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Improving the Skills For True Wellbeing of Adult Educators and Learners

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Abstract

Working with professionals of the adult education sector and with adult learners inspired a European Lifelong Learning project named “WELNESS” – SKILLS FOR TRUE WELLBEING. On many occasions educators and the learners feel stressed by the challenges in their lives. As a result, they experience decreased work engagement and job satisfaction. This project aims at equipping adult education professionals and learners with skills that will allow them to monitor their level of wellbeing and, to apply self-regulation strategies. The present study focuses on detailing the aims, rationales and procedures to be followed throughout the project.

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1. Background

Professionals of adult education need practical tools for self-management and maintaining their wellbeing. The same is true for adult learners – in order to be motivated to learn, expand their horizons and actively contribute to their communities, they need to be able to enhance and sustain their own wellbeing in the first place. Wellbeing has been identified as a foundation for effective teaching and learning. Discussing our experience gained through providing in-service seminars for adult education professionals we have found out that participants of the seminars have reported, on many occasions, that they often feel extremely stressed and overwhelmed by the challenges of their professional and personal lives. As a result, they experience decreased work engagement and job satisfaction and their performance and the quality of their interactions with learners and co-workers is negatively affected. Some of the principals of adult education organizations have reported that their institutions suffer from prolonged absenteeism of staff due to burn-out syndrome. The professionals of the highly rewarding but also challenging field

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of adult education are especially vulnerable to burn out syndrome. They spend plenty of time interacting with others—their students and co-workers, they need to update their knowledge and skills continually and sometimes they need to attend to the challenging task of evaluating their adult learners or subordinates as well as being evaluated. Without practical tools for monitoring their inner state and tools for self-management they are likely to suffer from decreased motivation and work engagement, drop in their creativity and work performance as well as poor health and hence frequent absenteeism.

In the specific case of the work context, a great deal of investigations have been developed during the last years in order to explain the influence of social support from different sources on well-being, health, work satisfaction and organizational results (Beehr, Farmer, Glazer, Guda-nowski, & Nair, 2003; Deelstra et al., 2003). Evidence has also been found on the positive role of social support in the interaction between work and burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). In the particular case of teachers, our main focus in the present project, the social support system may play a key role in mitigating the negative effects of burnout. This effect has been found in professionals of the service sector and those whose work is directly related with people (Friedman, 1996; Kahn et al., 2006). Social support increases these professionals' self-esteem and promotes their ability to cope with problems in their work place. In line with this, Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzen (1987) found that teachers with high levels of support from their superiors were less vulnerable to experiencing burnout.

Many professionals face working conditions characterized by a high level of emotional involvement and strong interpersonal demands. These conditions may lead to the burnout syndrome if professionals are unable to develop effective coping strategies and manage stress adequately (Carmona, Buunk, Peiró, Rodríguez, & Bravo, 2006; Durán, Extremera, & Rey, 2006). Burnout is not a trivial matter and it can significantly alter people's behavior, impair their quality of life and damage their health, contributing to significant manifestations of disease (Pozo-Muñoz et al., 2008).

Burnout is usually the result of chronic stress at work, combined with other negative working conditions, such as limited promotion opportunities and lack of positive feedback (Cooper, Dewe, & O' Driscoll, 2001; Elfering et al., 2005).

Existing burnout models have emphasized the role of mediating processes that may contribute to reduce the negative consequences of burnout in teachers. Some of these mediating factors are social support, psychosocial resources and coping re-sources (Pozo-Muñoz et al., 2008).

Myers and Diener (1995) proposed that subjective wellbeing reflects "a preponderance of positive thoughts and feelings about one's life" and defined subjective wellbeing as "the relative presence of positive affect, absence of negative affect, and satisfaction with life". Subjective wellbeing is interested in why individuals evaluate their lives in positive ways. Subjective well-being is a field that comprises positive characteristics and measurements. Also, it concentrates on lengthwise affects more than temporary emotional states. Subjective wellbeing has two general components: Emotional and cognitive. The emotional component consists of positive and negative affects whereas the cognitive component is related with the individual's life satisfaction (Diener, & Suh, 1997; Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Ahadi, 2002).

Pozo-Muñoz et al. published in 2008 a study that tried to determine whether social support has a direct impact on wellbeing or a buffer effect, reducing the negative consequences of burnout on teaching professionals' health and well-being. Overall social support showed a significant main effect on teachers' wellbeing. Concerning the buffer effect model, significant interaction effects were verified between social support and burnout. Taking an applied perspective, the results obtained in the present study point out the relevance of interventions focused on social support and burnout coping strategies for teaching professionals.

Cenkseven-Önder, F. and Sari, M., (2009) wanted to determine the rate of how teachers' subjective wellbeing is predicted by their perceptions about the quality of school life and burnout levels. The participants of the study consisted of 161 teachers (93 females, 68 males) who were working in elementary schools. Results showed that teachers' subjective wellbeing levels were predicted significantly by the Quality of School Life Scale sub-factors, namely "status" and "curriculum" and burnout scale sub-factor, namely "coping work-related stress." Teachers' life satisfaction levels were predicted significantly by the variables of "status", "coping work-related stress" and "school administrator" which is a sub factor of the Quality of School Life Scale. Also, teachers' positive affect was predicted by the variables of "status", "positive affects towards school" and "teachers," and teachers' negative affect was predicted by the variables of "coping work-related stress", "status," and "curriculum." Results also indicated that the

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