

Abstract: Interventions for stress and burnout of secondary school educators in high-risk schools – preliminary findings

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This study considers intervening in the plight of teachers in the challenging context of high-risk secondary schools on the Cape Flats, Western Cape, South Africa. Four separate interventions utilising psychological insights and practices facilitated in psycho-educational group interventions for stress and burnout were presented over 10 weeks for 15 hours to 50 educators in four secondary schools by independent qualified facilitators. A control group of 20 teachers also took part in the study.

These interventions were grounded in trauma release exercises, transpersonal psychology practice and transactional analysis and can be conceptualised as appealing to three different brain functioning: trauma release exercises engage the reptilian, survival brain; transpersonal psychology interventions, the paleomammalian, emotional brain and transactional analysis interventions, the neomammalian, rational brain. A fourth three brain intervention attempted to combine all three approaches.

Qualitative data comprised focus group thematic interpretation as well as constructionist analysis of focus group process. This was supported by quantitative measures of stress and burnout levels of educators, assessed at pre- and post-intervention stages as well as quantitative coding analysis of the impact of stress and burnout interventions on coping, well-being and classroom competency.

Preliminary findings suggest that teachers were able to significantly reduce learner burnout in the trauma release exercise, transactional analysis and three brain interventions. In coding analysis, trauma release exercises and transpersonal body techniques led to calm and relaxation, increased body awareness and improved self-understanding as well as providing self-help tools. Transactional analysis provided classroom tools and enhanced social connection. There was more cognitive understanding of stress transactions with transactional analysis; calm and emotional healing with transpersonal psychology and more centredness and groundedness reported by teachers who undertook trauma release exercises.

At this stage, preliminary findings suggest that stress and burnout can be mediated and well-being positively affected by multiple intervention approaches in this teacher population. A combined triune brain intervention design could be the most comprehensive approach to dealing with educator stress and burnout in high-risk schools.