

A leadership challenge paper in support of UNESCO Futures of Education 2050

**A Leader's Inspiration in Supporting the Longevity of
Teacher Well-being**

Crystal B. Jones (Turpin)

Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

cturpin@ualberta.ca

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A Foresight Challenge

A Leader's Inspiration in Supporting the Longevity of Teacher Well-being

The Alberta Leadership Quality Standard states that, “quality leadership occurs when the leaders’ ongoing analysis of the context, and decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality teaching and optimum learning for all school students” (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 3). This is only a small reflection of what leadership encompasses in the province of Alberta, Canada in our present time. Where do we go next? In applying strategic foresight and futures thinking tools and methodologies, I will share my personal narrative and foresight of how I can influence change for the future. By sharing my passion for leadership, my love for teaching and learning, and commitment to excellence in education, I will connect my insights to UNESCO’s 2050 Future of Education Learning to Become platform, with the goal to be a voice to “rethink education and shape the future” (UNESCO 2050).

It, Me, & Them

“Me – An Individual”

Aries states, “our sense of meaning, purpose, identity and spirituality will change, develop and be expressed differently across the lifespan – our needs and understanding may be different at different life stages, and may depend on the people we connect with, who influences our thinking and who we forge relationships with during our life journey” (Aries, 2018, pg. 4). In futures thinking, simply, we all have a narrative. I always knew that I wanted to be a teacher. Most stories that my family would share, would be that as a young girl I would rally up all my siblings and cousins, to make a “living room” full of eager learners and see if I could sustain engagement, while I drilled them with arithmetic and personalized worksheets to follow. I

ensured everyone was sitting in even rows on soft cushions and had the tools to warrant the best environment for optimal learning. Little did I know my idea of the role of teacher in the early 90's was way beyond what I had imagined, and that in our present day, teachers "scope of practice" continues to be under the microscope and lucidly undefined. I tell this story because it supports the idea that the lines between the past, present and future can be blurry. Maybe I always had futurists thinking within me, as I have recently learnt that future-focused work invites us to be playful and imaginative in our pursuit of change. Did I know 30 years ago, that this minute narrative could have such grand impact on my life today? No, but isn't that what futures thinking is all about? Small action can equate to vast outcomes. Foresight has invited me to question my assumptions, feel comfortable in naming problems outwardly, and to consider the alternatives to create a world I want to live in.

"Me – A Leader"

I will always be a teacher; I will always be a learner. I became a leader early on in my teaching career unknowingly, and realized as an Early Learning Consultant, that I enjoyed working elbow to elbow with teachers as much as I did with students. Applying to the Assistant Principal role, I was able to foster relationships and live out my vocation daily, with both students and teachers and the school community at large. I cultivated teaching and learning and yearned for collaboration, relationship, and tools to be a confident leader.

In 2018 when the Alberta Leadership Quality standard was presented, I wanted to ensure that I was checking off all the boxes that "resulted in quality teaching and optimal learning for all school students" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 3). Indicator 4(b) in the Leadership Quality Standard states leaders will, "create an inclusive learning environment in which diversity is embraced, a sense of belonging is emphasized, and all students and staff are welcomed, cared for, respected and safe" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 5). The action that I hope to infuse is underlying

here in this indicator. Teachers are facing a crucial time in living out their role of teacher and working in a hazy scope of practice. This is heavily affecting their well-being and mental health in the school community.

“Them” – The Teachers

The research around teacher well-being is astonishing. This is a prime indicator that this is a problem and we need to do something about it. The Alberta Teacher’s Association in 2015 conducted a study around teachers’ workload and the impacts it had on the performance within the teaching profession. In this report, statistics highlighted the significant impacts teachers are faced with in their roles and job dissatisfaction was attributed to, a) workload, b) perceived value of the work they do, c) working hours, and d) social and family demands. (ATA, 2015, p. 4). Jody Carrington boldly states, “teachers are not okay” and “our resources are growing thin” (Carrington, 2019, p. 164). In data from Alberta, it was reported that currently one in three teachers and educational assistants and/or families are prescribed antidepressants or anti-anxiety medication (Carrington, 2019, p. 164).

New teachers to the profession are also struggling. Susan Rodgers, a psychologist and professor from Western University, explains that compassion fatigue and emotional labor that young teachers are facing is alarming. She states, “burnout is essentially that feeling of being overwhelmed by stress and you don't have enough emotional resources to cope with that stress. It comes forward in a few different ways. One is the feeling of emotional exhaustion, we just feel like we can't help anymore, we feel helpless and start withdrawing emotionally” (Rodgers, 2017). Moreover, this is a global epidemic, the U.K.’s Education Staff Health Survey indicated 91% of school teachers suffered from stress in the past two years and 74% experienced anxiety; 91% reported excessive workload as the major cause (a 13% increase from the last six years) (Stanley, 2014). If you are a person in the Education sector reading this, these statistics may not be a

surprise to you and that is a problem, we need a global response to the stories these statistics are bestowing. Collectively we need to name the future of teacher well-being and we all have a part.

“It” – The Future

In the book, *Leaders Eat Last*, Sinek states, “companies and organizations are our modern tribes. Like any tribe, they have traditions and symbols and language. The culture of the company is like the culture of any tribe. Some have strong cultures and some have weak cultures. We feel like we belong to some more than others, that we more easily “click” with the people in one culture over another. And, like all tribes, some have strong leaders, and some have weak leaders. But they all have leaders” (Sinek, 2014, p. 62). Here we see the importance that leaders have in the role of their organizations. It is critical that leaders are aware of how they influence teacher well-being within the walls of their school community. As I try and take a glimpse into my future as a school leader, I hope by using the tool of scenario planning and analysis that I can support and be an action for change in supporting teachers and their mental well-being.

The ideas and foresight that will be presented may not be revolutionary, however if we can focus strongly on responding and committing to specific needs of individuals in our building through relationship, interconnectedness, and access to resources; how might this attribute to increased teacher well-being in our school communities? This will be explored through various research, focusing on leader’s psychological capital, the skills and traits of leaders, and providing an “inspired conversation and journey of change for the better as it evolves” (Aries, 2018, p. 1). I will place myself at the centre of the futures cone to provide personal insight into what the future may become. My hindsight, my insights, and my foresights reinforced by research will present a clear picture of a preferred future on how I as a leader, can influence the longevity of teacher well-being. Although my goal is to focus on my current staff, I hope that the message being

presented could also inspire the conversation of how to support teacher well-being within a larger societal context.

The Probable, Possible and Preferred Future of Teacher Well-being

Challenges

As a current leader with Edmonton Catholic Schools in Alberta, Canada, I feel supported in my leadership journey and attribute part of my success to the professional development opportunities and leadership support my district provides. However, there are areas that can be improved, but are limited by a larger societal context that lies in decisions made by policy makers and the view of the future of education in the province of Alberta. For example, uniformed curriculum redesign, constraints in budget, and a current view of privatized education systems put forth by our government, is resulting in low trust and confidence by stakeholders for a competency-based learning platform, that will support our future citizens within our province. As we know, policies and frameworks of education are constantly between an ebb and flow and are influenced by many. It is my hope that the work completed by major global corporations, such as UNESCO and the OECD, and the work locally of our Alberta Teacher's Association and government officials, will positively influence decisions in Alberta that will continue to reflect a strong educational platform and support of all learners in our province.

Even more alarming is the challenge that the COVID-19 pandemic has on the future of education. As we continue globally to learn and understand the impacts this pandemic will have on all aspects of our lives, we strive to make decisions that are made in the best interests of all people with the limited resources we have. Currently, as we plan for a positive school re-entry, we are forced to make rational decisions in a rapid information overload to ensure the health and safety of all staff and students. Our actions so heavily rely on policy makers and the ministries of Health and Education, and the importance of adaptability and flexibility are key in making

decisions at a school level that impact so many people's lives. We must document our response to the pandemic today, so that in the future we can elicit a better and informed reaction to protect humanity during unprecedented times.

Within education there will always be challenges. We can relate to this notion, as the world can seem volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous at times. Through futures thinking, we are challenged to imagine what could exist, and why we think our "it" should exist. It is why I feel so strong in my stance for supporting teacher well-being, and the need for school leaders to be equipped with the psychological capital to promote wellness in the organization, in my context, my school community. This research stems from work completed by Prof. M. Seligman in the field of organizational behaviour, as well as Bandura's work around positive psychology and self-efficacy. Psychological capital or positive psychological capital emphasize positive approaches, meanings, and results, as described as "a common underlying capacity considered critical to human motivation, cognitive processing, striving for success, and resulting in performance in the workplace" (Cavus & Kapusuz, 2015, p. 245). This has become my primary goal in changing teacher well-being in schools for the better and will be articulated below.

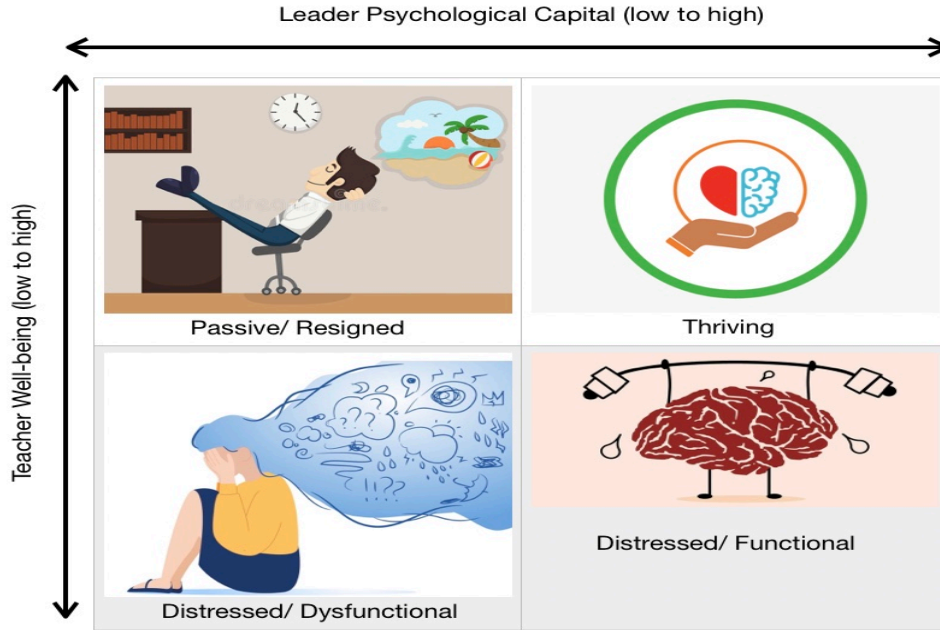
Scenario Planning

"Scenarios are alternate futures in which today's decisions may play out" (Ogilvy, 2015). Through this scenario analysis, a matrix will focus on teacher well-being (low to high) and the level (low to high) of psychological capital school leaders embody to highlight each quadrant. By unpacking the eight-step scenario planning process, strategies were refined and explored to forecast the future of teacher well-being within my school community. Through a careful analysis of leader's traits and skills, four scenarios are presented to showcase the effects that contribute to teacher well-being and how this can be supported in the future. The probable

(likely), possible (imaginable), and preferred (ideal) future are all influenced by a leader's psychological capital, and the traits and skills that influence teacher well-being (Table 1).

Leadership Traits and Skills that Influence Teacher Well-being					
TRUST	BALANCE	TIME	RELATIONSHIPS	COLLABORATION	EMPATHY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competence - Trustworthy - Honest - Relational transparency - A leader who will "talk the talk, and walk the walk" - Reliable - Loyal - Accountable - Just - Includes all stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Balance needs of others - Balance demands of time - Adheres to values - Optimistic - Maintain emotional equanimity - Leverage strengths and manage weaknesses - Acknowledge mistakes - Team player - Balance between leading and managing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan and prioritize - Ability to multi-task - Prepared - Adaptable - Organized - Realistic - Persistent - Focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High Psychological Capital <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Optimism 2. Hope 3. Resiliency 4. Self-efficacy - Respectful - Mindfulness - Positive affect - Self-awareness - Supportiveness - Empowerment - Ethical - Shared understandings - Interconnectedness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying and articulating a clear vision - Effective communication - Reflection - Commitment to ongoing professional development - Building a learning community - Access to resources available - Honouring diversity - Embedded prep time into teacher schedules - Ongoing analysis and leadership knowledge of the Alberta Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - perspective taking - Avoiding judgements - Recognizing emotion in another person - communication and understanding
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The four scenarios of teachers that will be presented are, 1) Passive/Resigned Teacher 2) Thriving Teacher, 3) Distressed and Dysfunctional Teacher, and 4) Distressed but Functional Teacher. Embedded in each scenario will forecast what a school environment and culture may look like if we do not support teacher well-being and ensure leaders are equipped with the psychological capital to sustain and support teacher well-being. The goal is to cultivate teachers in Scenario 2, as Thriving. Critical steps and personal insight will be presented on how we can preserve high leader psychological capital and the importance of this area for all aspiring leaders.



Scenario 1 (Passive/ Resigned)	Scenario 2 (Thriving)	Scenario 3 (Distressed/ Dysfunctional)	Scenario 4 (Distressed/ Functional)
<p>Both teachers and leaders will require support. However, teachers will not complain and feel the school culture is working for them. They do not want to put in any extra work and are happy with status quo. School culture will be fragile, there will be low collective efficacy, little collaboration and teachers may be viewed as simply being at school for the “paycheck”. There will be little accountability for teachers and leaders. People will work in silos and have individual relationships with stakeholders.</p>	<p>Both teachers and leaders will be aligned in vision and mission of school. School culture is strong. Quality teaching and learning is optimal and there are strong relationships with each other and with all stakeholders. Collective efficacy is high among teachers. Teachers feel valued, have agency, and access support as needed. Teachers feel supported with school and district leadership. Problem solving and open communication are valued. Strong pedagogical focus among school team, connected to school goals.</p>	<p>Teachers are at risk. Teachers will feel stressed, may experience burn out and may feel isolated. Leaders will have difficulty in building relationships and do not have the traits and skills to support change and transformations in school culture. Outside stakeholders or district staff will have to be brought in to consult a shift in school culture. A review of school-based teams and the Leadership/ Teacher Quality Standards should be reviewed. A plan of action has to be implemented and follow up conducted and documented.</p>	<p>Teachers are at risk. Attitudes of “getting the job” done are experienced. Teachers will have low self and collective efficacy, they will participate minimally, but may still have a voice. Teachers may appear moody and closed off. Leaders are looking at change within the school and will include teachers in transforming school culture. Leaders skills and traits, and psych cap are high, therefore dedication in reimagining school culture and improving teacher well-being is a priority.</p>

How do we reshape the narrative of teacher well-being? What are the critical steps?

Leaders need to be transformational. Carrington states, “when you are a leader of people who do hard work, your greatest asset will be to keep them regulated in times of distress”

(Carrington, 2019, p. 141). Leaders need to be equipped to build cultures on relationship. We must take critical steps in cultivating leaders on connection and supporting healthy minds of staff.

How do we move towards and sustain this preferred future?

1. A model of school division mental health must be created.
 - a. Most districts have this in place already, however the work of implementation and follow up requires more attention. We have to stop pushing this information aside and put it at the forefront. We have to embed more time into teacher well-being and work towards improving our statistics. We need to capture quantitative data and use this data to guide change and influence next steps in supporting teachers, we need to hear their voice. I want to ensure that I as a leader have evidence to guide my work in this area.
2. Resources need to be improved and access to resources need to be strengthened.
 - a. We simply need to get better at supporting teachers and staff who are at risk. Emotional check-ins and safe spaces to talk are key. Leaders and districts need direct access to resources. We need to have open communication and ongoing professional development to support teachers. I want to work to improve direct access to resources, and I want my teachers confident in accessing these resources at any time.
3. Redesigning weak school cultures; we need the right teams in place to cultivate optimal teaching and learning environments.
 - a. Consultative work at the district level should be implemented within schools that report low satisfaction with school leadership and school culture. Organizational structures should be reviewed, alongside roles and responsibilities. I want to ensure that I am carrying out the competency's in the Alberta Leadership Quality Standard. I

want ongoing communication and follow-up with my district superintendents to ensure accountability connected to school-based data.

4. Societal attitudes towards the teaching profession have to be rewritten.
 - a. The research is evidence that teacher's workload is astonishing. However, many people in society are quick to judge teacher's level of workload based on the hours within a school day, holidays within the school year and having the summer months off. This attitude needs to be improved. This is especially important as we return to school during the COVID-19 pandemic and how school re-entry plans effect teacher's roles and scope of practice. I continue to be a voice for teachers and leaders within my school community.

Conclusion

With the many hands supporting teacher well-being - school leaders, districts, government officials, healthcare mandates and initiatives, national influence, and global proposals and awareness, one would imply that teacher well-being is under control and supported at all levels. This is simply not the case. UNESCO 2050 is striving for a future that is transformational, but we collectively have a lot of work to do. UNESCO anticipates, "as we come to terms with human-caused changes to the planet and face the possibilities of fundamental transformations in social organization, human consciousness and human identity, humanity needs to devote attention to the question: what do we want to become? Knowledge and learning are at the core of transformations in human minds and societies. Learning to Become invites us to become something we have not yet become" (UNESCO, 2020). This cannot be achieved if we do not have the right tools in supporting healthy minds and societies. To transform human minds and societies this quest is deeply rooted within our teachers and their well-being. Is this anticipated future of 2050 attainable? The answer lies in you.

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