The Role of Principals in Enhancing Teacher Well-being in Schools in Rural Communities

Siphokazi Kwatubana
North West University
Sipho.Kwatubana@nwu.ac.za

ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand the factors that teachers and school management team members perceived as having the potential to boost teacher well-being in rural schools and the role the principal plays in promoting teacher well-being. A stratified sample of school managers and teachers from a rural high school in the Mopani district of the Limpopo province participated. A total of fourteen semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with seven teachers, yielding four enablers to teacher well-being and three roles which principals could play to support teacher well-being. The findings revealed that strong principal-teacher relationships, disengaging from work to socialize, adaptability, and a green school physical environment promote teacher well-being. The role of the principal in supporting teacher well-being is multi-faceted, encompassing the creation of a positive school culture and traditions, developing and maintaining a conducive green school environment, and promoting teacher adaptability.

Introduction

Teacher well-being, as evidenced in international studies by Burgess et al. (2018), Kidger et al. (2021), and Turner et al. (2022), as well as studies conducted in South

Africa by Van der Vyver et al. (2020), Du Plessis and McDonagh (2021), and Mabunda and Kwatubana (2023), has become a contentious issue in education. Teacher well-being is incredibly significant because of its impact on the effectiveness of a school, teaching, learning, and academic performance. Many researchers concur that teacher well-being is important to ensure the quality of teaching and learning (Roffey, 2012; Kidger et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2022). Literature supports that enhanced teacher well-being is essential for the delivery of quality education, commitment, motivation, job satisfaction, and the willingness to perform routine duties at the maximum level (Burgess et al., 2018; Bevene et al., 2020). For teachers to execute their professional tasks effectively, they should have enhanced well-being. Moreover, for a school to improve learner performance, there is a need to explore teacher well-being. This is because productivity and the quality of education rendered by any education system depend on teachers (Kruger, 2019). Thus, the heightened risk of poor well-being will likely impact the support teachers provide to learners and learner outcomes. Teacher well-being is critically relevant for the well-being of the whole school and a stable environment for learners, but also for financial considerations in curbing teacher attrition.

Teacher well-being is defined as the expression of a positive emotional state, which results from the harmony between the sum of specific environmental factors and the personal needs and expectations of teachers (Wissing, 2014). Teacher well-being is related to positive relationships with students, colleagues, and families. This study focuses on teacher well-being that is work-related and domain-specific. Thus, work-related teacher well-being refers to the healthy and successful functioning of teachers at work. It is about the ability of teachers to develop a positive and dynamic equilibrium between teachers' resources and their environmental, social, individual, physical, mental, and psychological challenges and demands (Benevene et al., 2020). It is therefore a multi-faceted concept that encompasses all the factors mentioned above.

There are many factors affecting teacher well-being that are unique to teachers in rural contexts. Rural schools face a dearth of infrastructure, overcrowded

classrooms, inadequate resources for teaching, learning and extra-mural activities, and a lack of basic services, such as clean water and sanitation (Du Plessis, 2014). Due to these challenges, pre-service teachers may have negative attitudes towards teaching in rural schools due to logistical challenges. Moreover, many schools in more remote areas struggle to attract and/or retain experienced staff. A study by Mafora (2013) reported that barriers to teacher retention in rural schools relate to policy and procedures frameworks, working conditions in schools, socio-economic push-pull factors, and the role ambiguity of principals. This can lead to teachers taking on school leadership positions earlier in their careers, which complicates their workload stress. A study by Taole (2022) reveals an inability of teachers to access professional development and collaborate with experienced teachers in rural schools in Vhembe district in the Limpopo province. Thus, such teachers are isolated from social and professional networks. Furthermore, according to the same study, the issue of small staff numbers in rural schools results in multigrade teaching. In multigrade teaching, there is an increased likelihood of teachers instructing school subjects that are beyond their expertise. It also creates greater workloads and professional development needs. The professional relationship between teachers also suffers in resource-scarce environments (Mathikithela & Wood, 2019). Such working conditions have an influence on teacher well-being, thus a focus on supporting teacher well-being in rural areas might create a buffer for teachers.

The table below presents studies that have been conducted in South Africa about teacher well-being. This information on teacher well-being highlights that there is a growing area of research that has seen a steady increase in publications in recent years.

TABLE 1

Research on teacher well-being from 2013–2023

Title	Author/s	Research questions	Findings	Recommendation

The relationship between well-being indicators and teacher psychological stress in Eastern Cape public schools in South Africa	Vazi et al. (2013)	To assess the relationship between indicators of well-being and stress and to further assess the relative importance of these well-being indicators in explaining stress variance in a large sample of Eastern Cape primary and high school teachers in South Africa.	Stress is prevalent amongst teachers. Subjective and psychological well-being factors added significantly to the explained stress variance. Both negative effect and role problems had significant positive correlations with stress, while psychological well-being had a strong inverse relationship with stress.	Interventions aimed at increasing psychological well-being, through enhancing environmental mastery, autonomy, positive relations with others, personal growth, life purpose and self-acceptance, would help teachers to cope better with stress.
Teacher mental health promotion in creating quality teaching environments in dysfunctional secondary schools	Mbulaheni et al. (2017)	To identify challenges in the promotion of the mental health of teachers for them to create an environment that promotes quality teaching and learning in dysfunctional secondary schools in Mutale area in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo province.	Conditions in the schools were not conducive to the promotion of teachers' mental health. Teachers were demotivated, resulting in poor performance in school activities including teaching in class. Some teachers even left the profession. Poor performance of teachers rendered the schools dysfunctional.	The Department of Basic Education needs to consider the promotion of the mental health of teachers in their quest to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
Fostering teachers' experiences of well-being: A participatory action learning and action research approach	Wessels & Wood (2019)	To work collaboratively with teachers to help them find ways to improve their experiences of well-being.	The findings indicate that frequent, informal social contact with colleagues, coupled with explicit action to focus on positive emotions, could improve teachers' experiences of well-being.	A collaborative action learning process could help to enhance teachers' abilities to improve and sustain their experiences of well-being.

JCIE

Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education
Vol. 19, no. 1, 2024, Regular Issue
DOI: https://doi.org/ 10.20355/jcie29562

The relationship between teachers' professional wellbeing and principals' leadership behaviour to improve teacher retention	Van Der Vyver et al. (2020)	To explore the relationship between the principal's leadership behaviour and teachers' professional well-being in improving teacher retention.	There is a relationship between perceived leadership behaviour and well-being. Transformational and transactional leadership dimensions could positively contribute to teachers' professional well-being, whereas laissez-faire leadership has a potentially negative influence on their professional well-being.	The use of transformational and transactional leadership behaviour results in teachers reporting positive job-related affective well-being, which can, in turn, influence teachers to remain in the profession due to their experience of enhanced professional well-being.
Leadership styles that would enable school leaders to support the wellbeing of teachers during COVID-19	Kwatubana & Molaodi (2021)	To explore what can be learnt from studies on teacher well-being during the COVID-19 crisis that can help us to determine the leadership style needed to support teacher well-being.	The paper highlighted two leadership best practices for navigating teacher well-being challenges posed by the corona virus pandemic, namely distributed leadership and compassionate leadership.	Distributive leadership is key in ensuring the effectiveness of remote leadership.
Qualitative exploration of workplace demands, resources and bullying among teachers in South African schools: Implications for individual and organisational well-being	Bernstein & Batcheloro (2022)	To examine workplace bullying among teachers in South African schools.	The findings in this study indicate that in the aftermath of bullying, feelings of incompetence, emotional exhaustion, depression and anxiety manifest. Furthermore, teachers reported engaging in withdrawal behaviour and expressing an increased desire to leave the profession.	There is an urgent need to increase resources and interventions to create a more conducive and healthy work environment.
Teacher awareness of psychosocial support available as per the Integrated School	Pillay et al. (2023)	To assess of which psychosocial interventions implemented at the schools the	The schoolteachers' abilities to support their learners varies per school and is based on their school's compliance to training their teachers on the school safety protocols and is not affected much by external training. Schools	Further studies explore whether the lack of mental health observations is a result of poor teacher-student relations or a need

Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education
2024, 19(1), pp. 85-109. ©Author(s), Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) licence.
http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE

Health Policy in South Africa		schoolteachers are aware.	that follow the ISPH regulations on teachers' training of protocols, better equip their teachers to observe psychosocial challenges their learners face.	for schoolteachers to be educated on mental health risk factors for learners.

The studies in the table above indicate a need for more interventions to support teacher well-being. The Department of Basic Education has introduced initiatives to better support teachers using an approach comprising one-off events, such as Teacher Appreciation Week or short workshops (Setlhare et al., 2016). There is a need for a more sustainable approach to support teacher well-being. The only study that focused on roles was that of Kruger (2019), which analysed the well-being discourse in reports of the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) to establish how the department as an employer and as a public service department understands its role in taking care of the well-being of teachers. There is therefore a lack of understanding of the principal's role in enhancing teacher well-being. It is argued in this study that the role of the Department of Education is as important as that of principals in enhancing teacher well-being. Bosak (2018) defines a role as a socially-defined pattern of behaviour expected of a person occupying a social position or belonging to a particular category. In this study, a role refers to certain functions that the school principal is expected to perform in promoting the well-being of teachers.

There is a scarcity of studies reporting on the role of school leaders in enhancing the well-being of teachers in rural schools; thus, little is known about the contributions they can make. Bernstein and Batcheloro (2022) call for an urgent need to increase resources and interventions to create a more conducive and healthy work environment for teachers. Kidger et al. (2021) advise on the importance of finding interventions that improve teacher and student mental health. They opine that interventions that have a bigger impact on school culture, including the quality of relationships and level of perceived support, would be more

effective (Kidger et al., 2021). This research aims to add to strategies and interventions that can be employed in rural schools to alleviate the impacts of organisational factors that decrease teacher well-being. This is important in ensuring an environment that enables teachers to thrive. Thus, the questions that guide this research are: what factors have the potential to boost teacher well-being in rural schools? What role can principals play in supporting teachers' well-being?

Principals as Health-Promoting Leaders

The general roles and responsibilities of school principals have been outlined in the policy on the South African Standards for Principalship (South Africa, 2016). One of these roles is creating a safe and secure school environment. For that reason, school principals are responsible for ensuring that the school, human, and other resources are organised and managed in a way that would provide a safe, effective, efficient, and invigorating environment (South Africa, 2016). However, principals can interpret this mandate differently. It is important that principals understand their role, as they must act on this policy imperative. Understanding of a role may improve a practice if what principals know is enacted. The researchers feel that the principal as a leader should better understand their role to guide the school community towards improving teacher well-being.

In executing this task, principals are expected to build and sustain a high level of motivation and support their staff in developing the skills required to successfully change, coordinate processes and activities, and encourage staff to sustain new practices and activities (South Africa, 2016; Dadaczynski & Paulus, 2015). The principals function as "gatekeepers" to school innovations that significantly influence whether a school will become and remain a healthy organisation (Dadaczynski & Paulus, 2015, p. 254). Thus, principals are increasingly identified as gatekeepers for initiating and sustaining standardised and complex interventions in school health promotion (Dadaczynski et al., 2020, p. 2). Moreover, educational leaders' active engagement in leadership for well-being decisions to build

communication, trust, and emotionally safe workplaces makes a positive difference (Du Plessis & McDonagh, 2021).

Research Method

This study followed a qualitative research design, as it focuses on "a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting" as McMillan and Schumacher (2010, p. 320) indicated. An in-depth understanding of principal's role in supporting teacher well-being was sought in the natural setting of the participating school. The qualitative research approach is also preferred because of its flexibility in data collection methods and its reliance on the direct experiences of human beings as meaning-making agents in their everyday lives.

This research comes from a larger study conducted in a rural high school in the Mopani East District of the Limpopo province of South Africa. The choice of this school was guided by the fact that P4 schools are big with a higher number of educators. In rural areas, the enrolment is big if it exceeds 600 learners. The status of this school enabled the researchers to draw a sample from a pool of information-rich participants, unlike P1 schools that comprise two to six teachers. The sample was made up of two school management team members (principal (P) and the departmental head (DH), two teachers who were members of the school health committee (t1; t2), and three teachers (t3; t4; t5) whose subjects registered high learner enrolments. The study was therefore comprised of seven participants. The school managers oversee the activities of the school and are informed about the well-being of the teachers. Teachers instructing subjects with high enrolment might have experienced higher educator-learner ratios that impact their well-being and that of their colleagues. Teachers who were members of health committees were responsible for implementation of health policies and programmes. The purpose of stratified purposeful sampling is "to capture major variations" even though "a common core may also emerge in the analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 240). The intention was to have access to information-rich cases. This was

a stratified sampling method that intended to improve the efficiency of sample design. Although this was a relatively small sample, important population subgroups were included.

Individual face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were used to collect and record information on the principal's role in promoting the well-being of teachers. Two interviews were conducted with each participant, the first on the factors that they perceived as having the potential to boost the well-being of teachers in rural schools and the second on the role the principal played in promoting the well-being of teachers. This means that fourteen interviews were held. This data was transcribed verbatim directly from the audio recording after each interview. The first author applied a thematic analysis, which is used in qualitative research to generate themes whereby broken bits of collected data ought to be understood in the context of themes. Thematic analysis is a suitable method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, as well as generating unanticipated insights (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is also useful for summarising key features of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to take a structured approach to data handling.

Ethics approval was received in April 2019 and permission was also granted by the Limpopo Provincial Education Department in May. The granting of such permission was communicated to the District Office by the Departmental Head (DH). The written permission was then issued by the Mopani East District Education Department. The first two phases of data collection (visual data collection and focus group interviews) for this study were conducted and completed in September 2019. When the first COVID-19 cases were identified in South Africa, the hard lockdowns and school closures followed, and it became difficult to continue with the research, especially in the first semester of 2020. In the second semester of the same year, schools reopened on a rotational basis. Individual interviews could be conducted and finalised, while the fourth phase (implementation of action plans and evaluation) could only be completed in 2021. This study reports on this third phase

of the project which involved conducting individual interviews. All the participants indicated above contributed to the results.

Results

In this study, it emerged that participants perceived close relationships between the principal and teachers; activities that enable teachers to disengage from work; the capacity to adapt to changes; and the availability and access to green school physical environments as having potential to facilitate teacher well-being. It was also revealed that school principals can play a pivotal role in enhancing teacher well-being. These results might have been influenced by the impact of COVID-19 on teachers and their well-being.

Close Relationships With Teachers

The participants mentioned the matter of close relationships with the principal as imperative in improving teacher well-being. A close relationship between the principal and teachers prevails where an atmosphere of trust and respect allows teachers to confide in the principal when faced with challenges. The following statements from two teachers and school managers highlight the importance of a close relationship between the principal and the staff members:

> There is a need to create a close relationship between teachers and the principal (P). This makes it easier to talk about challenges encountered by individuals and the school (t2). A close relationship is built with trust, open communication, and respect (t3). The principal has to create a safe space that enables teachers to confide in them (DH).

The suggested relationship between the principal and teachers may benefit both individuals and groups. At both levels, there is a strong possibility of improved well-being. When individuals share their problems with the caring and understanding principal, they perceive support. At the group level, when members routinely connect around shared problems and goals, a strong culture of

interconnectedness is built. According to Louis and Wahlstrom (2011), such relationships are necessary to respond to fluid and changing conditions. Moreover, they provide protection and care for teachers' professional and personal lives. The idea that it is the principal who must initiate these relationships is based on the notion that "a successful leader facilitates and supports mutually beneficial relationships with teachers" (Qian & Walker, 2021). Both teachers and principals may benefit in open, trusting, and respectful interpersonal relationships, thereby supporting each other's well-being. School principals, like teachers, are also exposed to the same high-demand rural environments, and they deal with quite different responsibilities and tasks; thus, their well-being would benefit from good relationships. Such relationships are also based on the listening skills of both parties. Both must be prepared to listen to each other. When principals listen to their teachers, they may foster an open and receptive work environment that helps teachers adapt during stressful times (Rave et al., 2022).

Trust has to do with certain leadership behaviours of a principal. Principal-teacher trust creates an opportunity for open and honest conversations about problems and challenges. Trust can be used as a pathway to open communication about issues. It becomes easier to offer and receive support where there is mutual trust. A study by Yılmaz and Altınkurt (2012) revealed a high level of positive relationship between the supportive leadership behaviours of school principals and teachers' trust in them. As this was a period where teachers were experiencing uncertainty about their jobs, safety, and families, they needed a safe space to off-load the burden they might have been carrying. A study by Hong et al. (2020), found that trusting relationships seemed to have helped teachers withstand challenging transitions by providing a safe space where teachers can learn and grow.

Supporting activities that help teachers to detach

Participants highlighted the importance of disengaging from work by being involved in activities that enable them to interact, relax and destress. Commenting on recreation and relaxation, teachers and school managers said:

> As a school, we organise fun days once per term where teachers come together and engage in various sporting activities such as playing soccer, netball and volleyball. This is an initiative of each school, and teachers always look forward to fun days (t2). Fun activities can be done within the school or with any other school. This enables them to strengthen relationships and creates opportunities for networking (DH). Principals must support such fun days, motivate teachers to organise them and allow teachers time to attend them (P).

Teachers do not always have time to focus on themselves. Their focus is on learners and the teaching content. The fun days indicated by participants can be used for interaction, relaxation, and to de-stress. Fun days can be beneficial for both physical and mental well-being. However, in a study by Varol et al. (2021), primary and secondary school teachers reported more difficulties detaching from work than employees from other occupations, due to emotional demands and performance pressure. This means that intervention programmes targeted at enhancing teachers' psychological detachment from work are vital. Participants in this research preferred outdoor games and sports activities as means to create leisure time to unwind and recuperate from work-related stress. White (2020) maintains that teachers have various ways to recover during off-job time, and the helpful methods include relaxing activities, activities involving other people, and exercising. The sporting activities between schools can be used as social and professional networking platforms.

Fun days were also regarded as vital for networking and socialisation. Opportunities for socialisation might be scarce in rural communities due to the remoteness of the areas and issues of logistics. Social support from colleagues becomes important in areas where there is a scarcity of resources and limited opportunities for professional development. Participants understood that social support can also be received from colleagues in other schools. Studies found that social support has a positive influence on both the organisation and the psychological traits of employees (Beausart et al., 2016). It is important to note

96

teachers' willingness to step out and navigate towards those resources to the benefit of their own well-being. Sporting activities between schools have the potential to combat isolation. Isolation has the potential to affect the well-being of teachers in schools in rural communities, where feelings of isolation and loneliness are not uncommon among teachers (Turner et al., 2022).

Principals are expected to play a leading role in ensuring that fun days materialise and become beneficial to teacher well-being. It is important that school leaders understand the crucial role that they play in developing a school culture (Ridho, et al. 2017) that maximises teacher well-being and minimises stress for teachers and learners. A positive school culture is associated with positive mental health of students (Jessiman et al., 2022). Creating a positive culture in a school requires that administrative leaders provide access to the necessary resources (Lummis et al., 2022) that encourage teachers to deal with the pressures of working in resource-scarce environments in a healthy way.

Facilitation of Preparation to Adapt to Changes

It was indicated that it is important for school principals to create opportunities for teachers to acquire skills that would enable them to adapt to changes taking place in the education system. These include initiatives to adapt to manage the changing situations that occur in the ever-changing learning environments. Commenting on the need for capacity building, the teachers said:

> Things are changing every day and it becomes difficult to adapt. One can easily be left behind and get discouraged (t1). There is a need for teachers to be equipped with skills to enable them to navigate the changes (t4). COVID-19 was one of many examples where things changed abruptly, and we had to adjust to the changes to survive. Sometimes I become so stressed because of not being able to move with the changing times and events and get stuck in the old (t5).

The COVID-19 experience was still fresh in the minds of the participants. This added to many other such examples of the ever-changing environment in education. Adapting to changes is an important skill in teaching because of the many changes in the education environment. Literature indicates that all three dimensions of adaptability are needed when faced with a challenging or uncertain situation. It is important to think about the situation in different ways, adjust one's actions in order to manage the change in situation or circumstance and adjust one's emotions to reduce anxiety or increase positive emotions in the face of change or uncertainty (Martin et al., 2012). Participants opine that it is the principal's responsibility to equip teachers with skills to adapt to changes. Perhaps the participants look up to the principal as the leader to initiate such projects.

A Focus on the Green Physical Environment of the School

Participants highlighted the importance of focusing on the physical surroundings of the school for healthier teacher well-being. The following statements which were supported by all participants are an indication of the high regard for the school green environment:

> One can realise that the school entrance is so invitational and attractive because of the flowers growing on either side of the gate, making the landscaping of the school look beautiful (t3). I like the rockery that is surrounded by the lawn on which flowers grow, I always look at it whenever I have time between classes (t5). Looking at the flowers and a school vegetable garden when crops are green helps with relaxation (DH). There is a lawn in front of the staffrooms and administrative office (t2). It is pleasing and refreshing to look at such surroundings when one is tired (P).

The utterances made by the participants indicate that they were pleased with the landscape of the school that was covered with lawn and had flowerbeds. It seems that participants were implying that the attractive landscapes of the school

provided healthy school environments, thus increasing teacher well-being levels. Researchers agree that time spent in nature can have therapeutic benefits for individuals. Moreover, an outdoor green space environment would be more relaxing than an indoor environment. Foellmer et al. (2021) argue that an academic green space can be used as a facilitator for recreation and attention restoration. The landscape covered by lawn absorbs carbon dioxide and breaks it down into carbon and oxygen, making oxygen readily available for respiration. Moreover, a landscape with lawn and trees reduces temperature levels by 20 to 30 percent compared to asphalt or pavement surfaces (Bryant, 2014). This is important in Limpopo, a province where temperatures can be higher than 40 degrees during summer months.

Discussion

This study sought to understand the factors that teachers and school management team members perceived as having the potential to boost the well-being of teachers in rural schools and the role principals play in promoting the well-being of teachers. A stratified sample of school managers and teachers from a rural high school in the Mopani district of the Limpopo province participated. A total of fourteen semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with seven teachers, yielding four facilitators of teacher well-being and three roles which principals can play to support teacher well-being. The enablers of teacher well-being were regarded as including strong principal-teacher relationships, activities for disengaging from work and socialising, adaptability, and a nature-based school physical environment that boosts well-being. The findings of this research indicate that the role of principals in supporting teacher well-being comprise three approaches that include creation of a positive school culture and traditions, developing and maintaining a conducive green school environment, and promotion of teacher adaptability. The positive school culture pertains to a nurturing school environment that is conducive for teaching and learning.

The participants opt for stronger ties in contrast to weaker ones where the principal directs the work of others from a position of authority. When the walls of isolation and segregation are demolished and new relationships are built on trust, open communication, and respect, a culture of mutuality and interdependence is formed. A principal-teacher trusting relationship is vital in the creation of safe spaces during times of crisis. Moreover, this resonates with Hong et al. (2020), who found that a positive relationship between the school principal and teachers is fundamental in fostering the well-being of educators, as this enables them to enjoy their work and increase their willingness to contribute to the school's positive learning environment.

Fun days create an opportunity to disengage mentally from work and relax. The experience of psychological detachment could be described as "switching off" (Sonnentag, 2012). Detachment is regarded to be the core recovery experience, having potentially strong associations with occupational well-being. Outdoor games are played in natural settings, which are regarded as restorative. This finding indicates that factors crucial for teacher well-being may include psychological detachment from work situations in natural settings. Studies confirm that employees who detach from work during or after work hours report higher levels of psychological well-being (Sonnentag, 2012), and those who participate in enjoyable activities outside of work (hobbies, sports) feel a greater sense of work-related well-being and physical health, and experience fewer symptoms of cognitive fatigue at work (Burgess et al., 2018). This research also highlights the role of social networks and social capital for teacher well-being, something that needs further research, as it was not explored in the present study. The social capital of teachers and principals might buffer against the high demands put on them and thus promote their well-being (Bauer et al., 2019). There is a need for the creation of rituals and traditions that facilitate teacher well-being.

The finding in this study indicates that green spaces and natural environments can promote teacher well-being in rural schools. Nature-based intervention has been proven to alleviate stress, decrease depressive symptoms, and lower blood pressure

in individuals. This finding corresponds with other studies that found that an attractive landscape supports the well-being of teachers. For example, Kopeva et al. (2017) found that the schoolyard with a properly planned landscape with vegetation creates a stimulating environment that promotes the well-being of both learners and educators, leading to an improved quality of life. Similarly, Bryant (2014) accentuates that a landscape with trees and plants contributes to an improved quality of life as it lowers the blood pressure levels and reduces the effects of stress. Specifically, green school spaces and natural environments have been associated with teacher well-being. A quantitative study by Foellmer et al. (2021) on the effect of green space on employees' well-being found that the green space environments were characterised by positive mood, happiness, and calmness, whereas the opposite is true with the unattractive and uninviting environment. Although researchers agree that school green spaces have a positive impact on academic performance (Browning & Rigolon, 2019), and improved mental well-being among children (Chiumento et al., 2018), no studies could be found that support the impact of green spaces on teacher well-being.

The next finding was adaptability. This pertained to the ability to adapt to external challenges caused by natural disasters such as COVID-19, and internal factors such as the changes in the education system. It becomes difficult for teachers to adapt to changes without being supported. This adaptation is about teachers functioning at work and not necessarily about instructional adaptation. Therefore, being equipped with skills was important for the participants in this study. A lack of such support and guidance would lead to an inability to adapt to changes. Granziera et al. (2019) regard adaptability as a concept and as a practice that needs to be promoted to equip teachers across all sectors with the skills and knowledge required to successfully navigate novelty, change, and uncertainty. Teachers in general struggle with adapting to changes in education if not supported. A study by Marishane (2014) found that teachers in rural schools could not cope with the pace at which the National Curriculum was changing because they were neither adequately prepared for the change nor given sufficient capacity to implement the change. The consequences of the inability to adapt were indicated as

discouragement, demotivation, difficulty, a sense of being left behind, stress, and being stuck in the old. All these consequences of an inability to adapt have implications for teacher well-being. They seem to be based on how teachers think, behave, and involve emotions. Collie and Martin (2016) argue that adaptability is a key capacity to be promoted among teachers. Moreover, a study conducted among government employees by O'Connell et al. (2008) revealed that employees who perceived greater support from their managers reported higher adaptability. However, there are no studies on how adaptability can be improved.

The three roles of principals derive from the factors that promote teacher well-being, as discussed above. The first pertains to building a positive culture that supports teacher well-being. Principals play this role by nurturing strong relationships with teachers through open communication. When a culture of open communication has been created and strengthened, the principal must implement decisions that uphold such school culture and not abandon cultural norms or values. As such, the principal is expected to play their role as a leader in influencing all the components of the school to jointly build a positive school culture (Ridho et al., 2017). The participants referred to informal communications that are not necessarily based on work-related matters. Any breakdown in, or absence of, communication between leaders and followers results in lost collegiality and teamwork. The intensity of communication indicates the effectiveness of principals who have leading skills and knowledge for bringing together all stakeholders in achieving common goals (Lashway, 2003). This role can also relate to rituals and traditions that are intended to facilitate teacher well-being.

The second role is associated with developing and maintaining a conducive green school environment that is healthy for teaching, learning, and well-being. The principal's role is to advocate for the maintenance of green school surroundings by providing resources and support. This is not a challenge for public schools, even those in rural communities, as the Department of Basic Education remunerates general workers. Each public school has a factotum or two, depending on the enrolment. The principal can influence the whole school community and mobilise

them and general workers around the project of developing and sustaining green spaces. Thus, as heads of educational institutions, principals can use their influence to create an awareness of the effect of green school surroundings on the well-being of the school community members. Principals as leaders need to act proactively by undertaking sustainable development projects that address biodiversity (Wahab, 2019).

The third role applies to the promotion of teacher adaptability. Although there are perceived negative results for an inability to adapt, no suggestions on how adaptability can be promoted were offered. Thus, there is a need to examine whether and how teachers' adaptability can be increased.

Conclusion

In this article we have discussed the factors that are perceived to be contributing to the well-being of teachers in rural communities. This research also provides insight into the possibility of using fun days to support teachers' psychological detachment. This finding highlights a need for a focus on the creation of rituals and traditions that facilitate teacher well-being in schools. This research also accentuates the need to extend the knowledge of how adaptability is associated with teachers' well-being and how it can be improved. It was surprising that there was no study found that support the impact of green spaces on teacher well-being. Thus, additional research can be conducted on green schools and teacher well-being initiatives.

References

Bauer, S. C., Silver, L., & Schwartzer, J. (2019). The impact of isolation on new principals' persistence: Evidence from a southern US state. Education Management, Administration and Leadership, 47, 383–399. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1741143217739359

Beausaert, S., Froehlichb, D.E., Devosa, C. & Riley, P. (2016). Effects of support on stress and burnout in school principals. Educational Research, 58(4), 347–365. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2016.1220810

Benevene, P., De Stasio, S. & Fiorilli, C. (2020) Editorial: Well-being of school
teachers in their work environment. Frontiers in Psychology, 11, 1239.
http://dx.doi.org:/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01239

Bernstein, C. & Batchelor, T.P. (2022). Qualitative exploration of workplace
demands, resources and bullying among teachers in South African schools:
Implications for individual and organisational well-being. South African
Journal of Education, 42(2), 1-9. https://dx.doi.org/10.15700/saje.v42n2a2081

Bosak J. (2018). Social roles. In T.K. Shackelford & V.A. Weekes-Shackelford (Eds.),
Encyclopedia of evolutionary psychological science (pp. 1–4). Springer.

Browning, M.M. & Rigolon, A. (2019). School green space and its impact on
academic performance: A systematic literature review. International Journal
of Environment Research and Public Health, 16(3), 1-22.
http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16030429

Bryant, P. (2014). The benefits of landscaping.
https://wemakedirtlookgood.com/2014/11/thebenefits-of-landscaping/.

Burgess, M., Keech, J., Brough, P. & Hawkes, A. (2018). Who wants to be a teacher?
Supporting the transition, wellbeing, and retention of new teachers [industry
report]. Griffith University. https://dx.doi.org/10.4225/01/5b31907a56e48

Chiumento, A., Mukherjee, I., Chandna, J., Dutton, C., Rahman, A., & Bristow, K.
(2018). A haven of green space: Learning from a pilot pre-post evaluation of a
school-based social and therapeutic horticulture intervention with children.
BMC Public Health, 18(836), 1-12. https://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-
5661-9.

Collie, R.J., & Martin, A.J. (2016). Adaptability: An important capacity for effective
teachers. Educational Practice and Theory, 38, 27-39.
http://dx.doi.org/10.7459/ept/38.1.03

Dadaczynski, K. & Paulus, P. (2015). Healthy principals–healthy schools? A
neglected perspective to school health promotion. In V. Simovska & P.
McNamara (Eds), Schools for health and sustainability (pp. 253-273).
Springer.

Dadaczynski, K., Rathmann, K., Hering, T., & Okan, O. (2020). The role of school
leaders' health literacy for the implementation of health promoting schools.
International journal of environmental research and public health, 17(6), 1-
16. https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/17/6/1855

Du Plessis, P. (2014). Problems and complexities in rural schools: Challenges of education and social development. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 5(20), 1109-1117. http://dx.doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n20p1109

Du Plessis, A. & McDonagh, K. (2021). The out-of-field phenomenon and leadership for wellbeing: Understanding concerns for teachers, students and education partnerships. International Journal of Educational Research, 106, 1-15. https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101724

Foellmer, J., Kistermann, T. & Anthonj, C. (2021). Academic greenspace and well-being – Can campus landscape be therapeutic? Evidence from a German university. Wellbeing, Space and Society, 2, 1-18. https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2020.100003

Granziera, H., Collie, R. & Martin, A. (2019). Adaptability: An important capacity to cultivate among pre-service teachers in teacher education programmes. Psychology Teaching Review, 25(1), 60-66. https://dx.doi.org 10.53841/bpsptr.2019.25.1.60.

Jessiman, P., Kidger, J., Spencer, L. Geijer-Simpson, E., Kaluzeviciute, G., Burn, A., Leonard, N. & Limmer, M. (2022). School culture and student mental health: A qualitative study in UK secondary schools. BMC Public Health, 22(619), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13034-x

Hong, J., Francis, D.C., Wang, Q., Lewis, L., Parsons, A., Neill, C. & Meek, D. (2020). The role of trust: Teacher capacity during school leadership transition. Frontiers in Education, 5 (2020), 1-9. https://dx.doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.00108.

Kidger, J., Turner, N., Hollingworth, W., Evans, R., Bell, S., Brockman, R., Copeland, L., Fisher, H., Harding, S., Powell, J., Araya, R., Campbell, R., Ford, T., Gunnell, D., Murphy, S & Morris, R. (2021). An intervention to improve teacher well-being support and training to support students in UK high schools (the WISE study): A cluster randomised controlled trial. PLoS Medical Journal, 18(11), 1-12. http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003847

Kopeva, A., Khrapko, O. & Ivanova, O. (2017). Landscape planning and school yards. IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering. 262(2017), 1-7. https://dx.doi.org/10.1088/1757-899X/262/1/012145

Kruger, E. (2019). Well-being for whom? Unpacking the teacher well-being discourse of the South African Department of Basic Education. South African Journal of Education, 39(4), 1-8.https://dx.doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39n4a1866.

Kwatubana, S. & Molaodi, V. (2021). Leadership styles that would enable school leaders to support the wellbeing of teachers during COVID-19. In New challenges to education: lessons from around the world (pp. 106-112). Bulgarian Comparative Education Society. https://bces-conference.org/onewebmedia/2021%20106-112%20Siphokazi%20Kwatubana%20Vivian%20Molaodi.pdf.

Lashway, L. (2003). Role of the school leader. University of Oregon.

Louis, K.S. & Wahlstrom, K. (2011). Principals as cultural leaders. The Phi Delta Kappan, 92(5), 52-56. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27922511

Lummis, G., Morris, J.E., Ferguson, C. Hill, S. & Lock, G. (2022). Leadership teams supporting teacher wellbeing by improving the culture of an Australian secondary school. Issues in Educational Research, 32(1), 205-224. http://www.iier.org.au/iier32/lummis-abs.html

Mabunda, K. & Kwatubana, S. (2023). Factors that promote teacher well-being in the physical environment: The context of a rural high school. International Journal of Social Science Research and Review, 6(10), 317-329. https://doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v6i10.1562

Mafora, P. (2013). Managing teacher retention in a rural school district in South Africa. The Australian Education Researcher, 40, 227–240. https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s13384-013-0088-x

Marishane, R.N. (2014). Perceptions of rural South African teachers on the national curriculum change: "Are We Chanting or Marching?" International Journal of Educational Sciences, 7(2), 367-374. https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09751122.2014.11890199

Martin, A.J., Nejad, H., Colmar, S. & Liem, G.D. (2012). Adaptability: Conceptual and empirical perspectives on responses to change, novelty and uncertainty. Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 22(1), 58-81. http://doi.org/10.1017/jgc.2012.8

Mathikithela, M. & Wood, L. (2019). Youth as participatory action researchers: Exploring how to make school a more enabling space. Educational Research for Social Change, 8(2), 77-95. http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2019/v8i2a6.

Mbulaheni, V.M., Kutame, A.P. & Mpofu, M. (2017). Teacher mental health promotion in creating quality teaching environments in dysfunctional

secondary schools. The Online Journal of New Horizons in Education, 7(4), 62-70. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-c1eda37b4

McMillan, J.H. & Schumacher, S. (2010). Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry. Pearson.

Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E. & Moules, N.J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16(1), 1-13. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

O'Connell, D. J., McNeely, E., & Hall, D. T. (2008). Unpacking personal adaptability at work. Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 14(3), 248-259. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1071791907311005

Patton. M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd ed.). Sage.

Pillay, J., Patel, L. & Setlhare-Kajee, R. (2023). Teacher awareness of psychosocial support available as per the Integrated School Health Policy in South Africa. South African Journal of Childhood Education, 13(1), 1-9. https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v13i1.1172

Qian, H. & Walker, A. (2021). Building emotional principal-teacher relationships in Chinese schools: Reflecting on paternalistic leadership. Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 30, 327–338. https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s40299-021-00563-z

Rave, R., Itzchakov, G., Weinstein, N. & Reis, H.T. (2022). How to get through hard times: Principals' listening buffers teachers' stress on turnover intention and promotes organizational citizenship behavior. Current Psychology, 42, 24233–24248. https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03529-6.

Ridho, M., Murtadlo, M. & Budayasa, K. (2017). Principal leadership in developing school culture. Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (ASSEHR), 108, 30-34. http://dx.doi.org/10.2991/soshec-17.2018.6.

Roffey, S. (2012). Pupil wellbeing-teacher wellbeing: Two sides of the same coin? Educational and Child Psychology, 29(4), 8-17. http://dx.doi.org/10.53841/bpsecp.2012.29.4.8

Setlhare, R., Wood, L. & Meyer, L. (2016). Collaborated understandings of context-specific psychosocial challenges facing South African school learners: A participatory approach. Educational research for Social Change, 5(2),18-34. http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2016/v5i2a2

Sonnentag, S. (2012). Psychological detachment from work during leisure time: The benefits of mentally disengaging from work. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 2(12), 114–118. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0963721411434979

South Africa. (2016). Policy on the South African standard for principalship. Department of Basic Education. https://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=WZ70fAgZhBg%3D&tabid=335&portalid=0&mid=7618

Taole, M.J. (2022). Challenges encountered by teaching principals in rural multigrade primary schools: A South African perspective. International Journal of Whole Schooling, 18(2), 1–27. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1346705.

Turner, K., Thielking, M. & Prochazka, N. (2022). Teacher wellbeing and social support: A phenomenological study. Educational Research, 64, 77–94. https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2021.2013126.

Van der Vyver, C.P., Kok, T. & Conley, L.N. (2020). The relationship between teachers' professional wellbeing and principals' leadership behaviour to improve teacher retention. Perspectives in Education, 38(2), 86–102. http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v38. i2.06

Varol, Y.Z., Weiher, G.M., Wendsche, J. & Lohmann-Haislah, A. (2021). Difficulties detaching psychologically from work among German teachers: Prevalence, risk factors and health outcomes within a cross-sectional and national representative employee survey. BMC Public Health, 21, 1–15. https://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-12118-4.

Vazi, M.L.M., Ruiter, R.A.C., Van den Borne, B., Martin, G., Dumont, K., & Reddy, P.S. (2013). The relationship between wellbeing indicators and teacher psychological stress in Eastern Cape public schools in South Africa. South African Journal of Industrial Psychology, 39(1), 1–10. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v39i1.1042.

Wahab, A. (2019). Green leadership as an emerging style for addressing climate change issues in schools. Journal of Social Sciences, 15, 58–68. http://doi.org/10.3844/jssp.2019.58.68.

Wessels, E. & Wood, L. (2019). Fostering teachers' experiences of well-being: A participatory action learning and action research approach. South African Journal of Education, 39(1), 1–10. https://dx.doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39n1a1619.

White, J. (2020). Supporting teachers' mental health and wellbeing: Evidence review. NHS Health Scotland.

Wissing, M.P. (2014). Meaning and relational well-being: A reflection on the state of the art and a way forward. Journal of Psychology in Africa, 24(1), 115-121. https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2014.904100.

Yılmaz, K. & Altınkurt, Y. (2012). Relationship between the leadership behaviors, organizational justice and organizational trust. Çukurova University Faculty of Education Journal, 41(1), 12-24. http://egitim.cu.edu.tr/efdergi.