The Importance of Teachers' Wellbeing and Resilience in Challenging Circumstances

Lali TAVADZE
Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University

Ivdit DIASAMIDZE
Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University

Natia KATAMADZE
Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University

Introduction

Life is full of surprises, unexpected things, challenges. It is worth noting that every aspect of our personal or professional life is full of challenges. Meeting these challenges, facing problems, overcoming difficulties, results in getting experience.

One of the biggest challenges that the whole world faced and that came like the bolt from the blue was teaching online! Covid-19 plans required all Universities finish the terms online leaving hundreds of teachers, professors, university support staff in a maze searching for the answer to the question "How to teach online?"

Decisions were made quite quickly. A traditional class was transformed into an online class. Online teaching showed both, advantages and disadvantages. A deep breath was taken. Problems, obstacles, challenges met. All of us were found in the same boat, more precisely, a lifeboat, meaning to keep everyone safe till reaching our destination.

Teaching online and moving everything to an online platform was a little bit devastating and overwhelming due to the fast transition in the middle of the term, but that was the best option and the only way to go on with the courses and the process of education in general.

In fact we can differentiate between: Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), Online Teaching/Learning, Resilient Teaching.

The period of going online can be recalled as the process of fast changes and quick decisions. When classes took place online it still could be felt that it was not the same as typical online course. Facilitation, planning in a hurry was closer to emergency teaching idea. "In fact, the COVID-19 crisis has fundamentally changed the field of online learning by adding the concept of "Emergency Remote Teaching" (or ERT, also sometimes called "panicgogy") to describe what happened when faculty were given an incredibly short amount of time to learn and teach as much as possible about teaching online." (https://onlineteaching.umich.edu/online-teaching-emergency-remote-teaching/)

Emergency Remote Teaching is defined in the following way: "The rapid transfer of some portion of a course to the online environment to ensure continuity of instruction during unpredictable emergent situations that threaten the ability to teach on-campus." (https://onlineteaching.umich.edu/online-teaching-emergency-remote-teaching/)

As it is clear from the above mentioned idea, emergency remote teaching is connected with sudden and unexpected changes or transitions. Pandemic was the reason of emergency remote teaching this time, but there can be other things leading to this type of teaching such as weather, sudden illness or even intense crisis. So, the situation threatening not only instructional environment but the health and well-being of both students and teachers alike might result in emergency remote teaching.

Another form of teaching mentioned above is online teaching. It can be defined as: "The transformation of teaching practices to include thoughtful and well-planned instructional strategies that effectively engage the unique affordances of online technologies and pedagogies to support learning." (https://onlineteaching.umich.edu/online-teaching-emergency-remote-teaching/)

Online teaching is well-structured, precisely planned in advance and thoroughly thought. It is not necessarily one person involved in the planning of the course but the whole group of faculty members can be assisting in the process. It is worth noting that there is no difference in the objectives and the results of online and face-to-face course. Thus, the expectations for learning outcomes are similar to face-to-face course expectations, but the way students come up with these results may differ, for sure. Different type of teaching methods can be employed, even the ones we have never used while teaching face-to face in a typical classroom environment.

And little by little, based on current development and situation we are moving to Resilient Teaching. Resilient Teaching is defined in the following way: "Intentionally integrate methods of teaching that easily adapt to rapidly changing contexts, to be capable of leveraging technology to move fluidly between environments." (https://onlineteaching.umich.edu/online-teaching-emergency-remote-teaching/)

Resilient teaching involves choosing teaching methods and strategies appropriately, integrating methods that might fit various and multiple environments thus keeping effective in any circumstances. As becoming ineffective is the dead-end for the educational system and what is more, it is a direct way to failure, teachers should do their best to integrate strategies and teaching methods that are capable of bending in a number of conditions and different situations smoothly and easily.

The importance of teacher wellbeing and resilience had been acknowledged long before the coronavirus pandemic struck the world. We believe that positive education

is focused on well-being and flourishing both in students and their teachers. One of the biggest issues, however, is that building well-being and resilience in students necessarily requires teachers with resilience and well-being. When students benefit owing to teachers functioning at their optimum levels, it results in positive education to grow and flourish. Just as the concepts of "broadening and building" (Fredrickson, 2013) apply to the individual, so too can they contribute to the emotional wellness and growth of the children who are taught by a resilient teacher. Incorporating positive psychology in education is the way forward. Teaching requires significant psychological stamina, and those who stay in the position cite that they rely on a sense of control and mastery (Hong, 2012).

What is Resilience? Research points to the power of resilience both as a response to stress and as a proactive mindset for well-being and achievement (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Psychological resilience has been characterized as "the ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences and by flexible adaptation to the changing demands of stressful experiences" (Tugade & Frederickson, 2004). People with high resilience demonstrate an ability to thrive in the face of adversity (Masten, 2001; 2014). Psychiatrists, psychologists, and sociologists have created models and statistical measures to operationalize resilience and study its components and application toward optimal human functioning (Seligman, 2011; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Kelley (2005) describes resilience as a natural and innate human psychological immune capacity, emphasizing that all humans have the multidimensional capacity to be resilient.

In addition to being an innate ability, resilience is a compilation of learnable skills. Resilience matters and it is malleable, even amidst previous and existing external hardship. The research around resilience concurs that it is comprised of several factors: emotional regulation, impulse control, empathy, optimism, causal analysis, self-efficacy, and reaching out. Each has been studied significantly and can be measured to quantify resilience and its improvement (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Connor and Davidson (2003) have outlined another scale to quantify resilience, the CD-RISC. CD-RISC consists of five factors: personal competence, high standards and tenacity; trust in one's instincts; tolerance of negative affect and strengthening effects of stress; positive acceptance of change and secure relationships with others; control; and spiritual influences. Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) categorize the uses of resilience in three ways, overcoming, stress-resistance, and recovery. Resilience is used to overcome past challenges such as poverty, trauma, and childhood abuse. It is used to resist daily stressors such as classroom conflicts, financial adversity, or co-worker relationships. Resilience is also needed as a tool to recover from significant hardships such as the death of family members, divorce, ill health, or tragic world events. In addition to being used as a reactive tool, resilience can be used proactively.

In a shift away from behaviorism in the field of psychology, resilience research reveals that one of the primary tools to building resilience is thinking style. To clarify, optimism (a resilience competency noted above) is a cognitive disposition toward a positive future (Scheier & Carver, 1985). The instrument that is widely used to measure optimism is the Life Orientation Test (LOT: Scheier & Carver, 1985), which measures generalized expectancies for positive versus negative outcomes.

Studies show that resilience and optimism go hand in hand. More specifically, high resilience individuals have a specific brand of optimism – realistic optimism (Schnieder, 2011). Their thinking is positive, yet grounded. It accurately acknowledges that which cannot be changed and proactively strives for what can be changed, in an effortful and resolute manner.

Resilience involves the capacity to effectively manage stress, and teacher resilience has been linked to retention and quality, and also to higher student achievement. A review of the research shows that personal characteristics such as motivation and self-efficacy are important factors in determining teacher resilience. (Beltman, Mansfield, , & Price, 2011).

Building Resilience There are a range of strategies that help build resilience including the cultivation of grit, defined as passion and perseverance for long-term goals, positive emotions, and the implementation of techniques that develop optimism such as how one explains past events (Duckworth, Quin & Seligman, 2009).

The need for building resilience in today's teachers and students has been cited in a number of studies (Gu & Day, 2013; Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013; Pearce, & Morrison 2011)

Wellbeing - Discussions about teacher wellbeing are often dominated by ideas related to negative mental health such as stress or burnout.

What is teacher wellbeing? Wellbeing is not only about coping with negative situations – it also includes ideas about what it means to live a good life. Perspectives on wellbeing are often divided in their approach. For example, subjective wellbeing encompasses ideas such as life satisfaction and the presence of positive emotion more frequently than negative emotion, while psychological wellbeing is concerned with ideas such as purpose in life and positive relationships with others. The understanding of wellbeing is further complicated by the fact that terms such as life satisfaction are sometimes used synonymously with wellbeing in the research.

There is no single agreed-upon definition of wellbeing in the literature, it can encompass a range of ideas from positive emotions to purpose in life, but most definitions agree that

wellbeing is multidimensional, comprising physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects. This resource defines wellbeing in terms of the broad concept of 'feeling good and functioning well'1: in other words, a state where teachers perceive job satisfaction, experience positive emotions more frequently than negative emotions, and function well both as a teacher and in their other roles in life (as a parent, spouse, family member, friend and so on). Functioning well includes supportive professional relationships, professional growth and a feeling of self-efficacy.

Models of wellbeing - There are several models that are useful in order to understand the complex concept of wellbeing. These definitions and models demonstrate varied interpretations of wellbeing. Individuals may interpret wellbeing differently depending on their culture, their character and their situation.

The PERMA model - The PERMA model derives from the field of positive psychology, which seeks to understand and build the ways in which individuals, communities, and societies flourish by possessing high levels of wellbeing. It comprises the five elements that are the foundation of wellbeing:

Positive Emotions

Engagement

Relationships

Meaning

Accomplishments

The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand: Five Ways to Wellbeing This is a well-known model within New Zealand and comprises five elements:

1. Connect - me whakawhanaunga

2. Give - tukua

3. Take notice - me aro tonu

4. Keep learning - me ako tonu

5. Be active - me kori tonu

Te Whare Tapa Whā - The *te whare tapa whā* model is based on the work of Mason Durie and is used in the NZ curriculum. *Te whare tapa whā* compares health to the four walls of a house, where all are necessary for the strength of the house, and each represents a different dimension: • taha wairua (the spiritual side) • taha hinengaro (thoughts and

feelings) • taha tinana (the physical side) • taha whānau (family) (Durie, 1998).

Why is it important to prioritize teacher wellbeing? Teacher wellbeing has a significant impact on universities, schools, teachers and students. Many of the negative effects of low wellbeing are well publicized, with stress or burnout being linked to attrition and the resulting teacher shortages worldwide. Teacher workload is often cited as a main cause of stress, due to the volume and complexity of the workload. It could be increased workload due to taking on management responsibilities, and challenges due to work-life balance. However, it is worth considering how the allocation of time to different tasks correlates to stress; for example, when teachers take on extra tasks in an area of work they value, stress may not increase and job satisfaction may improve. It is not only teacher attrition that is a concern - low teacher wellbeing can negatively affect students. Stressed or burnt-out teachers have poorer relationships with students and the quality of their teaching decreases. When teachers suffer from poor mental health, burnout, or depression, this has been linked to poor performance, absenteeism and attrition. Stressed or burntout teachers also negatively affect students due to diminished relationships with students, a lack of empathy, poorer preparation for lessons, and low-quality teaching. Hence, prioritizing teacher wellbeing and help to ensure teachers can flourish, this can promote better classroom climates and enable high quality teaching that leads to success for students. Teacher wellbeing is also linked to student wellbeing.

Teacher emotional intelligence - A review of almost 100 studies concluded that teacher emotions have significant effects on job satisfaction, morale, stress, and teacher engagement (Leithwood, 2006). Emotional intelligence (EQ) has been defined as knowing and managing one's emotions, recognizing emotions in others, motivating oneself, and managing relationships, and is linked to increased wellbeing. Studies show that teachers with higher EQ experience less burnout (Mérida-López , & Extremera, 2017). The concept of social and emotional competence is closely related to EQ, and teachers' social and emotional competence has been identified as a key influence on students' social, emotional and academic outcomes.

How can teachers promote their own wellbeing and boost their resilience? In addition to the whole-school approach to improving wellbeing, individual teachers need to take charge of their own wellbeing in order to flourish. A positive sense of identity is also an important factor in preserving self-efficacy and is linked to wellbeing. A teacher's identity comprises both their professional and personal selves, and maintaining a balance between these is important. For example, it has been shown that levels of wellbeing are reduced when school demands dominate a teacher's identity. Teachers can also support each other to enhance their wellbeing: for example, performing random acts of kindness has been shown to be beneficial to the giver's wellbeing as well as the receiver's. Moreover, they need to feel connected through shared experiences and struggles.

As previously noted, teacher resilience and wellbeing is inevitably linked to student resilience and wellbeing. The coronavirus pandemic has outlined the pressing need to build teacher resilience and promote their wellbeing.

References

Beltman, S., Mansfield, C., & Price, A. (2011).Thriving not just surviving: A review of research on teacher resilience. *Educational Research Review, 6*(3), 185–207. https://doi.org///doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2011.09.001)

Cann, R, (2019). The importance of teacher wellbeing. The Education Hub 2019. Retrieved from theeducationhub.org.nz

Connor, K. M., & Davidson, J. R. T. (2003). Development of a new resilience scale: the ConnorDavidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC). *Depression and Anxiety, 18*, 76e82. doi:10.1002/da.10113.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Durie, M. (1998). *Whaiora: Māori health development* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Duckworth, A. L., Quinn, P. D., & Seligman, M.E.P. (2009). Positive predictors of teacher effectiveness. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 19*, 540–547.

Fredrickson, B.L. (2013). Positive emotions broaden and build. In P. *Devine, & A. Plant, Editors: Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, Vol. 47.* Burlington: Academic Press.

Gu, Q. & Day, C. (2013). Challenges to teacher resilience: conditions count. *British Education Research Journal, 39* (1). pp. 22–44.

Hong, J.Y., (2012). Why do some beginning teachers leave the school, and others stay? Understanding teacher resilience through psychological lenses. *Teachers and Teaching, 18* (4).

Johnstone, A., Jones, A., King, J., & Kokores, S., (2017). Teacher well-being and resilience: Podcasts as a tool for global reach. Service Learning Project MAPP 702: Applied Positive Interventions University of Pennsylvania May 1, 2017 Retrieved from repository.upenn.edu

Jennings, P. A., Frank, J. L., Snowberg K. E., Coccia, M. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2013). Improving classroom learning environments by cultivating awareness and

resilience in education (CARE): Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial. *School Psychology Quarterly 28* (4), 374 –390.

Kelley, T.M., (2005). Natural resilience and innate mental health. *American Psychologist 60* (3), 265–271.

Krause, S. (2020, March 11). Help! I have to suddenly teach online! What should I do? [Blog post]. Retrieved from http://stevendkrause.com/2020/03/11/help-i-have-to-suddenly-teach-online-what-should-i-do/

Leithwood. (2006). *Teacher working conditions that matter: Evidence for change*. Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario.

Masten, A.S., Best, K.M., & Garmezy, N. (1990). Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity. *Development and Psychopathology, 2*(4), 425.

Masten, A. S. (2014). Global perspectives on resilience in children and youth. *Child Development, 85*, 6-20.

Mérida-López, S., & Extremera, N. (2017). Emotional intelligence and teacher burnout: A systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Research, 85*, 121–130. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2017.07.006

Online teaching & emergency remote teaching. (2020, May 21). Retrieved from https://onlineteaching.umich.edu/online-teaching-emergency-remote-teaching/

Pearce, J., & Morrison, C. (2011). Teacher identity and early career resilience: Exploring the links, *Australian Journal of Teacher Education 36* (1).

Reivich, K., & Shatté, K. (2002). *The resilience factor: 7 keys to finding your inner strength and overcoming life's hurdles*. New York: Broadway Books.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and wellbeing. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Schneider, S. (2011). In search of realistic optimism. *American Psychologist 56*(3), 250-263.

Scheier, M.F., Carver, C.S., (1985). Optimism, coping, and health: assessment and implications of generalized outcome expectancies. *Health Psychology 4*, 219–247.

Tugade, M.M., Frederickson, B.L., 2004. Resilient individuals use positive emotions to bounce back from negative emotional experiences. J*ournal of Personality and Social Psychology 86* (2), 320–333.

About Author

Lali TAVADZE is an associate professor at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University. She holds a Ph.D. degree and works at the Faculty of European studies. Her fields of interests are: Linguistics; Stylistics of the English language; English language teaching methodology. She is the author of various research articles that are published in journals indexed in Web of Science; Google Scholar. She has participated in the Erasmus+ teaching mobility programme. She has taken part in lots of international forums and professional development courses. She is the author of three books: 1. "Reading Fiction"; 2. "Text Interpretation"; 3. "Communication Theory and Practice".

E-mail: lali.tavadze@gmail.com

Ivdit DIASAMIDZE is an associate professor and head of quality assurance service of the faculty of Humanities at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University. She holds a Ph.D. degree and works at the Faculty of European studies. Her research fields of interests are: Stylistics of the English language; Text linguistics; English language teaching methodology. She is the author of various scholarly works that have been published in journals indexed in Web of Science; Google Scholar. She has participated in lots of international forums and professional development courses. She has completed three teaching motilities under the ERASMUS + programme.

Natia KATAMADZE is a lecturer, Assosiate Professor, at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University. She is an approved British Council /ETAG (English Teachers' Association of Georgia) teacher trainer. She has participated in the following projects: Erasmus Mundus Action 2 - Humeria –Post Doc Exchange program , Duration 6 months, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic, 2016-2017. ERASMUSMUNDUS ACTION 2 (Euro east), 2012- 2016. TEMPUS-JPCR Innovating Teaching and Learning of European Studies (INOTLES), 2012-2018. She is the author of more than 30 scientific articles. Her primary interests are research methods, student autonomy and creativity in a language classroom.

E-mail: natia.katamadze@gmail.com

To Cite This Chapter:

Tavadze, L., Diasamidze, I., & Katamadze, N. (2021). The importance of teachers' wellbeing and resilience in challenging circumstances. In A. Csiszárik-Kocsir & P. Rosenberger (Eds .), *Current Studies in Social Sciences 2021*(pp. 151–159). ISRES Publishing.