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Teachers' Wellbeing

Editorial

It is to be hoped that the social, cultural, intellectual, moral and economic benefits of education are uncontroversial (Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Brassey-Grundy, & Bynner, 2004). The provision of high quality teaching is, therefore, presumably important and a critical aspiration for all governments. Economically, the training and employment of teachers represents a large financial investment for any government. For example, in England, the government allocated over £700m in 2010 for initial teacher training (TDA, 2011). Thus, if education is valuable, and if it is to be a successful social and economic investment, the well-being, engagement, motivation and resilience of teachers are, also, important issues. However, teachers' resilience in the face of professional difficulties cannot be taken for granted. The consequences for children of impoverished educational systems and staffing cannot be ignored (Belfield & Levin, 2007).

Understandably, perhaps, governments may seek to hold schools to account (Richards, 2001; Wilson, 1995). The impact of such processes are not unambiguous, and consequently teachers may feel driven by policies that foster a mechanistic view of professional performance and stifle professional creativity (Case, Case, & Catling, 2000; Day, 2002; Ehren & Visscher, 2008). Many teachers report high levels of stress and dissatisfaction with their professional position and this is reflected in absence and attrition rates, although this has been disputed (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Bartlett, 2004; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Klassen, 2010; Shepherd, 2012). For those responsible for the training and employment of teachers it would seem desirable to be able to rely on the motivation and professionalism of those in the profession. What is it that is problematic and what may be done to ensure that those with day to day responsibility for the future well-being of children are themselves well placed to undertake such important work?

For this issue of Educational and Child Psychology, we sought papers that would consider psychological issues related to the wellbeing, resilience and efficacy of teachers, how these issues may be better understood, how may applied psychologists, for example, support the professional welfare of teachers, and what may be the ensuing benefits for children and young people?

While Sue Roffey provides an international perspective and asserts that positive teacher-student relationships are critical for the well-being of both teachers and students, Eleanor Salter-Jones provides some evidence of underlying psychosocial processes that may support the emotional well-being of teachers and students.

There can be little doubt that, like many human beings, teachers experience an emotional roller coaster. Their close encounters with young people who also manifest similar ups and downs may be, as Tracy Durksen and Robert Klassen document, particularly troubling in their initial training as teachers. Durksen and Klassen suggest that the nature of the support for teachers in the latter phases of their training may prove crucial in ensuring long term professional commitment and teachers' beliefs in their efficacy.

The issue of teachers' efficacy beliefs is further examined in Carol Brown's paper. The findings of her systematic review suggest that the more depersonalised teachers become, the less likely it is that

they can sustain positive beliefs in their efficacy. She suggests that a sense of not being valued and supported by schools' leadership can be detrimental to teachers' well-being. Ways of counteracting the erosion of positive beliefs and supporting the collective beliefs of a school are suggested by Hannah Critchley and Simon Gibbs. An intervention based on ideas deriving from 'Positive Psychology' was found to have a beneficial effect for teachers involved in this study.

A recurring theme in many of the papers we received related to the interaction between children's behaviour and teachers' practice. This is exemplified by the papers by David Armstrong and Fiona Hallett, and Michael Annan and Stacy Moore. Armstrong and Hallett remind us that children's behaviour continues to be a source of concern, but that much of the difficulty for teachers lies in their unresolved personal tensions between policy and practice. Armstrong and Hallett suggest that more might be done (by educational psychologists, for instance) to provide conceptual understanding and emotional support for teachers who might otherwise feel under-equipped to manage children who can be too easily categorised as 'having' social and emotional 'disabilities'. Thus the work of Michael Annan and Stacy Moore may prove of some assistance in developing ways of intervening. This work takes as a starting point the group-work pioneered by Gerda Hanko. Annan and Moore reflect on their attempts to enable teachers and support staff in schools be more effective as part of a project undertaken in an inner city area. They conclude that when school staff are able (a lack of time being one of the greatest constraints) to support each other there were improvements in terms of children's behaviour and in staff well-being.

Finally, therefore, we return to the importance of interpersonal relationships. In her paper Katie Partridge provides further illustration of the importance of positive interpersonal relationships that emerge in the reports she gathered from pastoral staff in a secondary school. This work also indicates how consultation (or supervision) that is based on systemic and psychodynamic principles can enable staff to reframe perceived problems and, through increased awareness of their own emotional reactions to conflict, can thereby gain enhanced beliefs in their emotional resilience and well-being.

We hope this collection of papers provides food for thought and practice for teachers, psychologists and administrators. We also hope that these papers will demonstrate the importance of considering psychological factors that permeate education and that can create the context for successful education for children by sustaining those who are most critical in providing it.

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