UNIVERSITÄT ZU KÖLN

Zentrum für Lehrer*innenbildung

ZfL Discussion Paper

Voices of Tomorrow:

Exploring Teacher Well-being with Student Teachers

Impressum

Zentrum für Lehrer*innenbildung (ZfL)
Universität zu Köln
Albertus-Magnus-Platz | 50923 Köln

Tel: +49 221 470-8610
Fax: +49 221 470-8600

https://zfl.uni-koeln.de/

Herausgeber*innen der Ausgabe:

Dagmar M. Benincasa, Jan Springob

Gestaltung und Satz:

Zentrum für Lehrer*innenbildung (ZfL) der Universität zu Köln
ZfL Discussion Paper | Band 14 | August 2024
ISSN: 364-0782

Dagmar M. Benincasa & Jan Springob

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EXPLORING TEACHER WELL-BEING WITH STUDENT TEACHERS

Abstract

Well-being is increasingly recognized as an important outcome in research on work-life and job satisfaction. As a field facing significant challenges, including high dropout rates and teacher shortages across various academic domains, teaching — being a high-stress profession — is at risk and requires a stronger focus on well-being. This exploratory study addresses the topic of teacher well-being (TWB) from the perspective of student teachers, emphasising the need for attention to well-being throughout different career phases. In a group discussion with seven student teachers from a German university, three key topics were explored to understand the 'essence' of TWB from their perspectives: (1) How do student teachers perceive TWB? (2) What role does TWB play in teacher education? (3) What do (student) teachers need in terms of TWB? Employing a qualitative approach, the results showed that TWB is highly relevant to students; however, they perceive a gap between the prevalence of TWB issues in negative media coverage and their own experiences from field placements, and the coverage of TWB in university courses. Student teachers expressed concerns about entering an unhealthy system without sufficient preparation or support regarding TWB. Conversely, they were motivated to drive a cultural shift in universities and schools regarding TWB. This study highlights the critical need for comprehensive well-being interventions in teacher education programs to foster a healthier and more sustainable teaching profession.

Keywords: *Teacher Well-being, well-being, teacher training, teacher education,* Future Skills

1. Introduction

Teachers have and have always had to face various challenges, demands and requirements in their job. Parts of them seem to 'come with the territory': For those who decide to take on a teaching career, factors such as a high level of communication with people of various ages and backgrounds, exposure to noise, conflicts, challenging behaviour, or adherence to (and conveying of) different curricula do not come as a surprise, albeit not in their actual intensity. On the other hand, stress factors besides the actual preparation and teaching of lessons – such as, additional administrative work or interaction with parents and pupils outside class – are often a lot less obvious to the eye. Some of these hassles contribute to the 'reality shock' that can hit not only in the first years of teaching (cf. Schmidt et al., 2016), but also during field experiences which, for many students, mark their first step into the 'real world of teaching'. Other possible stress factors, such as those related to the use of new technologies or changes in educational policy, on the other hand, can still emerge and overwhelm even experienced teachers after decades of teaching.

Many challenges that come with the fast-changing world we live in have a direct impact on pupils and teachers alike. In order to equip their pupils with the skills they need to act in the present and the future, "the profile of the 21st teachers also consider them to be intellectually curious, capable in collecting and analysing data about their school and classroom, and act upon it" (Viac & Fraser, 2020, p. 7) – requirements a lot of them do not have or have never been prepared for. Furthermore, the extent of possible stress factors as well as the gravity of their impact on teachers can differ greatly, depending on factors such as their individual resilience, the school location, the composition of a learning group or, in general, the resources available to both teachers and students, making it impossible for student teachers to assess exactly what their professional future and day-to-day business will look like. According to the International Barometer on Education Staff (2023),

> *the poor state of psychological health is evident in many countries, as well as insufficient support systems, […] for education personnel across the globe. This highlights a critical need for a more uniform and comprehensive approach to addressing the health and well-being of education personnel* (Education International, 2023).

However, in the discussion around well-being in education, it is often – and rightfully so – the overall school environment or the pupils in particular who get full attention (cf. OECD, 2022). But how can young people even recognise the importance of their well-being if their teachers do not set an example for them – or even embody the burnt-out, dissatisfied, unhappy opposite? Teachers' belief in the importance of pupils' well-being has progressed in many countries over the last decades (cf. TALIS, 2018) – but what about their own well-being? Are they aware of teacher well-being (TWB) and if so: What role does TWB play for them?

With the term 'well-being' itself and 'TWB' in particular, many connotations come to mind: from physical to psychological health, from demotivation to burn-out, from job fulfilment to job dissatisfaction. In the face of global teacher shortage and a rising teacher demand, TWB has been (re-)discovered over the past years, resulting in reviews and overviews of research on the topic, highlighting its significance for education in general (cf. Hascher & Waber, 2021; Taylor et al., 2024) as well as on more specific links to other phenomena, e.g. on turnover intentions (cf. Doan et al., 2024; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Within the research field of TWB, though, "multidimensionality and blur between well–being dimensions and well-being correlates compromise the comparability of study results" (Haldimann et al., 2024, p. 2). In addition, there are different definitions of TWB circulating: Viac and Fraser (2020) describe it as "teachers' responses to the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to their work and their profession" (p. 18), while van Horn et al. (2004) add the aspect of "positive evaluation of various aspects of one's job" (p. 366). Furthermore, Acton and Glasgow (2015) put the "individual sense of personal professional fulfilment, satisfaction, purposefulness and happiness" at the centre but add a social component by considering TWB to be "constructed in a collaborative process with colleagues and students" (p. 102).

Moreover, research on TWB just recently started focusing including pre-service teachers (cf. Dreer, 2023; Haldimann et al., 2024). As the active involvement of student teachers in day-to-day school life as not only interns in practical field experiences, but also substitute teachers as one measure against teacher shortage, TWB undoubtedly needs to be addressed well before officially fully entering the profession – during initial teacher education (ITE) – to fully establish it as an indisputable part of teachers' professional lives. As a new generation of teachers is about to start teaching, it is important to find out, first

of all, how they feel about the topic of TWB, what they know about it, what they associate with it, and how their perspective can contribute to the discussion and research on TWB. With qualitative research as an "attempt to find out how people see an issue, what individual meaning it has for them and what motives for action arise in this context" (Gläser-Zikuda, 2011, p. 119), this exploratory pilot study serves as a starting point to get a broad first picture of TWB from student teachers' perspectives to draw "conclusions [...] for practical application" (ibid.). It is a first attempt at identifying aspects of TWB that are important to student teachers and getting a first glimpse into the role TWB plays during ITE, hoping to shed more light on the field of TWB from the perspective of those who are at the verge of entering the teaching profession.

2. (Why) Is it worth talking about TWB?

Job-specific well-being – and especially the workers' perception of it – has gained more significance – or even 'popularity' – in the past, from the world of work (e.g. in the area of Human Resources or as topic of further education courses) to the world of research (cf. Thielen & Kroll, 2013; Slemp et al., 2015; Ortan et al., 2021). Well-being is, of course, important for every workforce – but it is the extent of its potential impact that distinguishes the *teachers'* well-being from the occupational well-being of many other professions.

During the recent pandemic, teachers were labelled as "*systemrelevant*" by the German government, meaning that they are relevant for upholding the system. This highlighted their immense responsibility for society and, due to their direct influence on children, its future. The many different duties, obligations and the overall complexity of a teacher's workday, however, make teachers feel more stressed than other job groups, including hospital workers (cf. Schaarschmitt, 2004; Gläßer, 2010). Wesselborg and Bauknecht (2022) found that German teachers in general show symptoms of mental exhaustion more frequently than employees in other working sectors. Teacher stress[1] is undoubtedly one of the main hazards to teacher's health and TWB: If it becomes chronic, it can lead to burn-out, low motivation, and, consequently, early retirement (cf. Münchhausen et al., 2021; Weiss, 1999). In the 2024 *Wellbeing for schoolteachers* study, "high levels of stress, depression, anxiety and poor physical health were observed in all countries and grade levels" (Taylor et al., 2024), making teachers, "among social professions, [...] one of the occupational groups in which burnout and stress symptoms are most widespread" (ibid.). The study emphasised that

> *work-related stress has been found to negatively affect the personal relationships of teachers, as well as their mental and physical health (Romano & Wahlstrom, 2000; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) […]. Other research has demonstrated how work-related stress is linked to negative psychological issues, low job satisfaction, absenteeism, and intention to quit* (Corrente et al., 2022) (ibid.),

illustrating the impact teacher stress can have. According to educational researcher Uta Klusmann, consequences from a bad state of TWB

[1] Teacher stress is defined by Kyriacou (2001) "as the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher" (p. 28).

> *are manifold. On the one hand, a chronic state of exhaustion is naturally very stressful for the teachers themselves. On the other hand, we know from other studies that a higher level of exhaustion is also associated with increased sick days. This has consequences for the teaching staff, who have to make up for these absences. In times of teacher shortages, this is difficult to achieve as there are often hardly any reserves of substitutes at schools* (Deutsches Schulportal, n.D.).

Sick days, however, are not necessarily taken by all teachers: Following the motto "just go in, push through (ibid.), US teachers disclosed that they carry themselves to school even if feeling unwell "because it takes significant work to prepare for and catch up from any absence" (Blum, 2024). Connections between sickness rates at schools and TWB can therefore not be drawn without restrictions, especially when considering the World Health Organization's (WHO) (n.d.) definition of health as "not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" but "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being". In the following, we will list and explain the most urgent reasons for examining TWB more closely.

- *We need to know* what *we talk about when we talk about TWB.*

As mentioned above, there are a number of well-being dimensions that are currently being discussed and researched. This mirrors what we see when we take a look at TWB outside the world of research: As a much-discussed and "popular" topic in teacher education around the world (especially when looking at (commercial) offers outside the university and other teacher training facilities), topics such as mindfulness, work-life balance, or workplace organisation have found their way into many teachers' lives, whether through well-established or less reputable teacher training providers who seem to use the term TWB as more of a buzzword to attract a (paying) audience[2].

All over the world, the well-being of teachers seems to be commented on by almost everyone from bloggers and influencers to teachers, teacher educators, journalists or politicians. Proposals of measures against the negative state of TWB are manifold, from rather obvious ideas such as promoting mindfulness (another apparent buzzword, often used in commercial contexts) or the establishment of a "good social network" (Köller, 2023) to more controversial ideas, such as asking more teachers to work full-time and to rethink their own well-being needs in times of teacher shortage. "Every headteacher, every single teacher must now ask themselves critically: What can *I* do? […] Do I really need to take my sabbatical *now*? [emphasis added]" (ibid.). TWB dimensions are mixed and matched, often according to the individual speaker's (or institution's) intention.

In addition, definitions of TWB – as aforementioned – exist, but do not always match the (cultural) context or literal translation[3]. One also needs to take into account the cultural dimension of well-being. The perception and understanding of TWB may depend on a certain country and geo-political circumstances as these conditions could shift the focus of a definition, for example by placing more emphasis on safety or physical health. Certain peculiarities in teacher training in different countries can also lead to a different perception of the topic on the part of student teachers and practising teachers. Therefore, it is

[2] In contrast, images depicting teachers as being lazy and always being on holidays maintain in many places, even though media coverage has already improved and shown less negative attitudes towards the teaching profession over the last decades (cf. Köller et al., 2019).

[3] For example, in Germany both "Gesundheit" and "Wohlbefinden" are used to describe "well-being", naturally dividing the subject into different areas with different focuses.

important to define the term for specific contexts in order to enable a targeted discussion at the same level, e.g. at university or at a school.

- *Early prevention is key.*

As a piece of key literature in the German research field of TWB, the Potsdamer Lehrerstudie (Schaarschmidt & Fischer, 2008) identified certain patterns which describe different types of work engagement and associated health outcomes among teachers, thereby increasing awareness for teachers' problematic (and potentially unhealthy) working conditions and calling for prevention instead of intervention. Several coaching and prevention programmes have since been developed as a means to establish TWB as a crucial part of the teaching profession (cf. Lehr et al., 2007). Before the actual start of their teaching career, however, many teachers have not come into contact with TWB. Instead, the topic hits them indirectly during their early career days, at a time when caring for oneself is often not prioritised, but is actually meant to "deserve the greatest support and attention to ensure effectiveness and well-being" (OECD, 2019). Once in school, resources to undergo further training are often limited – or the school's focus is put on, seemingly, more pressing issues, such as digital learning. The importance of preventative measures, however, recently became obvious in the aftermath of the pandemic which showed that Covid-19 "stretched [teachers] to their limits" (Education and Solidarity Network, 2024). Even though the pandemic impacted all sorts of workers and working sectors, according to the 2024 *State of the American Teacher Survey*,

> *compared with comparable working adults, about twice as many teachers reported experiencing frequent job-related stress or burnout and roughly three times as many teachers reported difficulty coping with job-related stress. Teachers were as likely to say that they intend to leave their jobs by the end of the 2023–2024 school year as comparable working adults* (Doan et al., 2024, p. iii).

Challenges posed by the pandemic for teachers further seem to have exacerbated pre-existing problems in the profession, turning Covid-19 into "a powerful reminder that the dedication and commitment of education personnel are assets that must be nurtured" (ibid.) in order to maintain "their health and well-being [which] are fundamental to ensuring quality education" (ibid.). Preventative measures have to be taken in a world that is characterised by change and changeability in order to not repeat the effects of Covid-19 on teachers. But despite the obvious need for prevention, TWB remains a topic often unheard of at universities. Seminars or lectures on the topic are not part of the usual canon (reminding oneself of other times academic offers seemed to have been lagging behind while the situation was already escalating in schools, i.e. on matters of inclusion or digitality). Well-being still appears to be considered each individual's responsibility exclusively – a notion that needs to be changed as early as possible, during ITE, as it cannot only jeopardise teachers' well-being, but also the future of society.

- *We need more teachers – and we need them to stay.*

The effects of teacher shortage – with teachers teaching more lessons, bigger classes, pupils not getting enough attention, certain subjects not being taught at all any more, etc. – will, sooner or later, lead to pupils and teachers being unwell. Negative TWB is therefore often considered to be one of the main reasons for teacher shortage, backed up by data on the connections between TWB and intentions to leave the profession (Doan et al., 2024)

or between TWB and job satisfaction[4] (OECD, 2019). According to Schaeper et al. (2023), "indicators of occupational well-being are […] predictors of educational and occupational decisions, competencies and behaviours" (p. 11) and can therefore be used to explain phenomena such as drop-out rates, teaching and learning quality (ibid.). Overall, the connection of unattractiveness of taking on (or remaining in) the teaching profession and a lack of well-being seems obvious.

As one measure to tackle teacher shortage and to meet the rising teacher demand, many student teachers in Germany have already started teaching a high number of hours at schools while still being enrolled in university. Apart from the fact that these student teachers are not yet fully qualified, working at a school alongside their studies pushes many student teachers to their limits – and confronts universities and schools with the question of how they can coordinate their activities without jeopardising the well-being of (future) teachers.

Regarding German teacher education, it is the second phase in particular that has come under fire by media coverage and 'horror stories', a recent newspaper article even depicted teacher training in Germany as "living hell" (Fokken et al., 2024) and an "'anachronism […] preventing innovation in schools'" (ibid.). Unsettling reports from trainee teachers, with some even taking legal action against "non-transparent assessment criteria" and the "high mental burden" during teacher training, (ibid.) support this presumption and call for a closer inspection of this phase of teacher education to improve the situation, but also to make the profession appear more attractive than it seems at the moment.

But it is also a question of retaining in-service teachers: For the UK, Education Support's 2023 *Teacher Wellbeing Index* showed that "teacher wellbeing has reached its lowest level in five years, with stress, insomnia and burnout all continuing to rise and working in schools unsustainably demanding" (Foster, 2023), providing another glimpse into the state-of-the-art at schools. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to (re-)build a work environment which is beneficial to TWB or which, at best, promotes TWB. The *TALIS 2018* study stressed that "teachers and school leaders whose well-being is looked after are likely to report stronger motivation at work and an increased commitment to staying in the profession. So, frustration and dissatisfaction should not be ignored" (OECD, 2019, p. 3). Here, special attention should be paid on the early career years: In Germany,

> *fewer than 5 percent of teachers leave the profession in the first five years, […] perhaps [turning] Germany's teaching force [into] […] the second-oldest in the OECD; approximately 40 percent to 50 percent of teachers were 50 or older in 2014, which will necessitate training an influx of new teachers as the current teaching force retires.* (National Center on Education and the Economy, n.d.).

As a crucial part of society, teachers are considering to leave their profession – people, of who, "despite these challenges, the majority […] would choose their profession again, a true

[4] It seems reasonable to suppose that closely monitoring teachers' job (dis)satisfaction could be a way to prevent them from leaving the profession. Job satisfaction alone, however, does not necessarily seem to be an obvious indicator of one's state of TWB. In Germany, "despite a high level of job satisfaction, over 30% of teachers and head teachers state that they are exhausted several times a week, 10% even every day. 41% are frustrated by their work at least once a week. 38 percent feel really depressed several times a month or more often at the end of the school day (Deutsches Schulportal, 2024).

testament to the dedication, commitment, and passion of teachers to the profession they love and that the world needs (Education International, 2023).

- *We need TWB for (and in) our future.*

Children and young people are not only affected by teacher shortage, but also by those teachers who decide to stay in the profession, albeit visibly struggling day by day, slowly becoming unable to carry out their profession satisfactorily and happily. Klusmann (Deutsches Schulportal, n.D.) stresses that "we know from studies on burnout that exhaustion is often combined with cynicism or irritability. Teachers distance themselves from their work, which is a protective mechanism for themselves. For the pupils, who are acutely aware of the teachers' situation, exhaustion and cynicism have a negative impact on their motivation and their relationship with the teachers" (ibid.). On the other hand, healthy work environments and working conditions for teachers have

> *a direct impact on the quality of education. When educators face overwhelming workloads, lack of recognition, experience psychological distress, […] this impacts their ability to teach effectively and motivation to remain in the profession. Addressing these challenges is essential for the well-being of education personnel […] [,] pivotal for ensuring quality education for all* (Education International, 2023),

and "fundamental to the future of education" (Education and Solidarity Network, 2024).

In the (near) future, teachers will be confronted with tasks and challenges they do not even know of yet, and will therefore, just like other professions, need to commit to life-long learning if they want to keep up with the world around them. Here, their TWB is, again, a significant aspect. So-called *Future Skills*[5] are meant to equip learners for the future and encourage them to self-reflect on their existing – as well as still needed – skills and resources. They promote well-being-adjacent skills such as health literacy, resilience or self-efficacy, with the latter being among factors that "ensure a positive work environment in which teachers and students thrive, thus leading to higher levels of involvement from teachers, students, and parents alike" (Ortan, 2021, p. 1). In the context of the OECD teacher study *TALIS 2018,* "boost[ing] teachers' sense of fulfilment through enhanced self-efficacy" (OECD, 2018, p. 65) has been set as one of the main goals for retaining teaching professionals, calling for "induction and mentoring throughout the career" (ibid.) as well as "meaningful and impactful opportunities for professional learning" (ibid.) to achieve this goal. Following the assumption that student teachers can learn from more experienced teachers and vice versa, organised cross-phase exchange, "shaped by purposeful, goal-oriented cooperation and communication on equal terms" and "aiming at profitable benefits for every person at any point during their teaching education and career, allowing each participant to get involved regardless their teaching experience" (Springob et al., 2023, p. 483), could be beneficial to a *Future Skills* shift towards a different handling of TWB.

[5] Future Skills are defined by Ehlers (2020) as "competencies that enable individuals to solve complex problems in a self-organised manner and to act (successfully) in highly emergent contexts […] [,] based on cognitive, motivational, volitional and social resources, are value-based and can be acquired in a learning process" (p. 57). Current research on *Future Skills,* however, is, according to Ehler, diverse: "What is perhaps labelled as 21st Century […] actually means *Future Skills*" (ibid., p. 122).

3. Exploring TWB: An explorative study

As illustrated above, the topic of well-being itself and TWB in particular is of high relevance to school, teaching, teacher training, and society. The impact outlined above calls for a firm establishment of TWB as early in teacher education as possible, starting during ITE. Therefore, we need studies that ask about student teachers' understanding of TWB, its significance for all phases of teacher education, and, most importantly, their needs and wishes regarding the development of TWB skills:

(1) How do (future) teachers perceive TWB?
(2) What role does TWB play in teacher education?
(3) What do (future) teachers need in terms of TWB?

For the qualitative pilot study at hand, those comprehensive questions provided a preliminary category system that helped design the interview guidelines and served as orientation through the data analysis process. As a first focus group for this pilot study, it was decided to invite student teachers and hear from those who are actually being trained, voices that often remain unheard in discussions on teacher education. Through deeper exploration of the central questions, this pilot study – with regard to content – aims at

a. initially identifying **topics of importance** within the area of TWB (to further explore and use for future research),
b. gaining a first understanding of how those who are going to be our future teachers perceive the **significance of TWB** for their future profession,
c. collecting first-hand information on the **state-of-the-art of TWB** in teacher education from the perspective of student teachers,
d. gaining first insight into their **needs and wishes** regarding teacher education in general and TWB in particular, as well as outlining **ideas for support** as they transition into their professional roles, and
e. discovering **unforeseen aspects** of TWB relevant to student teachers (underlining the explorative character of this pilot study).

With regard to methodology, the pilot study also served as a "test balloon" for the research method "group discussion" in the context of TWB, as well as for an exploration of analytic approaches towards the data collected in such. The method of a group discussion was chosen since the goal of the study was to "understand issues related to consensus and diversity across participants" (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018, p.3) instead of "get[ting] in-depth information about each participant" (ibid.)

The group

The discussants (n=7) have all been studying at UoC to become teachers (= *Lehramtsstudierende*) at different types of schools, therefore stemming from one milieu/"'conjunctive [space] of experience'" (cf. Bohnsack, 2014). Of the 23 to 28-year-olds, only one student has not yet finished their Bachelor's degree. The group size of seven allowed for enough time for each participant to make their contribution and followed Morgan and Hoffman's (2018) recommendation of using groups of "smaller sizes [...] for [....] topics and/or situations where the participants have a high level of engagement with the topic", as it was the case with the topic of TWB. However, due to the small (non-random) sample size, in addition to the overall purpose and scope of the pilot study as a "first dive" into TWB, the results cannot be considered representative.

Since all group members (as well as the two interviewers) have currently been working at the Centre for Teacher Education (CfTE) at the UoC, they have all been acquainted with each other. Some of the students had attended the same classes at university in the past; all of them had done at least one internship at a school as part of their studies. Their career choice as well as their interest in teacher training (through their employment at the CfTE) served as the 'common ground' for this group discussion, while the group members' differences in age, gender, study time and (teaching) experience allowed a diversity of contributions. All participants volunteered to participate in the group discussion during an internal training day at the CfTE and agreed to an anonymous data collection and analysis for this study purpose beforehand.

The setting

The 90-minute-group discussion was held in June 2024 at the CfTE. The group discussion took place during an internal training day at the CfTE which focused on well-being and aimed at all CfTE staff having an opportunity to further explore the meaning of well-being for them and their work through different activities, workshops, and lectures. The group discussion was held after an initial keynote, which served as a stimulus for the group discussion and ensured that all participants were – to the greatest extent possible – on the same level as far as their knowledge about the topic was concerned. For the discussion, the group met in a meeting room for student counselling, making for a casual, non-workplace-related atmosphere. A flipchart was provided to give the discussants the opportunity to pin down ideas.

Overall, the group discussion aimed at creating an open, friendly atmosphere in which "communication processes [...] that are similar to an everyday conversation" could be initiated, "not (only) exchanging arguments, but also [...] telling stories [...]" (Vogl, 2014, p. 581). The whole discussion was held in German to make sure everyone could fully express their views and opinions. As "the interaction between the group members is crucial" (ibid.) in every group discussion, didactic tools such as the *Think-Pair-Share* method were employed at times to ensure that single group members would not concentrate on individual stories and experiences too much. This gave the group ample opportunity to share and compare, which, according to Morgan and Hoffman (2018), is

> *one essential part of this interaction [...] that goes on in group discussions. On the one hand, the process of sharing includes discussions of the ways that participants feel similar to each other; on the other hand, comparing gets at the differences between participants. For the researcher, these ongoing exchanges around similarities and differences provide insights into not just what participants think but also why they think the way they do* (ibid, p.3).

The interview guide

An interview guide was developed before the group discussion to facilitate covering each central question – explicitly or implicitly – during the brief 90-minute period. The guidelines were subdivided into three central parts (with guiding questions planned for each category beneath), based on the aforementioned three central questions. The corresponding questions in each category were based on the preceding research as well as the researchers' hypotheses regarding student teachers' perception of and attitude towards TWB. Since the interviewers were primarily interested in the collective perspective

on TWB, but also wanted to give discussants the opportunity to elaborate their individual stands, if desired, rating conference elements were also included (cf. Hascher et al., 2020).

Tab. 1: Interview guide

CENTRAL QUESTION	GUIDING QUESTIONS
(1) **How do (future) teachers perceive TWB?**	*at the start of the group discussion:* **(1a) Think – Pair – Share: How would you personally define TWB?** **(1b) On a scale from 1 (totally unimportant) to 5 (very important): How important is TWB to you personally?** **(1c) (How) Can you divide the main topic of TWB into different areas / categories?** ● Which of them would you regard as most critical, controversial, …? ● Which one is most important for you as student teachers? *at the end of the group discussion:* **(1d) Would you change anything in your definition after this discussion? If so, what and why?**
(2) **What role does TWB play in teacher education?**	**(2a) (Where) Has TWB already been addressed in your training?** e.g. in seminars/lectures or also during field experiences; colleagues have completed further training, … or at other points in one's life
(3) **What do (future) teachers need in terms of TWB?**	**(3a) In general, what would you like to see in relation to TWB in teacher education (all 3 phases)?** ● …practically and theoretically? ● …institutionally as well as socially? ● Which questions would you like to (be) ask(ed) about TWB?

Acting as "bookends" for the group discussion, question (1a) is the starting point for the discussion, question (1d) marks the end of it. All other questions, however, can be handled flexibly during the discussions and do not necessarily need to be posed in the order presented above. As explained above, the interview guide served as a point for orientation during the group discussion, minimising the risk of taking the discussion on the, at times rather emotional, issue of TWB "in a direction […] not necessarily productive for the overall project" – something which, according to Morgan and Hoffman (2018) can frequently happen in less-structured interviews. Following the open nature of many qualitative research approaches, the interview guide was not standardised (Gläser-Zikuda, 2011).

3.1 Data analysis

The group discussion was transcribed by both interviewers by taking detailed notes, orientated to the *notes-only method* (Bertrand et al., 1992) and the *fair notes method* (Hill et al., 2022; Halcomb & Davidson, 2006) for pragmatic reasons, as both time and resources for both the discussion and the data analysis were limited. They concentrated primarily on collecting direct quotes and took notes on tone, gestures and facial expressions as they

are “important sources of information and can radically alter the interpretation of a statement” (Flick 2018, p. 117). Directly after the group discussion, the facilitators’ notes were compared and joined together in one transcription document that served as the base for the following analysis. The aforementioned flipchart served as an additional, visual document.

The participants’ contributions on the flipchart were photographed and included into the final transcript to be analysed. This final transcript was then translated using not only the translation software *DeepL*, but also online dictionaries and an online thesaurus to grasp the full meaning of the participants' words.

In terms of coding, a (digital) *Scissor-and-Sort technique/cut-and-paste method* (cf. Flick, 2018) was applied which “shares many of the characteristics of more sophisticated and time-consuming approaches” (ibid.) and proved sufficient for the purposes of this pilot study. After an initial reading of the notes, material related to each of the three central questions (which, as mentioned before, served as a category system here) was identified, colour-coded, and assigned to one of the categories by the interviewers. This step was guided by the aspects of

- repetition: *What is – repeatedly – made subject of discussion?*
- personal engagement: *Where do the discussants seem personally involved and/or experienced?*
- omission: *What do the speakers not mention or only mention 'between the lines'? (cf. Strübing, 2014)?*

Material that could not be assigned was put aside at first; some of it was later used to derive additional (sub-)categories.

In a second step, (sub-)categories were established both deductively and inductively. Following the *Summary-Based Reporting* approach (cf. Morgan & Hoffman, 2018) it was determined “which topics were most important to the participants through a descriptive account of the primary topics” (ibid., p. 12), taking into consideration that “what matters is not just the frequency with which a topic is mentioned but also the level of interest and significance the participants attached to the topic […] requir[ing] a degree of judgement on the part of the analyst” (ibid., p.13). In addition, further dimensions (of meaning) were opened up from the data material (cf. Strauss/Corbin, 1996). This was done separately by both interviewers and (preliminary) (sub-)categories were later shared, compared and – where possible – combined, which helped “to assess the reliability of the categorizations, at least with respect to major themes and issues” (Flick 2018, p. 124). This procedure facilitated a systematic and comprehensible analysis of the qualitative data collected and holds potential of reusability and/or modifications during future research.

3.2 Results

The data analysis showed that the aims of this pilot study could be met:

a. **topics of importance** within the area of TWB were identified and contributed to the categorization presented above, providing ample starting points for further (international) research;
b. a first impression of the **significance and perception of TWB** for student teachers could be gathered;

c. a first insight into the **state-of-the-art of TWB** in teacher education, primarily in the ITE phase, could be gained;
d. student teachers' **needs and wishes** as well as their ideas, solutions and approaches regarding TWB could be heard and can now be further differentiated and distributed;
e. **unforeseen aspects**, such as mentoring and field experiences, were expressed and can now potentially be included in later research.

In the following, the final (sub-)categories that were identified will be presented and interpreted with regard to the overall topic and goals of this pilot study. In general, the preliminary category system based on the three research questions (cf. 3.) could be maintained but was supplemented by sub-categories for further differentiation. Category *(IV): Cultural and contextual factors* was added as the data collected showed that these factors applying to German teacher education and/or teacher education at UoC played a crucial role for the discussants. Ideas for solutions and measures were mentioned throughout the discussion, appearing rather spontaneously and not always with a clear reference to the topic of TWB, showing the participants' high interest and emotional involvement in their current and future teacher education (cf. Flick, 2018).

Discussants' ideas were almost always met with affirmative words, sounds and gestures, resulting in a feeling of unity – at least in the sense of them all being "in the same boat". Despite the interview guidelines, the (quite lively) group discussion soon developed its own dynamic: Less – or more – time than anticipated by the interviewers was spent on some questions; the chronological order of the interview guidelines was not being followed. These deviations from the chronological order in the interview guide helped to identify relevant points, as the participants' reactions and engagement was a lot higher following some of the questions more than others. Especially considering the explorative character of this study, the differences in time spent on an engagement in some questions more (or less) than on others was an important realisation that helped to identify crucial aspects useful for the following categorization (ibid.).

3.2.1 Category (I): Perceptions of TWB

This category presents results taken from the group discussion that refer to the participants' overall understanding of TWB as this term was relatively unknown to most of them. Even though the discussion was in German, the English term "Teacher Well-Being" was being used for all of the discussion, as a literal translation of the term into Germany (see footnote 4) could have evoked misleading connotations.

Sub-category (I.i): Definitions of TWB

- *"For me, Teacher Well-Being means that teachers can work sustainably in their profession without symptoms of physical or mental overload and are generally happy to do so with passion. They should also be aware of the importance of their health and be able to protect it."*

When asked about their personal understanding/definition of TWB, the participants' answers varied in length and depth, but rarely content-wise. None of them merely concentrated on one aspect of TWB. Instead they all seemed to try to cover as many aspects as possible. It is also notable that some participants, although not being asked to do so, chose to put their definition much more personally by starting with "For me, …" or "I feel …", highlighting their personal involvement in the topic of TWB. Based on frequency

and repetitions, the following umbrella terms (with exemplary quotes below) formed out of the participants' written definitions:

Tab. 2: TWB umbrella terms

<table>
<tr><th>"physical health"</th><th colspan="2">"psychological health"</th><th>"job satisfaction"</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">"TWB includes physical and mental health"

"TWB initially means the physical and mental well-being of teachers"

"Interaction between physical and psychological factors"

"No symptoms of physical [...] overload"</td><td>"self-confidence and -efficacy"</td><td>"resilience"</td><td rowspan="2">"TWB is overall job satisfaction [...]; satisfaction is disturbed when individual factors become stressors and make a teacher's vulnerability greater than their resilience"</td></tr>
<tr><td>"I feel effective"

"I feel confident in my personal skills, both in terms of professional skills and health and recovery skills or know how/where to get support"</td><td>"goal: resilient handling of stress and conflicts at school"

"resilience must be greater than one's individual vulnerability"</td></tr>
<tr><th>"individual well-being"</th><th colspan="2">"work / school climate"</th><th>"work – life balance"</th></tr>
<tr><td>"individual factors are different for each person"

"individual and environment must be in harmony"</td><td colspan="2">"I feel seen, taken seriously and supported by my colleagues"

"cooperation with pupils, teachers, authorities, parents, school management"

"I feel seen, taken seriously and supported by my colleagues"

"mindful handling of teachers' needs"

"a considering environment & health awareness"

"climate at school, in class, among colleagues & capacity utilisation"

"conflict handling skills"</td><td>"appropriate working hours, appropriate workload"

"I feel appropriately and equally burdened with and relieved from work"

"No symptoms of work overload"</td></tr>
</table>

Sub-category (I.ii): Personal perception of TWB

- *"On a scale from one to five, I would say: Seven."*

On a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), all participants chose the highest number to describe how important TWB was for them personally – or even,

jokingly, the numbers 6 and 7, to underline how they feel about its significance. It was pointed out that, although TWB seems to be so important to student teachers, this does not reflect in their daily student life. For many, the importance of TWB had changed over time, influenced mostly by (their own or their peers') negative experiences and, especially, negative media coverage: "At the moment you only hear negative things about teachers; I'm trying each day to actively counteract this". Others reported that, in general, they found the negative media coverage rather useful, "because we need a change". However, many media outlets currently seem to portray an incoherent image of teachers, "somewhere between being '*larifari*' (= lazy) and burnt out", making it difficult to appraise the significance of TWB somehow. To some participants, it seemed difficult to make out a starting point for tackling problematic issues related to the teaching profession ("For example work-life balance – is that something I start tackling from the work side or from my personal side?"), including problems to separate TWB from "general well-being". The term "work-life balance" dominated the discourse in this category. Consequently, when asked to identify areas of TWB, they agreed on the main areas "**individuum**" (which included the keywords "sense of self-esteem", "work-life balance", "resilience", "self-efficacy", "organisation skills", "reflection (from the very beginning)" and "self > teacher") and "**school**" (including the keywords "classroom atmosphere", "(actually lived) school climate and values", "team work (often neglected)", "staff atmosphere", "esteem", and "infrastructure (classroom, Wi-Fi, digital devices).[6] Clearly separating the individuum from school and vice versa, however, struck the participants as problematic; instead, they came to the conclusion that strong interdependencies existed between the areas.

Sub-category (I.iii): Field experience and TWB

- *"All the teachers who were role models for me were so exhausted or ill at the end of the school year."*

All of the participants' perception of TWB had been shaped not only by their own – quite recent – experiences as pupils, but also to a great extent by previous field and teaching experiences, such as the *Praxissemester*[7] or former short-term internships. Consequently, the discussants' field experiences significantly shaped the discussion to an extent which came rather surprising to the interviewers. As for the teachers they accompanied and talked to in school, participants noted that "they [= the teachers] were all so well received by their pupils, do such great teaching, but somehow it eats them up". Although participants were in general not surprised by the reality of the teaching profession, some felt disillusioned: "If that's the future of good teachers, then I don't know if I can do the job for so long; that just seems too heavy". One also analysed the mood among many school staff: "At the moment, the majority of staff are teachers who always had to swallow everything, and that will have consequences at some point". Another participant expressed that after observing teachers during their *Praxissemester*, he does "not find the high dropout rates surprising at all". Some discussants already gained insight, to some extent, into how the job could impact their TWB. They reported that student colleagues of theirs who did not care about their well-being during their *Praxissemester*, taking on every task

[6] A third area, "measures", was identified as well, as the participants naturally came to talk about them during the discussion (see 3.2).

[7] The *Praxissemester* (= practical semester) at UoC is an integral part of teacher training that enables students to gain field experience in a school environment. This second semester during the Master's is spent in school to observe, plan and carry out lessons under the guidance of experienced teachers. The aim is to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired during their studies in practice, to test their own pedagogical skills and to prepare for their future career as a teacher.

and working a high number of hours, overall had a much harder time during their *Praxissemester*; some of them even "went to school crying every day", thereby highlighting the high pressure of the job and importance of caring for one's TWB before finally entering the profession. Overall, however, they praised the *Praxissemester* as it "can be a stressful experience, but can also help you to fully confirm your career choice, partly because you get reassured by teachers, but also by fellow students when exchanging experiences".

3.2.2 Category (II): The role of TWB in teacher education

Sub-category (II.i): The role of TWB at university

- *"[…] some brief information on support services on campus, that was all."*

Most of the participants had not dealt with the topic of TWB in a university-related context at all. Discussants studying to become teachers at a *Gymnasium* or *Gesamtschule* (= secondary school with A-Levels) reported that they had not come into any contact with TWB during their studies whereas one student studying Special Needs Education had visited one compact seminar that touched on TWB. The discussants had the impression that well-being in general was a bigger issue in special needs education than in general education. As for general well-being, one discussant remembered that "in one of the initial introductory lectures, the very last PowerPoint slide contained some brief information on support services on campus, that was all". Another participant told the others about one seminar on TWB from a few semesters ago and emphasised that this had been taught by a lecturer who was younger than the average lecturers. This lecturer had also invited a teacher trainee for a Q&A-session which was meant to focus on the trainee's positive experiences to specifically counterpart "all the horror stories you hear about teacher training".

Some participants pointed out the crux of addressing TWB in university classes. Although they would wish to learn more about the demands and requirements of the job, "if unfavourable TWB factors would be addressed early on, […] this could also lead to an insane fear of what is about to come". One participant was wondering whether the deeper implementation of TWB in teacher training, "making it part of the job requirements", would make society rethink the image they have of teachers.

"A lot of criticism was voiced regarding the majority of lecturers and teacher educators the discussants have come across during their studies. A "job reality check" was something all participants favoured for their time at university – if done by actual teachers, which, according to one participant, would "definitely be 500 times better and more efficient than if it was done by academics". "Who are those who are actually talking about TWB – and about the profession in general?", one discussant asked, questioning the effectiveness of being taught by people "who haven't seen a school from the inside in quite a while". The group also contemplated missing links between university and schools to enable knowledge transfer ("currently, there is a gap that can hardly be bridged").

Sub-category (II.ii): TWB in teacher training

- *"[…] It's just education for perfectionism – even though nobody's perfect!"*

The majority of the discussants admitted worrying about their oncoming teacher training, although being well aware that their view on this particular phase of teacher education had been shaped to a great extent by 'horror studies' or 'urban myths'. For some of them,

though, all of these "sources" as well as the teaching experience they had already collected at this point helped to develop a realistic, yet not (only) uplifting, view on their future job and what they will or will not be able to care for after leaving university: "As soon as I enter teacher training, I know that I will not have the time or resources to care about my well-being or changing the system", one discussant detected during the discussion, emphasizing the need to learn to care for one's (teacher) well-being before starting the job. Discussants criticised mentors' lack of training and the overall unrealistic nature of many of the tasks traditionally found in teacher training all over Germany: "Everyone knows that the staged lessons you have to show your examiners during teacher training are not realistic, including the pupils". According to one student, this reflected "[…] the whole process of teacher education […]: It's just education for perfectionism – even though nobody's perfect!" To gain an insight into the reality of the job, one student proposed lowering the number of BDU[8] lessons and increasing those of AU[9] lessons during teacher training.

Sub-category (II.iii): TWB in in-service training

All of the students had, naturally, not yet had any own experience with this third phase of German teacher education themselves, but also could not report from any experience among their internship schools' staff. According to one student's personal impression, "unfortunately, […] there are also many colleagues among the teaching staff who are no longer interested in change, who have not internalised lifelong learning at all", providing one possible explanation for these subjective observations. Even those who had already finished their *Praxissemester* and had therefore spent a longer time at a school had not noticed any colleagues undergoing training with regard to TWB. One participant, however, had noticed that some teacher unions had approached the schools with surveys touching this topic. The discussants also regarded the many administrative tasks for teachers to be one of the main burdens in the daily life of a teacher, claiming that "teachers should be given the opportunity to concentrate more on their core business of teaching again. […] Positions must be created for administrative matters."

3.2.3 Category (III): Needs and wishes regarding TWB

Sub-category (III.i) Student empowerment within "the system"

- *"I enjoy teaching […], but not in this system."*

"The system" was a term used many times during the group discussion, referring to both the structure of teacher education in Germany as well as the German school system, including both teachers and pupils. The group agreed that it was problematic to listen to politicians talking about unfortunate circumstances within "the system" ("When was the last time [the politicians] were in school?" / "Who are the people who are actually talking about this?") when their (lack of) knowledge of the job reality made them unreliable sources: "I don't want to have my idea and expectations of the teaching job be ruined straight away from someone who doesn't know what they're talking about, I'd rather try it

[8] In German teacher training, BDU (*Bedarfsdeckender Unterricht*) lessons are lessons taught by teacher trainees without supervision. The trainees are responsible for teaching, grading, parent work, etc.

[9] AU (*Ausbildungsunterricht*) lessons, on the other hand, are those taught by teacher trainees under supervision by an in-service teacher. AU lessons should always be reflected upon with the supervising teacher who still holds full responsibility for the organisation of the class.

out and fall flat on my face." At the same time, the students felt unable to voice their concerns themselves: "Even now, at university, […] I feel like I don't have the opportunity to express criticism or concerns" as there were "no visible links between education and politics". All participants were convinced that "the system" needed to be changed in order to make room for TWB[10]; however, according to them, none of them had obtained any knowledge of how to bring about such a system at university ("I wouldn't even know how to bring about change in the system!").

In addition, it was "frustrating how slowly things are progressing systemically", resulting in a stressful state for everyone involved: "I feel that the system is causing me a lot of stress because you can see everywhere that the system is not getting anywhere; it's only causing more stress for the people who are under stress." This rather dark prospect left some of the students in a state of surrender: "The system is at it is and will probably stay that way for the time being, […] so I have to accept the system as it is." / "I enjoy teaching and I like it, but not in this system, because I also know that I will probably end up being one of those who put everything into it, but I also want to have a real life besides my job." / "No matter how hard I try, for example, internal differentiation in my classroom, if I realize that a pupil can't cope in the system, it also limits my sense of self-efficacy – but it's not me, it's the system!"

The discussants clearly stated their "need [for] empowerment, knowledge on how can I organise myself with others", not only for their own sakes, but in their role as change agents: "You also need the generation that comes afterwards [= the students' pupils] to take care of themselves, to be more committed to changing the system". For this, teachers would, in general, need "more time to establish relationships with the pupils, so that you know what's going on in their heads". This would also strengthen teachers' senses of self-efficacy.

Sub-category (III.ii): Mentoring and counselling

The aspect of mentoring and counselling was present throughout the discussion. On the flipchart, all measures written down by the participants revolved around this: "continuous reflection of one's teaching/lessons", "continuous mentoring", "proper training for mentors and headteachers" and "counselling both inside and outside of school" were points that were referred to continuously. Some participants regarded the success and effectiveness of their field experiences as being highly dependent on the quality of support by their mentors; some anticipated the same for their oncoming teacher training. Therefore, all participants demanded "better training for mentors" and "a clearer image of their role". In their opinion, mentoring should not only focus on teaching lessons, but should clearly address job-related challenges connected to TWB, e.g. "learning when and how to say 'no'", as this would help "to manifest things for yourself, to reflect on yourself, to set boundaries".

[10] The students emphasised that a change of "the system" would not only benefit TWB, but also other aspects of school and education: Discussing whether pupils learned enough at school for the professions they are going to take on in the future, one participant thought that "a lot of change needs to happen soon so that the pupils don't suffer". In general, the students wished for more dialogue options between teachers and pupils and more room for "honest exchange". They asked for "more time for relationship work with everyone, but especially with the pupils."

Sub-category (III.iii): TWB as a cross-cutting theme

One student proposed "a more holistic approach of addressing TWB" and voiced the idea of implementing "TWB as a cross-cutting theme […] which is being considered again and again throughout all phases of teacher education". This turned the other participants' attention to a general lack of exchange in teacher education across all phases of teacher education. The discussants gathered that through continuous exchange with teacher trainees and in-service teachers (e.g. in the form of "compulsory/voluntary opportunities for exchange every six months or so") would allow for more "real reflection" on their own situation: "Accepting the situation is the first step that allows us to continue working with it. We have to analyse it: What is my personal focus? What is not as important to me? Then we can talk about what we could/would change, concentrate on making sure that we are all doing well, that there are enough teachers, that we can prepare children for the future."

Sub-category (III.iv): Sustainable TWB

The aspect of sustainability with regard to the maintenance of one's TWB was another aspect that was continuously mentioned, explicitly or between the lines. One participant stressed that TWB should enable "not just 5 years of good job performance, but 40 years". The term also made an appearance in one of the students' definitions: "For me, Teacher Well-Being means that teachers can work sustainably in their profession without symptoms of physical or mental overload and are generally happy to do so with passion. They should also be aware of the importance of their health and be able to protect it." According to the group, it would be very important to equip student teachers with tools that enable them to care for their TWB themselves: "If I can take care of myself, I face stressful situations differently".

3.2.4 Category (IV): Cultural and contextual factors

Some aspects peculiar to German teacher education made an appearance during the discussion.[11] The fear of not being able to become a civil servant after seeking professional psychological help was referred to several times. Participants described this as "stress triggering" and pointed out that this was often the start of a vicious circle: "If one does not go to therapy […] out of fear [of not being able to work in civil service], they don't know how to cope with the situation […]; then they start working and have much bigger problems in the end". One participant promoted the idea of starting to talk – or at least think – about one's mental health "right at the start of university: How far can I go with my mental health, will it have negative consequences?".

This falls into another dimension of critique uttered by the group: The general approach to (teacher) well-being. The group discussion was carried by the general wish to approach (especially: mental) health more openly – not only in teacher education, but in (German)

[11] It is important to note here that in Germany, teachers usually aim to become civil servants. Apart from the numerous advantages of civil service (i.e., job and financial security, better health insurance), some of the requirements and obligations can become disadvantages, e.g., if a short-term change of location is desired or, for example in case of mobbing, is needed. Regarding the requirements for civil service and their health suitability for the job, however, there are quite a lot of uncertainties and "myths" revolving around it: Many student teachers fear that they will not pass the official medical examination – which is a prerequisite for becoming a civil servant – if any information about previous psychotherapeutic treatment can be found in their medical records. For civil servant teachers who are already in-service, on the other hand, circumstances caused by a shortage of teachers – i.e.., being seconded to another type of school (at short notice) or having to take on additional (administrative) tasks – put them under a lot of stress.

society in general – without turning it into a "topic of fear": "It is hard to find the right balance between not talking about TWB and talking too much about TWB".

As far as ITE at UoC was concerned, the discussants uttered that a lack of knowledge about well-being could be addressed by, e.g., offering "seminars on well-being literacy, accompanying every field experience during ITE". Participants further wished for "'reality checks' in field experience-accompanying seminars" in order to "prevent 'reality shocks' by talking about TWB on a theoretical level only". Especially with regard to their field experience, participants wished for more actual references to German curricula as well as a re-evaluation of the internships' foci: According to the students, the many requirements for the tasks that need to be done during field experiences that made it very difficult to "approach the internships the way you would like to" and took away "most of the space to really use the internships for reflection". Regarding teacher training, complaints about the "myths" around this phase of German teacher education was another cross-cutting issue throughout the discussion. Yet, some participants wished for "less subjective assessment during teacher training" to take some pressure off this phase.

4. Concluding remarks: Implications for teacher education and future research

Above all, the group discussion showed that student teachers are overall highly motivated, do have a great interest in the topic of TWB and wish to learn more about it sooner rather than later. Having already come into contact with many of the challenges of teaching and for TWB through intense field experience, they do not enter the job unbiased – but, lacking support, many of them may feel as if they were entering the lion's den unarmed. Apart from more lectures and seminars on TWB-related topics, TWB needs to be implemented into teacher education as an established part of the job culture. By doing so, they can, as *change agents* (cf. Busse, 2021), contribute significantly to further manifest their beliefs and principles regarding TWB into school culture in general. Student teachers wish to be part of the change and teacher training must equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills and tools, and offer ample opportunities to empower them. Two international projects addressing this topic with various activities, products and publications at the University of Cologne already are the European University Alliance *EUniWell*[12] and the Erasmus+ Teacher Academy *teff*[13]. Amongst other things, the 'onboarding' of future teachers in the beginning of their studies in a so-called *Welcome Week* and the development of 'new professional standards' (including then also well-being skills) are realised within these projects.

Following a preventative approach, student teachers need more (or need to become more aware of) support systems at their universities, targeting not only students in general, but student teachers in particular. Such support systems should further explore the possibilities of cross-phased exchange, as student teachers ask for more "reality" during their studies. Establishing teacher networks from early on should be taken into consideration.

Mentors play a crucial role for their mentees: It is them who they need to believe, whom they need to trust and who needs to prepare them for the profession. The current situation is equally unsatisfying for both the teachers offering to mentor and the students: Mentors often take on the job in addition to their own teaching (or receive very little compensation

[12] More information can be found here: https://www.euniwell.eu/

[13] More information can be found here: https://www.teff-academy.eu/

for this extensive additional task) which then contributes to their workload, making it difficult for the students to evaluate the level of support they can or cannot receive from them. As a study from New Zealand revealed,

> *despite growing recognition of the need for a more overtly educative conception of mentoring, practices remain largely focused on giving directive advice to new teachers on classroom management, sourcing and using appropriate resources, and passing on institutional knowledge about how things work in the particular school/department. This [...] limits possibilities for expansive learning on the part of both the mentee and the mentor* (Kennedy, 2022, p. 7; cf. Langdon & Ward, 2015).

The role of mentors and mentoring needs to be (re-)evaluated and (re-)designed for the context it applies to. It should therefore not only be closer examined with regard to field experiences, but also with regard to the early career days; here, a look across borders may offer ideas for counselling and mentoring in teacher training. Realistic mentoring programmes, such as in Scottish teacher training (cf. ibid.), have already proved successful helpers during the transition into the teaching profession, helping to set expectations and parameters of the job. Such effective mentoring methods should be further examined and used to improve teacher education worldwide.

With respect to the implications for teacher education stated above, it is also advised to push research regarding

- *International / Contextual comparison regarding TWB:*
  The study results showed that the (cultural) context the discussants stemmed from highly influenced the overall discussion. Considering the differences between teacher education programmes worldwide, it would be interesting to find out if there is, indeed, an "essence of TWB" that can be derived by comparing discussion results from different countries.

- *Effects of media coverage on TWB:*
  As many group discussants stressed, the questionable image of teachers impacted their own view on the profession and made them feel uneasy about their career choice. With the number of communication outlets constantly rising, with e.g. social media, podcasts, blogs and videos emerging daily, with some sources being more reliable than others, the impact of this coverage should be the subject of further research.

- *Effects of field experience on (student) TWB:*
  The possible impact of field experiences on (student) TWB (cf. e.g. Dreer, 2023) should be conducted and further examined to further improve internship programs and provide future teachers with as much of a realistic insight into the teaching profession as possible.

- *The role of TWB in all phases of teacher education:*
  TWB must be made subject of discussions in all phases of teacher education, stressing the importance of life-long learning for teachers. Studies concentrated on making TWB a guiding principle, with special regard to mentoring, should be prioritized. Following a proactive approach, offers at university should be examined with regard to their contribution to TWB.

- *The overall purpose of a teacher:*
  Teachers, but also society in general, need to realize and value their purpose, especially with regard to newly emerging challenges in the future as well as their self-efficacy. Examining and (re-)evaluating the purpose of teachers could significantly contribute to fostering and maintaining one's TWB.

With regard to future research on TWB, this pilot study can serve as a blueprint for further studies, involving different target groups (e.g. in-service teachers, teacher educators/lecturers, student teachers from other countries) and being realised as part of international projects (e.g. the above mentioned *EUniWell* and *teff* consortia). Although the methodology used for the analysis was sufficient for this exploratory pilot study – taking into account the limited resources – the research methodology could be refined in future studies using more detailed transcription methods, coding procedures such as the Grounded Theory approach (cf. Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or a structuring qualitative content analysis (cf. Mayring, 2014). It is important to make TWB a crucial subject of any discussion on teaching, learning and school in the 21st century and in the future and implement the topic firmly in professional standards for the teaching profession (cf. del Gobbo et al., 2023) while at the same time starting "to design and implement policies focused on improving the health and well-being of our educators" (Education International, 2023).

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