

THE WANDA REFLECTIVE METHOD AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVING TEACHERS' WELL-BEING

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Potrjeno/Accepted

18. 7. 2025

Objavljeno/Published

5. 9. 2025

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Abstract/Izvleček

This qualitative research study focuses on teachers' well-being in the context of the WANDA reflective method. The aim was to explore teachers' subjective perceptions of the benefits of WANDA on their well-being. Data were collected through a qualitative written interview technique. The research sample consisted of sixteen primary and pre-primary teachers who had completed the WANDA method. Content analysis of the data was conducted using thematic analysis based on the PERMA model. The results showed that WANDA contributes to teachers' well-being in the areas of Relationship, Meaning, Positive Emotions, and Engagement. The Accomplishments category was the least represented.

Keywords:

WANDA, well-being, teachers' well-being, PERMA.

Reflektivna metoda WANDA kot orodje za izboljšanje dobrobiti učiteljev

V kvalitativni raziskavi se osredinjamo na dobrobit učiteljev v okviru refleksivne metode WANDA. Cilj je bil raziskati subjektivne zaznave učiteljev o koristih metode WANDA za njihovo dobro. Podatki so bili zbrani s kvalitativno tehniko pisnega intervjuja. Raziskovalni vzorec je sestavljalo 16 osnovnošolskih in predšolskih učiteljev, ki so opravili usposabljanje za izvajanje skupinske refleksije z metodo WANDA. Vsebinska analiza podatkov je bila izvedena z uporabo tematske analize na podlagi modela PERMA. Rezultati so pokazali, da metoda WANDA prispeva k dobrobiti učiteljev na naslednjih področjih: *odnosi, pomen, pozitivna čustva in zavzetost*. Najmanj zastopana je bila kategorija *dosežki*.

Ključne besede:

WANDA, dobro počutje, dobrobit učiteljev, PERMA.

UDK/UDC:

37.011.3-
051:159.938.363.6

DOI <https://doi.org/10.18690/rei.5403>

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Introduction

Well-being is understood as the result of subjective assessments of quality of life (Deci and Ryan, 2008) and is now a central concern for both individuals and educational systems. Research shows that higher levels of well-being correlate with better learning outcomes, social behaviour, health, and resilience (Huppert et al., 2013). In an educational context, teachers' well-being is essential for teachers themselves and for students' academic and emotional development (Taylor et al., 2024). As reported by (Thapa et al., 2013; Toropova et al., 2021), the widespread problem of low levels of teacher well-being and mental health has detrimental effects on schools. European policy documents increasingly emphasise promoting teacher well-being through systemic support and professional development opportunities (Eurydice, 2021).

The PERMA Theoretical Model

Most recently, a new conceptual framework has been proposed in an OECD working paper, in which teachers' professional well-being is defined around four key dimensions of well-being: cognitive, subjective, physical and mental, and social well-being (Viac and Fraser, 2020). Teachers' emotions and well-being have far-reaching consequences for themselves, their students, and the education system. Our study is based on Seligman's theoretical model PERMA because most studies on teacher well-being fall within the domains of well-being psychology and positive psychology (Hascher and Waber, 2021). Research has shown significant positive associations between each PERMA component and physical health, vitality, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Kern, Waters, Alder, and White, 2014). PERMA is also a predictor of psychological distress (Forgeard et al., 2011). Proactive work on the PERMA components increases aspects of well-being and reduces psychological distress.

The PERMA™ model focuses on five key components of well-being that Seligman believes contribute to human well-being (Seligman, 2011). The PERMA components are as follows: *Positive Emotion*: This element focuses on the experience of positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, and love. Positive emotions enhance our overall well-being and motivation. *Engagement*: This element refers to being fully absorbed in activities that challenge and engage us, often leading to a state of "flow". *Relationships*: This element emphasizes the importance of strong, supportive relationships with family, friends, and partners. Healthy relationships are crucial for

our mental health and happiness. *Meaning*: This element involves having a sense of purpose and meaning in life, which can come from various sources such as religion, philosophy, or personal beliefs. *Accomplishment*: This element focuses on achieving goals and experiencing a sense of accomplishment and pride in our achievements (Seligman, 2012).

Research confirms the importance of the individual categories of PERMA for well-being. A positive emotional state helps us to better cope with challenges and maintain motivation and productivity so that individuals increase their performance and achieve their personal and professional goals (Fredrickson, 2010; Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Positive Emotions build lasting psychological, social, and intellectual capital, enhancing our resilience and psychological well-being (Paakkanen et al., 2021). Positivity can improve psychological and physiological well-being when coping with negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2001). Psychological engagement is enhanced when professionals are asked to analyse their practice in a safe, dialogic environment (Fullagar and Kelloway, 2009; Aldrup et al., 2018). Professional and personal relationships significantly predict well-being outcomes, with professional relationships being the strongest protective factor against emotional exhaustion (Smetáčková and Francová, 2020).

The study used the WANDA reflective group method to explore the contribution made by aspects of teachers' perceived well-being to reflective practice. However, no studies to date have systematically analysed how reflective group methods like WANDA—designed to improve the collegial climate and promote professional self-awareness—impact these dimensions through a PERMA lens.

This study addresses this critical gap by combining the PERMA framework with qualitative analysis of teachers' reflective writing generated through the WANDA method. It responds to the growing call for research that is both theory-grounded and context-sensitive (Hascher et al., 2021; Kelchtermans, 2006), illuminating not only which PERMA domains are affected but also how they interconnect in teachers' subjective experiences.

The WANDA Method

The WANDA method is an internationally recognized tool for group reflection among teachers. The name comes from the words *waarderen* (to appreciate) and *daden* (to analyse actions) (De Schepper et al., 2016).

The method was developed in Belgium and is used to support a system for building professional learning communities (De Schepper et al., 2016). It develops participants' metacognitive thinking in group reflection on their practice.

Unlike other reflective practices, WANDA has a fixed structure. The facilitator guides teachers through five phases of analysis and appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2006) that unfold around teachers' exploration of a problem situation from different perspectives. Appreciative analysis ensures that problem situations are approached critically but respectfully, focusing on what might work rather than on what did not work or what went wrong.

The method is based on group reflection that leads participants to understand the relationship between what they think and what they do. WANDA sessions should be conducted in groups of 8-12 participants, with meetings scheduled at least once every 4-6 weeks and each meeting lasting 2.5 hours or longer. Adequate time is essential to foster the development of strong relationships among participants and create the safe environment necessary for meeting effectiveness. The first session begins with the facilitator helping the participants establish common rules guiding the process. The sessions follow a set structure, and each session consists of five phases: looking back, selecting a case, asking questions, gathering perspectives, and giving advice. The WANDA method can be implemented in an existing professional learning community or help build a new professional learning community. WANDA represents a method that focuses on collegial relationships, also known as peer relationships (Falk et al., 2019, p. 10).

The main aim of this qualitative study is to explore how primary and pre-primary schoolteachers perceive the benefits of the WANDA reflective method about their professional well-being, using the PERMA model as an analytical framework. Specifically, the study aims to identify which dimensions of well-being—Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments—are activated or strengthened through participation in WANDA, and how teachers reflect on these changes.

We aim to contribute to a multi-domain-specific approach to teacher well-being (Hascher et al., 2021), which explores the factors that may promote or undermine teacher well-being across distinct psychological dimensions. In light of the study's conceptual framework, the following research questions were formulated:

1. *How do teachers who participated in the WANDA reflective method describe its impact on specific dimensions of their well-being, as defined by the PERMA model?*

2. *Which domains of the PERMA framework (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishments) are most and least reflected in teachers' self-reported experiences?*

Methodology

A qualitative research design was chosen, using a written questioning technique that allows respondents to freely express their experiences and reflections without the constraints of predefined answers (Smith and Brown, 2023). Written responses to four interview open-ended questions served as the data source. The intention was to elicit both experiential and reflective content:

1. *How important was the WANDA course for your personal development/ what did you learn about yourself? (Q1)*
2. *How important was the WANDA course for your professional development/ what did you learn? (Q2)*
3. *How can WANDA contribute to the well-being of a teacher's professional life? (Q3)*
4. *Please indicate anything else you consider important. (Q4)*

Research Participants

The research sample consisted of a total of eighteen female primary and pre-primary teachers who had attended a training course on the WANDA structured reflective technique. The teachers participated in a total of 80 hours of regular group meetings held once a month from 2023–2024. Each meeting lasted 2–3 hours. All female teachers (N = 18) were approached for written reflection, but data from sixteen of them were analysed for the purposes of the research. The research population included ten primary teachers and six pre-primary teachers. Of the primary education teachers, six had teaching experience ranging from 3–6 years, while four teachers had more than 15 years of experience. Of the pre-primary teachers, three had more than 20 years of experience, and three had teaching experience ranging from 6–12 years.

Procedures and Analysis

For the purposes of qualitative content analysis, the method of thematic data analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) was chosen based on the theoretical framework of the PERMA model.

A deductive approach was applied in the analysis, with the predefined categories of the PERMA model serving as the framework for analysing the written responses of the WANDA course participants. The analysis was conducted in the ATLAS.ti software environment. The initial phase of the work involved detailed familiarisation by the researchers with the data, breaking down the text into meaning units and identifying the text units corresponding to the PERMA model's dimensions. A total of 221 meaning units of text were obtained, four of which, owing to their incompleteness, were excluded from the research analysis. Each text unit was further related to context, analysed, and assigned to the appropriate category of the PERMA model. The teachers' statements in the respective categories of the PERMA model were subjected to more detailed analysis, and with respect to the theoretical background, the PERMA model was sub-categorized. The subcategories created allowed for a deeper understanding and interpretation of the data obtained.

Results

One of the main research questions was *how teachers who participated in the WANDA reflective method describe its impact on specific dimensions of their well-being, as defined by the PERMA model*. The results are described and related to the individual categories of the PERMA model.

WANDA represents a method that focuses on the domain of collegial relationships, also known as peer relationships (Falk et al., 2019, p. 10). *Relationships* is the category that was most saturated in the research. In this category, teachers' statements such as "*finding a supportive group*," "*peer support and sharing experiences*," and "*peer support, inspiration...*" were significantly more prevalent and were included in the subcategory *Building professional community*. *Trust and open communication* was the second most saturated subcategory of this domain. WANDA participants indicated the importance of respectful communication within the professional community of teachers: "*Communication and its form is essential in interpersonal (professional, personal) relationships*," "*I have learned to listen more*."

As part of the *meaning* category, we identified two subcategories in the analysed statements. The category *Strengthening Teacher Identity* is represented by the statement, "*As the group grew, as Wanda grew within us, so did my awareness of myself and my place among people*." Teachers reported that group reflection and sharing of experiences contributed to strengthening their identity and awareness of their place among colleagues. *Collegial support and professional sharing* is the second subcategory of

the *meaning* domain. Teachers feel that WANDA provides them with a structured space to share experiences and support each other, strengthening their professional relationships and collaboration. The statement “*I learned to see situations differently*” shows that teachers gained a new perspective on their work through collegial sharing, which allows them to see situations from different perspectives.

Based on the qualitative analysis, we identified four meaning positions in this category area of PERMA, which were classified into the subcategories of *Relaxation and Stress Reduction*, *Appreciation of Collegial Support*, *Enjoyment of the WANDA Process*, and *New Perspective on Situations*. The most frequently represented subcategory was *Relaxation and Stress Reduction*. The need for teachers to cope with negative emotions, foster positivity and emotional stability, and gain more control over their work is evident here. We can mention statements such as “*The process itself can help me find inner balance and confidence*,” or “*WANDA can help teachers from the anxiety of being in professional situations that they can't handle*.” Another subcategory is *Appreciation of Collegial Support*. Here, the value of the statement is feeling grateful for being supported and inspired by others. The type of gratitude elicited in the respondents' statements is felt as a response to a specific action by another person (Lambert, Graham and Finchman, 2009). Respondents expressed appreciation, including appreciation at a cognitive level. This is evidenced by the statement, “*Thank you for the opportunity to be part of a not just fine group*,” or “*Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the course*.” Regarding frequency, the third subcategory, *Joy of the WANDA process*, was the least represented. Here, positive emotions associated with joy and satisfaction in self-reflection are expressed: “*I like to reflect on myself*,” or “*I consider the completion of WANDA as one of the best seminars for my personal development*.” The last subcategory is represented by *New Perspective on Situations*. It is represented by statements such as “*To gain distance*,” or “*That it is possible to find a good way out of an initially hopeless or extremely unpleasant situation*.” Respondents here describe a change in perspective and the ability to gain perspective, contributing to emotional stability.

Engagement in the PERMA model takes the form of full immersion in the activity, and focus on the task at hand, which is related to the skills needed to manage the task (Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre, 1989). This link was also shown by analysis of the respondents' statements. We called the first subcategory *Full Concentration on the Task*. In the context of WANDA, respondents reflected on the opportunity to become deeply immersed in the problem at hand by being consciously involved in its complex analysis and thinking about viable solutions. The second subcategory, *Empowering Skills*, is related to the importance of empowering professional skills that

enable deep engagement. Respondents' statements indicate a deeper engagement in reflection and personal growth, a sign of higher *engagement* and achieving a flow state. The *WANDA* subcategory *in professional and personal practice* includes statements focused on experiences of deep reflective techniques that enabled respondents in this cohort to use participatory immersion in analysis and problem-solving in their personal lives and teaching practice situations, as well. This subcategory is illustrated by the statement "*making little Wandas in my head*" or "*being able to observe with understanding*."

Another area of PERMA is *accomplishment*. Teachers who achieve success regularly reflect on their performance and evaluate what is working and what needs improvement. This self-reflection allows them to continually improve and achieve higher levels of professionalism and *self-efficacy* awareness. When teachers see that their efforts produce positive results, they feel more confident in their abilities and more motivated to continue their work. We identified three subcategories. *The meaning of professional growth* includes statements such as "*Work on yourself, learn from mistakes*." The ability to learn from experiences and mistakes is emphasized as an opportunity to learn and improve. The *Professional and Personal Growth* subcategory points to the complementary relationship between teachers' personal and professional lives. "*I blend professional and personal development. I know that I can keep learning, improving, finding more ways or limits*." The third subcategory is grounded in the meaning of *Professional Self-Esteem* that *WANDA* conveys to participants. Expressions such as "*It has moved me forward*," "*I have deepened my skills*," and "*I have learned*" were abundant in the teachers' accounts.

Based on the theoretical framework, we formulated the second research question: *Which domains of the PERMA framework (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishments) are most and least reflected in teachers' self-reported experiences?*

A total of 221 meaning units of text were obtained. Twenty-eight meaning units of text were assigned to the *Positive Emotions* category, 33 meaning units of text were assigned to the *Engagement* category, 83 meaning units of text were assigned to the *Relationship* category, 56 meaning units of text were assigned to the *Meaning* category, and 21 meaning units of text were assigned to the *Accomplishment* category. The teachers' statements in the respective categories of the PERMA model were subjected to more detailed analysis, and with respect to the theoretical background, the PERMA model was sub-categorized. The subcategories created allowed for a deeper understanding and interpretation of the data obtained.

Based on the written reflections of pre-primary and primary school teachers, it was found that group reflection using the WANDA method contributed significantly to the area of *Relationships*. This category represented the highest saturated category among all the questions asked about teachers' personal and professional development. The *Meaning* category, which refers to perceived meaning about the profession, also had a significant presence. Comparable results in terms of saturation were achieved for the *Positive Emotion* and *Engagement* categories. Concerning the WANDA method, the *Accomplishment* category emerged as the least represented category of teacher well-being. The results of the partial questions from the teachers' written reflections are presented in Chart 1.

In interview question Q1 (*What was the significance of completing the WANDA course for your personal development/what did you learn about yourself?*), all categories of the PERMA model were represented. Participants perceived the benefits of the WANDA course in all areas of teachers' professional well-being, emphasizing the significant representation of the categories *Relationships* and *Meaning*.

In interview question Q2 (*What was the significance of completing the WANDA course for your professional development/what did you learn?*), the categories of *Relationships* and *Engagement* emerged as significant. An interesting result is that out of the sixty-two units of meaning in the analysed text, no statement about professional development could be associated with the category *Positive Emotion* for the WANDA course participants.

Significant differences were found for interview question Q3 (*How can WANDA contribute to teachers' professional well-being?*), which explicitly asked participants about the perceived contribution of the WANDA method to teachers' professional well-being. The *Relationship* category was the dominant category here. The second category mentioned was *Meaning*. The same result was obtained for question Q1. For the participants, these categories of the PERMA model are important both in personal development and in the perceived professional well-being of teachers. The third category mentioned was *Positive Emotion*. For WANDA participants, the least saturated categories were *Accomplishments* and *Engagement*.

In interview question Q4 (*List anything else that you consider important*), participants were asked to list anything additional that they considered important after completing the WANDA course. Here, *Positive Emotions* and *Relationships* emerged as significant and interrelated categories. The *Accomplishment* category had zero representation in this question, similar to the question on teachers' perceived professional well-being (Q3).

Accomplishment does not represent a significant category in the benefits of the WANDA method for course participants.

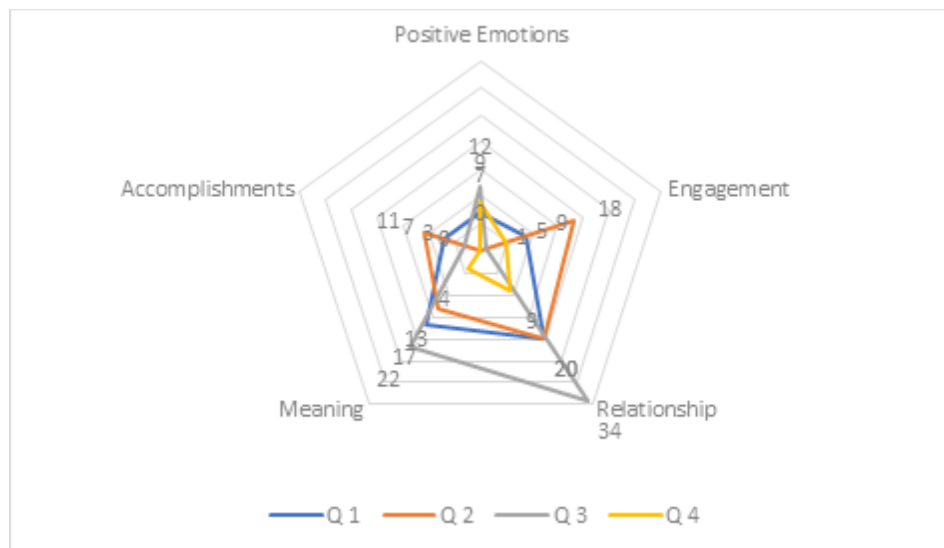


Chart 1

Saturation rate in the PERMA dimensions

Discussion

This study explored how the WANDA reflective method influences the five dimensions of teacher well-being as conceptualized in the PERMA model. The results indicate that *Relationships* and *Meaning* are the most affected domains, followed by *Positive Emotion* and *Engagement*, while *Accomplishment* was the least frequently represented. These findings answer the research question: Teachers perceive WANDA as a tool that supports specific well-being domains, particularly through collaborative reflection and strengthened relational dynamics.

The prominence of the *Relationships* domain is supported by extensive evidence from both Czech and international research. The large-scale study by Smetáčková and Francová (2020) involving 2,394 primary school teachers confirmed that the perceived quality of relationships within school teams significantly correlates with symptoms of burnout. Teachers experiencing high-quality professional relationships reported lower levels of emotional exhaustion and greater job satisfaction.

Moreover, their findings emphasized that professional rather than personal relationships had a stronger predictive effect on well-being. This distinction is mirrored in our findings, where teachers most frequently highlighted the professional value of mutual support and shared reflection within the WANDA process.

According to Konu et al. (2010) and Romano and Wahlstrom (2000), we can also point to the meaning of effective communication, trust, and providing support and assistance among teachers, all of which reduce stress and tension and contribute to overall well-being. The strong link between the categories of *Relationships* and *Positive Emotion* suggests that experiencing one's own and others' positive emotions (e.g., sharing joy) strengthens connections that “lead to many positive outcomes, such as subjective well-being, less negative affect, greater trust, and improved relationship quality” (Paakkanen et al., 2021, p. 2). Finally, the strong link between the dimensions of *Relationships* and *Engagement* should be mentioned, which points to the importance of positive relationships in expanding teacher engagement (Kilgallon et al., 2008).

The *Meaning* dimension emerged through teachers' reflections on professional identity, purpose, and the transformative potential of shared storytelling. This supports research by Zhai et al. (2024), who argue that professional meaning is deepened through collaborative narrative processing and that reflective dialogue helps teachers reframe stressful experiences into coherent narratives of purpose and resilience.

Positive Emotion was represented through gratitude, stress relief, and emotional regulation, which aligns with Fredrickson's (2001) theory that cultivating positive emotion enhances adaptive capacity. Teachers reported increased emotional balance and the ability to gain perspective on challenging situations, suggesting that structured reflection supports emotional clarity and recovery, as also noted in the work of Paakkanen et al. (2021).

Although *Engagement* appeared less frequently, some participants described deep involvement in the reflective process and improved metacognitive awareness of their work. This supports the claim that psychological engagement is enhanced when professionals are invited to analyse their practice in a safe, dialogic environment (Fullagar and Kelloway, 2009; Aldrup et al., 2018).

The domain of *Accomplishment* was rarely referenced, though some participants reported increased self-confidence or a clearer awareness of their competences. However, these reflections were subtle and may suggest that this domain requires

more structured goal setting or external validation to be activated through reflection—a limitation also observed in previous studies (Collie et al., 2012; Zee and Koomen, 2016).

Implications for Practice

The study underscores that group reflection methods such as WANDA can play a meaningful role in promoting teacher well-being, particularly in relational support and sense-making domains. Implementing such approaches into professional development policies could not only mitigate emotional strain but also contribute to reducing teacher burnout, as supported by national-level data (Smetáčková and Francová, 2020). Moreover, emphasizing structured peer interaction can counteract the individualized and isolating nature of teaching in Czech schools, where systemic support for collaboration is often lacking (Kasíková and Dubec, 2009).

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study was limited by a small, homogeneous sample ($N = 16$ female teachers), which reduces generalizability. As a method, written reflection may not fully capture all aspects of well-being—especially domains like Accomplishment. Furthermore, the study lacked pre/post measures and relied on a self-report technique, which may introduce subjective bias. Future studies should explore mixed-method or longitudinal approaches and examine WANDA's effect across diverse school cultures and genders.

Conclusion

WANDA appears promising for supporting teacher well-being by reinforcing relationships, fostering professional meaning, and enabling emotional resilience. These findings emphasize the importance of creating structured reflective spaces in schools and highlight the interdependence between social connectedness and emotional well-being in educational practice.

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