

Reflecting on the Challenges Faced by Teachers in Azerbaijan: From Anxiety to “Active Hope”

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Reflecting critically on their practice can guide teachers' thoughts from impulsive reactions to a level where their actions are controlled (Farrell 2013). Reflective teachers are more aware of their thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes, which are important for their personal and professional well-being (Ullrich & Lutgendorf 2002). Reflecting on my past experiences has helped me to obtain insights that were there and waiting for me to dig deeper to find them. In this essay, I will try to answer questions that have arisen from my reflections in my journal about how self-awareness can be seen as a path to becoming mindful of internal and external stressors, the main threats to the teacher's well-being, and the ways teachers could be supported to cope with stress. Haydon, Leko, and Stevens (2018) argue that self-awareness about stressful thoughts helps teachers change their mindsets and effectively manage stressful situations.

In the initial part of this piece, I will reflect on my experience. In the next part, teacher well-being will be briefly defined because I aim to discuss stress as the main threat to teacher well-being, and Azerbaijani government policy and practice will also be reviewed. Next, the notion of stress and the main stressors for teachers' professional lives will be discussed. Finally, well-being interventions and other teacher support mechanisms, as well as international practice around teacher well-being, will be discussed in a section on implications for the future.

For this piece, I reviewed online search platforms such as the Azerbaijani government websites, NUsearch, and Google Scholar to define the relevant resources for this essay. I also employed the reading list for the module "Responding Mindfully to Challenging Behaviour," in which I participated in 2021 year, and the module's terms such as "teacher well-being," "stress," "stressors," and "mindfulness." Unfortunately, this issue is underresearched in Azerbaijan, and the government has no policy dedicated to teacher well-being. My main goal was to use what I had learned about local and international experience regarding the topic to answer research questions.

In this paper, I will discuss my past experiences, which will not only describe me but also make use of anecdotes told to me by family members and, in general, my colleagues in informal contexts (not for the purposes of a study). For ethical considerations, I will not include the names of the region and schools where the teachers who shared their thoughts with me.

PART I

A. Reflections on the past experiences through the lens of a former teacher

In 2021 year, I took a module entitled Responding Mindfully to Challenging Behaviour, which led me to reflect on my experiences of being a teacher in Azerbaijan and how the country might improve teachers' well-being. In one of the first sessions of that module, we were asked to draw our self-esteem tree, with the roots representing people who played significant roles in our lives and contributed enormously to our personal and professional development; the tree trunk representing critical events in our lives; and the fruits representing our accomplishments. After completing the task, we were supposed to share our insights with our peers. However, when I started to reflect on my achievements, I discovered that my attitude toward success had changed, which was a very unfamiliar insight. I suddenly no longer accepted

as success my two university diplomas, my working experience at desired organizations back in my country, and having a chance to travel frequently. I did not know why. After the session, I contemplated what had happened and came to the following answer which I wrote in my journal at the time:

I lost my mother last year. I do not get her acknowledgements anymore. That is why now I am not interested in chasing success. I found out that I had been trying to please her all my life by achieving something that she did not. She was my mother and my teacher. I know how it feels to look at your teacher and wait for her praise. I think everyone needs to be acknowledged by their beloved ones. Unfortunately, sorrow prevents us from enjoying life, pushing us to ruminate on the past.

Cox (1993) admits that experiencing stress can change one's feelings, thoughts, and behavior and may even impact the individual's physiological functions (*Reflective journal, 10.02.2022*).

Next, we discussed punitive and restorative justice, and I felt the topic captured me. After watching a clip from the movie *Le Chorus*, I remembered my school days. When I was in primary school, we had a teacher who could be described as an abusive person. I was a slightly undisciplined child since, at the time, I used to feel great energy inside myself, which made me unmanageable. It was as if I could not sit for 45 minutes without moving or talking to my friend. Our teacher once approached me and hit me on the head. I was just eight, it felt like everyone was laughing at me, and I was extremely upset. After the lesson, it was my turn to sweep the class. I swept the trash under the teacher's table and went home. It was my first rebellious act at school, and I will never forget it. The following day, the teacher easily recognized that I had done it. He locked me in the wardrobe where we usually kept our shoes. I cried and asked for help, and my classmates ran and called my mother. She was teaching at that school, and

she removed me from the wardrobe and took me with her.

I still feel that huge embarrassment in my stomach and the pain of being humiliated in that way. Because of the cultural deference given to teachers my parents did not believe the teacher had transgressed against me with his punishment and did not take official action against him. I did not go to school for some time and hated my teacher. Several times, I caught myself thinking about what makes a person behave with such cruelty. Is it appropriate for a person without compassion to become a teacher or to choose other professions requiring care? Maybe he just wanted other students to see what misbehaving would result in for them, and he would not show any compassion, even to his colleague's child. He wanted all of us to see how powerful he was and to respect him. (Reflective journal, 17.02.2022)

When I started to work as a teacher, I discovered a "truth," which I had never thought about before, and that might affect a teacher's attitude to their students. Unfortunately, sometimes the mental state of teachers is irrelevant to teach a child. However, they do teach and create lifelong trauma in the little brains of their students. Teachers who demonstrate abusive behavior in the classroom may be showing signs of stress, and this may be because their interpersonal functioning is affected by stress (Kokkinos, C.M., Panayiotou, G. and Davazoglou 2005; Skinner and Beers 2016).

During my working years, I also encountered teachers who did not feel empathy. I kept thinking about why teachers might not behave in a friendly manner with their students. Sometimes I thought it was the effect of school culture that teachers must be disciplined and students must obey their commands. If they do not listen to the teacher, then the teacher is not "good enough" to teach, and students do not respect them.

From the beginning of the course, we were told to keep journaling, reflect on the topics, and write with awareness.

As former teacher-trainers, we had often written our reflections about training days, and this was not a new experience for me. During the training in the regions, my reflections were mostly about teachers' well-being issues. I found out that teachers' self-awareness in the regions was extremely low; they were unaware of their inner strengths and could not imagine themselves as changemakers. Cloninger (2006) describes the stages of self-awareness along the path to well-being. When people lack self-awareness, they act based on their immediate likes and dislikes. This is commonly referred to as an immature, "child-like" ego state. Next is the cognitive, ordinary adult – the "adult" ego state. The person at this level of awareness functions well when everything is good but may often experience problems under stressful conditions, such as anxiety, anger, and disgust. The next state of awareness is the meta-cognitive balanced adult or the "parental" ego state. This is an adult who notices all his subconscious thoughts and considers others' thoughts. The maximal stage of the self-awareness is called "contemplation," and it is described by effortless calm, impartial awareness, a "state of well-being," and "soulfulness" (Cloninger 2006).

Most teachers in training deeply feared the school's leadership and the Ministry of Education. It could affect their relationship with their students and their teaching quality. According to Hinds et al. (2015), teachers experiencing stress have a lower tolerance for misbehavior and tend to use strict discipline more often.

I tried to understand that their living conditions in remote rural areas were not the same as their colleagues who lived in the capital. Still, they were educated and should not have to be under the pressure of school administration to develop community and other issues to affect their relationship with students. I was interested in emotional intelligence and coaching then, and it was obvious that they were not aware of their personal insights apart from their professional ones. They did not think about themselves, their goals, and their

desires, which is why they faced hardships during the implementation of a tool, called the *Wheel of Life*, widely implemented in trainings to raise the awareness of a person regarding their life balance. The *Wheel of Life* is a wheel describing nine parts of your life, like work and career, family and friends, partner and love, financial situation, health, personal growth, community, spirituality, and fun. You have to assess each part of your life on a scale from 1 (very low) to 10 (very high) and draw borders on the numbers that describe your feelings accurately. After that, you will get the results that show you which parts of your life lack attention and need to get additional care. According to my observations when using this tool in various trainings, teachers often have difficulty with it because they haven't been trained to assess their lives in this manner.

I was concerned that they did not feel enthusiastic about their profession. Most did their job within the state policy framework but did not feel teaching to be their calling. I tried to motivate them, but the limited training days were not enough to remove the barriers they had in their minds. A teacher is not just a person who passes knowledge; they should guide their students through their learning journey. Teachers' enthusiasm seems to be positively related to their students' motivational and emotional experiences (Kunter 2013).

When you are stressed about something you cannot control, and with all this pressure from inside, you fail to assess everything happening in your environment properly. You are trying to narrow your communication circle to get less irritated. When I was stressed due to my mother's illness, I felt depressed and angry at the world. Unfortunately, my inner volcano affected my life outside the home, especially my professional life. My psychological condition was such that I sometimes was going through panic attacks. Then I learned about meditation and some calming techniques that I could use to calm myself, accept situations that I was not able to change, and grow compassion inside me (Reflective Journal,

Metta meditation practice, 24.03.2022).

To earn some currency for this reflection, I formulated some questions I would like to address further in the paper.

- 1. What affects teachers' well-being and their attitude towards their job?*
- 2. How can the government expect teachers with poor well-being to teach students notions of self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence when teachers themselves lack them?*
- 3. How can we support teachers so that they cultivate love and compassion towards themselves and their students?*

Below follows a discussion on the definition of well-being and major stressors as threats to teacher job satisfaction.

B. Review of the literature

I. What affects teachers' well-being: threats to professional fulfilment

Before participating in coaching classes, I never considered well-being as a complex approach. I merely thought that if one's mood is good, it means a person enjoys well-being.

What is the meaning of "well-being"? Does the definition of the word differ from one country to another? Why is it important in one education system and ignored in another? Maslow's hierarchy of needs could be applied to countries as well. Generally, Maslow identified five levels of human needs, including physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization, and classified them into the first and second-degree orders. The individual meets first-degree order requirements, but second-degree order needs are met mainly through external variables such as pay and labour contracts. The first-degree order requirements include physiological and safety requirements, whereas the second-degree order needs are social, self-esteem, and self-actualization. When these needs

are not met, the result is lower productivity. *Just like people, states also possess values and impose them on their populace. In a developing country, income may be valued above other needs; in a country with a stable economy, citizens' needs focus mainly on the higher levels of Maslow's pyramid.*

Well-being can be subjective and difficult to operationalize because subjectivity makes it fragile and easily manipulated. *The UK government defines well-being as how we are as individuals, as communities, and as a nation, and it measures 43 aspects, including anxiety levels, life satisfaction, and happiness levels. What well-being is and is not can be heavily influenced by how systems define relational and singular concepts of "self" and "other," as well as how it changes over time. This makes measurement untrustworthy; it might have no clarifying meaning at all. It can also be argued that well-being is socially and culturally constructed and thus has shifting "contextual and situational meaning" (O'Brien and Guiney 2021, p.4). People are said to be in stable well-being when they have the necessary psychological, social, and physical resources to face relevant challenges. When people face more challenges and do not have adequate resources, their well-being suffers, and vice versa (Dodge et al. 2012).*

Diganayeva (2021) claims that Azerbaijani teachers define *well-being* in general as "comfort", "health", and "happiness", and when they were asked to specify their answers in terms of their profession, they connected well-being to a higher income, a supportive school environment, and psychological health. They find low salaries, excessive workload, unsupportive staff and parents, and additional workloads, such as assignments and writing reports after working hours, equally stressful. Classroom size has also been mentioned as a stress factor, which approximately consists of 30 students; in the central cities, this number may go up higher. School psychological services are not appropriately provided; for example, Azerbaijani schools on average have two

psychologists per 2500 students. Compared to the UK, neither safeguard teams nor teaching assistant positions are available in Azerbaijani schools, and all these factors increase teachers' workload. Moreover, teaching vacancy positions are to be filled by two-stage state teacher exams, and this creates additional stress for the teaching profession.

Education is one of the three occupations that feel highly stressed at work (NEU 2019). As reported by Kabat-Zinn, Selye popularised the term "stress" in the 1950s and defined the concept of stress as "the nonspecific response of the organism to any pressure or demand" (2001). Kabat-Zinn (2013) defines *stress* as a total catastrophe and equivalent to pressure. Since stress originates from different sources, we all have our own variants. Consequently, we have different ways of coping with stress. Internal and external reasons might cause stress. Concerning internal sources, they might be lack of love for teaching, and teacher self-efficacy (Klassen & Chiu 2010), while external stressors include poor working environments, poor relationships with school leadership, students, and parents (Kebby 2018), lack of autonomy, and lack of a supportive whole school culture (Brady & Wilson 2021). Several studies have been conducted to determine which factors influence teacher stress levels and teacher experience. Langford and Crawford (2022) found that less experienced teachers are more likely to be stressed compared to experienced ones. Olagunju et al. (2020) found that the type of school in which teachers are employed (special, mainstream, private, public) has a significant effect. Special and public-school teachers are more likely to experience stress than are mainstream and private teachers. Female teachers are more likely to feel stressed due to a perceived lack of self-efficacy in the classroom, and monthly income and marital status (Klassen və Çiu 2010; Erdiller və Doğan 2015). In some countries, one more stress factor is political pressure on teachers under oppressive regimes, such as involving teachers in state election committees. For example, approximately 88.5%

of teachers in government schools in India report that they feel political pressure from state and local governments (Kaur 2016). Similar cases are experienced in Azerbaijan as well. According to the ODIHR EOM, voters—mostly female teachers and kindergarten personnel—were brought by buses from their villages to the rally, and some attendees were not allowed to leave (OSCE 2020, p.14). After every election (parliamentary, presidential), because of teachers' involvement in elections, the community, public figures, activists from opposition parties, and political movements often accuse teachers collectively of election falsification, an accusation, which negatively affects teacher's reputation in the community.

National Education Union (UK 2019) listed the lack of professional development opportunities among the teachers' job satisfaction factors. Professional development is essential for self-actualization, e.g., getting an opportunity to fulfil all of your potential, which Maslow listed as a first-degree order human motivation. Kheirkhah & Nejad-Irani (2018) revealed a significant relationship between teachers' needs and their productivity levels. It creates a place for the assumption that a teacher's motivation is directly proportional to his or her productivity and job satisfaction.

According to the UK National Educational Union (2019), when teachers were surveyed in 2017, 81% considered leaving the teaching profession because of the following stressors. The main stressors were reported as excessive workload and working hours; Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) inspections; challenging behavior of students; assessment targets; non-supportive leadership; threat of performance-related pay; lack of professional development opportunities; low school budget; and reduction of support staff were listed among the causes of teacher stress. The UK Well-being Index report shows that teacher stress has gradually increased over the 2014-2019 period, and the report included COVID-19 pandemic influence in the list of main stress reasons (Education Support 2019). 77% of teachers had

experienced behavioral, psychological, and physical symptoms due to their work (LBU 2018). Considering the abovementioned challenges, 54% of teachers have considered leaving the education sector due to threats to their well-being (Education Support 2019). In line with what Olagunju et al. (2020) claim, teacher stress has reached an alarming stage worldwide. In various studies of teacher stress across the world, the percentage of teachers self-reporting stress is higher than in other professions, e.g., in the UK, it is around 19–29% (Titheradge et al. 2018), in the US it is 30% (von Der Embse et al. 2015), in Norway it is 10–22% (Nerdum et al. 2016, cited in Olagunju et al. 2020).

From 2012 to 2018, the number of teachers leaving teaching increased significantly. 20% of teachers are experiencing occupational stress, while in other professions, this number is 13%. In addition, 41% of teachers are dissatisfied with their leisure time; they work 47–50 hours per week, with 21 hours devoted to planning and paperwork (NEU 2019). Approximately 84–90% of teachers in the UK think that OFSTED is creating additional pressure and workload for them (NTU 2013). The Department for Education and OFSTED released a set of guidelines and suggestions to assist school leaders in addressing the reasons for excessive workloads in schools and encouraging teachers to have a better work-life balance. Teacher working hours have decreased since 2016, and additional such reforms may be considered for improvement (NEU 2019).

1. Important issues are again overlooked: policy and practice regarding the well-being of teachers in Azerbaijan

Teachers serve as key practitioners for educational policy changes, which means that all changes to curriculum, pedagogy, and school administration are implemented with the help of teachers. However, even for the sake of ticking a box, state policymakers do not talk about it. In matters of education, the government behaves like a business person who wants to

produce high-quality goods but does not care about the state of the machinery required to do it. Throughout my years of teaching and working as a teacher trainer in various regions, I encountered dozens of emotionally exhausted teachers. Some of them were aware of their psychological conditions; others were not. Everyone places demands on teachers: school management, students, parents, inspections, and mentors, and, unfortunately, they receive no support to meet these many demands.

Before setting out discussions about policy and practice regarding teacher well-being, a brief overview of the Azerbaijani education system would be appropriate. Azerbaijan has a centralized education system. The Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for organizing education in all educational entities. All school directors and teachers are appointed by the MOE via school director and teacher exams. School directors and teachers are responsible for organizing the education in their school according to the state standards and guidelines and instructions of the MOE. The government finances public schools, those schools have no authority over anything; even simple decisions, e.g., launching projects on environmental issues, should be discussed with the relevant central authority before implementation. All the workload projects are to be implemented, and the MOE strictly defines topics for weekly discussions organized by homeroom teachers. According to the data given by the Statistical Committee, there are 151.725 educators involved in mainstream schools; approximately 81% of them are women (SSCAR 2020). Within the Azerbaijani sociocultural context considering the professional and household responsibilities of women teachers, especially in rural places, it makes it hard for them to create time for themselves for self-care. The average monthly salary is approximately 633 AZN (around £290) for 72 hours of teaching. Planning of lessons and assessment of homework is not included. Before, it was around 500 AZN. Thus, to contribute to the well-being of teachers, the Azerbaijani government

increased their salaries by approximately 20%, depending on their work experience, education level, and achievements (FED 2021).

Increased salaries usually serve as a significant motivation to improve work performance (Kongcharoen et al. 2020). However, teachers' salaries still appear to be lower than the country's average salary (729 AZN) (Marja 2021). Generally, teachers work after school by preparing students for exams for additional income. In the context of the continuously increasing workload, a lower-than-average salary in the country might serve as an essential external reason to influence teachers' well-being (Erdiller & Dogan 2015).

The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan recently amended the Law on Regulations for the Organization of Psychological Services in Educational Institutions and added some current notions trending in global education:

1. to provide necessary advice to parents or other legal representatives of children,

2. the administration of the educational institution, and pedagogical staff through group and individual counseling on the role and importance of psychological services in the development and spiritual education of students within the framework of psychological counselling,

3. to develop tools to form the personality of students, emotional education, as well as the peculiarities of child psychology,

4. to improve self-awareness, adequate assessment, adaptation to the social environment, as well as to overcome the crisis (Cabinet 2020).

Unfortunately, no article in amendment was dedicated to the psychological well-being of educators, as the regulation applies only to students. The question arises: how can a teacher who has low level of self-awareness or self-esteem

teach or guide a student in the field? Teachers' self-awareness might be defined by how they perceive themselves while interacting with students, and after they notice their current flow pattern, they start to change their position from being dependent on "*being brought along by events*" to independent where they make "*informed decisions based on their reflections about their future practice*" (Farrell 2013, p.469). Teachers start learning to control their attitude towards unexpected situations; they do not react but respond to the events.

As for physical well-being, teachers have to submit to a physical exam report once a year according to the Ministry of Education's instructions to ensure that they have no contagious diseases in order to protect the physical well-being of the students. However, teachers are not required to be psychologically examined. It seems that the psychological well-being of teachers is not important to the government as long as teachers implement their responsibilities. Azerbaijani regulations do not allow teachers paid time off for mental health. If you encounter an emotional disaster, e.g., the loss of a family member, you are allowed three days off work. However, if you lack the mental strength to begin the work, you must consult a physician and demonstrate that you are not qualified to teach in this mental state. Developed educational policy papers are designed to improve only educators' professional skills; nothing addresses teachers' emotional and psychological well-being. Unfortunately, no data on improving teachers' emotional and psychological well-being in Azerbaijan was found. Moreover, since the government overlooked the topic, no projects have been implemented by government bodies, nor have local and international educational organizations residing in Azerbaijan addressed teachers' emotional and psychological problems.

We discussed some of the main challenges that Azerbaijani teachers face in terms of well-being above, and now we will discuss the implications for practice.

PART II

Implications for practice: “from anxiety to active hope.”

Stress affects the quality of teaching and the tolerance degree for adverse student behavior (Kokkinos, C.M., Panayiotou, G., and Davazoglou 2005). Nelson (2009) agrees that people who have a sense of positive well-being are happier, more committed, and have more compassion, empathy, and gratitude. Teachers with a positive mindset, good health, and higher job satisfaction would teach more effectively as key individuals for student achievement (ESP 2020). Edinger and Edinger (2018) found a positive relationship between teachers' job satisfaction, administrative support, and collegial trust. Fox and Wilson (2009) stress the significance of this relationship, particularly for early-career teachers. I think “trust” is a keyword in this context.

We discussed stressors for teachers, and since some appear to be external, the government should pay attention to those issues to increase job satisfaction levels among teachers. Nowadays, some of the salient spiritual programs convince communities that we are responsible for the feelings that we experience. According to such programs, we must be aware of our stress and try to regulate it, but very few people talk about state responsibilities as stress creators. The mentioned stressors that teachers voiced might be considered a result of the mindful look of educators at state requirements, curriculum, and leadership within the school environment. As a human being, a teacher should not be blamed for the stressors in her life. In the Azerbaijani case, as an initial step for the improvement of the emotional and psychological well-being of teachers, relevant policy papers should be designed.

Next, the government should ensure the creation of a supportive whole-school culture (Brady & Wilson 2021) to boost the holistic well-being of educators. Some issues, however, cannot be changed because they serve as the system's backbone,

such as OFSTED in the United Kingdom and relevant education quality commissions in Azerbaijan. For example, OFSTED continuously releases guidelines and tries to refute accusations of educational organizations defining OFSTED as one of the main stressors in their reports. However, teachers still find inspections stressful. For now, inspections seem to be the only way to ensure effective education for students, and at this stage, teachers should demonstrate a balanced approach. The state policy should focus on mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) to improve teachers' self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence and to help them build mindful approaches toward the issues that create stress. Although some schools in the UK provide well-being activities, most teachers are unsatisfied with the "fun activity" after working hours. Some of them would like to dedicate this time to their family. Furthermore, teachers think that the school administration organizes these activities for "ticking the well-being box of OFSTED," and they are not genuinely interested in understanding staff needs (Brady & Wilson, 2021).

It can be concluded that the well-being intervention field is in its formative stage. Studies show that several interventions can improve the well-being of teachers by targeting diminishing stress, such as Positive Psychology Interventions (PPI), interventions focused on teacher's professional competencies, such as voice technique (adapting voice use to the sound environment) or emotional competence, inquiry-based stress reduction, mindfulness, and counselling (Dreer and Gouase 2021, p.9). Several countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain, were inspired by mindfulness programs for teachers based on an Australian project called "Brite: Building Resilience in Teacher Education," which launched studies and an online mindfulness module to cultivate personal and professional resilience in teachers (Mansfield & Correia 2021). In addition, mindfulness has been approved as a therapeutic intervention for anxiety and depression (Khoury et

al., 2013).

As we were taught in the Responding Mindfully to Challenging Behaviour module, mindfulness is not about “toxic positivity” towards everything, but vice-versa; it is thinking reflectively about everything you are concerned about. As Cuceloglu (2021) said, when we experience concern, we need to ask ourselves, “Why do I feel this?” or “What does this feeling try to tell me?” Reflection is a potent tool to boost the learning process; however, it cannot be considered a “spontaneous activity” for everyone, including teachers, and requires dedicated time and effort to make reflections (Gelter 2003, p.337). According to studies, journaling about stressful events or experiences such as trauma can help to improve mental and physical health. For example, a recent study compared three groups. the first group focused merely on describing emotions related to trauma or stressors; the second group focused on describing media events; and the third group focused on writing cognitions and emotions related to trauma or stressors. As a result, the third group became more aware of the positive aspects of stress (Ullrich & Lutgendorf 2002). According to Weare (2012), mindfulness practices improve the quality of thoughts and feelings and can improve mental, emotional, social, and physical health. Thus, it has a positive contribution to well-being.

At this point, I would love to share my learning points, which I believe would be helpful to my colleagues in living a more fulfilled personal and professional life and being more resilient to internal and external stressors. Reflective journaling helped strengthen my habits by noticing my thought flow and recognising the patterns. These moments were crucial for me in learning the truth behind the advertised knowledge about mindfulness. I learned how to be mindful of mindfulness itself and wish to pass this knowledge on to all my colleagues. It would be helpful for them to keep journaling by writing with an awareness of self and others, to practice breathing techniques and meditation, and use online resources

about mindfulness to learn as a self-learning practice.

In terms of a systematic approach to reducing teacher stress, school leaders could provide MBIs to their staff and cultivate a school culture that promotes a mindful approach to each other, students, and parents. I believe that a mindful teacher will be self-aware of the internal and external processes occurring within and outside of them. This will increase their confidence and boost their self-esteem, which will help to improve their well-being. Furthermore, if someone has self-love, he/she will undoubtedly have love and compassion towards all living things, including their immediate surroundings, colleagues, students, and parents. Thus, I think teachers need to cultivate self-love and self-compassion to cope with stress first.

If human flourishing is the purpose of education, then compassion is its fundamental motivation. We need to connect and develop this deep motivation as teachers in order to foster through our relationships with pupils and colleagues a compassionate and caring culture. ” (Rodrigo Brito, RMCB lecture slides, 24.03.2022)

Conclusion

According to Moon (2006), journaling is not merely about writing your experience but “processing it further.” As a valuable tool for personal and professional development, journaling connects reflective thinking and writing, and this activity promotes self-awareness and self-esteem. I enjoyed the trip to my past, being able to reflect on my experience. Being able to reflect creates a fantastic chance to see the actual wood, not just a tree, and I believe that experience helps our ego grow from an immature to a meta-cognitive, even contemplative, one. This practice seeds love and compassion for our past, present, and even future experiences. We practice not ruminating on the past but reflecting on it and accepting it; not anticipating the future but focusing our

thoughts on today.

Teacher well-being requires a holistic approach, and in several countries, this notion was evaluated from different angles, such as emotional, spiritual, physical, and psychological well-being. According to a policy and practice review in Azerbaijan, the government cares only about the physical well-being of teachers since teachers have to go through some compulsory health examinations and submit the report to school authorities. Policy papers inform us merely about the importance of students' physical, spiritual, emotional, and psychological health, and no project or program has been implemented to improve teachers' well-being. The Azerbaijani government seems to ignore issues related to teachers' well-being. However, research shows that students' attainment is strongly connected to teacher well-being.

The main stressors as a threat to teacher well-being are defined as internal and external ones. Internal stressors include: not loving teaching and perceived lack of teacher self-efficacy (Klassen & Chiu 2010). External stressors include excessive workload and working hours, OFSTED inspections, challenging behaviour of students (Axup & Gersch 2008), assessment targets, non-supportive leadership, the threat of performance-related pay, lack of professional development opportunities, low school budget, reduction of support staff, lack of autonomy and lack of a supportive whole school culture (Brady & Wilson 2021; NEU 2019; Kebby 2018). For the abovementioned reasons, the number of teachers not satisfied with teaching has significantly increased.

Teacher well-being issues are salient in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, and some European countries, where several studies are being conducted and various programs and projects are being implemented. Well-being interventions target reducing stress and improving teacher well-being. Some are mainly based on positive psychology and are called PPI, wise interventions.

Others focus on competencies related to a teacher's professional life, such as voice technique (adapting voice use to the sound environment) or emotional competence, inquiry-based stress reduction, mindfulness, and counselling. Mindfulness has been shown to improve coping with anxiety and depression as a therapeutic intervention.

To conclude, it would be helpful for teachers to keep journaling, reflect on their internal and external world issues in order to have control over the threats to their well-being, go through online related sources to learn more, and master some basic breathing techniques to use for calming themselves. Finally, state policy should be developed in terms of a systematic approach to improving teacher well-being; school administrations might offer MBIs for their staff and cultivate a culture supporting a mindful approach towards each other, students, and parents.

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