

Community Change Agent Paper #2

Alice E. Flanagan

Longwood University: Social Work Program

SOWK 412: Leadership and Professional Development

Professor Janie Brazier

11/9/2022

Defining Social Issue

Teachers, just like social workers, have a career where they are committed to a career in which there is lifelong learning and training. Although there is lifelong learning and training, there is also the risk of burnout in teaching. The shortage of teachers has resulted in teachers feeling overworked and underappreciated when elaborating on their stress and attrition. Hester et al. (2020) states, “Burnout places teachers at a higher risk for developing health-related issues, increased levels of stress, and feelings of severe job dissatisfaction. These factors can result in teachers’ decision to leave their positions” (p. 348). The burnout in teachers is associated with psychological distress that is presented in the cases of the students’ lack of compliance and respect with the educational process, absence of support with the principal management, as well as the challenging workload to manage. Special education teachers tend to have a more difficult time without trying to be burnt out because they have more responsibilities with trying to understand their students and their complex needs, especially when the students are nonverbal or nonmobile.

Due to burnout in the education career, this leads to people quitting and those responsibilities are pushed to somebody else. When burnout happens in the teaching world, it easily affects the quality of their style of teaching, therefore it is important for people to recognize these signs and symptoms sooner as opposed to later. The signs to recognize burnout include “feeling negative of or having a negative attitude towards others, feelings of cynicism, loss of enthusiasm for work, and low sense of accomplishment” (Lacroix & The Hartford Staff, 2022). There are solutions to address the concerns of burnout, which are: increasing the base pay to match the responsibilities, raising substitute pay and providing them with benefits, providing

access to services for employees for the help of health care, and reducing the time to reach for career-level pay.

Identification of Change Agent

The interviewer conducted an interview with her mother, Mrs. Flanagan. Mrs. Flanagan, the interviewee, is a special education teacher working with mild special needs in a high school setting ages 14 to 22 years old. Mrs. Flanagan has experience working with all the different levels of special needs in high school since 2013. Most of the interviewee's students are mildly autistic. Although the interviewee's students are mildly autistic, they still require extensive needs. When asking her the needs of her high school students, she states, "The students that I have, this year, are learning on a third-grade level, so it is like teaching teenagers and young adults with the knowledge of an 8 or 9 year old. I mostly adapt to their educational needs." When the interviewer asked Mrs. Flanagan, who she works with as a special education teacher, then responded by saying that " Besides just the student, I work with social workers, the different types of therapists, parents, psychologists, counselors, administration, and other teachers, as well."

The interviewee's job duties, as a Special Education Teacher, entail: assessing students' skills and learning requirements, designing Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), modifying curriculum so lesson plans are adapted to the students' needs, and collaborating with parents and school staff to record students' progress. The responsibilities that Mrs. Flanagan holds a position as a teacher, she says "It is overwhelming at times, because some students are on a different skill and academic level than other students." Special Education Teachers, like the interviewee, have responsibilities that include: monitoring children's behavioral patterns and arranging appropriate interventions when needed, finding engaging activities to teach skills, managing classroom crises

and resolving the conflict, preparing students for the next grade-level, informing parents about their children's performance and problems, and be a mentor for other professionals who work with children with disabilities.

Interviewee Practices Leadership in Special Education

As previously stated, Mrs. Flanagan provides her leadership position as a Special Education Teacher. The interviewee practices her leadership by understanding law and policy, on the state level and county level, by attending annual training sessions before the academic year begins. Mrs. Flanagan stays up to date by reading policy and literature to stay up to date to meet the legal obligations. Mrs. Flanagan practices leadership in the special education setting by developing a professional atmosphere of collaboration, in which there is a delegation of responsibilities that happen seamlessly and all participants are motivated to support the needs of the student and each other. Mrs. Flanagan also practices leadership by making decisions on the students' needs, organizing the classroom, being a mentor, outreaching to different community members for the student, building strong and positive relationships with her fellow co-workers and students, and promoting inclusion and diversity in the academic setting. The interviewee works hard to develop warm, supportive relationships with her students and their parents, and colleagues. With Mrs. Flanagan being supportive and friendly, her students know to go to her if they are having any issues or are nervous for upcoming IEP meetings. An example that the interviewee mentioned about her students viewing her as a leader is that, "I had a student, in the beginning of the year, who was struggling to afford lunch for one week, so I took the initiative to talk to the social worker and a couple of others to figure out a solution for the student to have their lunch."

Connections to Literature. The interviewee expressed interpersonal and informational roles in terms of her leadership style. The interpersonal leadership roles involve the leader and liaison role, in terms of the managerial roles that were mentioned in chapter 1: who is a leader and what skills do leaders need. The interviewer thought that Mrs. Flanagan has a leader role as her position of a Special Education teacher, because she fulfills the definition of a leader role. According to Lussier and Achua (2016), “The leader role is that of performing the management, functions (planning, organizing, leading, and controlling) to effectively operate the manager’s unit to accomplish organizational objectives” (p. 11). Another connection that is made is some of Mrs. Flanagan’s values in education are similar to the values social workers uphold to. Social workers abide by the code of ethics as a “set of standards that guide professional conduct.” (National Association of Social Workers, 2021). The values that Mrs. Flanagan has as a special education teacher, that are similar to the social work values, which are: service, social justice, dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, competence and integrity.

Mrs. Flanagan provides service to her students by being adaptable and providing them with their educational needs that are required by the state. The interviewee practices social justice by advocating for her students’ needs of assisting them to advocate and overcoming barriers for themselves. Mrs. Flanagan expresses dignity and worth of a person in her classroom by supporting her students and uplifting them by encouraging them that they can overcome any challenge that they approach. In concerns of the importance of human relationships, the interviewee attempts to make a positive connection in her students’ lives because, “I want to see them succeed, I know that they are capable of so many things and everyone needs to have a positive role model in their life. There is too much ugly in the world. I care deeply about my students and wish them the best, overall” she says. Mrs. Flanagan expresses strong competence

in her leadership position by collaborating with other fellow teachers, social workers, different types of therapists, administration staff, and parents. The interviewee expresses a strong sense of integrity by “leading by example is important, especially when expressing behavior. It is important to remember to take responsibility in your own actions, even if they are not appropriate. Being trustworthy, honest, supportive, and authentic, is important to not only to your students, but to the people you work with, as well” says Mrs. Flanagan

Thoughts and Insights From Interview. In conclusion the thoughts that the interviewer had was that teachers go through a lot of extensive work to help students. Even though Mrs. Flanagan has 12 students this year which may sound like a small number, she works very hard and diligently to aid her students to become successful people, both in the community and academic setting. The interviewer is in awe, admiring, her interviewee of all the high level of commitment and devotion that Mrs. Flanagan does to aid her students to become successful in both the societal and academic community. Another thought that the interviewer had was that there is intersectionality in both teachers and social workers, in terms of burnout.

References

- Hester, O. R., Bridges, S. A., & Rollins, L. H. (2020). "Overworked and underappreciated": special education teachers describe stress and attrition. *Teacher Development*, 24(3), 348–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2020.1767189>
- Lacroix, M., & The Hartford Staff. (2022, March 18). *Teacher Burnout: An Ongoing Crisis in Schools* (H. Savino, Ed.) [Review of *Teacher Burnout: An Ongoing Crisis in Schools*]. The Hartford Insights. <https://www.thehartford.com/insights/education/teacher-burnout>
- Lussier, R. N., & Achua, C. F. (2016). *Leadership :Theory, Application & Skill Development* (6th ed.). Cengage Learning
- National Association of Social Workers. (2021). *Code of Ethics*. Socialworkers.org. <https://www.socialworkers.org/about/ethics/code-of-ethics>