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Arleta SUWALSKA

University of Lodz, Poland

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0713-8451>

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**Contact:** [arleta.suwalska@now.uni.lodz.pl](mailto:arleta.suwalska@now.uni.lodz.pl)

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## Self-Care Learning of Educators in the Thriving Workplaces – Examples from Australia

### Abstract

In this article self-care learning of educators is analyzed through the lens of thriving workplaces —arenas shaped by Australian factors to enact educational change through overcoming arising problems. This article puts into consideration the features of Australian strategies for thriving workplaces. There are presented Australian ways of supporting others and self-care learning of educators.

The document-based method was selected because governmental publications and official statements offer invaluable insights into the social reality that shaped educational change. In line with Wodak and Krzyżanowski (2008, p. 156), the methodology draws on micro-level themes of discourse, identifies the broader framework of educational change within self-care learning of educators and practices of thriving workplaces.

The article results revealed that self-care learning of educators and their autonomy within thriving workplaces sustain new directions and opportunities in overcoming emerging problems, as „learning is the work”. There is put an emphasis on constant work on problem solving skills of educators and a zero tolerance for bullying and harassment.

**Keywords:** self-care learning, thriving workplaces, teachers.

### Introduction

Modern schools or organizations that thrive successfully operate on the principle that “learning is the work”. Reupert (2020, p.17) says “educators need

a welcoming, supportive, safe and intellectually stimulating environment to thrive". So, there is need for self-care learning of Australian educators, within well-led community of educators. Each successful workplace put an emphasis on a strong moral purpose within relationships. As Fullan (2020, p. 63) notes, "moral purpose, relationships, and organizational success are closely interrelated".

## **Theoretical approach**

Relations shows how we treat people—colleagues, and students—as we follow strategy and structure. Self-care learning and the concept of a healthy lifestyle, has been studied since ancient times (Albuck M, Gillis L., 2021). Lewin and Regine (2000, p. 27) claim that relationships emerge from authentic human connection and true care. Reupert (2020, p.18), defines wellbeing as "enjoyment in life, an ability to cope with stress and sadness, work productively, the fulfillment of goals and a sense of connectedness with others". Relations influence on solving problems by educators, their interactions with children, families and colleagues (Cumming, 2017; McMullen, et al., 2020).

The level of good relations of educators stimulates mental health, which is defined by The World Health Organisation (2022, p.1) as "a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn and work well and contribute to their community". Self-care is a pattern according to which teachers take care with themselves conscientiously, being aware of their needs and compassions. Teachers who possess a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to take initiative and overcome obstacles well in the face of challenges. So there is need for self-care of educators but also for systematic ways of solving the problems and creating of meaningful change.

The driver of systemic change in education, as Fullan (2005) claimed demands transformation across three interrelated levels: the individual educator, the school or particular organization and community in relation to the district and state (Fullan, 2005, p. 58). The central goal is to change within education both based on individuals and systems at the same time. Achievements within this change is related to the transformation and demand what Fullan calls "learning in context". From the above perspective, modern organizations need to involve essential elements of happiness, which are after Haidt named as love, which is based on meaningful relationships; meaningful work, that offers engagement and a sense of contribution. Haidt also mentioned about vital engagement with positive feelings and cross-level coherence – alignment each person values and the culture in which we live. If you get "these relationships right," Haidt concludes, "a sense of purpose will emerge" (pp. 238–239).

Australian Government, Department of Health and Aged Care<sup>1</sup>, by recognising deep, ongoing connection to Country, pays respect to Elders, „past and present, [...] put an emphasis on the continuation „of the cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples” (Beyond self-care, p.1). Educators’ wellbeing stays at the heart of caring for children and young people together with continuation of practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, especially in culture, and education. "Be You" supports educators in tools and knowledge which enable them to create positive learning communities contributing to mental health. According to The Monash University research there are entrenched issues in the Australian education contributing to stress of educators, so there is need for self-care learning of them being conducted in a meaningful way.

## Methodology

The document-based method was selected because governmental publications and official statements offer invaluable insights into the social reality that shaped educational change. In line with Wodak and Krzyżanowski (2008, p. 156), the methodology draws on micro-level themes of discourse, identifies the broader framework of educational change within selfcare learning of educators and practices within thriving workplaces.

In this article self-care learning of educators is analyzed through the lens of thriving workplaces —arenas shaped by Australian factors to enact educational change through overcoming arising problems. There are presented Australian ways of support others and self-care learning of educators.

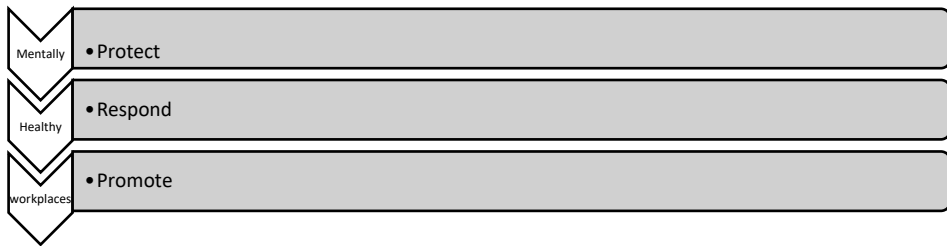
## Towards mentally healthy workplaces and self-care of educators

The National Mental Health Commission (2022) prepared suggestions (three pillars) which enable the creation of a mentally healthy workplace. Firstly, there is underlined the need for identification of work-related risks within mental health (named as **Protect**). Secondly, after identification there is **Respond** based on support of those who experience stress or issues related to mental health. Thirdly, the next step is based on recognising and enhancing the positive work aspects which could contribute to the promotion of mental health (**Promote**).

On the other side, there are steps (principles), which are needed for healthy workplace to thrive and to start changing into learning community where educators thrive. The most important step within thriving workplaces is a creation of a positive culture and environment which supports educators.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government, Department of Health and Aged Care founded "Be You" organization.



*Figure 1*

Building mentally healthy workplaces (author's source)

Secondly, thriving workplace put an emphasis on recognition and respect towards educators as professionals. Thirdly, there is indispensable acceptance of educators' autonomy together with their wellbeing. To build mentally healthy workplaces with self-care there is put an emphasis on the promotion of respectful relationships on the wave of collaboration.

Wellbeing stays in the centre of heart of working organization which also includes easy accessible resources. To make wellbeing and self-care stronger all educators have an access to initiatives which acknowledge their cultures, experiences and support their work with children. Fifthly, evidence-informed practice are used within educators learning communities to create high-quality, when design wellbeing initiatives. Sixthly, wellbeing initiatives, which are adaptable, need to be applied within the daily work of learning communities.

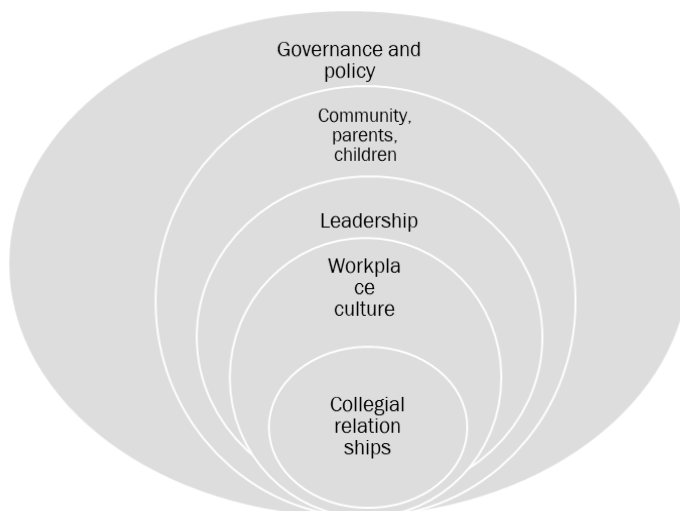


*Figure 2*

Guiding principles for healthy workplace to thrive and to start changing into learning community (author's source)

## Six layers indispensable for educator wellbeing

The collected documents revealed factors which contribute to Australian educators' wellbeing. The significant factors for each person are as follows: „Collegial relationships, Workplace culture, Leadership, Community, Governance and policy” (Beyond self-care, p. 6).



*Figure 3*

Contributors of wellbeing (Beyond self-care, p.6)

All above factors contribute to healthy workplaces and means that workplace is going to thrive. Self-care learning of educators is very important and in this approach it is also the way to support self-care of a whole community.

On the other side, factors which are presented below make difficult to achieve educators' wellbeing. These factors are as follows:

- “unsupportive leadership
- discrimination
- competition
- high or low workload
- lack of role clarity
- remote or isolated work
- emotional labour
- feeling undervalued
- job insecurity
- toxic culture” (Beyond self-care, p.6).

## Australian strategies for thriving workplaces, towards self-care learning of Educators

Meaningful change is possible if there is focus on self-care (Beyond self-care, p.6). There is also significant to follow the three components within learning communities. Educators underlined the importance of certain factors in building self-care of educators. Firstly, Collegial relationships, if they are poor quality within its interactions within workplace often contribute to „bullying, gossip, conflict and criticism can harm an educator’s wellbeing” (Beyond self-care, p. 12). Secondly, there is taken into granted Workplace culture within thriving workplaces. „Inclusion and belonging nurture wellbeing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTQIA+ educators emphasised the value of having their identity acknowledged and feeling comfortable to be themselves” (Beyond self-care, p.12). The third factor is Leadership. It is significant to prioritize staff well-being. As a result, leaders design a culture of care, full of autonomy and trust.

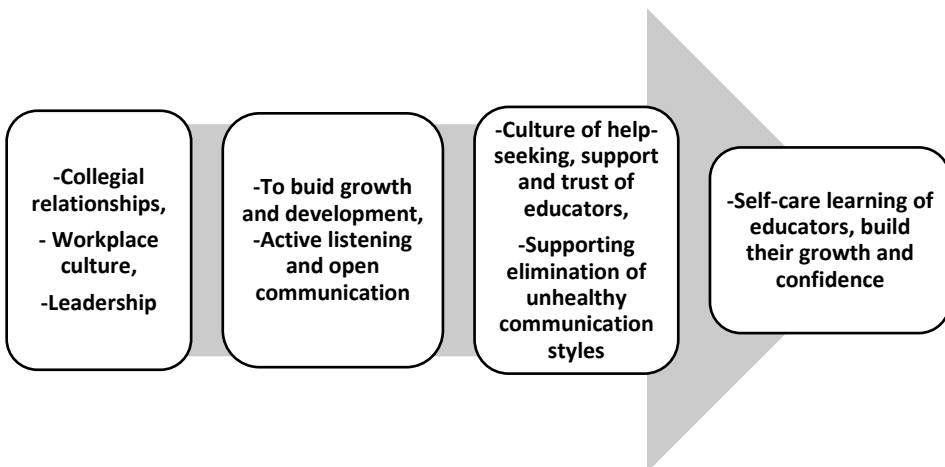


Figure 4

Strategies to reinforce self-care learning of Australian educators (authors’ source)

On the other hand, there are presented certain examples of strategies to reinforce self-care learning of educators (Beyond self-care. An Educator wellbeing guide, p.6-7). There is underlined planning optional social events for educators to attend. At the same time, educators have an allowance to choose learning developments which build their growth and confidence. It is related to promotion of access to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Moreover, there is underlined a step towards „a culture of help-seeking, mutual support and trust” (Employee Assistance Program, p.13) in which workers „maintain a welcoming physical environment”.

On the other side, in case of Australian **Collegial relationships**, teachers, who work together, present „positive practice” in a workplace. In case of *Collegial relationships* there are needed procedures based on time and response to avoid overt or casual discrimination with elimination of unhealthy communication styles. Additionally, there are welcomed opportunities for full team planning and working together. All expectations are based on open communication and active listening of educators who work together, care and rely on each other. There is put an emphasis on health promotion within inclusive relationships. Moreover, procedures are timely and eventual conflicts are solved skillfully.

On the other hand, in the clear Australian policies and procedures there are actions than only static documents. All strategies involve procedures to build respectful interactions between staff and educators to make people feel supported in the workplace.

## Collegial relationships and importance of speaking freely

Table 1

*Collegial relationships within Australian educators (author's source)*

Working together	Inclusivity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— respectful communication including individual views and ideas,</li> <li>— opportunities for team planning and working together with respect to each other</li> <li>— open communication,</li> <li>— listening to each other,</li> <li>— educators work together with the aim to for each other and rely on each other,</li> <li>— staffrooms promote healthy, inclusive relationships,</li> <li>— educators feel a sense of belonging,</li> <li>— procedures are design to be timely and responsive,</li> <li>— procedures to react quickly in a case of or casual discrimination and unhealthy communication styles,</li> <li>— constant work od problem solving skills for educators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— „respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ knowledge and a climate where non-Indigenous people assume responsibility for learning and embedding appropriate protocols within learning communities” (Beyond self-care, p. 10),</li> <li>— a workplace culture based on respect of educators,</li> <li>— there are prepared policies to identify and in an appropriate way to respond to exclusion of educator groups, „LGBTQIA+, culturally and linguistically diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander”, (Beyond self-care, p. 10).</li> </ul>

The policy of staff communication has a specific rules in case of what’s acceptable in the real communication within workplaces. There is not acceptable to to use bullying and harassment. “It’s not just words on a piece of paper. Seeing the piece of paper come to life, it’s not just sitting in a folder” (Beyond self-care, p.7). Moreover, it is really significant to be able answer on questions if

and how each learning community contributed to individual self-care? What ways can be used to create thriving workplaces if there is truly educators' well-being? To sum up, there is needed to provide a healthy and safe environment in which all staff and educators speak freely.

## Self-care learning and wellbeing – priorities

If leaders create the opportunities for educators to discuss the issues of wellbeing it makes the standards of wellbeing better. There is need for normalisation of conversations about wellbeing, if community is interested in achieving a higher level towards collegial relationships. People, who work together, should feel safe and supported at workplaces. All self-care of educators priorities make the workplace a better place (Beyond self-care, pp. 8–10).

We started looking at how we can improve staff mental health and wellbeing and we thought it would have a knock-on effect for the students. We had worked hard to create a positive culture in the school but we could see that was changing. It weighs on you all the time as a leader. It's about living it well, not just saying we do it well. We had to really dive into that – I posed some questions to the staff. What do we do well? What are three wishes for improvement on what we do well? We got an array of responses for both. It took about a term and a half to do this process – we opened up discussions with our staff and they fed back, it was collated and presented back. All the way along they had input and they could have ownership over the process. Some things we were able to fix really quickly. We spoke to them about that process. They could see it came from the right place. The ability to be able to feed back openly and honestly without feedback (Beyond self-care, p. 8).

## Supporting others and self-care learning of Educators – examples from Australia

There were prepared suggestions to thriving workplaces among Australian educators, according to collected documents.

- The first suggestion among Australian educators means to have a conversation and to show concerns and willingness to support, which invites other educators to look for help.
- The second suggestion is embodied in **Stop Reflect Act** framework in which if someone worries about someone when he/she experiences stress or a concern, there are supportive ways to overcome problems.
- The key is to understand feelings and experiences of an educator and offer practical support which do not cross educators' professional boundaries. In this perspective, it is suggested in Australian workplaces to encourage self-care which works as a protective shield for mental health. Moreover, it is advised to promote help-seeking and exploring all potential and options.



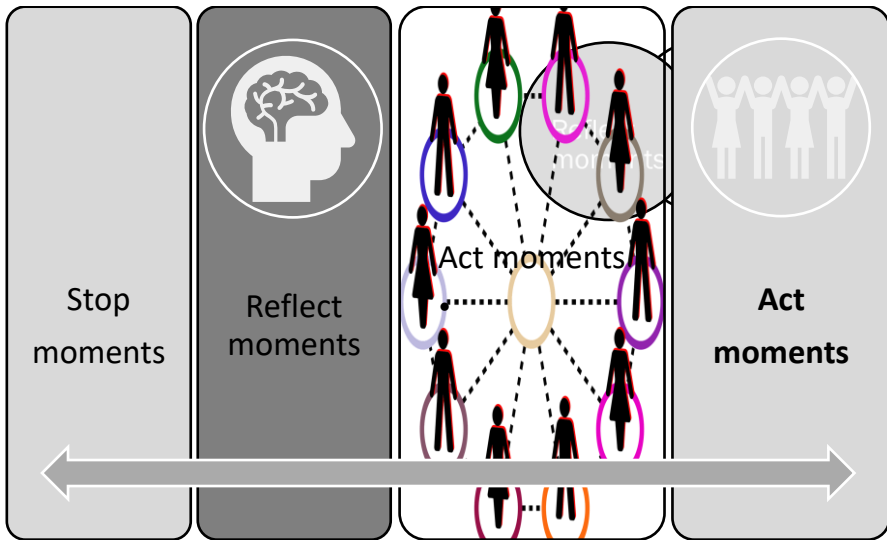


Figure 5

Stop Reflect Act moments within Australian community of educators, towards self-care learning (author's source)

- After the conversation with an educator, there is suggested to find time for own feelings and use self-care plan (named as STOP). The conversations among educators teach the community to create and maintain a self-care culture, where people are constantly learning.
- After all steps, it is suggested to stop (take a brief break, listening to your feelings) and try to find out time for Reflections (consider thoughts, feelings and physical and emotional safety).
- ACT- each step in ACT among Australian educators should be purposeful and intentional. It is not the aim to fully solve a problem, issues or find out answers to questions, these processes often go through a series of simple Stop Reflect Act moments.
- Through dialogue, educators explore different perspectives, and make the process of change more effective through meaningful engagement. If educators are involved in a truly collective vision within workplaces, they should foster clarity, transparency, enthusiasm, open communication, and deep commitment in their workplaces (Senge, 1990, p. 227).

## Results

Fullan (2005) underlined demands transformation across three interrelated factors, included the individual educator, the school or particular organization

and community in relation to the district and state (Fullan, 2005, p. 58). The article revealed that self-care learning with its improvement contribute to healthy workplaces. These workplaces are safe and stimulating towards growth of all educators, enabling them to cope with stress, learn and work well.

The article also presented that a sense of purpose of educators emerges if relationships are respectful, within positive culture, environment and a sense of belonging. There is need for self-care of Australian educators but also for systematic ways of solving the problems and creating of meaningful change.

There is needed an open communication of educators, full of active listening and rely on each other to follow the principle „learning is the work”. The article also revealed that self-care of educators and their autonomy within thriving workplaces sustain new directions and opportunities in overcoming emerging problems. There is put an emphasis on constant work on problem solving skills of educators and a zero tolerance for bullying and harassment.

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## **Nauka dbania o siebie wśród nauczycieli w dobrze prosperujących miejscach pracy – przykłady z Australii**

### **Streszczenie**

W niniejszym artykule analizie poddany jest proces samokształcenia nauczycieli przez pryzmat dobrze funkcjonujących miejsc pracy (obszarów ukształtowanych przez czynniki australijskie), co ma na celu wprowadzenie zmian w edukacji poprzez pokonywanie pojawiających się problemów. Dodatkowo przedstawiono australijskie sposoby samokształcenia nauczycieli.

W zakresie metodologii skorzystano z analizy dokumentów, ponieważ publikacje rządowe oferują nieoceniony wgląd w rzeczywistość społeczną, która ukształtowała zmiany w edukacji. Analiza dokumentów opiera się na mikropoziomowych tematach dyskursu, który identyfikuje szersze ramy zmian w edukacji w ramach samokształcenia nauczycieli i praktyk w dobrze prosperujących miejscach pracy.

W dobrze prosperujących miejscach pracy uwypatnia się konieczność ciągłej pracy nad umiejętnościami rozwiązywania problemów przez nauczycieli, w tym również zerowej tolerancji dla znęcania się i molestowania. W artykule podkreśla się również, że nauka dbania o siebie samych nauczycieli oraz ich autonomia zawodowa wspierają nowe kierunki i możliwości w pokonywaniu pojawiających się problemów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nauka dbania o siebie, dobrze prosperujące miejsca pracy, nauczyciele.