Burnout among teachers: theoretical setting, top-down innovation, and social relations
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§ 5 PREVENTION OR INTERVENTION

5.1 Self-efficacy and equity sensitivity as moderators

In this study we use the term intervention instead of treatment. Maddux and Lewis (1995) say that "intervention targets specific aspects of behavioral, cognitive and affective functioning" (p.42). That is why the purpose of intermediation in burnout, aimed at e.g. change of the participants, should be viewed as interventions and not as treatments. The word treatment is frequently used in an acute situation of emergency. Moreover, the word treatment implies the rather passive connotation of undergoing something in order to achieve results. Both clients and therapists should pay heed to France's advice (1996) that "the burnout clients are responsible for making their own decisions" (p.216).

The use of the term intervention makes it possible to use the intervention program as an instrument in the prevention of burnout, for instance in the case of novice teachers (Hagen, Gutkin, Palmer Wilson, & Oats, 1998; Kahill, 1988). It is essential for an intervention program to set up possibilities to influence the teacher's functioning, his working conditions, or both of them.

In the development of intervention programs the self-efficacy theory is sometimes the point of departure (Maddux, 1995). Strong self-efficacy beliefs are important for the mental pliability and adaptation of the individual. When, through weak self-efficacy beliefs people get into difficulties, they can try and find help to restore and even strengthen the self-efficacy beliefs (Litt, 1988). This study's main starting-point, too, is the fact that weak self-efficacy beliefs in specific domains of the educational process appear to be related with burnout among teachers (Brouwers, 2000).

Sometimes individual intervention is given preference to group intervention. The reason is that in the first place burnout levels differ from one teacher to the other and that in the second place the working conditions may differ considerably from one teacher to the other. The teacher's burnout level is also connected with domain determined self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997, p. 466): individual differences are very likely to occur in this matter. These considerations may cause individual interventions to be more successful.

Maddux (1995) suggests that the teacher should be both actively approached and stimulated to try and achieve improvements in respect of intervention. However, the organization should also be committed to the intervention and show a willingness to expend fiscal and human resources (Hughes, 2001; Kompier, Geurts, Gründemann, Vink, &
Smulders, 1998).

There are three types of interventions that attempt to increase teacher self-efficacy (Ross, 1998). First, we find skill development interventions, attempting to strengthen teachers' functional skills. Second, interventions based on changing teacher beliefs, although effects quickly disappear in case of lack of successes. Third, interventions that change conditions of teacher work, for instance increased collaboration and decision-making participation.

In case of interventions aiming to improve the teacher's skills, differences should be made between the teacher's capabilities (competence acquired by having skills at one's disposal) before and after the burnout period. Competence may be an aspect of the prevention of burnout, but not of the recovery from it (Jayaratne & Chess, 1986). Skills are important in the pre-burnout period; after burnout is diagnosed an increase of skills is of no avail for the recuperation of burnout. It means that the intervention in this case should be focused on a restoration of the teacher's self-efficacy beliefs.

Brouwer (2000) concluded that perceived self-efficacy in one of the teaching domains, managing student behavior, only served as a predictor for the attitudinal dimensions of burnout (depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment), and not for emotional exhaustion. When teachers display feelings of emotional exhaustion, he suggests to first restore feelings of equity in the relation of the teacher with the school. In other studies it was found, too, that lack of reciprocity was significantly related to teacher burnout (Van Horn & Schaufeli, 1996; Van Horn et al, 1999). We suggest developing an intervention model that applies these two theories in tackling the symptoms of each of the three dimensions of burnout.

5.2 Intervention programs and results

The development of intervention programs is necessary for both the individual workers as for the organization (Van Dierendonck et al., 1998). However, the application of the theoretical knowledge in the development of intervention programs is only limited to a few cases (Bertoch, Nielsen, Curley, & Borg, 1989; Kahill, 1988). The scarce results prove that emotional exhaustion, a dimension of the burnout syndrome, may be reduced with the help of some of these programs. The other two components, depersonalization and/or personal accomplishments do not seem to benefit from the interventions (Gorter, Eijkman, & Hoogstraten, 2001; Van Dierendonck et al., 1998).
It would be a useful starting point in the development of intervention programs to realize that two problematic situations might occur (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996). First, the problematic situation is a fact and unalterable, i.e. challenging student characteristics (the givens), or second, the problems are alterable (the alterables). Yet, some alterables can only be influenced in the long term; that is why the intervention had better be directed at alterables within a limited period of time. In some cases seemingly "unalterables" were changed. For example Pines and Maslach (1980) make mention of structural changes that were carried out in an organization and the effects on burnout among the workers were very positive. A second example is described in Oranje (2001). He examined whether a decrease of workload from the very first beginning of the teachers' career would influence job satisfaction and thereby burnout among the teachers. As the results are derived from a quasi-experiment that covered only a few years, the lasting effect on a teacher's career is still in the dark.

The intervention can be direct, i.e. the point of departure of the intervention is the source of the stress; on the other hand, there is the indirect approach, for instance the attempt to change a person's way of thinking about the stressors. The two approaches can be put into practice in an active way, i.e. the person actively tries to change the stressful situation, or in a passive way in which the stressors are denied or avoided (Kahill, 1988).

On the whole, the active way seems to be the more successful one, both for the direct as for the indirect approach. Based on these principles Cooley and Yovanoff (1996) made three groups participate in a program using stress management workshops and a peer collaboration program. As they had measured the level of burnout before and after the intervention, they could present results proving that the persons participating in the program had fewer burnout symptoms than the members of the non-participating group had.

Some studies claim that personal intervention strategies aimed at an improvement of the teacher's professional skills are more successful than strategies using psychological techniques to reduce the consequences of stress (Jenkins & Calhoun, 1991; Kyriacou, 1987). Jenkins and Calhoun (1991) also prefer an individual approach to a global approach. Global strategies give information in general about stress, the sources, and the consequences, and how to deal with it. Individual strategies depart from dealing with the problem by mentioning the most important personal stressor, clarifying the personal consequences, and taking responsibility for the stressor by the willingness to do something about it. Comparing the two strategies, it appears that the individual approach is the more variable one, and also the one devoting more time to solve the problem. The individual approach seems to lead to better results.
It goes without saying that the prevention of the onset of burnout is the most effective approach there is (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). When symptoms of burnout do appear we agree with Burke et al. (1996) who opine that burnout is a process and argue that an intervention at an early stage will prevent an unnecessary deterioration of the syndrome. A study from Hasbrouck (1997) not only confirmed their thesis, but presented some other important findings as well. In the program described teachers in training were matched with experienced teachers. The matching appeared to break the isolation of the inexperienced teacher who also learned that it is important and quite normal to ask for cooperation and help. Matching also taught the teacher to focus on instruction and he got the opportunity to practice the newly acquired knowledge. The goals of this way of training are the reinforcement of didactic skills and the passing down of instruments for being a successful professional in the future.

Bertoch et al. (1989) found significant differences between an experimental group and a control group in a stress reduction program. They used a holistic approach, i.e. they incorporated processes that had previously been found to be effective in reducing teacher stress.

Westman and Eden (1997) studied the effects of a respite from work on burnout. As the burnout person is not exposed to job stressors, symptoms of burnout disappear. The results showed that burnout is not a constant. On the other hand, it appeared that the results were of a transitory nature and re-appeared after some time, which was also found in a Dutch study among dentists (Te Brake, Gorter, Hoogstraten, & Eijkman, 2001).

In Van Dierendonck et al. (1998) we find the application of an intervention program based on the equity theory. They found that both emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment among the participants of the program were affected. This longitudinal study included two control groups, and used pre- and posttests, which characterizes it as a positive rarity in this field of research.

In conclusion we suggest departing from a theoretical base when developing intervention programs. Moreover, the program should be tested in a longitudinal setting, and methodological rules should be observed, e.g. the use of pre- and posttests, and the use of control groups (see also Te Brake et al., 2001). Finally, both teachers and principals should be involved in the intervention program in order to deal with both alterables and unalterables, that may not be so unalterable after all when following the recommendation of Kompier et al. (1998) to develop programs that are a subtle combination of a top-down and a bottom-up approach.
REFERENCES


Chapter 1


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Chapter 1


