Teacher wellbeing and its impact on student learning

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“In one day we not only teach, we manage behaviour, plan lessons, assess learning, counsel students, carry out first aid, reply to a long list of emails, write reports, tidy classrooms, create resources, mark books and create displays – the list is endless.” (Teacher, 2013)
Australian newspaper headlines

MORALE DRIVES TEACHER EXODUS
MORE TEACHERS, BUT FEWER STAYING THE COURSE

TEACHER EXODUS

SPECIAL REPORT: TEACHERS REVEAL WHY THEY WALKED

HEY POLITICIANS, LEAVE THOSE TEACHERS ALONE

TEACHER EXODUS SPELLS TROUBLE

WHY OUR TEACHERS WANT TO LEAVE

LET US TEACH
PRINCIPALS TURN TO BOOZE TO COPE

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS STRESSED, BULLIED, BASHED AND OVERWORKED, NEW FINDINGS SHOW

VIOLENCE THREAT TO SCHOOL HEADS
Prevalence

Teachers report the highest level of occupational stress in Australia, the United Kingdom and America (Bailey, 2013; Education, 2014; Milburn, 2011).
Prevalence

• In Australia, 41% of teachers report high levels of occupational stress (Milburn, 2011)
  – Teachers make more mental stress claims than any other industry (WorkCover, 2014)

• Nearly 40% of Australian school principals report feeling stressed or bullied (Michael, 2013)

• 46% of 7,200 K-12 teachers surveyed in the United States reported feeling stressed daily (Education, 2014)

• A survey by the National Union of Teachers in the United Kingdom found 81% of teachers experienced depression, anxiety, or stress at work ("Teacher Stress," 2012)
Principals

• Australian studies show that school principals feel overwhelmed by their workloads.

• They are stressed by expectations and the lack of administrative support in schools, teacher shortages, and dealing with parents (Tomazin, 2008)
Violence and threats

• One-third of school principals experience an incident of **physical assault**, 6 times higher than other workers (Milburn, 2012)

• Most attacks or threats coming from parents, with principals in rural locations most at risk (Michael, 2013)
Causes of stress - Teachers

• Sources of high levels of teacher stress: workload, workplace conditions and climate, and expectations.

• In particular:
  – excessive workload and working hours
  – poor student behaviour including lack of motivation and effort, disrespect, violence, challenging authority
  – management of bullying, and reactive management strategies
  – aggression from pupils and parents
  – classroom and school climate
Causes of stress - Teachers

- Pressures of assessment targets and inspections
- Conflict with management and colleagues
- Adapting and implementing new curriculum
- Teaching efficacy and learning new skills
- Self-esteem and status
- False public perceptions that teachers
- Lack of professional opportunities
- Lack of involvement at the decision making level of educational reforms

Early Career Teachers

“They’ve all tested positive for stress.”
Early Career Teachers

• The stress and burnout process may begin as early as the student-teaching experience.

• Student–teachers who experienced high guidance demonstrated lower levels of burnout at the end of their practicum than those who experienced low guidance (Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007)

• The attrition rate among early career teachers is 50% (Marshal, 2013a; Allen, 2005; Livingstone, 2007).
Early Career Teachers

• More than one-in-four Australian teachers suffer from emotional exhaustion after starting their careers and expect to leave the profession within the first five years of teaching ("Let us teach," 2007; Marshal, 2013b; Milburn, 2011)

• Reasons for stress and burnout include:
  – New practices not accepted widely by peers;
  – Feeling isolated;
  – Low morale;
  – Given toughest classes;
  – Lack of administrative support; and
  – Much tougher emotional conditions than they expected. (Marshal, 2013a)
Early Career Teachers

• A recent study has found the quality of collegial support and opportunities for professional learning encourage early career teachers.

• Student engagement and behaviour management, workload and physical, geographic, professional, and emotional isolation are causes of considerable concern to early career teachers, particularly in their first year of teaching.

(Buchanan et al., 2013)
Workplace bullying

Causes of stress – Workplace bullying

• 2008-2010, 300 NSW teachers and education department staff won compensation claims for workplace bullying (Jones, 2011)

• In a survey of over 800 Australian teachers in government, Catholic and independent schools:
  – almost all (99.6%) teachers reported that they had been bullied at school by fellow teachers, principals or parents
  – more than 90% of teachers reporting that they had been bullied by colleagues

(Allen & Chilcott, 2009; Davis, 2007; McDougall, 2007)
Causes of stress – Workplace bullying

• Bullying took the form of:
  – unmanageable workloads
  – being ignored or excluded from decision-making
  – having their integrity undermined
  – losing or gaining responsibilities without consultation
  – having personal property attacked
  – physical abuse, threats of violence

• Most likely to be targeted by school executive staff, followed by colleagues, principals and parents

(Allen & Chilcott, 2009; Davis, 2007; McDougall, 2007)
Causes of stress – Workplace bullying

2009-2010, 154 workers compensation claims were lodged by West Australian teachers as victims of assaults for being struck, bitten, kicked, punched, pushed, head-butted or spat on by students

(Phillips, 2011a)
Protective factors

- Factors identified as protective against teacher stress and burnout:
  - resources to increase sense of self-efficacy
  - connectedness with students and colleagues
  - supported by colleagues
  - receiving recognition for their work

(Klassen, Perry, & Frenzel, 2012; Flook et al 2013; Gardner 2010; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008)
Consequences of stress

• Stress is related to different work outcomes eg: workplace engagement, job satisfaction and attrition.

• Almost 70% of teachers do not feel engaged in their work
  – Affects their teaching, their ability to be responsive and successfully perform their role, and their relationships with students and parents

(Education, 2014; Flook et al., 2013; S Yoon, 2002; "Teacher Stress," 2012; Turkson, 2004)
Workplace Engagement Levels Among K-12 Teachers in the U.S., by Years of Experience

- Six Months to Less Than One Year: 35%
- One to Less Than Three Years: 31%
- Three to Less Than Five Years: 28%
- Five to Less Than 10 Years: 31%
- 10 Years or More: 32%
Consequences of stress

• One-third of Australian teachers indicated they intend to leave the profession within the next 3 years (Clarke, 2005)

• The personal consequences of teacher stress can include absence, burnout, physical and emotional distress, reduced self confidence and self-esteem, damaged personal relationships and suicide (Gardner, 2010; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Mearns & Cain, 2003; "Teacher Stress," 2012)
Consequences of stress

• Prolonged stress may lead to the emotional exhaustion that characterises burnout (Naghieh et al., 2013)

• A significant loss of skilled and experienced teachers through those choosing to leave the profession (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Mearns & Cain, 2003)

• A half to two-thirds of teachers have considered leaving the profession due to stress (Milburn, 2011; Phillips, 2011b; Simos, 2011; "Teacher Stress," 2012)
  – Reasons: not feeling part of the school community; poor communication between staff and management; school principal was not approachable; highly stressful working conditions; harassment, discrimination or workplace bullying; and the lack of administrative support.
Teacher stress and student learning

- Poor teacher engagement impacts student engagement levels (Education, 2014)

- Emotionally exhausted teachers may use reactive and punitive responses that contribute to negative classroom climates and student-teacher relationships (Osher et al 2007; Yoon 2002)
  - Patterns of student misbehaviour and teacher stress can form a cycle that is difficult to interrupt (Yoon 2002)

- Quality of relationships with peers/teachers and positive versus negative school experiences – student connectedness (Bond et al 2007)

- Poor school connectedness results in poorer academic and mental health outcomes for students (Bond et al 2007)
The way people hurt each other has evolved...
Building a positive school culture...

In a desperate attempt to tackle bullying, the principal reached out to the parents.

I'll give you $9000 to send your child to another school.
Cyber Strong Schools website:

• Five modules
  - Teaching and Learning
  - Whole School Policy
  - Professional Conduct
  - Developing Personal Knowledge
  - Student Cyber Leaders
What are the social networking sites young people commonly use?
• What is my role as an educator?
• Online resources available to be used within the classroom
Scenario 1:
Teacher X recently attended a professional learning seminar about creating a digitally rich classroom. She is keen to implement some of the strategies she learned during this Professional Development and identified an opportunity for students to explore and understand the characteristics of places by sharing and searching images of the world’s environments on Instagram. Teacher X discussed the potential learning opportunities by utilising Instagram to share images, however the principal was concerned the school’s current policies did not adequately address the use of social media for educational purposes.

Key Issues

Actions
Key Issues and Actions:

Amending and updating current policies
Professional Conduct
**Scenario:**

On a social networking site you receive a friend request from someone whose name sounds very familiar, but their profile picture is an artistic picture of a butterfly. After accepting the request you realise it is actually from a student who you haven’t taught before but attends your school. The student sends you a message saying they think you are a fantastic teacher. They also like a number of photographs you have posted of a recent holiday with friends, including one of you lying on the beach in your bathers/swimmers.
Developing Personal Knowledge
• Search your digital reputation

If you are publically available. For a more refined search place your name in “inverted commas” when using a search engine.

As well as Google, there are a number of other search engines you can use including:

• www.dogpile.com
• www.peekyou.com
• www.pipl.com
• www.nettrace.com.au
• www.wink.com

... and now type in your name to find out what is your digital reputation?

your name here

or search here:
Reducing the risk of stress

• Stress should be “tackled jointly by employers, unions and teacher professional organisations” (Milburn, 2011)

• A supportive school culture can reduce the risk of stress in schools (Howard & Johnson, 2004).

OTHER ACTIONS?
• The UK National Union of Teachers recommends the following school policies and processes:
  – “Control measures” to deal with risks associated with working time and bureaucracy
  – Policy on such areas of management as consultation over decision making, team-working, delegation and feedback
  – Ensure all teachers can benefit from appropriate training opportunities;
  – Student behaviour policy is clearly communicated to pupils and parents and is supportively managed by the head teacher and governors;
  – Assessing management style ("Teacher Stress," 2012)
Reducing the risk of stress

• Teachers have called for more **targeted specialist support** to help them cope with the emotional and mental strains of teaching ("Stressed-out teachers call for more emotional support," 2014)

• The promotion of **mental health and wellbeing strategies** for staff, stress management programs, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, web-based self-help, mindfulness, and social support may offer protection against stress (Flook et al., 2013; Woodward, 2006)

• Teachers participating in mindfulness training programs show significant reductions in psychological symptoms and burnout (Flook et al., 2013)
Reducing the risk of stress

- Individual teachers report coping with stress through:
  - Palliative action (excessive drinking, smoking, and avoidance behaviour, take frequent leave and/or seek medical advice which tends to lead to a regime of medication,
  - ‘Mental health’ strategies (regular exercise, hobbies and relaxation techniques)
  - Direct action (attempts to eliminate the sources of stress)

(Dinham, 1993)
Reducing the risk of stress

• Direct action techniques for coping with stress frequently include:
  – taking action to deal with problems
  – keeping feelings under control
  – seeking support from colleagues and/or the principal
  – having significant adult relationships outside work
  – organising time and prioritising work tasks
  – being competent

(Kyriacou, 2001)
“In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

Martin Luther King Jr