

COMBAT STRESS: A PRACTICAL STUDY HOW TO HELP TEACHERS

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Abstract: The article argues in favour of fighting off stress in the teaching profession. It also overviews a selection of activities that can be used to overcome stress and build up self-confidence. It relies on the author's research outcomes and personal experience as a teacher of English as a foreign language.

Keywords: job burnout, drop out, stress, overloading, English

Abstrakt: Artykuł dotyczy kwestii zwalczania stresu w zawodzie nauczyciela. Zawiera również przegląd wybranych działań, które można wykorzystać do przezwyciężenia stresu i zbudowania pewności siebie. Opiera się na wynikach badań autorki oraz własnych doświadczeniach nauczyciela języka angielskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: wypalenie zawodowe, rezygnacja z pracy, stres, przeciążenie, język angielski

Introduction

Although teaching profession is a demanding and rewarding career, it is becoming a real struggle to be respected and appreciated, both by parents and students. A current research has shown that during holiday months, 2022, there were 13 thousands vacats over Polish schools (Raducha 2022). Moreover, concerns on the low status of teachers have caused some harmful health syndroms, mainly job burn-out and, in effect, dropping out the profession. Teaching retention is led by different factors, a low salary, head teacher and staff relations, the lack of prospective promotion, not fulfilled personal individual needs, not recognising effort and involvement, or even chronic tiredness (Michniuk 2020). More and more teachers are resigning from work and seeking other more profitable job opportunities.

This paper reviews possible reasons of dropping out and burning out at work and then, it presents some possible options how to combat stress and to adopt some possible approach which may significantly enhance performances.

Background

Stress has always been an inseparable element of any job. Working with everyday dose of it can be much harmful for mental and physical health and may lead to some serious disorders. One of them is job burnout. It can be defined as stress caused by work environment and in effect, leading to dimensions, physical and mental tiredness and exhaustion, the lack of efficiency, and cynism (Lubbadeh, 2020). Moreover, Lubbadeh also mentions such conditions as temporary absence at work, a variety of health problems, mostly connected with cardiovascular issues), and even mental disorders, like for instance, insomnia. As a result, an exhausted and disaffected employee works much less effectively, loses motivation and is not willing to pass knowledge on to students. Going further, the extent of burnout is much wider. It can be deeply rooted in the whole family, as it is passed from one family member to another, then to children, and so on. WHO organisation mentions the term 'hook' which describes the state of being emotionally trapped by negative feelings and thoughts which cannot be possibly got away. (2020) A 'hooked' person one moment is exhilarated by spending time with their family and friends, and when some distractions occur, is filled with anger and rage. Job burnout does not end at a workplace, it wanders from one place to another, it grows to significantly wider extent, hurting friends and families.

Secondly, another term that may be associated with teaching is dropout. Dropout is just leaving the profession at different point of working career. Alliance for Education Excellence has carried out research concerning the possible reasons for it. 65% pointed that they left the profession due to the lack of spare time. 60 % mentioned too exhausting workload, and another 53% left teaching because of problems with students' behaviour. Henegar states that there are many reasons why teachers leave their jobs. First of all, he points out mandates. School work not only deals with teaching, but also with paperwork, extra classes and school celebrations. All mentioned things have to be organized by teachers and they demand effort and extra time which not always teachers want to devote. Furthermore, expectations of executives are often exaggerated and they ask for flexibility and the amount of necessary time to build extra activities and opportunities for learners. In addition, teachers have to still remember about providing the highest quality of education and fulfilling the aims of the curriculum. In such environment it is really difficult to manage time effectively, especially even more difficult to take care of after-work life (2019). Another point to consider is the fact that dropout very often touches beginning teachers. A study carried out by Public Agenda claims that 85% of candidates for teachers is totally unprepared for early obstacles which they need to face with at school. Despite the fact that these newcomers are well-equipped with knowledge and methodology, they will never be prepared in advance for

drafting documentation or organising school events. Furthermore, beginning teachers need to overcome different types of personality. Although expectations may be quite exaggerated, the real-life surprises. It can be said that students are quiet and always listen to a teacher, but everything changes when a person starts teaching. Then, they strike with reality and realise how it looks like. As a result, these ones who are not able to deal with all the matters, crack under pressure and resign from work (Henegar 2019).

The article argues over the subject of job burnout and dropping out and provides some possible suggestions how to overcome the problem. There is carefully researched data and also, I provide some solutions that come from my personal experience as a teacher of English as a foreign language.

Psychology of selflove

Psychology has always been a powerful tool in every field of study. In case of any problem concerning human behaviour, the answer can be found in psychology which provides relevant observation of human nature and relationships between people. Trends in psychology are changing year by year, there are more and more contemporary directions which adjust to mentality of today's society and world. I have forever wanted to be a teacher who builds positive relationship between me and my students, and co-workers as well. Once, I discovered selflove and since then, it has been guiding me in my work, to such extent that I think this is worth mentioning and sharing with other people. I have chosen this type of philosophy because only an exhilarated person can make other people feel the same way. Only the person who loves their job is able to teach and pass knowledge on to students. The term self-love has had different meanings throughout history. The term reaches the 6th century BC and mostly, presents self-love as the root of evil, which may destroy people (Senghaar 2002). Recently, one of the Polish young psychologists, has given it a new meaning in order to support people, especially women. Marciniak claims that everyone is the best teacher for yourself and there is no need to follow anyone, the most comfortable and sanative method is to follow the self (2022). Significantly, the belief in the self may help in gaining self-confidence and having control over stress and negative feelings at work and in social life as well. It has been said that if people want to find happiness, they do not need to be perfect and look for things that make them exhilarated. Year by year, decade by decade, they are pursuing different life goals, but still, it is not enough to be satisfied in life. The answer can only be found in one place – in one's soul. To discover yourself and get rid of negative thoughts and feelings, it is advised to listen to our soul needs.

To start with, take care of soul. There are a few steps to follow in this process and the first one is to avoid overloading and working long hours. A tired and

exhausted person is less efficient and has a tendency to forget things, what in effect, causes stress and tension at work. Secondly, avoid social media. Of course, a small amount is always allowed, but spending long hours following celebrities or just friends, may be harmful for our self-confidence which has already been built up. Reality created by celebrities on social networks fuels the battle to be better and to act more productively. However, spending time offline is much more productive and teaches us how to look for our needs and how to understand the self better. Even going for a walk somewhere can help our brain to relax and forget negative emotions (Marciniak 2022).

Another thing that may help to calm down is letting things go (Marciniak, 2022). It is said that no one can be enslaved by other people's expectations and perfectionism. Recently, it has been observed that there is growing popularity of courses, trainings or choosing personal mentors. Very often after completing these courses, a person does not feel fulfilled or wants to look for something more. The chain cannot be stopped, the more person accomplishes, the less satisfied they are. Then, being desperate pushes us to fulfill other people's expectations and goals. The only thing that can make people fulfilled is their own soul and thoughts. Everything what we need is in our body and it is not worth fighting for perfectionism. Think, you are good enough. You have got everything you need to be the best version of yourself. (Marciniak 2022).

Moreover, Marciniak also mentions 10 habits that may support the process of loving yourself.

1. **INNER DIALOGUE.** Although the world relies on human communication between people, it is often forgotten that the most important dialogue is in people's minds. Talk to yourself in a chosen form, you can talk to yourself in your head, out loud or write your thoughts in a diary. Do not consider things from the past, let everything go. Take into account only positive aspects of life.
2. **MEDITATE.** Continued everyday, it can easily become a habit which can bring you closer to your soul. All the answers are already in your head, just avoid distractions as the Internet, social media or negative thoughts. Sit down alone, switch off your phone and computer. Meditate for 5 minutes or even for one hour, it is your choice how long. Choose a place that can help you to rest. Think positive and it will come back to you.
3. **HUG YOURSELF.** Cross your arms, breathe deeply and be thankful for all the things that has happened in your life.
4. **WATER.** Drink water. Without it human body does not function properly. Coffee is not a drink that gives energy and power. Water provides our body with the proper balance and people need the balance in life.

5. GREATFULNESS. First, love yourself and be grateful for all the moments that has occurred in your life. Where the love is, there is no hate. Where the gratefulness is, there is no complaining. Everyday try to be thankful for at least one thing, it does not have to be something specific, just appreciate small things, like the fact that you can wake up or have breakfast. If you start being grateful for small things, you will see that your life is going to turn upside down and with kindness you can go further than you may predict.
6. EYE CONTACT. Maintaining eye contact with other people is vitally important. Look at people as you want to trust them and be kind. Secondly, do not forget about the self. When you wake up in the morning, go to the mirror, look at yourself, smile and say hello.
7. MOVEMENT. Human body is created in order to move. At work people spend around eight hours a day and sedentary life does not have a positive influence on our body and soul. Sleep usually lasts 8 hours and human body also does not move. There is also 8 hours more which you can devote to doing sports, or chores, gardening or just a simple walk. There is seven days in a week, each per twenty-four hours. Take as much as possible, your body will thank you later and your mind can work much more efficiently.
8. SELF-APPRECIATION. Appreciate yourself and celebrate small steps. Be a supporter for yourself, not a critic. Everyday think about things you have done and try to appreciate and be thankful. People often undervalue themselves it is time to change it and think positively about your own accomplishments.
9. BREATHING. Do not forget about relaxing and proper breathing. Lie down on your favourite place, rest and breathe. If you have to work, also take some time off. Learn to set goals and to unwind properly.
10. VISUALISATION. Visualise your dreams and passions. Think where you would like to see yourself in the future and what are your biggest dreams to fulfill. By visualisation you push yourself towards setting goals and realising them in the future.

Marciniak claims that there are more habits than mentioned above ones, but these ones it is enough to feel comfortable and they prevent from feeling stressed and anxious in life. Moreover, Higgins claims that self-love is the key for mental health as well as happytalism and it allows people to feel free from anxiety and depression (2018). It can also be necessary to imply for people who work hard and constantly fight for success and perfectionism. Paul Hewitt, a psychologist in Vancouver, Canada, the author of the book *Perfectionism: A Relational Approach to Conceptualization, Assessment and Treatment*, mentions 'the inner bully' who constantly pushes to be better, perfect, hurries towards success and criticizes yourself when

aims are failed. These can be even simple things, like not meeting the deadline, forgetting about something or the lack of preparation for a particular lesson. Prof. Neff explains that to overcome such obstacles it is advised not to focus on a negative inner voice, but on a positive, kinder one (2018). By cultivating self-love and self-esteem there is a possibility to combat negative emotions and to get rid of stress in private and working life.

A selection of practical tasks

Over many years I have created my own tasks and rules that may help to work more effectively. As far as I have observed, applying self-psychology and self-appreciation is one of the most functional points.

1. **APPLY SELF-LOVE PSYCHOLOGY.** Love yourself in the profession you perform and be thankful for having such work. There is a famous quotation by Maya Angelou, 'If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude.
2. **AVOID OVERLOAD.** Try not to take too much. First, adopt yourself in new environment and observe how much responsibilities you are able to take. Step by step, engage in more activities, but when there is a feeling that you feel tired and exhausted, try to slow down. Taking too many duties at once may be harmful, and in effect may lead to workload.
3. **LOOK FOR SOLUTION.** In every aspect of life you can always step back. There is no situation that you can resign or give up, or just look for another possible solution. Do not drop out when you are not able to overcome obstacles. Solution may come sooner or later, but in order to find it, you need to devote to searching answers and compromise. Getting stuck in one point may lead to blocking yourself and in effect, discouraging from making any progress at work. Sometimes it is necessary to get out of our comfort zones and leave behind all our previous ideas to find a remedy.
4. **BE KIND AND FRIENDLY, BUT NOT A FRIEND.** Human relationships have always been vitally important to function properly in the society. There are different kinds of work settings where people work. In some of them, employees work alone or even, work from home, where contact with other people is strictly limited. On the other hand, there are also settings in which people have thousands of colleagues or even meet thousands of clients or consumers. Be friendly to everyone, but you do not need to go into long-term friendships if you do not want to, and you do not need to tell all your life secrets and share life experience that you have got. Just try to maintain positive relations and respect others. It is much more comfortable to make friends with people we work with, or just meet at work than going

into conflicts and misunderstandings, it may get worse in the future and affect our work performances.

5. **BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF YOUR MIND.** Your mind is beautiful and you have got everything you need there. Try to teach yourself how to rely on your thoughts and control them. As a teacher, I used to write down the aims and plan of every lesson and I followed them carefully, step by step. I started being tired of it and once I realised that I do not need those papers anymore. Arrange everything in your head, it is able to store it all. Writing down and following notes is a good idea, but it prevents from being spontaneous and unpredictable, of course in a positive way. The same rule is applied if it comes to presentations. When you present, try not to rely on a presentation only. Presentation is just an additional tool to your performance, you are the essence of the whole talk.
6. **AVOID PAPER.** First, think before print. This point is connected with the fifth one. Before printing many copies, think if you really need such amount of materials during the class. Maybe you will be able to work without them, or you can conduct a lesson using your brain and bright ideas. Of course, small amount of materials is always necessary, but it can be too much for a teacher, or a student as well. Time passes really fast during the lesson, and always wonder if you have enough time to work on all copies that you have prepared. Sometimes less is much more productive and what students really remember, is a teacher itself, not a presentation or a copy.
7. **AVOID CHAOS.** Give a class particular rhythm. Do not get distracted easily. Tell your students that if they want to ask you something, they have a possibility to do it after you finish all the supposed work for the class. Follow your own routine, give some order to your activities and repeat it. Although it may seem that routine can be boring, your students pick it up quickly and they remember that you work on a such basis. Working without plan is chaotic for teachers and for students as well.
8. **HIDE AND SEEK.** Despite being in the centre of attention during the lesson, try not to hide yourself. Do not be afraid of speaking, do not avoid eye contact with learners, be open and talk to people who you teach and treat them with respect. If they see that you are willing to a conversation with them, they become more open, too.
9. **REMEMBER THEIR NAMES.** In spite of the fact that teachers have many names to remember, try to identify your students. This allows you to have better contact with them and treat them individually.
10. **FOSTER YOUR BRAIN.** As I have already mentioned in the article, the power of mind is unlimited. Remember, to take care of your brain in many possible options, for instance, eat fruit and vegetables that support the work of

our body, do crosswords or puzzles that develop creative thinking, go for a walk or meet with friends. Do not go online too often, rather promote of-line life. It will help you to function better, as well as, perform more effectively at work.

11. REPECT YOUR TIME. When you work, engage fully. When you relax, relax as much as you can. Learn to work without distractions, but when you relax, do the same. Do not think about work when you go on holidays, switch off your work phone, and do not respond to work emails. The same applies to work, do not think about your private life when you perform your work tasks. It will allow you to save a lot of time and meet the deadlines.

Conclusions

Taking into account the demands for people who want to be teachers of English, they should be equipped with psychological tips that may prevent them from having problems at work concerning job burnout or even beginning drop out. In an increasingly globalised work, there is a possibility to use a wide range of psychological activities that help to cope with stress and problems, one of them can be a psychology of self-love that relies on building the strong self that is able to function freely in the society and avoid future problems. To prevent job burnout and drop out is important to take care of one's self all the time and to work out healthy habits, of work and relax as well. Consequently, a person becomes more self-confident and performs more effectively at work.

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