



Strategies for Resilient Teachers Program

Whitepaper

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Introduction

A recent report on the demand and supply of teachers indicated that due to a number of factors the teaching profession could face significant shortages by 2014 (MCEETYA, 2004, p.595). It is for this reason that many government policies and research initiatives have been aimed at retaining existing teachers such as the *Top of the Class* (Hartsuyker, 2007) and *An Ethic of Care* (Tasmanian Educational Leaders Institute, 2002) reports. Indeed, the problem of retaining qualified and experienced teachers appears to be an international concern with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development commissioning the *Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* program (OECD, 2002). While the rates of teacher turnover in Australia are difficult to obtain as no official statistics are available, conservative estimates suggest that one out of every four teachers does not teach beyond five years (Manuel, 2003). The cost of this attrition is great and includes the difficulty of maintaining an adequate supply of qualified and experienced teaching staff where nine out of ten new teachers are taking the place of teachers who have left the profession for reasons other than normal attrition (Jalongo & Heider, 2006). This creates a problem where new teachers are entering an environment which is bereft of experienced mentors, thus creating more pressure on them and contributing to higher levels of attrition (Jalongo & Heider, 2006).

While there are many possible reasons for the problem of attrition in the teaching profession, the most prominent are high levels of stress and the immense demands associated with the profession. As with attrition levels in teachers, it is difficult to estimate the extent of the issue of stress in Australia as Government departments rarely release figures on either the number of stress claims from teachers nor the cost of such claims (Howard & Johnson, 2004). However, extensive research conducted at the University of Cardiff revealed that teaching was the most stressful profession of all those surveyed. Indeed, over 40% of teachers indicated that they were highly stressed, which was twice the average for all professions (Smith, Brice, Collins, Matthews, & McNamara, 2000). Additionally, Schaufeli and colleagues have indicated that five to twenty percent of all teachers are burnt out (Schaufeli, Daamen, & van Mierlo, 1994). While it is clear that high levels of stress can lead to high levels of attrition, stress can also result in additional problems, not just for educational policy makers, but for the individual schools as well.

These hidden costs include the problem of not only replacing teachers who have left, but of also finding casual staff to fill in for increasing short to moderate term absences caused by stress related illnesses (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Indeed, the average cost of a stress compensation claim is A\$12,000 with each claim consisting of an average of 9.6 weeks

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off work, making stress the most expensive and most time consuming compensation claim (S. Parker, 2006).

For teachers, the cost of stress is often health-related with issues ranging from an increased susceptibility to minor illnesses and mental health problems to cases of coronary disease and some types of cancer (Bradley & Eachus, 1995; Ritvanen, Louhevaara, Helin, Vaisanen, & Hanninen, 2006) Psychologically, individual effects include feelings of inadequacy and negative affect with as many as 20% of teachers in Australia experiencing psychological distress and close to 10% experiencing severe psychological distress, a level that is much higher than the general population (Bradley & Eachus, 1995; Howard & Johnson, 2004).

These problems all result in poorer quality educational experiences for school children and deficient teacher-student relationships (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998; Jalongo & Heider, 2006; Kyriacou, 2001; Pithers & Soden, 1999). In particular, burnout results in teachers who are “less sympathetic to students, less tolerant of classroom disturbance, less able to prepare well for classes, less committed and dedicated to their work ultimately leading to increased absenteeism and withdrawal from the profession” (Byrne, 1991, p.198). Importantly, these health-related, school-based and social costs point to a key issue in teacher stress and burnout in that teacher attrition is not the only negative outcome for teachers, schools and communities. As Kremer-Hayon and Kurtz (1985, p.243) have suggested:

the teacher who experiences burnout and remains within the system, despite depleted motivation and initiative, may pose an equally serious, insidious problem, since his or her demoralization and subsequent behaviour may directly affect the classroom atmosphere.

Clearly the teaching profession is stressful and this has potentially devastating effects for teachers, students and the community at large. For this reason it is important that we seek to reduce the impact of stress on teachers. Before this can occur, however, it is important to understand the particular sources of stress in teaching. Thus, this paper aims to explore the causes of stress in teachers before turning to factors which may help buffer them against the negative effects of stress and burnout for teachers. Such an approach is in line with the transactional model of stress which sees burnout and stress as a result of external stressors moderated by the personal capabilities and the social support experiences of the individual which results in psychological (e.g. job satisfaction), behavioural (e.g. extra role participation and positive work intentions[is intentions psychological?]), and physical outcomes (e.g. coronary heart disease and somatic complaints), (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998; Karger, 1981). From this perspective, the remainder of this paper will explore the social, school based, and interpersonal sources of stress and the potential role that personal capabilities and social support play in buffering the negative effects of stress.

Stressors in the Teaching Environment

Social

Social stressors tend to relate to societal changes in the community at large and include the effects of Globalisation and Capitalism (Karger, 1981). These social trends tend to result in stressors as a result of changes in social attitudes, technology, knowledge, demographic shifts and government policy (Giddens, 1999).

For teachers in particular, attrition occurs not only as a result of increasing societal change due to Globalisation but also in a context of increasing competition for skilled knowledge



based workers (Skilbeck & Connell, 2004). The effects of Globalisation and other social and technological advances have created new challenges for education in the form of increased demand due to a shortage of teachers, changes in the demographic makeup of the population and the need for individuals to integrate a vast amount of ever-changing information and technology (Kahn, Schneider, Jenkins-Henkelman, & Moyle, 2006; Mayer, 2006; McCormack, Gore, & Thomas, 2006; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Ritvanen et al., 2006). All this has resulted in an imbalance between what one invests into work and what one receives in return (Taris, Van Horn, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2004). This lack of reciprocity is exaggerated for teachers where, unlike most professions, excessive expectations from society at large are one of the key stressors they face on a regular basis (Punch & Tuetteman, 1996). Indeed, one study revealed that society's attitudes towards education are the second most dissatisfying factor that teachers encounter (Galloway, Boswell, Panckhurst, Boswell, & Green, 1985). Other important societal level stressors for teachers include government policies and cultural changes and the relatively low social status of teaching (Galloway et al., 1985; Kyriacou, 2001). Unfortunately the social sources of stress are likely to get worse in Australia with many teachers reaching retirement age, thus leaving a small quantity of less experienced teachers to take their place in facing the demands of an increasing professional standard due to government policy changes (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Skilbeck & Connell, 2004). Accordingly, these changes in social trends are likely to result in a further increase in the lack of reciprocity that teachers experience as fewer teachers are left to do more work, which in turn is leaving teachers feeling "that their work is meaningless and that they are powerless, alienated and isolated" from society at large (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p.400).

School

School level stressors tend to be classified into two broad classes relating to those general stressors that are found across many industries and those that are specific to the particular industry (P. D. Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Debus, 2007). General stressors tend to relate to workload: either in relation to the amount of work that one must complete; or to the complexity of the work - usually relating to either role conflict or role ambiguity (Cooper et al., 2001; Dollard, Dormann, Boyd, Winefield, & Winefield, 2003). For human services like teaching, the emotional demands of interpersonal work appears to be the most important source of industry-specific stress in education (Dollard et al., 2003).

Workload pressures for teachers tend to relate to time and role overload pressures and are major contributing factors to stress and burnout (Borg, Riding, & Falzon, 1991; Griffith, Steptoe, & Cropley, 1999; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Kyriacou, 2001; Steel, 2001). That role overload in particular is an issue for teachers can be seen in a recent government commissioned report which identified 13 separate and identifiable roles that teachers undertake, many of which take place across multiple fields (Skilbeck & Connell, 2004). It is the role overload and time demands that have been identified recently as one of the top two reasons why those studying to become teachers did not take up the profession and why existing teachers had considered leaving the profession (Bramby, 2006).

Other important sources of work related stress for teachers are a direct result of role conflict and role ambiguity which have been found to represent some of the major demands on teachers (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Kyriacou, 2001). The role overload pressure mentioned above often means that teachers are required to divide their limited time amongst multiple tasks, all requiring their direct attention, and therefore are often unable to meet the requirements of any single role as effectively as they would like, leading to role conflict pressures (Scheib, 2003). It is not just role conflict within school that is seen as resulting in stress but also role conflict between a teacher's work and social roles, such as those with family (Cinamon, Rich, & Westman, 2007) and religion (Lederhouse, 1997). A further source



of teacher burnout is role ambiguity due to frequent educational policy changes made by governments and schools that cause teachers to struggle to understand what exactly their job entails (Munthe, 2003). Interestingly, Bacharach, Bamberger, & Mitchell (1990) see this role ambiguity along with role conflict as largely a result of poor job design within schools.

While workload, role conflict and role ambiguity are potential problems across almost all industries, there are several other specific constraints in education which may uniquely contribute to the stress that teachers experience. These teaching-specific stressor factors include difficulties with discipline procedures and ineffective school administration (Griva & Joekes, 2003) but the major teaching-specific stress is the problem of emotional dissonance (the mismatch between felt emotions and required emotions. Dollard et al. (2003) suggest that teachers are at greater risk of suffering from emotional dissonance than many other human service workers due to the heavy emotional investment that they make in their students. Interestingly, not only does emotional dissonance in teachers lead to greater levels of stress and burnout, but it has also been linked with poor perceptions of the teacher's effectiveness by parents (Dormman & Kaiser, 2002). This is particularly concerning as social support has been shown to reduce the negative effects of emotional dissonance (Abraham, 1998, 1999), while poor interpersonal work-related interactions are associated with greater levels of emotional dissonance (Bakker & Heuven, 2006). These findings show the beneficial role that interpersonal relationships can play in teachers' work and how they are pivotal in understanding teacher stress.

Interpersonal

A key characteristic of teaching is the quantity and diversity of relationships that are ever present in teachers' work (Steel, 2001). It is not surprising then to find that the interpersonal domain is one of the key areas in which teachers experience large amounts of stress as teachers must learn to balance the competing demands of students, parents, co-workers and administration (Ritvanen et al., 2006). It is the complex network of interrelationships that teachers engage in that has been seen by many as a significant cause of stress in teachers' work. From a burnout perspective, the interpersonal sphere is the context in which chronic stressful conditions develop leaving burnout at least partially dependent on an individual's interactions with others (C. Maslach, 2003). As mentioned above, teachers often invest more of themselves in their students than they receive in return and can often find themselves emotionally overextended leading to higher levels burnout (Taris et al., 2004). Indeed, student misbehaviour is often seen as one of the major causes of stress (Steel, 2001) and in some studies has been shown to be the major cause of teacher attrition and poor recruitment (Bramby, 2006). But it is not just relationships with students but also demanding relationships with parents and co-workers that can become problematic (Howard & Johnson, 2004), especially when the demands from these parties are in conflict (Ritvanen et al., 2006). Another source of stress is work-family conflict as teachers' work often intrudes into home life (Punch & Tuetteman, 1996). Not only has research shown that work-family conflict is strongly predictive of teacher burnout but increasing investment in work relationships may actually increase stress and burnout by escalating the tension between home life and work life (Cinamon et al., 2007). While the interpersonal domain is an important source of stress, social support from relationship within teaching work is one of several important factors which help to buffer teachers from the negative effects of teacher stress and burnout.

Buffering Factors against Stress and Burnout

In the transactional model of stress, personal capabilities and social support are often seen as important moderators or buffers against negative outcomes of stress or strain (Cooper et al., 2001; Greenglass, Burke, & Konarski, 1997). Thus, much research has been directed towards what factors are most effective at not only buffering against strain, but also leading to greater



workplace engagement and satisfaction. The factors that seem to be most important on the basis of this research are social support, self-efficacy, self-concept, coping strategies, optimism, and hardiness or resilience (Cooper et al., 2001). Identifying these buffers is seen by many as the key to intervening in the stressful sphere of teaching to reduce attrition and to help teachers maintain engagement and effectiveness (Le Fevre, Kolt, & Matheny, 2006; Le Fevre, Matheny, & Kolt, 2003).

Social Support

While some interpersonal interactions can be stressful, social support from family, co-workers and others has often been considered as an important factor in buffering against stress or increasing resilience and has been linked with lower levels of burnout, especially when that support comes from other co-workers (Greenglass et al., 1997; Greenglass, Fiksenbaum, & Burke, 1996). While some recent research has suggested that certain types of social support communication, particularly those that focus on the negative aspects of teacher work, may actually be linked with higher levels of teacher burnout (Kahn et al., 2006), social support, especially when it is positive and job related, appears to be linked with increased resilience and lower stress and burnout for many teachers (Brunetti, 2006; Galloway et al., 1985; Griffith et al., 1999; Kahn et al., 2006; Kyriacou, 2001; Punch & Tuetteman, 1996). Can we add here that helping teachers garner social support is as important as the availability of it? However, social support is not the only buffer that research has identified as an important contributor to managing stress and demanding situations; personal capabilities such as self-efficacy and coping strategies also appear to be important protective and enabling factors.

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Self-Concept

Numerous studies have linked either teacher-efficacy or general self-efficacy in teachers to stress and burnout, though the way in which stress and personal efficacy are linked has been a contentious issue. In some cases, self-efficacy is considered to act as an enabling factor, not only protecting against burnout, but also increasing resilience and allowing teachers to grow and flourish in their occupation (Ross & Bruce, 2007; van Dick & Wagner, 2001). In other cases, burnout and stress, particularly in beginning teachers, is seen to develop from the gap between expected levels of efficacy and observed levels of performance (Friedman, 2000). For early teachers with “high expectations, knowledge of current pedagogy, and a heightened desire to meet the needs of students and the demands of fellow teachers and supervisors”, the reality of a lack of support, encouragement and opportunity can be particularly damaging (Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, in press, p. 1). The results of this are often “Feelings of ineffectiveness or unaccomplishment [which] are accompanied by a growing sense of inadequacy. The world seems to conspire against efforts to make progress. [Beginning teachers] lose confidence in their ability to make a difference professionally (sic)” (Friedman, 2000, p. 595). The final way in which burnout and self-efficacy are linked is via a direct association with burnout as the dependent variable (e.g. Chang, 2002; Friedman, 2003). Like self-efficacy, teacher self-concept has been identified both as a predictor of self-concept and an important influence on enabling teacher resilience, motivation, and success (Friedman, (Friedman & Farber, 1992; Roche & Marsh, 2000).

Coping Strategies

While self-efficacy and personality have received much research attention, perhaps no other individual level factor has been the subject of as many studies as that of effective coping strategies. This is because effective coping strategies are seen as one of the fundamental interventions in moderating the relationship between stress and the negative outcomes of that stress or strain (Cooper et al., 2001). Many distinctions have been made between effective coping and ineffective coping strategies including emotional verses active coping, adaptive verses maladaptive coping, positive verses negative coping and palliative verses direct



coping. These distinctions tend to suggest that coping strategies either contribute to greater resilience and are thus effective coping behaviours and cognitions or are largely ineffective and may actually lead to greater stress in the long run. For instance, direct coping relates to effective coping strategies that aim to address the actual cause of stress and either change the source of stress or change the way that stressor is experienced. Palliative coping generally refers to ineffective coping strategies that are designed to mask the effects of coping to ensure short term survival that may in the long run be maladaptive and lead to even greater levels of stress (Kyriacou, 2001). Findings from research on teachers suggests that task orientated coping or coping focused on dealing directly with the stressor at hand such as forward planning, tends to predict better workplace outcomes and less stress than do palliative coping strategies such as reacting emotionally to the presence of a stressor and avoiding the source of stress (Mearns & Cain, 2003; Pascual, Perez-Jover, Mirambell, Ivanez, & Terol, 2003; Rasku & Kinnunen, 2003). Interestingly, both disengagement from teaching or complete and sole focus on teaching to the detriment of all other interests predicts higher levels of teacher stress (Griffith et al., 1999). Likewise, realistic optimism, like effective coping strategies, appears to be useful in providing positive cognitions that teachers can use as a protective factor against workplace stress (Seligman, 1992). Indeed, some have suggested that optimism and self-efficacy, along with teachers' feelings of control, could represent a super-moderator that is the key to buffering teachers against the negative effects of strain (Cooper et al., 2001).

Hardiness and Resilience

While most research aims at exploring the problems with teachers work and how to restrict its influence on the formation of distress, the resilience or hardiness perspective focuses more on what factors lead to greater levels of teacher engagement and a host of other positive workplace outcomes (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Such personal capabilities are not only protective, leading to lower levels of strain, but also enabling, leading to more positive experiences, well-being and a sense of achievement (Bandura, 2006). Research from this perspective has identified a range of typical personal capabilities of resilient teachers, most of which appear to be the outcome of superior coping strategies (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Likewise, loss of hardiness may result in teachers being more susceptible to the environmental stressors of their job where research has shown that negative attitudes towards the amount of challenge in the job, commitment to the job, and the amount of control over ones job predicts higher levels of stress (Chang, 2003). This research represents that positive attitudes to the amount of control that one has over their work is negatively related to experiences of strain (Cooper et al., 2001).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The recent DEST approved study, *An Ethic of Care: Effective Programs for Beginning Teachers* (Tasmanian Educational Leaders Institute, 2002), was commissioned to explore the experiences of teachers through training, pre-service, and fully qualified teaching. This report identified that at least 20% of beginning teachers felt under-prepared to begin there careers and a quarter of supervisors felt that beginning teachers were not adequately prepared to meet the challenging demands of teaching. This suggests that in order to retain teachers, training must be made available to help teachers adapt to their role and develop the personal capabilities to meet the demands of their profession.

Clearly, with the negative and potentially devastating effects of high levels of stress that teachers face and the role that personal capabilities can play in helping teachers cope with that stress, ongoing and supportive professional development is a strong requirement for developing effective teachers. For this reason, individual level intervention aimed at building personal capabilities is perhaps the most important approach most schools can take in



reducing the negative effects of stress as many of the main stressors in teaching are inherent in the nature of teaching work and are thus unable to be significantly reduced (Travers, 2001), especially since research has demonstrated the effectiveness of such approaches (Ross & Bruce, 2007; W. Schaufeli & Enzman, 1998; Totterdell & Parkinson, 1999). This appears to be an important approach since many environment; stressors are unable to be reduced through school based interventions as they are inherent to the nature of teacher work (Travers, 2001).

On the basis of this review of teacher stress and the buffering effect of personal capabilities, I suggest that professional development for teachers should cover several factors that research has shown can help to reduce stress or to build engagement and job satisfaction. These areas include:

1. Programs aimed at developing effective coping strategies, realistic optimism and hardiness or resilience.
2. Programs aimed at helping teachers know how to create and access positive and work related social support.
3. Programs which help teachers build self-efficacy by creating realistic personal accomplishment expectations and developing better interpersonal communication techniques.



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