MORALE: A SILVER LINING FOR THE BURNOUT TEACHERS TO BE IGNITED PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

Most teachers typically begin their career with a high energy level, desirous of making their subject matter exciting to their students and demonstrating to them that they genuinely care for them as individuals. However, professional disillusionment- a type of midlife crisis – accompanied by fear, insecurity and anxiety often replaces the joy of teaching. This condition is an occupational hazard termed as 'Burnout'. Burnout is truly an illness resulting from physical, emotional or attitudinal exhaustion. The various causes may be students' apathy, overcrowded classroom, inadequate salaries, demanding or unsupportive parents, expanding administrative loads, negative public opinion etc.

The National Education Association (NEA) attributes much of the problem of burnout to low level of morale and satisfaction which leads to decreased teacher productivity in association with 'a loss of concern for and detachment from the persons for whom one works and the persons with whom one works'.

The solution lies in boosting morale of teachers, in raising enthusiasm and energy for work, forming an attitude of satisfaction, willingness to meet the challenging demand of this profession and a feeling of togetherness and consideration for other members of faculty and building capacity of group for the accomplishment of institutional goals as well as individual professional development.

The present paper focuses on boosting' Morale of Burnout Teachers through Administrative Support to Teachers in Educational Organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Morale is a moral or mental condition with respect to cheerfulness, confidence and zeal which positively effluences teacher's dedication in classroom and his impact on students and steady achievement of higher academic goals. This heightens the regards of students for teacher that makes school environment healthy and conducive to learning.

A decline over the past few years in the morale of teachers is identified along with recognition of teaching becoming an increasingly more demanding profession. The drop in morale has accompanied by professional disillusionment a type of midlife crisis- fear, insecurity and anxiety which often replaces the joy of teaching and is often termed as burnout condition. This condition gradually become more serious, the longer a teacher works, the more acute the problem becomes, particularly after a teacher has taught for a decade or longer. "When a not so-young-anymore teacher sees that his/her dreams not is being fulfilled and turning into downright nightmares, the temptation to bail out becomes strong." This condition of burnout leads to a gap

between teacher and students and less productive teaching-learning environment. Unless some drastic steps are taken to improve the position we have to wash our hands off proper education of the present and future generations and consequently suffer from deterioration in national development.

There are several ways proposed by the Academicians to boost the morale of burnout teachers as- improved working conditions, better pay, positive media attention, recognition, improved Career structure, online in-service training and administrative support to teachers. An effort has been made here to throw light on administrative support that can help in enhancing their self-esteem as well as work efficiency which consequently will boost up the morale of burnout teachers and increase their service quality along with high productivity.

What does the literature say about morale?

Morale is 'a feeling a state of mind, a mental attitude and an emotional attitude for one's job'. (Mendel 1987). When the teachers' morale is high and school environment is healthy, teachers feel good about themselves, about one another and their teaching which in turn impact on student morale and achievement alternatively. (OECD 2000, Young 1998) Low morale leads to detachment of teachers from their own teaching role thus job absenteeism is increased.

Morale and achievement are related. Ellenberg (1972) found that "where morale is high, schools showed an increase in student achievement, low levels of satisfaction and morale can lead to decreased teacher productivity and consequently to burnout." It is associated with 'a loss of concern for and detachment with the people with whom one works, decreased quality of teaching, depression, greater use of sick leave, effort to leave the profession and a cynical and dehumanized perception of students. (Mendel citing Holt, 1980). Young (1998) claims that morale is often influenced more by outside factors than internal ones. Rogers (1992, p.v.) identifies both internal and external factors responsible for influencing morale, highlighting pace of bureaucratic change; discipline and management concerns; staff and staff relations; time and work load pressures as the most common stressors for teachers. It is therefore individual teacher should take steps to maintain his professional morale intrinsically and that must be nurtured; supported and valued extrinsically by administration and school community.

Too many young teachers who initially begin their career with enthusiasm and positive expectations are looking for a change in direction after only 3-5 years (Hicks 2003). While experienced teachers 'Suffering form low morale are retiring early or leaving the profession to seek other employment' (O' Donnell 2001, p.l.). Thus the whole education system is suffering from such burnout teachers.

Who can be called as burnout teacher?

When a sensitive, dedicated teacher finds himself unable to perform the day to day duties of teaching due to a sense of tiredness, frustration, exhaustion are hopelessness, he either leaves the profession or stays in the same position and in general, is unsuccessful or ineffective as a teacher. Such a teacher rightly can be called as burnout.

Burnout is considered as the "exhaustion stage" during which "adaptation" energy is depleted and "diseases of adaptation" may be developed. It is a syndrome resulting form teacher inability to protect themselves against threats to their self-esteem and wellbeing. Down to earth, burnout teacher may be described as one no longer considering oneself professional, rather just paid individual. Sometimes teachers feel that they simply cannot cope with the pressure of their jobs. They experience certain "warning signals" such as being tired, forcing smiles when they

have nothing to smile about, and losing their temper over trivial matters. In some cases teachers actually suffer psychological symptoms such as fatigue insomnia and irritability. In such case they feel 'lack of commitment, abnormal desire for vacations, low self-esteem, and an inability to take school seriously.'

The National Education Association (N.E.A.) attributes much of the problem of burnout to teachers' pervasive sense of having lost control of their classroom. In some ways burnout is a type of "future shock" - not being able to cope with today's youngsters or with changing educational philosophy. The teachers complain that they do not know how to deal with students on drugs or with an increasing lack of respect for rules and authority. Teacher can feel the problem of burnout from:

- A specific school
- A specific subject or grade level
- K-12 teaching (moving to higher education,
     K-12 administration, state level positions.
- A field of education completely.

To improve the picture a need emerges to nurture a high level of morale and enthusiasm in the teachers for their concerned work.

Why morale boosting is inevitable for the teachers facing burnout problem ?

From the above discussion it is obvious that burnout teachers are often trapped in the cobwebs of several problems and are characterized with low level of morale. To increase the productivity of teaching-learning process, it is necessary to enhance the level of morale regarding their profession. Lack of which leads to crisis in education. Spanoil and Caputo (1979) classified burnout causes into two dimensions- Personal and organizational which are further elaborated-

I.   **Personal Dimension (Dynamic Individual Traits):**- Among the personal causes following three sub-dimensions are widely used and accepted by researchers (Anderson and Iwanicki 1984; russel et al 1987; Schab et al 1986; Schwab and Iwanicki 1982 Stephenson 1990) and are measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The three dimensions are:

1.   **Emotional Exhaustion -** referring to the depletion of emotional resources and the feeling that one has nothing to give.

2.   **Depersonalization** - referring to the development of negative and cynical attitudes towards one's clients, and

3.   **Feeling of Low Personal Accomplishment**- referring to the feelings of loss of effectiveness in performing one's duties. (Elizabeth Labone, 1994).

In the case of above three conditions, there is a big gap emerging between the teachers' beliefs and their accomplishments which results into burnout when workers find themselves under increasing pressure to succeed into their helping profession and hence demanded more of themselves than they really are able to give. Freudburger emphasizes that the phenomenon is confined to those who idealize their work and results in loss of this ideal. The researches suggested that work related stressors associated with burnout are mediated by dynamic individual variables. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura1986) considers all experiences and related behaviour or action to be mediated by self regulatory mechanism. Bandura considers one of the most important of these self regulatory mechanisms to be perceived self- efficacy. Demolin proposed that the term burnout was an inappropriate descriptor of personal efficacy and a teacher's level of efficacy may be an important factor in teacher burnout. Ashton and Webb (1986) proposed that a teacher's sense of efficacy consists of two dimensions-

1. **General Teaching Efficacy**- a judgment of whether or not teachers can change students outcomes and
2. **Personal Teaching Efficacy**- A judgment about their personal ability to control students' outcome. The teacher attempts to maintain his/her high personal teaching efficacy. Unsuccessful attempts to maintain personal efficacy lead to reassessment to personal efficacy. This result in them lowering their teaching efficacy which conflicts with their general teaching efficacy, that is their performance does not match their ideal. Thus this sense of low level of efficacy results in burnout.

This problem of burnout may be prevented if teachers can maintain a level of personal teaching efficacy higher than or equal to their general level of efficacy which ultimately concerned with their morale of teaching. Bandura proposes various strategies for enhancing self-efficacy including modeling of successful strategies and goal setting. The methods such as in-service re-training, re-defining goal and re-modeling of teaching strategies are much crucial in enhancing the lowered morale of burnout teachers which is a form of teacher conditioning.

II. Organizational Dimension-

Organizational (administrative) causes of burnout have included high level of stress related to inordinate time demands, inadequate relationships, large class sizes, lack of resources, role ambiguity, limited promotional opportunities, lack of support resulting in increased absenteeism, a low level of morale and deteriorated service quality, lack of direction or focus ,high level of complaining, lack of communication, lack of trust and positive feedback, a lack of co-ordination, and lack of openness to new ideas.

If we go through the root causes of such conditions, we perceive that the teachers employed for teaching are engaged in a variety of tasks such as curriculum development, community relations, resource management, student welfare, along with playground and sport supervision, marketing (mostly in private schools) census work (in government schools) etc. While the demands upon teachers have increased, there has been little change in pattern of employment, compensation, and career advancement of teachers. The increasing workload is the major contributor for stress and job dissatisfaction which is ultimate cause of burnout problem in association with low morale. (SEETRC 1998).

Another remarkable cause for teacher burnout problem is low remuneration. Teachers' salaries are a major 'status factor' (Kalantzis and Harvery, 2002) and have not kept pace with salaries of other professions (SEETRC1998). In comparison to other professions problem of ill-payment has become entangled with teacher's perception of lack of employer's respect. At home with low pay they fail to fulfill the demands for comfort and luxury of family. Reluctantly they move towards coaching profession in which their much time and energy devoted that influence negatively their performance in classroom. The conspicuous absence of academic performance of teachers leads to the greatest dysfunctional factor for decline in standards within the classroom resulting in disrespect and disregards of students for teacher. Thus this disastrous condition accompanied by fatigue, overload and administrative threats cause burnout problem in teachers.

Teachers' enthusiasm for teaching is a by-product of demonstrated support and respect from those who administer a system while they develop a defeatist attitude out of poor leadership. The psychological assault against teacher (threats, harassment, deadlines etc.) for completing syllabus, lengthy evaluation, projects and assignments that have become interesting due to lack of resources makes their conditions miserable. The excessive work load of paper-work has been a major

problem (Sach 2003, Hoyale 2001). The situation goes to worse when authority held them responsible for students' poor performance, indiscipline and ill behavior which cause teacher's morale deteriorated and they feel emotionally exhausted. Here the need emerges for positive reinforcement which can nurture a high level of morale so that they can get rid of problem of burnout.

The solution to burnout teachers who have undergone emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment lies in boosting their morale and re-energizing them for teaching learning process. Though there are numerous ways to reactivate them, one is 'Administrative Support to Teachers in Educational Organizations' as strong measures to revitalize their morale.

Administrative support to teachers in educational organizations

School administration needs to create a sound environment wherein morale of burnout teachers can be built and maintained continuously. This in turn requires Improving the Quality of Teachers Work Life (QTWL) in different dimensions. Through QTWL the organization can use what Abhram Maslow calls higher needs of self-actualization, and it combines these kind of motivational forces to help achieve higher level of accomplishment, satisfaction and a sense of personal worth which in turn yields higher level of physical and mental productivity. Some ways to improve Quality of Teachers Work Life are as follows-

Improved Teacher Status

Teacher job dissatisfaction and stress can be attributed to differences in salary and status of teacher compared with other professionals. Stress develops if one does not feel satisfied with his identity and status (Berdemeier 1979). Another reason of dissatisfaction is stress and tension among teachers by being "used" by the system.

Administration should improve teacher status through increased salaries and public relation compaign. These are necessary to draw attention of others and attract high quality people to the teaching profession. Teacher status must also be upgraded by quality of facilities, physical working conditions.

Job Enrichment and Job Redesign

Kyriacow and Sutcliff (1978) found different classes, behavior problems, shortages of equipment, to much paper work, and demands on after school time as a major cause of teacher burnout.

Job enrichment and Job Redesign must become an integral part of the school management. These are necessary condition to prevent them from overloaded by work and infusing in them a sense of personal accomplishment. Teacher must have the authority and power to change undesirable condition in their job environment. Administration must provide them optimal class sizes and workload, opportunity for planning time and work breaks, availability of supplies and equipment to accomplish task efficiently, duty free lunches, clerical support and improved work environment.

Participatory Team Leadership

Cook (1979) states that the major cause of teacher low morale are lack of positive administrative leadership, personal interaction and lack of opportunity for participation in decision making activities of the school.

Administrator in institution must be trained to trust and work with teachers, communicate all information to all teachers in problem solving environment which give teachers a sense of personal worth. Administrator must invite ideas, opinion from his group employees before reaching a creative decision but should never force, control or criticize them for the same. A sense of mutual respect must prevail here.

Supervision and Support

Burk (1978) found that lack of organizational support given to an individual on the job to be major cause of job stress and low morale. Teacher emotional exhaustion takes place when they are not appreciated for their performance; that asking for assistance and support is sign of weakness; and that there is no one (teacher, principal, parents) dealing with instructional and behavior problems.

Teacher morale can be built up on daily assistance from administrator who can aid to their professional development, simplify their work, cover class when they are absent, recognize for their outstanding performance, work as mentor and guide in dealing with instructional and behavior problem of children.

Mentoring Novice Teachers

Veenman (1984, pp 153-156) have ranked ten problems reported most frequently by new teachers. 'A few remarkable ones are- classroom discipline, dealing with individual differences, assessment of student work, obtaining sufficient material for a adequate instruction, heavy course loads with inadequate preparation time and getting along with colleagues. The needs of new teacher are represented in figure 1.1
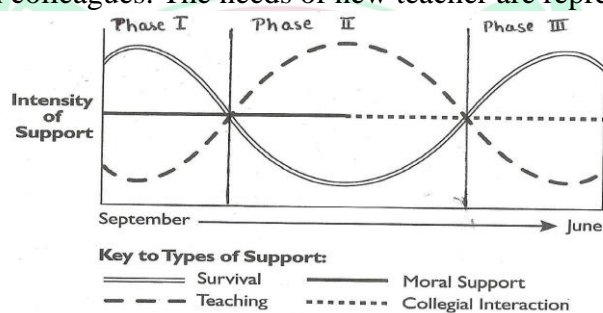
SOURCE: *Concord Public Schools Mentor Handbook*, copyright 1984, based on Veenman (1984). Adapted with permission.

The figure depicts -
Phase 1:   Survival needs high
Phase 2:   Curriculum and instruction needs high
Phase 3:   Survival needs high

It requires balance adjustment and ability to cope with stress. On failing to meet these demands novice teachers experience the problem of burnout. Mentors can support Novice Teachers in following four ways –

i)   Provide emotional support and encouragement – This may be particularly important when teachers who have been specifically recruited and hired in a white school community because of their diversity in colour, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, or educational background etc. often face unique challenges in adjustment. A mentor role here is to develop self – awareness and repertoire of interpersonal skills for overcoming these barriers.

ii)   Promote cultural proficiency regarding students and their families.

iii)   Provide information about daily workings of school and cultural norms of the school community.

iv)   Provide cognitive coaching to heighten their teaching effectiveness.

Stress Management Training

Burnout is special form of stress that reduces teacher efficiency. MacLean (1970) rigidity as the symptom of continued exposure to stress. Administrator should take some stress intervention measures to maintain instructional efficiency such as-

Self-instructional Training – Teacher learns to talk to himself to change his cognition to cope better with stress. It has four steps –

a) Preparing for the Stressor- It can be understood by an example. Suppose teacher has to submit reports cards of student of particulars grade in two days. He can prepare for the stressor by reasoning himself as-

"Worrying won't help…………. Rather it will reduce my performance.

b) Confronting Stressor – "As long as I am cool, I am in control of the situation."

c) Dealing with feeling of overwhelmed – "Take a deep breath, relax and slow down." Focus!

d) In last stage teacher would appraise himself how he coped with it.

Online professional development for global identification

Administration should direct teachers who have developed a sense of low accomplishment towards Online Professional Development to meet the diversified need of growing techno savy students and to infuse in them a sense of 'Social Presence' for satisfaction, fulfill the need of belonging which are necessary conditions for higher order thinking. It incorporates training in IT and mass media. Some important training modules that teachers need to undergo are discussed below-

a) **Training in Computer and Internet -**

The first and basic thing is the teacher with specialized skills need to be trained how to troubleshoot any problem in his/her computer. If the client is in emergency he should be able to provide his service even if his computer malfunctions. Secondly various forms to communication on the internet and their psychometric properties need to be understood. Broadly there are four forms of communication

	Synchronous	**Asynchronous**
Individual	personal chat	E-mail
Group	chat room	Forums and e-mail list.

Teachers need to be skilled in all these modes of communication. Thirdly teachers need to learn internet based money transactions. They can charge money for their services to ascertain that client doesn't take services for granted. Hence training in credit card transactions and network security is required.

b) **Training in Virtual Reality**

Students can be motivated to learn in 3D environment and virtual reality. Virtual reality has immense application in teaching and therapy and rehabilitation of drug addicts. Here teacher should know how to simulate real world in the world of graphics and animation.

c) **Training in web Designing**

The goal here is to make website more and more interactive and to tailor the website according to the need of web user. Even small detail like colour of website, the way information is presented tables, fonts; font size etc. should depend on type of students.

d) **Training in Mass Media**

Many teachers, counselor, psychologist are invited on TV and radio to give guidance on family matter, parent child relation. They are also invited in mass media to discuss various issues related to literature, science and environment etc. Some have even regular columns in Sunday special edition of various newspapers. It is a matter of concern that these professionals or not trained specifically for appearing on mass media. They need training in communication skill.

The advancement of online education will open new avenues of experiences in cyberspace created by computer networks. These experiences of cyberspace will be an extension of teachers' minds and personalities that will reflect their interest and attitude that boost up their morale for productive teaching-learning process.

Conclusion

The dynamics of our society and increased public demands on education have produced adverse and stressful classroom and school conditions. Increasing stresses in today's complex life have placed additional pressure on education in general and on teachers in particular. The conditions have led to increased in emotional, social and professional disabilities among teachers and other school personnel to fulfill the growing demands which results in the problem of burnout with a crisis in morale and with the feelings of being undervalued, frustrated, unappreciated and demoralized.

This decline in morale has been gradual, accompanied by burden of work placed on the teachers and a downgrading of status of profession in the eyes of the community. On the other hand teacher morale is more complex phenomenon than it generally understood which comprises of the three dimensions of morale as-

Personal morale +school morale + professional morale= teacher morale

The paper suggests that the ideal situation for morale would be to be positive at all the above three levels and then and only then the real potential of teachers can be realized to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching-learning process. The paper has suggested a way to boost up the morale of burnout teachers who have lost their sharpness and impact in performing teaching duties through administrative support in which the school authorities must accept responsibility or the role they have in remediation of teacher burnout. Thus it is hypothesized that these two measures would certainly be helpful in enhancing the morale of burnout teachers in personal, school and professional dimensions and the teachers who are today, being termed as burnout ones can be turned into ignited professionals of tomorrow.

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