The mediating roles of collective teacher efficacy in the relations of teachers' perceptions of school organizational climate to their burnout

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Reflective dialogues between teachers were negatively related with teachers' burnout.
- Organizational politics within school were positively related with teachers' burnout.
- Collective teacher efficacy mediated between school climate and teacher's burnout.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships between school organizational climate, collective teacher efficacy, and burnout in a sample of Korean middle school teachers. Using SEM, the results showed that school organizational climate reflecting higher levels of reflective dialogues was associated with both higher levels of collective teacher efficacy and lower levels of teachers' burnout. In contrast, school organizational climate reflecting higher levels of organizational politics was associated with lower levels of collective teacher efficacy, and did not have a direct effect on teachers' burnout. The relationship between school organizational climate and teachers' burnout was mediated by collective teacher efficacy.

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1. Introduction

Teaching is one of what researchers into burnout call 'at-risk professions'. For example, up to 20% of teachers reported burnout symptoms at least once a week in Canada (Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012). That is only one example, but in studies across Europe (Loonstra, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2009; Pietarinen, Pyhälto, Soini, & Salmela-Aro, 2013), Australia (Dorman, 2003), United States (Fisher, 2011), and even China (Chan, 2003) the message is the similar: teacher burnout is dangerous to one's health, and it's an internationally universal problem of the teaching profession. If so, can Korea be an exception?

Traditionally, Korean teachers have been endowed with a respectable and honorable status from society. Korean students have been expected to respect and obey teachers as they do to their parents, according to the ethics of Confucianism that have ruled Korean society for a long time. Teachers have used such authority

given by society and parents in teaching students. In addition, student groups were relatively homogeneous; they shared the common language, values, and culture. In such educational environments, Korean teachers could concentrate on teaching students academics without much of the burden of disciplining them in schools.

However, Korean teachers are now facing various increasingly adverse teaching conditions, making them vulnerable to job stress and burnout. Nowadays, they are charged with an increased workload and difficult duties due to disciplining more difficult students and experiencing difficulties in meeting parents' demands of better schooling for their children (Kil, 2005). Teachers in Korea can no longer enjoy a respectable and honorable status. In addition, they are vulnerable to student violence (Jang, Yoo, & Lee, 2012). As a result, many teachers in Korea are considering quitting their jobs early (Lee, 2012; Oh & Kim, 2012). This reflects that Korean teachers are experiencing uncontrollable burnout.

The purpose of the current study was to examine school organizational climate and collective teacher efficacy as predictors of teachers' burnout in a sample of secondary school teachers in South

Korea. Especially, the present study focuses on the mediation role of collective teacher efficacy in the relationships of school organizational climate to teacher burnout. According to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997), positive social interactions with colleagues may be considered as one of the strongest predictors for an increase in the sense of efficacy, but a reduction in burnout and stress for workers in the organization. Considering the quality of school organizational climate, the present study employed two different teachers' social interactions (Chan, Lau, Nie, Lim, & Hogan, 2008) as predictors of collective teacher efficacy and teachers' burnout. One consideration is reflective dialogue, reflecting the process by which teachers engage in in-depth conversations about teaching and learning. The other is organizational politics, which, in contrast, refers to behaviors that serve to promote self-interest without regard to or at the expense of organizational goals.

2. Research questions

- What are the relations of reflective dialogue and organizational politics to collective teacher efficacy?
- What are the relations of reflective dialogue and organizational politics to teacher burnout?
- What is the relation of collective teacher efficacy to teacher burnout?
- Does collective teacher efficacy have significant mediating effects in the relations, if any, of reflective dialogue and organizational politics to teacher burnout?

3. Literature review

3.1. Teacher burnout in school organizational climate

There is a significant body of evidence documenting that human service workers, including school teachers, are at risk of burnout (e. g., Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Cherniss, 1995; Farber, 1991; Jennett, Harris, & Mesibov, 2003). Burnout is the endpoint in the process of unsuccessfully coping with chronic stress. Human service workers, including teachers, who experience burnout, are characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1996). Emotional exhaustion reflects feelings of being emotionally overextended and depletes one's emotional resources. Depersonalization reflects a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people, who are usually the recipients of one's services or care. Lack of personal accomplishment reflects a person's negative self-evaluation in relation to his or her job performance.

Organizational climate has been considered as a central variable for predicting the level of human-service workers' burnout. For example, some studies in nursing have shown that higher levels of support from co-workers were associated with the lower levels of burnout (Glasberg, Eriksson, & Norberg, 2007; Jenkins & Elliott, 2004). In addition, an experimental study found that the intervention of peer support groups using a problem-based method was effective in alleviating health-care workers' work-related stress and burnout (Peterson, Bergström, Samuelsson, Åsberg, & Nygren, 2008). However, few studies in teaching were performed to examine such relationships.

School organizational climate also needs to be considered as one of the important predictors of teacher burnout, because teachers are members of school organizations where they share common tasks and pursuit of goals, and they share beliefs that they can work together to produce effects. In this context, some previous studies pointed out that lack of social support, a poor sense of community,

and confrontation and frictions within a school organization were central sources of teacher burnout (Pietarinen et al., 2013; Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Salmela-Aro, 2011).

In short, a socially supportive climate in the teaching profession seems to be a buffering resource against teacher burnout, whereas conflicting peer relations among teachers seem to raise teacher burnout. The current study will contrast the effects of supportive (reflective dialogue) and conflicting (organizational politics) climates of school organization, as perceived by teachers, on their burnout.

3.2. Collective teacher efficacy: its meaning and measurement

Teacher efficacy, which refers to "a teacher's judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 783), has been widely used as a predictor to explain differences of teacher effectiveness in the tradition of research of teacher efficacy for three decades. In fact, many studies have found that teacher efficacy is associated with teachers' behaviors and emotional responses (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Cherniss, 1995; Denham & Michael, 1981; Egyed & Short, 2006; Farber, 1991; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Parkay, Greenwood, Olejinik, & Proller, 1988; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990), performances (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Chan et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ebmeier, 2003; Ware & Kitsantas, 2007), and students' achievements (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Bandura, 1993; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eddles, 1989).

More recently, collective teacher efficacy, which is another dimension of teacher efficacy, has been considered to be an important predictor in explaining differences in teacher effectiveness. Goddard et al. (2000) applied the concept of collective efficacy to a teachers' group and developed the scale of collective teacher efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy refers to "the perceptions of teachers in a school that the effort of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students" (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 480). "Collective efficacy is not simply the sum of the efficacy beliefs of individuals. Rather, it is an emergent group-level attribute that is the product of coordinative and interactive dynamics" (Bandura, 1997, p. 7). It is not a monolithic group attribute, but its levels could vary among members, even in the same group. In addition, the commonality of efficacy belief does not mean that every member is of exactly the same view on every aspect of group functioning (Bandura, 1997).

Some researchers (e.g. Bandura, 1993; Prussia & Kinicki, 1996) aggregated members' appraisals of their group's capability to measure the group-levels of collective efficacy. This approach was used in using organizations as the unit of analysis. Others considered individually-perceived levels of collective efficacy without aggregation (e.g. Ware & Kitsantas, 2007), or used both the organizationally aggregated levels and individual levels of collective efficacy (e.g. Goddard et al., 2000). In any case, collective teacher efficacy was based on individually perceived levels of group capabilities as a whole. In fact, Goddard et al. (2000) employed individually-perceived collective teacher efficacy without aggregation by organization in checking for criterion-related validity of the collective teacher efficacy scale they developed, and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) also applied individually-perceived collective teacher efficacy to its relation with strain factors.

3.3. Sources of collective teacher efficacy

Since collective teacher efficacy was also constructed on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, it is plausible to examine its predictors with four principal sources of self-efficacy postulated by Bandura. According to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997),