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Teachers' Empowering & Well-being

Attention to the vitality, involvement, and well-being of school staff is a precondition for jointly promoting the development and well-being of the students. Motivated school staff who feel seen and recognised enjoy greater job satisfaction and more space to shape education for students.

Various influencing factors are important for the well-being of the teacher and the school staff, such as the complexity of teaching, the pedagogical tools a teacher has, and the role they play in promoting well-being for both students and teachers. Viac and Fraser (2020) introduced a framework that specifically looks at the well-being of teachers within the school system. The framework identifies four different aspects related to the well-being of teachers: these are cognitive, subjective, physical and mental and social well-being, and are always interrelated. The framework helps to gain insights into the well-being of teachers in a school-wide context. Working conditions influence the well-being of teachers. The four aspects mentioned can also be viewed separately and associated with, for example, an increased risk of stress and dropping out or leaving education. In addition, the framework also makes a connection with the well-being of students. Using this framework, school staff can reflect on how they relate to these aspects in their school organisation.



In the search for well-being at school level, reference is made to 'vital teaching' or 'the vital school'. This vitality is characterized the following:

- making connections: commitment to work, students and colleagues,
- having autonomy: shaping one's own role and dealing with boundaries,
- inspiration: being able to work on ambitions and dreams, and
- achievement: achieving success together with others.

A predictor of a teacher's well-being is, among other things, the pedagogical skills that a teacher possesses. As a result, they create a positive pedagogical climate for students and themselves. Strong pedagogical skills, such as being able to make connections with students, understand their concerns, and getting to know the students, promote a positive pedagogical climate in the classroom, which increases the well-being and vitality of those involved. Teachers can, as it were, fill their 'toolbox' by consciously working on well-being and social competencies with students and each other. The image the teacher has of the relationship with students forms the interpersonal identity standard.

How to work on the well-being of school staff

Gu and Day (2013) argued that teachers' well-being increases when they are less exposed to:

- demands and pressure,
- increasing administration,
- behavioral problems of students, and
- long working days.

Teachers who perform their work based on a moral conviction, with purpose, express creativity, feel connected, and continually discover more of themselves will do their job confidently. Leadership in the school should constantly encourage employees to hold on to the meaning of good education. For this, you have to be able to feel good as a teacher and a person, which occurs when a teacher feels and knows they are valued. Listening to teachers implies collaboration with school leaders and requires appropriate communication and connection. That is to say, communication that builds and encourages cooperation and works from a shared vision.

TIP 1: increase your own well-being.

Ask yourself what you need to be more relaxed in front of the class. This is very personal, and increasingly more schools offer programmes to help teachers in this area. For example, what some teachers do to relax includes:

- Laugh! With colleagues at recess or students in class, laughing is still by far the best way to relax.
- Starting the day or break with breathing exercises.
- Using breaks to go outside.
- Consciously schedule times when you do nothing for school; allow yourself to pay attention to your life.

TIP 2: Increase your own well-being. Work consciously on stress reduction.

- Think about what relaxes you most and try to give that a fixed place in your day.
- Give yourself time to recover from stressful situations.
- Try to live a healthy life. Plan regular moments of exercise in your day, and get enough sleep, helping lower stress hormones.
- Make realistic plans and keep your demands manageable.
- Are you experiencing a lot of stress? Discuss it with colleagues and find the primary stress source together.

TIP 3: You are your own instrument — questions to ask yourself and your colleagues.

- How do I set a good example for my class?
- In what do my students think I set good examples? (Ask them!)
- What do I hope my students learn from me as a person?
- What do I need to learn from others? Do I provide that to my students?
- How do I share my joy with the class? When was the last time I laughed in the classroom?
- When am I at my best as a teacher? When am I relaxed in front of the students?
- When do I enjoy my work the most?
- What can I do to increase those moments of pleasure?
- What do I need from my colleagues and supervisors to feel good in school?

TIP 4: When coping with stressful situations, ask each other:

- What helps you during stressful or drastic events?
- What are the strengths of your way of dealing with stressful or dramatic moments? What are the risks? How can you reduce those risks?
- What do you never do but is worth giving a try?

It is worth remembering that other people have different ways of dealing with events. One person wants to talk about it all the time, another prefers to go for a bike ride, and someone else locks themselves away and listens to music. Sometimes people cope in ways you find strange or would never contemplate, which can be annoying or confusing. If we give each other space to do the things that suit us, it helps everyone. We can ask what helps and teach each other different coping mechanisms, promoting understanding rather than arguments. Who knows, maybe we'll try something we never knew could help, and find it works.