The Role of Teacher Well-Being & Stress in the Classroom

This invited symposium aims to expand the discourse on social and emotional learning to include teacher development and well-being, and their role in promoting supportive school experiences for students. There is a growing literature on teachers’ work stress, with a recent survey of 7,000+ teachers noting that nearly half experienced job-related stress daily and studies indicating that stress may be related to the quality of their practice and student outcomes (Hoglund et al., 2015; Mclean & Connor, 2015). The following set of papers apply experimental and epidemiological methodology to shed new light on the role that teacher well-being and stress play in preschool and elementary school classrooms.

Jason Downer, Director of the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning at the University of Virginia, will describe a randomized controlled trial involving early career teachers in grades K-3. Teachers in the intervention group received training in the use of the Good Behavior Game (GBG), which is a group-contingency approach to classroom management. In addition, they received MyTeachingPartner video-based coaching throughout the year focused on improving teacher-student interactions and bolstering implementation of GBG. Findings will be presented that examine direct effects of GBG+MTP on work stress, as well as the extent to which work stress moderates GBG+MTP effects on students’ classroom behavior.

Robert Whitaker, Professor of Public Health and Pediatrics at Temple University, will use data from a 2012 online survey of 1,001 teachers in 37 Head Start programs in Pennsylvania to describe the association between teachers’ dispositional mindfulness and the quality of their relationships with low-income, preschool-aged children in their classrooms. The mediating role of teachers’ depressive symptoms and the moderating role of perceived workplace stress will also be described.

Josh Brown, Associate Professor of Psychology at Fordham University, and Patricia Jennings, Associate Professor of Education at the University of Virginia, will introduce Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE), which is a mindfulness-based professional development program that aims to help teachers bring greater calm, mindfulness and awareness into the classroom to enhance their relationships with their students, their classroom management, and curricular implementation. In the context of a randomized controlled trial, this presentation will focus on CARE’s direct effects on teachers’ stress and well-being (i.e., adaptive emotional regulation, mindfulness, psychological distress, time urgency) and classroom interactions, with follow-up models that examine the mediational role of stress and well-being on student outcomes.

The discussant for the symposium is David Blazar, who is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Education Policy Research at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.