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RECEIVED 29 September 2023
ACCEPTED 16 October 2023
PUBLISHED 30 October 2023

CITATION
Albrecht NJ (2023) Editorial: Teaching wellbeing
in Higher Education. *Front. Educ.* 8:1304700.
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2023.1304700

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Editorial: Teaching wellbeing in Higher Education

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KEYWORDS

wellbeing, Higher Education, teacher education, teacher burnout, wellbeing education

Editorial on the Research Topic

Teaching wellbeing in Higher Education

Ideally, the ultimate goal of education policymakers, school staff, and caregivers is to help children achieve the highest level of wellbeing possible (OECD, 2015; Albrecht, 2016; Waters, 2017). An analysis by the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD, 2015) showed that in 37 countries student wellbeing is *now* an explicit aim of over 70 percent of national education systems, with countries fostering both academic *and* student wellbeing outcomes (Waters, 2017). In particular, countries such as Australia, the Republic of Ireland, and New Zealand, have taken a prominent role in the development of wellbeing policies, models, and curricula for Kindergarten to Year 12 schooling (Albrecht, 2014; Bernay et al., 2016; Powell and Graham, 2017; Byrne and Carthy, 2021). In Australia, within both the government and private sectors, full-time positions have been created to systematically cultivate whole-school wellbeing. Some of these positions have titles such as “Wellbeing Coordinator,” “Wellbeing Vision Leader,” “Wellbeing Director” and “Deputy Principal–Wellbeing.” Whereas, other schools have multiple positions dedicated to nurturing student wellbeing, but without including the “wellbeing” role title. For example, at an Australian Catholic school, House Pastoral Leader Cathie Sullivan explains that nurturing a child’s wellbeing begins at the classroom level and continues to be supported by the: Year Level House Mentor, Head of House, Head of Pastoral Care, House Pastoral Leader, Head of Middle School, Principal, through to the Headmaster, with the School Counselor supporting all year levels (C. Sullivan, personal communication, September 21, 2021).

Educators generally consider wellbeing to be critical to learning and around the world many teachers are dedicated to cultivating compassion, competency, and connection in the classroom (Albrecht, 2018). One teacher undertaking professional development in the area remarked “...if wellbeing is absent, you can say goodbye to any hope of academic learning” (Waters, 2017, p. 7). Over the last decade, while many countries have devoted considerable resources toward the promotion of Wellbeing Education, the pandemic has further highlighted the importance of positive mental health to society. For example, Enkhthal Batjargal from the Mongolian education department said that due to the pandemic, her country has for the first time, started talking about *mental health* and finding strategies to help people navigate their way through turbulent times. She said that prior to the pandemic mental health and wellbeing were rarely discussed, however, now the government is transforming education and incorporating wellbeing within policy and curriculum documents (personal communication, April 8, 2020).

The pandemic has exacerbated the stressors facing children, families, and teachers, highlighting the need for even more resources to be allocated toward helping children and families cope and become more resilient (Racine et al., 2021). Wellbeing has thus become an important conversation in many education systems around the world. However, despite the burgeoning interest and research in the area little is known about how universities are preparing current and future educators to meet this demand. The current Research Topic aims to help fill this gap and presents five articles related to Wellbeing Education.

Colla and Mossman in their article Wellbeing integrated learning design framework: A multi-layered approach to facilitating wellbeing education through learning design and educational practice provide Higher Educators with a guide on how to create learning environments where wellbeing can emerge through the way we teach curriculum content. The researchers and teachers from The University of Melbourne in Australia, outline a framework called “Wellbeing Integrated Learning Design” (WILD). While they consider the explicit instruction of wellbeing to be important, their model transcends the explicit teaching of wellbeing concepts and practices, and through a range of models, theories, and practical examples they demonstrate how all Higher Educators, irrespective of discipline can provide undergraduate and graduate students with learning embedded in wellbeing. WILD provides a sustainable solution for Wellbeing Education in Higher Education.

Researchers Chang et al. from universities in Canada and the United States (US) present a novel approach to explicitly teaching college students wellbeing in their article Inner Engineering for Success—A complementary approach to positive education. Chang et al. found when reviewing literature that Higher Education students’ wellbeing has been declining. To optimize wellbeing within this sphere, they evaluated a program based on the science of yoga, called “Inner Engineering.” Inner Engineering addresses four dimensions of wellbeing—physical, cognitive, affective, and energetic and the researcher found that the program gave balance to students’ academic learning and helped them to flourish.

LaTronica-Herb and Karalis Noel from Buffalo University in the US underscore in their article Understanding the effects of COVID-19 on P-12 teachers: A review of scholarly research and media coverage the importance of finding solutions to the unprecedented personal and professional challenges facing teachers worldwide. The researchers recommend a range of broad sweeping changes to support teacher wellbeing and retention. These changes range from shifting societal expectations to reprioritizing professional development and teacher education to enable teachers to cultivate mindfulness, develop wellness strategies, and learn how to set boundaries.

Sklad from Utrecht University in the Netherlands tackles the urgent problem of teacher education related to the wellbeing of displaced children in his article Supporting and measuring current and future educators’ preparedness to facilitate wellbeing of displaced children in schools. He presents the design and validation

of a subjective measurement instrument to understand teacher self-efficacy related to working with refugee children—the Newcomer’s Teacher’s Self-Efficacy (NTSE) scale. The scale provides guidance for Higher Educators on the competencies required by teachers to promote and support the wellbeing of displaced children.

Oberg et al. from the University of Queensland in Australia discuss in their article Compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress in teachers: How they contribute to burnout and how they are related to trauma-awareness how compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress are leading to teacher burnout and teachers leaving the profession. When reviewing the literature, they found that teachers who do not have trauma-aware training have increased levels of compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout. They stress that whole-school trauma-informed education topics need to be provided by universities and schools to help improve the wellbeing of children, staff, caregivers, and the community.

The five articles presented in this Research Topic provide a valuable contribution to the knowledge base on Wellbeing Education in Higher Education. However, more research is needed to understand specific wellbeing programs universities are offering students.

Author contributions

NA: Writing—original draft.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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