

“NEW SKILLS AND ABILITIES TO ENABLE ME TO SUPPORT MY PUPILS IN A FORWARD THINKING POSITIVE WAY”: A SELF-DISCOVERY PROGRAMME FOR TEACHERS IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOL.

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The purpose of this study is to adapt, deliver, and pilot test the Self-discovery Programme (SDP) for teachers in mainstream school. The study used a pre-test post-test design. Quantitative data were collected by self-administered questionnaires given to teachers at two points in time: baseline (immediately pre-SDP) and immediately post-SDP. Qualitative data were collected via open questions at baseline and post-SDP to gain more in-depth information about teacher's experience of the SDP. In addition, observations were conducted at four points in time: sessions 1, 2, 6, and 10. Results suggest that overall the SDP-Teachers had been an enjoyable experience. The results of this study will add to the sparse literature and evidence base concerning interventions for teachers in mainstream schools, particularly interventions that consist of complementary and alternative medicine.

Introduction

Teacher Stress

It is a commonly held belief that teaching can be a highly stressful profession (Jarvis, 2002). This is supported by national survey data from the UK (Dunham & Varma, 1976; Travers & Cooper, 1996). Travers and Cooper (1996) found that one quarter of the 1,790 teachers surveyed, from a cross-section of school types, sectors and teaching grades, reported that they regarded their profession as *very or extremely stressful*. The National Union of Teachers report that stress is one of the biggest problems facing teachers today, and that it is the main health and safety concern in four out of five schools (NUT, 1999). Compared to other occupational groups (e.g. doctors, dentists, nurses) teachers experience lower job satisfaction and poorer mental health, such as anxiety and depression (Travers & Cooper, 1993).

The nature and causes of teacher stress are complex (Borg & Riding, 1991). Studies have examined the role different factors may play in relation to teacher stress such as environmental factors, contextual factors, and teacher coping and personality characteristics (Mearns & Cain, 2003). Although *classroom discipline* is a well documented source of teacher stress (Lewis, 1999), Kyriacou (2001) suggests that few studies have examined the impact of pupil behaviour problems and pupil-teacher interaction on teacher stress.

Teacher stress related to pupil behavioural problems

International research has provided mixed findings on the effect pupil behavioural problems have on teacher stress. When teachers are questioned as to what causes them stress in relation to their work, pupil behaviour is rarely cited (Okebukola & Jegede, 1992; Pullis, 1992). However, in the UK, Ho (1996) found five main issues to emerge as potential sources of teacher stress, one of which was pupil misbehaviour. A more recent study by Williams and Gersch (2004) also found that London based teachers in mainstream school reported misbehaviour of pupils (including noisy pupils and pupils' poor attitudes to work) as a source of stress. However teacher reports of student misbehaviour may be biased, as a study by Whiteman, Young, and Fisher (1985) demonstrated: the more stress teachers were under, the more negative their interpretation of student behaviour became. A report published by OFSTED on managing challenging behaviour in schools (OFSTED, 2005) reports more pupil behaviour problems in secondary compared with primary schools. The most common form of poor behaviour was the persistent low-level disruption of lessons that interrupts learning, can be exhausting and tedious for teachers, and may influence teachers' motivation, confidence, and morale.

Interventions to manage teacher stress

There is little research in the UK on the effectiveness of interventions to help reduce teacher stress (Jarvis, 2002; Kyriacou, 2001). Hall, Hall, and Abaci (1997) reported changes in teachers following a two-year part-time masters course in human relations, which used an experiential learning methodology based mainly on humanistic psychological theory. They found participants reported a reduction in stress, a more humanistic orientation towards pupil control (that is a more democratic approach to discipline), an increased sense of internal locus of control (i.e. an individual's belief that they have control over what happens to them in their life), and an improved sense of personal accomplishment. These findings were supported by qualitative interviews in which participants' discussed issues which included: being able to manage their stress better, giving pupils more responsibility in the classroom, and feeling more in control of their lives.

A Swedish study by Jacobsson, Pousette, and Thylefors (2001) examined possible factors related to feelings of mastery among teachers, to inform the development of guidelines for stress management interventions. They found that feelings of mastery were best predicted by learning orientation, positive feedback, and goal clarity. Learning orientation can be defined as continuous learning and professional development, which has been shown to predict professional accomplishment (Kuo, 1989). Further recommendations for interventions and professional development include encouraging teachers to develop more effective coping strategies by allowing them to reflect on the strategies they use (Lewis, 1999).

In the UK the Quiet Place Project offers holistic support for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, their families, and the school. It offers teachers support in terms of stress management to negate the effects of teacher stress on pupils. A pilot qualitative study offers some evidence to the usefulness of the project in offering direct and indirect support in terms of teacher stress levels (Renwick & Spalding, 2002).

Complementary therapy-based interventions

No UK studies were found to examine complementary therapy-based interventions as a mechanism to reduce stress in teachers. Two studies in the USA have examined various meditation techniques with positive outcomes (Anderson, 1996; Anderson, Levinson, Barker, & Kiewra, 1999; Winzelberg & Luskin, 1999). In a study using meditation techniques among teachers in South Africa, teachers reported decreased tension, personal mastery, increased sense of identity and tranquillity, improved coping behaviour and social interaction, and experiencing *transcending experiences* Kirsten (2004). Solloway (2000) demonstrated that not only could meditation techniques reduce teacher stress but the positive effects extended into the classroom and to the children. Teachers were taught a Contemplative Practitioner model of classroom practice. They learnt a meditation technique for use at home, which used the breath to anchor the attention in the moment. In addition, they were taught mindfulness practice (intentionally bringing awareness to the present) to use in the classroom. Qualitative evaluation reported improved student-teacher cooperation and interaction within the classroom leading to a more pleasant working environment. Also, students began to adopt the breathing technique that they saw their teachers using to keep themselves on-task in their work.

In conclusion, there have been a limited amount of studies on stress management interventions and on complementary therapy-based interventions for teachers, particularly in the UK. Those that have been conducted suggest preliminary evidence for the efficacy of meditation techniques at reducing teacher stress that may extend to other areas of the teacher's life and to the lives of their pupils.

The Self-Discovery Programme

The Self-Discovery Programme (Cullen-Powell, McCormak, & Barlow, 2001; Powell, 2005) was developed for children with special health and educational needs, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and children at risk of exclusion from mainstream school. Evaluation of the Self-Discovery Programme (SDP) for children has been conducted with positive results (Cullen-Powell & Barlow, 2005; Powell, Barlow, & Bagh, 2005). The primary aims of the Self-Discovery Programme (SDP) are to enhance self-awareness, increase self-esteem, and improve communication and social skills. The SDP is set in the theoretical framework of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1988). Strategies shown to enhance self-efficacy are mastery experience, role modelling, persuasion, and reinterpretation of physiological and affective state (Bandura, 1988). The SDP provides an environment in which simple relaxation, breathing, and meditation techniques can be practised (mastery experience), and participants

can observe their peers also practising the techniques (role modelling). The tutor provides clear instructions and explains that by using the techniques participants have a means of relaxing themselves during times of stress, and thus will be able to consider their response from a place of stillness rather than a place of heightened affect (persuasion). The relaxation techniques also provide a means of down-regulating physiological arousal and affective states (e.g. stress response).

The purpose of this study is to adapt, deliver, and pilot test the SDP for teachers in mainstream school. The aims of the study are to:

- Adapt the SDP for teachers.
- Deliver the SDP to teachers in mainstream school.
- Evaluate the SDP in terms of delivery, content, practical application, and value to teachers.
- Examine teachers' psychological well-being before and after the SDP.
- Review and modify the SDP based on the results of the evaluation and teacher / tutor feedback during the Programme.

Method

Participants

Eighteen participants were recruited from a Secondary School in Coventry. Fourteen were teachers, three were learning mentors to children, and one was an assistant to learning support. Participants were recruited via the Head of Nurture at the School. The Head of Nurture received information leaflets to help with the recruiting process. All participants completed a consent form and a baseline questionnaire prior to commencement on the SDP.

Procedure

The study used a pre-test post-test design. Quantitative data were collected by self-administered questionnaires given to teachers at two points in time: baseline (immediately pre-SDP) and immediately post-SDP.

Qualitative data were collected via open questions on the questionnaires. At baseline they were used to ask teachers to articulate their expectations of the SDP and what they hope to gain from attending the SDP. Immediately after the SDP, they were used to ask teachers to provide information on their experience of the SDP and to provide feedback on the delivery, content, and practical application of the SDP in their respective environment. In addition, observations by a researcher were conducted at four points in time: sessions 1, 2, 6, and 10. They were taken to inform the latter two objectives of this research. That is, to provide information that will contribute to the evaluation, review, and modification of the SDP for teachers.

Measuring Instruments

Participant demographics were collected in the Baseline questionnaire only. The following standard measuring instruments were used to assess participants' psychological well-being at both time points.

Psychological well-being was measured by the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) developed by Zigmond and Snaith (1983). The HADS is quick and easy to complete, has established reliability and validity (Moorey et al., 1991), and was designed to detect the presence and severity of relatively mild degrees of mood disorder in non-psychiatric, hospital out-patients. Scores range from 0-21, with higher scores indicating greater anxiety and greater depression.

Perceived Stress was measured using The *Perceived Stress Scales* (PSS10). The 10 PSS items explore feelings and thoughts during the last month, and respondents are asked how often they felt a certain way. The PSS10 has established validity and reliability (Cohen & Williamson, 1988).

Self-efficacy was measured using the Generalised Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) as modified for use in the UK (Barlow, Williams, & Wright, 1996). The GSES has established reliability and validity, and was designed to examine the strength of an individual's belief in his or her ability to respond to new or difficult situations and to cope with any associated obstacles or setbacks.

Participant health status was measured using a Visual Analogue Scale (VAS). The VAS is a 10cm horizontal line, anchored 0 (Poor) health, to 10 (Perfect) health.

Positive reappraisal involves reframing a situation to see it in a positive light. It was assessed using a subscale from the COPE, which has been shown to have established validity and reliability (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989).

The Self-Discovery Programme-Teachers

The tutor, already trained to deliver the SDP to children, delivered the SDP to teachers. The SDP comprised 10 sessions spread over one academic year. Each session was 1 hour in length and was delivered after school hours from 3.45 to 4.45pm. A room to deliver the SDP was provided by the school for the duration of the SDP.

The primary themes of the SDP-Teachers include simple stretching exercises, relaxation techniques, self-hand massage, peer hand and arm massage, colour, the senses, and communication including voice work and trust. Themes were in alignment with the themes of the SDP-children. At the start of each session teachers were welcomed with a handshake from the tutor (this is also an activity undertaken in the SDP-children).

Analysis

Quantitative data were subject to simple frequencies and percentages where applicable. Student t-tests were used to compare mean scores on variables pre-post SDP. Qualitative data from the questionnaires and observations were subject to standard content analysis.

Results*Participant characteristics*

The majority of participants were female (94%), were married or living with a partner (61%), White European (89%), and all had formal educational qualifications. Participants had a mean age of 40 (SD = 8) years. Eighty-nine percent were employed full-time and a total of 4 (22%) participants reported health problems including: Clinical anaemia, low thyroid function, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, and eczema. (See Table 1.)

Table 1
Participants' Characteristics

	Number (n=18)	%
Female	17	94
Male	1	6
Single	4	22
Married	10	56
Living with Partner	1	6
Divorced	2	11
Separated	1	6
White / European	16	89
Asian	1	6
Black/Afro Caribbean	1	6
Educational qualifications		
Yes	18	100
Health Problems		
Yes	4	22

Participants all worked in a Secondary School in Coventry. They comprised 14 teachers including 1 unqualified teacher, 1 assistant head teacher, 1 head of learning, 1 SEN teacher, the head of nurture, and the head of English, 3 learning mentors, and 1 assistant to learning. Sixteen participants were employed full-time and 2 were part-time. Participants had a mean of 13 years (SD = 10) teaching experience.

Qualitative data – Baseline (expectations of the SDP)

Seven participants wrote that they expected to learn coping strategies to deal with the day-to-day challenges and stress at work, and two participants hoped this would extend to their personal life. Three participants felt they would be learning about relaxation and three participants also expected to learn relaxation techniques to help their colleagues and pupils.

Ways of coping more productively with things that can affect the working life, to help oneself, pupils and colleagues. P14

Deeper insight into turning challenges into a more positive experience and outcome. P14

Two participants expected to learn how to increase their self-esteem. Two participants were not sure what to expect. One participant hoped that the Programme would help her to help her pupils.

New skills and abilities to enable me to support my pupils in a forward thinking positive way; to be able to reach their full potential in life. P9

Observations

Introductory session (session one). At the first session, fifteen teachers were present. One teacher was absent due to ill-health and two teachers failed to attend. The aim of the introductory session was to introduce the SDP aims and objectives to participants, and to introduce the tutor to the group.

Initially when teachers arrived for the session they were relaxed and chatty with one another. The group then sat down in a circle with the tutor. The group was attentive and very quiet, which seemed to reflect a slight nervousness and anticipation of what was to come. All teachers participated in the stretching and relaxation exercises. However, they were generally quiet throughout the session, even when the tutor asked the group questions. Throughout the session teachers appeared reticent: reserved verbal responses and lack of facial expression. Some teachers appeared self-conscious whilst taking part in the exercises. However, the atmosphere became more relaxed after the final meditation/relaxation exercise, which involved a visualisation and the joining of hands. Teachers appeared more open, were smiling more, were actively attentive, and seemed to be more connected as a group.

Session Two. At session two, 10 teachers were present. Two teachers were absent due to ill-health, two teachers had meetings with parents, three teachers failed to attend, and one teacher withdrew. The teachers appeared more relaxed this week. On arrival to the session, conversation was directed at the whole group including the tutor rather than between small groups of individuals. The exception to this was one participant who had a cold sat and outside the circle for the duration of the session.

As the session began teachers seemed more attentive and their gaze was focused mainly on the tutor. Teachers talked about their experience of the first session. This was discussed with the group and, there was increased cohesion and interaction. Teachers listened respectfully and appeared interested in what their colleagues were saying and made relevant comments in response. One teacher said that a time had occurred when she felt the need to do one of the relaxation exercises practiced in the first session to help her relax. However, as she was in a classroom situation, she involved the children in her class. This had been a very positive experience and the children had responded positively and appeared to enjoy it.

The tutor explained to everyone that they would be starting to learn peer hand massage today and asked for a volunteer to demonstrate on. Once the demonstration was completed, the group split into pairs to practise on one another. The group was generally very quiet when practising the massage; any talking that did occur was about the massage. When finished, teachers talked excitedly to their massage partner sharing their experience of giving and receiving massage. When asked if they had enjoyed the massage teachers said *lovely* in unison. Teachers looked relaxed and had clearly enjoyed the experience. The teacher who sat outside of the circle commented *it is relaxing just watching... You can just sense the calmness in the room.*

During the final exercise (hand holding meditation) teachers appeared less self-conscious than at the first session; facial expressions were relaxed. At the end of the session teachers shared their experiences of touch and massage with the group and there was a short discussion about the importance of positive touch.

Session six. Eight teachers were present. Nine teachers gave no reason for their absence. However, it was noted that invariably teachers have to speak with parents or are called upon for other duties after school, sometimes at short notice.

The session began with the tutor explaining to the teachers that this week's session would be about colour. Body language was now very relaxed; teachers began to relax in their chairs, were more open, and more engaging. They showed their interest in the session by making lots of eye contact with the tutor, verbal and non-verbal agreement with what she was saying and were a lot more ready to make comments or give their opinion about the subject.

After some exercises using colour, the tutor opened up a discussion with the group about the importance of colour in our everyday lives. However, at this point the room became very noisy. The tutor brought the group back by introducing some of the previous weeks stretching and relaxation exercises. One teacher said she had used the stretching and relaxation exercises after she had been sitting still at the theatre for a long period of time. Another teacher shared with the group that she had used the calming palm massage technique helpful during class. Thus, teachers appeared to be using the techniques learned at work and in their personal life.

The group requested that they practice self-massage to which the tutor was happy to oblige. However, the atmosphere had become lively and noisy as teachers talked excitedly about the subject matter. The tutor brought the group back by suggesting a short meditation before learning self-hand massage. Relaxing music was played in the background. All teachers kept their eyes closed throughout the exercise and eventually became quiet. The meditation succeeded in calming the atmosphere to some extent; but it soon returned to being lively and chatty. It was clear that the group was in a relaxed, but inquisitive and eager to learn frame of mind.

The tutor moved on swiftly to demonstrating the hand massage and again the atmosphere quietened as the group followed instructions. At the end of this session the atmosphere was relaxed yet alert as teachers were always quick to respond or start talking once the exercise had finished. At the end of the session no one left straight away.

This session had a very lively but happy atmosphere to it. The chatting was nearly always about the session / exercise and reflected the groups' interest. Their interest was also reflected by their body language, particularly eye contact with the tutor and eagerness to discuss the subjects. It was also clear that some of the teachers had begun to incorporate some of the exercises they were learning into their everyday lives and finding them beneficial. This was reflected by the stories teachers shared about when they had used the exercises.

Session ten. At session ten, six teachers were present. No reasons were given for the non-attenders. The session began with a short relaxation; teachers had their eyes closed and practiced deep breathing. Everybody looked relaxed and comfortable. Next was a stretching exercise. There was a short discussion on ways to incorporate the exercises learned into a daily routine and to some of the barriers to exercise. The atmosphere was gentle and quiet.

The tutor showed teachers how to give themselves a face massage. She demonstrated and talked them through it while teachers copied. Again the atmosphere was good humoured, one teacher looked like she was getting sleepy while she was doing the face massage and the others teased her about falling asleep. This was followed by a re-cap on self-hand massage.

One teacher shared with the tutor how another participant (who was absent at this session) had begun shaking hands with the children she taught to greet them. This is a technique used in the SDP for children. Apparently some of the children were unsure at first, but soon got used to it and some children even asked for it at the next class.

Before leaving the session all participants present thanked the tutor and suggested that they had found each session useful. One teacher shared with the group that she had not realised how stressed she was feeling until she started to calm down during the Programme. Teachers also said they hoped there would be funding next year for another course. Teachers offered that they had found meeting each week a very helpful means of supporting each other and wanted to maintain this momentum. There was a definite arrangement amongst teachers to meet next week for 20 minutes in the 'nurture' room for relaxation and then to go to the pub. One participant volunteered to do a relaxation exercise at the session.

Quantitative data – change over time

This analysis is based on 7 sets of completed questionnaires. T-test revealed that there were no statistically significant differences on study variables or age between responders and non-responders. Comparisons between study variables at baseline and follow-up revealed no statistically significant differences on any of the study variables. However, comparisons indicate the reduction in anxiety was approaching statistical significance. All the results were in the expected direction, with the exception of

depression, which increased fractionally. Mean scores on study variables at baseline and follow-up are presented in Table 2.

At baseline 5 (71%) and 2 (29%) participants were at risk of clinically anxious mood and clinically depressed mood, respectively. At follow-up, participants at risk of clinically anxious mood had reduced to 3 (43%); participants at risk from clinically depressed mood remained the same 2 (29%).

Table 2
Mean scores on study variables at baseline and follow-up

	Baseline Mean (standard deviation)	Follow-up Mean (standard deviation)	p value
Anxiety Range 0 – 21, ↑ = worse	9.57 (4.20)	7.00 (4.24)	.060
Depression Range 0 – 21, ↑ = worse	5.43 (4.79)	5.57 (4.86)	.846
Perceived stress scale Range 0- 40 ↑ = worse	19.43 (9.78)	14.43 (9.57)	.206
Generalised Self- Efficacy Range 10 – 40 ↑ = better	29.86 (5.21)	31.71 (3.86)	.267
Positive Reappraisal Range 0 - 16 ↑ = better	10.71 (2.93)	12.14 (1.95)	.202
Current health status Range 0 –10, ↑ = better	5.21 (2.66)	5.96 (2.82)	.507

Qualitative data – Post-Programme

Expectations

Four teachers said that the SDP met with their expectations and one further suggested that it had given her new techniques to deal with challenging students and situations. Two teachers said they had not known what to expect and one did not answer this question.

Practicalities of the SDP

Content: Six of the teachers thought the content had been good, in particular they had found the content to be interesting and varied. One added that she liked the fact they covered things that they could take away and try at home. One teacher commented the hand massage had been repetitive. One did not answer this question.

Delivery: Most teachers described the delivery as calming and welcoming. However, two of the teachers commented that they felt that it *lacked pace*.

Timing: Three teachers were happy with the timing. Two commented that they had found it difficult to stop/leave their work behind at the end of the day. Another said she thought a 4pm start would have been better. One did not answer this question.

Length of sessions: Four teachers were satisfied with the length of the sessions, one thought they could have been longer, one thought they were a little too long and one did not answer this question.

Teachers experience of the SDP

Three teachers wrote about how the Programme had given them important time to themselves. In this time they particularly enjoyed the relaxation and being able to unwind. Teachers found the breathing, relaxation, self and peer hand massage, and visualisation techniques useful. Two of these teachers said

they had told others about these techniques and one had also used the breathing and massage techniques with some of her students. One said she now did the hand massage on all members of her family.

Three teachers said they had enjoyed the social side of it, spending time with colleagues that they would not necessarily meet in their normal working day. The social contact allowed teachers to share their problems and knowing that other people felt the same was very important to them.

One teacher wrote about how she had used the hand massage she had learnt in the sessions on a close friend who was dying of cancer. She felt as if she had been able to do something to help her friend who was suffering greatly and she felt their relationship had become closer as a result. One teacher, who had only attended one session, said sessions had not been right for her because she was not the kind of person to talk about her emotions, so she had not felt comfortable in the sessions. Typical comments included:

Calming relaxing techniques – a range of them, plus how lots of people feel the same (that legitimises my own feelings). How important and useful it is to find time for myself. How easy it is to do something to help / improve my “feelings” or take control of my emotions (i.e. techniques to self calm / leave issues/problems outside the room etc). P15

Without doubt, learning the hand massage technique was a valuable experience – I took the “skill” a step further and moved onto feet and gave both to my dear friend who was in the last weeks of fighting cancer. Being able to offer her this relaxing treatment created a new level of intimacy to our friendship and really made me feel useful in the face of such suffering. We found a lotion we both liked the smell of and burned a candle and they were very special times. She’d gone now but I would not have felt so “physically” close to her had I not learnt this technique from The tutor. Thank you. P3

I felt uncomfortable with the session – I wanted to benefit from it, but felt it wasn’t for me mentally. I am the kind of person who doesn’t talk about my feelings / emotions – I wish I could, but just can’t. P5

Suggested improvements to the SDP

One teacher felt she would not want to change anything about the SDP. Others gave a number of suggestions, including, running the Programme on a fortnightly ongoing basis, crib sheets for reminders of useful exercises, a breakdown of the sessions at the start of the course so it felt more structured, shorter sessions, and spend more time on alternative therapies. One teacher who had felt that the course was not for her suggested having individual meetings with staff before the start of the course so staff could establish if it was something that would be useful for them.

Value of the SDP for teachers in mainstream schools

All seven teachers felt this course would be useful for teachers in a mainstream school. However, one suggested it may be better to have it off site, which she felt would help enable teachers to leave their day behind.

In this section three teachers gave their thanks for the opportunity/experience. Another said that, for those teachers that had stayed in the programme, it had helped them to realise the importance of socialising in a relaxing environment, and that they try to continue to do so now that the Programme had finished.

One real benefit was that for those who stayed in the Programme. It made us realise how important socialising in a relaxing environment is. We will continue to meet on a regular basis. Overall very useful. Thank you. P15

In addition, it was suggested that it would be useful to have the first session as an open session. Thus, teachers could ascertain if the course was for them, if they decided they would like to continue they could then take home a questionnaire to complete before the next session.

Discussion

The results of this small pilot study suggest that overall the SDP-Teachers had been a positive experience. Teachers’ initial expectations had been met. Teachers reported on the benefits of learning a range of techniques that helped them to feel calm and helped them to relax. In addition, teachers were pleased to learn techniques that were both easy to implement and were easily transferable to their

work and personal life. Thus, teachers had used techniques learned on the SDP to help them to deal with challenging situations at work, to help their peers, and in one case, to be able to offer something to a dying friend was particularly poignant. These benefits reflect the improvement in teachers' levels of anxiety, self-efficacy (confidence), positive appraisal, and current health status, measured by the questionnaires. The fractional increase in the level of depression may be a result of bereavement experienced by two teachers and the poor health of one teacher during the Programme.

The importance of the social experience of the Programme is emphasised in the data. Sharing work issues with colleagues and finding out that their colleagues had similar experiences and feelings were considered beneficial. The SDP clearly offers social support that is different from what teachers generally receive from colleagues, for example, in the staff room at lunchtimes. One positive outcome was that teachers had continued to meet each week after work and valued this time together. A follow-up study to determine whether this support network continues and in what format would be of interest to explore.

Teachers reported that the SDP would be a useful intervention for teachers in mainstream schools, which may reflect concern about teacher stress and relative lack of interventions and support currently offered to teachers. The literature suggests that pupil misbehaviour, particularly in secondary education, is a major factor contributing to teacher stress. In addition, the ability to cope with such behaviour is necessary for positive pupil-teacher interaction and pupils integration into school life (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Boesen, 1998; Johnson, 2000). The SDP provided a range of techniques that not only contributed to teachers feeling able to do something for themselves in challenging situations, but also enabled them to involve children within their class.

The results of our study support the existing but sparse literature that suggests the value of providing teachers with stress management interventions that incorporate support, such as the Quiet Place Project (Renwick & Spalding, 2002) and some meditative and relaxation techniques as demonstrated by Solloway (2000). The SDP provided a supportive environment, facilitated self-mastery, and provided practical skills that can be used to induce a sense of calm, as well as being transferable to the classroom and to life in general.

Practical implications

With respect to the Programme, the content and length of the session appeared appropriate. Although the delivery was reported to be *calming and welcoming* there was a suggestion that the delivery could have been at a faster pace. However, this may reflect teachers' difficulty in *switching off* from their work at the end of the day. Thus, the suggestion that the timing of the session may be better if it was later in the day (i.e. 4p.m.) and possibly off-site may help resolve this problem (although the latter has cost and travel implications, therefore may not be practical). Further, one aim of the SDP was to help calm and relax teachers, this perhaps acted as an antagonist to teachers general day to day experience: multi-tasking, and working in a lively and responsive / reactive environment. That is, teachers invariably have more than one conversation at one time, are used to noise, and work in a dynamic environment. The SDP was in essence a complete contrast to this, and may have challenged some teachers. It is difficult, even with the best of intention to suddenly stop and relax the mind when the mind and the body are still engaged, active and concerned with the problems of the day. Thus, the timing of the SDP may need to be considered as suggested above. Alternatively, a five to ten minutes *get it off your chest* session may be of benefit at the start of the Programme. However, all participants reported that the SDP would be a useful intervention for teachers in mainstream school.

Limitations

The study was set up as a pilot study with a small sample, therefore findings cannot be generalised. In addition, the high drop-out of teachers suggests that the introductory session may need to screen for those who feel that the SDP is appropriate for them, as suggested in the report. However, the positive findings suggest that a larger study to include more than one school and a more rigorous evaluation is warranted.

SDP Modification

Based on the observations and follow-up data, there are a number of modifications to the SDP-Teachers. These include: starting the Programme at a later time (i.e. 4p.m.); to provide an introductory session that includes information on the SDP, its content, purpose, and aims prior to recruitment that may help to resolve teacher withdrawal; to offer the Programme on a fortnightly basis; providing a

course handbook to include information about the rationale and aims of the SDP, its content, and simple instructions on relevant activities such as stretching exercises, relaxation, and massage techniques learnt. In addition, teachers felt that information on other complementary and alternative therapies would be useful.

Conclusion

Overall, the SDP-Teachers had been an enjoyable experience. The results of this study will add to the sparse literature and evidence base concerning interventions for teachers in mainstream schools, particularly interventions that consist of complementary and alternative medicine.

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