

Staying in tune and keeping positive: Redefining music teacher practices for online learning in Australia

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Teaching music during the pandemic has been challenging, time consuming, and stressful due to several lockdowns in Australia. This article focuses on initial findings from a national project (Reimagining the future: Music teaching and learning, and ICT in blended environments in Australia) that investigated music teachers' perspectives regarding how the shift to online teaching using ICT, impacted teachers' wellbeing from the start of the pandemic. A range of Australian peak music organisations were invited to participate in the project, covering all states and territories and a range of educational settings. Using a qualitative approach (online *Qualtrics* survey, N=105, March-April 2021), thematic analysis was employed to analyse and code the data. The findings highlight two overarching themes (adaptive teaching and balancing wellbeing) and four emergent themes (resources, confidence and competence, social connections, and leisure activities). Responses illuminate how teachers redefined their practice and how their experiences impacted wellbeing. Recommendations advocating ongoing research to ensure teachers 'stay in tune and keep positive' within the profession are made. Conclusions highlight the need for Australian policy makers, media, and educational jurisdictions to support teachers and adopt a positive stance in a post-COVID, normal environment.

Introduction

The pandemic has impacted all aspects of life and work including education. Classes were taught remotely on mass from March 2020 as the World Health Organisation (WHO) pronounced a global pandemic (Ducharme, 2020). COVID-19 "created the largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents" (United Nations, 2020, p. 2). Preparing and delivering classes from home with limited technical support or equipment proved difficult for teachers. They modified their pedagogy as they embraced new technologies out of necessity. Working in the online environment meant teachers had less social interaction with their students and peers (Wang, 2008). Teachers found the transition to online teaching challenging (Camlin & Lisboa, 2021; Littlejohn et al., 2021). They had to adapt and design activities that connected pedagogical content knowledge to learning outcomes (Makawawa et al., 2021; Rapanta et al., 2020). The impact of working from home created a myriad of effects on learning and teaching, significantly impacting student and staff wellbeing (Brooks, Creely & Laletas; 2021; Marshall, Shannon & Love, 2020). For those young people living alone, or from low-socio-economic areas with no work, their mental health issues doubled as a result of COVID-19 (OECD, 2021).

This article focuses on the education sector in Australia, where each State and Territory experienced different lockdown conditions and restrictions from March 2020 (see

Australian Government, 2021). Melbourne (Victoria) experienced the world's longest lockdown (Miller, 2021). In light of this, the Australian Childhood foundation found 29% of parents felt COVID-19 negatively impacted their child's education and 37% said children were more anxious and stressed because of the pandemic (Pivot, 2021). Principals felt COVID-19 positively impacted the professional practice but adversely impacted teachers' wellbeing (Flack et al., 2021). This resonated with medical research in Australia that identified how COVID-19 significantly impacted teachers' wellbeing (Beames, Christensen & Werner-Seidler, 2021).

The authors are tertiary music educators and this research forms part of their wider study (*Reimagining the future: Music teaching and learning, and ICT in blended environments in Australia*) that commenced in March 2021. Participants included music educators working across all education sectors (early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary music educators and studios). Two guiding questions informed the study (a) what are the online experiences and engagement of music teachers using ICT, and (b) how has teaching remotely impacted teachers' wellbeing? This work contributes to the growing body of knowledge exploring the impact of COVID-19 on teaching practice and teachers' wellbeing in Australia. The findings are significant and have relevance across all learning areas as well as music education.

Teaching online during Covid-19

The move to emergency remote teaching was largely improvised, with little infrastructure to support teachers. Many teachers and students did not have equal access to digital tools or infrastructures (Daubney & Fautley, 2020; Nichols, 2020). In this context, when restrictions are mandated, Ozer and Ustun (2020) identified the need for states and universities to take on the responsibility to provide financial and technological assistance to all learners, ensuring equity and access at a time of crisis. During COVID-19 teachers spent many hours planning, preparing and presenting videos, and interactive lessons online (Ferdig et al., 2020) as they adapted their thinking about how to engage students. Engaging students remotely was challenging (Ferdig & Pytash, 2021). However, teaching online also "promote[s] active learning in learners by providing opportunities to read, write, discuss, think, ask questions, solve problems, analyse, and create new things depending on the learning content" (Zayapragassarazan, 2020, p. 2).

This paper focuses on music teaching, where the virtual learning environment offers flexibility to integrate technology into the music classroom to enhance, reinforce, and improve student learning (Wardrobe, 2021). The use of different digital technologies, resources, and software provided teachers with opportunities to manage blended pedagogies during the pandemic (Merrick & Joseph, 2022). Teaching music in this period created considerable tension as practitioners were forced to re-conceptualise music education, as they had to adapt and re-adapt their practice (Camlin & Lisboa, 2021). While students experienced limited participation in the online learning environment, teachers needed to be more flexible in their social communication to promote student engagement through the development of cognitive, social, and facilitatory presence online. Music

students “faced even more stressful situations such as online instrumental and voice practice, which was less effective and quite frustrating because of the low sound quality” (Habe, Biasutti & Kajtna 2021, p. 3). Teaching online meant students missed out on the social connection of music performance with each other in real time, as artists and as audience members. This lack of social interaction was seen to impact wellbeing (Blackwell et al., 2020; Philippe, Schiavio & Biasutti, 2020). Teaching remotely involved a range of proactive tasks, such as intentionally facilitating conversations and giving direct instruction to students, while also mentoring and monitoring activities (Rapanta et al., 2020). While using technology provided rich learning choices for music students, the expectation to use technology during the pandemic was also stressful for students and staff alike (Joseph & Lennox, 2021; Panisorara et al., 2020).

Wellbeing

Wellbeing impacts all facets of life. The word wellbeing is often used interchangeably with happiness and quality of life (Dodge, 2012; Doods & Dandford, 2010) where subjective wellbeing is associated with how well someone is doing or managing their life (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2018). Eudaimonic wellbeing can enrich subjective wellbeing (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2015) whilst hedonic elements of wellbeing can be diminished when pain and suffering is experienced (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2018). Happiness and employment are ranked as important factors contributing to “the eudaimonic perspective, which emphasises positive psychological functioning and human flourishing, and the hedonic perspective emphasising happiness, positive affect and satisfaction with life” (Mansfield, Daykin, Kay 2020, p. 1). As this study shows, maintaining wellbeing during the pandemic has both positively and negatively impacted teachers as they worked across education settings.

Wellbeing has increasingly become an important part of public health organisations as they seek measures to maintain wellbeing (Kottke et al., 2016). A leading authority in the field of positive psychology, Seligman (2011, p. 97) found that wellbeing is “what humans pursue for their own sake”. He proposed PERMA as a model where wellbeing is nurtured through subjective positive feelings of contentment and happiness (*Positive Emotion*) and from enjoying activities (*Engagement*). Wellbeing emerges also from developing and maintaining rich relationships and interpersonal connections (*Relationships*), and by engaging with something greater than oneself (*Meaning*) and by mastering a skill or achieving one’s aims and objectives (*Accomplishment*) (Joseph & Human, 2021; Seligman, 2011). According to Farmer and Cotter (2021), the distinctive aspects which differentiate the PERMA model from other frameworks of wellbeing “is the inherent connection to eudemonic well-being (i.e., well-being stemming from personal fulfillment or meaning), and the focus on application of the PERMA domains within one’s life”. The Australian Unity surveyed over 65,000 adults nationally, and identified seven domains of wellbeing, personal relationships, standard of living, and achieving in life as the golden triangle of happiness (Australian Unity, 2021). This resonates with the five key PERMA elements to wellbeing (positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment) that impact lifestyle (Lee et al., 2017; Seligman, 2018).

The global pandemic has had a significant impact on the psychological and subjective wellbeing of diverse populations (Woodford & Bussey, 2021), affecting medical workers (Huffman et al., 2021), early career doctors (Coenen et al., 2022), students (Flack et al., 2021) and teachers (Alves, Lopes & Precioso, 2021). According to Cross (2014), teachers in Australia have made more mental stress claims than any other industry due to work-related issues. This growing trend is also seen in the *Teacher Wellbeing Index Report* in the United Kingdom, where teachers have experienced increased mental health issues and high stress levels (Education Support, 2020). In Australia, similar concerns have been raised by principals who found that “social isolation, a lack of routine and physical activity and the limited availability of in-home support were the biggest challenges” for teachers (Flack et al., 2021, p. 19).

Prior to the pandemic, teachers’ workloads increased, impacting their sense of wellbeing. 670 Australian teachers responded to the 2019 teacher wellbeing survey of which 76% said they worked over 40 hours and 31% said they worked over 50 hours in a week (Teach Starter, 2021). These figures increased during the pandemic with many Australian teachers identifying “social exclusion, physical workspace limitations, excessive screen time and stress” as factors that impacted wellbeing (Beames, Christensen & Werner-Seidler, 2021). At the same time teachers were also expected to support the learning and wellbeing of students while teaching remotely, which impacted their lifestyle (Carroll et al., 2021). In a recent wellbeing study of Dutch teachers, Kupers, Mouw & Fokkens-Bruinsma, 2022 (p. 4) identified “relaxed, worried and stressed, and happy work-a-holic” as three distinct responses to Covid-19 and teachers tried to meet work demands with limited resources. In Australia, 80% of the teaching fraternity reported to have managed their own wellness through yoga, mindfulness, meditation, and other leisure activities to improve wellbeing during the pandemic (Teach Starter, 2021). These findings resonate with the present study where teachers coped and managed their own wellbeing through leisure (Veal, 2017).

Leisure can take place on a continuum with casual leisure at one end and serious leisure at the other (Stebbins, 2001a). Casual leisure activities provide instant gratification and are intrinsically rewarding, pleasurable and short-lived, requiring little or no training for enjoyment thus contributing to happiness. Casual leisure activities are linked with restoring life balances. These involve activities that lessen stress while supporting rest, play, and conversation to name a few (Stebbins, 2001b; Elkington & Stebbins, 2014). Serious leisure on the other hand “is seen as an essential ingredient of an optimal leisure lifestyle” (Veal, 2017, p. 211). Blackshaw argued that serious leisure has taken leisure studies “in a new direction from other more conventional approaches which largely tend to focus their critical gaze on the dichotomy between work and leisure” (2010, p. 43). Stebbins (2001b; 2015) pointed out that serious leisure participants set aside time and invest effort into acquiring skills, knowledge, and experience. Serious leisure requires planning, ongoing effort and perseverance, it “is the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting, and fulfilling” (Stebbins, 1992, p. 3). These activities are structured, calling for persistence, effort, and commitment, which align with happiness and subjective well-being (Cheng, Stebbins, & Packer, 2017; Newman, Tay, & Diener, 2014).

Method

The study was reviewed, and ethical approval granted by Deakin University to undertake the research project in February 2021. Mixed methodologies were employed allowing participants to respond to a range of quantitative and qualitative items (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017; Creswell & Clark, 2017). A number of Australian peak music organisations were emailed the *Plain Language Statement* (PLS) at the start of March 2021. The PLS explained the project, inviting music organisations (for example: Australian Society for Music Education, Association of Music Educators, Australian Band and Orchestra Directors' Association National, Australian National Council of Orff Schulwerk, Kodály Australia, Australia and New Zealand Association for Research in Music Education and Midnight Music) to assist with recruiting participants. Once consent was granted, organisations contacted their members through various online mediums to disseminate the invitation and PLS which included the link to the anonymous survey.

Research instrument

Surveys are one of the most widely used techniques for gathering quantitative and qualitative data (Kelley-Quon, 2018). Anonymous questionnaires encourage participants to provide truthful answers (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). The Qualtrics survey proved an easy and quick way to collect information from a representative sample of music teachers (Wisker, 2008; Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012). Qualtrics served as a useful survey platform to administer the questionnaire (Boas, Christenson & Glick, 2020), where “data files are generated automatically, data management is streamlined” making the “research more efficient” (Carpenter et al., 2019, p. 2159). The online Qualtrics survey offered greater efficiency and effectiveness in gathering data when compared to mail surveys (Miller et al., 2020). The online survey enabled data to be collected quickly with fewer transcription errors (Gowda et al., 2019). In saying this, purely online studies have been associated with a lack of confidence among potential participants about the authenticity, legitimacy, or validity of the research (Hlatshwako et al., 2021). We mitigated these potential disadvantages of employing survey-based research by advertising and recruiting via trusted and established music professional organisations, who were already virtually connected to their members.

The survey was initially trialled and tested for ambiguity with music educators (early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary) to provide feedback before dissemination (Williamon et al., 2021). The amended survey contained 31 questions with a mixture of closed questions, for example ticking a box regarding age (Table 1), gender (Table 2), State and Territory (Table 3), qualification, year level/s taught, work status, and technology training. Examples of open-ended questions included:

- can you describe some of the pedagogies used in your teaching and learning environments?
- can you describe the types of music technologies and ICT employed?
- can you describe how your sense of wellbeing has been impacted in the shift to online modes of teaching and assessment?

Open-ended questions enabled the use of thematic analysis (TA) (Clarke & Braun, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants

All participants were required to tick a box agreeing that they had read the PLS and were over the age of 18. It is possible that participants may have received the same invitation from several music organisations. Respondents indicated that they were music teachers working in Government schools (n=43), Independent schools (n=21), Catholic schools (n=11) and studios (n=9). Only a few (n=6) ticked 'other', teaching music in community centres for example, and (n=15) identified as (tertiary music teachers).

Table 1 provides an overview of participants' age group, gender and location. No statistical analysis was made between categories.

Table 1: Participant demographics (N=105)

Demographic	Category	No. respondents
Age group	20-25	1
	26-30	4
	31-40	15
	41-50	27
	51-60	32
	61-70	11
	71+	1
	Did not wish to disclose	14
Gender	Male	14
	Female	77
	Other	0
	Abstained	14
Participants' states and territories	Australian Capital Territory	3
	New South Wales	26
	Northern Territory	0
	Queensland	13
	South Australia	4
	Tasmania	1
	Victoria	37
	Western Australia	5
Abstained	16	

Analysis

Thematic analyses were employed to code and analyse the data to inform the research questions (Alholjailan 2012; Creswell, 2012; Nowell, Norris & White, 2007). The use of thematic analysis as a research tool allows for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (Clark & Braun, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Nowell, Norris & White; 2017). Data were read and re-read many times to gain an in-depth overall

understanding before coding (Boyatzis, 1998; Javadi & Zarea, 2016). Whilst this was time consuming, familiarity with the data allowed for independent coding using margin notes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through (independent) reflection and (collective) dialogue via email, telephone and Zoom, a deeper, more nuanced interpretation of the data were developed between the authors (Woodford & Bussey, 2021). From this inductive analyses, recurring and prevailing themes emerged which were then grouped into broad overarching themes (Table 2) (Nowell, Norris & White, 2017; Thomas, 2006).

Table 2: Thematic themes

Initial coding	Emergent themes	Overarching themes
Steep learning curve	Resources	Adaptive teaching
Time		
Training for online delivery	Confidence and competence	
Professional learning (PL)		
ICT software and devices		
Students	Social connections	Balancing wellbeing
Family		
ICT - communications		
Walking	Leisure activities	
Gardening		
ICT collaboration		

Findings

Drawing on direct quotations from the childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, and studio music educators (Kelley et al., 2003), succinct qualitative data gathered between March-April 2021 are discussed in relation to two questions that guided the study: what are the online experiences and engagement of music teachers using ICT?; and how has teaching remotely impacted teachers' wellbeing?

Question 1: What are the online experiences and engagement of music teachers using ICT?

Overall, many teachers said, "the learning curve was extreme" during the pandemic. They identified a range of online teaching tools and music software they used to engage their students across different education settings. These included:

- Google Classroom
- YouTube
- Flipgrid
- MuseScore
- Vimeo
- PowerPoint
- Soundtrap

- Sibelius
- Garage Band
- Chrome Music Lab

Whilst the above resources were useful, teachers like Macy (primary teacher) found “sound quality and budgetary constraints” limited access and use. Sam (tertiary teacher) noted having to “shift from hard copy resources to virtual resources” in a short space of time. Other respondents like Peggy (primary and secondary teacher) felt they “used more online and digital teaching resources rather than traditional textbooks”. Tim (secondary teacher) found he “experimented, streamlined, and consistently flipped” between synchronous to asynchronous modes of delivery.

From the feedback it was apparent that participants employed various modes and approaches in different proportions within their online teaching practice. While some teachers commented on “the sheer amount of time spent online while engaging with technology” including “ongoing preparation that was very time consuming” others like Usha (secondary teacher) found they “covered a lot of ground with more advanced students in a way that maximised the effectiveness of face-to-face time”. This response by Zaine (secondary teacher) provides an overview of strategies employed:

I was able to use digital means to replicate some of what I had lost. Facebook and emails along with Zoom catch ups and the odd Skype or Face Time were ways that I maintained connection and communication. I resented the added number of Teams and Google ‘this and that’ as it added to my workload significantly, I used the discussion board for students so that I had a boundary around where communication occurred.

In addition, a number of teachers commented on their ability to adapt their practice by “uploading and compiling resources in Drive and Google Classroom”, with many identifying “Midnight Music” and “YouTube” as their “go to resource”. Part of building their confidence and skills was “creating videos to assist the students to ensure their sense of inclusion”, and “explaining tasks so that students wouldn’t miss details over Zoom”. Rebecca (primary teacher) found that creating videos “facilitated students internalising the embodiment when teaching songs”. In this way they were “able to sing with confidence”. It emerged that respondents “attended many PLs because they were virtual and affordable”. Annabel (studio teacher) summed it up by saying “I haven't had to worry about the health risks of face-to-face PLs, or travel time/arrangements”.

Creating a balance between learning, connection and enjoyment was important. Adam (secondary teacher) found that “posts on Google Classroom between student and teacher provided a platform for some check-ins and ‘banter’. Zoom lessons were a great way to check-in and hear students’ voices throughout the online period”. Others like Maya (tertiary teacher) felt that “students communicated issues more as they could email questions and not feel embarrassed when not understanding”. It was evident that teachers employed multiple forms of technology to enable student connection. This is summed up by Louise (secondary teacher):

I am able to respond to questions about learning when I am away from school for the day, which means the children can carry on learning. I have Google Classroom on my phone, so I am notified when a student has a question. It helps me keep in touch and let them know when I will be away and what they need to do.

Keeping in touch and staying connected was important in building positive relations with the students during a very stressful time.

Question 2: How has teaching remotely impacted teachers' wellbeing?

Participants used Zoom, WhatsApp, Messenger, Google Classroom, Teams, Seesaw, Facebook, and WebEx to connect with students, teachers, colleagues, friends, and family. The social connection using ICT between students and their families positively contributed to wellbeing. Anna (primary teacher) identified that "YouTube dancing lessons were great fun and a good physical activity for students who had spent much of their day on the lounge or at their desk". Marion (primary teacher) said "whole school singalongs brought happy feelings". Staying positive and starting the day off on a high note was key as Sally (primary teacher) spent time "making daily welcome-good morning videos with a short message about the learning tasks for the day which helped students look forward to completing their music tasks". Additionally, Thea (studio teacher) identified how "sharing something personal about what was happening in [their] own household like what did you eat for dinner or breakfast maintained the connection between student and teacher".

Adam (primary and secondary teacher) identified that "online Bucket Drumming as a play along session during the first lock-down for staff and students was a way to let their hair down, express themselves, connect and have fun. It was a great stress release during 'stress-less' week". It was heart-warming to note the many positive activities that contributed to wellbeing. Linda (primary teacher) found:

During the second lockdown last year I had one parent comment on Seesaw that all her children joined in one dance challenge activity (I teach dance as well), and she had the sound of laughter through her house. So, her child (with a disability) was able to have fun with his siblings because of a choice he made on Seesaw. I also loved photos and videos from other families where siblings joined in activities together, or mums joined in with a child.

Sheila (early childhood and primary) added:

Zoom Choir with ALL of kindergarten! This was a highlight of my week, and the release of stress was amazing. I had to have another teacher to "let in" all the kids, and everyone stayed on mute except me, but we sang our silly action songs and seeing them laugh, sing, and play along with me was just THE BEST. It brought joy to them AND joy to me.

When asked what were "some of the things that contributed to your sense of wellbeing?", some expressed a range of casual and serious leisure activities. Most teachers mentioned the word exercise, including:

- walking, cycling, and swimming
- running, hiking, and bush walking
- yoga, Pilates, and meditation
- time with family and friends
- reading

Whilst gardening was a common casual leisure activity some undertook serious leisure activities including:

- hobbies
- composing
- creating online resources
- learning an instrument or a language
- cooking

Participants also mentioned factors that negatively impacted their sense of wellbeing during the pandemic as they felt “stressed, unsupported, and under the pump” (Sally, secondary teacher). Many spoke about increased workloads. According to Maria (primary and secondary teacher) “the jump in the level of anxiety and tiredness amongst students was palpable”. She identified how her teaching time was “more focused on engagement and connecting students, not to mention my workload increased as the amount of emails and discussion threads were three times the normal volume” which impacted her work life balance. Leah (tertiary teacher) found her stress levels increased with “too many layers to try to coordinate, including multiple technologies, headset/microphones; cameras; laptop and desktop; PowerPoint presentation, YouTube videos”. Once restrictions were lifted Gavin (tertiary teacher) stated “I was chasing my tail trying to teach face-to-face and synchronous online (Zoom) at the same time. I found it very stressful managing on-campus and off-campus students concurrently especially with little IT support on campus when the technology did not work”. Many teachers at schools identified that “most things didn’t work well due to the unreliability of Internet and demotivation of children”. Jacquie (primary teacher) added “they just wanted human contact!” It was apparent in the response from Jerry (studio teacher) who said “I found learning a lot of new technology very quickly was very stressful and it took away precious time to be with my family”. Participants like Carlos (secondary teacher) admitted “my mental health suffered not being able to do the things I love like going to the movies, the gym and for those long country drives”. As restrictions were imposed, Yola (primary teacher) said “I was not able to see my sick Nan in aged care due to COVID-19 restrictions”. Rashid (studio teacher) on the other hand “felt lonely and isolated” during the pandemic, he mentioned “I felt depressed when I was unable to travel to attend my uncle’s funeral - limited numbers allowed for weddings and funerals”.

Discussion

The online survey offered participants a sense of privacy and anonymity to disclose information about teaching music during the pandemic (Braun et al., 2021; Postigo-Zegarra et al., 2021). From the findings, a range of ICT, resources and teaching

Conclusion

Despite the imposition of restrictions and lockdowns across Australia since 2020, music has “provide[d] a remarkably effective means of social connection in a time of social distancing, and in some contexts, it may allow our brains to feel connected even without traditional face-to-face interactions” (Greenberg, Decety & Gorgon, 2021, p. 1180). In this article the authors investigated the experiences and engagement of teaching music online during the pandemic using ICT, and how this had impacted teachers’ sense of wellbeing. The study focused on a small sample (N= 105), a limitation in itself. The lack of human interaction during online survey recruitment may have impacted the reduced response rates (Poynton, DeFouw & Morizio, 2019). Therefore, the results cannot be extrapolated to the general music teacher population in Australia.

Although many positives emerged from the findings, it was evident that teachers had worked “in overdrive” since Mid-March 2020. Notwithstanding these challenges, it was evident that ICT served as a powerful means to sustain teaching and connection regardless of location or time. It was evident that ongoing communication positively contributed to sustaining the daily interactions of all teachers. Varied ICT and music technologies allowed teachers and students to maintain learning across a range of diverse and sometimes disconnected learning environments. Daubney & Fautley, (2021) highlighted the “need to celebrate small successes. As we know, not all superheroes wear capes” (p. 10). The findings suggest that online teaching and learning will become accepted practice moving forward. Hence, initial teacher education programs in Australia need to engage future teachers to embrace new pedagogies, resources, and provide exemplars to support and enable the development of teacher capacity and confidence.

The shared sentiment of teachers is encompassed by Sofia (secondary teacher) who said she was “spending holidays on as many webinars as possible endeavouring to search and develop skills to keep students buoyant during this unprecedented time”. The present study does not measure the causes of mental health that may have impacted teachers, though many teachers like Li-Ming (secondary teacher) said, “I am struggling in this area of mental health and my school demands so much, there is minimal time for well-being.” The study showed that teachers experienced anxiety, burnout and exhaustion while taking care of themselves, and simultaneously embracing new ways of teaching. Beames, Christensen and Werner-Seidler (2021, p. 421) identified that “the mental health of teachers is a neglected area, with minimal research and regulations directly targeted to improving their experience” highlighting the need for ongoing research in this area.

Recommendations

From this music study, our recommendations are applicable to many learning areas. We recommend the development of more formalised structures to be made available to facilitate ICT infrastructure and training to support the mental health of teachers in blended environments (Beames, Christensen & Werner-Seidler, 2021). This includes the provision of dedicated staff positions to support and balance wellbeing in schools (Flack et al., 2021). Organisational changes need to take place to support job satisfaction that

promotes wellbeing (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). We suggest that music professional associations collaborate to share resources and foster programs that support wellbeing. Professional organisations need to invest in teacher professional learning to enable innovative ways to develop competence and confidence using a range of technologies and pedagogies in blended environments.

Finally, our study gives voice to Australian music teachers and their experiences in the online setting during the pandemic, adding to the growing body of research across teaching and learning while identifying a range of issues related to teacher wellbeing. Many of the findings and lessons learnt from the present study are also relevant to other learning areas in Australia and around the globe as teachers and tertiary educators continue to adapt their practice in response to the pandemic and balance wellbeing. Continued research is essential to ensure teachers ‘stay in tune keeping positive’ within the profession, while maintaining their sense of wellbeing.

Considering the many setbacks and challenges that teachers have encountered since the pandemic, it is imperative for policy makers, media, and educational jurisdictions across Australia to adopt an optimistic outlook as we look forward. Ongoing engagement in the profession is desirable to best prepare pre-service and in-service teachers for any unforeseen circumstances that may arise in the future.

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