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## Supporting Wellbeing through Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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## Supporting Wellbeing through Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

### Abstract

#### *Purpose*

This paper explores the impact and value of a scholarship of teaching and learning-led (SoTL) professional development in higher education (HE), with a focus on practitioner wellbeing.

#### *Design / methodology / approach*

The research was a small-scale mixed methods design, surveying 21 participants and interviewing 3 current students or recent graduates from a UK-based MEd in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Data was mapped against an evidence-based framework for wellbeing.

#### *Findings*

A SoTL-led form of professional development, a Masters in Teaching in Learning in HE, offers participants opportunity to exercise the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing in HE', which has positive outcomes for staff and students.

#### *Research limitations/implications*

The research project was not designed to explore the programme's impact on wellbeing, but to explore its impact and value to individuals and institutions. Reading data against the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing in HE' was retrospective, and we did not 'measure' individual wellbeing. However, the theoretical implications are that wellbeing is an additional benefit, which adds to the value of SoTL-led professional

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3 development in HE, and that further research is required to explore this more fully.  
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### 8 *Practical implications*

9  
10 The wellbeing framework outlined in this research and applied to HE can be used as a  
11  
12 model for shaping SoTL-led professional development, to the benefit of the entire  
13  
14 learning community.  
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### 19 *Originality/Value*

20  
21 This paper proposes a connection between wellbeing, SoTL-led professional  
22  
23 development, and SoTL.  
24  
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### 28 **Keywords**

29  
30 Wellbeing

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32 Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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34 Professional development

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36 Educational development

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38 Academic Development  
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### 47 **Introduction**

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49 Wellbeing is a highly significant topic in commentary on higher education (HE) today  
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51 (Henning, Krägeloh, Dryer, Moir, Billington & Hill ed., 2018; Houghton &  
52  
53 Anderson, 2017). For both students and staff, pressure is seen to have increased on  
54  
55 mental health, sense of identity, and overall happiness (Guthrie, Lichten, Van Belle,  
56  
57 Ball, Knack & Hofman, 2018; Neves & Hillman, 2018; Universities UK, 2017;  
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Morrish, 2019). This paper makes an original contribution to this literature, through empirical research that reads the value and impact of a scholarship-led academic, professional development programme in HE through the lens of wellbeing. It therefore offers a contribution to wider debates around wellbeing and professional development in HE, as well as a potential prompt for developing practice in different contexts.

This article is based on research into the impact and value to individuals and institutions of a Masters in Teaching and Learning in HE (MEd), instigated to inform programme developments. Open to staff from all disciplines, the MEd adopts a scholarship-led ‘focus on teaching and learning strategies underpinning the curriculum’ (Fanghanel, Pritchard, Potter, & Wisker, 2016a, p. 3) and can be understood as providing a ‘research-led form of professional development’ (Fanghanel *et al.*, 2016a, p. 3). As detailed by Fanghanel *et al.*, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) offers potential for enhancing learning and teaching in universities for individual and collective practitioners. Data gathered from 21 current or recent participants in the MEd suggested that it also supports personal efficacy and an ability to manage the stresses of working in contemporary HE. This led the authors to consider the complete dataset through the lens of wellbeing, to explore if, how, and why wellbeing is of value in understanding professional development.

A theory emerged: that the MEd presents opportunities for participants to exercise ‘Five Ways to Wellbeing’ (Aked, Marks, Cordon and Thompson, 2008), as they are applied to HE (Author, 2016; 2017). Participants reported enhanced wellbeing, which they understood to offer benefits to the wider learning community, colleagues and

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2  
3 students. There is a strong evidence for arguing that enhanced wellbeing promotes  
4  
5 positive staff behaviour within an organisation, and clearer commitment to pursuing  
6  
7 shared goals (Franco-Santos, Nalick, Rivera-Torres, & Gomez-Mejia, 2017), which  
8  
9 strengthens the case for SoTL-led professional development within an institution.  
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### 16 **Wellbeing, higher education, and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

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18 ‘Wellbeing’ can be defined as a state from which the subject may ‘realise his or her  
19  
20 own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and  
21  
22 fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community’ (World Health  
23  
24 Organisation, cited in Universities UK, 2015). Assessing a direct relationship  
25  
26 between a specific intervention and individual wellbeing is complex, not least because  
27  
28 of the multiple variables at play in individual understanding or experience of  
29  
30 wellbeing, and the problem of defining and measuring wellbeing in itself. It is not the  
31  
32 argument of this paper, therefore, that a causal relationship exists between  
33  
34 participation in the MEd, and the enhanced wellbeing reported; rather, we see  
35  
36 correlation between these two. At the time of carrying out the MEd research, the  
37  
38 principle researcher was involved in other projects using the New Economics  
39  
40 Foundation (NEF) evidence-based framework for wellbeing as it applies to HE  
41  
42 (Author, 2016). The ‘Five Ways to Wellbeing’ (Aked *et al.*, 2008) have been used  
43  
44 successfully to inspire individual and organisational change in the service of  
45  
46 wellbeing (Aked & Thompson, 2011). Author (2016; 2017; 2018) nuances the Five  
47  
48 Ways to better fit the HE context, and we summarise original and HE specific  
49  
50 versions in Table 1: [TABLE ONE NEAR HERE]  
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3 By mapping research data to this model, the current article illustrates how the MEd  
4 presents opportunities for HE teachers to engage in these different ways which, in  
5 combination, are understood to enhance wellbeing. Other authors, such as Seldon and  
6  
7 Martin (2017) name the Five Ways in their consideration of 'The Positive and  
8 Mindful University', but do not draw out the implications for staff development,  
9  
10 despite helpful suggestions about institutional changes likely to foster wellbeing for  
11 both students and staff. This article seeks to address this gap, it offers wellbeing as an  
12 additional factor to consider in effective SoTL-led professional development. For  
13 instance, an emphasis on connection, engagement, and safety within learning  
14 communities is recognised as key to enhancing HE teaching practice (McCormack &  
15 Kennelly, 2011); and accredited programmes of teacher development seem to impact  
16 on participant confidence as much as, if not more than, knowledge and skills (Butcher  
17 & Stoncel, 2012). Both of these points are returned to when considering our data.  
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35 The contemporary significance of wellbeing to student and staff success is well-  
36 acknowledged. For example, the last three years have seen declining rates of  
37 wellbeing measured amongst the student population, from a rate that is already  
38 substantially lower than a similar age group not in HE (Neves & Hillman, 2018). To  
39 focus on one detail, only 18% of HE students in 2018 reported their rate of anxiety as  
40 being 'low', compared to 36% of the wider population in 2016 (Neves & Hillman,  
41 2018, p. 51). This overlaps with a broader awareness of the mental health challenges  
42 faced by many students in UK HE, irrespective of their status as home or international  
43 (Pedder Jones, Lodder, & Papadopoulos, 2019).  
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58 The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is the scholarly inquiry of learning  
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3 and teaching practices of individuals, departments, and institutions. Cross-institutional  
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5 inquiries and research-informed approaches to academic or professional development  
6  
7 are widespread in UK HE (Fanghanel *et al.*, 2016a). We suggest arguments  
8  
9 supporting SoTL practices are strengthened by recognising the potential impact it can  
10  
11 have on staff - and by extension, student – wellbeing and learning.  
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### 16 **The research setting**

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18 The research took place in a research-led UK university, within a well-established  
19  
20 Masters programme in Teaching and Learning in HE (MEd). This programme is  
21  
22 primarily for academic and professional services staff within the institution. It offers a  
23  
24 valuable space for prioritising learning and teaching in an environment that is  
25  
26 predominantly research-focused. The programme aims to create an interdisciplinary,  
27  
28 scholarly community of practice. Sharing knowledge, ways of thinking, and  
29  
30 experiences of learning across academic disciplines is a crucial part of the  
31  
32 programme. A scholarly approach empowers participants to treat their own practice  
33  
34 as an object of research, with an awareness of the heterogeneity of this research  
35  
36 matter and method. In practice, the dozen or so participants in each cohort meet in  
37  
38 scheduled classes on a roughly fortnightly basis over two years. This structure helps  
39  
40 foster trusting relationships within the community of practice, where inquiry into  
41  
42 sensitive topics is embraced - including the efficacy of one's own teaching.  
43  
44 Participants have reported this is an important aspect of the programme. This research  
45  
46 offered a deeper understanding of why this matters.  
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### 58 **Research methods**

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60 The project was a mixed-methods study, using quantitative and qualitative (free-text)

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3 data from a survey and a small number of interviews. The host university granted  
4  
5 ethical approval for the research and all participants consented to the use of  
6  
7 anonymised data in academic outputs. Invitations to take part were sent to 90 current  
8  
9 or recent participants of the MEd, the majority of whom were UK-based. 21  
10  
11 completed the survey (a 23% response rate), and three semi-structured interviews, of  
12  
13 40-60 minutes, were conducted. To understand the value of the programme to a range  
14  
15 of HE teachers, interviewees were selected based on discipline, place on a HE  
16  
17 teaching-career trajectory, and role. They were  
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- 20  
21 ● Interviewee 1 - Arts and Humanities, academic leader, and MEd graduate;
- 22  
23 ● Interviewee 2 - STEM, new to HE teaching, teaching-only role, current MEd  
24  
25 student at time of interview; and
- 26  
27 ● Interviewee 3 – Learning support, with many years' experience as a HE  
28  
29 teacher across the globe, teaching-only role, MEd graduate.  
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35 A thematic analysis of the value and impact of the MEd was conducted manually,  
36  
37 through colour-coding of the transcribed interviews. This revealed wellbeing as an  
38  
39 emerging theme across the data. Survey free-text comments were then also colour-  
40  
41 coded, combined with the interview data, and both mapped against the 'Five Ways to  
42  
43 Wellbeing in HE' (Author, 2016; 2017).  
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49 The primary researcher was at the time a distance-taught MEd participant. Insider  
50  
51 research is not unproblematic (cf. Atkins & Wallace, 2012), but can offer valid insight  
52  
53 (Oakley, 2000). Here the researcher's familiarity with the programme facilitated in-  
54  
55 depth interviews and rich understanding of the data. The validity and quality of the  
56  
57 data, evident in the continuity of findings, offsets the small data set (cf. Creswell,  
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2012).

### Wellbeing and SoTL-led professional development

All interviewees, and 14 survey responses (67%), made direct reference to how the programme had seen them through a difficult time professionally, and identified a connection to their personal wellbeing. This consistency of response led us to map the data to the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing in HE'; a mapping we present here, acknowledging the inevitable overlap across the framework. We contextualise findings by referring to wider literature about contemporary UK HE.

#### Connect

Connection is by Aked *et al.* (2008) understood as 'with the people around you'; Author (2016) adds 'to the curriculum'. MEd participants recognise the importance of connection to/with colleagues across the university:

The cross-disciplinary cohort included staff from a range of academic disciplines as well as from professional and learning and teaching support services [...] [It] provided many opportunities to discuss and to challenge assumptions about learning and teaching issues from a variety of perspectives.  
(survey response)

These connections have borne professional and personal dividends:

I have made new friends [...] developed into collaborative arrangements for teaching and [...] a better understanding of priorities, challenges and differences in other disciplines.  
(survey response)

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3 This chimes with McCormack and Kennelly (2011), who identify the importance of  
4 personal connections in creating supportive practitioner communities to develop  
5  
6 learning and teaching.  
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12 Another dimension of connection is the strength of feeling participants show towards  
13 the programme subject matter - teaching and learning in HE - which is perhaps  
14 particularly important to make public in a research-led institution. The Scholarship  
15 of Teaching and Learning brings these dimensions of connection together: a shared  
16  
17 commitment to pursuing a rigorous approach to better pedagogic practice. It has been  
18 suggested there is disregard for those interested in researching pedagogic practice  
19 compared to those investing in disciplinary knowledge (Cheng, 2014, cited in Locke,  
20 2014; hooks<sup>1</sup>, 2003) as SoTL can be perceived as less rigorous than disciplinary work  
21 (Fanghanel *et al.*, 2016a; Pritchard & McGowan, 2016). For those interested in  
22 growing their pedagogic practice through SoTL-based research, this could inhibit  
23 establishing community with disciplinary peers. This may explain why 18 (86%) of  
24 survey respondents valued the programme's cross-disciplinary cohort, and 15 (71%)  
25 valued discussion with fellows on the programme: they found connection through  
26 shared investment in SoTL. Felton (2013), cited in Fanghanel *et al.* (2016b), suggests  
27 these communities of practice are crucial to addressing the cynicism of some  
28 disciplinary experts toward SoTL, a finding which this research supports.  
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51 When exploring how academic roles have changed over recent years, Locke (2014)  
52 outlines a disparity in the status and prospects of teaching-only staff compared with  
53 that of higher-status teaching-research staff. This resonated with participants on  
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59  
60 <sup>1</sup> Please note bell hooks does not capitalise her name.

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3 teaching-only contracts. However, an understanding of good practice deepened by  
4  
5 SoTL increased participants' confidence to connect with disciplinary peers: '[The  
6  
7 MEd has] changed my relationships with [research-focussed] staff. I see myself as an  
8  
9 equal whereas before I would have been less confident.' (Interviewee 2, with a  
10  
11 teaching-only contract.) There was also evidence that participants were pursuing  
12  
13 SoTL activities beyond the confines of the programme, with almost half (10) of  
14  
15 survey participants reporting championing SoTL within their faculties, and/or  
16  
17 building research profiles that included SoTL outputs.  
18  
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23

24 In summary, the sense of connection and community borne from engagement with the  
25  
26 MEd's SoTL-led programme appears to traverse the disciplinary and academic  
27  
28 divides outlined in Fanghanel *et al.* (2016b) and Pritchard and McGowan's (2016)  
29  
30 extensive research into attitudes and practices surrounding SoTL.  
31  
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### 36 *Be active*

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38 In Aked *et al.* (2008), this refers to physical activity. Author (2016; 2017) suggests  
39  
40 that in a HE context, 'be active' translates as active learning and the exercise of social  
41  
42 and political agency. Freire (1994; 1996) argues that effective education empowers  
43  
44 learners to take responsibility and be active agents in the shaping of the organisational  
45  
46 structures they occupy. Further, hooks recognising that educators may burn out when  
47  
48 institutional politics take over pedagogic practice (2003). For the depleted academic it  
49  
50 can be empowering, even healing, to reflect on practice, rethink one's approach  
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52 (hooks, 2003) and serve one's community (hooks, 2009). The current research bears  
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54 this out.  
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3 Respondents offered accounts of exercising agency in building organisational  
4 structures and operations, at individual, departmental/faculty, and institutional levels  
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6 informed by SoTL, explored on the MEd.  
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12 At the individual level, SoTL gave participants the knowledge and motivation to  
13 refresh pedagogic practice: 13 (65%) survey respondents ‘developed more engaging  
14 methods of delivery using principles explored on the course’. For example: ‘[the  
15 MEd] has encouraged me to design teaching content to be interactive and student-led  
16 where possible and has given me the confidence to try new things’ (Interviewee 2).  
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26 SoTL informed the embedding of good practice across departments and faculties.  
27  
28 Participants reported the positive impact the MEd had on colleagues’ practices and  
29 the student learning experience: ‘I led a review of the undergraduate curriculum [...]   
30 which included a strong “engaged learning” component at its core. This approach  
31 emerged directly from thinking and reflection I was able to undertake while attending  
32 the MEd’ (survey response). Impacts from the programme therefore rippled out  
33 beyond the individuals directly involved.  
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45 At the institutional level, SoTL-led understanding of good practice was used by  
46 respondents to shape institutional structures and organisational practices. One  
47 participant was ‘involved in a working group looking at student evaluation of  
48 learning, teaching and assessment, and my experiences on the course have certainly  
49 contributed to my input and recommendations’ (survey response); another was  
50 inspired to take growing responsibility for teaching and learning practices within their  
51 faculty and more recently across the institution (Interviewee 1).  
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5 Masika, Wisker, and Canning (2016) recognise that belonging to the SoTL  
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8 community of practice serves to ‘empower individuals through the sharing of  
9  
10 information and SoTL practice’ (Masika *et al.*, 2016, p. 7). Evidence here suggests  
11  
12 this empowerment also drives change beyond individual practice motivated by a  
13  
14 desire to serve the wider learning community.  
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### 20 *Take Notice*

21  
22 Taking notice involves looking both outwards and inwards (Aked *et al.*, 2008).  
23  
24 Reflection is integral to SoTL and good pedagogic practice; it is embedded within the  
25  
26 UK Professional Standards Framework for Higher Education Teaching (Higher  
27  
28 Education Academy, 2011) and the Professional Values of the Staff and Educational  
29  
30 Development Association (Staff and Educational Development Association, 2018).  
31  
32 The MEd invites personal and group reflection, allowing participants to better  
33  
34 understand their personal learning processes, teaching practices, and learn from peers.  
35  
36 This, coupled with the study of new approaches, has led to step-changes in practice;  
37  
38 as Shulman (2000) suggests, ‘Active scholarship of teaching provides the teacher with  
39  
40 a very different perspective on what he or she may have been doing for many years’  
41  
42  
43  
44 (p. 50).  
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#### 51 *a. Looking outwards, taking notice of the learning community*

52  
53 Taking notice was integral to participating in the community of practice established  
54  
55 on the MEd: ‘getting support and feedback from the tutor and others on the  
56  
57 programme made a difference to my confidence levels’ (survey response). Reflection  
58  
59 served to alert participants to students’ needs, leading to exploration of how to better  
60

1  
2  
3 serve student success. For example, after reflecting on student feedback with MEd  
4  
5 peers, a survey respondent used an assignment ‘to implement improvements to a  
6  
7 specific programme of study’. This suggests that a SoTL-led approach and  
8  
9 encouraging participants to reflect on practice enables changes with students in mind.  
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16 *b. Looking outwards, taking notice of the wider socio-political terrain*

17  
18 The desire to understand policy motivated some participants to commit to the  
19  
20 programme, and is a recognised driver for engagement with SoTL (Shulman, 2000).  
21  
22 Understanding the political levers that instigated change in the university, and so  
23  
24 pedagogic practice, combined with a confidence understood to be informed by SoTL  
25  
26 and finding a community of practice, led one interviewee (with an extensive  
27  
28 disciplinary research profile) to embrace teaching and learning in their career  
29  
30 trajectory: Interviewee 2 is now making ‘educational leadership central to my future  
31  
32 academic career’. The professional reward gleaned from this progression is  
33  
34 complemented by the personal satisfaction of enabling changes for the good of the  
35  
36 learning community.  
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45 *c. Looking inwards, taking notice or reflecting on individual teaching practice*

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47 Reflection encouraged participants to reshape pedagogic practice: 15 (71%) survey  
48  
49 respondents used MEd work to enhance the student experience. ‘The feedback I have  
50  
51 from students for the course I designed whilst doing the MEd is spectacular’ (survey  
52  
53 response). Interviewee 2, from a STEM discipline, found reflection challenging, but  
54  
55 recognised the process led to a better understanding of student need and their personal  
56  
57 ability to respond effectively. For many respondents recognising the impact of SoTL-  
58  
59 informed enhancements fostered recognition of the value of deep personal reflection,  
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2  
3 the MEd, and so SoTL.  
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8 Reflection has for one participant ‘changed how I work with students and support and  
9  
10 develop students’ reflective practices. I am better at supporting students in their  
11  
12 reflective practices’ (Interviewee 1). For another, ‘reflect[ing] on my own teaching  
13  
14 practices [is leading to my] helping others to realise their own teaching potential’  
15  
16  
17 (Interviewee 3).  
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20

21 In this way hooks’ thinking resonated: ‘The teacher who can ask of students [...]   
22  
23 “how can I serve?” brings to the work of educating a spirit of service that honours the  
24  
25 students’ will to learn’ (hooks, 2003, p. 92). This research offers support for HE  
26  
27 teachers who find personal satisfaction in taking serious notice of the student  
28  
29 experience, and acting on the observations that they make.  
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### 36 *Keep learning* 37

38 The UKPSF (HEA, 2011) asserts an effective HE teacher constantly invests in  
39  
40 professional development and updates their disciplinary knowledge. This study found  
41  
42 the MEd inspired personal desire, energy, and commitment to engage in continuous  
43  
44 professional development beyond the life of the programme.  
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51 Participants took a self-directed approach to engaging with SoTL-led activity: ‘I am  
52  
53 actively seeking new ways of delivery and can talk more confidently with other  
54  
55 educators about [pedagogic] principles [...] It also encouraged me to read widely and  
56  
57 introduced concepts which I am keen to explore further.’ (Interviewee 2). This  
58  
59 commitment to continuous learning was apparent in the majority of respondents; for  
60

1  
2  
3 example, 'I am really enjoying studying for the MEd [...] I feel more motivated in my  
4  
5 work and I really hope I continue to be able to study in this way throughout my  
6  
7 career' (survey response).  
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12 Further, respondents were keen for colleagues to engage in SoTL, recognising the  
13  
14 specifically robust nature of this 'research-based form of CPD' (Fanghanel *et al.*,  
15  
16 2016a, p. 3): 'We need opportunities for colleagues to undertake advanced  
17  
18 developmental activities relating to learning and teaching. The MEd goes deeper than  
19  
20 CPD' (Interviewee 1). Those involved with professional development may recognise  
21  
22 this desire to go further than information- or skills-based training, framed here as an  
23  
24 aspect of personal wellbeing that also pays dividends for the institution.  
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### 31 *Give*

32  
33 The MEd helped shape the service HE teachers bring to their learning community.  
34  
35 This service may include offering constructive feedback to peers on the programme;  
36  
37 supporting, building and engaging positively with a community of practice; and  
38  
39 offering students an enhanced learning experience.  
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45 bell hooks states 'satisfaction is in the giving itself, to create a context where students  
46  
47 can learn freely' (hooks, 2003, p. 91), a sentiment echoed by survey respondents and  
48  
49 interviewees; for example, Interviewee 3 claimed positive student feedback  
50  
51 'makes my job more enjoyable'. In hooks' experience, academic staff within high-  
52  
53 ranking universities are more likely to be in service to their institution than to  
54  
55 students, pursuing reward in esteem and career progression (hooks, 2003). SoTL and  
56  
57 its importance to the student experience can be less often recognised or rewarded  
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3 (Fanghanel *et al*, 2016). The MEd offers external recognition in the form of  
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5 Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, appreciation from peers for their  
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7 contribution to enhanced provision and, for one interviewee, reward via career  
8  
9 progression.  
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14 This small study suggests SoTL-led programmes provide opportunity to serve, or  
15  
16 give, to one's learning community *and to be recognised for these efforts*. This  
17  
18 responds to Pritchard and McGowan's (2016) plea 'to empower those advocates [of  
19  
20 SoTL] to begin conversations with those in charge of institutional policy and  
21  
22 implementation in relation to role profiles and promotion' (Pritchard & McGowan,  
23  
24 2016, p. 19), to expedite the development of teaching-based recognition and reward.  
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30 Overall, when mapped in detail against the Five Ways, the holistic benefits of  
31  
32 participating in the MEd become apparent:  
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35 The MEd is a wholly positive experience... It is positive in terms of its  
36  
37 structure and content. It is positive in terms of the framework in which it  
38  
39 encourages reflection and discussion. It is positive in that it carves out non-  
40  
41 negotiable time and space in which to explore ideas that are new to me or that  
42  
43 I have wanted to know more about. Being able to focus is extremely valuable.  
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46 (survey response)  
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51 The MEd had a positive impact not only on professional practice but also participants'  
52  
53 *attitudes* to their professional practices. As a survey respondent stated, the MEd  
54  
55 'makes me better at my job [...] it makes me a happier worker, and this directly  
56  
57 impacts the student experience'.  
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## Discussion

The research was conducted in spring 2016, a time of significant change (Locke *et al.*, 2016) and professional anxiety (University and College Union, 2016) across UK HE. Interviewees and survey respondents seemed alive to the challenges facing the sector, and stated explicitly how study on the MEd supported an ability to navigate these challenges, as well as reinvigorating enthusiasm for teaching and learning, investment in continuous professional development, and commitment to the student experience.

Carter and Evans (2013) suggest a ‘fundamental link between staff wellbeing and student satisfaction: engaged, committed staff will be those whose enthusiasm for their subject and their job shine through and rubs off on students.’ Freudenberg and Samarkovski (2014) suggest enthusiasm is crucial to student engagement and as such integral to successful pedagogic practice for the modern academic. Students’ enthusiasm further supports educators’ energy: ‘students can be an important source of motivation for academics, so an academic’s enthusiasm could be self-perpetuating, with enthusiasm feeding enthusiasm’ (Freudenberg and Samarkovski, 2014, p. 28).

This is the positive case for framing SoTL-led professional development as an activity to enhance wellbeing; the negative case is perhaps to minimise the harm caused by the changing circumstances under which HE takes place, including greater pressure on students and staff. Student disclosure of mental health conditions tripled between 2010 and 2015 (Equality Challenge Unit 2015, pp. 76-7), and it is usual for HE teachers to be the first point of contact for a student under duress (Garbutt, Gilby, &

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2  
3 Author, 2005). Moreover, students may present in any number of encounters triggered  
4  
5 by any number of issues – not only topics flagged as sensitive need careful  
6  
7 management (Author, 2014). A compassionate (hooks 2003) and suitably professional  
8  
9 response may be dependent on personal wellbeing – does the HE teacher have the  
10  
11 emotional reserve to respond with compassion, and attend to necessary signposting to  
12  
13 professional services as advised as best practice in this instance (Universities UK,  
14  
15 2015)? Professional development that is cognisant of wellbeing, including how it  
16  
17 may have a beneficial effect on participants, is perhaps one way to strengthen the  
18  
19 emotional resilience of staff in times that are rarely less than trying.  
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26 At the same time, it must be noted no intervention can *ensure* wellbeing, rather  
27  
28 ‘create a context where educators have every opportunity to realise the five ways to it’  
29  
30 (Author, 2017). This is a reasonable comment; the challenge for educational  
31  
32 developers becomes designing, and guiding participants into interventions, that seem  
33  
34 likely to facilitate wellbeing. A criticism of wellbeing-based initiatives is they merely  
35  
36 build individual-coping mechanisms to deal with a troubled context (Ahmed,  
37  
38 2018), and shift the focus of responsibility for wellbeing to the individual, rather than  
39  
40 the institution (Morrish, 2019). This was not the sense of the current study: the  
41  
42 building of wellbeing, coupled with enhanced understanding of effective teaching and  
43  
44 learning practices, empowered HE teachers to become involved in making structural  
45  
46 changes to their institution, to the benefit of their broader learning communities. This  
47  
48 broader level of change fits with findings in other sectors: when exploring how the  
49  
50 five ways have been used in organisational and community settings, Aked and  
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52 Thomas (2011) also found that taking a role in shaping the environment in which the  
53  
54 subject lives or works ‘makes people feel useful and feel good about themselves as  
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3 they begin to see that they have an important contribution to make' (p. 28). Our  
4  
5 analysis identified a virtuous circle, where participants' sense of agency and  
6  
7 empowerment further fuelled their engagement with SoTL, which enhanced delivery,  
8  
9 the student experience, engagement and subsequently staff enthusiasm for teaching  
10  
11 (Author, 2017) and energy and commitment to making positive change. This chimes  
12  
13 with the recognition of Fanghanel *et al.* (2016a, b) that SoTL can be used effectively  
14  
15 to drive improvement at all levels of an institution.  
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### 21 **Practical implications for educational developers**

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23 The burden of this paper is that SoTL-led professional development may be one  
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25 grounding source of wellbeing, from which HE teachers may more effectively fulfil  
26  
27 their professional responsibilities. In practical terms, this may mean designing,  
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29 developing, and talking about development opportunities more explicitly in the  
30  
31 language of wellbeing, for both staff and students. In particular, educational  
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33 developers may want to create spaces where participants can extend their  
34  
35 understanding of their practice, of their contexts, and of themselves - all of these  
36  
37 components appear beneficial for enhancing wellbeing, and having not just the skills  
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39 and the knowledge, but the confidence and disposition, to realise enhancements in  
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41 practice. This chimes with existing literature, such as Kahn *et al.* (2008), who  
42  
43 identify that promoting reflection is a necessary but not sufficient feature of academic  
44  
45 development programmes seeking to enable pedagogic change; and Butcher and  
46  
47 Stoncel (2012), who recognise the value of academic development as being as much  
48  
49 in the growth of practitioners' confidence, as any new knowledge they may have  
50  
51 acquired. Wellbeing provides an additional link here to organisational effectiveness  
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53 (Franco-Santos *et al.*, 2017), and therefore a business as well as a humane reason for  
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3 taking it seriously.  
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### 8 **Limitations of the research**

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10 The limitations of this research could be seen to be the emergence of wellbeing as a  
11 theme rather than integral to research design; the insider position of the lead  
12 researcher; and the small response rate. We therefore put forward these findings in  
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14 the spirit of inviting future research. Future research projects could continue with this  
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16 group of MEd participants and graduates, but with explicit focus on wellbeing and the  
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18 ‘Five Ways to Wellbeing in HE’. Another possibility would be to explore  
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20 participants in other professional development programmes, whether explicitly SoTL-  
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22 based, as in the MEd, or based on other academic disciplines. Finally, the data  
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24 presented here offers assumptions and observations about the broader effect of an  
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26 individual’s engagement in academic or professional development. It would seem  
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28 helpful to triangulate this with the experiences of colleagues and students of  
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30 participants, to gather their perspective on the differences made.  
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### 39 **Conclusions**

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41 By taking educators’ testimony as a starting point to explore the impact and value of a  
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43 SoTL-led programme of professional development, it is possible to add to Shulman’s  
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45 (2000) 3 P’s that motivate engagement with SoTL: to *policy*, *pragmatics*, and  
46  
47 *professionalism* we may add *personal*. Through the systematic mapping of educators’  
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49 reflections on their experiences of the programme onto an evidence-based model for  
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51 wellbeing applied to HE, it can be suggested that such SoTL-led programmes create a  
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53 context where HE teachers engage with activities to not only enhance pedagogic  
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55 practice and reignite enthusiasm for their professional role, but also support their  
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57 personal sense of wellbeing which, importantly, can be understood as a conduit to  
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3 positive organisational and structural change to the benefit of the learning community.  
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8 The MEd enables educators to exercise activities corresponding to the 'Five Ways to  
9 Wellbeing in HE': to *connect* across disciplinary and institutional divides; to be  
10 socially and politically *active* in shaping practice; to *take notice* of personal and  
11 student experiences; to *keep learning* about good pedagogic practice; and to *give* or  
12 serve the learning community. Understanding the interrelationships between HE  
13 teacher wellbeing and student experience brings together bodies of literature to inform  
14 one another, and provide opportunities for mutual growth. It also suggests investment  
15 in SoTL-led programmes of professional development offers benefit for the entire  
16 learning community.  
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**Table One: Five Ways to Wellbeing in a HE Context**

| Five Ways to Wellbeing | Five Ways to Wellbeing (Aked <i>et al.</i> , 2008) | Five Ways to Wellbeing in HE (Author 2016) |
|------------------------|--|--|
|                        |  |  |

|                                       |  |   |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>(Aked <i>et al.</i>,<br/>2008)</b> |  |   |
| Connect                               | with the people around you...connections will support and enrich you every day   | to the learning process, curriculum content and learning community  |
| Be active                             | exercise makes you feel good...discover a physical activity that you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness             | including physical activity, but also active learning and the exercise of social and political agency     |
| Take notice                           | be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful...reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you                   | of the learning community, curriculum content, and personal response to both                              |
| Keep learning                         | try something new... Take on a different responsibility at work... Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun | through the entire student lifecycle (Houghton & Anderson, 2017), in professional development, and beyond |

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| Give | do something for a friend or a stranger...Volunteer your time...Look out as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you | to the immediate learning or wider community |
|------|---|--|