

Act or React: Do Educators have the Physical Stamina to Sustain an Active Learner?

By Rebecca Bradshaw-Smith

Rationale

Teacher burnout is a serious psychological condition that affects the lives of thousands of highly effective teachers throughout the United States. An educator who is experiencing burnout has low morale, low self-esteem, and is physically exhausted (Roloff & Brown, 2011). Studies have shown that teacher morale directly correlates with student achievement; the higher the teacher morale, the greater the student achievement. The emotional experience of a teacher sets the tone for the class. Teacher burnout is one the most common reasons that effective teachers leave the profession. If more energy were put into providing emotional support for effective educators, they would be far more likely to continue to teach and to share their passion and knowledge in future years. The educators in the District of Columbia are prime examples of teacher burnout. Over the years, teaching in Washington, DC has evolved from educating our youth and going home to our families to educating our youth in the following roles – mother, father, nurse, counselor, maid, and in some cases, the referee. My research study will examine how educators throughout the District of Columbia combat “teacher burnout” and administration role. Through surveys and personal interviews, this study will seek to find out how we can save our educators from “Teacher Burnout” and increase “Work Place Morale”.

Literature Review

Todd Whitaker, Beth Whitaker, Dale Lumpa of Indiana University, have extensively researched how teacher burnout is a psychological and physiologic occurrence in their book entitled, “Motivating and Inspiring Teachers: The Educational Leader's Guide for Building Staff Morale. 2 Edition”. This phenomenon has to be addressed before we lose more of our highly effective educators.

Lori A. Brown of California State University, Long Beach and Michael E. Roloff of Northwestern University examined the relationships of extra-role time (ERT) behavior with burnout and occupational commitment among teachers through the lens of conservation of resources (COR) theory. Results reveal that teachers who invest in more ERT are also more likely to experience burnout and decreased commitment to teaching than those who invest less. However, results also indicate that the ethical practice of the employer fulfilling the psychological contract (keeping promises) entered into with the teacher offsets this negative spiral with implications for both teacher well-being and workplace outcomes.

Data/Tools/Process

I targeted teachers that worked in all eight quadrants of the city to explore their exercise and work habits. I created a ten (10) question survey that was submitted electronically. The survey was sent through a previously created Google Mail (gmail) account allowing for teacher anonymity. Thirty-seven teachers responded with the greatest response from my building. I spoke with the principal to inform her of my action research, she agreed to assist in any way possible.

Data Analysis

Thirty-two (32%) of the respondents indicated that they participated in some type of exercise daily for at least **30 – 60 minutes**.

Overwhelmingly the exercise of choice was walking/running – **83.3%**.

When asked about their mental state if they did not participate in their chosen activity **70.3%** of the teachers replied that they felt sluggish during the day.

When asked, “If you were given the opportunity to exercise during the work day, do you think that it would impact your production?” teachers overwhelmingly responded **YES – 75.7% to 24.3% - NO**.

Teachers feel **HAPPY** and **ENERGETIC** when they are able to reboot their minds and bodies during the school day.

Teachers that have been teaching from **0-5 and 6-11 years** responded at greater propensity -- **29.7%** respectively. There was a good mix of age ranges that responded.

Most of the teachers were from the **Northwest quadrant** of the city – **83.8%**

Teachers do not have the opportunity during the work day to reboot their minds and bodies, therefore leading to “**Teacher Burnout**” at a faster rate.

Recommendations

Teacher burnout is a psychological condition that leads to exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased teacher achievement and self-worth. Teachers should be “proactive” when setting limits to the amount of time they invest in work. Teachers should listen to their bodies so that they are aware of the physical and mental stress.

Administrators can assist in the prevention of teacher burn-out by providing faculty with a designated workout space and encourage the staff to use it before school, during preparation blocks and after school. This area does not have to be large or expensive. Teachers or area fitness centers can donate equipment. Teachers can be encouraged to walk the school and track the miles that they walk. Start a walking club just for teachers.

“Fitness in the hallway”, not only provides teachers with the stress-reduction benefits of exercise but also provides extra supervision in the building. The effect of teacher morale is often overlooked by policy-makers and faculty members. Positive teacher morale leads to high levels of student achievement. Preventing and treating teacher burnout provides a necessary health benefit to teachers and helps to ensure that children will receive the best education possible.

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