

FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

What about the teacher?

Carol Griffiths^{1,2}

¹ELT, Girne American University, Girne, North Cyprus and ²Auckland Institute of Studies, Auckland, New Zealand
Corresponding author. Email: carolgriffiths5@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

Given that I have been a teacher of one kind or another for practically all of my working life, starting as a high school English teacher before moving into TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages), I would like to suggest (in all modesty, of course!) that I am in a good position to understand the stresses of the job. In this position paper, I would like to try to explain the background to the issues of teacher stress, to identify contemporary problem areas, to suggest some possible ways to address the problems, and also to explain why tackling teacher stress is so important – both for teachers themselves, and also for the other stakeholders, especially the learners. Although this article draws essentially on the experience of language teachers and related literature, many of the issues described could apply to teachers of any subject at any level anywhere, a point that will be taken up again when suggesting areas for further research.

2. Background

2.1 Learner issues

There was a time when the teacher was the unquestioned fount of all knowledge (e.g. Confucius) and source of authority (e.g. the dreaded Wackford Squeers in Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*). Indeed, it could probably be said that for centuries, if not millennia, teacher-centred was the educational norm.

But all of that changed around the second half of last century, when the learner became the focus of attention (e.g. Nunan, 1988; Tudor, 1996). There was an 'explosion' (Skehan, 1989, p. 285) of interest in learner strategies (e.g. Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Chamot, 1987; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Cohen, 1998), learning style (e.g. Reid, 1987, 1995; Oxford, 1993; Kinsella, 1995) and learner autonomy (e.g. Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Dam, 1995; Benson & Voller, 1997; Murray, 1999). This philosophical shift coincided with the rapid development of computer technology, leading to fears that teachers might become an extinct species or 'teacherosaurus rex' (Grundy, 1999, p. 55).

But, here we still are! Not only that, but many of us are still busy training yet more new teachers to go out and carry on teaching. Indeed, not only have teachers not become extinct, but, talking about his large-scale research into influences on student learning in his inaugural lecture at the University of Auckland, Hattie (1999) concluded: 'It is teachers that make the difference' (p. 12). According to Hattie (2003), learners themselves account for 50% of the variance in achievement, while the home accounts for 5–10%, the school for 5–10%, peers for another 5–10%, and the teacher for 30%. In other words, with the exception only of the learners themselves, teachers are by far the largest contributors to variance in achievement. Hattie (2009, 2012) and Hattie and Anderman (2020) have continued to promote the idea that teachers are a key factor in learner achievement.

Other studies of the teacher/learner relationship have shown that, in one way or another, the teacher does have an effect (sometimes a considerable and significant effect) on the learners. Little (1995), for instance, wrote about how learner autonomy depends on teacher autonomy, and Briner and Dewberry (2007) found a significantly positive relationship between staff wellbeing and student

results. The relationship between student and teacher motivation has been studied by Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) and Furrer, Skinner, and Pitzer (2014) concluded that the quality of students' relationships with teachers is fundamental to students' academic engagement and achievement. Norton (2017) investigated the relationship between learner investment and teacher identity, and Rudolph, Selvi, and Yazan (2020) also draw attention to the complex interaction between learner and teacher identity.

2.2 Teacher issues

It is, of course, impossible to disagree that learners are important, an importance that we might also agree was, perhaps, under-emphasised in the past. But somehow, amid the admittedly well-placed concern to recognise learner needs, teachers have often almost disappeared as human beings in their own right, beings with individual identities that may affect the way they perform their duties, with complex needs and dynamic desires and goals of their own, and with families and/or other socio-ecological demands on their time, resources and energy.

It is heartening to find a re-emerging human interest in the teacher as an individual and recognition of the importance of the teacher's role in recent literature and other professional activity such as conferences and webinars. Relatively early signs of this recognition came towards the end of last century when Burns (1992) wrote about teachers' beliefs and their relationship to classroom practice. Freeman and Richards' (1996) ground-breaking book described teachers as 'pivotal in the enterprise of teaching and learning' (p. 1); and, in the same year, Woods' (1996) book considered how teachers' cognition relates to their professional performance.

Moving into the 21st century, we find an increasing interest in the teacher, even if this interest still lags well behind the interest in learners in terms of sheer volume of publications. Borg (2009) and Borg and Sanchez (2020) take up the issue of teacher cognition again, while Griffiths (2012) focuses on the teacher and concludes 'teachers are individuals with their own desires, families, preferences, needs, individual differences, beliefs, and characteristics' (p. 475). Harmer (2012) deals with essential teacher knowledge and Barkhuizen (2017) devotes a book to a collection of chapters on teacher identity. Mercer and Kostoulas (2018) discuss topics related to teacher psychology and Gkonou, Dewaele, and King (2020) compare teacher emotions to a ride on a rollercoaster. In a book intended to balance interest in good language learners, Griffiths and Tajeddin (2020) present a collection of chapters intended to identify the characteristics required for a teacher to be considered 'good'.

Teacher identity is often conceptualised in terms of the roles expected of a teacher. Harmer (2007) lists the following: controller, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, organiser, performer, role model, provider of comprehensible input, provider of feedback, assessor, motivator. Other roles noted in the literature include friend (e.g. Farrell, 2015), investigator (e.g. Dikilitaş & Griffiths, 2017), administrator (e.g. Griffiths & Sönmez, 2020), facilitator (e.g. Wilson, 2007), mediator (e.g. Dao & Iwashita, 2018) and babysitter (e.g. Collins, 2020). As we can see from the multiplicity of these roles (and we could probably think of yet more!), being a teacher is far from simple. It is not always easy, for instance, to be both a controller and a facilitator, a performer and a participant, but these kinds of sometimes rapid role-swaps are part of what is required of a teacher.

On a personal level, we must also remember that teachers are far from one-dimensional creatures who only operate in front of a classroom. On the contrary, they are complex beings who exist in dynamic social and ecologically situated environments, and these other factors external to the school may well influence the way the teacher performs professionally. This perspective is conspicuous by its absence from the literature. One notable exception is the article by Taylor, McLean, Bryce, Abry, and Granger (2019), who discuss the influence of multiple life stressors, including family conflicts, demands on their time, financial difficulties, household responsibilities and lack of support from family, friends, colleagues and community; according to this study, teachers who experienced these kinds of stressors were significantly more likely to suffer emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, identified by Maslach and Jackson (1981) as key components of burnout (to be further discussed in

the next section). Another article that deals with life (as distinct from work) stressors is by MacIntyre et al. (2019), according to whom financial difficulties are the most frequently experienced life stress factor; other stressors include changes in living situation or employment, death of a friend or family member, family, sexual or relationship problems, illness or injury, trouble with authorities, elderly parents, or lifestyle changes such as getting married or children leaving home. Although these stressors are in the background of a teacher's life, they can absorb a lot of mental and emotional energy and they have the potential to seriously affect a teacher's professional performance and the relationships with students.

To add still further to the complex reality of teacher identity, we must consider that, even when adopting a professional role in front of a class, teachers are individuals, defined by individual differences which make them unique. No two teachers ever do the same job quite the same way. Individual differences might include age, racial/ethnic/national/cultural background, sex/gender, personality, teaching style, teaching strategies, empathy, self-efficacy, anxiety, confidence, beliefs, motivation, and so on. Although there is a considerable body of work on individual learner differences (e.g. Carroll, 1981; Skehan, 1989; Dörnyei, 2005; Pawlak, 2012; Oxford & Amerstorfer, 2018; Griffiths & Soruç, 2020, etc.), there is very little which considers the teacher as an individual. Of the few studies that explore this area, Foley and Murphy (2015) concluded that individual differences were related to teacher burnout (to be further discussed in the next section).

From a theoretical point of view, we might say that teacher identity is a complex amalgamation of a dynamic blend of sometimes not entirely compatible roles. This dynamic complexity is exponentially compounded when we consider that it is contextualised (no two educational environments are the same) and dependent on the interaction of the individual human identities and socio-ecological backgrounds of both teacher and students.

3. Statement of the problems: Teacher stress, attrition and burnout

Given these complexities, is it any wonder that teaching is recognised as a stressful job? Actually, teacher stress is far from a new phenomenon (e.g. Coates & Thoreson, 1976; Hunter, 1977). It was defined by Kyriacou (1987, p. 146) as 'the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger and depression, resulting from aspects of [his/her] work as a teacher'. Furthermore, teacher stress does not appear to have been reduced in the decades since (e.g.; Schonfeld, 1992; Mearns & Cain, 2003; Rogers, 2012; Herman & Reinke, 2015; Pogere, López-Sangil, García-Señorán, & González, 2019). High levels of stress may help to explain the teaching profession's worryingly high rates of attrition (e.g. Macdonald, 1999; Hong, 2010; Saatcioglu, 2020).

3.1 Attrition among pre-service or novice teachers

The highest rates of attrition tend to come within the first few years in the profession; indeed, many pre-service teachers never actually make it into the classroom, having decided the job is not their 'cup of tea' before they even finish their teacher education courses (e.g. Kaunitz, Spokane, Lissitz, & Strein, 1986; Day & Gu, 2010; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2016). Most teachers go into the job full of high ideals, but, unfortunately, these often wither rapidly in the face of the realities of the task; although pre-service teachers might have imagined classes full of highly motivated students eager for knowledge, the reality is often sadly different, as exemplified by Sara, a former student of my own (Griffiths, 2012).

Sara had spent a lot of time carefully preparing an imaginative lesson by collecting plastic capsules originally containing chocolates into which she inserted questions related to the grammar point she planned to teach. She also painstakingly sellotaped together hexagonal shapes into a ball with the idea that students would take a question from the capsule, answer it, and then pass the ball to the next student who would then choose a capsule and answer the question inside. During peer practice

at the university, it worked well, and, on the day of teaching practice, Sara was full of optimism and enthusiasm as we walked along to the classroom together. However, the class was noisy, so she struggled to get their attention, and when one boy threw the ball rather forcefully at his successor, who then threw it back equally forcefully, the carefully constructed teaching prop ended up totally out of shape and unusable. Amid the uproar, the tray of question capsules fell on the floor amongst the sound of plastic being crunched underfoot. Sara was left struggling not to burst into tears, and order was only restored by the class teacher resuming control and ordering everyone to their seats reading in silence under threat of consequences, delivered in first language (L1). At the end of the year, to my great disappointment, Sara decided that teaching was not for her and she took a job in a bank instead.

3.2 Attrition among experienced teachers

Although, as noted above, the highest rates of attrition come from the ranks of pre-service or novice teachers, according to Glazer (2018), many experienced teachers also decide to leave before retirement and undertake work in other fields. Indeed, according to Santoro (2018), ‘teachers are leaving the profession at rates that outpace retirements and that create unstable conditions that undermine school effectiveness and student learning’ (p. 16). This high rate of attrition can leave schools understaffed, meaning class numbers must be kept high, which creates yet further stress for teachers who may already be struggling.

We have seen teacher attrition attributed to many different factors, including issues with professional identity (e.g. Hong, 2010), accountability policies (e.g. Ingersoll et al., 2016), resistance (e.g. Glazer, 2018), and emotional exhaustion (e.g. Pogorec et al., 2019). These factors contribute to what is commonly called burnout.

3.3 Burnout

Burnout is the term commonly used to describe a condition where an individual has given large amounts of energy until there is nothing left, and the metaphorical fire burns out. The burnout phenomenon has been recognised for some time, especially among people-oriented professions such as social work, counselling, medicine and teaching. Teacher burnout is defined by Kyriacou (1987, p. 146) as ‘the syndrome resulting from prolonged teacher stress, primarily characterised by physical, emotional and attitudinal exhaustion’. In order to investigate it, Maslach and Jackson (1981) developed an inventory to assess emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation (characterised by negative attitudes towards others), and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, which they identified as the three components of burnout.

For many years, teacher burnout has been the proverbial elephant in the room: everyone knows it is there – how could we not given the severe rates of attrition noted above – but nobody talks about it. Rogers (2012) suggests that the reason for this may be that a teacher ‘who is struggling ... hesitates to ask for assistance, concerned they may be perceived as ineffective – or “weak”’ (p. xii).

Interestingly and encouragingly, however, this conspiracy of silence seems to be lifting, as we can see from a number of recent publications on the topic (e.g. Taylor et al., 2019; Atmaca, Rızaoğlu, Türkdoğan, & Yaylı, 2020; Moè & Katz, 2020). The topic of burnout has also been recently included in two well-known teacher publications: *TESOL English Language Bulletin* and *IATEFL Voices*. It is good to see that the sleeping elephant of teacher burnout is at last beginning to stir and to be recognised for the very big problem that it actually is.

When it comes to considering the causes of burnout, many of the teachers – whose cases are described in Griffiths and Sönmez’s (2020) study – mention working long hours, including evenings and weekends, in addition to their classroom time and having no time allowed for human needs, such as getting married. They also mention lack of support from the other stakeholders in their socio-ecological environment (the educational/school authorities and the parents/students). For instance,

when Zeynep tried to get parent cooperation with getting students to do homework, they refused to take responsibility, saying only ‘you are the teacher, you solve this!’ (p. 84). Parents can, however, be quick to criticise. Zeynep, again, describes being reprimanded by her principal because a parent complained that she hurt a badly behaved student’s feelings; she concludes: ‘These events repeat every day, I feel exhausted’ (p. 84). Several of the teachers mention getting no support from school authorities (e.g. with student misbehaviour, or parent criticism). On the contrary, principals and others in authority are likely to side with the parent or to blame the teacher’s management skills. Some of the teachers mention verbal abuse from students (e.g. shouting, swearing) or even physical violence (e.g. one who was slapped across the face by a student, another who had powdered blue chalk thrown over her blonde hair). None of the seven teachers in this study continued teaching.

Of the 17 suggestions for avoiding burnout made by the teachers in Griffiths and Sönmez’s (2020) study, tellingly only one mentioned talking to the school management or administration. According to the teacher who mentioned this, ‘No satisfactory answer was given. I even wasn’t listened to. I felt the effort and respect towards my job wasn’t appreciated’ (p. 86). This accords with MacIntyre et al.’s (2019) observation that ‘teachers too often are the neglected stakeholder in language education and little research attention has been devoted to understanding their needs, motivations, and wellbeing (p. 35)’.

4. Plan of action

So, what can be done about this depressing state of affairs? Given that teachers are hugely influential in terms of student success (e.g. Hattie, 1999, 2003, 2009, 2012), and that teacher attrition is at alarming levels (e.g. Glazer, 2018; Santoro, 2018; Pogere et al., 2019; Saatcioglu, 2020), this is an extremely important question that urgently needs addressing.

I would therefore like to suggest that the issue needs to be tackled from four directions:

1. More effective preparation at the pre-service level to better prepare new teachers for the stresses they are likely to encounter.
2. Developing positive teacher mindsets.
3. Developing supportive mindsets among other stakeholders, that is the educational/school authorities and the parents/students.
4. Developing teacher coping strategies, autonomy, agency and pro-activity.

4.1 Bridging the gap between teacher education and the classroom

As the case of Sara (recounted earlier) demonstrates, there is often a ‘mismatch between what the student teachers have been taught, and what they have to face in their teaching environments’ (Swan, 2015, p. 65). Perhaps understandably, we teacher educators want to present the positives to our pre-service teachers, to be encouraging, and we hesitate to dwell on the negatives, such as the need to manage workload and control bad behaviour.

What can we do to help new teachers who are suddenly confronted with a situation for which they were not prepared and in which they are out of their depth? Rose (2019) calls for more teaching-informed research, which would help to ensure that real-world issues are included in research-informed policies and practices. Pre-service teachers should be made aware of such research, or, even better, included in the studies. Although this might not in itself actually change the kind of situation that Sara encountered, it might help to make new teachers more aware of the realities of what they are facing and allow them to pre-plan effective coping strategies.

Like most of the other themes I have addressed in this article (e.g. attrition, burnout), the need for coping strategies has been recognised for many years. Lazarus and Folkman (1984), for instance, define coping as ‘the ongoing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person’ (p. 141).

As examples of coping strategies, Green and Ross (1996) suggest constructing a step-by-step plan of action to remedy problems or seeking advice from others for how to solve difficulties. Pogere et al. (2019) recommend ‘increasing one’s effort or initiating direct actions’ (p. 271). Coping strategies are something teachers will need throughout their careers, so it would seem to make intuitive sense to begin to equip pre-service teachers with effective ways of managing the challenges they are likely to encounter, so that they go into their classes already psychologically and/or practically prepared for what they will need to deal with. For instance, in Sara’s case, at the very least she needed a more robust ball! She also needed to prepare herself psychologically and with materials to hand to shut the activity down if things got out of hand (as the regular classroom teacher did).

4.2 Developing teachers’ positive mindsets

In order to help teachers counteract the extremely negative effects of burnout, both novice and experienced teachers can, perhaps, call on the renewed interest in positive psychology (e.g. Seligman, 2004; Peterson, 2006; Gabryś-Barker & Gałajda, 2018; Stevens, 2018; MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2016) for support and inspiration. When a group of high school teachers was asked to suggest ways of dealing with problems (as reported in Griffiths & Sönmez, 2020), more than 80% said they had experienced or felt close to burnout. Seventeen suggestions for dealing with the problems were received, of which a majority (14 = 82%) related to positive self-management beyond the classroom:

- Talking with friends and colleagues
- Spending a weekend in a natural environment
- Turning the phone off
- Getting enough sleep (8–10 h)
- Going out with colleagues
- Positive self-talk (e.g. ‘I am only human’, ‘I can’t do everything’)
- Taking up new hobbies
- Socializing more
- Making new friends
- Outdoor activities
- Having long getaways
- Spending quality time with family
- Keeping away from demotivating, negative people
- Giving oneself treats

There are a number of other publications that make similar suggestions to those listed here, some of them going back to last century, underlining again the fact that teacher stress is far from a new phenomenon. Gold and Roth (1993), for instance, recommend attending to emotional, physical, psychological, social, personal and intellectual needs. Washington (2016) advises taking time to relax and care for one’s body. Mercer and Gregersen’s (2020) book on teacher wellbeing suggests that teachers need to focus on themselves without feeling guilty, since their state of mind and health affects their students’ ability to learn (e.g. Briner & Dewberry, 2007).

However, although attending to one’s wellbeing beyond the classroom is important, and although it may well influence the energy a teacher has for students, teachers will still need to cope with ‘the unavoidable hassles’ of their profession (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2017, p. 405). In order to assist with this, Hiver and Dörnyei (2017) introduce a metaphor derived from biology. In order to protect oneself from disease, one needs to develop immunity; similarly, teachers need to develop a degree of immunity in order to be able to resist the stresses of their professional lives and avoid burnout by developing positive coping strategies.

These ideas need to be made more available to teachers, perhaps in the form of publications or in-house workshops. Teachers should also be encouraged to think of positive self-care not as a selfish

indulgence, but as essential to being able to perform their professional duties effectively and in a way that is of maximum benefit to their students.

4.3 Developing supportive stakeholder mindsets

Unfortunately, the uncomfortable reality is that changing teachers' mindsets, as discussed above, is only ever going to solve part of the problem. Even with more positive mindsets and well-developed immunity, the kinds of conditions with which some teachers are faced are likely to prove beyond their ability to cope. Besides, teachers are only one of the stakeholders in the school environment. What about the others? Should they not be expected to accept their share of responsibility? What can/should be done about this negative picture? Several possibilities spring to mind:

1. Support with student misbehaviour

In recent years, children's rights have been strongly advocated, and, of course, quite rightly so. In the past (or, sometimes unfortunately, even in the present), there have been some horrific abuses, and there is, of course, no way this can be justified. However, a negative consequence of this emphasis is that where misbehaviour occurs (as in the case of the two boys described in Sara's lesson above) there is often very little the teacher can do about it. This seriously affects learning: in the case described above, almost none of the students in the class, even the 'good' ones, would have learnt anything from the chaos of Sara's lesson.

Although student misbehaviour is, of course, far from a new problem, it has received 'scant attention' (Wadden & McGovern, 1991, p. 119). Indeed, a search of the contents of the *ELT Journal* (which published Wadden & McGovern's article around 30 years ago, and that positions itself as concerned with 'everyday concerns of practitioners') reveals that this is the only article that deals with this critical issue directly. The issue is even more invisible in most other applied linguistic publications. This is in spite of the fact that the kind of behaviour they have to deal with seriously affects not only student learning but also teacher stress levels and willingness to continue in the job. Teachers should be able to rely on support from the other stakeholders (especially the parents and school authorities) when faced with unacceptable student behaviour (e.g. the two boys in Sara's class, whose behaviour resulted in disrupting the whole lesson and contributed to Sara's decision not to continue as a teacher)

2. Support from parents

Although we might expect parents to support their child's teacher, who is, after all, an influential figure in their child's life, sadly this is not always the case, as exemplified by Zeynep, a former student of my own whose efforts to get parents' support for their children's homework and behaviour met with no cooperation (Griffiths & Sönmez, 2020). Most parents are caring and responsible, sometimes in the face of real practical difficulties (e.g. financial strains, job pressures of their own, etc.), but the exceptions can make life very difficult for a teacher and the other students in the class. Where necessary, parents should be made aware of the importance of the teacher/s to their child's education and future, and systems should be in place to ensure that parents fulfil their responsibilities. This is in the best interests not only of the teacher, but also of the other students in the class and their parents; just a few disruptive students (e.g. those who consistently arrive without their homework or basic equipment, as Zeynep describes) can have a very negative effect on the morale of the whole class, which affects the 'good' students as much as the others.

3. Support from school or educational administration

Of the 17 suggestions for coping with the stress levels of the job made by the teachers in Griffiths and Sönmez's (2020) study only one involved approaching the school's management/administration directly, and the teacher who made this suggestion reported that 'no satisfactory answer was given' (p. 86). This lack of support from admin level becomes even more difficult to understand or justify in the face of arguments for the importance of a whole-school

approach (e.g. Rogers, 1995). Rogers (2012) further argues that ‘there are inherent stressors in our schools *that have to be addressed at that level*’ (p. xvi, author’s italics). Foley and Murphy (2015) similarly argue the need for a combined person-focused and organisation-focused approach, and Rogers (2019) also suggests strategies for building a positive whole-school culture. In other words, evidence seems to be mounting that the different stakeholder roles in an educational institution do not operate independently: they are all dependent on each other. It is therefore in everybody’s best interests that stakeholders work together and support each other.

4.4 Developing teacher autonomy, agency and proactivity

Unfortunately, again, when we consider the lack of progress from an historical perspective (and the difficulties of teacher burnout and attrition have been openly discussed since at least the 1970s, if not earlier), a change in other stakeholders’ mindsets is unlikely to happen overnight. In order to provide a new impetus, teachers, in addition to attending to their own positive mindsets and wellbeing, are likely to need to develop autonomy, to assume agency, and to be proactive in the pursuit of satisfactory working conditions.

The concept of learner autonomy has long been championed by the likes of Holec (1981), Benson (2013) and Little, Dam, and Legenhausen (2017), but interest in the importance of teacher autonomy is relatively recent. Little (1995) sees teacher autonomy as the ability to be self-directing, while according to Dikilitaş and Griffiths (2017) it includes the ability to free oneself from impositions and contextual constraints. Dikilitaş (2020) adds the important benefit that autonomous teachers help to develop learner autonomy, as also suggested by Little (1995) some years previously.

We might anticipate that autonomy would be promoted by agency, defined by Van Lier (2010, p. 4) as ‘movement, a change of state or direction’. Or, as Oolbakkink-Marchand, Hadar, Smith, Helleve, and Ulvik (2017) put it, agency is a ‘capacity for autonomous action, a process through which [people] intentionally transform and refine their worlds and thereby take control of their lives’ (p. 38). Similarly to other areas, although learner agency has received considerable attention (e.g. Toohey & Norton, 2003; Gao & Zhang, 2011; Duff, 2013; Huang & Benson, 2013; Larsen-Freeman, 2019, etc.) we find that teacher agency is much less conspicuous in the literature, although it does seem to be making its presence increasingly felt, including a special issue of *System* (Miller, Kayi-Aydar, Varghese, & Vitanova, 2018) dedicated to the topic.

Given the history of lack of progress with dealing with teacher burnout and attrition, we might further predict that in order to exercise autonomy and agency, teachers need to be proactive. A review of the literature reveals very little on this topic. A rare exception is *Stress management for teachers: A proactive guide* (Herman & Reinke, 2015). This very practical book takes a proactive approach to issues such as accountability, coping strategies, self-efficacy, administrative pressures, peer conflicts, dealing with parents, and managing anxiety, depression and anger.

5. The critical relationship between teacher wellbeing and student wellbeing and achievement

Although in this article I have focused on teacher wellbeing, it is important that we do not overlook the relationship between teacher state of mind and health and the effect that this has on students’ wellbeing and achievement. Although this area is still under-researched, the evidence to date strongly suggests that there is a strong and direct teacher/student connection. According to Sammons et al. (2007), for instance, ‘attainments by pupils of teachers who are committed and resilient are likely to exceed those of teachers who are not’ (p. 699). Likewise, as Herman and Reinke (2015) put it: ‘when teachers are stressed, they are less able to provide the type of environment we know is conducive to learning and to support children’s social and emotional development’ (p. 4). Stevens (2018) similarly concludes: ‘we know that a happy classroom is an essential key to not only a positive school culture and less teacher burnout but also to increased student engagement and student success’ (p. 3).

There seems, then, to be growing support for Hattie's (1999, 2003, 2009, 2012) conclusions that teachers are important for student success: indeed, according to Hattie (*ibid.*), teachers are the most important factor in student success with the exception only of the students themselves. According to Hiver and Dörnyei (2017): 'teaching may truly be the most important profession: teachers are in charge of training the next generation of citizens, and have the ability to shape the course of their students' future, for better or worse' (p. 405). Or, as Mercer (2018, p. 518) succinctly puts it: 'teachers matter'!

6. Conclusion

Although it would be nice for us to be able to think that teachers can rely on support from other stakeholders (administrators, parents, students) in the education endeavour, unfortunately, evidence from instances such as those described above (Griffiths & Sönmez, 2020), suggest that this is often far from the default position. However, as noted above, teachers are important, so, perhaps they need to be more willing to consider their own wellbeing, to assume agency, to be autonomous and proactive, and to demand the recognition and support to which their 'pivotal' (Freeman & Richards, 1996, p. 1) role suggests they are entitled. Teacher attrition is already a major problem (e.g. Macdonald, 1999; Hong, 2010; Glazer, 2018), and if something is not done to support our teachers, we may have more like Dilara, who describes some of the problems she has experienced and laments in a heartfelt note to me as her former pre-service teacher:

I so badly want to quit. I'm waiting for the end of the year. I'm even counting seconds. When I came here, I worked hard ...In fact, I love my job, I'm in love with English, I love children. But no matter what good is happening I can't stand it anymore...Then head of the department says, 'Please, teacher, don't go. Parents and we (as a school) love you.' Of course, they like me. I work hard no matter what. But I'm leaving. I want to leave so badly. Dear Teacher, for money for other things no matter what for, I'm not doing this job.' (Griffiths & Sönmez, 2020, pp. 84–85).

This is, of course, a most unsatisfactory situation for teachers, but perhaps the ones who really miss out are the students, whose social, emotional, intellectual and academic development is likely to be the ultimate casualty in the face of teacher stress, burnout and attrition.

In this article, I have attempted to define teachers in terms of their multiple roles, considering factors in the background of their lives and their own individual identities. I have also tried to consider theoretical underpinnings for this complex, dynamic, socio-ecologically situated human being, and noted the relative lack of teacher-focused research compared with studies that focus on the learner. Useful directions for further research to address this lacuna might be:

1. To explore ways of bridging the gap between teacher education and the realities of the classroom.
2. To explore ways of supporting teachers and enlisting the support of other stakeholders (e.g. parents, school authorities).
3. To explore ways of balancing learner and teacher needs and rights.
4. To explore the effect of family on learner success and teacher stress.
5. To explore which aspects of a teacher's job it is that actually cause the stress and burnout.
6. To explore different constituencies of the teaching profession in terms of their rates of stress and burnout, e.g.
 - a. Primary, secondary, tertiary;
 - b. Private versus state;
 - c. Teachers of varying subject matters (since, although this article has focused on language teachers, many of the points made are true for teachers of any subject);
 - d. Using different methodologies (e.g. CLT versus more 'traditional');

- e. In different locations (e.g. national, cultural, socio-economic, etc.);
- f. With varying individual differences (e.g. gender, age, personality, etc);
- g. Whether they are native or non-native speakers of the language they are trying to teach;
- h. Working in varying political environments;
- i. To explore the wider issues (e.g. national/global) that create stress and burnout.

It is now nearly a decade since I wrote: ‘teaching is a stressful job, and perhaps a clearer focus on how to train and support our teachers in the course of their extremely demanding profession is overdue for some serious attention’ (Griffiths, 2012, p. 475). A decade later, although there are some encouraging signs that teacher issues are beginning to be taken more seriously, there is still a lot of work to be done.

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Woods, D. (1996). *Teacher cognition in language teaching: Beliefs, decision-making and classroom practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Carol Griffiths has been a teacher, manager and teacher trainer of ELT for many years. She has taught in many places around the world, including New Zealand, Indonesia, Japan, China, North Korea, Turkey and the UK. She is currently working for Girne American University in North Cyprus and also as Research Professor at Auckland Institute of Studies in New Zealand. She has also presented at numerous conferences and published widely, including her books *Lessons from good language learners* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), *Developing teacher autonomy through action research* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), *The strategy factor in successful language learning* (Multilingual Matters, 2013), and *Individual differences in successful language learning* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). Individual differences, teacher education and support, English as a medium of instruction, English as a lingua franca, action research, and using literature to teach language are her major areas of research interest.