SPECIAL INTEREST ARTICLE

Teacher Burnout: A Failure in Leadership

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The rate of teacher burnout is increasing because school leaders are failing to modify their expectations of teachers. Teachers are adapting to meet COVID-19 protocols, but are paying the price of drained resiliency reserves due to a decrease in self-efficacy and the quality of professional relationships, and an increase in the pace of technological integration. School leaders can improve teacher resiliency by offering supports such as ongoing professional development, regular consultations, increasing time resources, and employing information technology professionals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the failure of school leaders to adapt their expectations of teachers. An already alarming rate of teacher burnout is being worsened by the change in standard operating procedures to meet pandemic protocols. To counteract this trend, teachers need to deepen their resiliency reserves. For this to occur, a change is needed to the supports that teachers can access.

The Problem: Asking Too Much

Teacher burnout causes many good teachers to leave the classroom for the wrong reasons. I have experienced the beginning stages of burnout several times in my career, not because I am lacking, but because of the expectations placed on me by the school, school community and other levels of management. Burnout, characterized by teachers interacting less with students and being less interested and invested in their lives, "exhaustion, hopelessness, and loss of efficacy" (Schussler, 2020, p. 646), leads to lower levels of student achievement and higher levels of student misbehavior (Jensen & Solheim, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic is rapidly intensifying certain causal elements of teacher burnout, including a decrease in teachers' sense of self-efficacy, a decrease in the quality of teacher-to-teacher relationships, and an increase in the pace that teachers are expected to integrate technology into their classrooms Sokol et al., 2020). School leaders, at all levels, need to acknowledge that their expectations of teachers can exceed what teachers are capable of and to change the supports that are offered to teachers.

COVID-19 makes teachers question their self-efficacy to meet all curricular outcomes (Capone & Petrillo, 2018). This increase in self-doubt happens because following the pandemic protocols uses up time that would otherwise be spent teaching curricular lessons. As well, over the past few decades, single-family homes have grown, parents have become more stressed, and screens have become babysitters – all of which lead children to spend less time learning by being in community (Brendtro et al., 2002). To fill this learning deficit, teachers devote lessons to teaching emotional self-regulation. Students can be taught strategies to self-regulate when they are calm, but can only truly learn to use them when they are dysregulated (Carrington, 2019). Emotionally co-regulating with students is exhausting. One year, I taught a student who had daily meltdowns and with whom I was continually co-regulating. I was exhausted every day. Teachers' sense of self-efficacy has been diminished by the time COVID-19 protocols and emotional self-regulation lessons take from their short instructional time. School leaders need to recognize the time constraints placed on teachers and to prioritize outcomes to combat the loss of self-efficacy in teachers.

The creation of cohorts to meet COVID-19 protocols has decreased the quality of teacher-to-teacher relationships. It is through building relationships with other teachers that a teacher builds a circle of support, and through a circle of support that a teacher finds a greater ability to cope (Sokol et

al., 2020). One year, my teaching assignment changed a day and a half before the start of the school year. I changed buildings and proceeded to struggle the entire year because I was not given the opportunity to create a support network within my new school community. Social distancing requirements have also diminished the time teachers have to bond with each other. Cohorts have led to the establishment of extra recess periods at my school to accommodate social distancing in the school yard. This means that grade K-2 teachers see grades 3-5 teachers only before and after school. In my division, the ban on singing, means that choir classes have been put on hold (River East Transcona School Division, 2020). This eliminated the only time in the school day cycle set aside for grade level teacher team meetings. School leaders needs to find a way to allocate time for teacher-to-teacher bonds to be built and tended to within the school day despite COVID-19 restrictions.

Worldwide, teachers have been given the daunting task of incorporating technology into curricula from kindergarten to grade 12 (Califf & Brooks, 2020). While many positive outcomes are associated with this trend, the current pace of technological roll-out is causing technostress in teachers and is leading to teacher burnout. Techno-insecurity is felt when individuals fear losing their job to someone else with a greater understanding of technology (Califf & Brooks, 2020). The sudden and complete shift to online learning, in March of 2020, has led to an increase in teacher techno-insecurity. Teachers were inundated with online resources to help them teach remotely, but were provided with little to no time to learn and integrate the new programs into their teaching while continuing to lead their classes (Sokol et al., 2020). I was overwhelmed in March 2020 and learned to use Microsoft Teams by trial and error as I was teaching students. I used activities that my students knew, and could complete independently, while I adapted my in-person lessons. School leaders need to give teachers time to incorporate technology into their pedagogy in a way that makes sense to them individually.

Teacher burnout leads half of teachers to leave their current teaching assignment, or the career, entirely within their first five years of teaching (Schussler, 2020). The range of negative emotions a teacher experiences during burnout negatively affect the classroom community (Jensen & Solheim, 2019). COVID-19 restrictions that began in March of 2020 amplified some sources of teacher burnout. Teacher efficacy, teacher-to-teacher relationships, and technological integration into pedagogy will improve once all school leaders recognize when their expectations of teachers exceed what the teachers are capable of and improved supports are provided for teachers.

The Solution: A Change in Supports

A decline in self-efficacy, faltering professional relationships and an increase in techno-insecurity are three contributing factors to teacher burnout. The ever-changing COVID-19 restrictions that have been in place since March 2020 have high-lighted that many supports currently offered to teachers are reactive solutions that do not eliminate the source of stress or help teachers build resiliency. School leaders need to offer proactive supports and resources for teachers to expand their resiliency reserves (Damico, 2020). These proactive measures could include ongoing professional development, regular consultations of front-line educators, an increase in time resources and employing information technology (IT) professionals.

For teachers to become more resilient, school leaders need to change the professional development (PD) opportunities that are offered. Rather than leading PD sessions that are one-off or behavior management based, teachers require ongoing PD that is relationship centered. This kind of PD will increase teacher confidence to co-regulate with students and will increase their ability to cope through consistent reminders of why they are using a particular pedagogy. Dr. Jody Carrington (2019) presented the idea of the "light up" in her book *Kids These Days* (p. 30). To help teachers remain passionate about the students who are the most difficult, she offers a "Stay Lit" conference every January and a "Relit" conference every November (Carrington, 2020). I read Dr. Carrington's book in February 2020 and it forever changed my personal pedagogy. By October 2020, I was struggling to continue with my change in pedagogy alone. On the Manitoba Teachers' Society PD day 2020, I

heard Dr. Carrington speak, and was able to recommit myself to her pedagogy. School leaders need to change the PD they are offering to ongoing, relationship-based PD that will lead teachers to deepen their resiliency.

To raise teacher bounce back, school leaders need to consult regularly with front line educators. A support that helps one teacher manage her stress and build a greater ability to cope may not help another (Rajendran et al., 2020). A remote learning teacher hub (Manitoba Government, 2020) will be the support that some teachers need, but not others. This hub is to employ many teachers when there is already a shortage of substitute teachers in many divisions (Bedford, 2020). Unfilled substitute teacher requests are often covered by resource teachers and educational assistants; however, in my building, there is no one who can be reassigned. The support I would place the most value in right now is IT support for the classroom space that does not have a projector, but this support would not be valuable to all teachers. Teacher resiliency will rise when school leaders consult with them and act upon the information that is shared.

Teacher resiliency will improve when school leaders increase the time given to teachers for collaboration and maintaining professional relationships (Capone & Petrillo, 2018). By restructuring teachers' timetables, school leaders can increase the amount of teacher collaboration (Rosenberg, 2020). Teacher collaboration is important not only to student success but also as protection from burnout. When teachers plan and teach lessons with other teachers, they develop improved teaching tools with a sharper focus on students, leading to higher student achievement. Successful collaboration between teachers can happen only when sufficient time is allotted to building connections and trust with colleagues (Muckenthaler et al., 2020). When my school went to code orange on the Manitoba Pandemic Response System, I went from teaching one class of 19 students to teaching 41 students split among three classrooms. This pushed me into a more intimate form of collaboration with my co-teacher. I went from exchanging ideas and materials with Cathy (a pseudonym) to a co-constructive model of collaboration (Muckenthaler et al, 2020). When given adequate time resources, teachers' resiliency will improve as they collaborate and build relationships with other educators.

School leaders can amplify teacher resiliency by employing IT professionals. Having a dedicated IT professional in a school would strengthen teachers' ability to cope because of the knowledge that they always have access to a person to help with technology problems. My school has 80 laptops and 30 iPads. Currently, the library technician is looking after them, but because the library is being used as a classroom, it is always not possible to access support when it is most needed. When we had a designated IT teacher, she was not given release time for IT-related tasks. For this reason, she gave up personal time and lunch breaks to accomplish this work (C. Paul, personal communication, September, 2019). An increase in teacher resiliency could be achieved by having dedicated IT professionals in school buildings.

The proactive steps of ongoing professional development, regular consultations of front-line educators, an increase in teacher time resources, and employing IT professionals have the potential to increase teacher bounce back. Offering these supports will permit teachers to cope with the ever-changing demands of the school environment (Capone & Petrillo, 2018). Raising teacher resiliency will keep teachers in classrooms in a time when many are thinking of leaving (Bedford & Fullan Kolton). School leaders can strengthen teacher resiliency by changing the way they offer support to educators.

Conclusion

Teachers will be more resilient when they are provided the opportunity to access the supports that they truly need. The deeper a teacher's resiliency reserves, the greater protection that professional has from the symptoms of burnout. School leaders must adjust their expectations of teachers considering COVID-19 protocols.

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