Original Research

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A Recovery Pathway After COVID-19 Teacher Burnout

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Abstract

Burnout in the helping professions, including teaching, has been well documented for over fifty years and has been captured within two seminal models offered by Maslach and her colleagues. For this study we interviewed 22 teachers bi-weekly to determine whether these models captured their COVID-19 pandemic work experiences during the 2020–2021 school year. Only one teacher, however, left work on a medical leave and then returned to work after burning out, and therefore provided a case study of the processes of both teacher burnout and recovery under pandemic conditions. The existing models of burnout were upheld as salient in understanding the processes of burnout during COVID-19, with specific emphasis on the job dimensions of workload and values incongruence. In particular, the values of honesty and safety were salient within pandemic conditions. Evidence-based suggestions are provided to assist teachers in supporting not only their return to teaching but also their full and long-term recovery from burnout after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

Teaching has been recognized over time as a stressful profession (Klassen et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2000), a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Pressley, 2021; Răducu & Stănculescu, 2022). Many studies about teacher burnout have focused on its antecedents, processes, and outcomes; however, the scholarship related to burnout *recovery* in teachers is sparse. Moreover, well-established theories of teacher burnout as they relate specifically to recovery within the novel conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic are underexamined.

The current study examines the experiences of one of the teachers from our national study of Canadian teacher burnout (Babb et al., 2022; Eblie Trudel et al., 2021a, 2021b; Sokal et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, in press). Jenny is a teacher who experienced burnout during COVID-19, took a leave from teaching, and then returned to the classroom. Her narrative is presented within the context of current theorizing about teacher burnout to determine whether the dominant theories are upheld under the unprecedented conditions of a worldwide pandemic and to develop a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of teacher burnout and recovery during a pandemic. While burnout is well-understood both theoretically and practically as a process, recovery from burnout has been treated as a state in both research and theorizing (Zijlstra et al., 2014). By following Jenny as she experienced burnout and then recovery over a year of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, we illuminate the transitions that encompass the recovery process. These findings will be important going forward not only to document the recovery processes related to teacher burnout from pandemic conditions, but also to provide a pathway for teachers questioning whether recovery is possible.

Two Theories of Burnout and Stress

Burnout Dimensions

The most widely accepted and referenced model of burnout is that of Maslach and her colleagues (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 1996), and this model continues to be relevant in the measurement of burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic (Abramson, 2022; Bailey et al., 2022). Over fifty years of research has supported burnout as comprised of three dimensions. The first dimension is exhaustion and can include physical, emotional, and mental fatigue. The second dimension involves a withdrawal of energy toward the focus of one's workplace as a means of self-preservation. In emotion-laden occupations such as teaching, social work, and the medical professions, the focus of the work is on relationships, so the withdrawal is termed "depersonalization" and, in the case of teachers, it involves withdrawal from students. In other professions, the focus is on the work itself, so the withdrawal is called "cynicism" (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 1996). This second component is based on Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources theory, which states that individuals will preserve their resources, prevent loss of resources, or strive to replenish their resources. The withdrawal of energy toward people or work is understood to be based on the need for resource conservation in order to meet job demands. The third component of burnout is loss of accomplishment and is characterized by the subjective self-appraisal of inability to meet the demands of one's job role.

Areas of Worklife

Maslach and her colleagues (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach et al., 1996) initially conceptualized burnout as an individual psychological syndrome. However, as early as 2000 they began to examine burnout as a condition of the incongruence between the individual and the work setting. Leiter and Maslach (2004) introduced the concept of matching within the Areas of Worklife (AWL) model, which suggested that mismatches in employee/employer expectations in up to six relationship dimensions precipitate the experiences of employee burnout. These areas included workload, control, rewards, community, fairness, and values, which have been validated in studies with samples from the United States, Canada, Finland, and Italy (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). For example, "mismatches in control can result from staff members feeling overly controlled through micromanagement or from excessive ambiguity and chaos in workplace policies" (Leiter & Maslach, 1999, p. 473). Importantly, this model captures individual differences in workplace stress and burnout, because it explains how the expectations of the individual in each of the AWL can result in different perceptions of the same workplace. That is, the problem is not the employee or the workplace in isolation, but rather the mismatch in their relative expectations along the six dimensions. This model continues to demonstrate its relevance under pandemic conditions, especially within the highly challenging contexts of teaching and healthcare (Abramson, 2022).

The reciprocal relationship between employees and employers as it relates to burnout was recognized most recently by the World Health Organization in their 2018 re-definition of burnout (World Health Organization,

2018). While burnout was once defined as a psychological syndrome within an individual, it is now conceptualized as a response to a misalignment of job resources and demands—which are the responsibilities of the employer and employee together. The AWL model is especially salient during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it addresses mismatches that arise "when the working relationship changes to something staff members find unacceptable" (Leiter & Maslach, 1999, p. 473). This type of systemic, inter-dependent understanding of burnout is of utmost importance when there are increased numbers of issues that are uncontrolled and uncertain (Sproles, 2018)—for both employers and employees.

Literature Review

Research on the six areas of worklife has demonstrated varying degrees of salience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first area, workload, involves the "number of hours worked, the amount of time needed to recover, and the nature of the workload one carries (heavy, light, difficult, dangerous, etc.)." (Masluk et al., 2018, n.p.). Copious research has suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic sharply increased the workload of teachers (Sokal et al., 2020a, 2020b). This observation is concerning, as Brom et al. (2015) found that workload is the strongest predictor of well-being among the six areas of worklife. Past research has shown that detachment from work, both physically and psychologically, is therefore necessary for restoration of energy to return to work (Sonnentag et al., 2010). Failing to detach during off hours has been associated with both burnout and chronic health problems (Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006), as detachment is viewed as a core recovery component (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Recent research validates the essential nature of teachers' detachment in terms of decreasing exhaustion (Gluschkoff et al., 2016)—the first stage of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Given the stress and time related to learning to conduct their classes online as well as the need to work from home during lockdowns, teachers' stressors and worries were significant factors during the pandemic (Pressley, 2021; Răducu & Stănculescu, 2022). "Perseverating" (Brosschot et al., 2006) or "ruminating" (Cropley & Zijlstra, 2011) is characterized by continuously high levels of arousal that are counter-productive to recovery and associated with poor well-being (Vahle-Hinz et al., 2014). As opposed to problem-based approaches that yield solutions or emotion-based approaches that allow people to reframe problems and therefore cope with them better (Turnovska et al, 2014; Zijlstra et al., 2014), perseverating can be compared to a hamster on a wheel exerting frenetic and constant energy yet staying in the same place. This lack of detachment and effective resolution can add to the workload of teachers under stress. The need for recovery is even more imperative in light of the circumstances of the pandemic, as copious research studies (Rydstedt & Devereux, 2013; Sluiter et al., 2000, 2001) have shown that high job demands in combination with low levels of control are related to higher needs for recovery activities.

Community, the second area of the AWL model, is described by Masluk et al. (2018) as "the integration within the team, mutual trust and the overall social network within the workplace" (n.p.). This sense of team membership and support can come from a variety of sources and has been shown to affect well-being (de Lange et al., 2003). Research has suggested that the support of colleagues during the COVID-19 pandemic was integral to teachers' coping (Babb et al., 2022) and has highlighted the role of immediate supervisors, such as school principals, in their importance for workers' well-being and avoidance of burnout (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Breevaart et al., 2014; Dimoff et al., 2016). Leaders are the conduits between the employees and the organization and have intimate knowledge of their employees that allow them to both communicate the organizational values and to support workers in meeting them (Leiter et al., 2010).

In the AWL, reward is the third area and refers to the adequacy of pay, recognition, and appreciation from both the recipients and the supervisors of the work (Masluk et al., 2018, n.p.). Brom et al. (2015) showed that when "people feel they are neglected by the organization's material and social reward system, they are likely to feel out of sync with its values" (p. 61), a context that leads to burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). A lack of recognition can make employees feel inconsequential (Friedman, 1996). Farber (2000) suggested that this

sense of "inconsequentiality" among teachers who are burned out would respond best to rewards that support satisfaction and fulfilment, as suggestions around relaxation, time management, and coping skills will do little to address the lack of control perceived when teachers' voices are not heard and respected.

The fourth area, control, "encompasses the employees' perceived capacity to influence decisions that affect their work and access to resources that enable them to develop professionally," according to the AWL model (Masluk et al., 2018, n.p.). Leiter et al. (2010) emphasized the importance of an employee's control over workplace decision-making around (a) workload; (b) influencing the alignment between organizational values and one's personal values; and (c) the relationship with one's immediate supervisor to one's own well-being. They found that employee agency and self-determination were imperative to avoiding burnout. That is, "when people are unable … to pursue what they value in their work, they experience conflict" (Leiter et al., 2010, p. 71).

The area of values, fifth in the AWL model, speaks to the alignment of the employee's personal values with those of the employment organization (Masluk et al., 2018, n.p.). Leiter et al. (2010) found that value incongruence between employees and organizations correlated with exhaustion, depersonalization, and loss of accomplishment—all three components of burnout. Past research has supported the importance of specific values such a safety and honesty to workplace well-being (Laitinen et al., 1997). Moreover, research has shown that the greater the incongruence, the more likely the employee is to burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Masluk et al. (2018) defined fairness, the final of the six AWL components, as lack of favoritism and discrimination in the workplace. A weaker link between the area of fairness and burnout has been found in previous research (Brom et al., 2015).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

As part of a larger study, we interviewed the same 22 teachers from various schools within a school division every two weeks for a year during pandemic conditions (2020–2021). The main themes are reported elsewhere (Eblie Trudel et al., submitted) and demonstrated a varied response to teaching during the pandemic (Babb et al., 2022). Of the 22 teachers interviewed, Jenny was the only teacher who left work on a medical leave as a response to her stress during the 2020–2021 school year. More importantly, Jenny provided us with the opportunity to follow this teacher in situ, as she worked to return to the classroom. We began each phone interview by asking what had gone well and what had been a challenge during the previous two weeks. We ended each week by asking if the participant had anything to add. Furthermore, there was a focus theme and questions introduced in the middle section of each bi-weekly interview. Examples include: (1) What directives have you received about changes in processes due to COVID-19? How do you feel about communications—their timing, frequency, clarity? (2) How has COVID-19 affected your ability to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students? (3) Are there any advantages in terms of unexpected positive changes while teaching during a pandemic?

As the focus of the current case study, analyses were conducted using the bi-weekly interview data from one of the teachers, Jenny, who experienced full blown burnout over the course of the larger study. We endeavored to answer the following research questions

1. Are Jenny's experiences of burnout and recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic captured by two current theories about burnout developed before the pandemic?
2. What lessons can we learn from Jenny's experiences regarding the processes of recovery from burnout during COVID-19?

Methods

Participants

Jenny, a pseudonym, taught in a multi-grade, elementary classroom in an urban school and is the focus of the current analysis. Jenny preferred the pronouns she/her and had been teaching in a multi-age, elementary school classroom for five years. She held bachelor's degrees in Arts and Education and was pursuing graduate work part-time.

Context

An important consideration of Jenny's experiences during the pandemic is the context of the Canadian province and city in which she was teaching, and therefore we provide that context here. An understanding of the ways the pandemic unfolded in relation to schooling in Jenny's province and school division is important to analyzing her journey through burnout, as change and instability have been linked to burnout (Sproles, 2018). The province, Manitoba, Canada, had recently undertaken an extensive review of its education system, and the report of the review findings (the "K–12 Review") were scheduled to be released in March 2020. The first provincial case of COVID-19 was diagnosed during March 2020, and the government delayed the announcement of the K–12 Review indefinitely. Farber & Ascher (1991) showed that teacher stress in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s was exacerbated by school reform there, so the delay of the Manitoba Review boded well in terms of decreasing teacher stress in that province during the first waves of the pandemic. Students left schools for spring break in late March 2020, and—due to concerns about the initial wave of COVID-19—their classes resumed in an online format in April 2020 and continued online throughout the remainder of the school year. In addition, in June 2020 students within the study school division were invited to attend school once each week in small groups in order to maintain contact with teachers and to learn and practice the safety protocols for the return to school in September 2020.

Face-to-face teaching resumed in September 2020 and involved social distancing, masking, frequent disinfecting, and no sharing of materials. Parents of students in each classroom in the school division were given the choice of in-class or remote instruction, and teachers within Jenny's school division were not required to provide both modes of teaching simultaneously. In the fall of 2020, Winnipeg experienced some of the highest COVID-19 infection rates in Canada, with a disproportionate number of cases in the geographic area of the study school division. As part of the provincial pandemic response system, the city of Winnipeg went into a code red lockdown on November 2, 2020, with requirements for closure of all retail stores except those providing essential supplies. Restaurants, sports complexes, and theatres were also closed, and citizens were required to stay at home and not permitted to visit with family or friends. Throughout these measures and despite provincial lockdowns, schools in the province remained open for face-to-face, classroom-based teaching at "elevated orange" pandemic response status. Early in the fall of 2020, it was found that the masks provided to teachers by the provincial government were expired. Shortly afterwards, it was disclosed that most of the federal monies that had been supplied to the province to support educational responses to COVID-19 remained unspent. This situation precipitated widespread protests and criticism by teachers, teacher organizations, and by the editors of the local newspaper (Sokal et al., 2020c).

The city's code red lockdown continued throughout the December holiday season and into spring 2021, when some restrictions were gradually lifted. Concurrently, in mid-March 2021, the government announced the results of the K–12 Review, including plans to dissolve the provinces' current school divisions, revise the curriculum, and implement standardized testing.

In terms of Jenny's experiences within this context, she went on stress leave in early December 2020, a few weeks before the scheduled winter break. She received counselling during that leave and returned to classes in early February. Jenny spent the first two weeks upon her return to school job sharing with the teacher who

worked as a substitute teacher with her students while Jenny was away on leave. In later February, a few weeks before the unexpected announcement of the K–12 Review, Jenny returned to teaching her class full-time, all the while continuing with weekly therapy sessions.

It should also be noted that Jenny is a dedicated, highly committed teacher, placing her in a category of high risk for burnout (Sproles, 2018). In each interview, she spoke about her students in positive ways and expressed concerns for their learning, their emotional safety, and their physical safety. At no point was there any evidence of depersonalization in terms of withdrawing her emotional energy from her students. What then were the factors of mismatch that led her to a stress leave that took her away from her students for over two months, and how does the research inform our understanding of these factors?

Data Collection

Our interviews began in October 2020 and continued by phone every two weeks until June 2021, with the exceptions of two weeks at December holiday break and one week at spring break. During this time, Jenny went on stress leave, recovered, and returned to school.

Data Analysis

In order to determine whether Jenny's experiences were captured in the models previously discussed, we separated Jenny's transcripts from those of the other interview participants and then coded them using the themes presented in the AWL model—workload, community, control, rewards, values, and fairness (Leiter & Maslach, 2004). Deductive, thematic coding was selected, given that the evidence of the six AWL themes had been validated as relevant to teacher burnout in previous pre-pandemic research (Brom et al., 2015; Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Masluk et al., 2018). This approach therefore met the research goals. Importantly, the interview questions were not framed to provoke answers specific to the six AWL, and this approach was purposefully chosen to determine whether some or all of the AWL dimensions would emerge organically in Jenny's comments over the weeks of interviews. Once the transcripts were coded by the AWL themes, the relevant themes were compared to pre-pandemic findings related to teacher burnout in order to answer the research questions.

Results

In analyzing and coding the transcripts of the interviews with Jenny, it became apparent that many of the previous findings regarding teacher stress and burnout during typical teaching conditions were exacerbated and magnified by the pandemic.

Analysis by Six Areas of Worklife

The six AWL proposed by Leiter and Maslach (2004)—workload, community, control, rewards, values, and fairness—provided the framework for analysis and discussion of Jenny's data. Importantly, we provide the dates of each of Jenny's comments for the reader to ascertain the context within which they were provided.

Workload

Similar to the experiences of many teachers, Jenny told us about how the changes in classroom routines and pedagogy resulting from the pandemic had added to her workload. The early weeks of school—in the light of safety restrictions—necessitated new ways of working with her students:

Early October 2020: "The teaching is very, very much not how I'm used to teaching. In terms of how I used to be teaching, there's no hands-on allowed, there's no group work allowed, and so it's very much reliant on me

to do every single thing within the classroom. So, I am getting a child a glass of water, to getting them a pencil, to cleaning everything up—it's all got to be done by me."

By late October, the stress of additional cleaning responsibilities was beginning to deplete Jenny's store of energy. Her comments indicated the relentless nature of the demands as well as her perceptions that help was not being provided:

Late October 2020: "I spent 40 minutes trying to disinfect everything again in my class. And you know, I just kinda fizzled out. And now we've moved onto the next COVID drama, and nothing was actually done to help us in that kind of 'rally' that everyone [originally] had."

Not only was Jenny's workload increased by the changes and additions to pedagogy and cleaning, but it was also increased by a workday extended by parents who called her at home:

Early October 2020: "Shouldering the stress of parents has been a lot at the beginning of school this year. Unfortunately, due to last year when we had to teach from home, parents have my phone number. I had to phone them from home [where they gained access to her phone number], and so I frequently get phone calls of parents now who are very stressed, and I have to kind of talk them down."

The increase in both the hours and nature of the work that resulted in the exhaustion exemplified by Jenny's comments was not sustainable. The work took a toll on Jenny, resulting in her taking a stress leave in early December:

January 2021: "I wouldn't say [the holiday break changed my perspectives at all]. About two weeks before the holidays, I [had a breakdown at work], had to immediately leave, and was told by my doctor not to return to work. So, the holiday was a tremendous amount of stress in terms of a lot of doctors' appointments, and meetings with the union, and trying to figure out a treatment plan for going back to work. It wasn't really restful—quite stressful in fact. I was thinking that in seven days we were gonna have to go back in there—knowing that people were gathering. So, I think it was best that I chose not to go back to work."

Jenny's comments indicated that she was experiencing high levels of exhaustion but was unable to detach once she was at home, including during the holiday break. Even when Jenny was not pulled back into working by parental phone calls, Jenny's comments indicated that she was worrying about the return to work during her holidays in December, not in the sense of problem-solving, but in the sense of continuous emotional processing of the situation without resolution or reframing.

In the case of Jenny, her comments indicated that even when she was on stress leave, she continued to monitor her emails from parents and to think about and worry about her workplace and students, again indicating a lack of effective detachment.

January 2021: "I didn't respond to them because I was on leave, but I saw emails come through [from parents] saying "we don't feel safe in the city. We have family in the country, we're going to ride it out there, and we don't have access to the internet, so we're just doing our own thing."

Upon her return to full-time work at the end of February, Jenny's comments indicated that she seemed more aware of protecting her own mental health; however, she also indicated that navigating her way through the problems associated with teaching during a pandemic would still need to be addressed:

Late February 2021: "Now I'm back [teaching full-time] and have to deal with, how can I kind of manage my mental health while still, dealing with these problems with the students who really need my help, and kind of navigating all the really big stressors of my job while still kind of maintaining the mental health work I was doing on my leave."

Community

Jenny expressed the importance of community and social supports, including peers, administrators, parents, and students, as resources in her recovery. Collectively, Jenny indicated that COVID-19 had affected her connection with her colleagues, parents, and students in negative ways. Only the connection with her administrator served as a positive relationship and resource during the pandemic.

Peers

Early in the pandemic, Jenny spoke enthusiastically of the collegiality within her school:

November 2020: "People are pulling together and helping each other, and that's been going really well."

Jenny's perceptions of the other teachers and the tone of collegiality changed by the time she returned from leave. She identified with her peers as being in a similar state to her own before her stress leave.

Early February: "I think what was really tough to see—as someone who has taken time off work and has now come back to work having worked on myself and my mental health—was how low the morale is in the school after them all being back at work for a month. So, it was really tough to see how much all of the other teachers in the school are struggling to keep wanting to work. Everyone just seemed exhausted and not able to look past their fear of COVID and the pandemic, and try and focus on their job, which was exactly where I was before I left. It was really disheartening to see how much everyone was struggling."

These perceptions continued throughout the spring and Jenny attributed them to the changes necessitated by COVID-19 safety measures in her school.

March 2021: "Sense of community is not great this year, because we're not all together, right? So, our staff room has a max of four people allowed in it at a time–all sitting at opposite corners of the room. There's literally been no chance together to connect and do some team building. I think the isolation is quite hard on some of the teachers. We can't support each other like we usually do. I think that has really done a number on school spirit and our ability to keep going."

Jenny's comments clearly indicated that she was not finding a sense of community from her colleagues as the pandemic unfolded, which may have contributed to her burnout.

Administrators

Jenny's comments indicated continuous support from her administrator, which she credited with supporting her recovery.

October 2020: "The support from my administrators and principal and learning support teacher have been incredible."

Parents continued to call Jenny for support while she was on stress leave, and the principal was integral in allowing Jenny to detach from these demands.

Late January 2021: "My admin has been amazing when parents are hysterical and phoning me about COVID, as always being able to divert those calls to them (admin). They are dealing with the parents who are feeling overwhelmed by the situation."

Jenny provided some introspection about the support she received from her administrator and questioned whether it was the result of a new leader in her school or a response to leading teachers through a pandemic. In either case, Jenny felt that she was heard by both her principal and the divisional leadership team.

March 2021: "Well, it's interesting also because we have a new principal at our school this year. I feel like this

year, they're really just hearing everything we are saying and hoping that they can, if they have the ability to fix that thing, they will do it quickly in order to keep us sane and able to do our jobs. I think the school division in general has acknowledged that everyone is struggling, so if they've got the finances to help something, they are doing it."

Parents

Jenny's comments about her students' parents tended to focus on their demands but were framed within compassion and empathy. Aside from one expression of gratitude (described later in the manuscript), Jenny's description of parents focused on their needs and stress.

January 2021: "The crazy push of learning is really mind-blowing to me. I think back to March 2020, we were told to just get through, no pressure on assessment. Yet as the pandemic got worse, we were told to be able to produce more product, and I think that is absolutely crazy and incredible stress on teachers, but on the families also."

Students

It was clear from most of Jenny's comments that a great deal of her stress came from trying to meet the emotional and learning needs of her students within pandemic conditions. It should be noted that Jenny taught a multi-age class, where students had Jenny as their teacher three years in a row. This not only created a greater understanding of her students' academic abilities and learning habits, but it also fostered close student–teacher bonds that were challenged within pandemic safety requirements:

November 2020: "I've noticed kids who have never acted out before–because all of my grade 2s and 3s I've taught before–are starting to show weird quirks that I've never seen before, because they're not learning together as a community."

"The obsession with keeping [a minimum of 6 feet of] space has really forced those kids who were already having a tricky time connecting with adults or with others, to distance themselves more."

Rewards

Jenny's rewards seemed to focus on gratitude and recognition. While Jenny did not mention a lack of recognition from peers or administrators, she did mention one incident where parents expressed recognition and several where the communications from government (with an absence of recognition) contributed to her stress.

Late October: "It is pretty remarkable to hear some appreciation from the families about what we're doing and how they appreciate us trying our best through it all."

November 2020: "We all felt very defeated about the [government] announcement yesterday. Everyone was quite hopeful we would be given a little extra breathing room, and the fact that teachers are never really mentioned in the announcements, there's never a 'thanks' or never a 'we understand that you are not trained to work in a pandemic.' I think that is the main thing that I'm feeling right now is kind of forgotten in this whole thing, because they keep saying it's about children first, but what about the people who work with the children?"

Control

In the case of Jenny, a clear differentiation was made between the support she received from her school and divisional administration (as previously discussed) and the backing from her government and union. That she felt "inconsequential" (Farber, 2000) to her government and union was evident in her comments at all points of the pandemic.

Early October: "I think it's incredibly frustrating how little our voices are being heard even by our union. You know I got an email from my teachers' association yesterday with a survey that I was hoping was going to ask about our mental health and what they can lobby the government for. Instead, it was 'do you want (an) online yoga class?' That's the last thing I need right now—another thing that I have to go to."

Late October: "There was a good [newspaper] article about people rallying and saying, 'this isn't ok' and 'teachers need the support', 'what happened to all that money the federal government gave us?' It's just a bit disappointing to see that the provincial government has never responded to all of those news articles and has made no further attempt to address teacher burnout."

November: "Everyone in my school and myself in particular are feeling devalued and very forgotten by the provincial government. It is very frustrating every time I hear them talk, to hear that it's always about the kids, when we are employees and work for them. That it's never about us, and never about our safety."

Values

Jenny's interview data suggested a lack of alignment between Jenny and her employer in the valuing of safety and honesty.

Safety
Jenny's comments indicated that she experienced increasing worry and distress over the Christmas holiday break when she considered going back into the school with others who had "gathered over the break." Her lack of a sense of safety in the workplace was a recurrent theme leading up to her stress leave.

January 2021: "As someone who was not feeling safe in my classroom [before the holiday break], there was a lot of lying. One of the main reasons I ended up leaving work was because the week that I had a left, I was a close contact by a teacher in my school who had tested positive [for COVID]. Then, Public Health told me that I was not to call myself a 'close contact' and I was not allowed to tell anyone that I was in contact with someone: I was to lie about the situation. I don't feel safe in the school right now (note this comment was made when Jenny is out of school on stress leave)."

When COVID-19 case numbers began to fall in her city after the Christmas season, it became evident that many people followed the Public Health orders and did not gather over the holiday, providing Jenny with a sense of relief and greater safety.

Late January: "So, I was happy to see our community really taking those two weeks seriously [continued lockdown over Christmas holidays], and I think that has helped keep our numbers down. Hopefully it will continue: We're a month after Christmas now, and things are looking quite promising, and so I was encouraged because it makes me feel a lot safer going back into school in a week and a half."

It is interesting and noteworthy that Jenny attributed the positive turn of events to compliance of the citizens but does not credit the improvements to the government's Public Health orders restricting gatherings over the holidays. Her unwillingness to credit the government for this initiative may be a result of her lack of trust for government that had developed based on her perceptions of their dishonesty.

Honesty
Jenny's perception of dishonesty and the requirement that she become complicit in it were significant factors in her taking stress leave. Not only was she exhausted from her unrelenting workload due to her ineffective recovery practices within pandemic conditions, but her school also faced an outbreak where she perceived that she was expected to comply with a lack of truthfulness to her colleagues and the parents of her students.

Early January 2021: "The week in which I left was very traumatic for a lot of people in the building, and I just

couldn't believe the amount of secrecy the government was demanding of us—like having more than five cases in our school but not being declared an outbreak, even though they admitted that it was transmitted in our school. Then, they asked us to lie about—it was very disheartening and discouraging to see what the government is doing to us now."

Note that Jenny attributes the expectation for her complicity with the government rather than the school administration. These attributions continued in the comments from Jenny during her leave.

Late January 2021: "I think it would be incredibly hard [to be an administrator] because all of the decisions that they have to enforce are rules they don't necessarily agree with. All of the rules that are now being enforced are from the government, an elected party that you might not agree with, and so I feel frustrated on their behalf because when I was going through my whole stress leave, I could see how much their hands were tied and how they had to deliver information to me that they didn't want to deliver. They had to enforce rules that I would almost say are inhumane—when they were telling me that I wasn't allowed to tell the EA in my room that a kid in my class had been exposed to COVID, because that is what the government told them to say."

Jenny not only perceived that she was expected to conspire in following dishonest procedures with which she did not agree, but also believed that the government made the same demands on her principal.

Late October 2020: "It's been pretty overwhelming to read the news reports obviously with us going into code red, and all of the deaths and things and to kind of, just kind of keep going as usual like as if nothing happened. We said in our school that we kind of feel like we are living in the twilight zone, because everything seems to be crumbling outside the school, and we walk in and have to kind of keep going as usual—even though we know that everything is getting worse and worse in the world. So that's been pretty stressful."

November 2020: "It's like the ship is sinking but 'keep going.'"

Together, Jenny's comments point to values incongruence as one of the main factors in her stress leave, with particular emphasis on her values of safety and honesty that she believed were not in alignment with the government's actions.

Fairness

Aside from comments related to the government, captured here under control and values, Jenny made no comments about fairness. The creators of the areas of worklife model (Leiter & Maslach, 2004) have posited that this weaker link may be explained by the stronger link of value congruence between the organization and employee

Discussion

In terms of the research questions, the data suggest that pre-pandemic theorizing about burnout was able to capture Jenny's experience of burnout during the pandemic. Specifically, pre-pandemic research (Brom et al., 2015; Leiter et al., 2010) showed that workload and values were most salient among the six possible AWL elements, which matched with Jenny's pandemic-based burnout experiences. The specific importance of the values of safety and honesty demonstrated in Jenny's case study have also been validated in pre-pandemic research on burnout (Laitinen et al., 1997). The overall congruence between Jenny's experiences during the pandemic and the theorizing about teacher burnout prior to the pandemic can therefore inform the processes of recovery from burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, Brom et al. found that while greater congruence in workers' and organization's values supported well-being, congruence of values was an essential but insufficient condition to prevent burnout without management of workload. Turnovska et al. (2014) posited that the most effective response to workplace stress is a combination of person-centered approaches

(such as detachment and recovery strategies) and organizational approaches and that together these factors contribute to "organizational health." It is within this framework that we offer an evidenced-based pathway for support from administrators, governments, and policy makers to assist teachers like Jenny as they recover from the pandemic.

Integration Into the Current Literature

Workload and Detachment

Rothland (2013) illuminated aspects of the teaching role that make detachment and recovery especially difficult for teachers. These include the expectation that work will typically take place at both school and at home, which in pre-pandemic conditions was more common in teaching than in other professions in North America (Krantz-Kent, 2008). In addition, the lack of a defined end to the workday in teaching erodes the separation of work and homelife, making detachment and recovery especially challenging for teachers. The lack of ability to detach was salient in Jenny's case, as it was in the cases of many teachers who were required to teach online from home during the pandemic. Grund et al. (2016) suggested changes to these teacher practices that could promote greater recovery, as encouragement to detach from work to preserve a worklife balance is an important role of administrators. Grund et al. (2016) advocated that teachers should spend the last 30 minutes of their workday at school and have a clear plan for that time. This time should be used for problem solving or, in the case where the problem cannot be solved that day, creating a list of next steps and resources necessary for the resolution. Querstrate and Cropley's (2012) findings support this approach in that they found that solution-focused thinking, rather than rumination and perseveration, was effective in decreasing exhaustion. Supports such counselling offered through the employee assistance plan would assist teachers in developing these practices.

To support detachment in non-working hours, Kinnunen et al. (2011) suggested that employees can also plan some outside-of-work activities that involve different systems and resources that contrast with those of worklife. Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) and Els and colleagues (2015) posited that recovery activities demonstrate four characteristics (detachment, relaxation, mastery, and control), of which the first two are most effective in promoting recovery. Mastery refers to setting goals and doing or learning something new, which necessitates a focus away from work issues. Control refers to one's ability to make the choice of how to spend leisure time in terms of when and how to complete non-work activities of choice. Els and her colleagues found that, of these four elements, mastery experiences were the best predictors of decreased burnout risk. This finding makes sense, as having the impetus to improve at a new sport or hobby outside of work would require the focus that comes with psychological detachment, as well as control over the time it takes to improve and the relaxation that comes from a leisure activity of choice. These sorts of activities may include sports or other physical activities (Zijlstra & Sonnentag, 2006), as well as social activities (Kinnunen et al., 2011).

Jenny, along with other teachers under stress, might find themselves perseverating even during sports or social activities, which might diminish effective recovery. Therefore, self-regulation of thoughts and feelings—often associated with the practice of mindfulness—will also be necessary for teachers to recover effectively. Self-regulation involves a person's exertion of control over their psychophysiological states (Zijlstra et al., 2014) including overriding preservation to regulate attention to other foci. Importantly, self-regulation requires practice over time and necessitates having a store of energy available for this work. Ensuring that there is energy available at the end of the workday will be important to Jenny's and other teachers' success at off-work recovery activities and ensuring this surplus is a shared responsibility between employees and employers.

Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) emphasized the importance of both external recovery and internal recovery. While most research has focused on external recovery (as described in the previously cited research) as taking place during off-work hours, such as evening and weekends, internal recovery is defined as short breaks

during the day. During the pandemic, these short opportunities for internal recovery were often not possible as teachers were responsible for student supervision during staggered recesses, often ate lunch while supervising students who also ate their lunches in their classrooms, and were required to cover classes due to shortages of substitute teachers, which then resulted in continuous workdays without breaks. It will be imperative to ensure internal recovery periods are reinstated post-pandemic to recuperate and avoid further burnout. Administrators and governments are important drivers in ensuring that there are sufficient resources available so teachers can take their breaks during their workdays, as outlined within their employment contracts.

It is clear that Jenny used therapeutic resources to learn to manage her burnout and its symptoms. Research using group-based, controlled, and randomized groups of teachers showed that these types of interventions can be effective but that the effect sizes are small (von der Embse et al., 2019). Furthermore, these types of group interventions frequently suffer from high attrition rates, which influence the efficacy of the intervention (see Unterbrink et al., 2010, for example). Importantly, without organizational attention to the workplace causes of burnout, these types of teacher-initiated treatments will do little to mitigate burnout upon teachers' returns to work (Bakker & De Vries, 2021). Again, employers are essential partners in the prevention of and recovery from burnout.

Values Incongruence and Demoralization
Jenny's values of honesty and safety were misaligned with those of her government and employer, which required her to act in ways that promoted stress and burnout. Research has investigated the individual costs to employees who are required to enact behaviors that are misaligned with their emotions, called "emotional labor," and showed that these practices cause stress to the employees (Barry et al., 2019). Such was the case with Jenny before her leave, when she felt unsafe yet perceived she was required to remain silent and complicit with dishonesty. Näring and colleagues (2006) conducted a study of emotional labor in teaching and found that the professional requirement to display expected but inauthentic feelings, as well as suppression of actual feelings, were associated with the three components of teacher burnout described by Maslach and Jackson (1981).

Santoro (2011, 2018, 2020) has written about the condition in which teachers' and organizational values misalign and described it not as a form of burnout, but rather as "demoralization," where the conditions of teaching change in ways that make it impossible for teachers to garner the moral rewards of their profession. She described demoralization as "situations where the conditions of teaching change so dramatically that the moral rewards are now inaccessible" and "teachers can no longer do 'good work' or teach 'right'" (Santoro, 2011, p. 3). "Demoralization means you still have resources, but you cannot do the work under the conditions you find yourself in" (Porter, 2018). Santoro (2011) argued that while burnout focuses on the psychology of the teacher, demoralization focuses on the state of the profession. Santoro (2018) challenged the term "burnout" as inadequate in describing situations like Jenny's and instead suggested the term demoralization as a better descriptor to characterize the problem of mismatch between the values of the teacher and the policies and practices within schools. Evidently, the concept of demoralization epitomizes Jenny's perception of her situation.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Researchers warned at the onset of the pandemic that attention to the needs of teachers would be imperative to the successful navigation of the pandemic and for minimizing collateral damage to the profession (Dorcet et al., 2020). Researchers who have studied increased levels of burnout in teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic are now calling for research on interventions for recovery (Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Current research has demonstrated that a partnership between employees and employers is the most effective way to manage stress, avoid burnout, and when required, recover from burnout (Bakker & De Vries, 2021). Jenny's case study

demonstrates that many of the pre-pandemic findings related to these processes were held up during pandemic conditions. We therefore have a roadmap to recovery to support teachers as we move beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, and the current study provides a starting point for this new phase of growth.

Limitations

Although the insights gained by tracing Jenny's journey provide a detailed journey through burnout and recovery, they represent the realities of one teacher in one context. Replication using a broader sample of teachers could highlight other experiences with this journey.

Conclusion

Within the understanding that Jenny and other teachers in Manitoba experienced both burnout as well as demoralization during the pandemic, substantial efforts will be necessary to rebuild psychological safety in schools and trust between teachers and the government. The main challenges identified in both the literature and in practice are not only how to create and sustain confidence in organizations and individuals, but also how to reinstate safety and recover trust after it has been lost (Heifetz, et al., 2009). According to Edmondson (2019), leadership behaviours focusing on availability, approachability, humility, openness to feedback, as well as modelling of fallibility and vulnerability, serve to promote elements of a "fearless organization" (p. 152). From the perspective of the government, this endeavour would include government leaders setting the context and expectation of uncertainty (given the unknowns of the pandemic) and authentically listening to stakeholders in the education sector to develop shared meaning and expectations. It would also involve being able to understand gaps and failures in transparency and committing to learning together to discern solutions and next steps, acknowledging teachers' professionalism and commitment during a time of unprecedented disruption. Greater government transparency would enhance the ability of school organizations and teachers in Jenny's province to more effectively respond and recover from uncertainty and change, a context that Moss and Bradbury (2022) deem essential to addressing the necessary priorities of student learning in a post-COVID world.

Zijlstra et al. (2014) suggested that recovery from burnout has been treated as a state, rather than a process—either a person is burnt out or they are not. From the perspective of an administrator who holds this understanding, Jenny could be classified as recovered from burnout, as she has returned to work and is functioning effectively in the classroom. However, the partially resolved issues with workload detachment and the continuing and unresolved issues with values incongruence in terms of safety and honesty suggest that Jenny is not fully recovered from burnout. The demands of the pandemic in addition to the political context and reform movement in education examined in Jenny's case study persist and are likely realities for other teachers, as we move beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

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