

Teacher stress as a factor in the management of emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Introduction

A number of studies have been conducted around the nature and consequences of teacher stress as cited in Travers & Cooper, (1993) and Cooper (1995). Many of these focus on the impact this has on the profession in terms of the cost of teacher burnout and subsequent absence from duty and/or leaving the profession. Travers & Cooper (1993) and Cooper & Kelly (1993) investigate the specific sources of this stress in order to provide an information base regarding the specific nature of the stressors, as well as their impact.

This paper builds on the work of researchers such as these from within the Action Research Paradigm of A Quiet Place Project. Offering data from a current and practical experience base, it seeks to present a 'what works' methodology for those involved at grass roots level in support of the work of teachers. Offering a model for therapeutic support within mainstream provision, it shows itself able to address complex issues such as teacher stress in a practical and above all useful way, capitalising available resources both individual and institutional.

After providing a background to the work of A Quiet Place, the paper will consider the specific role of teacher stress both exacerbated by, and contributing to, the difficulties of working with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Background to A Quiet Place Project

Holistic Support

Developed to support children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, A Quiet Place aims to offer holistic intervention for the child, for the family and for the school, specifically in terms of teacher stress, as part of supporting the whole child. Operating from an eclectic perspective, the project aims to support the development of emotional literacy and well being by :

- utilising innovative and creative techniques appropriate to the needs of clients
- working in a manner that catalyses and supports positive social change
- seeking effective strategies to support children, families and schools under stress by

Results from Stress Survey :

- building self awareness & esteem
- teaching parenting skills
- offering stress management support

Operational procedures are held in place and monitored by an explicit protocol, a tightly regulated system of supervision and training for practitioners and a process of external monitoring and quality control.

Educational Therapeutics

This is a term coined to describe and to characterise the type and the quality of the interventions delivered by A Quiet Place. Derived from the Latin "educare"- to draw / lead out and the Greek "therapeutae"- those who served in the temple where people came to be healed, the term seeks to embody the original intent behind these terms.

Essentially humanistic in orientation, Educational Therapeutics works from a model of health and well being and holds that :

- the client is the expert on their own life
- parents have done their best given their own experience
- therapist is a facilitator in the process of the client moving towards self knowledge and self healing
- client and therapist work together towards an effective outcome

It aims to

- to provide effective, sensitive, respectful and holistic client centred therapy within the education system
- to provide monitored, short term interventions in creative and innovative ways
- to focus on the positive present, latent or potential resources of the client
- to work with other services in order to provide continuity of effective intervention for the client

The Ace Factor

Fundamental to the therapeutic interventions offered by A Quiet Place is the concept of change, and the capacity of the individual to make that change. Change is seen as having three discrete components which also form stages in the process of implementing and then maintaining such change :

Awareness

Choice

Energy

The idea of *awareness* rests on the concept of an internal and personal

Teacher stress as a factor in the management of emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Results from Stress Survey :

model or map of external reality. Recognition of a situation or circumstance that needs to change, and perhaps more salient, that it is possible *to* change, forms the cornerstone of this awareness. While this is implicit in all good therapeutic or counselling processes, clients who have either been referred or have sought therapeutic support on their own have usually reached a certain stage of awareness. Within the educational context however, therapeutic intervention usually occurs in response to a situation. Working towards a solution therefore must of necessity begin with a process of awareness raising, including issues of problem ownership and the development of some understanding of the idea of personal agency.

Choice extends the concept of awareness to include empowerment and the capacity not only to comprehend the presence and nature of different options, but also to appreciate own capacity to influence outcomes choosing a particular option.

These stages correlate with Prosashka's cyclic motivation model, which begins with a stage called pre-contemplation, during which the facilitator's role is to help the client appreciate their present situation. Only when this is achieved does the individual enter a cycle of change, which takes them through contemplation, action, and hopefully on to maintenance. The alternative to maintenance, which signals successful or completed change, is relapse, whereby the individual continues another revolution of the cycle. (QUOTE REF). The similarity between this model and the one posited by Educational Therapeutics lies in the educational or didactic nature of the process, and illustrates the distance which must be bridged in the process of offering therapeutic support within an educational context.

The *Energy* component in this model represents the manner in which Educational Therapeutics makes explicit that which is usually implicit or even ignored in the usual therapeutic model. Whereas traditional counselling or psychotherapy supports change in its clients via the therapeutic model from which it operates and through the process of on-going therapeutic sessions, the clients of educational therapeutics are, as indicated previously, clients more by virtue of circumstance than by their own choice. They therefore seldom have the motivation to sustain prolonged therapeutic contact. This is particularly true of the home and school elements of the holistic intervention programme. The overt acknowledgement that energy is required to implement change forms part of the empowerment model, and supports the sensitive, client centered approach to which Educational Therapeutics lays claim.

The implementation of methodologies which rest upon these premises form the operational basis for A Quiet Place interventions.

A Quiet Place and Stress Management

The stated objective of A Quiet Place Project is the development of

Teacher stress as a factor in the management of emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Results from Stress Survey :

Emotional Literacy and Well-Being. The concept of Emotional Intelligence, as discussed by Goleman (1996) draws heavily on recent brain research. Of specific importance is the impact of stress on the functioning of brain. (Carter, 1999). A study reported by Motluk (2000) suggests that long term stress has the same effect on the brain as trauma. The loss of hippocampal mass in sufferers of Gulf War Syndrome is thought to be attributable to the inhibition in the growth of new brain cells formed in the hippocampus. These new cells are thought to be fundamental in the process of laying down memories. Extrapolation of these findings has significant implications for education.

The Action Research Paradigm necessitates a hands-on and pragmatic response to observed phenomena. The vast weight of case study data gathered over the years provides evidence of the deleterious effects of the adrenalin response and cortical inhibition in both the short and the long term. For a large number of clients supported by A Quiet Place, adrenalin arousal is a way of life. Their failure to thrive, and inability to engage educationally supports the findings of Motluk in a tragic way.

All Quiet Place interventions therefore contain elements of stress management in support of the client and their situation.

Teacher Stress

Taking account of research findings, but more immediately, dealing on the ground with the effects of teacher stress on children, A Quiet Place offers a range of stress management support for teachers:

Training in Educational Therapeutics

Stress Management via Inset Training

Classroom stress management strategies

Emotional Intelligence Curriculum support (via teacher training and / or PHSE)

Individual therapeutic sessions

Weekly relaxation training

Results of Interventions

While feedback from staff is positive regarding the impact of A Quiet Place on the children who form its primary client group, and teachers use to good effect the techniques for classroom management and stress reduction; levels of teacher stress remain significant.

Teacher interviews

Teacher stress as a factor in the management of emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Results from Stress Survey :

An independent researcher (Heather Piper, from Manchester University) was commissioned to interview staff, parents and children as part of the data gathering for the evaluation of A Quiet Place. Nine members of staff from three participating schools were interviewed over a two-day period. Staff without exception were wholly positive about the experience. However, there were some noticeable differences between the three different schools' comments.

One school regarded Quiet Place as part of its whole. The Quiet Place staff had been into the classes before children had to take their SATs tests, and calmed children down with relaxation techniques. Also children in the EBD unit had been taught to massage each other's hands in class, this was now just routine. The staff (and children) all related to Quiet Place as central to their existence. Comments were made such as

it has affected our whole atmosphere, the way we work, its an added strand, its an added strand, its been an input to the whole school community.

The other schools, although positive, tended to make comments about helping the individual rather than the whole. So comments included

the best thing about it is that we can offer a child help immediately, we don't have to make a referral and wait six weeks or so until the situation breaks down and we have to exclude the child, we feel much less helpless than we used to

we can help those children who go to the wall i.e. those who just take their problems inwards.

Mainly comments were made about how it calmed children down and how they benefited from the one to one attention from a friendly and concerned adult.

Totally relaxing, just peace and tranquillity

All the schools were able to allow their staff to benefit from A Quiet Place on a personal basis to a greater or lesser extent. Having this personally positive experience themselves meant that they were able to understand the benefits for the children more fully.

In a school where A Quiet Place has recently been set up, 4 members of staff claimed to be on the verge of leaving the school in favour of a school with less difficult children. The prospect of the support promised by A Quiet Place persuaded them all to give it another year. In the words of one teacher:

It's just knowing that there is somewhere to go for help that you're not alone

Results from Stress Survey :

Case Study

Describe here the case of the teacher at Hope Valley who was able to remain in school in spite of extreme stress.

Any other case studies

Discussion

It is clear from the above that the support for teachers is both direct, via work with the teachers themselves, and indirect, in terms of support with difficult children, with children's stress levels and with classroom management. The indirect support begins to address the issues of excess workload identified by Cooper & Kelly (1993), while the direct support works with the individual coping styles discussed by Cooper (1995).

Stress Survey

The length of time that the support of A Quiet Place has been in some schools means that in those schools there will inevitably be a high level of knowledge or awareness of skills and strategies of stress management. Day to day experience however reveals a significant level of stress even in these schools.

A three-part stress questionnaire was therefore devised in an effort to determine where, in the context of an ACE model described earlier, further support should be targeted. Part 1 contained demographic measures such as the presence of stressful life events, as well as health measures and stressful actions habitually engaged upon. Part 2 contained items reflecting the respondent's awareness of potential stressors, and measures to counteract the effects of such stressors. Part 3 contained strain measures – a reflection of the subjective experience of stress and its impact on the life and health of the individual.

A small pilot investigation was initiated in an effort to make this differential diagnosis. The questionnaire was completed by 38 teachers from Quiet Place Schools and 13 non-teachers. The non-teachers were students on a personal development training programme, and therefore not representative of the population as a whole. They were chosen to test the ACE Factor hypothesis described earlier – i.e. that awareness and energy have a significant effect on the level of stress experienced.

Results of Stress Survey

Descriptive result tabulations are found in Fig. 1 and Table 1. While there is little difference between the means of part 1 of the questionnaire for the two groups, the means of both part 2 (awareness) and part 3 (impact or experience of stress) is higher for the non-teaching respondents.

Results from Stress Survey :

		Part 1	Part 2	Part 3
Non-teacher	Mean	15.77	27.54	29.69
	N	13	13	13
	Std Dev	8.20	8.88	9.52
Teacher	Mean	19.04	26.00	38.29
	N	38	38	38
	Std Dev	10.11	6.98	10.55

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Stress Survey for Teacher and Non-Teacher groups

Results of Stress Survey

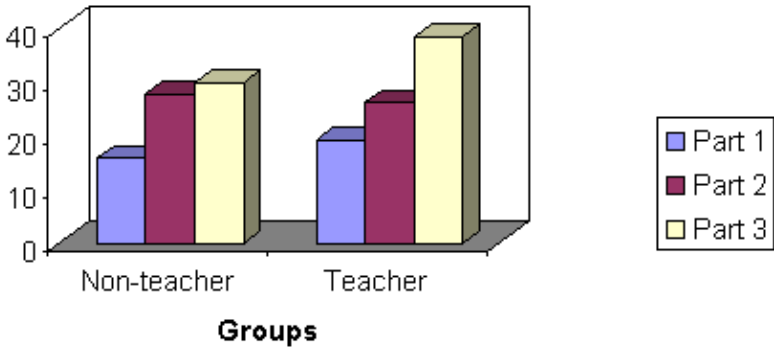


Fig 2 : Comparison of Stress Survey Results Across Schools

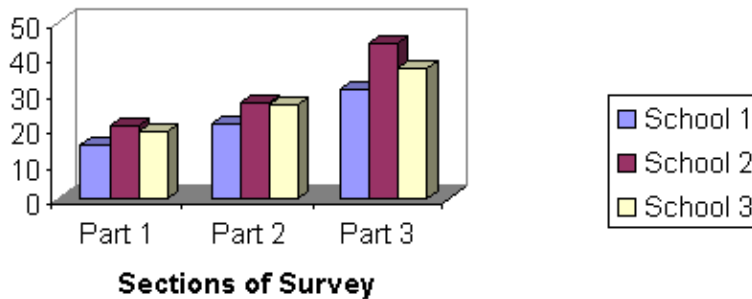


Fig 2. shows a comparison of means across schools. Whereas demographic stress factors and measures of awareness show little variation across groups, school 2 shows a visibly higher level of the impact of stress than the other schools. In terms of the ACE model proposed by this paper, it can be hypothesised that school 2 shows a deficit in the *Energy* factor i.e. respondents know what to do, but for some reason are unable to implement their knowledge. It is interesting to note that this particular school has had A Quiet Place for approximately 4 years, and that stress management and support has been available to staff throughout this period. A survey of the uptake of the support measures in place at this school however shows that over the past 12 months less than 5 teachers attended relaxation or made use of the available facilities in any way. The long association with A Quiet Place has ensured that respondents are *Aware* of what to do to manage their own stress, but results from the survey show that they do not apply that knowledge in any useful way.

Conclusions

While this paper offers no hard, quantitative data, it seeks to investigate a practical methodology, both to stimulate future investigation, and to offer useful interventions which, in line with the aims and objectives of A Quiet Place Project, will decrease absence from school and maximise the opportunities for learning for the children concerned. The pilot survey offers some support for the ACE model, and interview data indicates that A Quiet Place interventions offer both direct and indirect support in terms of teacher stress levels, and that the presence of A Quiet Place in participating schools has a wide ranging impact on the functioning of the system as a whole.

References

Carter, R. (1999) Mapping the Mind. London : Seven Dials.

Cooper, C.L. (1995) Life at the chalkface identifying and measuring

Results from Stress Survey :

teacher stress.

British Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol 65, 69-71

Cooper, C.L. & Kelly, M. (1993) Occupational stress in head teachers : a national UK

study. British Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol 63, 130-143.

Goleman, D. (1996). Emotional Intelligence. London : Bloomsbury.

Motluk, A. (2000). Grow your own. New Scientist, Vol. 165 No 2225.

Proshaska

Travers, C.J. & Cooper, C.L. (1993) Mental health, job satisfaction and occupational

stress among UK teachers. Work Stress, Vol. 7, No 3, 203-219