

Teacher Ecology and Wellbeing: Focusing on What Teachers Can Control

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Abstract

Prominent researchers in positive psychology emphasize that teacher wellbeing is a collective effort, deeply embedded in the broader ecological context of the teaching environment (Jin et al., 2021; Mercer, 2021; Sulis et al., 2023). Jean-Marc Dewaele clearly articulates this in his article, stating: “In order to be happy (and thus more effective), teachers need to be treated fairly, have manageable workloads, a decent salary, regular training, agency in curricular and pedagogical matters, and support from school, regional, and national authorities” (Dewaele, 2021, p. 216). Recent studies further reinforce the notion that wellbeing must be nurtured as a shared responsibility between individuals and their institutions (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2024; Herrera et al., 2023). In this talk, I will shed light on the connection between teacher wellbeing and teacher ecology, narrowing the definition of “ecology” to focus only on the external factors within the teacher's control. Even when broader conditions are unsupportive, wellbeing in the classroom remains attainable. Teachers can rely on specific social and emotional competencies to nurture positive emotions and promote wellbeing in their classes. Above all, when teachers embody the principles of KEEP – kindness, empathy, enthusiasm, and professionalism (Azaryad Shechter, 2021) – they create an environment where students feel psychologically safe and pedagogically cared for. In turn, this cultivates students’ trust and respect, which are essential for sustained student engagement, teacher confidence, and resilience. Wellbeing reigns in their classroom because they build strong relationships with students (Moskowitz et al., 2022), enhance teaching enjoyment (Botes et al., 2022), and promote learning enjoyment (Dewaele, 2021). I am convinced that we can reignite our passion for teaching and inspire students to enjoy learning at all stages of our careers. Participants will leave this talk with practical skills and a renewed sense of empowerment to foster their own wellbeing and that of their students.

Keywords: Classroom emotions; enjoyment, positive psychology; teacher and learner resilience;