Introduction

Why cultivate wellbeing?

As with any journey, we start at the beginning, which are our reasons for wanting to write this book. We believe that **teacher wellbeing** is key in education. Teachers are the central hub in any classroom, and their psychology – including their emotions, beliefs, behaviours and reactions – is likely to affect students' learning and wellbeing through processes of psychological or emotional influence (Williams, Mercer and Ryan, 2016; Frenzel and Stephens, 2013). In other words, if teachers are motivated and satisfied with their jobs, students will pick up on this and feel motivated and happy too. Additionally, if teachers are motivated and happy at work, they will also teach more effectively (Holmes, 2005). Their wellbeing is crucial to the quality of their teaching and to the success of their learners.

Second to this, we also believe that teacher wellbeing is highly dependent on the wellbeing of the educational leaders and managers in the organisation (for the rest of the book, we will use the term *educational manager* to refer to leaders and managers at all levels). Educational managers are the key influencers in any school and their psychology is likely to shape the performance and psychologies of teachers and other staff working with them (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2008). Put simply, if educational managers are motivated and happy, teachers will pick up on this and be motivated and happy at work, thus ensuring that students are motivated and happy as described above – which culminates into a successful and flourishing school (for ease of discussion, we will use the term *school* from now on when referring to any educational organisation, at any level – i.e. primary, secondary, tertiary – that has managers, teachers and learners).

Prioritising wellbeing

As a clinical psychologist (Kate) and a researcher in the field of English language teaching (Christina), we are perplexed that wellbeing, a factor that is so clearly important to the performance of educational managers and teachers (and subsequently learners), is often overlooked or not prioritised in policies, appraisals and goal setting. For managers, policies often refer to legal requirements and protocols. Appraisals often focus on objective

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performance measures such as student achievement and teacher retention figures, as well as budgeting and resource allocation. For teachers, it is much the same. In professional training, emphasis is primarily placed on classroom management or on teaching methods, techniques and materials, which, despite their usefulness, do not equip managers and teachers with the necessary mechanisms to look after themselves in what can be highly stressful roles. When Kate is talking to educational managers, they are often confused when she suggests that they might prioritise their own wellbeing for the benefit of the whole school by taking some time off or working on their personal development. In some of Christina's research with English teachers across a range of settings, an instinctive reaction from some of the participating teachers was that considering or reflecting on their own emotions is a selfish and egocentric approach to teaching, which does not place students at the heart of what is taking place in the classroom. Beginning with this introduction and throughout the book, we hope to convince you that improving educator wellbeing is not a selfish approach at all and, in fact, it is *entirely necessary to the success of your learners.*

⚷ Oxygen masks

When Kate is presenting to educational managers on the topic of wellbeing, she often asks them to consider the safety instructions that are given to airplane passengers by the crew before take-off. In the unlikely event of loss of cabin pressure, passengers travelling with young children are required to apply their own oxygen masks first *before* helping the children to apply theirs. This is by no means intended to imply that the young children are not the adult passenger's priority; quite on the contrary, it means that the adult needs to look after themselves before they are in a position to be able to help the children. Educational institutions function in a similar way; educators need to put on their own oxygen masks first, so they can be at their best when working with students.

> *'When it comes to the crazy, turbulence-filled flight that is teaching, we've got to put our own oxygen mask on first.'*
>
> Kelly Treleaven
> Teacher of English

🧠 Task 0.1: Prioritising your own wellbeing

Think about your answers to these questions:

1. How do you feel about prioritising your own wellbeing?

2. Do you experience any blocks and resistances towards doing this?

3. If there was a way to resolve the blocks and resistances, list the ways in which you would like to improve your own wellbeing.

Take a few minutes to reflect on your answers and consider what your life might look like if you put on your own oxygen mask first, before supporting the others in your organisation.

| Educator wellbeing: the challenges faced

In the vast majority of educational environments across the globe, educators lead busy lives (Day and Gu, 2010). Not only are they responsible for what is taking place in the classroom, but they also manage a number of personal and professional commitments outside of class. Balancing a personal and professional life can be daunting, and stress from the workplace can significantly affect an educator's personal life. A number of factors in the workplace have been associated with lower levels of professional wellbeing and high levels of stress. These often comprise excessive workload and workplace demands, difficult interpersonal relationships with colleagues and students, little support from senior management, and issues with one's professional role such as challenging responsibilities, the constant need to adjust to change, unclear career prospects and a lack of personal fulfilment. Language teachers are also likely to face additional challenges which are specific to language teaching, including teaching in their non-native language and coping with large classes. Practical ideas to work with these issues are presented in the chapters that follow. For now, let's meet some fictional educators from around the globe, composites of real teachers at different stages in their career, to illustrate the demands of the profession and how it can affect wellbeing.

Vinicius, an early-career teacher from Brazil

*Vinicius has been qualified as an English teacher for two years. He works at a lower secondary school (*Ensino fundamental*) in Brazil with students aged 6–14. His lifelong dream was to become a teacher, inspired by his many positive experiences during his own education. However, as time goes on, he is finding the role increasingly demanding. His classes are scheduled back to back, and there is little time to get to know the students or his colleagues. There are a couple of classes of*

students which he has begun to anticipate with dread. These classes do not seem to be interested in learning the subject and several of the students can be disobedient – talking during the class, throwing paper around the room and ignoring his requests to focus on their work. Vinicius struggles to control his frustration with these students and on a couple of occasions, he has ended up shouting back. Some of the more defiant students have walked out of the class in rebellion. Vinicius has asked for help with student behaviour from his line manager, but the manager seems overloaded and has not provided any support. He is too embarrassed to discuss it with any of his more experienced colleagues.

Vinicius is feeling tired. He works long hours each evening, preparing his lessons for the next day and is finding that he struggles to have time to catch up with friends and family. The daily experiences of the teaching role he had so looked forward to are quite different to what he expected while he was training. He does not understand why his students seem reluctant to learn and is disappointed by the slow progress he seems to make with them. He feels isolated at the school, unvalued and unsupported. Overall, he feels like he is failing in his role and reluctantly, he has started to think that teaching is not the right profession for him. He has begun to consider other careers he could pursue.

The experience of Vinicius is not unusual for an **early-career teacher**. Research examining why teachers of working age leave the profession has identified that early-career teachers (defined as teachers within first five years after training) are often the group most at risk of leaving (Guarino, Santibañez and Daley, 2006). Although rates of attrition in this group vary internationally, they can be as high as 40% in some countries (Ingersoll, 2003). **Teacher attrition** is a serious problem: there is a shortage of teachers globally (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). Whilst most education systems are focused on recruiting more teachers, there are obvious advantages in improving retention of qualified teachers: saving the financial costs of recruitment and training whilst retaining experience and knowledge within the teaching profession (Ingersoll, 2003).

Vinicius's struggle to motivate and discipline some of his students is a common experience for beginning teachers (Ingersoll and Smith, 2003). **Classroom management capability** is one of the hardest skills for a teacher to master, and the degree to which a teacher feels confident in classroom management skills, such as managing behaviour and keeping students on task, is strongly related to the symptoms of **burnout** (Aloe, Amo and Shanahan, 2014; Betoret, 2009). Vinicius is very aware of his difficulties in this area and is already in a state of anticipatory stress before each of these problematic classes. States of **stress** make individuals more reactive in the moment, with fight-or-flight responses coming from the emotional centres of the brain. In a state of fight or flight, teachers like Vinicius will respond reactively and harshly to challenging students, resulting in a downward spiral of deteriorating classroom relationships, increasing problems with classroom management and

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further issues with **challenging student behaviour** (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Success in the classroom is based on a delicate balance of trust and respect between teacher and student; Vinicius is losing this balance.

As an insightful individual, Vinicius is aware of his struggles and has asked for help from others. Unfortunately, he feels unsupported by his line manager, who is experiencing her own stress and does not have time to adequately address his needs. The quality of support that early-career teachers receive from managers is crucial to their success, and not receiving adequate support is one of the main reasons they struggle (Buchanan et al., 2013), demonstrating the central link between the wellbeing of educational managers and teachers. Exacerbating this, the nature of the school day, along with his position at the bottom of the professional hierarchy, inhibits Vinicius from seeking help from his teaching colleagues in the department. The long working hours prevent him from talking through some of these issues with friends and family too. A high percentage of early-career teachers report working more hours than experienced colleagues and longer hours than they expected prior to the role (Goddard and Goddard, 2006). Vinicius is feeling isolated, with low levels of social support, undermining his self-esteem and preventing him from thriving in the classroom (Dussault et al., 1999).

A combination of any of these challenges may result in early-career teachers like Vinicius either leaving the individual school (being a **'mover'**) or leaving the profession entirely (a **'leaver'**). This is a huge shame; we believe supporting early-career teachers to cope with the demands at this stage in their career can prevent talented and dedicated individuals from leaving the profession. In Chapters 1 and 2, we will help you to understand how the internal coping resources of teachers can be increased with an understanding of how our minds work and **self-compassion**. Furthermore, in Chapter 3 we will discuss how building **compassionate school cultures** increases the external resources available to the beginning teacher, nurturing their development through collaborative and supportive relationships. In Chapter 4, we will also present strategies for how educational managers can cultivate teacher wellbeing within the classroom to tackle challenges related to classroom management, which are similar to the difficulties Vinicius is facing in his current position.

Natalia, a mid-career teacher from Spain

Natalia has been a qualified teacher for 15 years. She works as a French and English teacher in a local secondary school in Spain three days a week, and then teaches English on several evenings in a private language school for older students. Natalia became a teacher to make a positive difference to the lives of young people. She is a very caring person who is sensitive to the emotional needs of others. She is aware of the increasing mental health problems in her students and has noticed a palpable increase in anxiety in her classroom, especially related to assessments. She knows that the academic performance of her students will directly influence their ability to

obtain employment or a place at university. In addition to this, educational reforms and high levels of external evaluation exert a high pressure on the school she works for. Therefore, she feels a huge responsibility, both to the young people in her classes and her colleagues, to perform highly and secure the best grades for her students.

Natalia has enjoyed her teaching career so far, finding the work satisfying and meaningful. However, recently she has been suffering from a lot of physical illness and has had to take some time off work. She regularly struggles to get out of bed in the morning on workdays and finds herself procrastinating over her planning and marking in the evening. She gets frustrated with herself over this and wishes she could be as efficient in her job as she used to be. She finds herself becoming irritable at home, arguing with her family over small things that didn't use to bother her. Again, this causes frustration and guilty feelings for bringing the pressures of her work home with her. She is aware that she is not performing at her best in the classroom too, feeling distant from her students and colleagues. She worries she may lose her contract at the private language school. She is starting to feel very stuck.

Natalia has made it through the early years of teaching, mastering many skills and reaping the personal rewards that the profession can bring. However, like many mid-career teachers, she is starting to develop the signs of **burnout**. Teaching can be a stressful profession at times and this brings positive and negative effects. Brief periods of stress are functional: the body and mind are designed to adapt to increased demands in the short term and hence short-term stress can increase performance, and productivity, and is often enjoyable (ask anyone who has been on a roller coaster!). In contrast, longer term, chronic stress can lead to behavioural, emotional and physical problems as the mind and body struggle to maintain the increased effort. As a result of prolonged workplace stress, teachers reach a state of burnout when they become exhausted, detached from the role and feel a lack of accomplishment (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001). Burnout is a very serious problem. It is found in the teaching profession worldwide (Kyriacou, 1987) and it typically persists over time, with the majority of individuals remaining in burnout for a year or more (Burke and Greenglass, 1991).

Natalia's current personal experience typifies burnout in the early stages. She is feeling emotionally strained and finding it difficult to cope. The emotional aspects of the teaching role are rarely discussed but have a considerable impact on teachers. Teaching involves a significant amount of **emotional regulation**, where the teacher is responsible for managing the emotions and behaviours of students, whilst at the same time managing their own feelings and behaviour in response to these (Brennan, 2006). This forms a positive, enjoyable part of the role when there is harmony between the teacher and the class. As any teacher knows, sharing joy, humour and awe with the class is a great part of the job. However, when the teacher is struggling with their own emotions, as Natalia currently is, it becomes draining. Teachers may additionally employ strategies such as 'surface acting' (putting on a display of appropriate

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emotion) to hide their real emotions from the class, which over time leads to emotional exhaustion (Näring, Vlerick and Van de Ven, 2012). The additional strains of the Global Education Reform Model (GERM) (see panel below), and the associated increase in standardisation, assessment and external accountability (Sahlberg, 2012; Berryhill, Linney and Fromewick, 2009), can also emotionally affect teachers. The ranking of individual schools and colleges against one another in league tables based on academic outcomes has resulted in competitive **'high stakes'** systems (Lipman, 2004). Natalia is feeling a heavy personal responsibility for the academic outcomes of her students and the performance of the whole school.

⌖ The Global Education Reform Model (Sahlberg, 2012)

The Global Education Reform Model (GERM) originated in Chile and the USA in the 1970s and is based on neoliberal political ideas of competition, free market economies and fewer state-run institutions. Although not a formal movement, the GERM has subsequently influenced the educational policies of many countries around the world.

The GERM is associated with the following:

1. Standardising curricula across schools, focusing on a core set of subjects that all students must study.

2. Standardised outcome measures, so that both individual students and schools can be compared against each other.

3. A focus on educational outcomes, with the publication of competitive school league tables.

4. Introducing the idea of a free market economy into education, so that learners have the freedom to choose which school they attend (achieving this through state-funded vouchers or the privatisation of education).

5. Performance-based accountability for both teachers and schools, with the success and failure of teachers and schools resting on the performance of their students on standardised assessments.

6. Increasing autonomy for schools to decide how they run, within the constraints of statements 1–5 above.

As Natalia's teaching role is affecting her at a personal level, she is struggling to prevent stresses at work from affecting her at home; the stressful effects of teaching have been shown to negatively affect personal relationships (Cinamon, Rich and Westman, 2007). If she continues in this state without support, her situation will worsen. At the extreme, burnout can progress to serious mental health problems such as depression and anxiety (Bauer et al., 2007). High levels of distress can lead to unhealthy coping behaviours; for example, UK teachers report coping with workplace stress by eating more and consuming alcohol (Education Support, n.d.). As a consequence, physical health is negatively impacted, both by maladaptive coping behaviours and by the long-term physical effects of chronic stress on the cardiovascular and immune system (Honkonen et al., 2006). Not surprisingly, burnout is associated with high rates of absenteeism (Borg and Riding, 1991) and consistent with this, Natalia is already experiencing an increase in the frequency of illness and time off, and this is making her worry about losing her private language teaching contract.

Poor Natalia is caught in a downward spiral. As the effects of burnout grow, they diminish her ability to perform her role. A core component of burnout is **depersonalisation**, where the teacher develops a cynical attitude, feels a distant attitude towards the people they are working with, and loses interest in their work (Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2006; Maslach et al., 1986). Teachers in a state of burnout are less engaged with their work and show reduced commitment to the organisation compared to their peers (Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2006). They also have lower levels of professional self-esteem, including less desire to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for the job (Khezerlou, 2017). Therefore, a vicious cycle emerges: as the teacher's emotional and physical state diminishes, their level of competence in the role starts to suffer, and this further erodes their confidence and worsens distress. Unchecked, this can have disastrous personal and professional consequences.

Teachers like Natalia can be helped with a focus on individual wellbeing and through increasing levels of **compassion** in the school community. In the chapters that follow, we discuss how educational managers can support teachers to break the vicious cycle by reflecting on their own wellbeing and setting **boundaries** between personal and professional life, so that the two are in a positive relationship (Eyre, 2016). In Chapter 1, we demonstrate the role of the **self-critic** (a nasty creature!) in driving the burnout cycle, and in the Training Toolkit, provide workshop exercises you can do with teachers to work with self-criticism and reduce some of its effects. Chapter 3 also discusses how to create **compassionate school communities**, which help by intervening and offering individuals support before they become stuck, with everyone in the school taking responsibility for each other. As you will discover, compassion is a joyful, whole-school commitment to flourishing and thriving.

Emily, a university English teacher in South Korea

Emily has been teaching English as a foreign language for 12 years, starting at a private language school in Turkey and then moving to university teaching positions, first in Thailand as an English teaching assistant and, for the last six months, in South Korea. She was born in Leeds, and after completing her undergraduate studies and CELTA qualification in the UK, she started applying for teaching jobs overseas. The excitement and enthusiasm she always had when taking up a new job and starting a new adventure in a new country were often combined with stress and nervousness about adjusting to the culture, understanding the education system and meeting the requirements of the post. While in Seoul, she met many fellow expats but also immersed herself in the local community by participating in social events organised by the university and socialising with her Korean colleagues outside of work too.

Emily enjoys teaching and life in Seoul but often worries about whether she is doing things the right – or expected – way, and interacting effectively with her hosts. She feels that she learns a lot from her colleagues, not just about teaching but also how the structures and hierarchy within the university work. Her students are another source of knowledge and have been very helpful with tips and advice on living in South Korea, especially when Emily had first arrived. However, Emily is also often confused about her role and uncertain about what her students are expected to achieve at each stage/year of study for their main degree, how this could be done through the materials and syllabus prescribed by the institution, and how the structure of the foundation year leads to the main degree course. In fact, Emily feels a lot of pressure and is stressed about getting her students to what is considered the 'right' level in English – which is quite a high level of proficiency – by the end of the foundation year, because she appreciates how important this achievement is for the students who want to be admitted to a full degree programme. For a degree programme students would need to meet the entry requirements related to English language proficiency. At times she also feels that students can see her stress and therefore may not trust her. As a newcomer, she wishes she had been assigned a mentor upon joining this university with whom to discuss these aspects in detail, as she does not want to overload her colleagues with questions.

Although Emily is new in her current position, she is no longer an early-career teacher but has experience of teaching English in two other countries and two school types. Her stresses are therefore different from those of a newly qualified teacher, despite being in a totally new environment and trying to get used to her new life. To some extent, her experience might share some of the characteristics of **culture shock** (Berry, 1994), as moving to a new country (in this case, for work) can be life-changing, requires adjusting to an unfamiliar environment, and is often accompanied by stress and disorientation. At times, stress can be increased by the fact that teachers do not necessarily speak the language of the country they have just moved to.

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Ward (1998) also suggests that cross-cultural adjustment includes both psychological and sociocultural dimensions, which are coupled with the expectations and stresses of a new job, new colleagues, new students, new leadership, new timetables, etc. These influence teacher wellbeing, especially at the initial stages of transition, which Emily is currently going through. In fact, international teachers might be expected to experience some form of culture shock, in varying degrees, once they go through the 'honeymoon stage', where moving to the new country is seen as an exciting new start (Roskell, 2013). This is followed by a stage of distress and then recovery and adjustment, which enable teachers to remain in the country and carry on with their jobs. Apart from the experience of culture shock, Emily is facing the pressure that many language teachers teaching foundational year courses at university level encounter. The primary source of stress in this case is related to teachers' efforts to get their students to a high level in English and help improve their academic skills, in order to prepare them as adequately as possible to join an undergraduate course and do well in it. Oftentimes, this stress comes from the teaching staff (e.g. lecturers and professors) on the main degree courses themselves!

Many English language teachers, whose first language is also English, get their first teaching jobs in an exciting new place overseas and continue to travel the world while teaching English at the same time. We believe that Emily's story resonates well with the experiences of many teachers and educational managers reading this book. Throughout its different chapters, we present vignettes from a number of teachers from all over the world, which reflect some of Emily's stresses but also highlight the importance of **mentoring** new staff, working closely with colleagues and as part of a healthy team, and finding coping mechanisms for minimising stress and increasing wellbeing. In Chapter 3, we also discuss a whole-school approach to teacher wellbeing, and how individualised strategies may not always work successfully if the whole school does not work together.

Sam, head of a language department in the UK

Sam started his career as a newly qualified teacher in languages ten years ago. He spent several years travelling the world, teaching English and French in both public and private sector schools. After returning to the UK, he had several moves of school, gaining management responsibilities as he went. Three years ago, he finally secured a role as Head of Modern Languages in a UK secondary school, where the students are aged 11–18. Sam became a teacher to empower young people through language acquisition and inspire them to travel the globe.

Sam enjoys responsibility but at times finds his senior management position lonely. He finds being caught between the demands of more senior leaders and expectations of the staff in his department a difficult balance. Recently there have been changes