Overview

Teacher stress is high, in fact teachers exhibit higher levels of stress than any other profession (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). Whether this be day to day stress of required tasks or institutional stress factors, teachers are struggling (Curry & O'Brien, 2012). As teachers battle exhaustion, so does their ability to cope and remain buoyant to the increasing social and emotional demands placed on them day in and day out which directly impacts wellbeing (Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem, 2012). Wellbeing in schools is typically centered on meeting student needs yet with the extensive data on the incidence of teacher stress, it seems only reasonable that teacher wellbeing should be addressed as well (Roffey, 2012). As mentioned, there is currently extensive research of teacher stress and burnout, yet the research surrounding teacher wellbeing remains a relatively new field (Parker et al., 2012). The one thing we do know is that in order for teachers to teach wellbeing to students, they themselves must be well (McCallum & Price, 2010).This review of the literature will aim to explain the common causes of teacher stress, the consequences of teacher stress and current interventions that have been shown to minimize teacher stress and support wellbeing.

The Nature of Teacher Stress

 "In Australia, as in other countries, the incidence of teacher stress and burnout is a cause for serious concern" (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p. 399). This has been highlighted in a study conducted in Western Australia by Howard & Johnson (2004) of all education sectors (i.e., primary, secondary, university and further education), where it was found "10–20% of the 2138 respondents were experiencing psychological distress and a further 9% were suffering severe psychological distress" (p.400). The Independent Education Union in Victoria and New South Wales (IEU, 1996) found this stress manifested itself in terms of irritability at home (59%), irritability in classroom (55%), general anxiety (64%) and feelings of powerlessness (45%) (Howard & Johnson, 2004). The long term consequence of this is beginning teachers leaving teaching within the first 5 years of entering the profession (Pillay, Goddard, & Wilss, 2005). In fact Goddard and O'Brien (2003) found burnout increased significantly over an eight month period when they followed 123 beginning teachers in Australia using the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The beginning teachers stated they felt "the effort they were putting in to perform their professional duties was greater than the rewards they achieved" (Pillay et al., 2005, p. 24). This trend in attrition from the teaching profession is said to be a major factor in predicting the possible teacher shortages Australia faces in the near future placing further pressure on existing teachers within the system (Pillay et al., 2005).

Another significant factor that influences teacher stress is the amount of emotional energy needed to effectively engage in an estimated thousand interpersonal contacts a day (Holmes, 2005). The quality of these interactions has a direct impact on whether a teacher feels supported, valued and recognized or undermined and alone. It is for this reason that "teachers need assistance in developing their self-regulatory resources for coping and being resilient" (Roeser et al., 2013, p. 789). We also know effective teaching is strongly influenced by the relationships we form with students (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013), therefore we must learn how to maintain awareness of our emotions and how we manage them in times of stress. In a bigger picture, this means developing explicit structures that enable emotional literacy, to build positive relationships where teachers feel supported and part of a professional learning community (Roffey, 2012).

Defining key terms

In order to fully understand the nature and causes of teacher stress, as well as strategies to support wellbeing we must define key terms. The Oxford dictionary defines stress as "something that causes a state of strain or tension" (Dictionary, 2002), however it must be noted that stress and burnout are two separate issues (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Teacher stress is described as "unpleasant feelings that may involve anger, tension, frustration or depression and are generally perceived as constituting a threat to self-esteem or wellbeing (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p. 400). Burnout on the other hand occurs "when individuals endure prolonged periods of high levels of stress to include both physical and mental exhaustion" (Pillay et al., 2005, p. 24).

When looking at defining wellbeing, it must be acknowledged that growing research continues to argue over one single definition. The International Journal of Wellbeing released a paper in 2012 discussing the complexities of defining wellbeing and summarized with their own definition; "Wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge" (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012, p. 222). Given the challenges teachers face, this definition of wellbeing seems to best align with the types of resources teachers need to also minimize stress and support wellbeing. Perhaps another layer to this is the link between social and emotional competencies and burnout and how this too impacts wellbeing (Jones et al., 2013). Either way, "a notion of wellbeing that encompasses all the dimensions (social, emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual), which is referred to as 'whole person' learning, is needed." (McCallum & Price, 2010, p. 23).

Causes of Teacher Stress

The causes of teacher stress are very complex and varied and could best be described from an ecological perspective where individual factors link with school factors and school factors link with systemic factors. However, to simplify this, a national snapshot of the US, (Richards, 2012), found the top three sources of teacher stress to be; feeling overcommitted with too many duties or responsibilities, having to meet the demands of needy students, and having little or no down time to relax. The results of these stressors led to feelings of exhaustion, deflation, overwhelm and negativity. In an Australian study by Howard & Johnson (2004), the ten main causes of teacher stress where found to be "teaching students who lack motivation; maintaining discipline; time pressures and workload; coping with change; being evaluated by others; dealings with colleagues; self esteem and status issues; problems dealing with administration/management; role conflict and ambiguity and poor working conditions" (p.400). The bottom line is, these ongoing stressors have a direct impact on job satisfaction with a "lack of congruence between expectations for one's career and the actual reality of the work" (Curry & O'Brien, 2012, p. 179). As schools increasingly become places of social and political inclusivity, the unrealistic expectations placed on teachers to meet these needs rises (McCallum & Price, 2010). This coupled with the changing nature of the work where teachers are required to do more with less resources simple adds to the challenges they face (McCallum & Price, 2012).

Consequences of Teacher Stress

The consequences of stress vary between physical, emotional, social and psychological manifestations. However in a specific education context, stress has been shown to reduce beginning teachers' sense of accomplishment when surveyed across a 12 month period (Pillay et al., 2005). This had a direct impact on their self-esteem, self-efficacy and resulted in ineffective cognitive patterns. The resulting factor is, when teachers are stressed, their interactions with students are affected. Watt and Richardson (2008) from Monash University highlight this further where the results of their studies show;

> *"Teachers worn down by their work exhibit reduced work goals, lower responsibility for work outcomes, lower idealism, heightened emotional detachment, work alienation, and self-interest. When teachers become burned out, or worn out, their students achievement outcomes are likely to suffer because they are more concerned with their personal survival."(Richardson, Watt, & Devos, 2013, p. 231)*

A study in the UK went one step further to show that teacher wellbeing had a direct impact on students SAT scores with a variance of 8%. This means teacher stress and wellbeing has a direct impact on student outcomes (Briner & Dewberry, 2007). Explained further, Watt and Richardson (2013) discuss how "teachers who are engaged, committed, and enjoy their work, provide greater

autonomy support to their students" (p.271), encouraging intrinsic motivation, self-regulated learning and higher achievement.

Also, when teachers become stressed, they judge themselves against what a 'good' teacher should be adding further pressure to themselves. If they are unable to perform at their own perceived image of perfectionism, then threats appear to their self-worth which may further reduce self-efficacy (Parker & Martin, 2009). In a study of 2,569 Norweign teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014), self-efficacy was shown to be positively related to job satisfaction and negatively with burnout. Self-efficacy was also linked to intrinsic motivation and mastery expectations. If teachers have high self-belief and the skills to move towards mastery, then perhaps personal learning and development in relation to managing stress can occur (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Interventions and Strategies to Promote Teacher Wellbeing

Interventions that address teacher stress are beginning to feature alongside student wellbeing programs (Jones et al., 2013). A major contributor to this could be the rise of evidence based interventions coming from the field of Positive Psychology. Positive Psychology is a field of inquiry concerned with what makes communities and individuals thrive (Waters & White, 2015). Instead of exploring a deficit model of what is not working, it looks at what is working. Martin Seligman, founder of Positive psychology has described a PERMA Model of wellbeing that represents five pillars for planning positive psychology interventions (Waters & White, 2015). These include positive emotions, engagement (flow), relationships, meaning and achievement. Within these lie interventions that explore gratitude, character strengths and virtues, support networks, goal setting and celebrating achievements. These all require a discourse in emotional literacy, growth mindsets and social and emotional competence. Teachers themselves are asking for more support where in a Wellbeing Australia Survey, teachers said they wanted to feel acknowledged, valued and feel a sense of connection with others (Roffey, 2008). Here it can be seen that they too recognize the link between well teachers and well students yet time is still not prioritized for learning these new interventions.

One of the most significant applications of positive psychology in education is occurring at Geelong Grammar school in Australia. Here Seligman and his team worked with all levels of the school community for two years to 'Live, Teach and Embed' wellbeing into the curriculum for staff, students and parents (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009).The fundamental goal was to promote flourishing. Flourishing itself is defined as "the presence of emotional wellbeing or the presence of positive feelings about ones self and life; social wellbeing or feeling connected to others and valued by the community, and physical wellbeing that focuses on functioning well" (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013, p. 149). Comprehensive programs were put in place for both teaching staff and non-

teaching staff with opportunities to reflect, discuss and plan for ways to support their own wellbeing, with promising intentions (Norrish et al., 2013).

In fact, in a study of 300 teachers in the UK, those who were able to manage their work-life balance and display resilience to maintain their wellbeing, were more effective teachers based on measuring SAT scores (Bajorek, Gulliford, & Taskila, 2014). More and more studies are highlighting the positive predictors of teacher effectiveness. One such study was conducted by Duckworth, Quinn, and Seligman (2009), where they measured 390 teachers at the beginning and end of a school year in terms of their optimistic explanatory style, grit and life satisfaction, against student's academic gains. The study concluded that teachers do indeed make a difference and in fact can be taught positive interventions to boost wellbeing (Duckworth et al., 2009). Another study of 430 teachers across the Catholic and Independent sector in Australia found that goal orientation was a major predictor in coping strategies of teacher stress(Parker & Martin, 2009). When teachers have the cognitive resources to set clear and effective goals of what they want as opposed to what they don't want, they regain a sense of autonomy which builds self-efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Another program that has been effective in supporting teachers to be resilient is the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) professional development program (Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2011). The three areas of this program include teacher training in 'emotion skills instruction', teaching 'mindfulness based interventions' and promoting empathy and compassion through 'listening and caring practices'. The program consisted of several one day workshops with intersession phone coaching over a period of a few months. A pre and post questionnaire encompassing various wellbeing scales, efficacy scales and mindfulness scales where used to measure the programs impact. The results of this pilot study showed increases in wellbeing, a reduction in time related stress but little change in motivation and efficacy. The study concluded with recognizing the significance time plays in teacher professional and personal development and how crucial prioritizing time for teacher self-development is. If schools are to improve the academic, social and emotional outcomes of students, then teachers must be given time for their own development (Jennings et al., 2011). This program along with others such as RULER approach developed by Yale Emotional Intelligence Centre (Dr Marc Brackett), My Teacher Partner (University Virginia) and SMART: Stress Management and Resilience Training (Dr Amit Sood), all "aim to build educators mindfulness, job satisfaction, feelings about students and efficacy for regulating emotions" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 64)

A common link with these programs and that of positive psychology interventions seems to be that of mindfulness (Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012). Research into the influence mindfulness has on stress is beginning to grow, highlighting the importance of self-awareness and self-regulation as a tool for coping a regulating job stress (Roeser et al., 2013). A study at Portland University sampled 113 school teachers to determine the feasibility of an eight week mindfulness program as professional development. The results of the program were very positive where teachers showed reduced stress

and greater self-compassion (Roeser et al., 2013). In fact, in a summation of the literature of mindfulness in education, "mindfulness training offers a new generation of professional teacher development" (Albrecht et al., 2012, p. 7).

Conclusion

Teacher stress continues to be of concern in schools across the globe, however recognising what makes teachers flourish with interventions to support their wellbeing from a strengths model is relatively new. As with any new area, research is limited and more needs to be done to specifically link interventions with teacher wellbeing practices. Positive psychology offers one such avenue to do this with its growing body of evidence, however more is needed with specific reference to teacher wellbeing. Perhaps the biggest challenge to this is schools lack of urgency in prioritising time for professional development in the area of teacher wellbeing or lack of understanding about current interventions. However, it is promising to know that a rising number of positive psychology interventions centred on building teachers own social and emotional competencies can actually influence their ability to manage common stressors and better support students in the process. While interest in teacher wellbeing grows, student wellbeing remains at the forefront of funding and time allocation, leaving teachers to manage every day challenges with their own resources. If we are to truly support young people in their wellbeing we must prioritise teacher wellbeing. This can best be encapsulated from a teacher commenting on the importance of teacher wellbeing in a Wellbeing Australia Survey;

> 'Developing the positive wellbeing of staff has made a huge difference. When teaching staff feel appreciated and empowered, they are much more likely to show patience and empathy for their students; to go the 'extra mile' for the students in their care. They are also more likely to share and work with others in order to support their students and promote wellbeing." (Roffey, 2012, p. 15)

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