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## **Trauma-Informed Teacher Wellbeing: Teacher Reflections within Trauma-Informed Positive Education**

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*Abstract: For the last 15 years, teacher wellbeing has been a priority area of exploration within education and positive psychology literatures. However, increasing teacher wellbeing for those who educate students impacted by trauma has yet to be comprehensively explored despite repeated exposure of teachers to child trauma and their experiences of associated negative effects such as secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatisation, compassion fatigue and burnout. This study follows teachers' understandings and reflections upon their own wellbeing after learning the literatures supporting trauma-informed positive education. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used as the methodological approach to represent teachers (N = 18) in order to privilege the language, voices and experiences of participants. Results yielded a new set of domains of trauma-informed teacher wellbeing to assist teachers to increase their own wellbeing when working with students. The likely upsurge in students and teachers across the world experiencing trauma symptoms (primary and vicarious) arising from the COVID-19 global pandemic makes this research timely and relevant.*

### **Teacher Illbeing and Wellbeing in Trauma-Affected Classrooms**

In Australia, approximately 50% of teachers will leave the profession in the next five years, and 45% of teachers will not be teaching in ten years' time (Willett et al., 2014). Up to 25% of teachers attribute their reasons for leaving to problems with disruptive student behaviour (i.e., student defiance, student violence, student apathy, poor administrative support, role-ambiguity to support whole-school approaches to student management; Antoniou et al., 2013; Betoret, 2009). Considering the possible reasons that students struggle to successfully engage in school, Hughes and colleagues (2017) suggest there is a strong predictive relationship between experiencing adversity as a child and experiencing social and behavioural problems along with other detrimental impacts to physical and mental health later in life.

For over 30 years, the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), defined as the stressful events or circumstances that children may experience in childhood, have had profoundly devastating impacts on health, social functioning and education attainment (Felitti et al., 1998). Current research on the frequency of ACEs and Australian children is limited; and recent reports estimate 72% of Australian children have experienced at least one ACE (Sahle et al., 2020). In some children, the inability to contend with the negative impacts of ACEs manifests in classrooms as students' inability to successfully learn and can appear to

teachers as heightened, off-task, resistant, aggressive and/or withdrawn behaviours (Downey, 2007).

The continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are compounding these concerns, and emerging research suggests that vulnerable students struggling to engage with learning are now further disengaged (Sonnemann & Goss, 2020). Specific to low-income schools, COVID-19 increased the equity gap and increased barriers throughout communities for struggling students to meaningfully continue their educational journeys (i.e., poor access to on-line learning systems, inadequate technology both at school and home, breakdown of school/home communication, and limited capacity of families able to engage with school staff; Flack et al., 2020). Vulnerable students have been made more vulnerable due to the aforementioned systemic concerns (i.e., loss of consistent school connectedness), and recent research suggests that psychological distress including anxiety and depression has increased during COVID-19 (Drane et al., 2020).

Investigating teacher exposure to students impacted by trauma is still emerging which means that most teachers are not yet trained in trauma-informed practices nor understand how trauma's secondary effects impact on teacher wellbeing (Berger, 2019; Berger et al., 2016). Further, in attempts to mitigate the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, teachers are struggling with maintaining their own wellbeing while contending with new stressors from their own emotional management, development of adequate skills for distance education, and uncertain trajectory of their own professional futures (Alves et al., 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020). To support teachers in this quickly changing professional milieu, the aim of this study was to qualitatively explore the ways in which teachers defined and increased wellbeing for themselves within trauma-affected classrooms.

According to Cartwright and Cooper (2005), supports to mitigate professional burnout should be targeted at three levels as primary intervention, secondary intervention and tertiary intervention. Primary interventions focus on stress reduction by adjusting the workplace environment. Secondary interventions focus on professional capability (increasing skills and knowledge) with aims to provide proactive strategies and coping mechanisms that help better manage workplace adversity. Tertiary interventions target professionals who directly require rehabilitation from stress-related health concerns such as burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

Burnout is defined as the negative impacts of occupational workplace stressors, prolonged chronic response to emotional and job stress, and insufficient recovery (MacDonald, Kelly, & Christen, 2019; Maslach, Shaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Teacher burnout leads to detachment, alienation, cynicism, apathy, absenteeism, and the decision to leave the profession (Dicke et al., 2018; Rojas-Flores et al., 2015). Secondary traumatic stress (STS) is defined as the debilitating impacts to a professional's wellbeing as the result of exposure to an individual impacted by trauma with the same physical and emotional impacts as burnout (Stamm, 1995). Teachers have higher rates of burnout and STS than other related professions (Abraham-Cook, 2012; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020); attribute their stressors in part to ineffective student discipline management and inadequate school leadership support (Ingersoll & May, 2012); and report high levels of STS despite reporting job satisfaction at similar levels to other helping professions (Borntrager et al., 2012).

Within the workplace, intervention approaches to decrease professional burnout and STS can be considered as primary interventions when they focus on adjusting the workplace environment (Cartwright & Cooper, 2005). For example, interventions seeking to mitigate burnout and support teachers to better support students change environmental factors in schools such as decreasing class size and student-teacher ratio, aligning consistent behaviour management processes across the school, clarifying professional role ambiguity, increasing teacher voice in school policy and increasing frequency of performance feedback (Alisic et

al., 2012; Garcia-Carmona et al., 2018). These interventions are often structural and involve policy decisions made by school leaders for teachers to adhere to or follow.

An example of a secondary intervention is training that seeks to help teachers understand vicarious traumatisation (the enduring psychological consequences for teachers exposed to students' dysregulation; Halevi & Idisis, 2018), and compassion fatigue (the natural behaviours and emotions which occur as a result of knowing about the stressors of the person one is trying to help and the stress from helping the traumatised-person; Hopwood, Schutte, & Loi, 2018), particularly when processing graphic and painful narratives of their students resulting in negative coping behaviours (Benuto et al., 2018). Approaches like these can be viewed as secondary interventions because they aim to provide coping mechanisms to address adversity (Cartwright & Cooper, 2005). The current study utilizes a secondary intervention approach but adds something new to the literature by going beyond equipping teachers to cope with negative factors (i.e., trauma and stress) to also build their capability for wellbeing.

### **Reducing Stress is not the Same as Improving Wellbeing**

Kern and colleagues (2014, p. 501) assert that, "positive functioning is not simply surviving stress; it also entails thriving physically, mentally, socially, and professionally." Predicated on Keyes' (2002) two-factor theory, which posits that increasing mental health requires more than addressing deficits in mental health, the contention within this argument is that struggling teachers must be supported through interventions that help them redress burnout and STS, *and* also be offered opportunities that deliberately show them how to foster their own use of psychological strengths and identification of their other internal assets and resources for wellbeing (i.e., emotional intelligence, character strengths, growth mindset, and resilient self-talk).

Counterintuitively, one does not develop one's strengths by addressing one's weaknesses (Magyar-Moe, 2009). This means that secondary interventions for teachers (focusing on teacher capability by providing them with proactive skills and strategies) need to support teachers to address both their distress (e.g. burnout and STS) *and* to build up their positive psychological assets. The additional benefit of designing teacher interventions that foster wellbeing is that when teachers are doing well in workplace wellbeing, they are more committed to their work and more satisfied in their health and other personal wellbeing domains (Kern et al., 2014).

In a recent systematic review of school-wide interventions seeking to increase teacher resilience within bioecological frameworks, Kangas-Dick and O'Shaughnessy (2020) suggest that successful interventions provide all three levels of support to enhance wellbeing for teachers. Primary supports include adjusting the school environment by providing increased social and behavioural supports and building positive school climate. Secondary supports include teaching teachers strategies to reduce stress and encourage resilient behaviours. Tertiary supports detail how school leaders and mental health professionals can directly support staff members who are individually struggling in their own workplace resilience. However, these authors argue there is a "dearth of experimental studies" (p. 142) exploring how teachers build resilience at an interpersonal level in order to build collaborative, collegial professional support networks.

In prior exploration of teacher wellbeing, teachers have been the subject of studies tracking their wellbeing through their pre-service training (Turner et al., 2012), followed during their learning of wellbeing frameworks such as PERMA (Seligman, 2018) and SEARCH (Waters, 2019; Waters & Loton, 2019), trained in positive education capacities

(Waters, *in press*), explored for the relationship between teacher wellbeing practice and student learning (Turner & Theilking, 2019), investigated for correlation of wellbeing indicators (i.e., optimistic explanatory style, grit and life satisfaction) to determine teacher effectiveness (Duckworth et al., 2009), and considered for wellbeing benefits within the context of healthy student-teacher relationships (Aldrup et al., 2018; Spilt et al., 2011).

Intervention approaches with teachers include gratitude practices (e.g., recording daily gratitude reflections in journals. See Chan, 2013; Emmons & McCullough, 2003), stress management programs that build up a teachers' coping strategies, resilience, optimism and hope (Siu et al., 2014), mobile apps to learn wellbeing skills (i.e., learning how to use digital storytelling to explore the connection between thoughts and emotions; Mayhills, 2016) and mindfulness-based stress reduction (Hwang et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2015). Teacher wellbeing has also been a beneficial focus within professional learning communities where teachers work together to implement a shared goal for professional practice improvement (Webb et al., 2009).

Although these interventions have been shown to increase teacher wellbeing, they have not accounted for the specific professional responsibilities of teaching students who are impacted by trauma, have complex unmet learning needs, and are often unable to learn without effective teacher engagement strategies. Nor have they accounted for the need to assist teachers to combat their own burnout and STS that can result from working with students impacted by trauma. The present study contends that interventions designed to assist teachers who are working in trauma-affected classrooms should be based on the two-factor theory (Keyes, 2002) and should aim to provide teachers with skills, knowledge and mindsets that assist them to both reduce their distress *and* to increase their strengths and wellbeing. We also contend that interventions designed to assist teachers working in trauma-affected classrooms should have a dual-purpose to (1) help teachers address their own distress/wellbeing and (2) provide teachers with strategies that allow them to support their students when students become heightened, escalated and/or dysregulated in class.

### **Learning the Literatures of Trauma-Informed Positive Education**

As stated above, while there have been several trauma-informed approaches designed to help teachers who work with students impacted by trauma to reduce illbeing, more opportunities are required to increase wellbeing for these teachers. To address this gap, Brunzell and colleagues (Brunzell et al., 2015; Brunzell et al., 2016b) developed an evidence-informed systematic literature study based on the two-factor theory of wellbeing (Keyes, 2002) for teachers working in trauma-affected classrooms named *trauma-informed positive education* (TIPE). Learning TIPE has already been shown to assist teachers to increase self-regulatory abilities in students (Brunzell et al., 2016a) and to increase relational capacity and psychological resources for wellbeing in students (Brunzell et al., 2019).

The current study was the next step to better understand how teaching with knowledge of TIPE may impact teacher wellbeing. The question guiding this study was: *In your role as a teacher, what changes have you noticed within your own wellbeing when reflecting upon your new learning arising from TIPE?* This study provides viable new pathways to support and educate teachers to both successfully mitigate the negative impacts of exposure to childhood adversity while simultaneously assisting teachers to capitalise on what is *right* in their work and to nurture their own workplace wellbeing.

## Method

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996/2012) was the qualitative methodology employed throughout the study. The use of IPA guided the epistemology, reflexivity, design, data collection, analytical strategies and writing up of data. An IPA methodology prioritises and privileges the subjective lived experiences of the study's participants as told by the perspectives of teachers themselves and assumes that when people have significant experiences, they reflect on that significance. As such, IPA data centres upon participants' own reflections (Smith et al., 2009).

To note, this study took place before the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this study's methodology and analysis features pre-pandemic data, when considering the need to support teacher wellbeing in the emerging new-normal, this study offers helpful directions for research and practice support for teachers.

## Participants

Researchers selected two schools located in Australia: one school close to a metropolitan centre and one school in a rural location. Selection criteria was shared with community principals for interest in participating in the study. Although it was beyond the scope of this study to specifically assess the frequency of student trauma within each school community, principals requested participation in the study due to specific concerns when supporting children involved within child protection services and living in out-of-home care arrangements. School reports confirming this were supplied from school staff including wellbeing teams, community psychological support agencies, and child protective services case managers working closely with each school.

'Southern Primary School'<sup>1</sup> is a small primary school (Foundation to Year 6) situated in a rural community 150 kilometres from a large metropolitan city. Composing this school's student cohort, 24% were of Aboriginal descent, 30% were known to the state government department responsible for child protection services, and 72% of families were in the state's lowest quartile for socio-economic status.<sup>2</sup> This school had 160 enrolled students and 10.7 full time employees on staff. The sample in this study included nine teachers (seven women and two men, ages 22–51), and they had between one and 17 years of teaching experience averaging 12.2 years at this school. This group of nine classroom teachers represented all teaching staff for all year levels within this small school.

'Western College'<sup>3</sup> is a Foundation to Year 12 school in an outer suburb. At the time, Western College contained 2,040 students. More than 40% of families were in the state's lowest quartile for socio-economic status of which 42% of students had a language background other than English. The school had 113.6 full time employees, including this study's participating nine teachers (six women and three men, ages 22–32) having between one and six years of teaching experience and averaged 1.8 years at this school. The teachers were classroom teachers (Years 5 - 8). Teachers taught single subjects to multi-level classes throughout the year.

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<sup>1</sup> All names, including school and participant names, have been given pseudonyms to protect participant identities as outlined in the study's ethical agreements.

<sup>2</sup> The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) for this school is 883 (ACARA, 2020). An ICSEA is a scale which allows comparison among schools with similar student cohorts. Schools with ICSEA scores of 800 to 999 are considered to be lower in educational advantage than the national Australian average.

<sup>3</sup> The ICSEA for this school is 967 (ACARA, 2020).

### **Group Interviews**

In total, 18-teachers learned about the literatures supporting TIPE across eight days spread over 11-months (the complete school year). The data contained within this current report was specifically collected in the final session. In this final session teachers were divided into groups of four to five participants and during interviews asked to reflect on their journey throughout the year and asked about possible impacts on their own wellbeing.

Group interviews employed fixed questions that were adapted as the interview continued to account for flexible outcomes (Howell, 2013). Group interviews were preferred for data collection for potentially stimulating participants through group recall and shared reflection (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The choices of IPA methodology and group interviews were deemed most appropriate to maintain focus on the utterances, voices, and reflections of the teachers themselves.

### **Participant Journals**

Teachers were also prompted to write in individual journals about the actions they had taken and their reflection on those actions throughout their learning of TIPE. Journals were employed to help elucidate individual and unique stories that may not have arisen within group interviews. Journals were collected and analysed in the same ways as the group interview transcripts.

### **Data Analysis**

The following IPA guidelines were used to analyse the data (Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2009). First, each transcript was read and re-read (while listening to the group interview recording) to become familiar with the given text to allow all emergent themes to arise. Next, a close line-by-line analysis was completed for emergent themes. Then, the process of abstraction developed what became super-ordinate themes. The naming of these themes came directly from the text (voices of participants). Finally, master themes were named for use in discussion and theorising. IPA prompts researchers to both search for patterns of themes within the individual and can also strive to balance the convergence and divergence of themes within a group (Smith, 1996). In accordance with IPA, participants' own words were used by researchers in naming themes in order to track the development and control of language throughout the study.

### **Results**

The results of this study emerged when teachers were specifically asked: *What changes have you noticed within your own wellbeing when reflecting upon your new learning arising from TIPE?* In keeping with this study's IPA methodology, it is important to recall that the data provided by teachers detailed in this study were their own responses when prompted to consider their own wellbeing and self-perceived shifts within their own wellbeing. In summary, this study provides a unique contribution by exploring how these particular cohorts came to define wellbeing for themselves when prompted by the researchers. Table 1 represents teacher responses at the end of their learning of TIPE.

<i>Master theme</i>	<b>Trauma-informed teacher wellbeing</b>				
<i>Super-ordinate themes</i>	Classroom coping	Increasing self-regulation	Increasing relational abilities	Increasing psychological resources	Expanding professional capacity
<i>Emergent themes</i>	Noticing trauma-exposure responses  Wellbeing is first about us  Professional maturity  My own self-care  Overly complex demands	Increasing regulatory abilities  Increasing understandings of my own stress responses  I am more calm  I am more conscious and aware	Improving relationships  Understanding healthy relationships  My ability to be a role-model  Stronger workplace relationships  Stronger personal relationships	Positive emotions  Confidence  Gratitude  Character strengths  Values of social action  Resilience  Growth mindset	Higher aspirations  Articulating my practice to others  My own developmental journey

**Table 1. Themes for trauma-informed teacher wellbeing**

Although all themes in Table 1 were deemed worthy of analysis for discussion and future recommendations, due to limitations of this report, only three super-ordinate themes are explored in depth. The three themes were chosen due to highest frequency across participants and had the most direct relevance to novel theorising on teacher wellbeing: (1) increasing self-regulation, (2) increasing relational abilities and (3) increasing psychological resources.

### **Increasing Self-Regulation**

When prompted to discuss how their own wellbeing changed by the end of their year of TIPE, teachers discussed strategies to enhance opportunities to increase their own self-regulation. Additionally, they discussed the impacts of thinking, reflecting, and actioning self-regulation outside of the classroom in their personal lives.

### ***Increasing Regulatory Abilities***

Maddie, in her first year of teaching, taught a combined class of Years 5 and 6. She described herself as full of passion and urgently wanted to improve her ability to be an effective teacher. She lamented that her university teacher training course did not teach her how to “calm down”. Rather, she said her teaching course recommend that she “take control.” However, left to her own intuition, she began the year by yelling every day.

When learning TIPE, she set her own goals to breathe before correcting students; co-regulating students by first focussing on her own body’s signs of escalation; and remembering to model self-regulated responses to student’s initial resistance when prompted to return to learning tasks. She also went to great lengths throughout the year to provide



ample opportunities for her students to self-regulate using sensory strategies like fidget-tools; providing short movement breaks throughout her lessons; and incorporate movement in other transition routines throughout the day.

By the end of the year, she reflected after learning TIPE:

*So now, I'm going into this a lot calmer. And you know what? Screaming at them is not going to make a difference. That's how I've changed. I used to walk into my classroom and start by screaming at them. I used to walk into the classroom and say, if that kid's mucking up, I'm probably just going to yell at them because that's the only thing I know. But now, learning all of these students are different, what can I do to stay calm? How can I stay calm and still get the message across? So that's how I've changed. I don't go in guns blazing anymore.*

This quote suggests Maddie had begun to understand that she needed to increase her own regulatory abilities when faced with the myriad of classroom challenges. She attributed her new understandings both to better knowledge of her students and their backgrounds as well as the content she was learning through TIPE. She also voiced a desire to “get the message across” and the group discussed that the “message” was several learning aims beyond academic goals (i.e., healthy relational strategies for group work, listening in classroom discussions, etc.). Her comment, “I don't go in guns blazing anymore,” was shared by a number of teachers who initially believed that “taking control” of the classroom meant dominating the room from the start of the lesson. The teachers agreed that loud and escalated teacher behaviour most likely had the opposite effect to what the teachers desired in students.

Although this process of building awareness was a new one, she valued the opportunity to talk about it with her colleagues. When prompted to consider their definitions and their own shifts in wellbeing, some participants shared that TIPE validated ways of working that were already a part of their own personal process, others voiced the value of having their new learning as a guidepost for coaching and mentoring scenarios which created consistent mechanisms of support across the school for teachers.

### **Increasing Relational Abilities**

Students impacted by trauma and adversity may challenge and often disrupt relational bonds with those around them as a maladaptive self-protection strategy (Schore & Schore, 2008). Teachers reported that their own wellbeing increased due to their increased ability to manage the relational ruptures of their students (i.e., students arguing with the teacher or their peers instead of learning) which had improved as a result of TIPE. Two emergent themes are summarised in this discussion: understanding healthy relationships and teachers' own ability to be a role-model.

### ***Understanding Healthy Relationships***

All teachers reported increased understandings of what contributed to healthy relationships as a result of TIPE. They felt their ability to form and maintain strong relationships was enhanced by deepening their knowledge of relational attachment (Schore & Schore, 2008). All teachers discussed their prior intuitive sense of building relationships but articulated that trauma-informed concepts (such as co-regulatory attachment and unconditional positive regard) assisted them in articulating their understandings. The teachers collectively discussed how to maintain a vision for the child's wholeness while still focussing

on areas of their students' unmet learning needs. By doing this, teachers reflected that it was easier to maintain focus on the relationships with students instead of letting relational ruptures replace unconditional positive regard. Teachers also theorised that strong relationships could hold students steady when they become escalated in the challenge of learning. Here, Leyla and Lisa, who shared the same classroom spaces, discussed their new understandings of relational practice.

Leyla began:

*I think [TIPE] made me more aware of things that can impact how relationships develop and how attachments can form, and it makes me think about things that I wouldn't necessarily have thought of previously with the relationships I have.*

Lisa replied:

*I was sort of on the same way as [Leyla]. On days that I don't connect to students, I feel like a robot. I go in there, I teach what I'm doing and then I just leave, and like there'd be nothing there, I'd be brain dead basically in the classroom because if I don't care about them then I don't care about the content.*

Lisa continued by sharing that deliberate relational moves in her classroom (i.e., greeting each student with a personalised short conversation, deliberately asking students about their emotions that day, being aware of physical positioning with students, and being more aware of relational interactions when giving corrective feedback) had created a more "comfortable" atmosphere. She proposed, "Our kids, if they don't feel comfortable, it's like fight or flight—and my kids this year, it's flight. They will literally run away from the challenge." The group then discussed the possible connections between strong relationships and the de-escalated stress response needed for effective learning.

### ***Ability to be a Role-model***

When prompted to consider their own wellbeing, being a role-model took on priority importance for these cohorts of teachers. Group discussion moved to positioning role-modelling through attachment theory as a cornerstone of effective classroom relationships with students. The teachers saw that when they modelled and mirrored their thoughts, feelings and behaviours to their students it allowed these children to eventually take-up the developmental and relational responsibilities for themselves. Aside from the benefit to the students, all teachers agreed that role-modelling served to increase their own sense of wellbeing at work. When asked at the end of the year, Gloria also spoke of her responsibilities as a relational role-model for students:

*I think this work this year has changed my attitude that you are very much a reflection of the people who model things in front of you, and I think it probably didn't occur to me until we started doing this and looking at myself and my teaching and those sort of things.*

In response, Joseph replied:

*I would say also, thinking back on what they're saying is we're also role models in our own personal lives... the way we actually deal with conflict, the way we actually deal with positive reactions, the way we deal with our excitement and stuff like that, how we actually do that.*

Initiating, forming and sustaining relationships when met with resistance was a challenging task for all teachers. The five different emergent themes each described facets of relationships for teachers contending with stressors both inside and outside their workplace. As stated in the example above, the teachers shared that increasing relational abilities required many opportunities to remain focused on attachment-based strategies.

### **Increasing Psychological Resources**

The third theme explored in this section is increasing psychological resources which refers to increasing wellbeing through the acquisition of new language, cognition and social skills (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Two super-ordinate themes, character strengths and growth mindset, will be briefly elaborated below.

#### *Character Strengths*

Teachers learned about character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The teachers were quick to analyse their own *signature character strengths* (i.e., strengths that matter most to the individual and are central to one's identity), compare strengths to members of their team to understand how their strengths complimented one another, and design ways for their students to identify and practice their own character strengths. In the interviews, teachers reported on ways they were using their own character strengths within their professional and personal lives and stated how deliberately practicing their own character strengths increased their sense of wellbeing.

Jackie told a unique story about how her students helped her identify and practice some of her own strengths where she asked her students to select a person in the class and identify some of their signature character strengths. She was quite surprised to find that one of her students selected *her* and her strength of courage. She continued to explain that she never saw herself as having courage, but the student's work made her stop and reflect on what she might have been modelling for them without her conscious attention. Jackie continued:

*I don't find myself a very courageous person in a lot of things that I do, but according to my kids, I always come across as being very brave and someone that they can look up to. It's completely different when someone else comes to you and says, "Actually, you're courageous," and you go, "What do you mean?" So, it's good to see that my strengths within myself have actually grown, and that [the students] can actually pick those strengths in other people now.*

She believed this was a significant shift for her because she described herself as a timid person, scared to drive places by herself and nervous to be in locations without knowing anyone. She disclosed that she had never shared her fears outside her family, but for the following month she kept thinking about herself as a courageous person. At the end of their year together, she proudly accounted to the group all the places she's gone by herself as a result of this positive student feedback. The teachers consensually believed that they had been operating from a strengths-base before this study, but they recognised the relevance and application of a consistent language and approach to character strengths extending far beyond the classroom walls.

#### *Growth Mindset*

Increasing psychological resources for wellbeing includes a focus on growth mindset to assist students to question and combat the deeply internalised self-derived theories about the potential of their own intelligence and their abilities to learn being either fixed or having the potential to grow (Dweck, 2007). Considering the complex unmet learning needs within some students, who may have spent a lifetime developing maladaptive compensatory behaviours in school because they have been told (implicitly or explicitly) that they are too damaged to behave or to succeed, teachers identified a fixed mindset (i.e., wherein one

believes their own qualities will not change despite effort) in many of their students. One way in which the teachers countered fixed mindsets was by introducing the concept of a growth mindset in their classrooms.

A new and unexpected contribution was hearing the ways in which teachers were applying the classroom strategies to *themselves* thereby increasing their own psychological resources for wellbeing. For example, as Jenny started explicitly creating growth mindset reflection opportunities for her high school classes at the end of each lesson (e.g., through use of an ‘effort rubric’ and facilitating student peer-to-peer coaching), she soon found that she too started reflecting with a growth mindset when encountering major personal goals during the year:

*In my personal life and life outside classroom, I'm going through some significant big events in my life, including buying our first house. It's been important to maintain a growth mindset and thoughts to have a positive experience and still get through my life. Training for a half-ironman (triathlon race) means that I am needing to stay in a growth mindset to get through long training sessions—and I have noticed the changes in my thoughts during these sessions too.*

This data suggests that with these personal applications from professional development, new learning for teachers effectively helped them meet their own needs as trauma-affected professionals taking care of both the students and their own wellbeing in trauma-impacted environments.

## Discussion

This study found that teachers working with students impacted by trauma can be shown how to reduce illbeing and to increase their wellbeing when learning the literatures supporting TIPE. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), five super-ordinate themes suggested how teachers came to define wellbeing for themselves and perceived increases in their own capabilities to shift their own wellbeing. It is important to privilege the perspectives of teachers for how they came to define wellbeing, and these results suggest promising pathways to support teachers in the areas they deemed important to their own wellbeing. Teachers reported increases within wellbeing domains of (1) workplace coping, (2) increasing self-regulation for themselves, (3) increasing relational abilities for themselves, (4) increasing psychological resources, and (5) expanding professional capacity. Taken together, the five themes accumulate to show growth in *trauma-informed teacher wellbeing* for the sample of teachers.

It is useful to recall that teachers educating students impacted by trauma are at risk of being trauma-affected professionals given that they may experience the vicarious effects of secondary traumatic stress when continuously exposed to the dysregulation of their students (Bloom, 1995). The current data confirmed the need for teachers to have ongoing opportunities to learn about and identify possible presentations of secondary traumatic stressors in themselves and in their schools as trauma-affected systems (Bloom, 1995) to protect and to nurture their own wellbeing.

To recall Cartwright and Cooper's (2005) identification of *secondary interventions* to support professionals (interventions which focus on equipping teachers with proactive strategies for coping and managing workplace adversity), the results of the present study suggest that TIPE facilitated teachers' own creation of trauma-informed secondary interventions. Teachers reported that as a result of their participation in TIPE, they believed

they had greater ability to cope with workplace stressors. They noticed they had developed more self-regulated and relational responses to student and classroom adversity.

However, beyond just survival (and protective) strategies for workplace stressors, TIPE facilitated teachers' creation of strategies for their own wellbeing and positive functioning (Kern et al., 2014). They were able to positively shift some of their own mindsets by developing psychological resources such as positive emotion, gratitude, character strengths, resilience and growth mindset. Beyond their classrooms, teachers believed their strategies started in their personal lives and flowed back into their work, as most teachers reported stronger relationships in their homes and with other family members because of their involvement in the study.

When contrasting TIPE to other teacher interventions, TIPE has several advantages: 1) it addresses the two-factors of illbeing and wellbeing, 2) it has a dual-purpose of teachers and students, 3) it has an intentional aim of educating teachers about the impacts of trauma on student learning, and 4) it was shown to shift teachers' mindsets from managing workplace stress towards increasing positive functioning through wellbeing strategies. Further, given that TIPE was designed as a pedagogical intervention, it also provided applicable wellbeing strategies to teachers and accounted for the practical concerns of trauma-impacted, resource poor workplaces wherein employees find themselves rationing resources of time and energy (van Dernoort Lipsky, 2009). In summary, the results suggest that TIPE makes good use of professional learning time by simultaneously offering effective intervention pathways for pedagogy *and* wellbeing.

Although the results are promising, TIPE needs to be tested and applied in more schools to replicate and extend these results. Although the data supporting this new model comes from teachers reflecting on their own phenomenological experience of wellbeing in trauma-affected classrooms, other teachers in other contexts may experience TIPE in different ways. In keeping with IPA methodology, it would be useful to explore TIPE with a homogeneous group of teachers as similar to these two cohorts to see what changes occur for teachers in very similar circumstances; and then, to examine how teachers in very different circumstances, cultures, and communities might increase their own workplace wellbeing given the opportunity to learn the skills and strategies for teacher practice arising from TIPE. It should also be noted that secondary interventions (such as TIPE) have limited impact without systemic and primary changes within organisations (Kangas-Dick & O'Shaughnessy, 2020). Given the COVID-19 global pandemic and the potential widespread trauma (and vicarious impacts) in many classrooms (Alves et al., 2020), the use of TIPE in the new normal of classrooms is a particularly relevant area for future contribution.

## Conclusion

Effectively teaching students requires teachers to understand trauma, identify trauma-informed teaching strategies for their students, and have techniques that improve their own wellbeing. Depending on the individual teacher, being ready to teach implies developing deep curiosity and care about the self and others. Framed within the practical reality that teachers, particularly as trauma-impacted practitioners, have finite time and energy to take on new initiatives towards practice or behaviour change, these findings suggested that teachers benefitted when modelling and mirroring the same capacities they were hoping to nurture in students, thereby showing by living examples the benefits of consciously embedding strategies to bolster wellbeing.

The findings of this study offer promising directions for teachers in classrooms supporting students impacted by trauma. However, the implications of our findings hold

greater promise for all teachers given the current uncertainty and ongoing negative impacts of COVID-19. As they continue to manage professional expectations to increase student engagement, academic improvement and wellbeing during the pandemic, teachers will do well to centre their attention on practice pedagogies like trauma-informed positive education to fortify their own resources for wellbeing.

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