

Swiss primary teacher wellbeing in the face of distance teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic

Tina Hascher, *University of Bern, Switzerland*

Susan Beltman, *Curtin University, Australia*

Caroline Mansfield, *The University of Notre Dame, Australia*

The COVID-19 pandemic confronted teachers with unprecedented challenges and a rapid forced change of distance teaching after school closures. The pressure to perform in an unfamiliar online setting may cause stress and negative emotions and threaten teacher wellbeing. Teacher wellbeing is a multi-dimensional construct often including positive emotions, satisfaction and relatively fewer complaints or stress. Although teacher wellbeing is an important aspect of positive functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2008), little is known about individual responses to the pandemic and their impact on teacher wellbeing.

The purpose of the study was to explore primary teachers' responses to educational changes related to distance learning and their wellbeing at work during the Covid-19 pandemic. This qualitative study investigates the wellbeing of 21 primary teachers in Switzerland, with specific attention to how they managed the change to distance teaching. In individual on-line semi-structured interviews teachers shared their experiences about wellbeing, challenging situations, positive experiences and how they coped with the pandemic professionally and personally.

Findings highlight challenges that varied throughout the process with a most radical change at the beginning of school closure but also ongoing new challenges such as keeping connected with students and maintaining teaching quality in a distance setting. Individual differences regarding the negative impact on teacher wellbeing are related to differences concerning social and professional support, technical skills, individual health issues and educational governance. Along with individual resources, supportive colleagues, parents and leaders served as crucial resources to bolster resilience and maintain or reestablish wellbeing during the endeavor of distance teaching.

Although using a self-selective sample of primary school teachers, with severely struggling teachers less likely to participate in this retrospective study, the results reveal a collection of experiences and coping strategies that can be of high value for sharing knowledge within and among school teams and student teachers.