

Understanding Teaching-Learning Practice

Timothy R. N. Murphy
Patricia Mannix-McNamara *Editors*

International Perspectives on Teacher Well-Being and Diversity

Portals into Innovative Classroom
Practice

 Springer

Understanding Teaching-Learning Practice

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Patricia Mannix-McNamara
Editors

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*This book is dedicated to the well-being of all
teachers who are committed to their learners
in ethnically and socially diverse classroom
teaching contexts*

Foreword

The European project is based on the idea that nations with diverse backgrounds, cultures, languages and histories share a common ambition for peace and prosperity and on the conviction that this diversity can help us to realise that ambition.

However, while on the one hand diversity can be seen as enriching, it can also create tensions. Diversity is often associated with inequality and social injustice, such as when certain groups have a higher status or income or are more valued than other groups. This makes diversity a promise, an aim, a challenge and a mission.

This multi-layered perspective on diversity is not only true for society as a whole but also for education. Diversity in schools can be considered as an asset and a source for learning by recognising the cognitive, social, creative or ethical capital of each and every pupil. Such an understanding of the school's mission, configured around equality of opportunity for all, is recognised as being pivotal for strengthening social justice in societies.

This challenge for schools—on the one hand to embrace diversity as a source for inspiration and learning and on the other hand to fight unequal opportunities and strengthen opportunities for all—is largely the responsibility of teachers. They are the ones who can embrace diversity within classrooms, supporting pupils and fostering their capabilities regardless of their background. The awareness of the importance of teachers in creating societies that embrace diversity should lead to education policies that put teachers at the centre. Increasingly, however, teaching as a profession, is being impacted by a focus on performativity and associated expectations. This often occurs without due regard for the necessary conditions that are essential for teachers to play their role and to meet the expectations and challenges that they are confronted with.

Teacher well-being is one of these essential conditions. Teacher-focused policies are not only about attracting enough teachers to the profession but also about creating the conditions that can invite teachers to stay passionate and inspired throughout their teaching career. Education policies should not only focus on the well-being and learning of pupils but also on the well-being and learning of teachers, as the latter is the precondition for the former.

From this perspective, this book *International Perspectives on Teacher Well-Being and Diversity: Portals into Innovative Classroom Practice* is a very welcome contribution to the understanding of teacher well-being. Based on inspiring cases from a

variety of schools, the authors elaborate the concept of teacher well-being and the elements that are important to it. They emphasise key sources for teacher well-being like ownership (e.g. through engagement of teachers in action research and action learning focused on their own classroom practice), meaningfulness (that the things they do are meaningful to themselves and their pupils), self-efficacy and agency (that they are able to have an impact on their pupils) and autonomy (that—together with their colleagues—they have the room to make decisions on what fits best their pupils).

The authors also identify inhibitors that can reduce the success and well-being of teachers: workload, stress, performativity pressures, lack of autonomy and isolation. Strengthening the key sources for teacher well-being, as well as ameliorating the impact of the inhibitors, can result in increased overall happiness and contentment for teachers, characterised by personal professional fulfilment, satisfaction and purposefulness, which in turn, will influence the well-being and learning outcomes of pupils.

The various contributions in this book offer a theoretical exposition on teacher well-being, together with a social agenda, alongside a practical application and exploration. Through the use of well-designed research activities within the everyday context of schools, these elements are combined and enriched, strengthening our understanding of teacher well-being, both in theory and practice. The insights that are presented in this book can help to support teachers, school leaders and policymakers at local and national levels, to strengthen their efforts regarding teacher well-being, not as a one-off effort to support novice teachers, but as a challenge that remains important throughout the lifespan of a teacher's career.

One of the strengths of this book is the way in which the authors put the messages they have for teachers, school heads and policymakers into practice themselves. This book developed from an international project funded by the European Commission. Through the diversity of project partners, the project itself was based on the value of diversity—not only within Europe but also including South Africa as a partner that is characterised—maybe even more than Europe- by diversity. This results in messages that transcend local contexts and can be inspirational for a variety of education systems.

The authors also recognise and embrace the understanding that teachers cannot solve inequality and deal with both the promises and tensions of diversity on their own. In writing this book, the authors actually rephrase the adage 'it takes a village to raise a child', to a new one:

it takes both a school, a social and an academic community to support a teacher.

The authors embodied this both within their local context by considering teacher well-being through collaborations between universities and schools, as well as through cross-national collaborations, bringing different elements of and perspectives on teacher well-being together in this book.

As such, *International Perspectives on Teacher Well-Being and Diversity: Portals into Innovative Classroom Practice* can be a valuable source for both teachers, school

heads, policymakers and researchers giving conceptual, practical and inspirational insights into how teacher well-being can be strengthened within schools across the world.

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International Perspectives on Teacher Well-Being and Diversity: Portals into Innovative Classroom Practice was inspired by the editors' participation in an EU Erasmus+Funded Project on *Teacher Well-Being and Diversity: Managing language and social diversity in classrooms* (TWBD) 2016–2019 (2016-1-NO01-KA201-022081). The project team included five HEIs: University College Copenhagen (UCC), Denmark; University of Limerick (UL), Ireland; Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick, Ireland; Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet), Erasmus+ Lead Partner (formerly Oslo and Akershus University College), Norway; and, University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa. Each HEI was aligned with a partner project school. Together with their partner schools, each HEI contributed a chapter for *International Perspectives on Teacher Well-Being and Diversity: Portals into Innovative Classroom Practice*. Their contributions, together with the two specialist chapters (Chapters Two & Three) provided by contributors external to the Erasmus+project, greatly added to the learning and research evidence in this publication. Dr. Timothy R. N. Murphy and Professor Patricia Mannix-McNamara, School of Education, University of Limerick, as editors, also wish to acknowledge in particular the editorial assistance of Dr. Gerry Jeffers, Maynooth University, in the production and compilation of this book. Additionally, they are very grateful for the advice and support provided by Nick Melchior, Lay Peng, Jayanthi Krishnamoorthi and colleagues of the editorial team at Springer throughout the publication process.

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Abbreviations

CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
CPD	Continuing professional development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School
DES	Department of Education and Science (until 2011) and Department of Education and Skills from 2011–present
DH	Department of Health
EAL	English as an additional language
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
HOD	Head of department
HSE	Health Service Executive
IIAL	Incremental Introduction of African Languages
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
MIC	Mary Immaculate College
MIREC	Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NQT	Newly qualified teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMI	Office of the Minister for Integration (Norway)
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PE	Physical Education
PLC	Professional learning community
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SGB	School Governing Body (South Africa)
SMT	Senior management team
TC	Teaching Council
TPWB	Teacher pedagogical well-being
TWB	Teacher well-being
ULSoE	University of Limerick School of Education
UWC	University of Western Cape
WSD	Whole School Development

Chapter 1

Introduction



Timothy R. N. Murphy and Patricia Mannix-McNamara

Abstract International Perspectives on Teacher Well-being and Diversity: Portals into Innovative Classroom Practice offers a suite of practical methods and research approaches to promote educator well-being in responding respectfully, ethically, and in a strength-based way to growing student diversity. Several themes emerged throughout the book, including the potential of teacher collaboration, the impact of the neo-liberal turn in education, the need for culturally responsive pedagogies, the importance of dialogue with parents, the critical factor of school leadership, and the inter-connection between teacher well-being and pupil well-being. Each of the themes identified above are obvious topics for further research, and the chapter concludes with a consideration of such opportunities.

Teacher well-being as key to quality learning by students is moving centre stage in educational conversations/discourse (see, for example, Hawkins, 2017; Rechtschaffen & Kabat-Zinn, 2014). *International Perspectives on Teacher Well-being and Diversity: Portals into Innovative Classroom Practice* intends to act as a compilation of a suite of practical methods and research approaches that promote educator well-being through supporting teachers and pre-service teachers in schools and university contexts to respond respectfully, ethically and in a strengths-based way to growing student diversity in their specific contexts. It aims to provide a collection of approaches and strategies that can then be selected, applied and/or adapted by readers in ways that respond to the diversity that exists in their specific contexts.

As classrooms across the world become more diverse, many teachers aspire to being more inclusive, ethical, culturally sensitive and pedagogically responsive. At the same time, greater student diversity can present tensions and challenges which impact teachers' well-being. This book offers practical examples from four different

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countries—Denmark, Ireland, Norway and South Africa—that illustrate teacher initiatives in multicultural classrooms and document their impact on teacher well-being. The discrete chapters are rich in practical detail as well as conceptualising the emerging issues faced by schools. Teachers, school leaders, teacher-educators and student teachers will find in this book a range of approaches, strategies and dispositions that can be adapted to local contexts.

The importance of this focus is underlined by recent research at a European level, such as that of De Paola and Brunello (2016). Brunello and De Paola (2017) remind us that immigrants usually concentrate in less affluent neighbourhoods. A persistent theme in *International Perspectives on Teacher Well-being and Diversity: Portals into Innovative Classroom Practice* is that socio-economic disadvantage can often be characteristic of ethnically diverse classrooms. Five of the chapters have been developed by classroom teachers, together with their collaborating Higher Education (HEI) partners. Each partner school was intentionally chosen for its potential to provide insights into the focus topic of teacher well-being and diversity. The contributing HEIs include University College Copenhagen (UCC), Denmark; Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Ireland; Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet), Norway; University of Limerick (UL), Ireland; and, University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa. They, together with their partner schools, have participated in an Erasmus + project *Teacher Well-Being and Diversity: Managing language and social diversity in classrooms*.

1.1 Teacher Well-Being and Complexity

The project of teaching is a complex endeavour. It is recognised, for example, that teachers today are increasingly expected to perform tasks that extend beyond their job description (Kimonen & Nevalainen, 2013). How the teachers' role is understood is continually being refined in the context of rapidly changing societies (Besson, Huber, Mompoint, & Rohmann, 2015). The job description is never quite fixed and always evolving.

Thus, teacher well-being (TWB) is multifaceted. Across the chapters in this edited collection, various perspectives on teacher well-being (TWB) are explored related to the particular contexts that are being considered. In Chap. 2, an understanding of TWB is developed in the context of professional empowerment through situated learning within a self-study action research approach. A number of the chapters consider TWB from a social justice perspective (see for example, Chaps. 3 and 4). In Chap. 3, the author contends that recognition of the caring, relational and affective dimensions of life are recognised are a prerequisite for TWB from a social justice perspective. The South African contributors in the following chapter also evidence how pivotal a social justice perspective is for TWB, especially in the context of multilingualism. And, multilingualism itself is a prominent feature for how TWB is being understood (see Chaps. 4, 5, 6 and 7). Across several of the chapters, it is also evident that a longitudinal Finnish study on teacher pedagogical well-being (see

Soini et al., 2010) provided a theoretical back-drop for how TWB is being interpreted (see Chaps. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8).

In these neo-liberal times, Hall and McGinity (2015, p. 5) make reference to the impact that the cult of ‘deliverology’ has on teachers’ sense of professionalism (see also Barber et al., 2010). The net effect, Hall and McGinity contend, is to reduce teachers to the status of ‘compliant operatives’. Teachers can be perceived as ‘the white van men of education’ responsible for ‘delivering’ education policies conceived on the sofa of No. 10 Downing Street (Campbell, 2011), or its equivalent in any other country.

The diminution of the status of teachers has resulted in an increase in teacher stress and burnout (Schleicher, 2018). Schleicher’s study reported that one in four teachers in Sweden felt stressed out at school and have seriously considered changing their profession and/or workplace. It also referenced a similar study in England which revealed that 61% of teachers are thinking of quitting the profession altogether (NASUWT, 2017). The diminution in the status of teacher professionalism can also negatively impact teachers’ beliefs in their own abilities, what is referred to in the literature as ‘teacher self-efficacy’ (Schleicher, 2018; Zee & Koomen, 2016). A number of studies have demonstrated a correlation between teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction and commitment (Chesnut & Burley, 2015; Klusmann, Kunter, Trautwein, Ludtke, & Baumert, 2008).

The latter study identified a connection between occupational well-being and a teacher’s sense of satisfaction with classroom practice (Klusmann et al., 2008). A similar link was also made by Soini, Pyhältö and Pietarinen in their study on Teacher Pedagogical Well-being (TPWB) (2010). In that study, TPWB is described by Soini et al. (2010, p. 737), as being constructed ‘in the core processes of teachers’ work that is, carrying out and developing teaching–learning process, including, for example, planning classroom activities, interacting with learners, making evaluations and choosing and developing instructional tools’. Additionally, they also acknowledge the importance of teachers interacting with colleagues for teacher well-being, although their primary emphasis is on the significance of teachers interacting with learners.

Ethnicity and social disadvantage are also acknowledged in the literature as impacting on the work of teachers in schools and accordingly on their experience of well-being. In each of the chapters in *International Perspectives on Teacher Well-being and Diversity: Portals into Innovative Classroom Practice*, the collaborating HEIs together with their partner schools respond to challenges of ethnic and social diversity as they impact on teacher well-being.

1.2 Teacher Well-Being in the Context of Ethnic Diversity

A recent OECD study on ‘The Lives of Teachers in Diverse Classrooms’ (Forghani-Arani, Cerna, & Bannon, 2019a, 2019b) highlighted the pedagogical import of increasing ethnic diversity in classrooms on teachers’ work. It elevated the task

of developing culturally responsive pedagogies to a ‘professional imperative’ for teachers. A number of the chapters in this book have attempted to respond to this imperative (see Chaps. 4, 5, 6 and 8). Not responding to ethnic diversity in this way can have a negative impact on learners’ motivation, overall well-being and development (European Union, 2017a, 2017b). This, in turn, can have a negative impact on teachers’ well-being.

The latter report made reference to the projection that by the middle of the twenty-first century, it is estimated that 20–40% of Europe’s population could have an immigrant background (European Union, 2017a, 2017b). The EU’s responsibility to all those who are rightfully and legitimately in the EU is enshrined in the ‘Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union’ (European Union, 2012). Although it is recognised that education and training play a crucial role in meeting this responsibility (European Commission, 2016), there is a concern that teachers feel ill-prepared to teach in multicultural settings. An OECD ‘Teaching in Focus’ (2019) reported that across 38 TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey)¹ participating countries and economies, 12.7% of teachers identified a high need for professional development in this area.

The TALIS finding is significant in light of the ‘professional imperative’ referred to above. Also, the under-preparedness of teachers limits the extent to which they can capitalize on the potential benefits of multiculturalism. In its report on ‘Preparing Teachers for Diversity’, the EU recognises that diversity can function as a rich educational resource in classrooms to enrich the competencies and creativity of all learners, promote inter-group contact, as well as offering opportunities for reflection and peer-learning (European Union, 2017a, 2017b, p. 21). The enhancement of such core classroom activities will have a positive impact on teachers’ overall sense of well-being, especially as it pertains to their teaching and learning (Soini et al., 2010).

Multicultural Learning Environments (MLEs) as a resource for classroom teaching is also evident in a number of the chapters in *International Perspectives on Teacher Well-being and Diversity: Portals into Innovative Classroom Practice* (see Chaps. 4, 5, 6 and 8). These authors are also aware of the challenges presented by MLEs for the work of teachers in classrooms. The Danish, Irish, Norwegian and South African chapters acknowledge the importance of developing teachers’ capacities ‘to be empathic and reflexive about their own beliefs, cultural and socioeconomic differences’ (European Union, 2017a, 2017b, p. 20). Such capacities they point out in their respective chapters are very important for developing communication skills for diversity. Teachers with these developed communication attributes are well placed to harness ‘the cultural and linguistic capitals’ of learners with a diverse background, to enhance the competencies and creativity of all learners and to promote cohesion in schools (Meinhoef, 2013). This sense of cohesion is important as it provides a conducive environment for the propagation of teacher well-being (OECD, 2009).

Teachers in MLEs also encounter the realities of language diversity. Respecting and nurturing such diversity is central to EU policies, for example, in promoting

¹TALIS collects internationally comparable data on the learning environment and the working conditions of teachers and principals in schools across the world.

a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages (European Union, 2019). It highlighted that only four in ten learners in secondary education reach the ‘independent user’ level in the first foreign language, indicating an ability to have a simple conversation. This deficit is the opposite of what is intended for the ‘European Project’, which proposed that ‘multilingual competence’ would be at the heart of the vision of a European Education Area (European Union, 2019). However, in its ‘Preparing Teachers for Diversity’, the EU recognises that one of the most important challenges faced by learners with a diverse background is that the language of schooling often differs from the language(s) they speak at home (European Union, 2017a, 2017b, p. 21). In this publication, Danish, Norwegian and South African contributors elaborate on this important challenge. It is also considered in the context of Chap. 8 from Ireland.

A key insight for harnessing language diversity as a classroom resource is the importance of non-formal learning (European Union, 2014). In reference to this, the Danish authors introduced the concept of ‘læringsglemsel’ (see Chap. 6). It affords all of their participants (teachers, learners and parents) the opportunity to engage with a rich, varied and meaningful, diverse learning context. The resulting partnership between UCC and their project school ‘Nord School’ (pseudonym) highlights the importance of valuing the culture and language of learners with a migrant, minority and/or, socio-economically disadvantaged background. It is acknowledged that this can have a positive overall impact on the motivation, overall well-being and development of all involved (European Union, 2017a, 2017b). Similar approaches are evident in Chap. 5 where the Norwegian teachers, as well as the learners and the parents, recognize the importance of more ‘informal communications’ as part of the multicultural language learning environment.

Various EU policies emphasise the importance of teachers engaging with the primary carers of learners, actively reaching out to diverse communities in order to gain deeper insights into parental expectations (European Union, 2019; 2017a, 2017b). A number of the contributors in *International Perspectives on Teacher Well-being and Diversity: Portals into Innovative Classroom Practice* have also found that engagement with the primary carers of the learners to be pivotally significant for effective teaching and learning in MLEs. In both the Danish and Norwegian chapters, reference is made to Nordahl (2007, 2008) who perceives parents/guardians as a resource to be engaged with to activate the learners’ motivation and engagement with the learning process. Chapter 8 foregrounds the work of Smyth, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne (2009) which also reported on the importance of engagement with parents/guardians. It found that the language difficulties among parents were a greater barrier to learners settling into primary school than the child’s own language difficulties. The impact of the breakdown in communication between the parents and the teachers as a consequence of language barriers is also considered by the South African contributors to this publication (see Chap. 4).

1.3 Teacher Well-Being in the Context of Socio-Economic Disadvantage

Immigrant learners face an intersection of multiple potential challenges that can result in multiple forms of marginalisation according to a Report on ‘The Lives of Teachers in Diverse Classrooms’ (Forghani-Arani, Cerna, & Bannon, 2019a, 2019b). One of these is socio-economic disadvantage. Research from the ‘Preparing Teachers for Diversity’ Report (European Union, 2017a, 2017b) found that such disadvantage, coupled with a migrant and, or, minority background, can impact on a learner’s access to good quality education. This recognition is foregrounded in a number of the contributions in this publication.

In Chap. 3, Maeve O’Brien is concerned with the challenges faced by Irish teachers who work in schools that are impacted by an intersection of multiple factors. In particular, it focuses on the impact on teachers’ well-being. Similarly, in Chap. 8, Carol O’Sullivan, Sandra Ryan and Lisha O’Sullivan, consider the impact on the well-being of teachers who work in disadvantaged multicultural and multilingual school contexts. This is also the focus for Karen Collett and her colleagues in Chap. 4. They highlight the achievements and challenges for TWB and multilingualism at a school located within a high poverty context in South Africa. And, the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on classroom effectiveness and well-being in the context of an urban secondary school in Ireland is also the focus of the authors in Chap. 7.

1.4 Overview of Chapters in the Book

In Chap. 2, Bernie Sullivan, Mary Roche, Máirín Glenn and Caitriona McDonagh offer a taster of self-study action research as they have practised it in the expectation that teachers will begin to experience how it may support well-being and diversity. They explore the idea that self-study action research, where teachers undertake research projects in their own practice, can contribute to teachers’ sense of well-being. Such practitioner enquiries have as their aim the understanding and improvement of practice. Critical self-reflection is an essential aspect of self-study action research, and provides the practitioner with the opportunity of looking at what is good about their practice, as well as what could be improved on. This process allows teachers to focus on the positive, thus enhancing their sense of well-being as they cope with the increasing diversity of their classroom situations. The authors look at the prospect that, through carrying out research in their practice, teachers can experience a sense of empowerment and this helps them to feel that they are in control of their own professional development. This discussion leads them to consider the concepts of teacher identity and teacher agency, and the impact of well-being on these concepts.

In the following chapter, Maeve O’Brien draws on her long experience in the field of education as a primary school teacher and home/school liaison co-ordinator in