

The elephant in language education: Teacher stress and wellbeing



Sarah Mercer

CEBS, Bad Hofgastein, Oct 2023



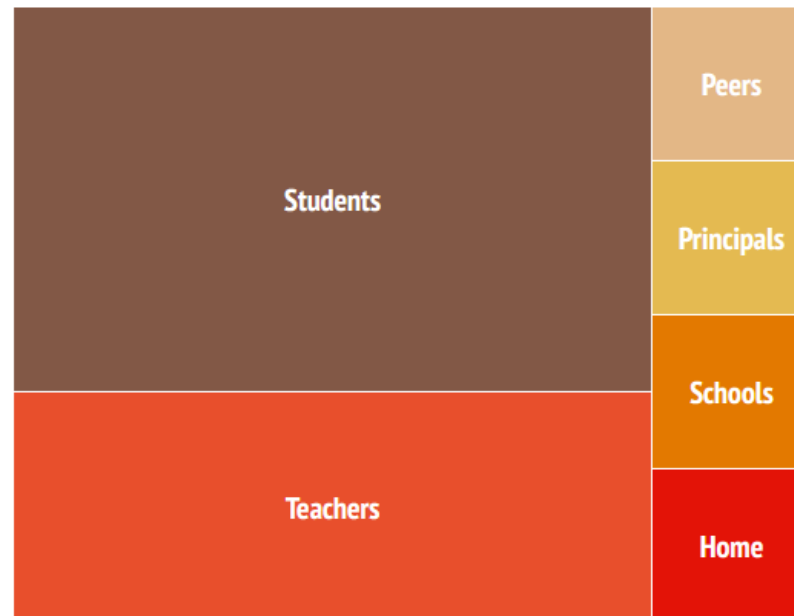


What do you think has the biggest impact on student achievement?

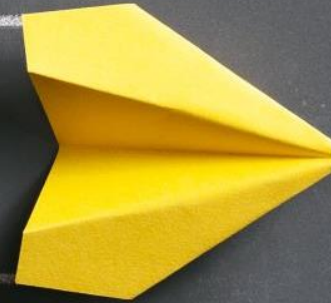
According to Hattie (2018)...

- The largest impact is the student themselves (50%)
- The second largest is the teacher (30%)

Identifying what matters most? Achievement variance in %



Teachers matter!
A LOT!





Outline for today

- What is wellbeing?
- Why language teacher wellbeing?
- What do we know about language teacher wellbeing?
- Three things you can do



What do you understand by wellbeing?

Wellbeing

- Two main perspectives (Ryan & Deci, 2001)
 - **Hedonic – Pleasure**
 - **Eudemonic – Meaning**



Hedonic

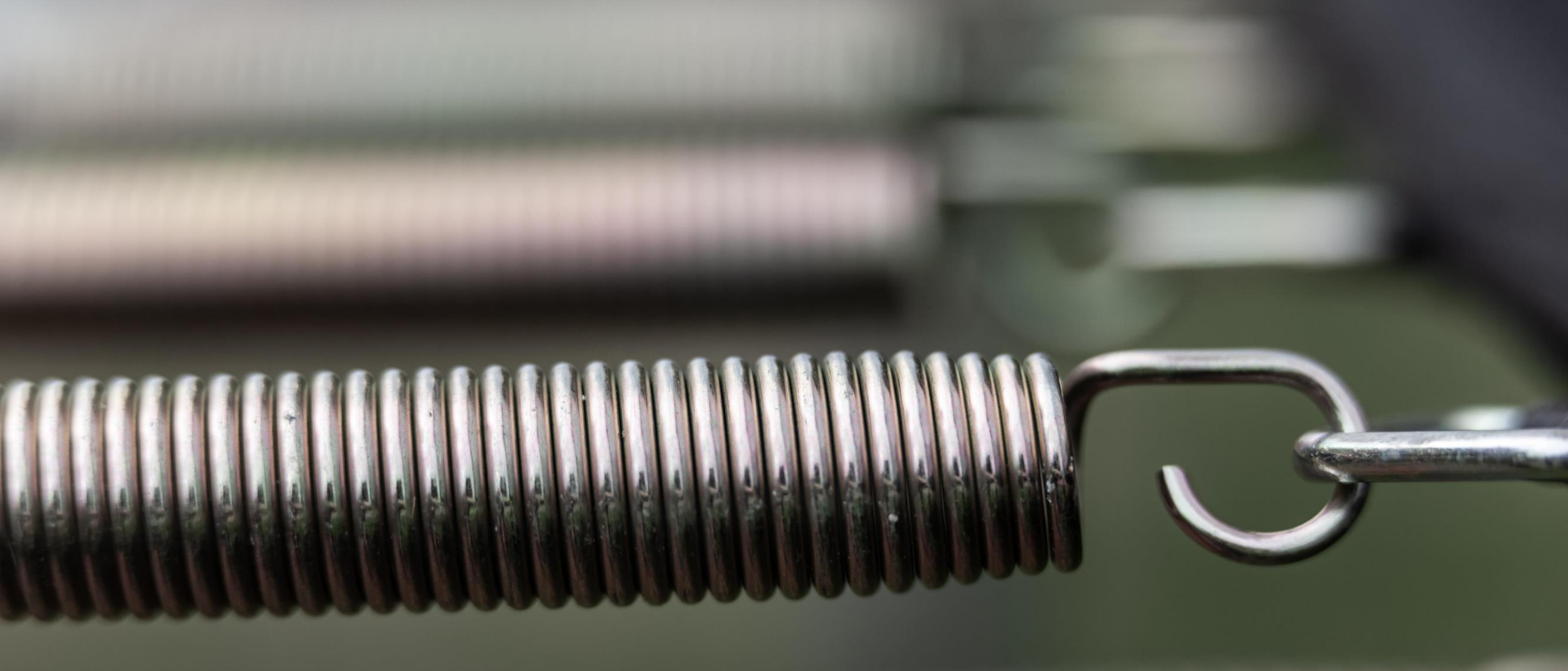
- Subjective well-being (SWB) most common construct
- Perception of balance between positive/negative emotions and overall sense of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2009)
- Personal subjective experience of positivity



Eudaimonic

- Self-actualization – Finding meaning and purpose (Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 1993)
- PERMA (Seligman, 2011)
 - P ositive emotions
 - E ngagement
 - R elationships
 - M eaning
 - A ccomplishment
 - +V itality (Butler & Kern, 2016)





Tension: Wellbeing self and system

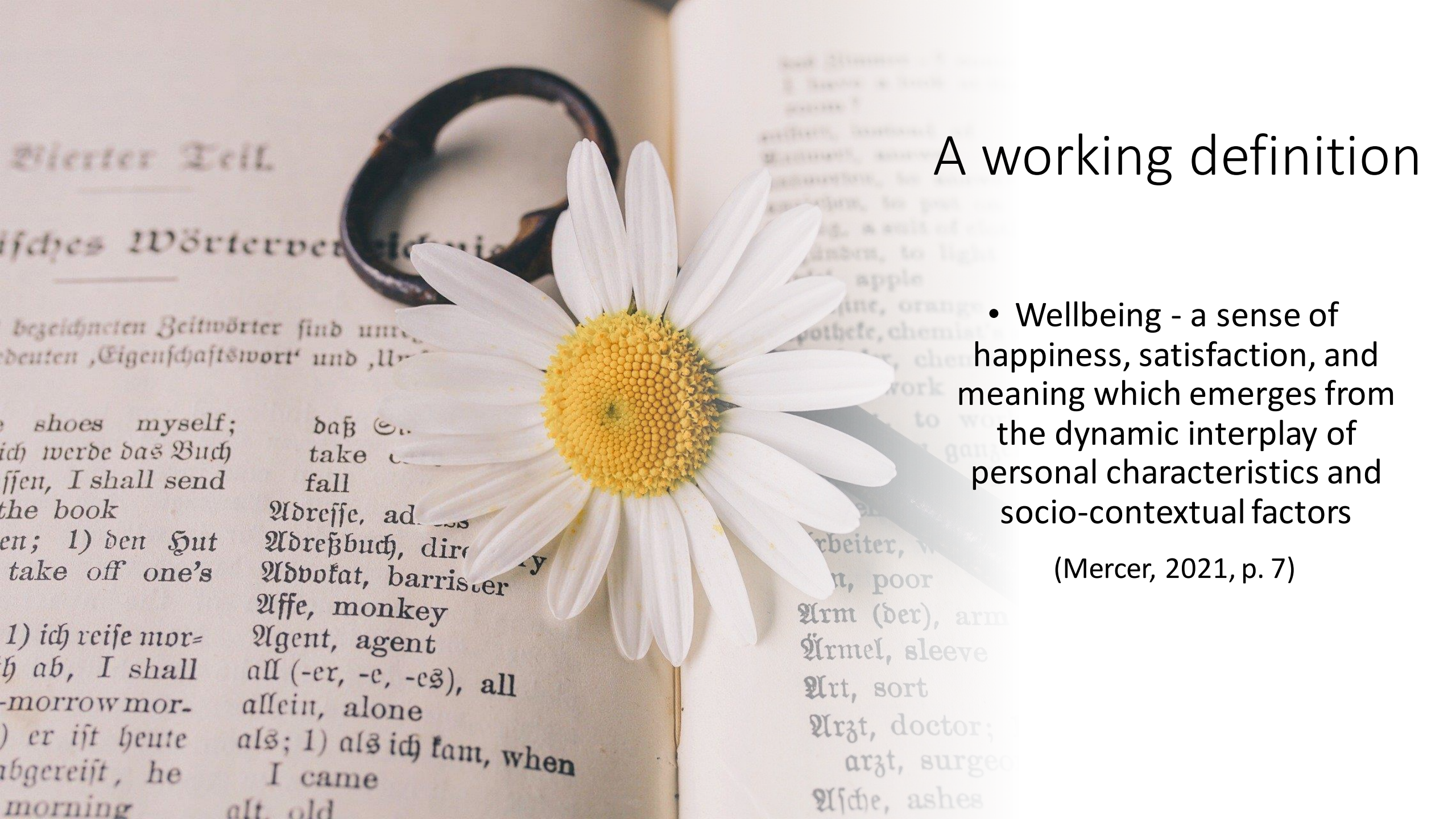
Wellbeing –
It is not just
your
responsibility!



A working definition

- Wellbeing - a sense of happiness, satisfaction, and meaning which emerges from the dynamic interplay of personal characteristics and socio-contextual factors

(Mercer, 2021, p. 7)





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Why teacher wellbeing matters?

- Teachers with high wellbeing:
 - Teach more creatively (Bajorek et al., 2014)
 - Cultivate better relationships in the classroom (DeVries & Zan, 1995)
 - Attain higher levels of achievement among learners (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; Carprara et al., 2006)
 - Have fewer discipline problems (Kern et al., 2014)
 - Have students with higher wellbeing and lower psychological distress (Harding et al., 2019)





Teacher wellbeing in Austria (TALIS, 2018)

- 16% of teachers "agree" or "strongly agree" that their profession is valued in society, which is lower than the average across OECD countries (26%). However, Teachers have above-OECD/EU average salaries in Austria as an indicator of status.
- 12% of teachers report experiencing stress in their work "a lot", which is lower than the OECD average (18%).
- Post-pandemic: 65% reported moderate to high stress; Increase in levels of depression (21-28%); particularly stressful for younger adults (<35 years) (Humer et al., 2022)

Good Practice

Teachers' wellbeing is the foundation of good practice



N. Iker © 2018



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LANGUAGE TEACHER WELLBEING ACROSS THE CAREER SPAN

Giulia Sullis, Sarah Mercer, Sonja Babic and
Astrid Mairitsch



PSYCHOLOGY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Three-year study investigating the wellbeing of EFL and FL teachers across the career trajectory

- Two main qualitative data sets combined:
 - In-depth interviews with Austrian EFL (=30) and UK MFL teachers (n=28)
 - Final corpus: approx. 500,000 words
- In-depth interviews (n=22) with teachers from across the globe during pandemic
- Final corpus: approx. 210,000 words

Dynamic balance between challenge and resources (Dodge et al., 2012)

Figure 4. Definition of Wellbeing



Teachers' professional life phases (Day, 2017)

Pre-service: Combination of studies and practica

Early-career: 0-3 and 4-7 years of teaching experience

Mid-career: 8-15 and 16-23 years of teaching experience

Late-career: 24-30 and 31+ years of teaching experience

Resources and challenges across the career trajectory⁺

(Sulis et al., 2023)



• Resources

- Growth mindset
- Motivation/enthusiasm
- Social capital
- Sense of agency

• Challenges

- Uncertainty future
- Lack of confidence
- Need to build skills
- Lack of wellbeing awareness

• Resources

- Realism – letting go perfection
- Guidance – mentors (formal & informal)
- More financial stability
- Growing confidence and resilience

• Challenges

- Poor work/life balance
- Finding position in school n practical terms
- Developing professional identity
- Dissatisfaction with teacher status

• Resources

- High levels of self-efficacy
- Sense of pride and accomplishment
- Range of coping strategies
- Strong social network within professional domain
- CPD opportunities

• Challenges

- Balancing personal & professional commitments
- New responsibilities adding to workload
- Slowing down physically
- Problematic work/life balance

• Resources

- Extensive experience and subsequent skills and confidence
- Sense of meaning from life's work
- Self-awareness of needs and wants

• Challenges

- Decreasing patience (in class and CPD!)
- Changes in family set up
- Health issues
- Educational innovations to cope with
- Looking ahead to retirement

Key issues comparing UK and Austrian data

- Educational system (organization, training, and support)
- Socialisation processes and job commitment – Future selves
- Inspection bodies (e.g., OFSTED)
- Standardised tests (e.g., Matura) or educational reform
- EFL vs MFL (language motivation and status)
- Financial and teacher status
- School climate/leadership



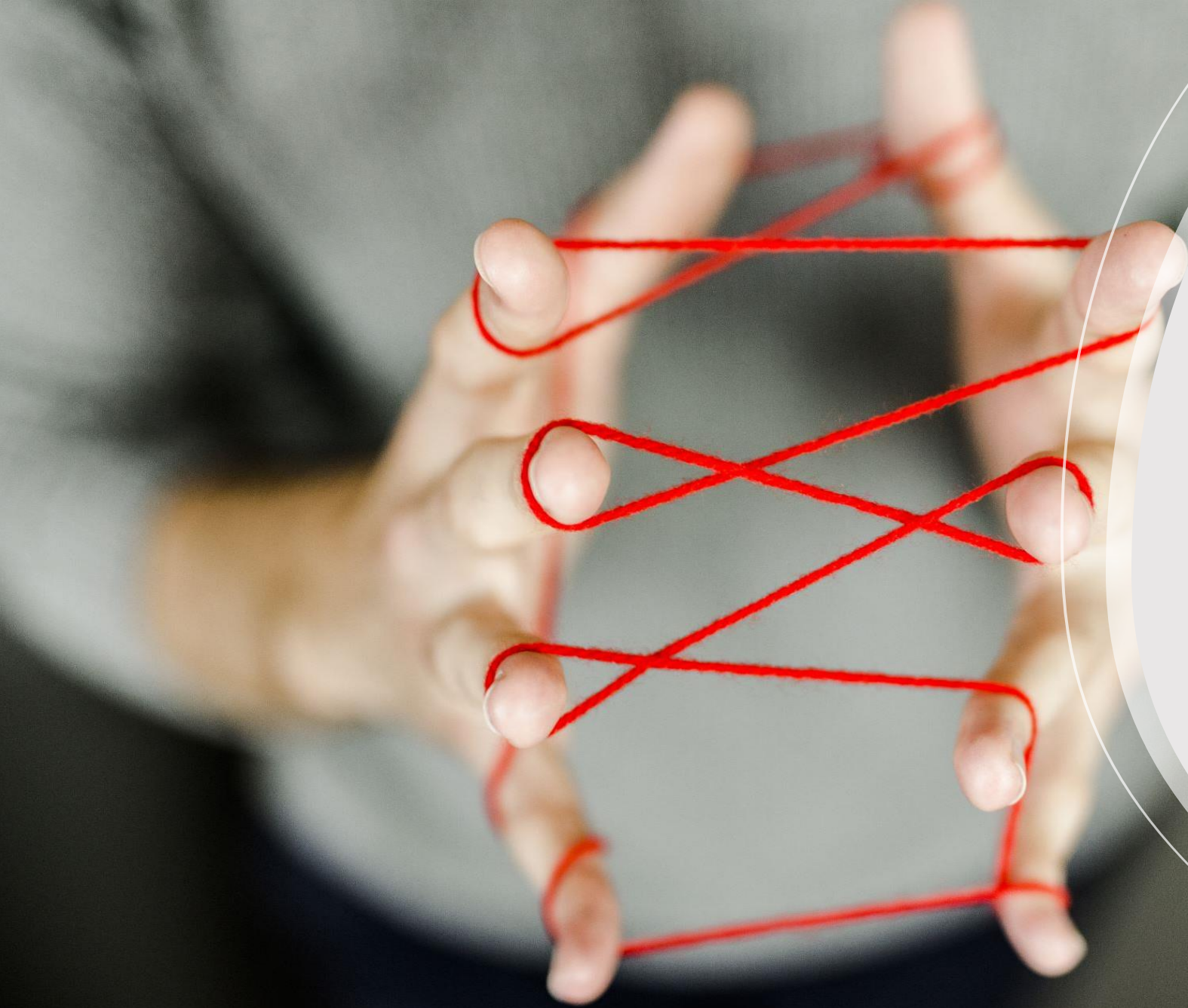
Understanding
teacher
wellbeing:
Context matters





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Two strands of action

- Personal actions
- Structural/systemic change/support

A close-up photograph of several hands of different ethnicities and ages, held together in a circle. The hands are open, palms facing each other, creating a sense of unity and support. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting. The lighting is bright and natural, highlighting the textures of the skin and the details of the hands.

Mental health issues / wellbeing

Please do not be afraid or embarrassed to seek help

3 Things I can change

- What I pay attention to (positivity)
- How I interact with others (relationships)
- How I manage my time (recharging my batteries)



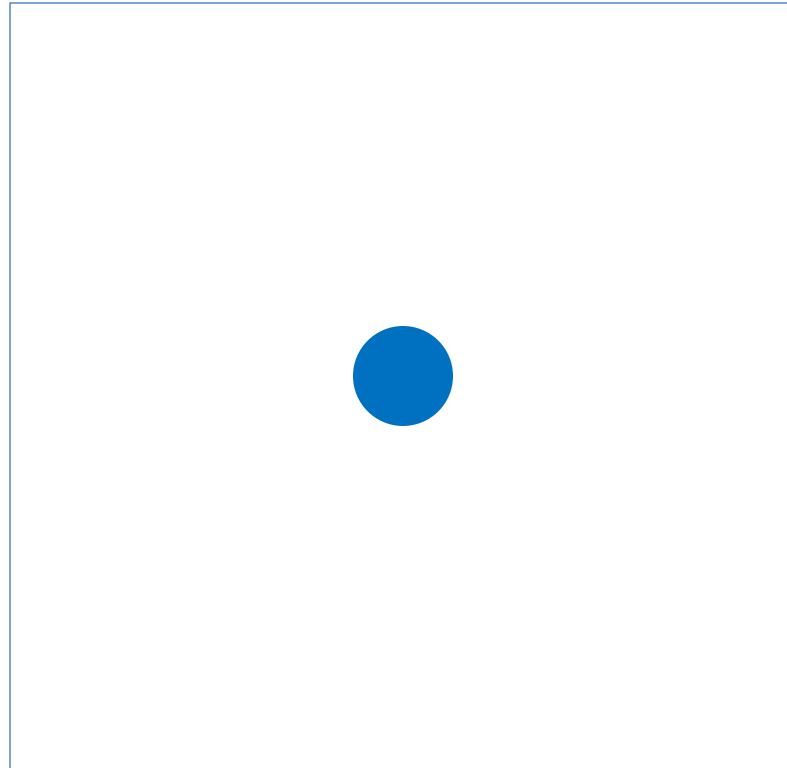
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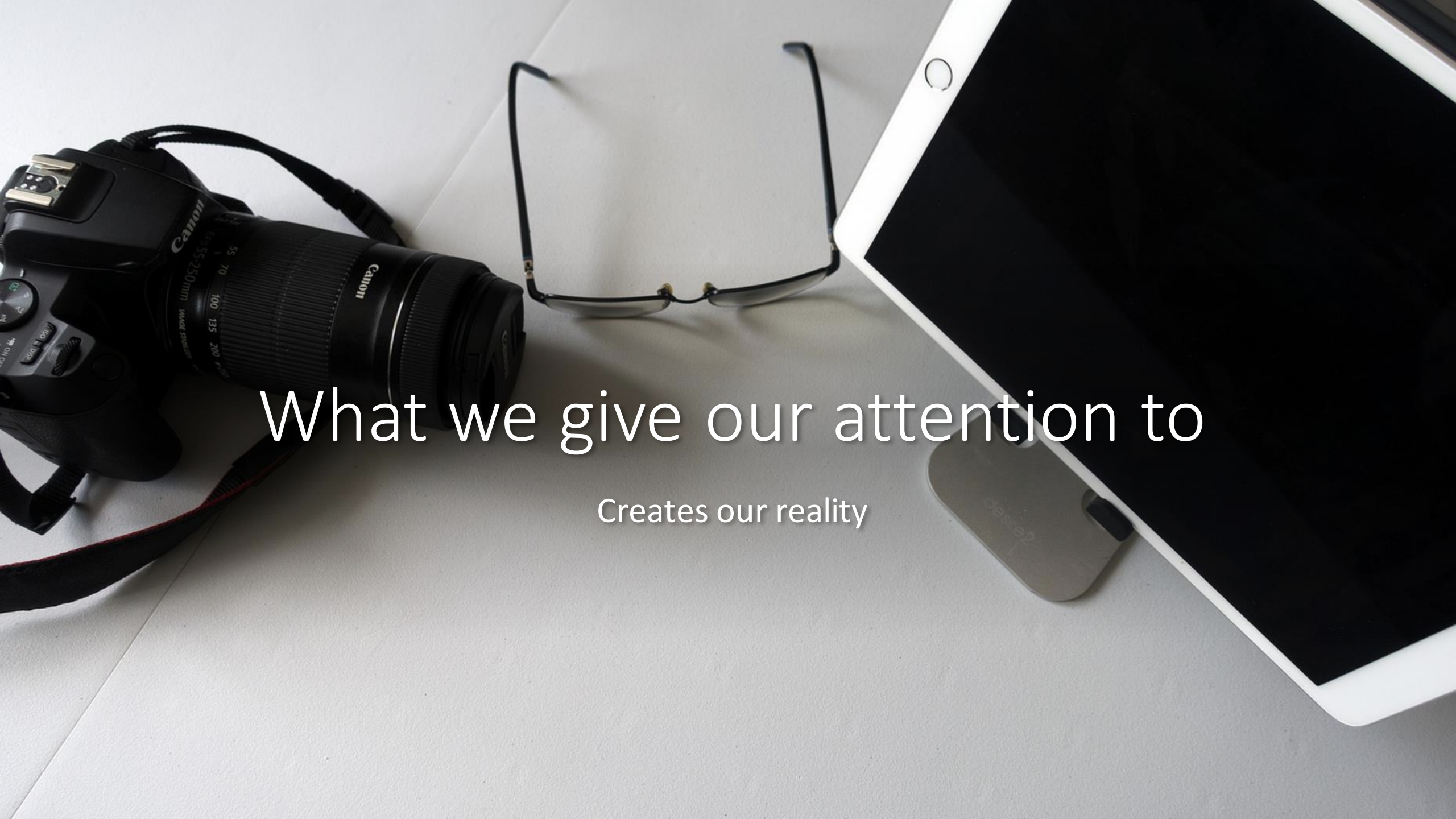
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Example: Something I can change

- What I focus my attention on





What we give our attention to

Creates our reality

Focus on the
positives



Focus on the
positives is
not...



Give yourself
'permission
to feel'
(Brackett, 2019)



Gratitude practices





Savouring (Bryant & Veroff, 2006)



Savour a positive moment

- From the **past**... Good memory
- From the **present**... Something enjoying now
- From the **future**... Something looking forward to





What is your teacher strength?



Appreciative inquiry



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Relationships vital for wellbeing



All relationships are effortful



What are the characteristics of your ideal colleague?




Relationships at
work

EVERYONE at work needs to feel:

Respected, Appreciated, Supported, and Heard

RASH



Even small acts of kindness
can make a profound
difference to somebody else.

Misha Collins



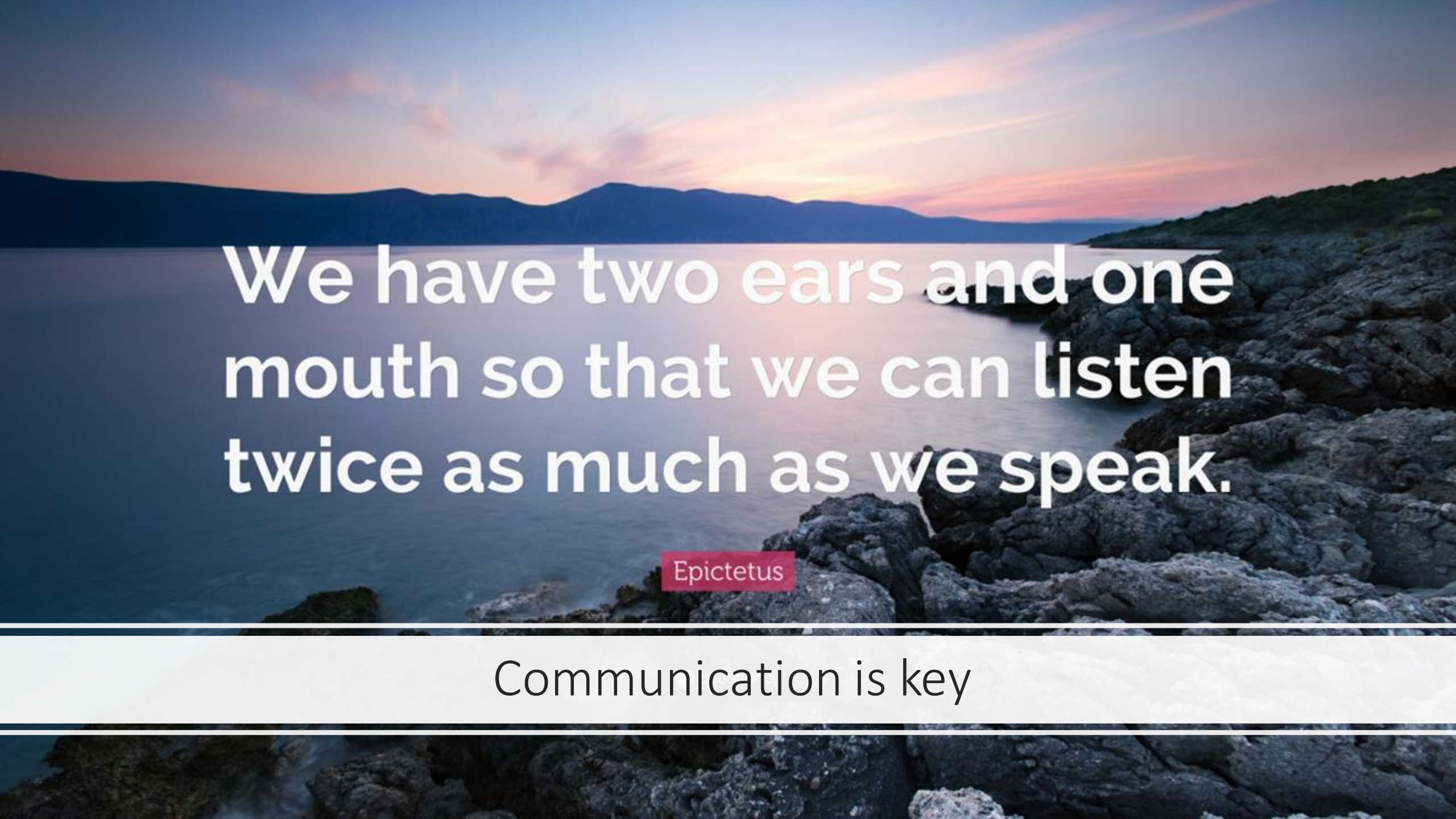
Who is important
to you and who
deserves more of
your quality time?





To protect and nurture ALL relationships

- Invest energy and time in the relationship
- Spend *quality* time together
- Work on communication
- Empathy – Try perspective switching
- Engage in acts of kindness



We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.

Epictetus

Communication is key

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Work/Life balance... Symbiosis (Fox, 2015)

Time Management

- Is about setting priorities
- Allocating time for work and non-work
- Not to do *more* work, to work more *efficiently* so time for leisure
- Parkinson's law
 - "*Work expands to fill the time you make available for it*"





Making time *for* leisure

What are your time management tips?

- *Be realistic about workload expectations*
- *Set boundaries to weekend/evening*
- *Fix time for hobbies, sport, family, and friends*
- *Timebox work*
- *Let go perfection*
- *Learn to say 'no'!*
- *Think about your priorities!*

Your time, your life

Spend it wisely – Each day only comes once



POSITIVELYPANICKED.COM



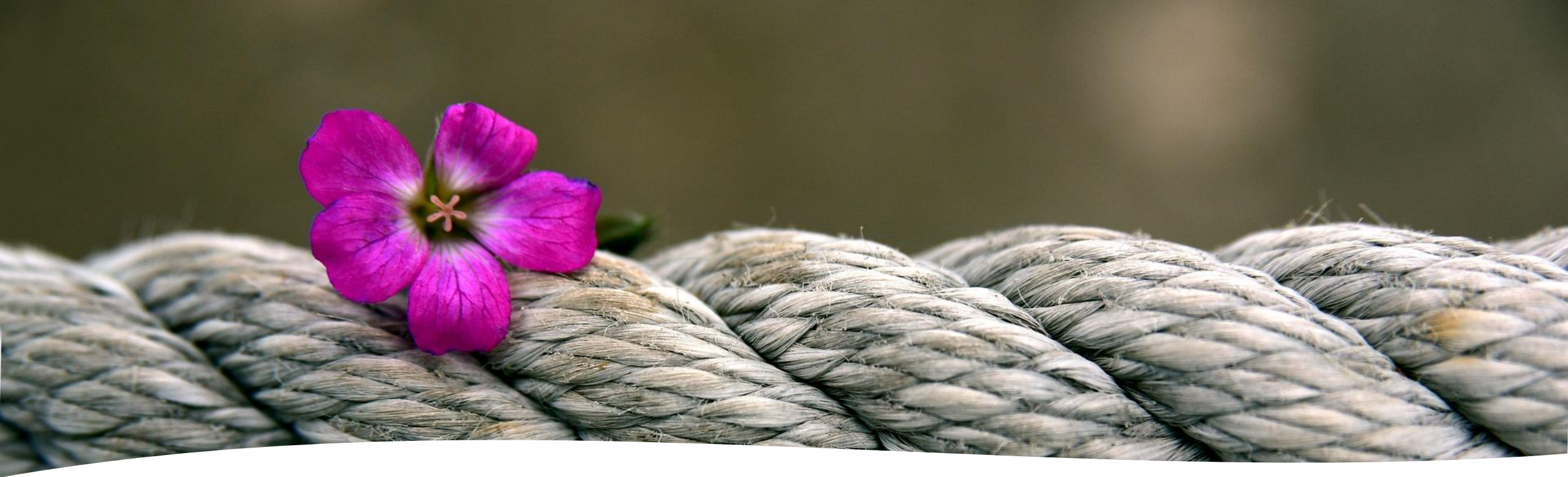
You can't pour
from an empty
cup.

SELF-CARE ISN'T SELFISH. IT'S NECESSARY.

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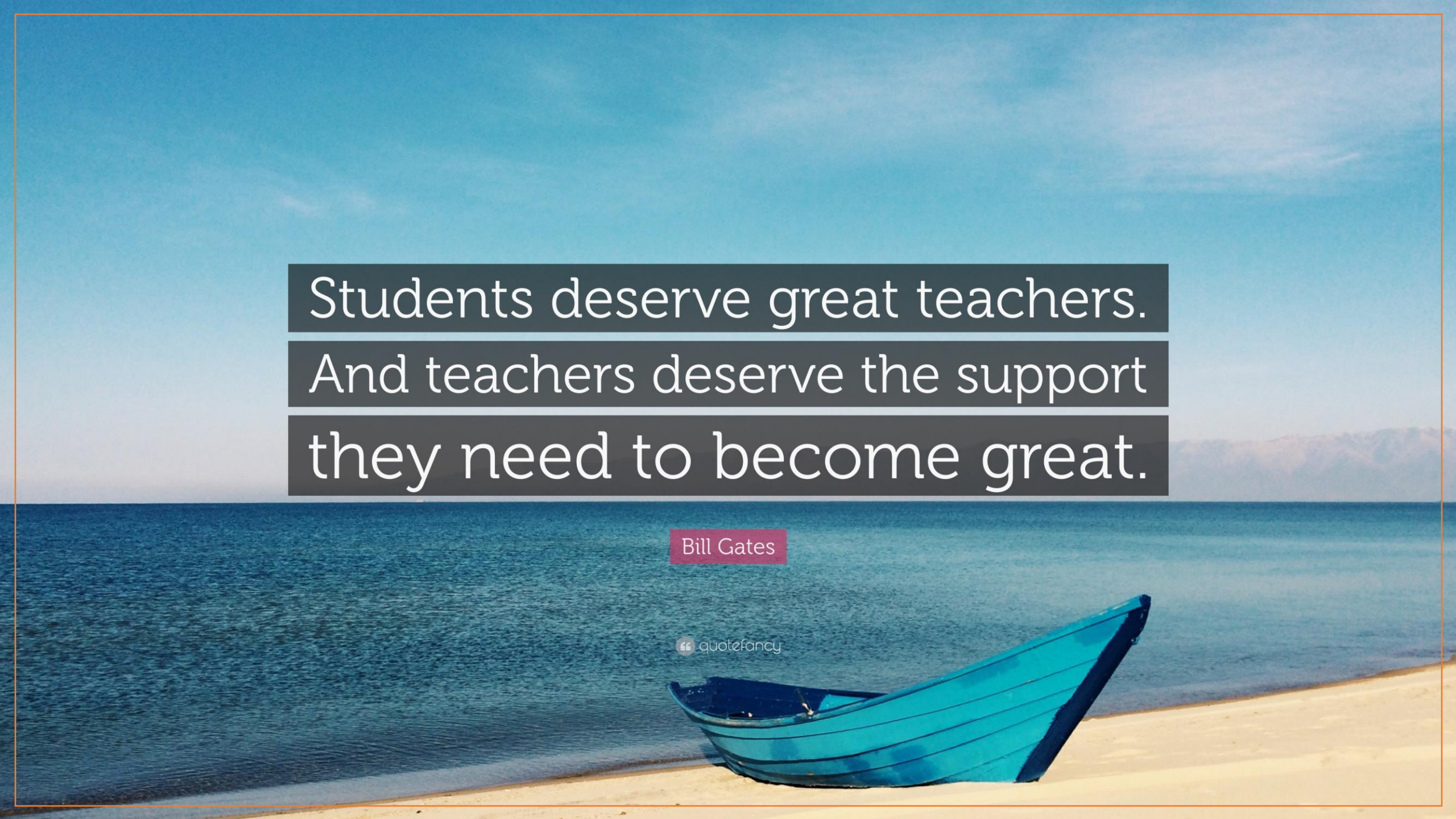




Teacher wellbeing is
a form of social
justice

- “Caring for my self is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.” —
Audre Lorde

It is political

A blue boat is beached on a sandy shore. The background features a calm blue ocean and a clear blue sky. The quote is overlaid on a dark grey background.

Students deserve great teachers.
And teachers deserve the support
they need to become great.

Bill Gates

quote fancy

If you would like
to learn more
about teacher
wellbeing



sarah.mercer@uni-graz.at

