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§ 2 BURNOUT AMONG TEACHERS

2.1 Introduction

Teachers are a well-defined category of human service professionals and are known because of their ability to define their feelings and perceptions of work, which makes them popular in burnout research (Cox & Brockley, 1984). A more serious reason to try and find out how teachers are doing in their jobs is the fact that our society can only function as it does because of the very important role teachers play in the education of our children. Without teachers it is hard to imagine how our cultural and intellectual achievements could be passed on to a next generation. As burnout among teachers has serious consequences for the teachers themselves, their family, their pupils and parents, colleagues and principals, and at macro level financial-economic consequences for the education budget, it is a matter of course to go all out to clarify some of the intricacies of teacher burnout.

In today's ever changing world of expectations it is the never-ending cry for educational alterations that turned the once so quiet and sedate world of the teacher upside down. Modern teachers working in these demanding surroundings have difficult and exacting jobs to perform. In the Netherlands, the Central Statistical Office published data revealing that burnout in the world of education is more frequent than in any other branch of industry or human service organization, like construction, transport, health-care, or hotel and catering industry (CBS, 1999). This finding is in line with research showing that an important number of teachers say that they feel they might leave the job and that they have had enough of their work (Berkhout, Zijl, & van Praag, 1998; Friedman & Farber, 1992). It also appears that 65% of the teachers consider disruptive pupil behavior to be the main stressor of their work. These results clearly demonstrate the impact of burnout on the educational process. The Dutch State Employees' Pension Scheme, responsible for the provision of benefits and pensions, reported in 1995 that 44% of the total numbers of persons unfit for work were teachers (ABP, 1995). Studies in the U.S.A. and England show that many teachers quit their job (Farber, 1991; Merseth, 1992), or if they do not, experience much stress (Borg, 1990). Besides macro-level consequences, micro-level consequences, such as job dissatisfaction, alcoholism or marital problems (Iwanicki, 1983) spring from the difficult work conditions under which teachers perform their jobs.

Apparently there are teachers who are not able to perform their job any longer, or who
probably perform their tasks on a minimally low level. It will be clear that a burned out teacher is someone who requires attention, energy, and perhaps money that had better be spent at the educational process itself.

2.2 Management of pupils

Studies concerning school discipline make mention of increasing worries about disorders in many schools (Kuyper, Van der Werf, & Lubbers, 1999; Martin, 1997). The teacher is supposed to be the managerial leader of educational processes in the classroom and of the inter-relationships with and among pupils. In case of a lack of skills, burnout symptoms are almost sure to develop. Symptoms of burnout are also likely to develop among teachers who may be adequately supplied with skills, but whose self-efficacy beliefs are very weak.

Management is a striking feature of organizational school life (Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990). But what exactly is classroom management? In a study on novice teachers’ acquisition of management techniques the following description is found: “(...) the terms classroom management and discipline are not synonymous. The literature generally defines classroom management as a broader umbrella term that describes teacher efforts to oversee the activities of the classroom, including the social interaction, student behavior, and learning” (Martin & Baldwin, 1996, p.107). In this description first a distinction is made between discipline and the management of classroom activities. Second, the description clearly distinguishes three domains of classroom activities. Pupils in class should be engaged in the main activity studying. Next, social interactions in the classroom are distinguished. Last, the pupils’ behavior is mentioned during instruction periods and when communicating. To lead and give direction to the classroom activities with the purpose to smoothly run the learning processes is the task every teacher has to accomplish.

Managing pupils is no simple task, as many teachers will assent (Kuyper et al., 1999). Schools in the United States of America get help from external professionals, the school counselors. The school counselor is not so much responsible for specific affairs, but gives help to schools to create a good atmosphere in general. In spite of this, many of these external professionals (57 %) are often confronted with disciplinary problems. The problems especially relevant for novice teachers are related to the question of how to practically shape classroom management (Martin & Baldwin, 1996).

In a study on future teachers three aspects of how to control learning processes appeared to be important (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). The first process refers to the idea that
classroom control varies between two extremes, from the humanistic view to the conservative view. The second refers to the teacher’s orientation on motivation: is motivation judged to be of an intrinsic or an extrinsic character. And the last aspect refers to the teacher’s bureaucratic orientation, or to what degree do teachers support attitudes, values, and behavior advocated by the school organization. Teachers, who believed that education is an important aspect in their pupils’ lives, appeared to have stronger self-efficacy beliefs and to support a more humanistic way of controlling classroom activities.

When managing pupil behavior, teachers appear not to react in the same way to disorderly behavior. Research reveals that 30 percent of the teachers, who negatively judged particular ways of behavior and believed it to be of an intolerable nature, were not prepared to accept responsibility for it (Kauffman, Wills Lloyd, & McGee, 1989). Behavior that was considered to be most unacceptable and negative referred to pupil behavior causing loss of classroom control, disciplinary problems, and behavior thwarting the teacher’s directives or requests. Aggressive, non-social and disruptive behavior was found to be unacceptable. When many teachers state that they have weak self-efficacy beliefs to manage this type of pupil behavior, a large part of the pupils will fall behind in acquiring the necessary educational goals, and at the same time the teachers’ self-efficacy will become even weaker.

2.3 Behavioral aspect of classroom management

Classroom management requires behavioral as well as cognitive skills. If teachers are not sufficiently equipped with both or either of them weak self-efficacy beliefs may develop, which may be partly responsible for the development of burnout.

Burnout is most likely to arise in case there is an important discrepancy between the nature of a person’s work and the person performing the work (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The person who intends to apply for a particular job, e.g. a teacher, should be able to really carry out the tasks required in order to be successful.

A prerequisite for the behavioral aspects of classroom management is the possession of knowledge and skills about how to organize everyday lessons. It goes without saying that modern education, for instance the innovative Dutch primary and secondary education systems, requires entirely different skills from the ones a teacher needed some decades ago (Kuyper et al., 1999). Teachers should be acquainted with the new didactic developments and also have the skills to teach in the innovated system. Research reveals that although skills are at the teachers' disposal, they are not always capable to create an orderly and a quiet
classroom atmosphere and consequently run great risks to develop burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 1998; Burke, et al., 1996; Byrne, 1991; Friedman, 1995; Hock, 1988). It is also found that in many cases a substantial part of the teacher’s attention is focused on behavioral outcomes that are not explicitly connected with teaching pupils, but rather with attempts to try and establish order and cooperation (Emmer & Hickman, 1991). Especially novice teachers often experience difficulties with respect to this (Martin & Baldwin, 1996). Skills that should be applied to attain educational goals are reduced to skills to achieve and maintain order.

It is of course also possible that for some reason or other, there are teachers who do lack the skills necessary to be successful in classroom management. The consequential situation that is likely to arise can be explained with the so-called discrepancy model (Prakash, 1991). It posits that the perception of the discrepancy between the demands of the teaching job and the skills at the teacher’s disposal produces feelings of distress. Previous research already revealed that the experience of stress is caused by an unbalance between the demands of the job and the skills available (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978). The situation of imbalance is followed by stressful reactions. A very interesting implication of this finding is that not only a lack of capacities but also a surplus of capacities causes stressful feelings. Teachers should be helped to find the sources of stress and after that they could be offered the chance to acquire and practice the skills to cope with the stressors (Jenkins & Calhoun, 1991).

2.4 Cognitive aspect of classroom management

People having sufficient skills to perform a task are not always performing at an optimum level (Bandura, 1997). It is supposed that teachers mostly learn sufficient skills with regard to classroom management. However, this fact does not guarantee a proper application of these skills (Raudenbusch, Rowan, & Cheong, 1992). The teacher should also have strong self-efficacy beliefs to use the skills. Without sufficient self-efficacy beliefs the teacher’s performance will result in poor achievements, and the absence of experienced successes will produce feelings of distress, and ultimately symptoms of burnout appear. For that matter, the importance of what teachers think, their cognitive processes have not been given much attention to in educational research (Covino & Iwanicki, 1996).

Support for the proposition that stress among teachers is closely related to the teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs is found in Parkay, Greenwood, Olejnik and Prollor (1990). Their findings indicate that teachers who believed that they personally possessed the necessary skills and also believed in general teacher efficacy experienced little stress. These
teachers took the view that they could influence their pupils’ achievements, or in other words were successful in their classroom management. In contrast to this group are the teachers who negatively valued their personal self-efficacy beliefs and teacher self-efficacy in general. They appeared to experience more stress and they said that they were not responsible for their pupils’ achievements. Self-efficacy as described here operates as a mediating construct between skills and performance (Chwalisz, Altmaier, & Russell, 1992; Maddux & Lewis, 1995).

Research into the professional self-image of teachers and their degree of burnout reveals that if teachers believe they do not professionally function well, i.e. display weak self-efficacy beliefs, the relation with burnout is rather strong (Friedman & Farber, 1992). These teachers are less capable in managing classroom processes, and they will be less satisfied with their job; pupils are going to react negatively for they sense the teachers’ negative self-evaluations. Because of the pupils’ negative attitudes the teachers experience a continually weakening of self-efficacy beliefs.

Coladacri (1992) found a relation between the level of the teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs and the tendency to leave the job. This tendency indicates the teacher’s involvement in the educational process. If a teacher has strong self-efficacy beliefs the involvement will be strong as well, and moreover the relations with the pupils will also be positive, for the teacher believes in the possibility to control the pupils’ achievements (Kauffman & Wong, 1991). The lack of confidence to manage pupil behavior is an important reason for job-turnover. It goes without saying that job-turnover decisions are mostly found at the end of the burnout process.

2.5 Classroom management of social interactions

Woolfolk et al. (1990) approach classroom management by departing from two extremes on gliding scale. In a humanistic view the school is an educational community in which pupils study in an atmosphere of cooperative interaction and experience. Characteristics of the conservative view of control are pessimism, punishment and distrust. The first ideology seems to contribute to a reinforcement of the teacher’s self-efficacy beliefs. The underlying idea is the conviction that education benefits from pupils’ intrinsic motivations. These intrinsic student motivations will facilitate the teachers’ attempts to maximize the time that students are actively engaged in worthwhile academic activities (Brophy, 1998). The ideology of control, however, weakens the pupils’ involvement in the learning processes.
Teachers appear to devote more attention to improper pupil behavior than to correct pupil behavior. This fact points to a coercively focused way of classroom interaction (Shores, Gunter & Jack, 1993). The use of positive verbal attention for proper behavior is the outcome of positive mutual interaction. Education and coercion are often considered to be identical (Sidman, 1989). The compulsory character of our school system makes pupils exhibit behavior that is characteristic for the symptoms of coercion such as escapism, evasion, and reactive control behavior (Shores et al., 1993). The last term means that one person’s display of aversive behavior is reinforced in order to be able to escape from the other person’s aversive behavior. Behavior judged negatively is replied negatively. In the short run this reaction may be successful. The teacher may be able to compel the pupils to behave, or the other way round, the pupil may force the teacher to exceptionally pay attention to coercive classroom control management. In the long run these techniques are harmful for both teacher and pupil. Classroom management of social interactions in this way is a very undesirable management technique. Teacher behavior bringing about positive social interactions with pupils is possible and desirable. Teachers’ attention in the form of praising the pupils for their work will reinforce pupil achievement and contribute to a positive social interaction (Shores et al., 1993). Unfortunately, the facts are that only very few teachers use the possibilities of positive reinforcement. Teachers should not only organize their classes by trying to prevent unwanted behavior, but also by positively commenting on pupils’ work and behavior. Following this course of interaction will reduce disorderly behavior.

In conclusion we can say that supportive relationships between teacher and students will promote the students' interest in the subject matter and also the students' academic achievements (Raviv, Raviv, & Reisel, 1990).

2.6 Classroom discipline and burnout

The word discipline recalls conflicting emotions. On the one hand discipline is necessary because a society without discipline may slip off into anarchy. On the other hand, discipline may refer to a servile submission to higher powers. The unresisting submission to rules may eventually deteriorate into arbitrariness.

Good classroom management is necessary for the teacher’s attempts to realize his goals. Management as such is not a goal in itself, but a road to achieve that goal. Being part of classroom management, discipline has been a matter of great concern for the last thirty years (Garibaldi, Blanchard, & Brooks, 1996). Teaching knowledge and skills, educating pupils, is
the teachers' main task, but they often spend more time paying attention to various behavior problems of their pupils in class. The importance of discipline in educating pupils is generally accepted, for without discipline no effective education is possible (Driekurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1982). Discipline, however, is neither slavishly obeying rules nor implicitly charging pupils with rules, but just as in the case of classroom management, discipline is necessary in order to create a quiet classroom atmosphere.

The realization of classroom discipline is the result of negotiations. In the negotiated order theory the negotiations between the teacher and the pupils are elaborated (Barquist Hogeluch & Geist, 1997). The negotiations are a form of micro-emancipation of both teacher and pupil. It means that through communication the two parties involved try to reach a mutually accepted type of order. In this process the one party tries to discover the expectations of the other party and vice versa. Both parties listen to each other, get to know what they like to achieve and in this atmosphere of openness they find a common basis to make the instruction periods pass off smoothly. When this goal is achieved the negotiators will be satisfied and this feeling will positively influence the classroom climate. The structure of the negotiations is formed by clear and lucid rules, and by the understanding that both parties have of the serious consequences of disorderly behavior. The interaction on discipline gives pupils and teacher the opportunity to cooperate and bring about a positive classroom atmosphere in which education can prosper. Disciplinary problems often arise because of the pupils' dissatisfaction with the way discipline is created and maintained.

It is essential for good classroom discipline that both parties know about discipline and what necessitates discipline (Haroun & O'Hanlon, 1997). It is important that school discipline is based on cooperation of all parties involved. Teachers are to be helped in developing a control ideology based on the pupil's self-discipline. The main goal should be to help pupils understand why certain types of attitudes have to be changed for the better not only in their own interest, but in the interest of their fellow pupils and the society as a whole as well.

It is a problem, however, that discipline is interpreted differently by the individual teachers (Johnson, Whittington, & Oswald, 1994). When pupils perceive the various interpretations the consequence may be that one teacher is played off against the other and neither pupils nor teacher know where they stand. That is why it is important that everybody in the school clearly knows what is understood by disruption of classroom order and what the consequences are for the pupil involved. It is necessary, after having reached agreement on the definition of disorderly classroom behavior that the teacher should indeed be able to recognize similar behavior and act in accordance with his counterparts.
Maintaining discipline is a skill that is different from other skills when teaching pupils (Emmer & Hickman, 1991). At the same time a positive relation has been found between strong self-efficacy beliefs in the domain of discipline and strong self-efficacy beliefs in one’s own effectiveness in teaching (Kauffman et al., 1989). Strong self-efficacy beliefs are necessary for practicing teaching on a high level, and this will create a buffer against the development of stress and burnout. Teachers having weak self-efficacy beliefs in maintaining discipline prove to have weak self-efficacy beliefs in the teaching domain. This group of teachers may be more vulnerable to stress and burnout.

Burned out teachers probably do not associate with their pupils in a sympathetic way, they have a low level of tolerance for classroom disturbances of order and discipline, and they prepare lessons on a rather low level (Byrne, 1991). Consequently, they are less involved in their job, which may result in absenteeism, and ultimately in quitting the job. Burned out teachers were asked if their situation was due to the possible existence of disciplinary problems. It appeared that teachers having little or no stressful feelings had only minor problems in maintaining discipline; they had only few intra personal problems and had good relations with their superiors (Parkay et al., 1988). This study also found relations between discipline and the origin of burnout.

Other studies show that the degree of negative stress and burnout increases because of experienced difficult and disorderly pupil behavior. The subject of discipline is very important, for creating and maintaining a quiet place for pupils to live and learn is a prerequisite for teachers to be successful in their educational process (Borg & Falzon, 1993; Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, 1995; Eilam & Shoham, 1998; Friedman, 1991, 1995; Gold & Grant, 1993; Hart, 1987; Hodge, Jupp & Taylor, 1994; Hoerr & West, 1992; Smith & Bourke, 1992; Travers & Cooper, 1993).