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Teacher wellbeing and its implications for professional development

On-line Webinar Saturday 6 June 2020



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What it means to be struggling as a secondary teacher in England

Dr Suzanne Culshaw



Bio: Suzanne works part-time as a Research Fellow at the University of Hertfordshire and part-time as a languages teacher in an Academy in Suffolk. Over the years, Suzanne has taught and led languages and business studies in a number of schools in the Eastern region. Her interest in educational research was sparked during her MEd at the Faculty of Education in Cambridge, where she completed her dissertation on the impact of lesson observation feedback on teachers' sense of self-efficacy. She was then successful in being awarded a fully-funded studentship at the University of Hertfordshire where she completed her PhD in October 2019. Her research looked at what it means to be struggling as a teacher, a study with implications for professional learning and leadership approaches. Currently she is part of a European research project team exploring arts-based approaches to professional learning, in particular the development of distributed leadership. Suzanne is a keen user of Twitter and has hosted Twitter chats for a range of professional associations, including a slow chat for IPDA.

Abstract:

In this presentation I offer a new conceptualisation of struggling, which has the perspective of teachers at its heart and has implications for leaders. My doctoral research found that struggling is experienced as a temporary, fractured state. Dimensions of struggling include heightened embodied tensions and a negative emotional tone. Struggling is also associated with a damaged self-view and a reduced sense of controllability. Contrary to the predominant view in the literature - which often positions struggling as a deficit and sees it as an *outcome* of poor performance - this study found that struggling can, in fact, be the *precursor* to poor performance. In summary, I have taken the concept of struggling out of the domain of (in)competence and capability and have repositioned it in the wellbeing arena.

If we accept that struggling is experienced as a fractured state, then there are clear implications in terms of professional learning. First and foremost, rest and recuperation are needed to 'heal' any fracture and exerting any pressure while in that state – such as unrealistic demands or expectations for CPD – could in fact cause the fracture to break. We need only to look at how some of us are responding to the current global pandemic to see how difficult it can be to focus, concentrate or learn when in a heightened state of stress or anxiety. Struggling feels like a temporary paralysis, a state of stasis in which we are unable to engage productively, especially perhaps in the process of learning.

I will present the innovative methodological approach I took to collect stories and images from participants. I will share vignettes from these stories and highlight how these teachers' experiences of struggling impacted not only on their wellbeing, but also on their professional identity and their ability to teach and lead effectively. As part of the presentation, I will lead a guided reflection in which we will have the opportunity to tune in to with what it feels like to be struggling. We will also try to connect with others who might be feeling the same way.

Finally, I will outline some recommendations for how teachers – and especially leaders – can support colleagues who are struggling. One suggestion is that compassion has the potential to support and soothe in a way which might 'heal' the fracture. So, I will share my thoughts on how compassionate communication – with ourselves and with others - might help us not only to acknowledge and accept our experience of struggling, but to start to 'unstruggle.' Only then might we be back in a position to re-engage with professional learning.

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Can teaching quality be maintained as teacher workload increases?

Zeynep Ekin

I am from Ankara which is the capital city of Turkey. I taught English to both young and adult learners at American Culture Language Schools and I have been teaching English for a year at Bilim College which is a private school in Cankaya, district of Ankara. I am a member of BELMAS and I have been presenting my articles since 2018. I am particularly interested in leadership, management, organizational outcomes, teacher workload.

Abstract:

Teacher workload is a widespread problem in many countries, as research shows, for example, in parts of Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom (Sudgen, 2010). In the UK, despite efforts to reduce teacher workload, the latest survey results show that teachers' working hours have increased since the last collection of data (TALIS, 2018) and it is seen that 51% of primary teachers and 57% of lower secondary teachers believed that their workload was unmanageable. Furthermore, according to the research, there is a noticeable relationship between working hours and teachers' perception of whether their responsibilities are manageable or not. However, despite the complaints, the workload of teachers continues to increase (Sudgen, 2010). Additionally, in research conducted on the east coast of Canada, 73% of teachers stated that their workload was overwhelming, and it has a huge impact on the quality of education system, when so many educational institutions are losing their qualified and effective teachers (Sudgen, 2010). Apple (1996) suggests that, as workload increases, teachers' creativity is likely to decrease. A further factor, evident in analyses of the workload of teachers in Canada, the United States, and the UK, is that non-teaching duties have become significantly wider (Sudgen, 2010). Planning, marking, parents' meetings, collaborative activities and professional development are implied but not specified in teaching contracts but impinge upon teachers' time. This may impair the effective performance of teachers in schools, leaving workload issues to be urgently addressed (Wood, 2019).

Against that background, this paper reports on an investigation of teacher workload intensification in the Cankaya district of Ankara, Turkey. I report on the initial findings from a qualitative research project conducted with teachers working in private schools in that district. Teacher workload in Turkey is below the average of OECD countries and legal working hours have been determined as not more than 40 hours per week. However, Turkey is still in the group of low-performing countries according to PISA assessment.

My research interests are, therefore:

- (1) What is the relationship between increased workload and teachers' performance and effectiveness?
- (2) Do non-teaching duties affect the overall quality of teaching performance?
- (3) How do these findings relate to a country's position in international comparisons of educational systems?

This research aims to contribute valuable information to the field as the issue has not been investigated thoroughly through empirical research in Turkish educational settings.

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Could using Art as a coping mechanism help staff improve their mental health resilience, and if so – how could this be adopted into schools and colleges?

Jennifer Linsdell



Jennifer Linsdell is currently a teacher of Media & Graphic Design as a sixth form college in Birmingham. Alongside this, she is studying her Master of Arts in Arts & Education Practices. Her focus in her MA is to investigate and explore the impact of Mental Health in Education, and how we can use Art to support a more positive wellbeing in both staff and students. She is an active member of #FEResearchMeets and has also previously had an article published in the Society of Education & Training's Research Supplement, the biggest research magazine in the FE sector.

Abstract:

Context of Research & Relevance: I knew that coming into my master's I wanted to investigate Mental Health in Education. I've also always been astounded at the lack of funding and availability of Art Education through certain Primary & Secondary schools. Through a range of previous studies looking at the use of Art to support student wellbeing, I decided that this would be extremely relevant and potentially hugely helpful for staff also. I found that not a lot of research had taken place in Education regarding the use of Art as a mechanism, despite the huge use of this within the medical world. There is a huge lack of action research which could give positive long-term effects, and I really wanted to find something which would be genuinely useful for staff.

Research question, method & results: Could using Art as a coping mechanism help staff improve their mental health resilience, and if so – how could this be adopted into schools and colleges? Staff completed a three-week study, where they were requested to complete a 'Art Therapy' technique each evening. These ranged from things such as emotion wheels, to designing and writing postcards to people, each with a relevance to a negative emotion and then slowly building into more positive drawings and techniques. The data was measured using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, through the analysis of change in score from the beginning of the study to the end. Every member of staff showed meaningful change through the completion of this study, with some even now making this something they genuinely do every evening to support their mental wellbeing.

Discussion: The next steps for me are to begin to discuss how this can be pushed out across all different types of education, and how the potential to use art therapy techniques in education can be used to make genuine and sustainable change.

References: [WEMWBS – Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale](#); [Staff Wellbeing Index 2019 – Education Support Partnership](#)

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How teacher mental wellness contributes to building a coaching culture within the classroom

Zelna Lauwrens



Zelna Lauwrens runs Kids Life Studio <https://www.kidslifestudio.com/>

An avid advocate for mental health and wellbeing, Zelna has been active in promoting resilience & leadership building with a special interest in youth since 2003. As the founder of multiple companies, with representatives in 27 countries, she offers sustainable solutions to the modern day problems relating to stress and anxiety in a global context. Zelna started her career as a special needs teacher, school counsellor and behavioural consultant. She then went on to lecture at multiple international universities on subjects relating to Inclusive Education and Behavioural Studies and is currently an Honorary Fellow of the Global Policy Institute of Queen Mary University London. An author of multiple books and recent co-founder of The Secret Parent Foundation, she also founded the Global Children's Change Makers Conference, to bring thought leaders from around the world together, to discuss best practices relating to children's mental health.

Bonita Ackerman Du Preez



Bonita Ackerman du Preez runs Future-edge Therapy <https://www.future-edgetherapy.co.uk/>

An ambassador for teacher well-being and mental health support, Bonita Ackerman du Preez has worked tirelessly to support both teachers and pupils in schools across the United Kingdom. Starting a career in South Africa, working her way to senior teacher leadership level and retraining in Trauma Recovery, Anxiety and Stress Management, Bonita founded her therapy, international coaching and training business with a particular focus on integrating therapy, technology, confidence and resilience. She specialises in designing bespoke training and 1-2-1 programs for both independent and corporate clients while enjoying her work with individual clients and offering workshops designed to support the community of Bedfordshire. Her passion to teach, inspire and encourage others is driven by offering a unique coaching and training style which creates an open and dynamic environment, builds trusting relationships and empowers individuals' to find solutions to take control of their own destiny.

With ample experience in the traditional classroom in an international context, both Zelna and Bonita left the teaching profession due to various stressors personally experienced. This led them to independently launch independent businesses with a key focus on offering support services through coaching and therapy. With a keen interest in finding solutions to teacher retention, productivity and maximising learning potential in children, they collaborated on a joint project in October 2018, to create a toolkit for teachers to support their own wellness and promote their learners wellness through the use of their unique life coaching model as a positive intervention for use in the classroom context. This led to them co-authoring a book called "My Coaching Classroom" which focuses on their unique playful, positive and peaceful approach to teaching and learning that supports wellbeing. (Due to be launched 5 October 2020.)

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Abstract:

Context of research: Life Coaching is a powerful transformational technique for personal change and learning and already a shift is occurring in the teacher role in educational settings from instructor to facilitator (Griffiths, 2005) This approach is an effective way to support the mental wellness of teachers and their learners.

Relevance of Research: There is growing acceptance that large-scale educational reform is needed to meet the challenges of the 21st century. (Devine et al 2012)

Teachers play a critical role in this as they are responsible for shaping the lives of their learners. Whilst their primary role is to facilitate academic learning, they also influence social and emotional development. (Darling-Hammond et al 2019) Our project aims to carry out multi-sited and collaborative research on inferring how the resilience and mental health of teachers impacts on classroom ethos. We aim to address emerging challenges around what is happening within the individual classroom in a global context with the emphasis on a number of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing. This intervention builds on and expands on previous models of life skills education and life coaching to include an integrated solution.

Keywords: Teacher mental wellness, life coaching, mental wellbeing, life skills, SDG

Research Questions: 1. What factors impact on teacher mental wellness and are there any similarities in a global context? 2. What is the impact of teachers' mental wellness on classroom ethos, behaviour and learner performance? 3. What mechanisms do teachers already employ in the classroom relating to wellness and how do they measure corresponding impact? 4. How can life coaching be used in the classroom as an effective strategy for dealing with challenges as they arise? 5. What kinds of changes are needed within our education system globally to reflect best practices for mental wellness in teachers and their learners?

Method/ Framework: All life coaching approaches can provide valuable contributions, but ultimately school improvement fails if coaching remains on an individual level. Therefore, our method determines if the current systems of collective and collaborative learning are in place to generate a classroom coaching culture. We focus on gathering data through means of a survey consisting of a range of questions. This is further substantiated through focus discussion groups with ex teachers who have already left the profession. Results: Learners are more likely to attend, succeed academically and graduate from school when they have strong, trusting, supportive connections with one or more of their teachers. This can only occur if teachers themselves are supported with a system for maintaining their own mental wellness in and outside of the classroom based on their own first-hand experience. **Discussion:** There are three major causes and impacts on teacher stress: these include too much focus on academic achievement, inadequate and unstable leadership and disjointed inadequate resources for dealing with emotional and behavioural problems in the classroom. (Greenberg 2016). Our emphasis recommends an approach for how teachers can manage their stress to maintain good relationships with their learners through an approach of coaching in the classroom.

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Teacher motivation to engage in Teacher Professional Learning: Voices from Dubai

Amira Abdou



I am a final year doctoral student at the school of education at Leicester University. I am very passionate about teaching and teachers. I taught in private schools in Cairo and Dubai for 20 years. I have experience in teacher in service training and CPD in Cairo and Dubai. I also worked as a school reviewer and team evaluator for the MoE in UAE. My research interest area is Teacher professional learning and teacher motivation.

Abstract:

Context of Research: Dubai represents a unique education policy context that hosts a highly diverse education system. There are 193 private schools that host 183 nationalities and offer 17 different curricula. This huge private education sector is inspected by Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). KHDA runs annual inspections, quite like the Ofsted UK model, on private schools and not on public schools. Almost more than 90% of Dubai expat students, and more than 50% of Emirati students attend private & for-profit schools (KHDA Inspection Report, 2015). Expatriates are not allowed to enrol children in public schools that accepts only Emirati students. Another unique feature is that 100% of male teachers are expatriates and more than 60% are female expatriates (Ridge 2010). Most of these teachers who come from Arab Middle Eastern countries lack pre-service training (Faour 2012).

Research Question: What motivates teachers to engage in their own professional learning across different career stages?

Research Sub Questions: 1. Does the type of motivation vary according to teachers' career stages? 2. Do the needs- as proposed by Self-Determination Theory (SDT) - vary according to teachers' career stages? 3a. what would teachers deem as an effective professional learning activity/opportunity? 3b. Must one, some or all three needs (competence- autonomy- relatedness) be fulfilled for teacher professional learning to be deemed effective by teachers?

Relevance: The quality of an education system is primarily determined by the quality of its teachers (Mourshed and Barber, 2007; GMR2013). Accordingly, developing sustainable teachers' professional learning, building teachers' capacities and improving instruction can be effective ways to improving students' learning experiences and supporting them while reaching their fullest potential.

The conceptual framework of my study makes connections between Self-Determination Theory, Professional Capital and teacher professional learning across different career phases. I am looking at teacher motivation to engage in their own professional learning across different career phases from the perspective of Self-Determination Theory. SDT proposes that all humans have three basic needs for competency, autonomy and relatedness to sustain their intrinsic motivation and achieve psychological well-being, creativity and positive work-related performance and outcomes. (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Gagne and Deci, 2005; Deci and Ryan, 2007; Gorozidis and Papaioannou, 2014).

Method/ Framework: The research design is a single holistic case study with an interpretivist approach. Semi-structured open-ended interview questions were used to collect the data. Thematic analysis is the analytical frame with hybrid approach employing deductive-inductive reasoning. After conducting 10 interviews during the

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pilot study, the data analysed was so rich and informative that I decided to develop the pilot study and integrate it as stage one of my research design. In stage two of the study, data collection tools extended to include interview with principal and policy document analysis to ensure a more robust study design and provide triangulation.

Results: Teacher tacit knowledge; Teacher Reflexivity; The role of students in teacher motivation; Lack of Teacher autonomy; Middle leaders: strongest impact, yet weakest link.

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