

HOLISTIC HEALTH AND TEACHER WELLBEING

Dr Rachael Jefferson Buchanan is a lecturer in Human Movement Studies (Health and PE) and Creative Arts at Charles Sturt University, having graduated from Chelsea School of Human Movement (Brighton Polytechnic) in physical education, dance and special educational needs in 1988. Rachael has built a successful career which includes considerable time as head of department of an international school in Switzerland and a nine-year period as a lecturer in Primary Physical Education, Dance and Professional Practice at Bath Spa University. Rachael emigrated to Australia in 2013, where she combines her work in physical education and the creative arts with her role as an early career researcher at Charles Sturt University (New South Wales).

Rachael cites the highlights of her career to date as introducing a physical education-friendly fundamental skills programme to the UK and writing a related book (Jefferson-Buchanan, 2009); working as an international physical education consultant for CAIE and other international organisations such as UNICEF, UNESCO and Montrose; advocating women's rights in the academic workplace; and completion of her PhD, which considered the governance of the body in physical education in England over a 114-year period (Jefferson-Buchanan, 2019). Teacher wellbeing is at the core of her work and combining teaching and research provides her with the platform to advocate change to a system that increasingly deprives individuals of their wellbeing. In this article, Rachael shares some personal reflections on the subject of teacher wellbeing, provides a simple self-awareness exercise for colleagues to complete, and invites readers to join her social media community.

The quest to understand the complex issue of wellbeing has been a part of Rachael's professional endeavour for decades, and in the early days this included training in yoga techniques for the classroom with its symbiotic relationship creating benefits for both teachers and children; and mindful meditation, which provides an opportunity to explore our current thoughts, emotions

and feelings without judgement. It seems particularly appropriate that Rachael now leads a module at Charles Sturt University entitled 'Wellness and Wellbeing' aimed at Early Years undergraduates. Rachael laments that, whilst student wellbeing has been high on the agenda for many years now, teacher wellbeing has been neglected. She considers that, more recently, a light has been shone on what is going on in schools in terms of teachers and their unpaid workload in the evenings and at weekends. The cumulative effect of teachers working 60-80-hour weeks inevitably has the potential to lead to an increase in work-related stress.

In this article, wellbeing is viewed as a state of holistic health encompassing social, psychological and emotional facets. A range of wellbeing dimensions are acknowledged (see Table 1) with the potential to impact on lifespan, career choices, relationships and every aspect of life. Rachael is convinced that improved wellbeing starts with a critical knowledge of self. When this critical knowledge is lacking, we find ourselves in a fixed mindset preventing change or growth.

If wellbeing is achieved by making progress across a range of dimensions, it follows that if one dimension lags behind the others our attention should look to that area for betterment. One of the models Rachael introduces to her students is self-exploration of the eight dimensions discussed below and we invite you to participate in your own self-exploration.

Physical: This dimension involves the functional operations of the body, such as physical fitness, dietary and lifestyle habits and medical self-care. Physical educationists have a very good understanding of how the body operates and we know physical activity improves our wellbeing. But we often push the boundaries when it comes to our own physical health, for example, not warming up properly before demonstrating and working with injuries picked up during our own sporting endeavour. Poor nutrition and lack of rest can also play their part.



Explore your wellbeing

This exercise reminds us that wellbeing is not simply about fitness levels. Wellbeing is about holistic health and about self-awareness.

- Consider each dimension listed in Table 1 and allocate a score to indicate your level of wellbeing, where one is extremely low and ten is extremely high.
- The advice is to not ponder for too long as you allocate your score.
- Avoid giving a seven (often referred to as the 'sitting on the fence' option) – consider whether it is a six or an eight to give a truer indication.
- Do not worry how others might be scoring – your 'five' will mean something totally different to another person's understanding of 'five'.
- Once complete, stand back and consider which dimensions need addressing to promote your overall wellbeing. What do you notice?
- Any concerns? Ask for help.

Table 1: Eight dimensions of wellbeing (adapted from materials provided by Charles Sturt University).

Dimension of wellbeing	Definition	Wellbeing factor <i>0 = low/10 = high</i> <i>Rate yourself</i>
Physical 	<p>Involves the functional operations of the body, such as physical fitness, dietary and lifestyle habits and medical self-care.</p>	
Social 	<p>Involves the ability to get along with and feel connected to others, creating a sense of belonging with others.</p>	
Emotional 	<p>Involves an awareness of your own and others' feelings, an acceptance of the range of human emotions and the ability to manage emotions and cope with stress.</p>	
Intellectual 	<p>Involves maintaining an active mind and growing intellectually.</p>	
Spiritual 	<p>Involves the personal search for meaning and direction in life.</p>	
Environmental 	<p>Involves the preservation of our natural environment and resources.</p>	
Occupational 	<p>Involves deriving personal satisfaction from your work.</p>	
Financial 	<p>Involves the appropriate management of financial resources and the ability to plan financially for the future.</p>	

Social: This dimension involves the ability to get along with and feel connected to others, creating a sense of belonging. There is potential for physical educationists to score highly in this dimension. We tend to be good team players with a strong sense of community, an appreciation of fair play and the drive to participate with like-minded people outside of school. Our colleagues often keep us going and physical education departments can be close-knit supportive groups.

Emotional: This dimension involves an awareness of your own and others' feelings, an acceptance of the range of human emotions and the ability to manage emotions and cope with stress. We are subject to high levels of stress in teaching because of the constant interactions and infinite pressures, and we bring with us the normal range of emotions – grief, despair, joy, an argument from last night, a disappointment from this morning. This dimension is about our ability to be authentic and to realise it is okay to not be okay.

Intellectual: This dimension involves maintaining an active mind and growing intellectually. Many physical education teachers simply do not have the physical time to pursue their intellectual curiosity. As professionals, we want to keep up to date with the latest pedagogy and the most recent research and it becomes frustrating when this aspect of our lives becomes sidelined. *Physical Education Matters* serves a purpose here, but so does social media where it takes minutes, rather than hours, to engage with fellow professionals online.

Spiritual: This dimension involves the personal search for meaning and direction in life. For some, this relates to ethnicity or religion. For others, it extends beyond that and associates with us having a strong sense of our unique place in the universe and the effect that we can have on others, particularly with regard to capacities such as kindness, respect and gratitude. It is also involved with having a sense of our own self: our feeling of being in a community of human beings and an understanding that we all operate in different ways.

Environmental: This dimension involves the preservation of our natural environment and resources. In addition to the more obvious sustainability agenda, this dimension is concerned with us recognising that the environment in which we operate is our space. As well as our personal spaces, this includes the school setting in general, the physical education space in particular, and space in the wider community where we work, such as the parks, fitness studios and sports centre we use. Respecting, valuing and caring for our environment creates a sense of belonging which increases wellbeing.

Occupational: This dimension involves deriving personal satisfaction from our work. It is about having a deep and meaningful connection to what we do and believing that we can make a difference. Having a sense of purpose and getting satisfaction from our work despite the ups and downs is important. Most of us struggle with our wellbeing when we feel our purpose is undermined, when we feel leadership does not value us, and when our voice is not heard. The ever-increasing expectations of the education system are a constant threat to teacher wellbeing.

Financial: This dimension involves the appropriate management of financial resources and the ability to plan financially for the future. Financial wellbeing levels vary from country to country. In the UK, teachers are relatively well paid

compared to elsewhere, but if you equate salary to the number of actual hours worked, the hourly rate is potentially little more than the minimum basic wage. Add to this the dwindling budgets schools have for resources, resulting in teachers using their own money to pay for essential items, and the situation becomes volatile.

Self-awareness is an essential element of wellbeing, as is having the determination and the commitment to thrive. However, many agree that there are systemic issues at play which mean teachers are having to be robust in order to withstand the system. Often it is a matter of surviving rather than thriving. Teachers tend to love what they do. They are passionate about the children, they want to make a difference, but this only carries them so far.

Time will tell, but the pandemic has perhaps helped teachers to have the realisation that this relentless work ethic cannot continue. To a certain extent, lockdown gave thinking space, a shock, which may have created a reawakening of sorts. Overworked, stressed individuals do not realise how tired they are until they have a change of scene or a change of role. The pandemic helped to shine a light on the capacity for teachers to have flexibility and mental agility that allowed them to reflect on self and to contemplate what works and what does not work for them. Indeed, it was an opportunity for them to think about what it is about teaching that they still love, and what is it about teaching that they need to rethink and rework to accommodate their personal wellbeing needs. ■

Continue the discussion

Rachael's Facebook page, **Physical Education, Fundamental Movement Skills and Holistic Health**, set up in 2014, was created to bring important research to the attention of busy teachers and other interested parties. With over 10,000 followers, Rachael nurtures a community interested in lifelong learning and one where teacher wellbeing is a frequent topic. She says: "We have some really interesting conversations. My readers want to keep up with the latest research, but they don't have time to search for, or read, full research reports. They want a quick summary. So that's what they get." The page has become a thriving community in its own right; it is a safe space for teachers to explore and to share best practice. All are welcome and Rachael looks forward to welcoming you to the page. Link: <https://www.facebook.com/3dancingfeet/>

REFERENCES

- Jefferson-Buchanan, R. (2009). *Fundamental fun: 132 activities to develop fundamental movement skills*. STEPS Professional Development.
- Jefferson-Buchanan, R. (2019). *A genealogy of the governance of the body in physical education in England from 1902 to 2016*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Charles Sturt University] <https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/en/publications/a-genealogy-of-the-governance-of-the-body-in-physical-education-i>.

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