Burnout among teachers: theoretical setting, top-down innovation, and social relations
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CHAPTER 1

§ 1 BURNOUT RESEARCH

1.1 General introduction

The first folio of Shakespeare's works that was published in 1623 addressed its readers with the words "To the great Variety of Readers. From the most able, to him that can but spell". It means that his work was not only intended for scholars but for any man who could read. With these words in mind, the present book has been composed to introduce, to clarify, and to reflect on the findings of the serious problem of teacher burnout for all those who wish to broaden their views on it.

This study is composed of two parts. In part one the burnout construct will be discussed together with an introduction into the self-efficacy theory and the equity sensitivity theory. Moreover, some studies on prevention and intervention will be reviewed. In part two five empirical studies will shed a light on teacher burnout in the Netherlands. In the last chapter the results of the findings and its implications will be discussed.

In the last few years the burnout syndrome has been studied intensively almost all over the world. In the theoretical part of this study some questions about burnout in general will be discussed. In section 2.1 Maslach and Jackson's (1986) widely accepted definition of burnout will be explained, and then resulting from this definition domain, onset, and consequences will be paid attention to. Some aspects that have been topics of many studies will be discussed. The fact that these issues return again and again suggest disagreement or even a clash of opinions between the various researchers. At least one conclusion can safely be drawn: the burnout paradigm has not been conclusively marked out yet.

After this, the issue will be constricted to teacher burnout. As burnout is found to be related to people's jobs, special attention is paid to the core task of a teacher, i.e. teaching pupils. This issue is highlighted in our studies as well. Social relations with principals, colleagues and pupils form the guiding principle in our empirical studies. In connection with this, questions such as what is teacher burnout, and which variables contribute to teacher

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burnout will be put in the limelight. The answers to these questions are important in order to be able to diagnose who suffers from burnout, to disentangle the intricacies of the onset and development, and finally to promote the recovery from burnout. A theoretical framework is needed for reasons of explaining the problem of burnout. Moreover, research on burnout will be hugely promoted when social scientists, medical doctors and politicians depart from one mutually accepted theory that provides them with a set of concepts that prevents Babel-like confusions.

For reasons mentioned above, introductions to the self-efficacy theory and the equity sensitivity theory are included in part one. The self-efficacy theory helps explain human behavior. It does not mean that other theories have become null and void when this theory rapidly became very popular in the western world. However, the self-efficacy theory's attractiveness lies first and foremost in its distinguishing malleability (Eden, 1988; Eden & Zuk, 1995; Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Ross (1998) even refers to self-efficacy in terms of "...the waxing and waning of teacher efficacy" (p.49). It means that unlike other personal variables, someone's self-efficacy can increase or decrease. It is not a fixed and unalterable personality trait. When explaining human behavior, self-efficacy appears to be an important mediator between thought and action. According to the self-efficacy theory someone is not simply an onlooker to his environment, but someone who is active to shape his own environmental context (Bandura, 1997). Our empirical studies will examine whether someone's self-efficacy beliefs play a mediating role in the origin and development of the burnout syndrome among teachers.

Another theory that is used in the explanation of human behavior, especially of employee behavior, is the equity theory (Adams, 1963). Equity refers to someone's evaluation in his relationship with a comparable other person. The assessment of the ratio of the outcomes someone receives in the relationship and the inputs to this particular relationship against the outcome/input ratio of a comparable other person can be perceived as equal or unequal. This personal evaluation of equity in a relationship is termed equity sensitivity. So, equity sensitivity is a personality trait that varies e.g. among workers in an organization, but in contrast to self-efficacy, equity sensitivity is not malleable. In the literature this personality trait is found to be related to burnout (Taris, Schaufeli, de Boer, Schreurs, & Caljé, 2000; Van Horn & Schaufeli, 1996). In one of the empirical studies (Chapter 5) we examined the role of equity sensitivity as an intermediate variable between self-efficacy and burnout.
In the first empirical study teacher burnout is examined among teachers working in an innovative educational setting, the studyhome. The Dutch word for a radical innovation of the upper years of secondary education is "studiehuis". As there are two English words for "huis", namely house and home, it is a matter of interpretation which of the two represents the Dutch equivalent better. In consulting the Concise Oxford Dictionary we found that the word house refers to a building made for people to live in. The word home refers to the place where one lives. As the educational innovations intended to reform the school into a place where students and teachers live and work in mutual respect of each other acquiring, assimilating, and applying subject matter, the word home seemed to be the most appropriate choice in this context. The study asked teachers to answer the self-report Maslach Burnout Inventory and a self-report questionnaire about the innovative educational changes in connection with the teachers' attitudes towards the innovations.

The second study examines the direction of the relationships between the three dimensions of burnout among the respondents of study one. In order to take timely measures in the fight against burnout it would be an advantage if psychologists and medical doctors knew which of the dimensions of burnout is to appear first so that they can tune their help to the dimension at issue.

Study three is about the question whether teachers are able to acquire social support from their counterparts and principals. It is a matter of course that teachers are not only involved in social relations with pupils, but also with staff, administrators and colleagues. Positive social relations are found to be conducive to the teachers' well-being. Teachers who are able, i.e. have the competence, to acquire social support in times of trouble may not so easily fall victim to burnout as teachers who lack the ability to ask for social support.

The fourth study is about the moderating effect of equity sensitivity on the relation between teacher burnout and self-efficacy. In this study we aimed to refine the accuracy of the diagnosis of burnout among teachers. By taking someone's equity sensibility into account part of an explanation may be offered why work-related aspects function as significant contributors of burnout for some workers, but not for others.

The fifth study aimed to improve the assessment of teacher burnout, specifically related to student classroom behavior. More often than not teacher burnout is diagnosed with the help of self-report questionnaires that are notorious because of their social desirable answers. Anyone who is involved in teaching knows that pupils or students are very keen observers of teacher behavior. As burnout is manifest through various symptoms that are classified in the three dimensions of burnout, students of a regional training center (RTC)
were asked to fill out questionnaires on perceived burnout symptoms, perceived disruptive student behavior, and the perceived teachers' competence to cope with disruptive student behavior. If the human professional's behavior is not only assessed by self-reports but also by the client's perceived behavior, the professional's mental health diagnosis will become more accurate.

In short, the studies have a few unifying principles in common. First, all five studies depart from the idea that the self-efficacy theory contributes valid information about the teachers' behavior. Second, each of the studies examines an additional mediating aspect of teacher burnout. The influence of an innovative educational setting, the mediating role of equity sensitivity, the role of social support, and the improvement of the instruments are dealt with in the studies one till five, respectively.

In chapter 7 the findings and implications of the empirical studies will be discussed. One of the most blatant aspects of modern teachership will be challenged in this part. Teachers are looked upon as professionals, as men and women who are de facto made responsible by our society for the education and instruction of a young generation (Cruess, Cruess, & Johnston, 2000). However, in reality they have no or hardly any influence in matters concerning curriculum, didactic approaches, financial responsibilities, referral decisions, test methods and in-service training. Almost every aspect of the teacher's professional life is decided by others.

As the chapters of part two have been published in or submitted for publication in international journals, especially the second part may suffer from some overlap of theoretical introductions, explanations, and discussions. Still, the separate introductions to the studies contain different outlooks on the burnout syndrome and have consequently highlighted different aspects of it.

1.2 Definition and dimensions of burnout

Sometimes, after deep-delving investigation social scientists seem to have landed on a new phenomenon in our society. The question arises whether such a discovery is indeed a new phenomenon, or whether it is an existing one that has adapted itself to new environments. It was as early as 1933 that investigators were acquainted with teacher anxiety, teacher morale, and teacher problems (Turk, Meeks, & Turk, 1982), which phenomena are today
referred to as burnout. The publication of the first article in which Freudenberger used the concept burnout in 1974 was probably on problems known, but worded newly. Freudenberger used the concept burnout in the literature that specifically discussed problems among the human service professionals.

In the literature various definitions of burnout are found. The Maslach and Jackson definition (1986) may be the one best known, but it is not the first or the only definition there is. Burnout has been identified as one type of chronic response to the cumulative, long-term negative impact of work stresses (Blase, 1982). Capel (1987) says that as early as 1946 Seyle described stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand made on it to adapt. An other approach (Hare, Pratt, & Andrews, 1988) says "burnout is a phenomenon in which the cumulative effects of a stressful work environment gradually overwhelm the defenses of staff members, forcing them to withdraw" (p.105).

In a general sense there is agreement on the idea that burnout is a multi-dimensional construct. These dimensions are connected with each other, but at the same time they are independent entities. This view is found in the generally accepted definition of burnout by Maslach and Jackson (1986) that states that burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity. People who are burnout appear to suffer from a lack of emotional resources and a high degree of depersonalization and they believe they hardly achieve any personal accomplishments. Emotional exhaustion is expressed by feelings of fatigue because of a depletion of a person's emotional energy. Depersonalization refers to the development of negative and callous behavior in the relation to others. And last, a burned out person values his personal accomplishments as insufficient, and shows feelings of dissatisfaction because of that (Byrne, 1991).

Although the Maslach and Jackson definition (1986) speaks of three dimensions, and almost all studies refer to burnout as a three-dimensional construct (Maslach, 1993; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993) there is disagreement as to the dimension that appears first. In short, there are three models that describe the relationships between the three burnout dimensions.

First, Golembiewski, Munzenrider, and Stevenson (1986) claimed that burnout started with depersonalized behavior towards recipients of care, then reduced personal accomplishment followed, and finally feelings of emotional exhaustion cropped up. This model was supported in various cross-sectional studies (Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1990, 1993; Golembiewski & Roundtree, 1986). Second, Leiter and Maslach (1988) were of
opinion that the sequence of the dimension started with emotional exhaustion, then depersonalization followed, and reduced personal accomplishment appeared last. This model was also confirmed in cross-sectional studies (Byrne, 1994; Cordes, Dougherty, & Blum, 1997; Greenglass, Burke, & Konarski, 1997). Cross-sectional studies can not definitively solve questions like this. Longitudinal studies make causal deductions more plausible for they rule out reverse causation, the impact of third variables and background variables (Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, & Buunk, 2001; Zapf, Dormann, & Frese, 1996).

So far, only few researchers have dealt with the sequence of the three dimensions of burnout in longitudinal studies. Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, and Buunk (1997) found that emotional exhaustion appeared first, and only then did reduced personal accomplishment appear, followed by depersonalization that influenced emotional exhaustion. Leiter (1990) found that only personal accomplishment had a significant reciprocal longitudinal effect on emotional exhaustion. Lee and Ashforth's study (1993) lent support to the Leiter and Maslach (1988) model. However, neither Leiter (1990) nor Lee and Ashforth (1993) tested all possible synchronous and longitudinal effects in both directions. Brouwers (2000) met the conditions mentioned before in a longitudinal study that partly confirmed the sequence of the burnout dimensions as proposed by the Leiter and Maslach model (1988). In Brouwers' study no support was found for the Golembiewski et al. model (1986). Summing up the studies discussed, no conclusive support for any of the models was found.

Instead of conducting a new examination among human service professionals, Van Dierendonck et al. (2001) re-analyzed five longitudinal studies using secondary data. The results of this study support the model in which personal accomplishment seems to be the beginning of burnout. Together with depersonalization it influences emotional exhaustion. In order to early discover the beginning of burnout attention should be paid to someone's competence and attitude towards the recipients of care. The new Van Dierendonck et al. model is perhaps not the last word on the sequence of the burnout dimensions, but it is very promising and fits in with studies claiming that lack of self-efficacy is a key factor in the onset of burnout (Cherniss, 1993; Leiter, 1992; Schwarzer & Greenglass, 1999).

There are authors who posit that burned out people have a chronic difficulty in dealing with stress (Burke, Greenglass, & Schwarzer, 1996). This may indeed be the case, but it is important to emphasize that stress and burnout are different concepts and that stress does not automatically result in burnout. Cherniss (1980), later supported by Burke et al. (1996), speaks about burnout when people have a chronic difficulty in the management of stress. Stress as such is not harmful. Selye (1976) distinguishes eustress and distress to mark the
difference between positive and negative stress. When trying to give sufferers an insight into their situation, it is very important to reject a fatalistic view on stress and burnout: it is always the person himself whose reaction to stressful events is decisive for the origin and development of burnout. Cunningham (1983) says that burnout “...is defined as the inability to cope adequately with the stresses of one's work or personal life” (p.37).

In view of the seriousness of the burnout syndrome it is necessary to find out the common features of the various burnout approaches so that they can be taken into account when developing an intervention program. Maslach and Schaufeli (1993) found five common characteristics in the definitions they scrutinized.

First, people suffering from burnout show symptoms of unrest and dissatisfaction, like emotional exhaustion, fatigue and depression. Second, mental as well as behavioral problems are emphasized, but physical complaints are also mentioned. Third, burnout is connected with someone's job. Fourth, burnout symptoms occur in people who have not suffered from psychological diseases before. Fifth, there is a diminished effectiveness in one's job accompanied by diminished accomplishment because of negative work attitudes and behavior in general. The recognition of the multi-dimensional character of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment) is important in case an intervention program for burned out people is to be developed. Besides the disagreement on the sequence of the burnout dimensions, the various studies on burnout hardly ever clearly identify the exact level of burnout. Most studies speak of percentages of burnout among the respondents, which does not say much about the seriousness of burnout among the individual respondents.

We should also take into consideration that although the dimensions indicating the existence of burnout are connected, they will appear at different moments and on different levels of seriousness. Not all people who are found to suffer from burnout symptoms, even while working in identical work settings and meeting with the same work-related stressors, fall victim to the same degree of burnout. For that matter, Spaniol and Caputo (1979) distinguish three levels of burnout, mild, moderate, and severe. But the three components of the syndrome are most clearly shown in the third degree of burnout. Intervention programs should regard these fundamental principles of the burnout theory in order to offer help geared to the symptoms displayed.

Besides differences in opinion concerning the definition of burnout, its relation to stress, and the sequence of its dimensions there are differences in the burnout approach according to the time burnout studies appeared. Maslach and Schaufeli (1993) identified three
distinct phases in the conceptual development of burnout. The pioneering phase (mid 1970s till early 1980s) in which the burnout concept was applied to a wide domain of problems, whereas the empirical research was limited to non-standardized observations of a few individual cases. The empirical phase (until the early 1990s) is characterized by mainly large-scale correlational research with the help of standardized instruments. Finally, there is the conceptual phase (from the early 1990s on), that is characterized by the use of psychological theories in burnout research. The present study belongs to the conceptual phase as the various parts attempt to discuss teacher burnout with the help of a psychological theory, the self-efficacy theory and the equity sensitivity theory. In respect of this, we assert that it may be necessary to use more than one psychological theory in the explanation of burnout, for has one particular theory ever been able to explain part of human behavior exhaustively?

1.3 Domain

Originally, the concept burnout was used for professionals working for and with people who were dependent on their help, for instance nurses, social workers, police-officers, dentists, or social lawyers (Cherniss, 1980; Gorter, Albrecht, Hoogstraten, & Eijkman, 1998). In the definitions discussed before, burnout is connected with the human service workers. The relations between these professionals and their clients or patients may gradually generate feelings of negative stress that ultimately lead to symptoms of burnout.

Some authors state that burnout should be approached in the context of the total organization someone is working for in order to prevent or alleviate causal factors and the associated symptoms of it (Eldridge, Blostein, & Richardson, 1983). The question resulting from this opinion is whether burnout will or will not have to be restricted to the domain of the human service workers. Indications for the latter statement can be found in studies that introduce for instance the organizational variables related to burnout or the lack of control that people experience in their jobs.

In respect of the first category of studies it is clear that almost any organization is characterized by interpersonal contacts and that is why the study of burnout should not be restricted to the human service professions (Glass & McKnight, 1996). Support for this can be found in studies showing that interpersonal contacts are the main source of burnout (Gaines & Jermier, 1983). The second category of studies points to a wider domain too, because lack of control is found in commercial jobs as well. Garden (1987) found that the burnout phenomenon is primarily associated with "people's professions", and as a result investigations
and studies are mostly limited to these occupations. She also found that the majority of human service workers could be psychologically described by the Jungian typology. She suggests to investigate job burnout in occupations other than the human services, and to control for the Jungian type (the feeling type and the thinking type). Glass and McKnight (1996) recognize the enlargement of the domain of burnout research, but they wonder whether it is still the same phenomenon that is investigated. We take the view that burnout should be looked upon in its original sense, however, without "deciding on a premature close in our thinking on this question" (Freudenberger, 1983, p. 24 as cited in Garden, 1987, p. 546).

In conclusion we may say that it is important to answer the question in which job professionals run the risk of falling victim to burnout. In the course of the years, significant relations have been found between specific jobs and burnout. However, it also seems as if all work-related problems are reduced to the same burnout denominator. By expanding the burnout domain in this way, adequate measures for prevention or intervention may become very difficult.

This study departs from the Maslach and Jackson definition (1986) (see section 2.1), so burnout is viewed as a syndrome especially manifest among professionals in the so-called human professions (Cherniss, 1980; Freudenberger, 1974). It goes without saying that teachers belong to this group of professionals.

1.4 Process or situation

When burnout is discussed, it is important to consider the time-aspect of the syndrome. Two opposing views stand out. The one looks upon burnout as a situation and the other views burnout as a process developing in someone's life. Burke and Richardsen (1996) speak about burnout as 'the burnout process…' (p.102). According to Cherniss (1980) the process shows three stages. First, the stage in which there is an unbalanced situation between the demands of the job and the individual's resources to meet these demands. Second, the stage that is characterized by an immediate and short-lived emotional response to the ill-balanced situation, in which fatigue, anxiety, stress and exhaustion are manifest. In the third stage of the burnout process a number of behavioral and attitudinal changes crop up. Most striking are the impersonal and distant ways in which clients are treated, along with the fixation on one's own needs.
Resulting from the viewpoint that burnout is a process, the issue change versus stability over time needs to be answered. Do individuals stay in the same stage or do they change phases? Golembiewski and Munzenrider (1986) found that substantial but not complete stability existed over a one-year period of time. The extreme phases (begin and end phases) were more stable than the intermediate phases. Results from other studies, too, underline the fact that burnout should be looked upon as a process (Burke et al., 1996; Westman & Eden, 1997). This point of view is quite understandable, because newcomers in the human professions do not suffer from burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Only after some time will the first symptoms of burnout appear. Farber (1983) puts it in this way "There is no dichotomy when speaking about burnout: to be or not to be burnout" (p.3). In the literature there is little or no support for the opinion that burnout is exclusively to be viewed as a situation.

Burke and Greenglass (1991) say that one of the advantages of viewing burnout as a process over time is that it allows us to track antecedents of burnout, particularly those features of the organization that contribute to the development of stress and then of burnout. When removing the stressors that are related to burnout, the origin and development of it can be prevented from coming into existence (Westman & Eden, 1997). In case someone falls victim to burnout, it should be borne in mind that it is not a situation in which someone will have to live for the rest of his life, but that it can be mastered with adequate support and intervention. Consequently, this view offers an additional argument to regularly screen professionals for symptoms of burnout, for only in this way full-blown burnout will be prevented from developing.

1.5 Theory related to the origin of burnout

It is hard to find an answer with regard to the origin of burnout. However, the social cognitive theory offers an interesting possibility to get a better understanding of the syndrome. This theory is a reaction to the behaviorist theory that dominated psychology for quite some time. Behaviorists try to explain human behavior with the so-called stimulus-response sequence. Gradually association chains are formed and large entities of association chains come into existence, which can account for human complex behavior. In spite of the criticism of late years on the behavioral theory, part of human behavior can be explained by it. On the other hand, especially complex human behavior, for instance the origin and development of speech or social behavior, can not satisfactorily be unraveled. This instigated
Bandura to develop a theory that connected the observable human behavior with the non-observable inner processes. One of the basic principles of the social cognitive theory is that people can learn by observing others, which was verified by Bandura's experiments. The observed behavior can be imitated at once, but it may also be put off until a later suitable moment arises. The social cognitive theory rejects a dualistic view of the self-implying that people are looked upon as agents when they act on the environment and as objects when they reflect and act on themselves. Behavior (acting) and reflection (cognition) in the social cognitive theory only shift the perspective of the same agent, however, it does not mean that the self is converted from agent to object. The social cognitive theory posits that human behavior, - action, cognition, motivation, and emotion-, is influenced by and at the same time influences its environment (Maddux, 1995).

According to the social cognitive theory, four processes can be distinguished in learning, viz. attention, retention, production and motivational processes (Bandura, 1977). In order to explain human behavior as a development in the course of time, Bandura uses the term “personal agency”. The term agency refers to acts done intentionally. Man is the agent of his own behavior. It is an important starting-point of the social cognitive theory that people are both able and willing to control their own lives.

1.6 The core of burnout

The social cognitive theory offers an important basis concerning the origins of burnout. Departing from this theory it may be concluded that it is not the tasks someone has to perform which are the sources of stress, but somebody’s perceived self-efficacy to successfully carry out these tasks (Vrugt, 1995). Organizational and individual aspects are sources of burnout in this view. This perspective offers a psychologically acceptable explanation for the fact that some people doing one and the same sort of work get burnout and others do not, which view is for instance supported by Maslach and Leiter (1997). The situation in which person and task are not attuned to one another leads to a negative functional downward spiral. Any person’s perceived self-efficacy level differs as well as the resulting consequences. In contrast to someone having weak self-efficacy beliefs, someone having strong self-efficacy beliefs will not easily fall a victim to stress or burnout when confronted with a difficult task (individual aspect) or a troublesome organizational matter (organizational aspect).
Research reveals that if someone wants to perform a task at an optimum level, knowledge and skills are necessary, but this is not sufficient (Vrugt, 1995). The person in question who has the appropriate knowledge of the actions and consummate skills to perform the actions in a particular domain, needs a strong sense of self-efficacy to turn knowledge and skills into successful actions. If these conditions are met, the person will experience hardly any working condition as being stressful and consequently there are few chances for burnout to develop.

1.7 Consequences of burnout

In the international literature sometimes individual, sometimes organizational and sometimes both consequences of burnout are mentioned (Burke & Richardsen, 1996). A clear survey of the consequences can be found in Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli and Buunk (1998) and Williams (1989). The first category of consequences refers to micro-level individual consequences, which may be of both a physical and a mental nature. Micro-level consequences that are often mentioned are absence from work, job turnover, decreased personal efforts at work, and diminished work satisfaction. Sometimes, psychosomatic consequences and an overall lower quality of life in general are mentioned. Related to this are tiredness and exhaustion, sleeping problems, headaches, and having a cold or influenza. Moreover, insomnia, an increase of the use of medicines and alcohol and a high blood pressure are mentioned as well. Besides these physical complaints, various mental problems may appear. Depression, anxiety and stress are the most common ones. When speaking about the quality of life in general, we come across marital problems and a negative influence of work related factors on family life. As a result of the physical and mental complaints, people often stay at home for several days and in the worst case they willingly or unwillingly leave their job (Van Yperen, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1992).

On the medium-level we find consequences for the organization. When the professional is absent he cannot contribute his share to the organizational goals. Even when the professional is present it appears that the organization employs a worker who is not satisfied and consequently causes a deterioration of the quality of the care provided to clients or patients (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The financial losses are one of the more important consequences of stress and burnout for the organization, because the productivity slackens and the worker's job involvement diminishes. It is likely that the consequences for both the individual and the organization are intertwined, however not necessary identical.
The last category of consequences refers to the macro-level, i.e. consequences for the nation. All people getting an income have to pay taxes, amongst others to help support the social security system. In Holland over 900,000 former workers (CBS, 1999) receive a so-called "W.A.O." benefit (granted by the law for workers who are deemed unfit to work). It goes without saying that enormous sums of money are needed to provide this category of people with sufficient income to live on. Moreover, because of their incapacity for one job most of these people are stigmatized and have hardly a chance to find a job in a different branch of the labor-market. Most investigators, however, only mention individual and organizational consequences (Burke, et al., 1996; Burke & Richardsen, 1996; Van Dierendonck, et al., 1998).

In conclusion we may posit that burnout is a process that enacts at various levels and at each level a development to a more serious level or a return to a burnout free level is possible. The consequences of burnout are so serious for individual, organization, and nation that it is most necessary to try and find solutions for the origin of burnout in the human service professions and in our case for teachers in particular.