would increase teacher wellbeing.

The following section explores self-efficacy as it relates to teacher wellbeing. Subject knowledge is the first aspect that is explained. Thereafter, discipline as it relates to self-efficacy is explored.

3.4 SELF-EFFICACY AS A TEACHER

Self-efficacy, according to Bandura (1997), is the perceived ability to exercise control over one's environment. This is equated with the belief in one's abilities or competencies to perform well in a given task. Teacher self-efficacy is therefore the belief that one can teach well and provide effective discipline when problems arise (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016:292).

There are four main sources of self-efficacy, namely mastery experience, modelling or vicarious experience, social persuasion and physiological or emotional states

(Bandura, 1994; 1997) (see section 2.1.4). Teachers who experience low self-efficacy and who do not believe in their own capacity to teach competently will most likely experience poor teacher wellbeing. As Aldridge and Fraser (2016:292-293) points out, self-efficacy is connected to job satisfaction and teachers who are dissatisfied in their jobs are not likely to experience self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is therefore connected to a teacher's knowledge about a specific subject and different teaching methods as well as to discipline as is shown in Figure 3.4.
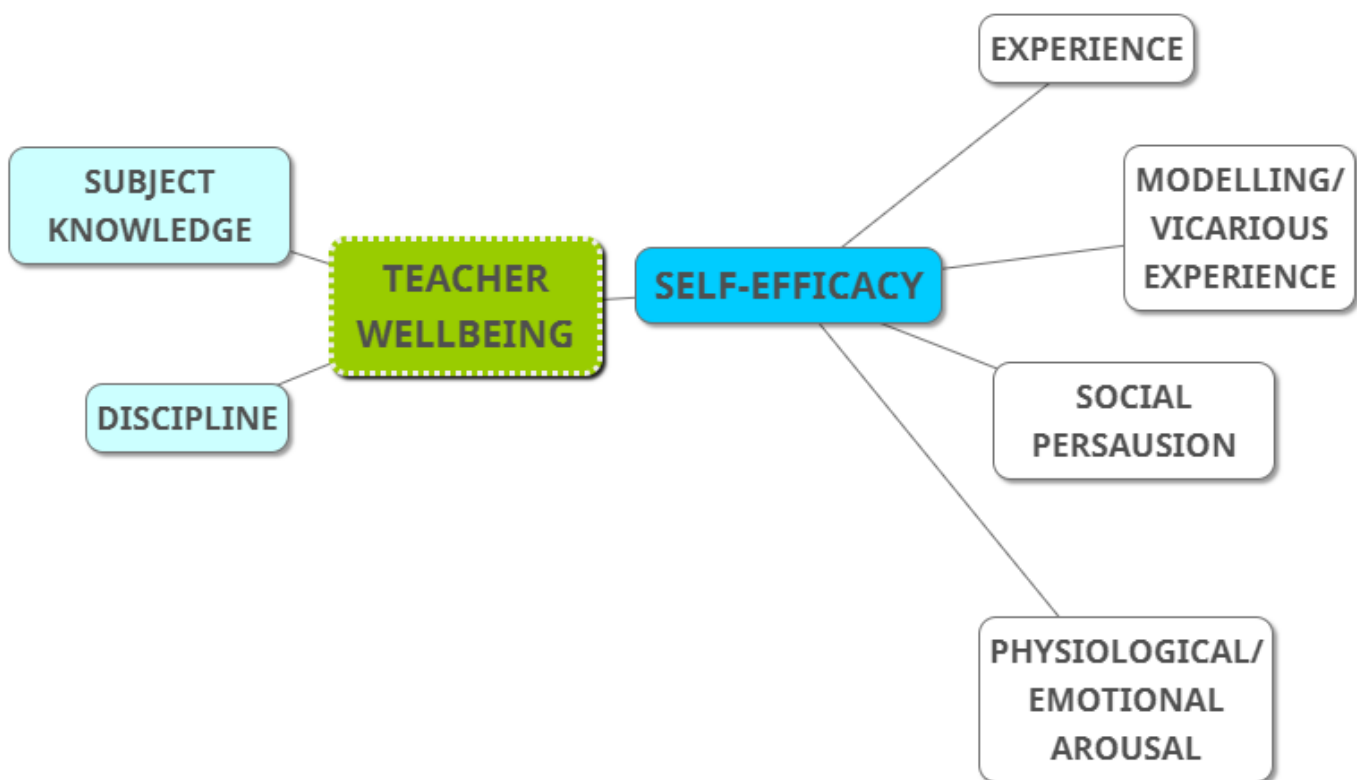
Figure 3.4 Influences on teachers' self-efficacy and wellbeing (own figure)

Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy was discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.1.4). This section of Chapter 3 links the various sources of self-efficacy as illustrated in Figure 3.4 to aspects of teacher wellbeing. In other words, teachers' must be self-efficacious within the domains of subject knowledge and discipline, and empower themselves through one or more sources of self-efficacy. Teachers who have access to a mentor or who attend CPD workshops are more likely to gain competence within

these domains improving their self-efficacy and wellbeing, compared to those who do not have access to these opportunities. .

3.4.1 Subject knowledge and teaching methods

Subject content knowledge is the information that teachers are expected to have and be able to teach (Bowles & Pearman, 2017:42). Highly self-efficacious teachers are able to explain the work clearly, so that the learner is able to understand the work; they understand whom they are teaching, what they are teaching, and how to teach (Marland, 2002:7). Increasing teacher self-efficacy is achieved by improving subject content knowledge, among others. Increasing self-efficacy with regards to pedagogical content requires a learner-centred approach that comprises collaborative learning experiences. Starting with the anticipated outcome or assessment and working backwards by selecting appropriate instruction and aligning it with the identified content that makes the standards interesting for each learner are viewed as characteristic of highly efficacious teachers.

Responsive teaching is another approach efficacious teachers adopt. This approach considers learner differences and diversity within the classroom (Walton, 2016:508). Otherwise known as inclusive education, responsive teaching requires sensitivity and respect with regard to learner differences. Improving teachers' subject content knowledge and knowledge about teaching methods to enhance teacher self-efficacy and wellbeing necessitates CPD and training. CPD provide teachers in South Africa with ongoing support and encouragement to enhance learning experiences for learners (Walton, 2016:242). Thus, self-efficacy and teacher wellbeing can be improved by attending workshops and training that provide knowledge and skills about how to teach a subject well.

3.4.2 Discipline

Discipline is another aspect of classroom management that is directly connected to teacher self-efficacy and indirectly to teacher wellbeing. Teachers who do not feel confident about their ability to manage a classroom will likely mishandle the delivery of discipline in their classrooms. For example, it was observed that the infliction of punishment on a learner who is misbehaving does not offer the learner coping skills or strategies on how to self-correct behaviour (Thompson, 2018:71). Discipline, on the other hand, provides the learner with an opportunity to be accountable for their actions. Teachers need to ensure that they have as much information about the learner as possible to be able to use the most effective approach. Learners who have genetic learning problems or experience child abuse at home that are causes of misbehaviour will not likely respond well to traditional forms of punishment. Rather, these learners may benefit from positive behavioural interventions, restorative practice and responsive classrooms (Thompson, 2018:72-79).

According to Botha, Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2013:6-7), it was observed that ill-disciplined learners could cause teachers to behave abusively. However, teachers who familiarise themselves with school policies and procedures regarding discipline will put themselves in a better position to deal with misconduct (Thompson, 2018:82). School violence in South African schools that has its origins in community crime and violence, affects learners' ability to perform well academically and leads to bunking and depression (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013:1-15). The behaviour of these learners was seen to affect teacher wellbeing. Teachers who were dealing with misconduct by learners needed to remain in control, find out more about personal circumstances and to request assistance.

A study that explored public school teachers' views related to disciplining learners in South Africa found that even teachers who had extensive professional teaching experience felt helpless in some cases regarding the discipline of particular learners who displayed significantly high levels of disrespect (Segalo & Rambuda, 2018:3). The

teachers felt unsafe and disempowered in environments where learners displayed violent and criminal behaviour which, in turn, influenced their wellbeing negatively (Segalo & Rambuda, 2018:4). Support from the DoE as well as from parents was necessary. Moreover, workshops on human rights and teachers' rights as well as the continued exploration of how discipline could be enforced were recommended. To emphasise the aforementioned with regard to self-efficacy and discipline, they conclude: "Knowing how to guide students to self-manage their behaviour and providing the appropriate reinforcements to maintain order in the classroom takes skill, practice, and having an adept awareness of their needs and background information" (Thompson, 2018:81).

The next section indicates the influence that perceived recognition has on teacher wellbeing. This section considers firstly, salary and promotion and secondly, performance evaluation.

3.5 RECOGNITION FOR WORK

The extent to which teachers are recognised for their work has implications for teacher wellbeing. Feelings of encouragement and motivation are found to be characteristics of a positive state of mind and provided the foundation for continuous and improved work performance (Lindsay, Sugai & De Pry, 2002:192; 198). Teachers value recognition and this improves their work performance. Figure 3.5 shows the key elements of perceived recognition as performance evaluations, as well as salary and promotion opportunities which influence teacher wellbeing.

Figure 3.5 Aspects of recognition that influence teacher wellbeing at school (own figure)

Figure 3.5 illustrates teacher wellbeing and the influence of perceived recognition which is discussed below and includes performance evaluation, as well as salary and promotion.

3.5.1 Performance evaluation

An analysis of teachers' perceptions of performance evaluation in South Africa indicated unintended consequences of the performance evaluations. The narrow focus on a measured output, teacher burnout and falsification of information in order to maximise credit or avoid punishment were such consequences (Mutereko & Ruffin, 2018:34). An obvious benefit was the improvement in performance; however, the intention for the performance evaluator to support teacher wellbeing was unclear.

Research done by Johnson et al. (2016) indicated that the introduction of performance agreements represented a threat to teachers and not a motivation. This could be because of the circumstances in which many teachers found themselves. For instance, they experienced a lack of control over external events and a deteriorating school infrastructure. Also, the performance agreements could reflect badly on a school based on accountability for the performance of learners' examination results.

Although performance evaluation improved accountability among teachers (Mutereko & Ruffin, 2018:41), according to Heystek (2015:7), teacher motivation could be enhanced more effectively through other means, such as providing better facilities, increased support from departmental officials at a local level and greater parental involvement.

One example of a performance evaluator that was introduced to measure the performance of teachers in South Africa was the IQMS. It involves a summative evaluation of teachers conducted by school management teams (SMTs) and is moderated by external parties (Mutereko & Ruffin, 2018:34). Although this study highlighted the benefits of the IQMS related to improved performance and accountability of teachers, it also revealed falsification of information, increased focus on measured outputs by teachers, and increased administration for teachers. Other negative views included inadequate introduction, rushed training on how to use the instrument effectively and the evaluator's assessment was often not seen as valid (Queen-Mary & Mtapuri, 2014:4). The findings pointed to the notion that the IQMS would not aid teacher wellbeing. The IQMS neglected teacher development in South Africa and thus did not improve teacher wellbeing (Pilane & Mosoge, 2014:15).

3.5.2 Salary and promotion

The IQMS referred to in section 3.5.1, determines salary and promotion opportunities by means of competence scoring (Kimathi & Rusznyak, 2018). A score of at least 56 is required for annual salary progression, and a score of at least 76 is required for promotion purposes. The competence score of teachers is based on the effective delivery of a specified task requiring specialist knowledge. However, wise judgement, reflective practice and ethical orientation are ignored and are less consequential for the purposes of promotion and salary progression (Kimathi & Rusznyak, 2018).

Other research into the remuneration of teachers highlighted the view that teachers and teacher organisations in South Africa believed that teachers were not being paid enough to live adequately and that they had to take on supplementary work, causing absenteeism, in order to meet basic standards of living (Mulkeen et al., 2007:23). This view was further emphasised by a study in which participants believed that they were not being paid enough to compensate for their workload (Ngobeni, 2006:90). Based on this information, it can be said that teacher wellbeing is not a consideration when it comes to the remuneration of teachers and is one of the causes of teacher attrition.

Although salary is one of the aspects leading to teacher dissatisfaction and attrition, other aspects include arbitrary teacher deployment systems, unattractive work locations, unprofessional treatment of teachers, lack of professional development opportunities, and insufficient supportive supervision (Mulkeen et al., 2007:ix). An alternative motivating factor for teachers is promotion opportunities. Increased salary and providing increased promotion opportunities will enhance the quality of hired teachers as these factors play a role in how well teachers live and thus influence teacher wellbeing.

The last section discusses the importance of a desire for engagement in school activities and how this affects teacher wellbeing. Factors such as motivation and involvement as well the individual's locus of control are considered.

3.6 ENGAGEMENT IN ACTIVITIES AT SCHOOL

Figure 3.6 illustrates how engagement in activities at school relates to teacher wellbeing.
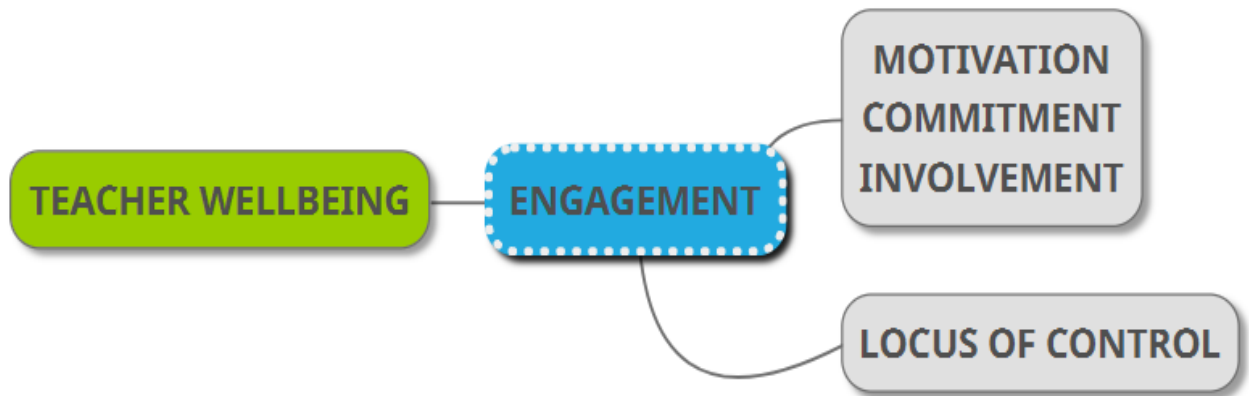
Figure 3.6 Engagement activities that influence teacher wellbeing at school (own figure)

Figure 3.6 illustrates that motivation, commitment and involvement, as well as locus of control are significant factors contributing towards teachers' engagement and wellbeing at school.

3.6.1   Motivation, engagement and involvement

The motivating factors to remain in the teaching profession and to maintain adequate levels of engagement depend on how well the teacher responds to the school environment. Teacher wellbeing is related to resiliency, which influences motivation and engagement. Work engagement is defined as a rewarding, optimistic, professional state of mind, characterised by commitment, enthusiasm and energy (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004:293). Furthermore, factors that drive motivation and engagement are learner achievement and the quality of the teacher's relationships with learners (Mulkeen et al., 2007:30).

The facilitation of work engagement can be through the consideration of a work-role 'fit'. In other words, a teacher's self-concept and values must align with the specified

work role in order to establish meaning and purpose in work (Rothmann & Hamukang'andu, 2013:1-16). When teaching is experienced as a calling, work engagement is a natural outcome. A work role that does not align with a particular self-concept, even when there is a calling orientation, needs to be re-crafted to allow for meaning. This could imply reframing the rationale of the work, taking on additional work that is more closely related to the self-concept and engaging with other tasks that are viewed as more meaningful.

Another aspect of work engagement and motivation is commitment. Commitment is influenced by personal factors, learner characteristics, practice settings and education policy (Day & Gu, 2010:64). The interaction between the different critical influences over the course of teachers' professional lives, produces either negative or positive outcomes in terms of the teachers' commitment. For example, teachers who are near retirement become either disenchanted with their work, or more serene depending on the above factors and their interaction.

According to Crosswell (2006:194), commitment is characterised by passion, investment of extra time to teaching, engagement in the school community, the facilitation of learner knowledge and values, the development of learners' emotional wellbeing and academic achievement, and seeking professional development opportunities. These characteristics determine a teacher's level of commitment and engagement and are indicators of teacher wellbeing.

A study that researched the influences on the work engagement of secondary school teachers in rural Kwazulu-Natal emphasised the importance of job resources as essential for work engagement and as a necessary motivational influence, especially when job demands were high (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:237; 238). This study found that the absence of effective job resources as drivers of work engagement led to demotivation among teachers at the school. Interventions to promote enhanced work engagement were contextualised professional development programmes that improved communication between relevant stakeholders of the school. Dehaloo and

Schulze (2013) suggested that improved communication between the DoE, SMTs and teachers would realise the improvement of job resources and the reduction of job demands with the aim of facilitating work engagement and thus enhance teacher wellbeing.

3.6.2 Locus of control

Teacher wellbeing is influenced by a teacher's locus of control. Locus of control is the belief individuals have about their responsibility for a particular event and the attribution of that event to themselves, or to other people or factors such as luck or faith (Akkaya & Akyol, 2016:72). People who have an internal locus of control believe they are responsible for their own behaviours and their results based on their own personal decisions and efforts and are more inclined to be proactive in disempowering situations (Devin, Ghahramanlou, Fooladian, Zohoorian, 2012:4172). An investigation into the link between locus of control and job satisfaction found that teachers who acted from an internal locus of control had higher levels of job satisfaction and wellbeing compared to teachers with an external locus of control.

A teacher's locus of control is associated with classroom management and is therefore a significant factor that affects teacher wellbeing (Mirsaleh, Ardakani & Nodushan, 2016:1). A teacher's ability to manage a classroom effectively depends on the self-efficacy of the teacher and is further supported by belief systems surrounding the teacher's extent of control. Improving the internal locus of control in teachers, particularly as related to classroom management and discipline skills, increases teaching efficacy and classroom management and improves class climate. Teachers who are under a lot of pressure to follow the continuous policy changes directed by the DoE, a lack of support and feelings of not being in control result in despondency and aggression (Botha et al., 2013: 8).

Bluestein (2010:8) also reported that increases in the amount of content teachers were expected to teach within a given timeframe and rigid prescriptions of how to teach it led to decreased enthusiasm for teaching because creativity and freedom were thwarted. Decreased motivation is likely to have negative effects on a teacher's locus of control and leads to decreases in job satisfaction and commitment (Ahluwalia & Preet, 2019:44), and therefore also of teacher wellbeing.

Teachers need to seek ways to be courageous and innovative in attending to learners' needs. Teachers who are proactive and who create ways of facilitating effective learning and developing teaching methods where there is a lack of support and resources will feel more empowered to remain within the teaching profession. Teachers with an internal locus of control experience less stress, increased learner achievement and therefore more teacher wellbeing (Czubaj, 1996:372).

3.7 SUMMARY

In Chapter 3 the influences on teacher wellbeing were highlighted. The focus was on the teacher's interpersonal relationships at school, thriving at school, self-efficacy as a teacher, recognition for work and lastly, engagement in activities at school.

Chapter 4 is the next chapter in which the researcher explains the PAR design to improve teacher wellbeing at a school.

Chapter 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters the conceptual framework underpinning teacher wellbeing and the factors that influence teacher wellbeing, namely interpersonal relationships at school, thriving at school, self-efficacy as a teacher, recognition for work, and engagement in activities at school, were explained.

Chapter 4 presents the research design and data collection methods in line with the research problem focusing on a lack of teacher wellbeing in South African schools and how to improve teacher wellbeing. PAR research was selected as the methodology to improve teacher wellbeing. The purpose of this chapter is to present the ethical measures, research design, data collection methods, data analysis and validity in action research.

4.2 ETHICAL MEASURES

In this study, I applied for and obtained ethical clearance from Unisa as evidence of my responsibility to act ethically towards the participants in this research (see Appendix A – ethical clearance certificate).

4.2.1 Voluntary participation

Voluntary participation refers to a human research participant's exercise of free will in deciding whether to participate in a research activity (Lavrakas, 2008). In line with this, the researcher informed the participants in a participant information sheet that their

participation in the action research project was voluntary and that they could end their involvement at any time (see Appendix B).

4.2.2 Informed consent

Obtaining informed consent is an obligation of a researcher. It refers to the permission from participants to participate in the research before data collection begins (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:3). Informed consent is achieved by providing participants with an explanation of the research, an indication that they may terminate their participation at any time with no penalty, and a full disclosure of any risks associated with the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

In this study, each participant received a participant information sheet that described the research endeavour and the related risks (see Appendix B). It was made clear to the participants that the improvement of teacher wellbeing through various workshops and activities would be explored and that the potential risk of this research might trigger uncomfortable emotional responses. Request for permission to conduct this study was further gained from the principal of the school (see Appendix C).

Each participant also received a consent form which was to be signed indicating their understanding and willingness to participate in the action research project that aimed to improve teacher wellbeing (see Appendix D). As noted, participants who might wish to terminate their participation at any point in the research process would be granted this request.

4.2.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

Privacy was achieved by maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Anonymity is ensuring that there is no link between the data and the participants

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Anonymity was ensured by warranting that there was no identifiable information with which to connect any participant to the research.

Secondly, confidentiality is guaranteeing that only the researcher has access to the research data and the participants' names (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Confidentiality was assured as only the researcher and research team knew who was involved in the research study.

4.2.4 Avoidance of deception

I maintained openness and honesty with participants throughout the research process by providing full disclosure of the purpose of the research. Participant review further contributed to the trustworthiness of the research on the improvement of teacher wellbeing as participants were allowed to provide feedback and comment on the research findings ensuring the credibility of the research.

4.2.5 Role of the researcher

I am a teacher at the school where the research on the improvement of teacher wellbeing was being conducted which meant that my role in the research process required that I be seen as a participant as much as a researcher; thus as PAR describes, my role was that of participant-researcher. All participants were seen as equals; however, my role was set apart in the sense that I conducted as well as facilitated the research process which included collecting data from participants and analysing it.

The ambiguous nature of the participant-researcher role necessitated continuous negotiation between participants and the researcher. Thus, my role required that I balance the participant position while providing a supportive and expert approach.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used action research as research design. Action research in schools is defined as: "Studies undertaken by practitioners in schools that address an actual problem in the school or classroom" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:1). The main objective of action research is to assist teachers within education settings to improve practice (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The research design of this investigation was *participatory* action research, a sub-set of the broader action research methodology. PAR was chosen as the research design to investigate how teacher wellbeing could be improved because it sought, as its goal, a combination of teaching and capacity building with a commitment to research and social change (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019).

In line with a PAR approach, the research problem was investigated through cycles of planning, acting, data collecting and reflecting in a collaborative setting (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Each cycle informed subsequent cycles and was executed in cooperative settings where the aim was related to improve some aspect of the practice. In this research, the aim was to improve teacher wellbeing. It was imperative for the cycles of research to achieve practical outcomes in the particular school context.

Each of the PAR cycles was executed in four phases as explained in the sections that follow: *planning* (section 4.3.1); *action* (section 4.3.2); *data collection* (section 4.3.3) and *reflection* (data analysis – section 4.3.4). Four of these cycles were completed.

4.3.1 Planning phase

The planning phase of the research process included an intervention plan. For each of four workshops plans were designed from the literature and implemented to improve the wellbeing of the teachers who participated. The workshops would be implemented

over one term. Each workshop included a discussion and exploration of the designated topic as well as an activity which, depending on the workshop, was either completed within the workshop time or at home.

Every workshop began one cycle of action research of which the purpose was for the participants to discuss and explore in-depth topics related to the improvement of teacher wellbeing. The topics of the four workshops and the techniques to implement for improvement were in particular developed from the conceptual framework explained in sections 2.1.1 to 2.1.4. The four topics that seemed most important with regard to the problem in the context of this research were identified as:

(i)   The theory of teacher wellbeing and the factors that influenced it (Chapter 2 and 3).

(ii)   Interpersonal relationships and the impact that the relationships with colleagues, learners and parents had on the teachers' wellbeing (Chapter 2 and section 3.2).

(iii)   Workload and time management and the impact that workload had on teacher wellbeing (Chapter 2 and section 3.3.2).

(iv)   Teacher support and resilience and how to utilise the support that was available to the teachers at the school (Chapter 2 and sections 1.1; 1.6.3; 3.2.5).

Thus, each workshop had a specific topic which became the foundation of the discussion and exploration of teacher wellbeing among participants. The questions that were asked at each workshop are listed in the forthcoming section 4.3.3.4 (data collection).

The above-mentioned plan was implemented in each of the four action phases as explained in the sections that follow.

4.3.2 Action phase

As noted, the *first workshop* focused on *teacher wellbeing in general* and the discussion, guided by the facilitator, explored the theory thereof as well as the factors that influenced teacher wellbeing. The factors that influenced teacher wellbeing that were explored in this workshop were of broad significance and included: interpersonal relationships, thriving at school, teacher self-efficacy, recognition for work and engagement. The workshop ended with an activity aimed at improving overall wellbeing, namely *journal writing*. The objective of journal writing was to help change the participants' feelings and thoughts about a particular event or situation. It has been reported that writing about difficult events makes people emotionally stronger, less upset, and less cognitively avoidant about the particular difficult situation compared to those who do not write about said events (Stapleton, Hui Zhang & Berman, 2021). The activity required that the participants write about something that negatively impacted them every day until the following workshop. The effects of the journal writing were discussed in the subsequent workshop and whether or not the activity helped or did not help participants to experience wellbeing. This discussion was audio-recorded in a focus group meeting. (See Appendix E.)

The *second workshop* began with a discussion of the topic of *interpersonal relationships*. The focus was on the impact that the relationships (with colleagues, learners and parents) have on the participants' wellbeing. In addition, it was explored what could be done to improve the relationships. One of the ways that interpersonal relationships could be improved was through effective communication (Wallen & Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1968). The activity that participants attempted was based on an exercise developed by Wallen (Wallen & Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1968). The activity consisted of a series of questions which participants answered and which covered verbal and non-verbal communication as well as the teachers' perception of how they communicated. According to Wallen et al. (1968), four skills could be developed to improve communication and thereby interpersonal relationships. These four skills included paraphrasing, behaviour

description, description of feelings, and perception checking. The series of questions were based on these four communication skills. (See Appendix E.)

The *third workshop* focused on improving *workload and time management*. The participants discussed the impact that workload had on teacher wellbeing and ways to successfully manage their time. Workload was one of the most salient factors pertaining to teacher wellbeing and research pointed to the enormous negative impact that this had on teacher wellbeing. For instance, one of the main factors contributing to teacher stress was workload (Ngobeni, 2006). Effective time management was one way in which to reduce the negative impact that workload could have on teacher wellbeing. Thus, the recommended activity for this workshop was learning how to prioritise tasks in order to improve workload stress and teacher wellbeing. The activity began with participants proposing typical ideas for daily tasks related to teaching. Each task was then given a point from 1 – 5; 1 being of lowest priority and 5 being of the highest priority. Participants were requested to do a prioritisation list every day for a week and the effect that this activity had on workload and time management was reflected upon and audio-recorded in the following focus group. (See Appendix E.)

The aim of the *fourth workshop* was to explore *teacher support and resilience* and to uncover what support was available to participants at the school and how that support could be used. Teacher support through means of resources and professional development opportunities as well as supportive relationships was observed in teachers who exhibited confidence and resilience (McCallum & Price, 2016:124). Practicing mindful exercises was one way to enhance resiliency, thus the activity for the last workshop was a mindfulness exercise. The exercise entailed a 10-minute body scan meditation that required the participants to sit down in a chair and listen to instructions for focusing on different parts of the body. By focusing on different parts of the body the person becomes more present and mindful, and without any other distractions, the person becomes more relaxed. (See Appendix E.)

4.4   DATA COLLECTION

4.4.1 The school context

The study was conducted in a small, independent school that specialised in the Cambridge curriculum and classes ranged from pre-school to A-levels. The home-school environment provided learners with small classes; the smallest class included four learners while the largest class had 10 learners. The school also provided online learning for distance learners, of whom two lived in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The learner-teacher ratio was 4:1. Additionally, the school teachers constituted a racially diverse population as there were five Black teachers, four White teachers and one Brown teacher. The population of the learners consisted of majority Black learners and minority White, Indian and Brown learners.

The school's aim was to provide education catering for learners who wished to study an international curriculum and who preferred to learn in a more specialised learning environment, including the distance learning option. Thus, teaching prior to Stage 9 was geared towards providing learners with a foundation for completing International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) 1, IGCSE 2 and A-Levels. The school fees reflected the above international curriculum as they ranged more on the higher end of the general school fees spectrum in South Africa. However, some families were not required to pay the full amount based on personal financial circumstances. Learners who were enrolled in the IGCSE 1, IGCSE 2 AND A-Level stages wrote external examinations which were paid for directly to the British Council.

Each learner was required to bring a laptop, tablet or cell phone to enable access to the Virtual Learning Environment. The Virtual Learning Environment was the online learning space where teachers uploaded teaching content and activities and where learners could access it. This was the platform from which all teaching-learning activities ensued. Although the school did not offer competitive sport due to lack of

space, the timetable included physical education as well as 'Club Hour' on a Friday. Club Hour was a time for learners to explore a range of interests such as art, cricket, walking and gardening. The learners were not required to wear a uniform and were free to express themselves within limits which contributed towards a relaxed but respectful learning atmosphere.

4.4.2   The sample

In contrast to quantitative research, action research does not require large groups of participants because the aim is not to generalise but to improve practice in a specific context (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:485). The aim would therefore be to work extensively with a small but dedicated group of participants.

The researcher employed *non-probability sampling* as the participants included teachers at the school who happened to be accessible and who represented certain types of characteristics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:150). The characteristics of the participants included teachers who are trained to teach the Cambridge curriculum and who are working in a small independent school. All of the 10 teachers at the school were invited to participate in the action research project. Since the participants were selected on the basis of being accessible and willing, *convenient sampling* was used. Convenient sampling was used for the action research since representativeness is not required in action research (Schumacher & McMillan, 2014:480). The workshops were designed in line with this approach and included the researcher as participant.

In addition to the above, the participants were selected to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:152). The judgement of the researcher was used to select participants who were information-rich on the topic of teacher wellbeing. Thus, *purposeful sampling* was applied to investigate the improvement of teacher wellbeing.

The sample initially included 10 participants. The participant sample included 5 black participants, 4 white participants and 1 brown participant. Table 4.1 illustrates the

sample with regard to their professional roles at the school. This includes the stages and subjects they taught. Each letter in the key represents one teacher at the school.

Table 4.1 Teacher subject roles

Subject	Stage					
	R-2	3-4	5-6	7-9	IGCSE 1-2	A-Levels
English	orange	blue	light orange	gray	gray	gray
Afrikaans	orange	blue	green	green	dark green	dark green
Math	orange	blue	green	purple	cyan	cyan
Science	orange	blue	green	purple		
Social Studies	orange	blue	light orange	light orange		
ICT			purple	cyan	cyan	cyan
Commerce			light blue	light blue	light blue	
Environmental Management					dark green	
Biology						dark green
Business						light blue
Travel & Tourism					light blue	

Key	
Teacher	**Indicator**
A	orange
B	blue
C	yellow
D	green
E	light orange
F	purple
G	gray
H	light blue

I	
J	

The teachers in Stage R-1 and Stage 3-4 taught all five subjects to children who ranged from age 4 to age 7. From stages 5 and upwards, the subject teachers became more subject specific such that one teacher taught one, two or three subjects across stages. Thus, although the classes were small as mentioned previously, the time needed for preparation and workload remained high. However, the school had combined certain stages due to the small classroom climate, for instance, there were two learners in Stage 5 and three learners in Stage 6. The teacher was tasked with teaching the same content to a combined stage while differentiating content according to each learner depending on the learner's ability. As learners entered IGCSE 1, 2 and A-Levels, fewer subjects were chosen by the learners and were taught by the teachers. However, these subjects required more preparation and classroom time.

4.4.3 The role of the researcher in data collection

In PAR the researcher is required to fulfil the role of participant as well as researcher (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:478). Thus, a dual role was necessitated in order that the researcher be seen as an equal during the workshops and activities. Conversely, a facilitative role was assumed in addition to being as objective as possible during the data analysis stage. Participant observation, as a data collection tool, further required the researcher to maintain a 'detached' stance which was to be matched with the role of researcher as participant.

A disadvantage of the above-described position of the researcher was the difficulty experienced in remaining 'objective' and 'detached' from the research while simultaneously being immersed in it and in close proximity to the participants and setting. The provision of information-rich data that is unbiased was challenging for the researcher because of the dual role necessitated by action research. The researcher ensured objectivity as the data was also studied by an outside expert - the supervisor of this action research investigation.

4.4.4 *Data collection techniques*

Action research utilises mixed methods as a data collection approach. Thus, the researcher employed various qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques with which to investigate the problem. These techniques were the most appropriate techniques for the purposes of the study (Schumacher & McMillan, 2014:482).

- Participant observation

The researcher exercised participant observation during each of the four workshops. Participant observation enabled the researcher to obtain people's perceptions of events and processes expressed in their actions, feelings, thoughts and beliefs (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:378). The observation was, therefore, connected to the conversations, feelings and thoughts surrounding the topic of teacher wellbeing and each of its related themes.

Observing the participants conversing with each other during the workshops (both with regard to their verbal and non-verbal communication), allowed me as the researcher to gain further insight into the level of emotional attachment or non-attachment towards the topics that were discussed. It further allowed me to take note of how comfortable each participant was during conversations that were perceived as more sensitive in nature. Each workshop was recorded, and was supplemented by field notes.

- Field notes

Field notes are recordings of observations and reflections on them (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:376). Since my dual role required that I participate as a participant as well, I could not make comprehensive field notes. I focused mainly on the reactions

of participants as the conversations developed. Interactions between participants as well as their reactions to each other signalled certain indicative emotional experiences of the participants.

Field notes were written in short-hand during workshops which provided some insight. The recordings were much more reliable in providing a more substantial account of the workshop meetings.

Within the context of the workshops, which was a discussion between equal members of a group, the act of taking field-notes could have been an indicator of separation. I was also concerned that if it was obvious that I was taking notes, the participants would act and behave according to that, which would skew the data towards inauthenticity.

- Workshops

I organised and facilitated four workshops which focused on the over-arching theme of teacher wellbeing. The workshops provided a safe space for the participants to meet as a group and discuss a topic of relevance.

The first workshop focused on teacher wellbeing and was led by the following questions:

1. How do you rate your own wellbeing as a teacher?
2. What enhances your teacher wellbeing?
3. What impacts negatively on your teacher wellbeing?
4. What do you think you can do to improve your wellbeing as a teacher?

The second workshop looked at the interpersonal relationships among participants, learners and management. The following questions directed the discussion:

1. What is the impact of your relationship with learners on your wellbeing?
2. What is the impact of your relationships with colleagues on your wellbeing?
3. What is the impact of your relationship with parents on your wellbeing?

4. What can be done to improve each of the above relationships?

The third workshop involved a discussion of workload and time-management. The following questions were posed during this workshop:

1. What is the impact of your workload on your wellbeing?
2. What is the impact of your time management on your wellbeing?
3. How do you ensure that you have me-time to reload your batteries?
4. What can be done to improve each of the above?

The last workshop was focused on teacher support and resilience. The questions that led the workshop were:

1. What are the support structures you have to enhance your wellbeing as a teacher?
2. How can you increase the support you get to enhance your wellbeing as a teacher?
3. How can you increase your resilience?

Each participant was given opportunities to express their views on the topics discussed. Whenever the discussion faltered because participants were reluctant to recount their experiences, I provided some examples from my own practice or from research. These examples functioned as tools of encouragement in order to stimulate the conversation.

At the end of each workshop, the participants were given an activity to do. The activity was meant to reflect a practice or tool one could employ going forward to improve that aspect of teacher wellbeing. For example, the last workshop on teacher support and resilience required the participants to do a 10-minute body-scan meditation. The feedback for the experience of the particular activity would be provided in a focus-group meeting.

Each workshop recording was transcribed verbatim which was analysed for themes and patterns.

- Focus groups

The purpose of the focus group meetings was to provide a time and space for feedback from the participants of their experiences and perceptions of the activities. This was conducted at the beginning of each of the workshops, except for the last workshop, which was done right at the conclusion of the workshop and activity.

The feedback highlighted whether or not the prescribed activity was beneficial or not, for the improvement of teacher wellbeing, interpersonal relationships, workload and support. The participants relayed recommendations and other practices that they used to enhance some aspect of their wellbeing.

- In-depth interviews

Once the four workshops were completed, I conducted individual interviews with five of the participants in a private and comfortable area of the school. The five interviewees were selected because they seemed most information-rich.

I had prepared an interview schedule prior to the interview that reflected each of the topics discussed in the workshops (see Appendix F). The personal interviews gave the participants time to elaborate, more specifically, on the workshop discussions, thus providing detail on the perceptions, feelings and beliefs surrounding each topic.

Each question was designed to allow the participant to elaborate on each topic related to a specific workshop in more detail, for example: *How do you experience your interpersonal relationships as a teacher?* The questions also required of the teacher to reflect on the experience of the workshop.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. (See Appendix H for an example of an interview transcript.)

- Questionnaire

A questionnaire that needed to be answered by means of a three-point Likert scale (ranging from disagree to agree), was given to each of the participants at the end of the four workshops. (see Appendix G.) Fifteen statements were included on the questionnaire such as:

1. I experience joy and meaning as a teacher.
2. I am an effective teacher who makes a difference in the lives of learners I teach.
3. I remain optimistic even when success is not immediately obvious.

Each of the statements focused on one key aspect of teacher wellbeing as revealed by the conceptual framework (Chapter 2). For example, finding joy and meaning in teaching would be significantly related to participants' overall sense of teacher wellbeing, according to the conceptual framework. I conducted a pilot test of the questionnaire with a teacher who did not participate in the study in order to judge the content validity of the instrument (McMillan & Schumacher 2014:195). The pilot test also indicated how long the questionnaire would take to complete and whether the items were clear.

The observations, workshop recordings, focus groups and interview data were analysed qualitatively, while the questionnaire was analysed quantitatively. The analysis of the data was part of the reflection phase of action research and is shown in the next section.

4.4.5 **Reflection phase**

Normal qualitative data analysis techniques were used for the qualitative section, and descriptive statistics were employed for the quatitative section (Schumacher & McMillan 2014, 483).

4.4.5.1 Data analysis of the qualitative data

- Segmenting

The data was divided into units of meaning which related to one of the sub-categories in order for the data to be interpreted in a meaningful way (Schreier, 2014:178). One unit or segment of data corresponded exclusively to one theme and was coded.

- Coding

The above-mentioned segments of data were allocated codes. Labels were assigned to each of the codes. These codes served to position each data segment into a meaningful category for further analysis. The codes related to setting, participant perspectives and social structures (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:399). For example, a *calling orientation* as a sub-category of the category/theme *Teacher Wellbeing,* was coded as CO. Other examples are: Recognition for work – RFW; Learner appreciation – LA; and Shared goals – SG.

- Forming categories or themes

Categories were formed based on the main research questions. Coded segments were allocated to a specific category as the analysis of data occurred. Recursive analysis of data segments and codes was employed in order to maintain consistency

and to highlight contradictions within the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:405). Some examples of the categories include: Teacher wellbeing, Interpersonal relationships, and Workload and time management.

- Discovering patterns

An examination of the data was done through triangulation of which the cross-validation among data sources, data collection strategies, time periods and theoretical schemes served to indicate specific patterns (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:407). A comparison of each category illuminated emerging patterns. For example, it was clear that a '*calling orientation*' as related to the category of *Teacher Wellbeing,* was significant for the majority of participants across all data collection methods, including the workshop recordings and interviews. Similarly, the subcategory '*shared goals*' within the category '*Interpersonal Relationships*' emerged as an important aspect irrespective of data collection technique.

4.4.5.2   Data analysis of the quantitative data

The questionnaire consisted of 15 items (see appendix G). Each item could receive 'disagree', 'neutral', or 'agree' as the scales of potential responses. The quantitative questionnaire data were analysed by means of descriptive statistics. Thus, the responses of the five participants were analysed as frequencies and percentages with regard to each item on the questionnaire. At this stage of the data collection process, some of the participants decided to drop out of the study due to personal reasons.

4.5 VALIDITY IN ACTION RESEARCH

Validity in action research refers to the trustworthiness of the outcomes of the research and as such has certain criteria by which to measure its validity. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:451) refer to five criteria as measurements of the validity of action research in particular and is a system for judging the integrity and quality of research

project. The five criteria are discussed in the next sections as related to this specific research studying the factors that influence teacher wellbeing.

4.5.1 Democratic validity

Democratic validity takes into account the voices of the stakeholders' involved in the research process. It points to all the various viewpoints of the people who have a stake in the problem and it is the researcher's task to ensure that multiple perspectives are brought into the research process. Thus, in this research all the participants' viewpoints were accounted for (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:451).

4.5.2 Outcome validity

Outcome validity addresses the question of whether the action that emerged from the study was a practical and feasible solution regarding the research problem. In this research, outcome validity was ensured by recursively adapting the activities related to each of the workshop topics. For instance, the feasibility of the prioritisation of tasks on a weekly basis in collaboration with other teachers was viewed negatively; teachers believed that this should rather be a spontaneous day-to-day individual activity. The reflections of the participants in the focus group sessions assisted the outcome validity of the action plan.

4.5.3 Process validity

Process validity is concerned with the competence of the researcher. The dependability and competency of the researcher as well as the appropriateness of the data collection methods and techniques were significant measures of process validity. In this research, these measures included prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation of methods (observation, focus groups, interviews and questionnaires).

4.5.4 Catalytic validity

Catalytic validity assesses to what extent the participants implemented new ideas and concepts as related to the research problem and based on the findings of the study. It further indicates to what extent the participants were changed by the research process and the actions they were willing to take in order for the problem to be addressed. In this research, catalytic validity was ensured by the teachers' sense of accountability and responsibility towards each other within the timeframe of this study. During the focus group sessions, participants were requested to provide feedback on the activities that were implemented after each workshop and this resulted in constructive discussions surrounding the implementation of new ideas and concepts related to the improvement of teacher wellbeing.

4.5.5 Dialogic validity

Dialogic validity refers to the dissemination of the study's findings. Sharing the results of the action research investigation involved having a dialogue with colleagues through some type of public medium such as peer-review journals, conferences, district-level professional development sessions or websites. After this research has been completed, the study will be shared and made available to those relevant stakeholders including the school and the participants who collaborated in this research.

4.6 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the research design. A thorough description of the ethical measures and research process was provided. This included the data collection process, data analysis and the validity of the action research process.

In chapter five I present the findings of the studies.

Chapter 5

THE FINDINGS AND A DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of this PAR are discussed in the following sections of Chapter 5. The research question in this study was: *How can teacher wellbeing in a South African primary school be improved by means of action research?* (See section 1.2). It was the researcher's aim to address teacher wellbeing and its improvement through action research (see section 1.3). A discussion of the sample as well as the categories and subcategories are examined in the sections that follow. Categories related to the conceptual framework are discussed broadly as factors that influence teacher wellbeing. In addition, the factors were examined among the participants within the context of this specific school environment. The findings of the analysis of data are thus provided below.

5.2 THE SAMPLE

As explained in section 4.4.2, non-probability sampling, more specifically purposive and convenient sampling, was used in the study. All purposefully selected teachers had faced some manner of a lack of teacher wellbeing. Out of the 10 teachers at the school, six participated in the workshop. Five of those six participants agreed to the individual interviews and completed the questionnaire. Since the results of the PAR project did not aim to generalise, but to inform a plan of action related to instructional decisions, curricular changes or school policies, the sample was appropriate and large enough given the nature (action research) and aim (to work intensively to improve teacher wellbeing in this particular context) (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 479).

Table 5.1 indicates the biographical background of the teachers who participated in the study and the way they contributed to data collection.

Table 5.1 Biographical background of the participants who contributed to data collection

Teacher	Workshop	Interview	Questionnaire	Race	Gender
A	√	√	√	Black	Female
B	√	√	√	Black	Female
D	√			White	Female
E	√	√	√	Brown	Female
F	√	√	√	White	Male
I	√	√	√	White	Female

Table 5.1 shows that the majority of participants were female, and that there was a balance in terms of ethnic group (two black, two white, and one brown teacher). There was only one white male who participated in this study.

5.3 CATEGORIES AND SUBCATEGORIES

The categories were derived from the factors that influence teacher wellbeing (see Chapter 3). The subcategories emerged inductively from the responses of the participants during the data collection stage. Quotations from the participants' responses are provided to validate the findings resulting from the research study.

The transcribed interview data were analysed by following Tech's method (Poggenpoel 1998:343):

(i)   Read through all transcriptions to get a sense of the whole. Jot down ideas that come to mind.

(ii)   Start with the best or most interesting interview and think about what it is. Underline words or sentences that are meaningful in the context of the research. Write ideas in the margin of the transcription.

(iii)   Do the above for all the transcriptions. List all the topics that can be identified.

(iv)   Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the relevant segments of text.

(v)   Find a descriptive word for a topic to form a category. The topics should correlate with the interview questions.

(vi)   Under each of the above-mentioned topics (categories), identify sub-categories.

(vii)   Identify relationships between the categories and sub-categories, for example, cause and effect may be a relationship.

The following table (Table 5.2) represents the categories and subcategories that were identified from the workshop and interview transcripts.

Table 5.2 Categories and subcategories from workshop and interview transcripts

Research question: *How can teacher wellbeing in a South African school be improved by means of action research?*		
Categories	**Subcategories**	**Codes**
1. Teacher wellbeing in general	• Calling orientation • Recognition for work: salary • Learner appreciation • Academic achievement • Techniques to enhance own wellbeing -Time outdoors -Being active -Socialising	• CO • RFW • SA • SA • AA • TO • BA • S
2. Interpersonal relationships	• Relationships with colleagues - Respect - Empathy - Trust • Relationships with parents • Relationship with learners • Communication skills • Conflict management • Striving for positive relationships	 • R • E • T • RP • RS • CS • CM • SPR
3. Workload and time management	• Feeling overwhelmed • Significant preparation • Working in isolation • Online teaching • Time management • Prioritisation of tasks • Lack of resources	• FO • SP • IS • OT • TM • PT • LR
4. Teacher support and resilience	• Defining resilience • Collegial support • Support of management and family • Continuous professional development	• Def • CS • MS • FS • CPD

The categories and subcategories are explained in the discussion of the findings in section 5.4 that now follows.

5.4 QUALITATIVE DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The main categories that were derived from the transcripts were teacher wellbeing in general, interpersonal relationships, workload and time management, as well as teacher support and resilience. Each of these factors is explained in the next sections (5.4.1 to 5.4.4).

Quotes are given as illustration of participants' views and feelings. At the end of each of the quotes there is information indicating who the participant was who uttered the words as well as whether this information could be found in the workshop transcript or the interview transcript. The letters A, B, D, E, F, and I correspond to the participants while the letters WT indicate workshop transcript and the letters IT indicate interview transcript.

5.4.1 Teacher wellbeing in general

As shown in Table 5.2, the teachers' wellbeing was influenced by their having a calling orientation; recognition for the hard work they do by means of their salaries; learner appreciation; and academic achievement.

As explained in section 4.3.1, the first workshop covered the topic of teacher wellbeing in general (see Appendix E). The participants explored some aspects that resulted in a feeling of wellbeing and how they experienced teacher wellbeing in general. One of the first clear indicators of teacher wellbeing was the feeling of a 'calling' experienced by the majority of teachers in the setting. This data correlates with research by Rothmann and Hamukang'andu (2013:1-16) who outline what it means to experience a calling orientation and work role 'fit' (see section 3.3.1). The participants in this study described the calling orientation as one aspect that encouraged teachers to feel

motivated every day, and especially on days when motivation could be low. One teacher explained:

> *"When a learner improves in a subject or does really well on an activity it helps me to remain dedicated to my role as a teacher."* (B; WT, 20 October 2021)

Another clear indicator of teacher wellbeing was the recognition for work in the form of salary increases. The conversation involved a discussion of the various experiences of the teachers' salary expectations. One of the teachers elaborated:

> *"Salary is important for teacher wellbeing as having money contributes to a feeling of stability and a less stressful life."* (D, WT, 20 October 2021)

The discussion among the participants agrees with research by Mulkeen et al. (2007) which indicates how important salary is for the quality of hired teachers (see section 3.5.2). The participants pointed to the fact that stressing about money leads to a diminished sense of wellbeing. One participant, who has two children younger than five years old, disclosed:

> *"I need to work two jobs in order to make ends meet and there have been times in my life where it is more about survival and I had no time to think about anything else."* (A, WT, 20 October 2021)

Learner appreciation was a term mentioned by three of the participants who taught very young children under the age of six years old. These participants highlighted the importance of learner appreciation in line with a feeling of wellbeing. While the participants who taught the older learners said learner appreciation was important, it

was more academic-focused in that an improvement in marks was the impetus to feel motivated to provide valuable lessons for their learners. Academic achievement of learners was thus emphasised as another aspect of teacher wellbeing since it enhanced teacher self-efficacy. This can be seen in light of Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory which emphasises the point that teacher efficacy may influence certain patterns of classroom behaviour known to yield certain gains (see section 2.1.4). According to Witmer (2005), research on academic achievement indicates that increased academic achievement affects teacher wellbeing positively, which necessarily improves relationships between teachers and learners (see section 3.2.4).

During the workshops, the teachers acquired techniques to enhance their own wellbeing. These ways were further discussed. Some teachers provided examples such as spending time outdoors and being active as well as making time to socialise outside of school. Two teachers said:

"I like to spend time alone." (F, WT, 20 October 2021)

"Music has a therapeutic effect for me." (A, WT, 20 October 2021)

The last-mentioned participant elaborated on how listening to music helped to lift her spirits and feel better.

The activity that was implemented for the teacher wellbeing workshop was journal writing. The participants would take 10 minutes every day until the next workshop to write about a negative event that happened at school. The outcome of this activity was discussed a week later in a focus group. The journal writing activity had a positive impact on the participants' ability to understand negative events and could be seen as a practice to help approach future similar situations in a different way. For example, feedback from one participant was as follows:

> *"Journal writing helps me to capture and revisit specific events of the day and that helps me to stop and reflect consciously."* (I, WT, 20 October 2021)

The majority of participants agreed that journal writing was a practice that could help to reflect on the day which was ultimately constructive. However, it took time to turn thoughts into words. For that reason, some teachers were averse to the activity. In this regard, one of the participants questioned whether writing something down really helped. For this particular participant simply reflecting mentally at the end of the day was experienced as more beneficial. This participant explained:

> *"Reflecting and thinking about a possible solution to reach a learner who is averse to learning in a 'traditional' sense … the reflection at the end of the day helps me to frame the problem differently and therefore to offer a solution instead of instantly reacting."* (F, WT, 20 October 2021)

In light of Ryff's (2014) psychological theory of wellbeing, journal writing as an intervention can be seen as a positive activity to bring a person out of negative functioning into a neutral position (see section 2.1.2).

The most apparent indicator of one factor that affected teacher wellbeing was highlighted during the individual interviews: hearing the opinions of the other participants during the workshop sessions made the hardships of teaching feel like less of a burden and there was a feeling of relief and of being less alone. Related to this was the aspect of teacher wellbeing that was enhanced by means of collegial support, especially during times of burnout, because without a sense of wellbeing, teachers cannot thrive. The research on thriving at school links thriving to joy and meaning, workload and class size. The data that also pointed to collegial support as a means to improve teacher wellbeing (see section 3.3). According to Zuze and Juan (2020), teacher collaboration has positive outcomes for learning which could improve teacher wellbeing (see section 3.2.1).

In summary: The techniques for the improvement of teacher wellbeing that were mentioned by participants during the individual interview process were planning well for lessons, physically exercising, participating in recreational activities, socialising and, lastly, journaling about negative events that happened in school to facilitate reflection about the incidents.

5.4.2 Interpersonal relationships

Table 5.2 illustrates that the following aspects of interpersonal relationships influence teacher wellbeing: Relationships with colleagues (respect, empathy and trust), relationships with parents, relationships with learners, communication skills, conflict management skills and striving for positive relationships.

The second workshop attended to interpersonal relationships as an aspect of teacher wellbeing (see Appendix E). For interpersonal relationships with other teachers to be satisfactory, Johnson et al. (2014) emphasise relationships that are accepting in order for the teachers to feel a sense of belonging within a nurturing and encouraging relationship (see section 3.2.3). In this study, three main concepts were identified, namely respect or empathy, trust and a common goal for satisfactory relationships to materialise between colleagues. The theory conceptualised by Seligman (2011) points to 'meaning' as an indicator of wellbeing and is related to many of the aspects discussed in this workshop, such as having shared goals and positive relationships (see section 2.1.1). Other aspects related to interpersonal relationships with colleagues that were also highlighted were having open and accommodating relationships, and a free atmosphere where colleagues and management can learn from each other.

For example:

> "Exercising empathy [is important] because it is difficult to understand each other given that we all come from very different

backgrounds which can lead to misunderstandings between colleagues." (I, WT, 27 October 2021)

"Having a shared passion that unites rather than divides [is significant] and … given the nature of diversity, it is necessary to have a common goal." (B, WT, 27 October 2021)

Regarding relationships with the learners' parents, it was discovered that the participants who experienced the most supportive relationships with the parents, were those who taught learners younger than the age of seven years old. One participant explained:

"The parents of these learners are involved in their children's lives … as teachers we are trusted and supported." (B, WT, 27 October 2021)

Comparatively, Witmer (2005) states that involving parents by making a positive phone call or sending an encouraging email message to each family at the beginning of the school year will ensure positive and healthy relationships with parents, and that ensuring positive relationships with parents is partly the responsibility of the teacher (see section 3.2.5).

One participant who had built a trusting and supportive relationship with a learner's parents had no reluctance in communicating with the parents when the learner was struggling to learn and exhibited misbehaviour in response to the teacher. This participant elaborated by saying that:

"Communicating with the parents helped the learner to feel supported and the behaviour improved. Trust between parent and

teacher is crucial in maintaining good interpersonal relationships."
(B, WT, 27 October 2021)

One participant admitted that her avoidance of parents came from a fear of being personally attacked by a parent. The participant had an extremely negative experience with a parent who became violent in response to his child relaying false information about the participant. Reflecting on the incident as a group led to the conclusion that teachers had only a certain amount of control over situations. Beyond a particular point it was all up to the parents to manage their children.

The participants who taught learners older than the age of seven years, found that the parents were less willing to get involved in the lives of their children at school so that it was much more challenging to collaborate with the parents. The participants realised it was important to build connections with parents because those positive connections would have a positive influence on teacher-learner relationships but were not sure how to approach parents who were seemingly unwillingly to get involved.

In an interview with one of the participants, learner-teacher relationships were discussed in depth. The participant pointed to a lack of discipline and regulations surrounding disrespect from learners. This made the participant feel disempowered because issues were never addressed. The participant explained:

"When there's blatant disrespect, I found it very hard to overcome
my own ego to not react to that but then afterwards it felt like none
of the disrespect was ever addressed and was never resolved so
it kind of just kept spiralling and the same thing is happening with
another learner (I, IT, 17 November 2021)

It was clear from the above data on learner-teacher relationships that those teachers who teach younger learners (6-10 years old) had far more engaging relationships with those learners and parents who were more involved in general. In contrast, teachers

who taught older learners had difficult relationships with learners because of a lack of constructive protocols surrounding discipline in the school. According to one participant, when discipline issues were not addressed relationships with learners could not be improved.

Relationships with older learners could be improved by allowing those learners certain opportunities. According to Witmer (2005:226), providing learners with opportunities that allowed them to take educational risks and to participate in decision-making would make learners feel that they were responsible for their own learning, which, in turn, would foster intrinsic motivation to learn, and a relationship based on mutual respect. These measures were identified as not only the basis for improving academic achievement and discipline but also enhanced teacher wellbeing as efforts by teachers were being realised (see section 3.2.4).

The activity that was implemented during the workshop on interpersonal relationships was an activity on types of *communication*. Communication was discussed as a significant skill regarding the quality and possible improvement of interpersonal relationships. The activity required participants to indicate what emotion or feeling a particular sentence was communicating. For example, the participant indicated what emotion or feeling these sentences communicated:

1. Shut up! Not another word out of you!
2. I'm really annoyed by what you just said.

One of the participants reflected:

> *"Someone could be communicating one thing but the interpretation of it may be different. Learning how to communicate [clearly] is crucial for the building of true connections with people."*
> (I, WT, 27 October 2021)

During the feedback session on the above activity, participants added *conflict* as an element of interpersonal relationships, and decided that without effective communication relationships were doomed, especially when conflict arose. Another participant added:

> *"When someone is inauthentic with their words, the person receiving the communication may end up feeling confused and because you don't know where you stand with the person this causes disconnection and adds to future conflict. On the other hand, choosing to remain silent may improve interpersonal relationships because keeping the peace is more important."* (D, WT, 27 October 2021)

According to this participant, choosing to keep quiet in a conflict situation is as much a skill as effective communication because by choosing to not respond, this communicates something without having to say it in words. The participant added that sometimes it was necessary to voice concerns and use a personal experience as an example. The participant was given a contract to sign by management about which she had concerns as the contract did not specify a main role but rather listed a number of different positions and responsibilities. The interpretation was that management could expect anything from the person who signed the contract. The participant did not communicate this concern to management and eventually held a deep resentment for the people in management positions. In order to improve their interpersonal relationship, the participant talked about how setting personal boundaries was essential and to communicate these to the relevant people. In response to the aforementioned, another participant added:

> *"Sometimes you keep quiet to keep other people happy but this can also lead to conflict and confusion because eventually it will come back later and it would be better to confront the situation. Who people are affects how we communicate with them.*

Communication is dependent on the context and the person. If the person cannot receive information well, I would rather keep quiet in order not to offend the person. However, being able to receive criticism is reflective of a mature adult." (D, WT, 27 October 2021)

Another participant agreed that keeping quiet says a lot but will also raise other issues and impact interpersonal relationships negatively because leaving issues unresolved will have an impact on the future of the relationship. The example this participant provided was that when dealing with someone who was angry, keeping quiet would promote peace while responding in a similar vein would only exacerbate the situation.

During the individual interview process, communication as a means to improve interpersonal relationships was frequently mentioned. More importantly, effective communication when there was conflict was highlighted. For example, one participant explained:

"Diversity is … it's also very challenging. It's like the biggest asset and the biggest challenge because you have to overcome so much of your own worldviews … and the way you kind of make sense of reality is challenged by what other people think and you have to accommodate everyone. So, I find that challenging, especially when it comes to organising and doing stuff for the school." (I, IT, 17 November 2021)

Another participant had a similar experience and explained that besides communication making a real effort with people to build a solid connection may help to improve interpersonal relationships. A study by Ngobeni (2006) investigating interpersonal relationships, similarly to the above data, points out that a lack of teacher wellbeing is linked to poor interpersonal relationships (see section 1.1). Another aspect of communication, especially between managers and teachers, is the leadership style of the manager. According to literature, a democratic leadership style improves communication channels and provides teachers opportunities to contribute towards

decision-making thereby improving teacher wellbeing (Ngobeni, 2006) (see section 3.2.1).

5.4.3 Workload and time management

The third workshop was a discussion of teacher workload and time management and how these aspects impacted on teacher wellbeing (see Appendix E). The following were the main factors related to workload that were identified from the transcripts: feeling overwhelmed, significant preparation, working in isolation, online teaching, time management, prioritisation of tasks and lack of resources.

The majority of the teachers agreed on a feeling of being overwhelmed when they first began teaching at the school. This sentiment was also indicated in Schaufeli and Bakker's (2004) research which highlighted factors such as time pressure and excessive demands leading to burnout (see section 3.3.2). Life satisfaction is one factor of wellbeing in the theory of psychological wellbeing by Ryff (2014) who advocates for interventions that would facilitate progressions towards mastery (see section 2.1.2). Thus, teachers who felt overwhelmed by workload might implement certain strategies to enhance mastery of workload in order to decrease stress and improve teacher wellbeing. The participants were given multiple subjects to teach to several stages which were combined. One participant indicated:

> *"Although the school has less than fifty learners, the amount of*
> *work and effort required for planning and preparation is the same*
> *as teaching a class of fifty learners."* (E, WT, 3 November 2021)

Another element that was talked about was the significant preparation that was required of teachers related to the fact that the learners who attended this specific school did not feel supported in mainstream schools. A participant explained:

> *"Teaching these [special needs] learners requires a type of teaching that is very different to mainstream schooling which I experience as rewarding but challenging. Each learner [in the school where the research was conducted] receives individual attention which is highly demanding."* (B, WT, 3 November 2021)

Another factor that was mentioned was that because there were so few teachers who taught their specific subject, collaboration with other teachers was non-existent. In other schools, for example, there may be two or more teachers who taught the same subject and those teachers could share information and content. One participant felt taken advantage of as a new teacher because she was teaching three subjects to two stages and there were no resources available. The participant revealed:

> *"I learnt to work smarter and began to manage my time better so even though I had more work to do this year, I experienced more fluidity. Online teaching has made the experience of teaching harder for me."* (I, WT, 3 November 2021)

In research conducted by Dehaloo and Schulze (2013), the absence of effective job resources as drivers of work engagement led to demotivation among teachers at the school. Interventions to promote enhanced work engagement were contextualised professional development programmes that would improve communication between relevant stakeholders of the school. It was suggested that to improve job resources, communication between the DoE, SMT and teachers should be improved (see section 3.6.1).

Although one participant did mention the prioritisation of tasks and planning to feel less overwhelmed, the majority of participants felt they were all working in isolation as collaboration was non-existent. One participant stated:

"There's a lot to do from scratch." (I, WT, 3 November 2021)

Collaboration among teachers, according to Zuze and Juan (2020), has positive outcomes for learning which could improve teacher wellbeing (see section 3.2.1).

The Covid-19 pandemic facilitated online teaching with which the teachers and the learners were unfamiliar. Another participant added that being online was stressful because as a teacher you did not know whether or not the learner was paying the necessary attention to the lesson.

The majority of participants acknowledge the necessity of time management skills. According to literature reducing job demands requires effective time management (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) (see section 3.3.2). A few teachers pointed out that it was something that needed to be personally improved. Some participants ensured that their planning was done during the holidays for at least the first three weeks of the term. One participant preferred to do it on a weekly basis and after school in order to prioritise 'me time' during the holidays. All the participants agreed that as time went on, planning and preparation became easier and that getting inspiration to offer a lesson in a different way added to the stressful nature of teaching, especially when there was a lack of resources and support.

The activity for this workshop was a prioritisation list. Each task on the activity was given a rating of 1 to 5 (1 being of least importance, and 5 being of most importance). Initially, planning was given a 5, creating content a 4, marking a 4, break duty a 5, meetings a 3 and looking after the generator a 5. The group realised that depending on the task, day or time, the priority was subject to change. For example, on days when there was no load shedding, obtaining petrol for the generator would become a 1 on the list.

It was clear in the last focus group that prioritisation of tasks could be very challenging especially when workload was experienced as overwhelming. In the literature,

workload was a common factor known to affect teacher wellbeing (Bubb & Early, 2004). Contributors to workload experienced by teachers in South Africa are comparatively similar in this research study; these include preparation and planning, management and supervision and administration among others (see section 3.3.2). At this point in the study, participants were informed about the school closing down at the end of the year, and that a new school would be opening in 2022. This was very stressful for the participants and some of them had agreed to the move while others remained hesitant. Secondly, we were heading towards the examination period and all the participants were prioritising the preparation of the examinations and trying to motivate the learners to study for them.

Transport and time were also mentioned during the discussion as external factors that had a negative impact on teacher wellbeing. A common thread as regards workload during the individual interviews was the feeling of stress because of a lack of support and resources at the school.

5.4.4 Teacher support and resilience

The last focus group was on the topic of teacher support and resilience (see Appendix E). The main categories that were identified in this regard was defining resilience, collegial support, support of management and family, as well as continuous professional development.

Teacher support and resilience was an ideal topic given the news about the closure of the existing school and the opening of a new one. Each participant had differing views in terms of how they foreshadowed these changes in the light of teacher support and resilience. When asked to define teacher resilience, one participant stated:

> *"Resilience is the ability to withstand pressure from outside and still show up."* (I, WT, 10 November 2021)

Comparatively, resilience has been defined as the ability to cope with change and challenge, and bounce back during difficult times (Kids Helpline, 2014). According to Johnson et al. (2014; 2016), improving resilience and therefore wellbeing, may involve developing significant relationships and a sense of connectedness or belonging; developing a sense of personal and teacher efficacy; the ability of social and problem-solving skills; a sense of achievement and a future orientation.

Two of the other participants talked about endurance or to be able to endure, and others referred to the ability to bear all the pressures and difficulties. The teachers shared experiences for others to follow and thus improve their resilience. According to Seligman et al. (2006), relationships provide connection and support, which are fundamental to wellbeing because they provide purpose and meaning (see section 2.1.1). One of the first support structures that was mentioned was support and companionship from colleagues. One participant said:

"Relating [positively] to staff and friendships [with colleagues] are significant factors that affect day-to-day teacher wellbeing." (A, WT, 10 November 2021)

Again, Seligman's (2011) theory on wellbeing emphasises the importance of relationships because the drive to connect with and serve others promotes our survival and enables an individual's capacity for love, compassion, kindness and empathy (see section 2.1.1). Comparably, support and understanding from management and family members was the second support structure referred to in this study, especially during times of conflict and related to the establishment of proper discipline. One of the participants felt very strongly about family support and managerial openness. This participant explained:

> *"Family provides the energy needed to keep going. Management who has an open-door policy is key to my experience of wellbeing."* (B, WT, 10 November 2021)

Another participant provided an example of when she first started at the school and felt inferior as the parents were not supportive and compared her to the previous teacher who was more technologically experienced. One of the other teachers and a member of management provided the necessary support in the form of encouragement to help her through this difficult time. They believed in her which made her believe in herself.

The participants also talked about CPD specifically related to the new school that would be opening in the next year. According to Naidoo (2019), a comprehensive qualification for principals did not exist. The DoE developed an ACESLM. The research revealed that South African principals who acquired the ACESLM were more capable of managing schools effectively and of fostering school improvement (see section 3.2.1). Training would be needed given that the school would be adding a new online system for the provision of content. However, research does point to CPD as one of the contributors of stress due to lack of time (see section 3.3.2). In South Africa, teachers are expected to spend 85% of their time teaching, and the rest of their time on preparation and planning, assessment, extra-mural activities, management and supervision, professional development, pastoral duties, guidance and counselling, and administration (Chisholm et al., 2005). Nevertheless, without training, participants felt that they would not be able to teach well and with confidence. For example:

> *"CPD is necessary for everyone to be on the same page … without support, teachers cannot perform well. Support from management in the form of training enhances our wellbeing."* (B, WT, 10 November 2021)

Another participant talked about taking responsibility for one's own learning and that self-learning and improvement also played a significant role to enhance wellbeing. In response, the other participants mentioned the importance of modelling responsibility for learners.

During the workshops the participants discovered that to improve resilience required of them to go inwards, pray and meditate. Other ways to improve resilience that were mentioned were being in nature or having a conversation with an objective person and building connections with colleagues. Lastly, a culture of support, especially of human support was discussed. A participant explained:

"Although technology does provide a support structure in many ways, relying on our fellow colleagues for solutions through collaboration is key to teacher wellbeing and the development of resilience." (I, WT, 10 November 2021)

The culture of support discussed in the workshop can be linked to research by Day and Gu (2013) as well as Johnson et al. (2014) who highlighted the importance of collegial support and trusting relationships between colleagues in fostering resilience (see section 3.2.3). A question that was asked during the individual interviews which was broadly received as a difficult question to answer was: "To what extent do you feel in control of your life?" Most of the participants mentioned 'chaos' in their answers and that when there was conflict and chaos ensued, some participants could handle that well and were resilient while others felt out of control. This group learnt about the techniques used by the other teachers to improve resilience.

The last activity for the conclusion of the workshops was a body scan meditation. The body scan meditation was a mindfulness practice that brought the mind into the present moment as it involved scanning the body for different sensations and bringing awareness to different parts of the body which helped the body and mind to become

relaxed and centred. Many of the participants had not experienced meditation before. During the individual interviews, some participants indicated that they would have liked to actively meditate every week because of the benefits that were felt thereafter. These benefits included a feeling of joy and a good night's sleep on the day of the meditation activity. Lyubomirsky (2001) tested her theory on wellbeing and several of those studies (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009) recommended that individuals who practice and record positive strategies regularly turn these strategies into positive habits (see section 2.1.3).

5.4.5 Towards improving teacher wellbeing

The aim of this study was to improve teacher wellbeing. Reflecting on the four workshops, it was clear that the participants enjoyed the experience of being together and getting to know one another's points of view on particular issues. This was one aspect that stood out as contributing to the improvement of teacher wellbeing because this aspect inspired feelings of empathy as well as camaraderie.

During the first workshop on teacher wellbeing in general, the participants all agreed that three aspects contributed towards their wellbeing, namely, experiencing a 'calling', recognition for work in the form of salary as well as learner academic achievement. Only a few pointed out spending time outdoors and being active. I observed that the journal writing activity also helped the participants to reframe some of the negative feelings surrounding specific personal events at the school and some of the participants reflected that they would continue to do journal writing because of the resulting positive effects thereafter. Thus, it improved their wellbeing.

The data from the second workshop on interpersonal relationships indicated that respect, empathy, trust and a common goal were all necessary features of relationships and that without those three elements, teacher wellbeing decreased. It was clear that relationships with learners, colleagues, management and parents were

a significant contributor to the participants' motivation to work effectively. In other words, where relationships were poor, teacher wellbeing diminished significantly, and therefore impacted on the effort required for effective teaching to continue. It was realised that the most effective way to improve these interpersonal relationships and wellbeing was through effective communication.

The third workshop was, comparatively, the most challenging of all the workshops due to the nature of the topic – time management. Workload was experienced as the most challenging aspect of teacher wellbeing; and each teacher approached time management differently making it difficult to come to a consensus on what could ultimately improve, for example, feeling overwhelmed or time needed for significant preparation. Some teachers used their holiday time to plan and prepare for the following terms lessons and day-to-day activities; while others sacrificed their weekends or time after school. It appeared that time management, more specifically prioritising tasks, was a significantly personal topic but all the participants agreed that improving their time management skills benefitted their wellbeing.

Towards the end of the data collection period, I observed that the participants were enthusiastic about the potential for workshops to improve teacher wellbeing. This was especially true of the last workshop in which the activity was a group body scan meditation as explained above. In the days that followed, I observed a deeper sense of camaraderie between those participants who participated in the workshop. The participants confirmed this observation in the individual interviews when asked: *What did you like about the workshops?* The participants further explained that if we were to schedule more workshops like the ones I had conducted, they would feel more connected to each other and to the school in general which would have a positive effect on their wellbeing.

When asked in the individual interviews how the programme could be improved, most participants pointed to having longer time periods for the workshop sessions. However, this was contradicted by the difficulty in initially getting the participants to

join the workshop sessions. Out of the 10 teachers who were at the school, six participated in the workshops, and five in the subsequent interviews. Thus, time for data collection was an issue for them.

5.5 QUANTITATIVE DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The questionnaire data were analysed by means of descriptive statistics. Thus, the responses of the five participants who completed the questionnaire (see Appendix G) were analysed. The questionnaire was answered by the five participants once the workshops and individual interviews had concluded. The results are presented as frequencies and percentages with regard to each item on the questionnaire.

Table 5.3 indicates the views of the teachers on each item of the questionnaire.

Table 5.3   The views of the teachers on the items of the questionnaire

Item	Disagree F(%)	Agree F(%)	Neutral F(%)
I experience joy and meaning as a teacher.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5(100%)
I am an effective teacher who makes a difference in the lives of learners I teach.	0%	0%	5(100%)
I remain optimistic even when success is not immediately obvious.	0%	0%	5(100%)
My level of internal motivation helps me to alleviate feelings of frustration during stressful periods.	20%	0%	4(80%)
I am engaged deeply with my work which enhances the meaningfulness of my work.	0%	20%	4(80%)
Being a teacher is a calling for me.	0%	20%	4(80%)
I derive meaning from my positive relationships with the learners I teach.	0%	0%	5(100%)
My workload is manageable.	0%	20%	4(80%)
I manage my time effectively.	0%	40%	3(60%)
I make time for activities outside of school that contribute to the feeling of joy and meaning I experience.	20%	20%	3(60%)
I feel supported as a teacher within my team.	20%	40%	2(40%)
I generally feel motivated, engaged and committed within my sphere of work.	20%	20%	3(60%)

A diagram of the above-mentioned data appears as Figure 5.1.
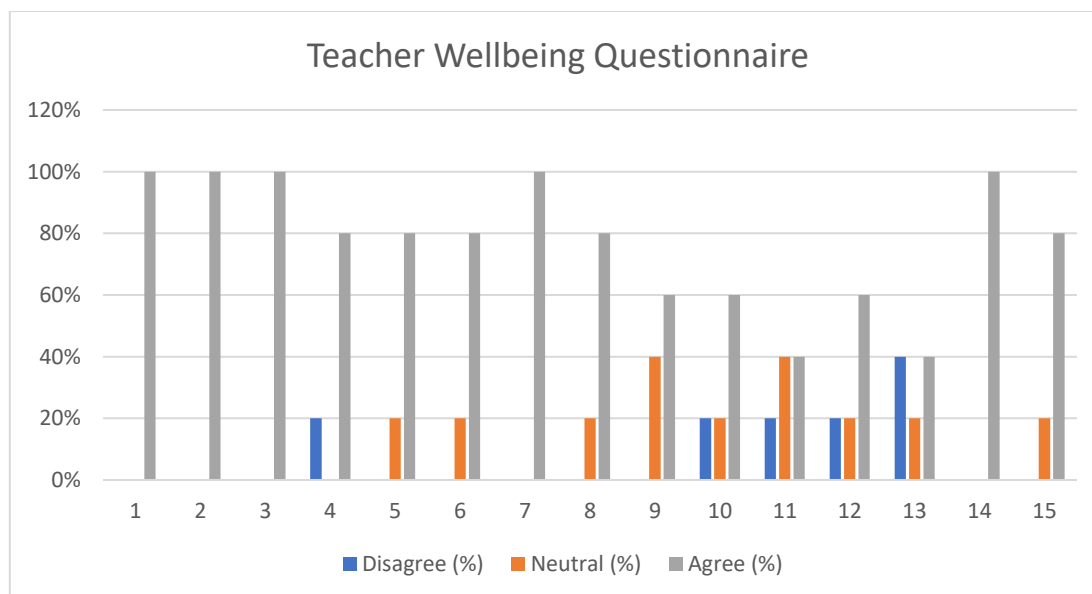
Figure 5.1 Teacher wellbeing questionnaire data

The data in Table 5.3 and Figure 5.1 indicate that struggles with *time management* and a lack of *teacher support* were much more concerning to the teachers compared to the other items included on the questionnaire. Time management and teacher support were discussed extensively in the workshop sessions and in the individual interviews. The activity for the time management workshop was the creation of a prioritisation list. The participants reflected that this activity was challenging because when workload became overwhelming, prioritising tasks only added to the feeling of being overwhelmed. The activity for the teacher support workshop was a group meditation and the majority of the participants responded well to the activity as they expressed that it generated feelings of relaxation and calm, and thus improved teacher wellbeing.

It is also clear from the table and figure that, apart from time management issues and a lack of teacher support, the other aspects of teacher wellbeing were experienced as satisfactory by the five teachers at the end of the four workshops. These aspects included finding joy and meaning in teaching, experiencing self-efficacy, being motivated, being deeply engaged with teaching, experiencing teaching as a calling and having positive relationships with relevant parties.

5.6 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the findings of this study. Categories and subcategories were drawn from the data collected from the sample which were described in this chapter. Furthermore, a discussion of the qualitative and quantitative data was presented. The findings were discussed and interpreted in the light of the literature presented in Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter six provides the conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The final Chapter (Chapter 6) presents the conclusions, recommendations, contributions and limitations of this study as well as a summary of the entire study. This chapter seeks to answer the main research question: *How can teacher wellbeing in a South African primary school be improved by means of action research?* (see section 1.2.) This research question was investigated by means of the research design explained in Chapter 4. The findings of the study were given and interpreted in Chapter 5. The most important factors that affected teacher wellbeing were teacher wellbeing in general, interpersonal relationships, workload and time management, and teacher support and resilience.

The following sections provide the conclusions and recommendations that were based on the findings presented in Chapter 5.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions in this study were based on the initial research question in Section 1.2 which was attended to by way of PAR. Four cycles of planning, acting, data collection and reflection were completed. The study collected data through a number of workshops, interviews and a questionnaire. The data were interpreted in the light of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 and literature presented in Chapter 3.

The following conclusions are reflective of the categories and subcategories that emerged from the data and were discussed in Chapter 5 (see section 5.3).

6.2.1 Teacher wellbeing

It can be concluded that teacher wellbeing, as experienced by the participants, was similar to the experience of many South African teachers in that motivation was affected by factors such as a calling orientation, salary, learner appreciation and academic achievement (see section 5.4.1). In order to improve teacher wellbeing in general, conclusions were drawn from the focus group discussion in which participants jointly agreed that the journal writing activity made them feel more present and reflective of their experience. This activity, they agreed, would provide an opportunity to reframe a negative experience which would improve teacher wellbeing.

In addition, with the aim of improving teacher wellbeing, participants agreed that collegial support and collaboration were significant factors in their experience at school (see section 5.4.1). The findings revealed that the workshop sessions had a positive impact on the participants' wellbeing because it provided opportunities to be together in a less formal setting. Thus, it can be concluded that teachers who meet regularly in less formal ways experience an enhanced wellbeing. The interview data revealed that planning well for lessons, exercising, participating in recreational activities, socialising and journaling were all ways to improve teacher wellbeing.

6.2.2 Interpersonal relationships

This study showed that positive relationships with fellow teachers and management, learners and parents were important factors for teacher wellbeing (see section 5.4.2). When these relationships were poor, the data revealed that effective communication was one way to improve teacher wellbeing. Exercising empathy and having shared goals were also central to the experience of teacher wellbeing.

It can be concluded that having the support of parents, especially from parents of children who exhibit misbehaviour, was key to teacher wellbeing. Another conclusion

drawn from the findings was the issue of discipline (see section 5.4.2). A school needed established discipline and regulatory procedures to maintain fixed boundaries between learners and teachers, and that without such measures, teacher wellbeing was greatly diminished.

According to the participants, improving interpersonal relationships required the effort of all parties in choosing to build authentic connections while maintaining boundaries which contributed towards improved teacher wellbeing.

6.2.3 Workload and time management

It can be concluded that when there was a lack of support and resources in school, workload and time management were negatively impacted. According to the participants, when workload extended beyond the time one had to complete it, teacher wellbeing was low (see section 5.4.3). Thus, to improve teacher wellbeing as related to workload and time management, access to support and resources had to be prioritised by management.

The findings also revealed that prioritising tasks, which was the activity for this workshop, did not always help to alleviate the stress of workload and, instead, made some of the participants feel more overwhelmed (see section 5.4.3). According to these participants, this extra activity only added to their already existing workload. It was agreed that time management skills should be improved upon with the aim of improving teacher wellbeing. This could mean sacrificing time in the school holidays that is dedicated to planning lessons for the following term. The findings showed that there were diverse approaches when it came to organising time and planning and that every participant viewed workload differently.

6.2.4 Teacher support and resilience

It can be concluded that teacher support was crucial for teacher wellbeing and that improving support by way of collegial support, managerial support and family support was essential (see section 5.4.4). Thus, having an open-door policy and providing opportunities for CPD, it was discovered, would improve teacher wellbeing. The term that the participants used to describe this experience was a *culture of support* and signified the importance of having trusting relationships between colleagues.

Resilience, as it related to workload, was discussed in connection to the experience of workload. According to the participants, resilience was the ability to withstand external pressure and to endure. The findings indicated that improving resilience required going inwards, praying and meditation as well as being in nature or having a conversation with an objective person and building connections with colleagues (see section 5.4.4). Thus, resilience was key to teacher wellbeing and could be improved by consciously applying specific techniques that worked for individuals.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.3.1 Recommendations for how to improve teacher wellbeing

Based on the findings presented in Chapter 5, and on the conclusions listed in section 6.2, it is firstly recommended that to improve teacher wellbeing teachers need to be provided opportunities for team building workshops in the form taken in this study (see section 6.2.1). This would be recommended for a fifth cycle of PAR.

The above-mentioned recommendation would require all teachers to meet regularly to discuss and organise team building activities which would foster a greater sense of belonging. The workshops conducted in this PAR study could be an ongoing effort

organised by the researcher, along with the teachers, to encourage collaboration among the teachers at the school. Collaboration according to the participants has been lacking among the staff; thus the continuation of the workshops as a team building event would aim to improve collaboration as well as to build positive relationships among staff members (see section 6.2.2). The meetings could be made compulsory by management and could take place once every two weeks at the school. In addition, the speaker at each meeting could rotate among the staff thus providing each staff member an opportunity to raise any topic that he or she feels must be attended to. A discussion and an activity surrounding the topic could be completed by each staff member.

Secondly, management should organise formal training for inexperienced teachers and teachers who wish to improve their skills (see section 6.2.3).

The second recommendation originates from the conclusions surrounding workload and time management as well as teacher support and resilience (see sections 6.2.3 and 6.2.4). This recommendation would require management to budget for and organise formal CPD opportunities for inexperienced teachers and those teachers who wish to engage with current teaching material and approaches. The deputy principal could organise and schedule these meetings and relay the information to staff members. It need not be compulsory for all teachers to attend every CPD event; however the content of the CPD meetings could become content for the ongoing workshop sessions that are held at the school in order for all teachers to discuss and practice the skills that are learnt. At least one teacher would therefore attend a CPD meeting and present the content in the workshop sessions at the school.

6.3.2 Recommendations for further research

The focus of this study was improving teacher wellbeing in a small South African independent, primary school. The chosen methodology, PAR, was a useful way to

gather information and to bring to light some of the personal experiences of the teachers who participated in this study. However, I would recommend that a longer time period with more participants would shed more light on improving teacher wellbeing. Furthermore, I would recommend conducting similar studies in different contexts in order to compare teacher wellbeing. For example, it is recommended that similar investigations take place in larger government schools across the country with the aim of improving teacher wellbeing in different contexts.

6.4 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher contributed to the body of knowledge on teacher wellbeing in South Africa. Furthermore, the researcher contributed to the improvement of teacher wellbeing in South Africa by means of PAR, by demonstrating that teacher wellbeing can be fostered through collaborative workshops aimed at improving interpersonal relationships and communication.

It was discovered in this study that teacher wellbeing can be improved through a culture of support and that team building activities similar to the researcher's workshop sessions would greatly improve teacher wellbeing. Moreover, opportunities for training must be provided for those teachers who wish to expand their knowledge and teaching approaches.

6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The small sample size was not seen as a constraint. It consisted of seven dedicated participants who attended the workshops and five who participated in the individual interviews and completed the questionnaire. In line with the character of action research, the aim of the study was not to generalise; rather the aim was to work in-depth with a small group of committed participants to improve practice in a specific

context (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:485). To this end, the sample size was sufficient and the research fulfilled its aim.

The greatest limitation of this study was time constraints. It was difficult for the researcher to organise sufficient time with each of the participants who became increasingly anxious about their own timetables.

6.6 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to investigate ways to improve teacher wellbeing. The conceptual framework which formed the foundation of this study were the theories of Seligman (2011) and the PERMA model, Ryff's (2014) model of psychological wellbeing, Lyubomirsky's (2007) theory of wellbeing and Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy. These theories conceptualised wellbeing and was also applicable to teacher wellbeing and the improvement thereof. A literature review on the factors that influenced teacher wellbeing was also presented.

To improve teacher wellbeing, PAR was selected. The study was conducted in a small independent school that specialised in the Cambridge curriculum and classes ranged from pre-school to A-levels. The researcher employed non-probability sampling as the participants included teachers at the school who happened to be accessible and who represented certain types of characteristics. The characteristics of the participants included teachers who are trained to teach the Cambridge curriculum and who are working in a small independent school. Convenient sampling was used for the action research since representativeness is not required in action research (Schumacher & McMillan, 2014:480). As such, the results of action research are intended to inform a plan of action related to instructional decisions, curricular changes, or school policies, the sample was appropriate given the nature (action research) and aim (to improve teacher wellbeing in this particular context) of this study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:479). Data was collected via four workshop sessions, focus groups, individual interviews, observation and a questionnaire.

The findings of this study revealed that teacher wellbeing was influenced by five factors that needed to be improved during the project to enhance teacher wellbeing. These factors were: teacher wellbeing in general, interpersonal relationships, workload and time management and, lastly, teacher support and resilience. The factors were fundamental to the action research investigation on improving teacher wellbeing. Recommendations for further improving teacher wellbeing and for additional follow-up study were made. The limitations of the study were also highlighted.

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UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2021/09/08

Ref: **2021/09/08/48782912/04/AM**
Name: Ms JB Chessman
Student No.:48782912

Dear Ms JB Chessman

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2021/09/08 to 2024/09/08

Researcher(s): Name: Ms JB Chessman
E-mail address: 48782912@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0833916237

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof S Schulze
E-mail address: Salome.schulze@gmail.com
Telephone: 0824472714

Title of research:

An action research project to improve teacher wellbeing in a South African primary school.

Qualification: MEd Psychology of Education

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2021/09/08 to 2024/09/08.

The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2021/09/08 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.

2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be comm unicated in writin g to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.

4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risk s for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.

6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.

8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2024/09/08**. Submission of a completed research ethics pro gress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2021/09/08/48782912/04/AM** *should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research pa rticipants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,

Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motlhat@unisa.ac.za

Prof PM Sebate
EXECUTIVE DEAN
Sebatpm@unisa.ac.za

Approved - decision template – updated 16 Feb 2017

APPENDIX B

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Participant information sheet

Ethics clearance reference number: 2021/09/08/48782912/04/AM

Date: 18 October 2021

Title: An action research project to improve teacher wellbeing in a South African primary school

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Jade Brittany Chessman and I am doing research with Professor Salomé Schulze, a professor in the Department of Psychology towards a Masters degree in Psychology of Education at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: An action research project to improve teacher wellbeing in a South African primary school.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The aim of this study is to explore, describe, and improve teacher's experiences of teacher wellbeing in a South African primary school.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You were selected to participate in this study because of the factor of convenience that exists within the selected research site.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves participation in four workshops. Each workshop will focus on an aspect of teacher wellbeing. You will participate in short activities during each workshop, while some activities may be done at home. The activities allow for reflection and improvement of your own wellbeing. The topics are:

Workshop 1: Teacher wellbeing

Workshop 2: Interpersonal relationships

Workshop 3: Workload and time management

Workshop 4: Teacher support and resilience

At the start of each workshop, a focus group will be conducted. The focus groups and interviews (after completion of the study) will be audio-recorded with your consent and will be conducted after school and at your convenience. The duration of the interviews will be between 45-60 minutes. There is also a short questionnaire to complete. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The study will benefit the education system in following aspects:

- It will add to the body of knowledge on teacher wellbeing or lack thereof;

- It will provide insight into teacher's perspectives of teacher wellbeing;

- It will provide insight on how to enhance teacher wellbeing.

ARE THEIR ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

The only potential risks you may experience is a level of emotional discomfort related to some of the topics for discussions. Should you experience any negativity during this research, you may contact Prof Schulze on 082 447 2714.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research *[this measure refers to confidentiality]* OR your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give *[this measure refers to anonymity]*. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings *[this measure refers to confidentiality].*

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard at 59A Mandeville Road, Bryanston for future research or academic purposes and electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. After five years the hard copies will be shredded and the electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There shall be no payment or incentives for participating in this study.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

Yes.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

I wish to inform you of the research findings of this study. You may contact me on 083 3916237 or at chessman.jade@gmail.com. The findings will be available in 2022.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof Salomé Schulze on 082 447 2714 or at Salomeschulze@gmail.com. Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you,

Jade Brittany Chessman (Researcher)

Letter requesting permission to research

Request for permission to conduct research at Steps Academy School

An action research project to improve teacher wellbeing in a South African primary school.

26 July 2021

The Principal

Steps Academy

133 Randpark Dr, Randpark Ridge, Randburg, 2194

The Principal

083 226 3120 ilse.marais@stepsacademy.co.za

Dear Mrs. Marais,

I, JADE CHESSMAN am doing research under supervision of Prof Salomé Schulze, a professor in the Department of Psychology towards a Master's degree at the University of South Africa. We are requesting permission to participate in a study entitled: **An action research project to improve teacher wellbeing in a South African primary school.**

The aim of this action research is to explore, describe, and improve teacher's experiences of wellbeing in a South African primary school. Participation is voluntary and anonymity and confidentiality of all records of the participants will be maintained throughout the study. The data derived from this study may be used to inform the improvement of teacher wellbeing. Your school has been selected because the researcher is a teacher at the school and will participate in the study as a researcher-participant.

The study is a participatory action research design. The data collection instruments are focus groups and unstructured observation, open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The benefits of this study are that it should:

- create awareness of teacher wellbeing or lack thereof;

- add to the body of knowledge on teacher wellbeing;

- be used to inform teachers how to improve their wellbeing.

There are no great risks involved in this study. The only potential risks that may be experienced is a level of emotional discomfort related to some of the topics for discussions. The participants are non-vulnerable adults. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

Feedback will be given to the participants in form of an informal meeting at the school. A presentation on the purpose, findings and recommendations of the study will be done with the principal at the school.

Yours sincerely

_____

JADE CHESSMAN (RESEARCHER)

CELL: 0833916237

Chessman.jade@gmail.com

APPENDIX D

Participant consent form/return slip

Ethics clearance reference number: 2021/09/08/48782912/04/AM

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I am aware of the risks to confidentiality for focus groups which is that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the nature of a focus group. I, as the researcher, will maintain confidentiality and ask that the participants respect the privacy of their fellow participants.

I agree to the recording of the focus group meetings.

I agree to the recording of the interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname…………………………………………… (please print)

Participant Signature…………………………………………………..Date…………………

Researcher's Name & Surname Jade Brittany Chessman ……………………………………(please print)

Researcher's signature………………………………………….Date…………………

APPENDIX E

Workshop schedule

The purpose of the workshops is to explore how teacher wellbeing can be improved by means of action research.

Workshop 1: Teacher wellbeing

The first focus group will involve a discussion, guided by the facilitator, of the topic teacher wellbeing. The discussion will include the factors that impact teacher wellbeing.

Questions that will guide the discussion are:

How does each participant relate to teacher wellbeing?

How does each participant rate their own wellbeing, and, why?

Activities related to the improvement of teacher wellbeing will be designed by the facilitator which participants will complete.

Workshop 2: Interpersonal relationships

The second workshop will begin with a 15-minute focus group to review how the activities in the previous workshop helped the participants to improve teacher wellbeing. Feedback from each participant will allow the group to explore which activities will produce positive outcomes.

Next, the researcher will facilitate a discussion of the impact that interpersonal relationships have on teacher wellbeing. Interpersonal relationships include other teachers, learners and parents.

Questions that will guide the discussion are:

What can be done to improve interpersonal relationships?

Activities related to the improvement of interpersonal relationships, e.g. though improved communication, will be designed by the facilitator which participants will complete.

Workshop 3: Workload and time management

The third workshop will begin with a 15-minute focus group to review how the activities in the previous workshop helped the participants to improve their interpersonal relationships.

Next, the researcher will facilitate a discussion of workload and time management.

Questions that will guide the discussion are:

What impact do workload and time management have on teacher wellbeing?

What can be done to improve workload and time management?

Activities related to the improvement of workload and time management will be designed by the facilitator which participants will complete.

Workshop 4: Teacher support and resilience

In the last workshop, participants will provide feedback on how the activities improved workload and time management.

Next, a discussion of the availability of teacher support and how it can be used will be facilitated by the researcher.

APPENDIX F

Interview schedule

Question 1: Please introduce yourself and state your role at the school.

Question 2: Tell me about your experience of the first focus group meeting and the discussion of joy and meaning as a prerequisite for teacher wellbeing?

Question 3: Explain how the activities you participated in developed your sense of joy and meaning?

Question 4: What techniques were helpful in enhancing joy and meaning that you learnt from the other participants?

Question 5: What techniques did not contribute to joy and meaning for you?

Question 6: Tell me about your experience of workload.

Question 7: Did the measures you implemented help to alleviate the pressures of workload?

Question 8: How would you describe your use of time? Do you make time for activities outside of school that contribute towards your wellbeing?

Question 9: Do you feel you are in control over most things in your life?

Question 10: Is there anything you would like to add?

Probing:

Can you give me examples?

Can you elaborate or explain further?

Do I understand you correctly?

How do you handle things when you don't feel in control over things in your life?

TEACHER WELLBEING QUESTIONNAIRE

Mark X next to the answer that most accurately describes your experience.

1. **I experience joy and meaning as a teacher.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

2. **I am an effective teacher who makes a difference in the lives of learners I teach.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

3. **I remain optimistic even when success is not immediate or obvious.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

4. **My level of internal motivation helps me to alleviate feelings of frustration during stressful periods.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

5. **I am engaged deeply with my work which enhances the meaningfulness of my work.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

6. **Being a teacher is a calling for me.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

7. **I derive meaning from my positive relationships with the learners I teach.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

8. **My workload is manageable.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

9. **I manage my time effectively.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

10. **I make time for activities outside of school that contribute to the feeling of joy and meaning I experience.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

11. **I feel supported as a teacher within my team.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

12. **I generally feel motivated, engaged and committed within my sphere of work.**

Disagree	Neutral	Agree

Interview transcription example

Interviewer: Hi Elsabe, welcome to the interview. So the aim of this investigation is to explore the improvement of teacher wellbeing as you know from the workshops, um, so your experiences of teacher wellbeing and how that can be improved, um, your opinion is valued, feel free to express your views and feelings, both positive and negative, your responses are voluntary and you can withdraw at any stage of the interview. Your name will be treated in confidence so you will remain anonymous and it will not appear in any research report. All information will be used for research purposes only, um, and with your permission the interview will be recorded. You did sign the consent form.

Okay, so question one, please introduce yourself and state your role at the school.

Interviewee: Hi, my name is Elsabe, I am a teacher at Steps Academy and I teach uh the stages from 10 to 12, uh, Afrikaans, Biology and Environmental Management um, what else do I do here? That's the formal role.

Interviewer: You can state your informal roles also.

Interviewee: Informally, I serve as advisor to our principal, I serve as a colleague and friend to my fellow staff and I try to incorporate Arts and gardening into my teaching approach during Club hour.

Interviewer: Okay, um, so tell me about your experience of the first workshop meeting and the discussion of wellbeing as a prerequisite for teacher wellbeing.

Interviewee: Ya, I absolutely agrees with everything that was said in the first workshop, um, like it is, I think it is so obvious that if we can't, if we're not thriving then we can't possibly be expected to show up and make a meaningful contribution in the space, um so ya, I think wellbeing in any space, like even if you don't even have a job, if your wellbeing, if you're suffering from lack, um, then just as a human being your experience will be diminished, you will not be, you will not thrive.

Interviewer: Yes, okay, so um, what techniques were helpful in enhancing your wellbeing?

Interviewee: Ooh, the journaling definitely helped a lot, um, it actually got me back into journaling again cause I was, I wanted to get into again but then, ya when you formally asked us to do it that was when it was like okay it's time. Um, so I really love like rephrasing or just ya, putting your thoughts in words and then actually writing them down so you can reflect and see sometimes how silly you are, um, uh, I also like the one where we had to think about the different methods of communication. I did like that one a lot because it's like the difference between what people are saying and what they mean is often, ya, you can misinterpret.

Interviewer: So that was the interpersonal relationships workshop.

Interviewee: Yes, I really like that one because it is all about relationships and I think in a school especially, um, you know like we said we are the brand and I've thought about this many time, um, especially, beginning of this year where it felt like it was absolute chaos when we didn't have the assembly, um, I got here and I just realised this is actually just a concept and if the people don't show up then there is nothing so it's all about the relationships and communication.

Interviewer: Yes, and the uniting, because that's what the assembly does. I feel like it's uniting us.

Interviewee: Yes, so okay, we're all here, what are doing? Cool, let's do it.

Interviewer: Let's go on, ya, we can move forward now.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Um, Okay so, how do you experience your interpersonal relationships as a teacher?

Interviewee: Ya, um, whew, I learnt a lot especially when it comes to like, in student teacher relationships. Um, I think because this is such a unique environment where there isn't like, there is a hierarchy but not really, um, uh, I felt very, a lot of the times I felt very disempowered because as the teacher and as the, don't want to say the superior but the grownup in the relationship, as the grownup in the relationship, um, obviously, you have to take everything that the students do with like a pinch of salt and you have understand they are kids and where they're coming from but when it, when there's like blatant disrespect I found it very hard to overcome my own ego, to not react

to that, but then afterwards it felt like none of the disrespect was ever addressed and was never resolved so it kind of just kept spiralling, um, and the same thing is happening, even though, okay I'll just name the name, okay Mecayla's gone now, but the same thing's happening with Toriso now, like the disrespect and it just, it's not addressed. So that's like in terms of the interpersonal relationships with students that I find challenging but that's focusing on the negative so on the positive side, um, I love the fact that I can go to any of the students and have like a relationship with them and they're so open, like when Cailyn comes to sit on my lap in the morning, that like makes my day, um so the casual environment.

Interviewer: And also the fact that we have a small school, I think that makes a difference.

Interviewee: Such a big difference cause you don't have to, it's not about favouritism either, it's like the kids know that we're here for them, and everyone relates to a different teacher and I'm glad about the diversity as well. Um, so ya, and then with the staff, um, like we've spoken a lot about this privately but just like for the record it's like diversity is so important and it brings so much to the table but then in the same breath I wanna say it's also very challenging. It's like the biggest asset and the biggest challenge, um, because you have to overcome so much of your own like worldviews and the way you kind of make sense of reality is challenged by what other people think and you have to accommodate everyone, so I fond that challenging, especially when it comes to organising and doing stuff for the school, personally I don't care but when it's about like for example, one thing that stood out, like talks about vaccines, all the teachers are not on the same page so for us to then give the students information about something that's very important, it becomes very hard and I found that challenging throughout the year. So challenges but I wouldn't have wanted to be a teacher in any other space.

Interviewer: So, what could you do to enhance, for example, those examples you gave, what could you do to enhance your interpersonal relationships as a teacher?

Interviewee: Communication, definitely, um like, be more confident to express, um like but also like we've said is you have to, you can only speak from your own perspective so when you wrote that letter for example, you always said, I feel this, I'm experiencing this, this is how it seems from my perspective, um so ya just developing better

communication skills would be great, um, and then I think also maybe trying to put um regulations in place where if students are disrespectful you need to address it. So having systems in place that we can rely on that will provide support for us because at this point there is none and we are so lucky that nothing went horribly wrong this year but you know, it could've. Also, I think it goes the other way as well is what would we as a school do if there was misconduct from a teacher towards a student. Uh, there are no systems in place. A lot of teachers haven't even signed contracts so like having the system, the structure set up properly so that the system can run smoothly is very important and I think going forward that is something we need to consider as a school, um, just to increase the wellbeing of both the teachers and the students. So communication is very important and then also taking time for myself will help me improve my wellbeing when it comes to interpersonal relationships, um, and also like letting go of stuff, like ya, not getting too attached. Like when Feli came out now with the calendar. I was like there's so much I wanna do but actually I don't have to do it now and it's, like, ya if that's what she wants to do, do it. It's also good that everyone's contributing.

Interviewer: Okay, so, please tell me about your experience of workload. So I know at the moment it's very relaxed but, ya, in the past.

Interviewee: In the past it has been extremely stressful, especially when the AS Biology was dumped on me, like it wasn't dumped on me, I had like an idea but then it was added onto the load, it wasn't like we'll take this and then you take that so I was capable of doing it but it did come at with a lot of stress, um, and long hours and ya, like the lack of support because you're the only teacher teaching that subject, like in this school there's no one I can relate to about Biology.

Interviewer: Ya, I think that goes for every teacher though in a way because in bigger government schools. I think we were talking about this the other day. There's at least three or four teachers teaching the same subject so that collaboration.

Interviewee:Ya, there's a head of department. Ya the collaboration is lacking a lot, um, especially when we want to eventually do cross-curricular approach, um, I think that's gonna be a big challenge for us because we actually don't know how to collaborate because we all coming from very different subject fields and I also think that what you studied influences the way that you teach. We all have different mindsets about a lot

of different things. What were you talking about, workload? I don't think it's too bad, um, I also think at Steps you can do the minimal and get away with it and that's not enough for me so I did put a lot of the pressure on myself as well.

Interviewer: So in a way it was a choice?

Interviewee: It is a choice, yes.

Interviewer: So what measures did you implement to help you alleviate the pressures of workload?

Interviewee: Uh, well I stopped doing the thing where I was making notes, uh, cause it took so much time so I instead relied a lot more like on the textbook and those resources that were provided. I also put a lot more of the responsibility onto the learners. I think I will do more in the future, I will put more responsibility on them because it is their education.

Interviewer: So also, just for the record, you are teaching much older students so the, that responsibility is, it's okay. It works.

Interviewee: Ya, they should be able to handle it, um, so I put a lot more responsibility on them and that took some of the load off especially in the AS level, um, Adil was my only student at the end, um, and he just, sometimes I would show up and he would've done more than me so that really helped a lot and I think it also has to do with trying to inspire the learners to care about the subject so that they're interested and curious and then they learn, um, it's not always possible but when you get it right its so rewarding.

Interviewer: So you said earlier just now in your response that you were taking notes. So you were doing that in the beginning. Can you elaborate on what that means?

Interviewee: Uh, well, it wasn't as glamorous as it sounds but when I was at university I really enjoyed when the lecturers put effort into making their notes look like pleasing to the eye because I'm a very visual person, um, so what I would do is because also with environmental management, that's a good example, we don't have an online textbook and the kids don't have access to textbooks. I think one costs R600.00 and we just do not have at the school, um, so then I would physically type over the whole textbook and then take the different sections and then look for images on Google and

then, the notes look awesome but now looking back, what a waste of energy because I don't even know if they appreciated the work, like Toriso once said like wow mam, your notes look so good.

Interviewer: So in terms of appreciation of work, that would be like that recognition of work which we spoke about also in the first workshop. So is that important for you, like having that recognition?

Interviewee: Not anymore. In the beginning, yes, like I remember when we had out first exam and the kids did so horribly and I was like taking it very hard but now.

Interviewer: So it was personal for you in a way?

Interviewee: Ya very, like you think I remember doing this in class and now I think back to my teachers did the same thing, um, so I don't, not anymore, now I just, the motivation comes from inside. I really could not care less about like the approval of management because management, we know what they are.

Interviewer: and the approval of the students?

Interviewee: Ya especially that because they don't understand why they have to do this stuff and I get that. I'm very vague now. Hopefully you'll be able to get some data from this.

Interviewer: I will, definitely. Okay so, um, explain to what extent and how do you make time for activities outside of school that may contribute towards your wellbeing.

Interviewee: Um, ya, I think its also changed a lot, um so I told you in one of the interviews, I said I was working a lot on the weekends and then during the week, in the afternoons, I would take time for myself but now because a lot of the work has been done, um, I just have more free time in general but then this last two terms I've spent a lot of time after school, like helping Ilse think about next year, um, so in that way that took the time I had freed up with my notes, um, but then I don't know actually Jade, like it's a hard question, um.

Interviewer: So in terms of like you know your weekends and stuff , how do you make time for those activities? In your mind, how do you come to the decision to go away for the weekend?

Interviewee: I think I need to go away for the weekends, I know I need that so then throughout the week, for example, if I have a class test set for next week then I'll just set it quickly in my off periods or after school, uh, ya I prioritise my weekends more this yea so ya, I just moved around all my stuff.

Interviewer: So time management?

Interviewee: Yes, that's the word.

Interviewer: Alright, so explain to what extent, this is a little bit of a difficult question, explain to what extent you feel in control of most things in your life?

Interviewee: Ya geez, it's funny that you use the word control because that's actually what's come up for me lately is to not try to control cause I am very controlling, um, and that's why I cant teach the young kids because they just too chaotic, um, so well in like my personal relationship with my partner I feel pretty confident in what's happening there so I feel in control of how I carry myself in the relationship and obviously I can't control what happens but ya like my reaction to the situation, I think I'm like, and also meditation and taking time for myself helps to function in that relationship. And then at school, as you know we are not in control. It is absolute chaos some days.

Interviewer: SO that's the question, to what extent do you feel in control when chaos arises?

Interviewee: Sometimes I get completely overwhelmed and like today, for example today is one of those days where because Ilse's not here, it feels like everyone's just trying to get away with doing as little as possible and that influences me to now also not want to bring my full self. It's funny like today I feel like I'm not in control at all and I'm just gonna let whatever happens happen, um, but in general I feel quite confident because I have that financial security so I don't feel overwhelmed by not being control, um, but it does, I think money is a big contributor to people feeling scared when they're out of control, um, ya so having that has made the turbulence of this year and the potential of losing a job, it's made it less scary.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. So how did you experience the four workshop sessions. So what helped you to enhance your wellbeing? What did not help? And what would you recommend?

Interviewee: Well, you know I didn't do the prioritisation which I'm sad about because I think that is something that I struggle with often. I get so focused on the details that I lose sight of the bigger picture, um, so I would actually like to give that exercise a try in future, um, I think actually I'm just gonna be, I'm gonna flatter you, I think all of the approaches in the workshops like will have a very big contribution to wellbeing if you take them to heart. Like if you want to improve your wellbeing, taking time for yourself, working on your communication skills, working on your relationships through the communication, um, and practicing mindfulness will definitely increase your wellbeing. Like I do not doubt that, um, so ya, I think your workshops have so much value and I would like to see you develop them more in future if you feel like it because like teacher wellbeing is so important because if you're not, like I see the days where I show up and I'm just not fully here, like my lesson are not there, the students don't respond to me and then it's like a wasted day so wellbeing is key.

Interviewer: So what would recommend?

Interviewee: Maybe the space could be improved. Um, maybe you could also expand on them and make a longer session.

Interviewer: SO that was the original plan. To have longer session but given the response I found that quite difficult.

Interviewee: Ya, I understand. And I think it should be like an ongoing thing. Um, ya where mindfulness exercises are brought into the sessions more. Like that last session was fantastic. The fact that Saziso burst out laughing, that beautiful, that's like joy that just bubbled out of her. It's very powerful. I think it has a lot of potential if the teachers are open and I think working on making the teachers more open, that could be a good, something for you to do, approach, or work on. But ya I did think your sessions were very good.

Interviewer: And then the last question is, is there anything else you would like to add? Like about the overall experience

Interviewee: Sho, well I'll tell you what drew me to education in the first place was um, so I was never, I didn't grow up like one day I wanna be a teacher, like I never played teacher teacher even, like that was not a thing, I like playing with small animal dolls, um and then after I studied Science I had a very big disconnect with like society and

humanity and I was very much like, I was so angry angry, I just hated humans, um, I didn't want anything to do with them but then after doing my degree, I was like I also don't want to pusue Science, um because it's too boring, um and that's when I just literally because my mom also did it and one of my aunts did it, it's like okay cool, let me just do my post grad in education so that if I need money and I need to start working and that is something, like it's a decent, okay actually it is more than that, I was thinking about how do I want to contribute to society? But that only came at the end of doing my PGCE. I just did it so I could spend another year at university I guess um and so. But then throughout the year when I, after having a life changing experience with certain chemicals, I would say, I started to think deeply about my role as a human on this planet and how can I make meaningful change um with the skill set that I was given and that's when education started to open up for me more as a tool to reach people so that I can amplify my impact um so ultimately I entered education because of my passion for conservation um and it was like a little detour. And I was never planning on teaching so soon. I was planning on having a longer gap year which I hate, I want a gap life. I do not want to be in the system but I'm so grateful for this opportunity to have met you and to have experienced being a teacher in a such an open environment. I feel so lucky, I just fell into the space and ya I'm learning every day.