

# ***A concern in the relationship between burnout, personality characteristics and coping skills at teachers as a factor that contributes to the quality of teaching***

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## **Abstract**

The quality of teacher life is the primary factor that affects the quality of teaching. Teachers must not stop functioning as professionals. This analyze pays attention to factors that contribute to feelings of ineffectiveness. Burnout is more and more becoming a problem that requires special attention as it affects directly devotion, motivation and the quality of teacher work. It especially affects health. The study brings important data from literature review.

Teachers are faced with a physical, intellectual and psychological threat. School changes affects teachers as individuals but also their abilities to be successful in their profession and to stay in the profession. This study aims to analyze in a theoretical point of view the literature suggestions about the link between burnout, personality characteristics (Type A personality) and the coping skills (active or passive, emotional focused coping or problem focused coping ). This is a study of literature in this field that seek to find out a meaning, why based on these characteristics teaching is identified as one of the most stressful occupations.

The literature suggests that there are at least five different categories of values that people may seek to fulfill at work, and in general these values are: 1) material values (such as a comfortable life), 2) achievement related values (such as wisdom, a sense of accomplishment), 3) a sense of purpose, 4) social relationships, 5) maintenance of the self-concept. Teacher burnout is affected by the lack of some values, these study seeks to analyze too.

Key terms: burnout, coping strategies, personality characteristics, type A.

## **Introduction**

Burnout has been identified in a variety of ways during all these period of investigation

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by numerous authorities. Most of these individuals recognize burnout to be related to a person's feelings of physical depletion, helplessness, hopelessness, depression, detachment and especially disillusionment. It has been said that burnout most often occurs as a final step in a progression of unsuccessful attempts by an individual to cope with a variety of conditions that are perceived to be threatening.<sup>2</sup>

In these conditions the quality of teaching is absolutely affected. Despite the conditions of work the quality of teaching is affected by the strategies of coping with stress at teacher work. These qualities are often related to the personality characteristics. This is why it is important for teachers to be informed about the effective ways of managing stress at work. Lack of commitment at work and the degenerating morale of teachers is a reflection of the lack of teaching quality. In total teachers can not function effectively at work because they can not cope with stress.

Burnout and the quality of teaching, the high cost of idealistic teachers.

A careful review of the literature reveals that much has been written about burnout since Herbert Freudenberger, a clinical psychologist, used the term in 1973. The definitions of burnout reveal that teachers pay a high cost for quality in their work. From all his experience with these phenomena, Freudenberger defined burnout as a syndrome that included symptoms of exhaustion, a pattern of neglecting one's own needs, being committed and dedicated to a cause, working too long and too intensely, feeling pressures coming from within oneself, being pressures from harried staff administrators, and from giving too much to needy clients (1974, p.161)<sup>3</sup>

He found that individuals who are helping professionals pay a high cost for high achievement in either their personal and professional lives (1983, p.25) Freudenberger attributed much of this to "the times we live in, the swift acceleration of change, the depersonalization of neighborhoods, schools, and work situations" (p.xvii)

Maslach and Pines investigated burnout from a social-psychological perspective rather than from a clinical approach used by Freudenberger. Maslach (1973) discussed how role-related stress in professionals could lead to the dehumanized treatment of clients. She collected data on workers involved in human service jobs. Her emphasis was on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

Maslach and Pines identify specific environmental conditions that contributed to burnout and specific symptoms that characterized burnout. Both Maslach and Pines believed that job characteristics are the prime determinants of a person's probability of becoming burned-out. Maslach (1982) stated that "burnout syndrome appears to be a responsive chronic, everyday stress rather than to occasional crises". She also stated that what changes over time is one's tolerance for this continual stress, a tolerance that gradually wears away under the never-ending onslaught of emotional tensions". (p.11)

All three of these professionals, Freudenberger, Maslach, and Pines, stated that burnout is most likely to affect those who begin their profession with a great deal of idealism and caring for others. However, there is a difference in how these three describe the burned-out professional. Maslach and Pines picture them to be less idealistic, with nothing left to give which presents more problems for society. Freudenberger's burned-

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2. Y.Gold and R.A.Roth 1993 *Teachers managing stress and preventing burnout*

3. Freudenberger, H.J.(1974) "Staff burnout", *Journal of Social Issues*, 1, 159-64

out professional may be more cut off, yet they are the conscientious and hard-working professionals who drive themselves.

During the 1970s, Cherniss conducted research on specific job stresses. Many teachers learn that they have unrealistic expectations regarding teaching. Cherniss believed that burnout was essentially caused by a mismatch between what workers feel they are getting in return from their work and what they feel they are giving to others (1980a, 1980b).<sup>4</sup> He also believes that burnout is caused by the loss of commitment and moral purpose in work (Cherniss and Krantz, 1983, p.198). Therefore, committing oneself to a cause for formal ideology may prove to have a positive effect in preventing burnout.

Cherniss' model includes sources of burnout at three levels: individual, organizational and societal. This model contributed important insights into the problem of burnout that was being investigated at that time.

According to Farber (1983)<sup>5</sup> when an individual is unable to make a career change due to economic difficulty within the society and is no longer feeling a high sense of gratification in their work, frustration grows and the probability of burnout increases. Farber based his definition of burnout heavily in the social and economic conditions that influence a worker's life and their perceptions of their work.

Burnout is a work-related syndrome that stems from an individual's perception of a significant discrepancy between effort (input) and reward (output), this perception being influenced by individual, organizational, and social factors.

### **What remains after burned –out**

Teaching has been identified as one of the three most stressful occupations (Hunter, 1977)<sup>6</sup>. It is ranked as the number one stressful job, ahead of jobs such as air traffic controller, medical intern and firefighter (Men's health, 1991). Many teachers are being treated for the same symptoms soldiers in combat are likely to experience (Bloch, 1978). Schools are among the most stressful ecologies in our society (Samples, 1976)<sup>7</sup>. Studies have shown that as much as 78 percent of our teachers are plagued by stress (Coates and Thoreson, 1976), and it may be one of the worst health problems with which teachers have to deal (Sylwester, 1977). Another report refers to 'the new academic disease' (Melendez and de Guzman, 1983), and recent analyses indicate teaching is more stressful than ever.

The most dangerous threats to the physical, emotional and intellectual welfare of teachers are the stressful and emotional dilemmas they encounter almost daily. These have a debilitating effect on teachers' professional health which inevitably leads to burnout and dropout. Simply, if you aren't well you can't teach well.

The 1990 Carnegie Report also indicated that nearly 40 percent of the teachers report that if they had it to do over, they would not become a public school teacher (Carnegie foundation, 1990, p 5)<sup>8</sup>. The Nea study (1979) revealed 41 percent would not; and a study of almost 6,000 teachers in New York found 35 percent in suburbs and 55 percent in New York city would not choose teaching

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4. Y.Gold and R.A.Roth 1993 *Teachers managing stress and preventing burnout*

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6. Freudenberger, H.J. (1974) "Staff burnout" *Journal of Social Issues*, 1, fq. 159-64

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8. Y.Gold and R.A.Roth 1993 *Teachers managing stress and preventing burnout*

again, with 47 percent overall saying no (Fiske,1982).

Burnout is frequently cited as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynism occurring among human services professionals. In a paper presented to the Midwestern psychological association, the five most frequently cited causes of teacher burnout were: lack of administrative support, lack of parental and community support, workload, low student motivation, and discipline problems. Developing a positive relationship with the administration, decreasing workload, and receiving more parental and community support along with disciplinary procedures werer the most frequently suggested strategies for decreasing burnout (Raquelpaw and de hass,1984). A paper presented by Wangberg (1984), to ASCD, is reflective of the nature of the problem. Considing of a survey of 255 teachers, the study found that the most frequent teacher comments concerned poor working conditions, the increase of paperwork, and the declining status of teachers as leading to job dissatisfaction.

### **Teacher ability to cope with stress**

According to studies on burnout it is important to understand how teachers deal with it. How can they cope effectively without causing any harm to quality. Perhaps because of its common lay usage, the term ‘coping’ has accrued a variety of meanings. nevertheless, there seems to be growing agreement among professionals (eg. Lazarus, Averill, and Opton 1974; Lazarus and Folkman 1984 a, 1984b, Murphy 1962, 1974, White 1974) that coping refers to an individual’s efforts to master demands (conditions of harm, threat, or challenge that are appraised as exceeding or taxing his or her sources 8.

An adequate system for classifying coping processes has yet to be proposed, although initial efforts along these lines have been made (e.g., Cohen 1987, Han 1969,1977; hamburg, Coelho, and Adams 1974; Lazarus 1966,1975; Mechanic 1962,1978b; Menninger 1963, Murphy 1973). Folkman and lazarus (1980) have suggested a taxonomy of coping which emphasizes two major categories, problem-focused and emotion-focused modes. Problem –focused coping refers to efforts to improve the troubled person-environment relationship by changing things, for example, by seeking information what to do, by holding back from impulsive and premature actions, and by confronting the person or persons responsible for one’s difficulty.

Emotional –focused or palliative coping refers to thoughts or actions whose goal is to relieve the emotional impact of stress (i.e., bodily or psychological disturbances). These are apt to be mainly palliative in the sense that such strategies of coping do not actually alter the threatening or damaging conditions but make the person feel better. Excamples are avoiding thinking about the trouble , denying that anything is wrong, distancing or detaching oneself as in joking about what makes one feel distressed , or taking tranquilizers or attempting to relax.

An issue that frequently emerges in dicdussion of coping is whether some coping processes are more effective than others. For example if teachers choose to deny the problem it may affect the quality of teaching.

Traditionally, emotion-focused modes of coping (particularly defense mechanisms such as denial have been viewed as pathological or maladaptive. On the other hand denial can serve a positive function in preventing a person from being overwhelmed by a threatening situation.

Teacher personality also plays an important role. If a teacher is Type A personality, will experience time urgency, chronic activation, multifasia, hostility or may became nervous.

A major factor is that teaching is a high stress occupation. Many of the personal and professional problems that are not being handled by teachers are reflected in their reporting feelings of irritability, fatigue, frustration and anger. When these symptoms are not dealt with, teachers experience greater stress which often leads to increasing levels of burnout and eventually dropout (Gold, 1985; Schwab and Iwanicki, 1982b).<sup>9</sup>

One study of 580 full-time classroom teachers indicated a high percentage of dissatisfaction with teaching. Major issues cited as influencing resignation decision included a high amount of required non-instructional duties, inadequate growth potential, lack of status and respect, lack of rewards and little autonomy, discipline problems, lack of parental and community support, and prevalence of low morale and burnout (Holmes et al., 1988).<sup>10</sup>

Developing a positive relationship with the administration, decreasing workload, and receiving parental and community support along with disciplinary procedures were the most frequently suggested strategies for decreasing burnout (Raquepaw and de Hass, 1984).<sup>11</sup>

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