

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT SYNDROME: FACTORS AND PREVENTION

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Abstract: *The teaching career is viewed as one supposing a lot of stress so that teachers are most vulnerable to the burnout syndrome. The concept was described around 40 years ago in psychology and it is associated with the psychological pressure as it's been considered to be an erosion of a positive psychological state and there are no effective programs to fight against it. Teachers have many duties nowadays, which generate a high level of stress: the relationships with students and parents, the subjects and their related curriculum, the research, the counseling etc. All these responsibilities are related to the social, economical and political context which has a strong influence on teachers' psychological state and pedagogical competences. The burnout syndrome has been introduced in the field of psychology by Freudenberg, it has received a lot of attention as an academic subject and it has also been analyzed during the last years within thousands of publications (over 6000 books, chapters and journal articles)(Maslach et al., 2001; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). There are many articles (Friedman, 2000; Urbanovská, 2011; Antoniou, Ploumpi and Ntall, 2013; Bas, 2011; Fisher, 2011) and PhD thesis regarding burnout and professional teaching (Păduraru, 2010; Coșa, 2011) that have analyzed and explored the subject by presenting different strategies to cope with this phenomenon or to prevent it. This paper aims at analyzing the role of motivation in generating teachers' professional burnout syndrome. A great amount of studies have described the main sources of teachers' stress: bad behavior of learners, time pressure, conflicts with colleagues, poor social evaluation, poor student behavior (Geving, 2007), lack of administrative support (Blase, Blase, & Du, 2008) and too many tasks (Brown, 2005), new methods of teaching, low levels of income, students' lack of interest, attention and motivation, difficult relationships between parents and teachers, dysfunctional team work (Păduraru, 2010). On the whole, the current study is focused on the prevention and cure of burnout syndrome among teachers.*

Key words: *teaching profession, burnout syndrome, stress, involvement*

INTRODUCTION

In the field of psychology, the burnout syndrome is related to Freudenberg and it has received a lot of attention as an academic subject during the last years following the issue of thousands of publications, over 6000 books, chapters and journal articles (MASLACH *ET AL.*, 2001; HALBESLEBEN & BUCKLEY, 2004). There are many articles (FRIEDMAN, 2000; URBANOVSKÁ, 2011; BAS, 2011; FISHER, 2011) and PhD thesis dealing with teachers' professional burnout (PĂDURARU, 2010; COȘA, 2011), which have analyzed and explored the subject by presenting different strategies to cope with this phenomenon or to prevent it. FREUDENBERGER (1974) considers that burnout is a "a loss of former enthusiasm and motivation as a result of emotional interest" (apud FISHER, 2011). MASLACH *et al.* (1996) have defined it as a "syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity" and SCHAUFELI, LEITER & MASLACH, (2008) have found a metaphor for this exhausting syndrome: "smothering of a fire or the extinguishing of a candle".

SOURCES OF TEACHERS' STRESS

A great amount of studies have described the main sources of teachers' stress: bad behavior of learners, time pressure (KOKKINOS, 2007), conflict with colleagues, poor social

evaluation, poor student behavior (GEVING, 2007), students' misbehavior (KOKKINOS, 2007; GELMAN, 2008; BETORET, 2009 APUD ALOE *et al.*, 2014), a lack of administrative support (BLASE, & DU, 2008), too many tasks to accomplish (BROWN, 2005), new methods of teaching, low levels of income, students' lack of interest, attention and motivation, difficult relationships between parents and teachers (PĂDURARU, 2010). These reasons have caused teachers to leave their profession at a higher rate than in other fields of activity (MINARIK, THORNTON, & PERREAULT, 2003), especially the novice teachers (HANUSHEK, 2007, INGERSOLL & SMITH, 2003) which are strongly influenced by the negative effects of class sizes, school administrators, parents (FISHER, 2011). URBANOVSKÁ (2011) has also found in her study that "most teachers feel stressed because there is no possibility to relax and gather lost energy, feeling of insufficient financial and nonmaterial estimation related to the loss of perspective, dissatisfaction with social situation". Burnout affects in great measure most teachers' emotional wellbeing, which in turn affects their professional lives (MESLACH, 1993; BERG, 1994). There are some behaviors that could be considered to be "indicators" of the burnout syndrome: job dissatisfaction, irritability, doubt and anxiety over some issues, despair role conflict, lack of punctuality, sense of failure, cynism and the accusatory attitude (BAS, 2011).

The relationship between parents and teachers is viewed in a contradictory manner: both supportive and problematic. It is very well known that parents have a great impact on their children's success at school and parents who are deeply involved in school help their children to accomplish success (MACHEN, WILSON, & NOTAR, 2005). The cooperation between teachers and parents is the first contributor in developing trust in schools (ADAM & CHRISTENSON, 2000), so the interest in involving parents in school decision making represent a real request (HOY & TSCHANNEN-MORAN, 1999). Even if the positive results of this kind of cooperation are recognized everywhere, there are teachers who still manifest resistance to parental involvement in school problems, because in education is easier without outsiders (HOY & SABO, 1998) or because parents blame teachers for most problems occurring in classrooms (FRIEDMAN, 2000). Conflict management can be described as a process "that begins when individuals or groups have differences regarding interests, values, beliefs, or practices that are important to them" (MUCHTAR & HABIB, 2010 APUD KARAKUŞ & SAVAŞ, 2012). Teachers who express trust in parents and students use cooperative conflict management strategies which in turn develop positive relationships. It is strongly recommended for school administrators to encourage parental involvement in order to increase cooperation and trust between parents-teachers-students (KARAKUŞ & SAVAŞ, 2012).

UNDERSTANDING THE BURNOUT SYNDROME PROCESS

Following a cognitive scenario as a reaction to burnout syndrome, teachers use functional (coping mechanism) or dysfunctional responses to mediate the stress (they become cynic, apathetic or rigid). From an emotional point of view, teachers feel overloaded from the very first moment and then they become exhausted and disappointed in time. CSIKSZENTMIHALYI (1990, APUD FRIEDMAN 2000) have found that challenges and skills could explain anxiety and stress in individuals, and a high discrepancy between perceived professional skills, resources, demands, outcomes and job challenges may determine a strong sense of professional inefficiency. The personality traits which may contribute to burnout are: a type A personality, perfectionism, a pessimistic view of self, high-achievement, the need to be in control.

The role of teacher training departments could become over time that of preventing "a reality shock" that the novice teachers experience in their daily school and classroom professional life (JESUS & PAIXAO, 1996). Teachers are complaining about their teacher

training programs that lack basic knowledge regarding students' discipline problems and classroom-behavior disturbance (WEINSTEIN, 1988). FRIEDMAN (2000) has found that most teachers experience during their first year of teaching the next three stages:

- ❖ Stage A: The Slump, with the following words which explain their state: "shock", "nightmare", "catastrophe", "collapse", "suffering", "despair", "crisis", "pressure";
- ❖ Stage B: Fatigue and Exhaustion, explained by the following factors: "difficulties with students", "overload", "criticism", "lack of recognition and reward", "isolation", "blaming initial training";
- ❖ Stage C: Adjustment, when teachers tries to adapt using learning teaching techniques, using words as "intuition", "trial and error".

STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH BURNOUT

Success in teaching is strongly connected to three basic types of skills: technical, human and conceptual skills (KATZ, 1975). Technical skills suppose understanding of methods, processes, procedures (professional tasks), human skills are related to working effectively with students, treating them with respect and helping students to develop their social, informal and personal potential. Conceptual or organizational skills are related to seeing the organization as a whole (FRIEDMAN, 2000).

When a teacher faces the burnout syndrome, they are strongly recommended to get professional help. So clinicians should avoid treating teachers' syndrome as a single phenomenon, because there's a lot of need for integrative intervention, combined with psychoanalytic insight, emphatic concern (getting support from friends or colleagues), cognitive strategies (re-evaluating goals and priorities), stress-reduction techniques (FARBER, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

The issue of teachers' professional burnout is rather new in our country, yet it shouldn't be treated as unimportant. This article is designed to be a starting point for future research regarding what is happening in real life after completing the teaching training programs or even during these programs. Our future intention is to try to prevent the burnout syndrome, through a different kind of teaching the Educational psychology discipline, which is the first included in teaching training programs and by organizing meetings between students and teachers during their first year of teaching career. In order to be more adaptive, a teacher should be informed regarding symptoms related to this syndrome, ways to prevent it and the necessity to seek help from colleagues or/and specialists, because if a teacher doesn't cope with this symptoms the consequences may lead to severe depression. Meanwhile, there seems to be a lack of parental implication in sustaining children towards achievement and success. This could be an issue for future teachers to take into account: real connections with parents in order to make them support some educational tasks and to make them aware of their role in students' success and integration in real life.

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