The criticality of teacher educator wellbeing: Reflecting through arts-based methods

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Abstract: Teacher educators face many challenges related to workload and government-mandated reforms in Initial Teacher Education programs. Evidence suggests that COVID-19 has exacerbated these challenges as universities must become more cost-effective and improve research outcomes and impact, often resulting in heavier workloads. While these challenges may be faced in other disciplines, teacher educator wellbeing, stress and burnout is an under-researched field, and little is known about if and how teacher educators maintain their wellbeing during times of uncertainty. This collaborative autoethnographic study applied an arts-based research method to explore the wellbeing challenges faced by four Australian teacher educators through the lens of the PERMA wellbeing framework. Data was collected through conversations, written reflections and field texts. While tensions often emerged, opportunities for success and positive changes also became known. The importance of agency and self-determination of teacher educator wellbeing became an important foundation for continuation in teacher education.

Introduction

The higher education sector globally has been recognised as a high-stress environment for academics (Lee et al., 2022). Increased pressures to publish in high-quality journals (Barton et al., 2022), huge workloads (Graham, 2015), high casualisation (Leathwood & Read, 2020) as well as cutting costs (Alexander, 2020) have all been identified as impacting university employees' wellbeing (Kinman et al., 2006). In recent times, these pressures have been proven to increase because of COVID-19 (Parte & Herrador-Alcaide, 2021) with social isolation due to lockdowns and greater fatigue being felt by many (Shen & Slater, 2021), especially women (Kitchener, 2020; Malisch et al. 2020).

Teacher educators are those that work within Initial Teacher Education (ITE). While these observations have been made across the university sector, those that work in teacher education face extra stressors resulting from negative media reports and strict government mandates related to their work (Mansfield et al., 2016). In Australia for example, regular

reviews of ITE programs occur, impacting on teacher educators' work in multiple ways (Churchwood & Willis, 2019). Examples include constant vigilance and change in content in learning and teaching (Rowe & Skourdoumbis, 2019). Such governmental reviews attempt to transform the teaching profession and address Australian school students' declining learning outcomes (Pendergast, 2023), citing 'significant public concern' around the 'quality of teaching in Australian classrooms and the effectiveness of the preparation of new teachers for the profession' as the rationale for the review (see for example Australian Government Department of Education, 2015; 2023). These reports often misrepresent current ITE (The Educator, 2023), disregard the expertise of teacher educators (Gore, 2023), and the existing evidence which asserts that recent ITE graduates are performing well in classroom (Gore et al., 2023). Further, these public reports inaccurately position teacher educators as not being motivated toward improvement of pre-service teacher experience and outcomes (Gore, 2023). Such tensions have also been witnessed across the globe, including in India (Kaur, 2017) and the UK (Kidd & Murray, 2020).

Teacher educators face significant challenges in their work but very little is known about how the university sector might best support their wellbeing during most difficult times. Significantly, Turner and Garvis (2023) call for more research to be conducted in the field of teacher educator wellbeing, stress and burnout to address the gaps in current knowledge. In particular, Turner and Garvis (2023) signal the need for greater methodological diversification in this field to support better understanding of teacher educator wellbeing. This exploratory study with its Australian teacher educator participant group and innovative research approach addresses this call for research in the field of teacher educator wellbeing, stress and burnout.

Teacher Educator Wellbeing

Across the literature, there is an absence of what is known around the wellbeing of teacher educators. In a recent international scoping review, which aimed to determine what is known from current literature about teacher educator wellbeing, stress and burnout, and what are the gaps in current knowledge (Turner and Garvis, 2023), revealed that only thirteen articles that related directly to teacher educators' wellbeing, stress and burnout were published globally between 2016 and 2022. The inclusion criteria for this scoping review were research around teacher educator wellbeing, stress or burnout published between the years 2016 and 2022, written in the English language and with the full text available.

Some of the studies included this scoping review identified specific stressors and support factors for teacher educators. Possible stressors include feeling undervalued or unacknowledged (McDonough et al., 2021), poor work-life balance, including intensification of workloads (Kiltz et al., 2020; McDonough et al., 2021), external accreditation requirements (Kosnik, Menna and Dharamshe, 2020), change management and negotiating university structures (Kiltz et al. 2020; McDonough et al. 2021) and being impacted by student problems (Kiltz et al., 2020). Of particular concern was the identified negative relationship between teacher educator exhaustion and a student-focused approach to teaching (Cao, Postareff, Lindblom and Toom, 2018). If such relationships exist, higher quality for university teaching can only be achieved once teacher educator wellbeing is addressed.

Fewer studies have explored supportive factors of wellbeing for teacher educators. These factors have been identified as relationships with colleagues (McDonough et al., 2021), respect (Naz et al., 2019), goal setting and achievement (McDonough et al., 2021), social support (Padilla &Thompson, 2016) and engaging in research and professional learning

(McDonough et al., 2021). As such, self-awareness and self-regulation were essential for supporting and regulating wellbeing for teacher educators (Kiltz et al., 2020).

Given the lack of Australian and International research in the field of teacher educator wellbeing stress and burnout, and lack of methodological diversification in this field (Turner & Garvis, 2023), this current study plays an important role in the endeavor toward addressing this gap in knowledge.

Framing the Study
The PERMA Wellbeing Framework

The PERMA wellbeing framework proposes that wellbeing is a construct that includes the elements of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman, 2012). Positive emotion is the subjective measure of happiness and life satisfaction (Seligman, 2012), which includes feelings of joy and contentment (Butler & Kern, 2016). Engagement, or flow, is the subjective measure of being absorbed in a task (Seligman, 2012) and includes feelings of interest and excitement (Butler & Kern, 2016). Positive relationships are relationships with others which support wellbeing (Seligman, 2012) for example, giving and receiving social support and having a sense of satisfaction with one's relationships (Butler & Kern, 2016). Meaning is the subjective experience of belonging to, or serving, something which you believe is bigger than yourself (Seligman, 2012). This includes individuals feeling that their life is purposeful, valuable and worthwhile (Butler & Kern, 2016). Accomplishment refers to experiencing achievement or success (Seligman, 2012), such as making progress toward goals and being able to handle responsibilities (Butler & Kern, 2016). High PERMA is a state of optimal wellbeing which is often described as flourishing (Seligman, 2012). Each of these individual elements have previously been well-researched and demonstrated to have a positive relationship with subjective wellbeing (See 'Findings and Discussion' sections).

Although PERMA wellbeing theory has been extensively researched and applied in the field of education (see for example: Turner & Thielking, 2019) and in the context of student wellbeing (see for example, Morgan & Simmons, 2021);), there is a dearth of literature around teacher educator wellbeing (Turner & Garvis, 2023). In particular, very little is known about teacher educator wellbeing as conceptualised by the PERMA wellbeing framework. A search of Google Scholar, Scopus, and Proquest data bases using the terms "teacher educator" and "PERMA" and "wellbeing" for studies published between 2012 and 2022 in English language revealed zero relevant results. Therefore, this study with its focus on teacher educator wellbeing as conceptualised through the PERMA wellbeing framework makes a valuable contribution in the field of teacher educator wellbeing.

Arts-Based Research Methods

For the purposes of this autoethnographic study, the authors selected an arts-based approach as the mode by which they could best reflect on, and subsequently express, their thoughts and feelings about their professional experiences and perceptions of wellbeing. Reflective practice is important for all professionals working in stressful environments. Reflection can be used as a tool to explore relationships between mandated practices within systems compared to an individual's purposeful intent within these spaces (Jennings & Baldwin, 2010). Indeed, deep reflection can be a catalyst for initiating change and helping people to feel empowered (Ryan & Ryan, 2015). One such area needing a change in many

work contexts is self-care and wellbeing. Moffatt et al (2016) highlighted how conscious reflection is critical for ongoing self-care. The act of reflecting in and on action (Schön, 1983) can support people to review challenges and consider possible solutions which in turn improves wellbeing and positivity (Barton et al., 2020).

Most reflection in the workplace tends to happen through conversations or the written word (Lavina et al., 2017) however, it has been proven that other approaches to reflection, such as those that are multimodal or arts-based, can be more powerful in uncovering deep and hidden meanings that may be difficult to translate or transcribe into words (Moffatt et al., 2016). The arts, for example, offers participants multiple ways to express emotion and thoughts through a methodological process of inquiry (Yuen, 2018) whereby selected artworks are created and then discussed. Often metaphorical meanings are identified which can unsettle dominant discourses (Kovach, 2009) most prevalent in oral or written language. Arts-based methods empower other ways of knowing which consequently improve mental-health and wellbeing (Coad, 2020).

Arts-based research has been defined as: A research method in which the arts play a primary role in any or all of the steps of the research method. Art forms such as poetry, music, visual art, drama and dance are essential to the research process (Austin & Forinash, 2005, pp. 460–461).

As a method with a strong tradition in research in schools and with children (Marshall & Gibbons, 2015), Bagnoli (2009) advocates for the widening of its utilisation among other populations. Studies using arts-based methods have begun to emerge in the university context (Barton et al., 2022) as a means of exploring the deep complexities of work and life in this space.

A limitation of Arts-based research methods is the ability of the participants to tolerate, describe and represent psychological states such as anxiety, frustration and joy, which may arise during their experience using Arts-based methods (Gerber et al., 2018). In this study, this limitation was overcome as the participants were experienced in, and comfortable with the experience of Arts-based methods.

Research Design

This exploratory study was conducted using collaborative autoethnographic and arts-based research methods and aimed to answer the research questions: what are the current challenges to wellbeing that teacher educators in two Australian universities face? And to what extent can arts-based and reflective approaches support teacher educators' wellbeing?.

Collaborative autoethnography is a qualitative research method which has been previously used by researchers to study issues relating to academic work (see for example, Martel et al., 2022; Kiriakos & Tienari, 2018), and in particular, teacher education (see for example, Kim & Reichmuth, 2021; Roegman et al., 2021). Collaborative autoethnographic research is simultaneously collaborative, autobiographical and ethnographic, and has a typical sample size of two to four researchers (Chang et al., 2013), which allows for in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of the individual participants (Creswell, 2012; Chang et al., 2013). As per autoethnographic research methods (see for example, Chang et al., 2013; Creswell, 2012), data was collected through conversations, written reflections and field texts, which in this study were the artworks with the intent of sharing and highlighting these individuals' own experiences. This project received ethics approval from the relevant universities to collect data on teacher educator wellbeing, including COVID experiences. All ethical procedures were followed to protect participants, in line with national human ethics standards. Data were collected in May 2022. At this point in time in Australia,

COVID restrictions had been lifted and a subsequent move toward hybrid work practices in higher education had been introduced for example, online lectures rather than face-to-face lectures.

The four participants in this autoethnographic study are all female teacher educators, working in two universities in different states in Australia. Two of the participants are senior lecturers and early career researchers and the other two participants are professors. Three of the participants have research, teaching and leadership roles at their university and the other participant has a significant leadership role and also a research role. A limitation of this study is that all participants were Australian females, therefore findings may not be transferrable to other contexts.

Data were collected via a one-hour online (due to geographical location) arts-based workshop led by one of the participants who is experienced in conducting arts-based research workshops. Visual art, including the elements of line, shape and colour were chosen for this research as it was most appropriate for the online nature of the arts-based workshop. The session commenced with individual reflective time with verbal prompts and then progressed to the individual development of an art piece (see Appendix 1), using materials and techniques self-selected by each participant, to represent their thoughts and feelings about their experiences as teacher educators. This activity was enriched through as ongoing conversation between them as they worked on their artwork and experiences. Following the session, they continued to work on their art piece and completed a short written reflective piece that spoke to the meaning they had invested in the piece. These were subsequently shared online with one another, where they had the opportunity to ask questions about these art works and thus enrich one another's written reflections. Thus, the transcript of the recorded conversation and the written reflections were all collected as data for the project. The artwork served as a mode of reflection and additional means of reporting and sharing the project.

Analytical Approach

Following collection, thematic analysis (Creswell, 2012) was applied, firstly to the individual reflections and then to the conversational transcript. In the first cycle of analysis, data were coded using a deductive approach and descriptive coding (Saldana, 2009) to determine key emergent topics and concepts. The first cycle coding included: 'work-life balance', 'negative feelings about work', 'wellbeing protective factors', 'teacher educator work'. These codes showed initial alignment t the PERMA wellbeing framework. Therefore, these data subsequently underwent a second cycle of analysis using an inductive approach (Twining et al., 2017) with codes pertaining to the five components of the PERMA wellbeing framework: 'positive emotion', 'engagement', 'relationships', 'meaning' and 'accomplishment'. In the following section, we present and discuss the findings drawing on verbatim excerpts from data collected (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015) and a review of the literature (Twining et al., 2017).

Findings and Discussion

In this section, we share the findings of this study by presenting and discussing aspects of our conversations, artwork, and reflections that relate to relevant elements of the PERMA wellbeing framework. The different teacher educators are represented as Voice 1, Voice 2, Voice 3 and Voice 4.

Positive Emotion

Even though all the teacher educator participants in this study expressed feelings of joy and gratitude about their work, they also acknowledged that in recent times these feelings had been overlaid with less positive emotions such as resentment, anxiety and sadness. To illustrate, Voice 1 expressed that her happiness at work had been 'covered up by a sense of uneasiness' (shown in her artwork as a black cross). Similarly, Voice 3 stated that despite initially feeling 'cheerful and excited' about her work as a teacher educator, she has experienced moments of 'despair, hopelessness and powerlessness' at the complexity of challenges facing teacher educators (as represented by dark downward spirals in her artwork).

Individual's experience of positive emotions has been demonstrated to have a relationship with their subjective wellbeing (see for example Authentic Happiness Theory: Seligman, 2002; Broaden and Build Theory: Fredrickson, 2004; Emotional Intelligence: Rema & Gupta, 2021). In the context of the workplace, research shows that experiencing positive emotions such as hope, optimism, gratitude, happiness and joy produces outcomes such as individual subjective wellbeing (Seligman, 2012), improved work performance (Kaplan et al. 2009), job satisfaction, (Lanham et al.; 2012)., self-efficacy (Diener et al. 2020), greater creativity (Amabile et al. 2005), innovation and resilience (Fredrickson, 2010). In addition, experiencing positive emotions at work has a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion and burnout (Lanham et al.; 2012).

In groundbreaking research on emotions, social psychologist Fredrickson (2010) and Fredrickson and Losada (2005) identified that the difference between someone who is languishing at work and someone who is flourishing at work is the number of positive emotions they experience at work as compared to the number of negative emotions they experience at work. Drawing on Schwartz et al.'s (2002) study of cognitive-affective set-point ratios, Fredrickson and Losada (2005) developed a set of mathematical principles to describe the relationship between positive affect and human flourishing. Fredrickson and Losada (2005) identified that in order to overcome the toxicity of negative affect and promote wellbeing and optimal mental health, a ratio of three positive emotions to one negative emotion is the 'tipping point' at which people begin to thrive. Deductive analysis of the data in this study reveals that the participants spoke of positive emotions (hope, joy, happiness, contentment, gratitude and optimism) seventeen times in comparison to speaking of negative emotions (hopelessness, anxiety, stress, depression, resentment, sadness and powerless) twenty-eight times. Previous research (see for example Frederickson, 2010), suggests that such a ratio (17:28) would have a detrimental effect on the participant's wellbeing.

Engagement

All participants in this study expressed feeling highly interested in, and absorbed by, their work as teacher educators. However, this engagement was often tempered by an awareness of the professional pressures placed on them as teacher educators. For example, Voice 4 expressed feeling pressure to achieve quickly: *"I am in a professional race to prove my worth, my value. … I must do this fast or let myself and my profession down."* Voice 4 expresses the chaos of emotions resulting from these accountabilities and performative challenges through the chaotic positioning of words in her artwork. So too, Voice 2 expressed: *"In the last couple of years teacher educators have had to be highly flexible in supporting people during COVID … We have also experienced greater accountability from the government and recent reports around quality of teachers."* Voice 2 described these

times as feeling "*stormy within teacher education*" and asserted that, "*it is important we continue to acknowledge and reflect on our resilience in the face of disruptions.*"

Challenges identified as disruptive to teacher educator engagement (and therefore wellbeing) were identified as the result of ever-increasing intensification of the role, such as the pressure to balance teaching and research requirements and the additional workload which ensued in moving teaching and learning materials online as a result of COVID-19 induced changes to higher education practices. In addition, accountability to government-initiated mandates, and the shortage of properly qualified and experienced teacher educators has had a significant impact on the performative expectations on teacher educators.

The relationship between engagement and wellbeing has been previously examined by researchers such as, Huppert and So (2013). Csikszentmihalyi et al. (2017) conducted extensive research in countries such as United States, Italy, Germany, South Korea and Japan on the experience of high engagement, or flow, in the workplace. Their findings reveal that when an individual is deeply engaged in their work, they begin to find the work intrinsically rewarding. This is most likely to occur when the individual has been able to meet a challenge which they had initially thought to be difficult and daunting (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2017). Such engagement requires that the individual have both the time and space to reach this state of flow, which this research finds to be unavailable to a large extent to teacher educators in the current work climate.

When individuals experience high levels of engagement, sometimes termed flow, at work they are likely to be more creative (Yan et al., 2013), experience more positive emotions at work (Demerouti et al., 2012), and have lower levels of burnout and exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2012). However, research has identified potential flow-blocking workplace components. For example, negative emotions have been found to be negatively related with flow (Tobert & Moneta, 2013), as has mental exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2012) and feeling disempowered at work (Peters et al., 2014). When individuals are not able to overcome such workplace challenges it results in them feeling worried and anxious and they are less likely to experience engagement, or flow, at work (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2017). Absence of engagement results in lower subjective wellbeing (Seligman, 2012).

The participants in the study did report feeling interest, engagement and absorption in their work. For example, analysis of the arts-based workshop transcript reveals that participants referred to aspects of teacher educator work as 'interesting' 25 times during the one-hour workshop. However, they also reported feeling negative emotions, stress, pressure, powerlessness and anxiety at work. The presence of these flow blocking elements in their work indicates that, to some extent, they have not been able to sufficiently overcome the workplace challenges experienced by teacher educators in order to attain a flow state at work. Such absence of flow, or engagement at work results in reduced subjective wellbeing.

Relationships

Participants reported that their sense of having positive supportive relationships with their colleagues had been negatively impacted as a result of COVID-19 pandemic effects on universities. As one example, Voice 1 acknowledged that while she strongly believed that leaders should prioritise employees' wellbeing (as conceptualised by the words *"they always protect you"* on her artwork), her experience during the COVID-19 pandemic was that requests for support were not necessarily addressed. Voice 1 suggests that possibly leaders were struggling with their own wellbeing and therefore unable to provide support to colleagues. Voice 3 expressed feeling an ongoing sense of isolation and loneliness after two years of working from home, explaining that even post COVID, (May 2022 when this

research was conducted); "*I can go on to campus and not see anyone for the whole day. It's a very isolating experience where you just go in, do your teaching and then you leave*". Other research has also reported on educators' sense of isolation as a consequence of the shift to online connection and work from home health mandates (Parte & Herrador-Alcaide, 2021).

The relationship between positive relationships and wellbeing has previously been included in the Need to Belong Theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The quality of relationships in the workplace depends not only on the interactions between individuals, but also on workplace communication practices and leadership style (Roffey, 2017). High quality workplace relationships support people to feel connected (Deci & Ryan, 1985), energised (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003) and motivated (Quinn et al., 2012). In addition, positive relationships in the workplace improve individual's psychological wellbeing (Roffey, 2017), growth, development and performance (Cross & Cummings, 2004) and improve the flow of communication, information and advice in the workplace (Levin & Cross, 2004). However unsupportive workplace relationships result in individual's experiencing negative emotions (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), feeling deenergised, demotivated, having difficulty concentrating on their work and decreased workplace performance (Gerbasi et al., 2015).

As a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the higher education workplace, teacher educator participants in this study reported feeling a decrease in the quality of their relationships at work in terms of level of support experienced, sense of belonging and regular face-to-face interaction and communication. Concerningly, the absence of high-quality workplace relationships can result in reduced subjective wellbeing for individuals (Seligman, 2012).

Meaning

All participants reported that finding meaning in their work as teacher educators supported their wellbeing. For instance, Voice 2 stated that she finds meaning in her work as a teacher educator through considering the child's perspective:

> "*For me, it is a combination of a personal and professional identity within this space, being a teacher educator, parent and former teacher. It is about having insider and outsider perspective on the system as my identity takes on multiple roles. As such, I always return to the yard stick measurement of what is the purpose and why - what is best for the child or children in society. Child perspective and Voice should be the most important contributor to how we engage in teaching and education.*"

In a further example Voice 2 explained that conducting professional development sessions for teachers was meaningful for her as it allowed her to make an impact and connect with teachers:

> "*One thing I think that I find really rewarding is impactful teacher education work. For example, on the weekend when I gave professional learning to teachers in the field, It's an amazing experience to have that immediate connection and response through professional learning. It gets back to how do we actually make an impact and how can we actually connect with teachers. It stimulates you to want to keep going as a teacher educator.*"

Similarly, Voice 1 stated that working with and supporting teachers in schools was meaningful for her:

> "*I think the work that I do in schools really keeps me going a lot. I was in two different schools last week, ... and even just talking to the teachers and letting*

them have time to reflect can be quite powerful, and that keeps me going. I do feel for teachers because I see the pressure that's on them and there's a lot of confusion at the moment. I think with COVID and everything else that's happened. They're just so confused about what to do and where to go next and have lost that sense of self-efficacy around their professionalism that they are trained professionals. Because they're constantly put down. It's just horrific, and I think that then trickles down to us in the work that we do and I find that really difficult."

In other comments, Voice 3 reflected that after two years of working remotely, recently going back onto campus and seeing the faces of her students had a positive impact on her wellbeing and reminded her that' "*this is why I do this job and it's a really meaningful job*". Whilst, Voice 4 asserted that overwhelmingly, it is the close connection with colleagues that she finds meaningful, "*our dependence on our close colleagues to support our wellbeing is just enormous*". The need for social connectedness became particularly apparent during Covid-19, with research reporting on the significant relationship that exists between levels of social connectedness, stress and fatigue (Nitschke et al., 2021).

Finding meaning in work has previously demonstrated a strong relationship with psychological wellbeing (for example see: Steger et al., 2008; Diener et al., 2010; Huppert and So, 2013). Longitudinal research reveals that when individuals find meaning in their work, they are more likely to experience high levels of motivation, job satisfaction, wellbeing and perform in their job at a higher level (Steger, 2017). Employees finding meaning at work also benefits organisations through increased employee career commitment (Duffy et al., 2014) and reduced absenteeism (Soane et al., 2013).

Participants in this study reported finding meaning at work through feeling that their work is purposeful, valuable, worthwhile and serves the greater good. For example, considering initial teacher education in terms of what is best for children in society, conducting professional development and support for teachers in schools, working with pre-service teachers and connection with colleagues. Finding examples of meaning in teacher educator work is supportive of these participants' subjective wellbeing.

Accomplishment

Participants reported that their experiences of wellbeing related to their accomplishments at work were often tarnished by the stressful nature of teacher educator work. For example, Voice 4 describes the work-life conflict and sacrifices which she has made for accomplishment as a teacher educator:

"I am unsure how to navigate the divide between work and home without falling between. This reflective activity forced me to pause, to channel what has become a rising anxiety onto a simple piece of paper. That choice I make between my own wellbeing, my family and my professional life, and the guilt that can come with that."

In addition, they revealed that at times the stress could be more justifiable if there were further opportunities for accomplishments to be acknowledged. Voice 4 explained:

"It's balancing the expectations on you…at times it feels as if you achieve something but then there is still so much to do and you do not allow yourself to celebrate the accomplishments along the way."

Participants expressed a belief that teacher educator work was not valued as a profession. Voice 1 reflected:

> *"I don't see it as needing a pat on the back, I think it's about being valued. Everybody has the right to feel valued and I think at the moment, teacher educators on so many levels are not valued and that value is not articulated on any level. I think that as a profession, we deserve to be valued. And whether that's on an individual level or on a whole profession level, I think sense of value is a right and if you earned it, you should get it."*

Participants also reflected that there was a disconnect between teacher educator wellbeing and university and government policies, namely a lack of investment into teacher education facilities and staffing at universities. As a result, participants' teacher educator colleagues were, in some cases, prioritising their wellbeing by cutting back their hours to part time, taking long service leave, stepping back from leadership positions and switching to less stressful roles.

Participants also cited the expectation to accomplish more research outcomes in less allocated research hours was negatively impacting their wellbeing. As too was the reduction in department budgets (for example for conference attendance), and the non-replacement of academic support staff as they leave, meaning that academic staff are often required to complete 'un-workloaded' administrative tasks reducing their time available for research. There was the recognition that universities were in many ways seeking solutions to the external pressures of accountability and the financial repercussions of the global pandemic due to the loss of international student income. Embroiled in this reform agenda, however, are academics at risk of becoming unintentional casualties of the need to accomplish more with less.

Accomplishment as an aspect of wellbeing has been included in Duckworth et al.'s (2007) examination of grit, McClelland's (1998) Human Motivation Theory and Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory. Experiencing positive emotions in the workplace has been demonstrated to be predictive of workplace accomplishment through enhancing attention, cognitive processes, creativity, decision making and self-regulation (Fredrickson, 2013). More recently, in a study of employees' perception of job performance, including participants from Australia, China, Japan and Hungary, Goh et al., (2021) demonstrated that experiencing positive emotions at work had a significant effect on employee accomplishment. In addition, the experience of finding meaning at work significantly mediated the relationship between positive emotions and accomplishment (Goh et al., 2021).

In this study, teacher educators reported experiencing a ratio of 17:28 positive emotions to negative emotions. As would be expected from previous research (e.g., Fredrickson, 2013; Goh et al., 2021), experiencing such a large number of negative emotions at work reduced the participants' sense of accomplishment at work. In addition, participants reported that factors such as not feeling that their work was valued and feeling unsupported by their universities negatively impacted their sense of accomplishment at work.

Conclusion

This exploratory study with its Australian teacher educator participant group and innovative research approach works toward addressing the current gap in knowledge in the field of teacher educator wellbeing, stress and burnout.

While this study was a small sample size it aimed to share the perspectives of four Australian teacher educators during COVID-19. We acknowledge that these experiences may not be the same for all teacher educators however, we hope that by sharing these, others may learn about the work of teacher educators in universities in Australia. Teacher educators in this study reported that their positive emotions, engagement, relationships and

accomplishment aspects of their wellbeing have been negatively impacted by their work as teacher educators. This is an important finding of the emotional work of being a teacher educator. While they did express negative emotions, they also spoke of hope and possibilities for change. As such, the importance of arts-based research and PERMA to help explore and also support wellbeing within teacher education is noted through the reflections and changes of the Voices involved in this study. The study shows that while negativity can be present, this can also be mitigated. The process allowed the experience to be documented from an 'insider perspective', highlighting the complexities but also showing areas for growth. As such, the Voices often found meaning at work as their reason to continue as teacher educators, where a sense of purpose provided protection for wellbeing.

The authors acknowledge that this study is not without limitations. First, the study reports on the subjective experience of a small sample of teacher educators across two contexts, and therefore no claim to the generalisability of findings is made. However, the aim of qualitative research is not to produce generalisable findings, but to explore the experiences of individuals within a homogenous group (Creswell, 2012). This study which aimed to understand the experiences, thoughts and feelings of teacher educators about their own wellbeing, required an approach that would gather the rich insights reported in this paper. Knowing more about how individual teacher educators feel about their everyday work might influence policy or at the least, share these experiences with others. The authors encourage further studies, using a range of methodologies and alternative contexts, that can also contribute to the gap in the literature pertaining to teacher educator wellbeing. Second, the study reports on teacher educators' perceptions of wellbeing pertaining to a specific timeframe. This study, however, aimed to provide insight into the ways in which wellbeing was experienced at this juncture of high performativity and post-Covid in higher education. The authors do see value in future longitudinal studies.

This exploratory study also helps to fill gaps in teacher education wellbeing within the literature, illuminating Voices through the use of arts-based research. Through this approach, individual meanings have been shown including the current barriers as well as enablers to support positive wellbeing. The study also highlights the importance of cultural and contextual considerations when acknowledging teacher educator wellbeing. In this case, the place, time and location are important for consideration of what was experienced. As such, we recommend that further studies continue to build teacher educator wellbeing within the higher education sector and provide particular need to the increasing barriers as well as enablers to support wellbeing and positive growth. We believe that a focus on the wellbeing of teacher educators within research not only supports the wellbeing of the academic, but also future pre-service teachers who observe modelling and ways of working to support positive wellbeing within teaching. We suggest that future research studies are also longitudinal to show changes over time to identify specific patterns. Through more research on teacher educator wellbeing that identifies patterns, betters supports can be created for teacher educators around wellbeing to help reduce teacher educator burnout and attrition. Simply put, without teacher educators, it is difficult to teach pre-service teachers. There cannot be future teachers graduating from universities if teacher educators burnout and leave.

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Appendix 1. The artworks (note: all participants have given their consent for these artworks, including photos, to be included in this article)

Figure 1: Voice 1

Figure 2: Voice 2

Figure 3: Voice 3

Figure 4: Voice 4