

Teaching Through Stress Management and Stress Proofing

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Abstract

Reaching stress-free situation demands a balancing between the schematic prioritisation of the contextuality of phenomenological confrontations and dimensionalities of instructional decisions. The shadowing of the designed modalities of stress symptoms and modes of stressors in teaching scenario lead towards the centrality of ineffective teaching syndrome. In order to equip the teachers with the proximal curriculum transaction skills, it is necessary to downsize the stressful situations through stress proofing tactics.

Introduction

Stress is currently an insidious phenomenon that must be recognised and addressed in various professions, because of the complexity of present day society. Teaching profession is more prone to escalating levels of stress. The daily interaction with students and coworkers, and the incessant and fragmented demands of teaching often lead to overwhelming pressures and challenges, which may lead to stress. Where, work stress is unrelenting, some

negative physiological, psychological, cognitive and behavioural consequences may result. Pressure due to curriculum load, inadequate administrative support, poor working conditions, lack of resources and work overload have all been identified as stressors among classroom practitioners and it results in a grossful negligence towards reflective pedagogic practices.

Even though a negligible proportion of shadowing of stress is necessary, creation of extensive stressful

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environment produces not only psychological disturbances but also several harmful effects on the bio system of the individual. The physical and psychological status of the teacher, who is the 'king – pin' of educational scenario influences teaching-learning process and the moulding up of the future generation. The intensive stress declines the professional enthusiasm, affect the quality of classroom teaching and results in complete breakdown, if proper stress management techniques are not adopted.

A number of individual and organisational strategies like exercise, relaxation, behavioural self-control techniques and cognitive therapy techniques have been developed for stress management. These coping strategies will develop the individual to combat existing stress and burnout. But, developing an immune system to prevent diseases in advance is better than to struggle to overcome them. Hence, an effective policy framework which is plugged in with sufficient constructs for stress proofing should be developed and practised.

Schematic Prioritisation of the Terminology

Teacher stress is a phenomenon which emerges due to the stressors. This causes potential threat to the rationality in repertoire of teaching, resulting in a general feeling of not being able to cope with the academic and non-academic endeavours. It leads to the contextuality of emergence of stressful phenomenological confrontations or dimensionalities.

Stress is an automatic, immediate response of the body to any threat, challenge or any kind of change which requires the body to adapt.

Stress is a substantial imbalance between environmental demand and the response capability of the focal organism.

Modes of Stressors in Teaching Scenario

Demands on teachers are increasing, more work, more students and less time (Easthope and Easthope, 2000). Even more demanding than the complexity of teaching is the fact that teaching can also generate a high level of stress fatigue and lead to burn out. The external and internal obstacles that block the progress of the individual towards a desired goal, conflicts and pressures are major sources of stress. Contributing factors to stress in the educational scenario include curriculum rectification, curriculum transaction, classroom management, eligibility determinants, teacher effectiveness, professional development, pupil assessment, inappropriate facilities, unclear expectations, demands from administrative duties, increasing diversification of expertise, time pressures and deadlines, continual overload of work, learning difficulties of students, lack of peer cooperation, dealing with inequities and pupil stress, teacher pupil ratio and lack of discipline.

These stressors are impinge upon today's teachers at every level and in every type of organisation. The effects of such stress can create physical problems (cancer, heart diseases, ulcers etc), psychological problems (emotional outbursts, lowered self-esteem, resentment of supervision, inability to make decision etc. and behavioural problems (tardiness, absenteeism, turnover etc).

The external and internal obstacles that block the progress of an individual towards a desired goal, conflicts and pressures to achieve specific goals or to behave in particular ways are major source of stress. In the present educational context classroom management, curriculum transaction, eligibility determinants, enterprenurial skill development, teacher effectiveness, professional development, assessment, decision making, inappropriate facilities etc. are the major stressors.

Designed Modalities of Stress Symptoms

Awareness about symptoms of stress will help teachers to assess themselves and to determine how they relate to stress and burnout for them personally. Symptoms of stress generally fall into four categories.

a. Physical Symptoms

The physical symptoms of stress are caused by the hormones secreted by the body in a challenging situation. The hormones namely, cortisone and adrenaline raise blood pressure and the body prepare to react to the situation. If the problem is not overcome or when we fail to overcome the stressful situation, these hormones and chemicals remain unreleased into the blood stream for a long period and results in psychosomatic illness and weaker immune system of the body.

An individual experiencing stress experiences physical symptoms like muscle tension, heart palpitations, sweating or hot flushes, shallow or erratic breathing, a feeling of being choked or a sensation with pain in the

chest, nausea or abdominal distress, feeling numb or experiencing a dry mouth and urge to swallow repeatedly, asthma, feeling dizzy, unsteady, headaches, constipation, shoulder and back pains, sleep disturbances, decreased appetite, voice loss, weight loss etc.

b. Emotional Symptoms

The emotional symptoms indicating stress are: feeling dispersed and down hearted, feeling detached from oneself, fear of losing control, intense apprehension, fearfulness, increased irritability, tearfulness etc.

c. Cognitive Symptoms

The cognitive symptoms of stress are: reduced interest, decreased concentration, defective linking of content and pedagogic practices, belloved level of competency, increased distractibility, difficulty in decision making etc.

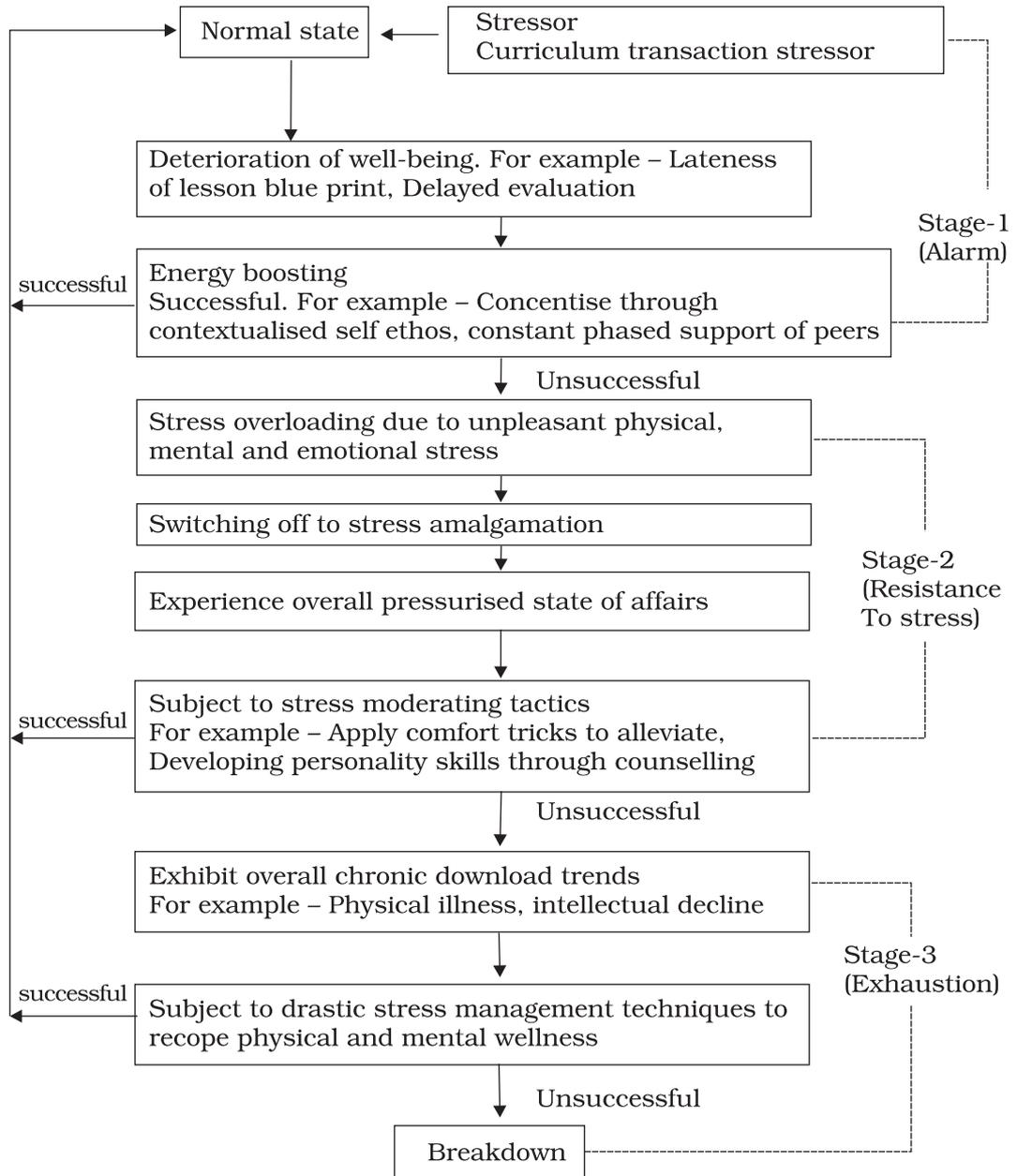
d. Behavioural Symptoms

Restlessness, withdrawal from inter-personal interaction, extensive smoking, sleeping or drinking, loss of hunger, losing touch with friends, feeling isolated in class, procrastination, obsessions, indifferent behavioural patterns, moodiness and grudges, etc.

Integrated Model Depicting Causative Dimensions of Stress Stages and Suggestive Strategies for Stress Management

This model explains how an individual passes through different stages and how he copes with it. Individual teachers are responsible for identifying potential stressors, reducing or eliminating risks, and taking steps to

reduce stress when it occurs by developing a wide range of stress reducing mechanisms. The scheme of the model is shown below.



Stress Management Tactics for Conductive Learning Process

Individuals and organisations cannot remain in a continuous state of stress. Stress management tactics are aimed at diminishing the physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural burden that is linked to stressful situations in daily life. Following are examples for stress management tactics that can be practiced by classroom practitioners:

- “ understanding oneself
- “ self-talk
- “ skillful methodological orientation
- “ resort to comfort tricks
- “ developing positive attitude and action
- “ optimistic thoughts
- “ forming effective resource groups
- “ work sharing
- “ professional development programmes
- “ introspective analysis
- “ personal organisation and responsibility of action
- “ communication skills and listening skills
- “ interpersonal skills
- “ judgement of threat
- “ stress monitoring
- “ time management
- “ self-rewarding

Teachers need training in conflict resolution skills as well as knowledge of many stress reducing mechanisms they can employ to counteract the stress.

Stress Proofing

Stress proofing is a process through which one can make himself stronger, fitter and more able to cope with the effects of stress. Developing an immune system proceed with a context of side

stepping the obstacles in advance instead of ploughing through them or scrambling over them.

Stress proofing the workplace is a process that works best where it is fully supported by both management and staff as a means of delivering improvements in individual and organisational wellbeing and excellence. Personal wellbeing and teaching excellence should go hand in hand.

The aims of stress proofing are:

- “ to achieve physical and mental fitness
- “ to relinquish unhealthy habits
- “ to be optimistic and positive
- “ to achieve self-forgiveness
- “ to have a purposeful life
- “ to enjoy life and people
- “ to be alert and dynamic
- “ to create positive imaging
- “ to have energy and vitality
- “ to be confident

The major areas which require stress proofing to acquire teaching excellence are

1. Communication Systems

Communication is about talking and listening, passing and receiving information, and developing channels through which people feel free to express their opinions and ideas, and hence develop themselves. The formal and informal systems of communication should be improved. The communication system in school should enable to feel that they are valued.

2. Time Management and Work Load

Time pressures and work overload are always very high on the casual factors of stress for any teacher. An organised, efficient and effective approach to time

management is essential for all teachers. Prioritisation of work helps to organise time effectively. The workload should be divided accordingly to the efficiency of the teachers.

3. Staff Welfare

There is a great link between working condition and worker performance. The head of the institution, management, government and local authorities should take the necessary steps like good remuneration, infrastructural facilities, staff wellness programme etc. for staff welfare.

4. Team Formation

Teamwork links people each other and through this, we can encourage creativity in teaching, work sharing, etc. The school must build group dynamic strategies to improve the teamwork.

Stress Proofing through Life Style

Developing a healthy life style is as good as an additional immune system. You can make yourself more immune to the stress, and hence, less prone to the problem they generate. Prevention is better than cure and it is more effective to avoid stress than to treat it. In order to achieve stress proofing, the lifestyle should be changed. Following are some stress proofing tips:

- Internalising relaxation techniques
- effective stress checking
- taking long brisk walks regularly
- developing humour sense
- self-forgiveness
- setting realistic and practicable goals
- timely and desired reactions
- maintaining good social relationships
- developing assertiveness

- practicing yoga and breathing exercises
- realistic self-assessment

Ideal frame of Action for Stress Check

In order to manage the stress experienced by an individual, the first step is to check the stress level and to identify the factors, which contribute. This section enable the readers for it.

- Well-defined objectives
- Appropriate communicative competency
- A sensible approach to time and workload
- A pleasant working environment
- Little ill health and low absenteeism
- High levels of moral and motivation
- A good image in the community
- Consistent and effective team work
- Feeling of membership and loyalty in staff and pupils
- Less conflicts between pupils
- Designing content with a view to develop desirable life skills
- A positive sense of self as an active learner
- Skills of self-assessment

Conclusion

The physical and psychological status of teacher influence and facilitate active construction and decontextualisation of knowledge, mediated by discourse of pedagogical task of teaching to disseminate innovative ideas and concepts for devising an appropriate teaching-learning paradigm. The long-term effects of stress not only affects the physical health but also results in a decline of mental abilities and in appropriate behavioural patterns. The problem of stress is, therefore, needed to

be tackled effectively by cooperation at every level. Appropriate techniques for stress monitoring should be adopted based on the stress analysis. Stress-coping skills should be included in the curriculum of pre-service and in-service training programmes. Implementation of co-operative teaching and pre-assessment can make drastic changes with respect to stress reduction in the educational scenario. The curriculum rectification projects should be discussed in advance with teachers. Periodic evaluation of teachers should be

conducted, and dynamic and pragmatic policies for their career development should be adopted. In addition to formal reward system, non-monitory rewards and appreciation for better performance should be introduced. Appropriate orientational and professional development programmes should be included in the teacher education scenario for stress proofing the teaching community. Only through a well-knit mechanism of stress proofing, teaching excellence for conducive teaching-learning environment can be empowered.

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