Teacher Burnout and Perceptions of a Democratic School Environment

Anthony Gary Dworkin  
The University of Houston and The Australian National University  
gdworkin@mail.uh.edu

Lawrence J. Saha  
The Australian National University

Antwanette N. Hill  
University of Houston

How do democratic personnel policies of the public school principal affect teacher burnout and how does teacher burnout affect support for democratic instructional styles? Using sequential OLS models from questionnaire data of 2,961 urban public school teachers, the research finds that teachers, who perceive that their principals are non-authoritarian, are supportive and collegial, and involve them in campus decision-making, are less likely to experience burnout than those teachers who perceive the opposite. However, both burned out teachers and those who report that their principal treats them democratically do not support a similar democratic treatment of their students, as indicated by their rejection of student-centred instruction. Policy implications of the research are discussed in the context of the state’s accountability mandate.

MANAGEMENT STYLE AND TEACHER BURNOUT

The concept of burnout originated in the writings of the psychologist Freudenberger (1974). He first coined the term burnout to characterize a malady experienced by human service professionals who appear to ‘wear out,’ or reach a stage where they are no longer able to perform their tasks effectively, and sometimes even to care about their clients.

Research on burnout has generally come from a psychological orientation, which views burnout as a failure to cope with job stress. This approach defines burnout as a loss of idealism and enthusiasm for work that is manifested by exhaustion, depersonalization, depression, low morale and emotional withdrawal (Maslach and Jackson 1981). It is an approach which regards the causes of stress as being related to work overload, role conflict and role ambiguity (see Dworkin 1997).

Because of this focus, the emphasis of most psychological research sees burnout as an inability to cope with an array of life stressors. This approach tends to ascribe ‘blame’ for burnout to the victims of burnout and proceeds then to offer of a panoply of strategies to enhance coping ability (Abel and Sewell 1999; Cedoline 1982; Farber 1991; Gold and Roth 1993; Pines 1993; Shaw, Bensky, and Dixon 1981; and Swick and Hanley 1983).

1 It is possible to conceptualize a principal who, faced with a burned-out teaching staff, might need to resort to authoritarian practices to compel teachers to fulfill their full teaching duties.
In addition to the somewhat clinical approach cited above, there are social psychological orientations that view burnout as the loss of idealism and enthusiasm that can be organizationally induced, although this orientation, too, recommends coping strategies (Cherniss 1980, 1992; Maslach 1978a, 1978b, 1993; and Maslach and Jackson 1982). Likewise, Pines and Aronson (1988) portray burnout as a mental exhaustion induced by emotionally demanding situations. Pines (1993) suggests that such situations create an existential crisis in which the individual comes to question his or her role identity.

The sociological views of burnout take a somewhat different focus. These views have grown from the tradition of alienation research. In this perspective, which is embraced by the Berkeley Planning Associates (1977), Dworkin (1987, 1997, 2000), Dworkin, Haney and Telschow (1988, 1990), LeCompte and Dworkin (1991), Schwab and Iwanicki (1982), Sparks and Hammond (1981), burnout is seen as a form of role-specific alienation. Borrowing from the conceptualization of Seeman (1959, 1975), this perspective views burnout as the result of the conjoined effects of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and estrangement. Thus burnout is seen as organizationally induced and should thus be redressed through organizational change, not personal coping.

The present paper represents an application of the sociological perspective where burnout is a form of role-specific alienation. Its purpose is to investigate the relationship between teacher burnout and the subjective experience of a particular form of school setting, namely the democratic school. The particular relevance of the linkage between burnout and democratic schools is twofold. First, because burnout is seen to result from a sense of powerlessness, this condition that can be resolved by the prerequisite organizational conditions that permit democratic schooling to flourish. But second, a burned out teaching staff may be incapable of making the necessary extra efforts to empower students in a student-centred democratic school.

Thus, in this study we focus attention upon the teachers’ perceived managerial style of their school principals, the perceived collegiality that exists among teachers at their school, and their endorsement and practice of a student centred pedagogy. These attitudes and reported behaviors are examined as factors both affected by, and likely to affect teacher burnout. Our research objective is to examine the links between the behaviors and perceptions associated with a democratic school and teacher burnout.

**TEACHER BURNOUT AND THE DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL**

Building on the alienation perspective as outlined above, studies of teacher burnout should focus attention on various characteristics of school organization, and the conditions that flow from them. Some of these have already been identified. For example burnout has been linked with school size, school bureaucratic structure, grade level, the administrative style of the principle, and other similar factors which contribute to a stressful work environment. Furthermore, many of these characteristics have a curvilinear relationship with burnout, which suggests that burnout may be a phenomenon that appears under moderate rather than extreme conditions.

Our focus is on a particular kind of school organization that has periodically received much attention, namely the ‘democratic’ school. Recently, interest in the concept of a democratic school revolve around issues that vary from its student-oriented pedagogical ideologies (that is, that democratic schools are conducive to better achievement by students), to specific subject concerns, for example the learning of civics (that students learn about a democracy better in a democratic school). But interest in the democratic school originates from wider concerns as well.
The concept of the ‘democratic’ school has its origins in the writings of John Dewey. Dewey believed that a democratic society was one in which the divisions between groups, no matter on what criteria, should be minimized and that shared values, meanings and goals should be maximized (Soltis 1994). The school, according to Dewey, should be a microcosm of the type of society that is desired. Thus to achieve a democratic society, it is necessary to first have a democratic school (Dewey 1916). Accordingly, the implementation of a ‘democratic’ school would have implications for the roles and behaviours of administrators and teachers within it, and this organization did, and still would, clash with the hierarchical organization of traditional western schooling.

If organizational conditions are seen to be a cause of teacher burnout, as the sociological perspective described above argues, then one might expect that there are identifiable aspects of organizations that are directly linked to its occurrence. For example, if an authoritarian structure, the centralization of decision-making in administrators, the external monitoring of teachers and the absence of professional autonomy are the causes of teacher alienation and burnout, then the democratic school might be seen as an organizational alternative to minimize its occurrence. However there are some complications in this hypothesis that need to be considered.

At a macro level, it has been suggested that there is a fundamental contradiction between the notion of a democratic school and the kinds of school structures found in a free-market economy. On the one hand parents want the right to choose the best school to suit their own and their children’s interests. On the other hand, society regards schools as primary agents for creating a common set of values and culture among its citizens (Levin 1994). This conflict between the private and social goals of schooling also impact upon the environment of the school, and the position of the teachers within it. The idea of a democratic school as the best structure for the maintenance of a democratic society resolves this conflict through the interactions between the main participants of the schooling process, namely the principal, the teachers, the students and the parents.

Various theories of management suggest that a democratic environment in a school context not only benefits the academic and socialization experiences of students, but also affects the work productivity and well-being of teachers. A democratic school environment is one in which teachers and students, along with school administrators, engage in open and shared decision-making processes in the teaching-learning enterprise where differences are minimized. Dewey argued that in a democratic school the students would share in the determination of their own learning environment and learning content and process. Many contemporary writers advocate a democratic voice for students and teachers in school management (Apple 1988; Carnoy and Levin 1985; Darling-Hammond 1996; Giroux 1988; Goodlad 1996; Sarason 1996; Soder 1996; Tedford 1996). To the extent that this aspect of the democratic school is implemented, then the professional and autonomous role of the teacher is radically changed from its traditional form. Further, as Darling-Hammond (1996) has observed, the task of implementing democratic instruction is both daunting and requires skills not often provided to teachers in their pre-service instruction. Herein then lies the contradictions of the attempt to incorporate democratic values into school organizational structures.

One manifestation of these contradictions can be found in the current phase of school reform in the United States and other countries. Central to these reform efforts have been accountability systems that mandate high-stakes, standardized testing. These tests are used as a sole or principal evaluation instrument in order to award or withhold an educational outcome such as student grade promotion or graduation, or to assess teachers, school
administrators, schools, or school districts, including the likelihood of their continued employment, continued operation, or state certification. Accountability systems such as that which is prevalent in the United States affect teachers and schools and increase the chances that teaching will be narrowed to the curriculum actually tested, and that teachers or school administrators may compromise their professional standards order to elevate student scores (McNeil 2000). This has the potential of retarding the development of the kind of democratic school environment that empowers teachers and students and mitigates burnout.

CONCEPTS AND THE ANALYTICAL MODEL

In order to proceed with the examination of our proposition, that a democratic school reduces the likelihood of teacher burnout, we first must define what we mean by a democratic school. For our definition of the democratic school, we rely heavily on the discussion by Tse (2000). Given that we are primarily concerned with the school organizational structure and its impact on teacher morale, we begin by selecting from Tse those characteristics of a democratic school that likely affect a sense of alienation from the teaching role. What follows is an itemization of the relevant characteristics.

- Non-authoritarian and non-bureaucratic management by the principal;
- Open communication of knowledge and information;
- Shared decision-making regarding school matters;
- A sense of responsibility by staff and students for school decision-making;
- Student-centred approach to teaching and learning processes;
- Parents are regarded as partners in the educative process;
- Full representation of teachers and students on the school council or school board.

Not everyone would agree with this description of a democratic school. Nor is there consensus about its desirability. These are not the issues of concern here. What is of concern are the consequences of a democratic school environment for the facilitation of the professional role performance of teachers. Although in theory the ideology of a democratic school environment assumes the feeling of a satisfactory role performance by teachers, in practice this has not been the target of systematic investigation. While we have research studies of how students respond to and perform in a democratic school environment, we know little about how teachers respond and perform. In particular, we know little about whether a democratic school creates an organizational environment that minimizes factors that are conducive to teacher burnout.

However, in making the above argument, there are some cautions that we need to point out. Democratic schools may not minimize teacher burnout; they may even contribute to its occurrence. What are some of the negative factors that must be considered? First, teachers themselves may consider their own role as more ambiguous in a democratic setting. Most role definitions for teachers assume a hierarchy of knowledge and power where the teacher stands above the student. However in a democratic school environment, this hierarchy is minimized, with consequences for a wide range of negotiable behaviours, including those of learning and discipline. In a traditional school the power of teachers is vested in their exercise of authority to order compliance, while in a democratic school a teacher’s power is vested in expertise, which must be regularly demonstrated through persuasion. This state of role-ambiguity might be stress producing, at least for some teachers where role-ambiguity is uncomfortable.

Second, democratic schools are likely to require teachers to exert extra effort in working on a shared basis with students in the teaching-learning process. This too might create a more stressful environment for teachers. One of the characteristics of burned-out teachers is that
they tend to be less willing to make extra effort on behalf of their students. Whether the
democratic environment is the cause or the effect of the burnout syndrome, clearly the
environment itself may become a catalyst for its manifestation.

Third, the notion of a democratic school cannot be conceptualized without recognizing that
the school is also a workplace. It is a site where the power relations betweenadministrators,
teachers, students, and even parents, are contested. Therefore even a democratic school must
somehow resolve these issues of power (Ginsburg and Kamat 1997). For these reasons, it
could be argued that a democratic school further ‘de-skills’ a teacher, in that teaching and
learning become a shared exercise in which the teacher is only one equal partner, if that
(Seddon 1997). All of these characteristics add further complexity to the questions that
guide the present study.

Finally, under the aegis of school accountability mandates by the public, government, and
business, the content of curricula is often removed from the control of school personnel (see
Heubert and Hauser 1999). Control over curricular decision-making that often accompanies
the implementation of accountability systems may make democratic schooling problematic.
Negotiating the pressures for some level of democracy in schools and the accountability
mandates can result in heightened job stress for teachers as well as in school administrators
(Dworkin 1997).

Keeping in mind these cautions, we have developed a model, presented in Figure 1, that
describes our hypotheses and guides for analyses of the relationship between the
‘democratic’ characteristics of schools and the incidence of teacher burnout. Our model also
examines the extent to which teacher burnout is related to the rejection of student-centred
teaching, a central component of the democratic school.

![Figure 1. Analytical Model showing the hypothesized relationship between
Management, Burnout and Support for Democratic Education](image)

Our analytical model is based on the production-function procedure according to which we
cluster variables into additive blocks. The relationship between democratic education and
burnout is expected to be complex, even when the perspective of only the teacher is
considered. In our analysis we assume that personnel practices of the school principal affect
burnout, but we recognize that the reverse could be argued.\(^2\) Nevertheless, much prior work
has suggested that the principal is central in defining the school climate and in affecting
teacher morale, including the magnitude of teacher burnout (Dworkin 1987; Dworkin, Haney
and Telschow 1990; Dworkin and Townsend 1994; Firestone and Rosenblum 1988;
Kyriacou 1980; and Murphy and Paddock 1986). Therefore, we hypothesize that the
teacher’s perception of the authoritarian style of the principal will be directly related to
teacher burnout. We expect that this relationship will persist even when other burnout
variables are included in the analysis.

\(^2\) It is possible to conceptualize a principal who, faced with a burned-out teaching staff, might need to resort to
authoritarian practices to compel teachers to fulfill their full teaching duties.
In the second part of the model regarding support for democratic instructional practices, we place burnout as an independent variable. Jackson (1968) observed long ago that teachers exert much control over the students once the classroom door is closed and the principal returns to his or her office. Democratic instruction, or ‘the acceptance of student-centred teaching’, requires additional effort in classroom planning compared to those in which a set lesson plan, perhaps even drawn from a textbook, is used.

Burned out teachers, according to Maslach and Jackson (1981) blame their students for their sense of a personal loss of accomplishment (meaningfulness). As democratic teaching styles require both trust and respect on the part of teachers, it is unlikely that burned-out teachers will grant such trust and respect to the very students they blame for their sense of loss. Finally, it is unlikely that those teachers who feel that they are denied autonomy and freedom by their school principals will accord autonomy and freedom to their students. Consequently, we propose that the relationship between burnout and democratic instruction requires burnout to be the independent variable and democratic instruction the dependent variable. Furthermore, we hypothesize that the more burned out the teachers, the less they support student-centred curriculum.

**DATA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF VARIABLES**

The data for this analysis are taken from a survey questionnaire administered in the fall of 2000 to all teachers in one of the Houston area’s largest school districts. The district employs over 3,600 teachers and has an enrollment of 55,000 students. It is one of the largest in Texas to receive an accountability rating of ‘Recognized’ by the Texas Education Agency, thereby indicating that it has promoted above average achievement among all major racial/ethnic groups of students and among students from low income families. The student body of the district is composed of 49.7 per cent Hispanic, 35.4 per cent African American, 11.7 per cent white, and 3.2 per cent Asian American. The district student body has slightly more boys than girls. A total of 70.1 per cent of the students participate in the Federal subsidized lunch program thereby labeling the district as ‘high poverty’. This poverty rate is higher than found statewide, but similar to that found in large urban districts in the state.

Of the total teaching population, 2,961, or 81.8 per cent completed the survey. Although teacher demographics are not comparable to those of the student body (60.5% of the teachers are white, 28.9% are African American, 9.3% are Hispanic, and 1.3% are Asian American), the district is one of few in the metropolitan area that has had a history of minority teacher employment for over 30 years. The district usually loses 10 to 15 per cent of its teachers each year, largely due to retirements and some due to the turnover of new teachers. This turnover rate is comparable to that of most school districts in the metropolitan area and is lower than in many of the other high-poverty districts. As is

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1 The study was part of a larger project that sought to measure the nature of the school climate in the district using 23 different indicators. However, to enhance the return rate no attempt was made to collect data which might identify individual teachers, or to link individual teacher attitudes to student performance on the state-mandated test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Therefore, some demographic variables were deleted from the survey instrument.

4 One of the authors of this paper has had a working relationship with the district for a decade and his research group serves as the out-sourced research department for that district in studies of student achievement and faculty attitudes.
typical of K-12 schools, the teachers in the district are predominantly female (79%). More than one-half of the teachers have been teaching for less than ten years.

The questionnaire items were analyzed using principal component analysis to determine their structure, and factor scores were computed to create scales based on the individual items making up the latent constructs. Reliability estimates were determined for the scales based upon Cronbach’s coefficient alpha. Table 1 presents the resulting variables that are included in the analysis. They are grouped according to the constructs they measure, with some constructs containing more than one variable. In each instance the variables measuring a component formed a unidimensional scale with each factor loading surpassing a threshold of 0.40. Non-significant items were dropped from the scales prior to re-factoring. Reliability coefficients also attained acceptable levels for the number of the variables they contained. In most instances the alpha value exceeded 0.80. Table 1 presents the constructs, their measurement, and reliability coefficients.

Table 2 presents the results of two OLS regression analyses in which the two hypothesized elements of democratic education are the dependent variables, and the perceived and actual structural variables, and the attitudinal variables are the independent variables. The left hand side of the table, Part A, presents the effect of democratic personnel practices on teacher burnout, and the right hand side of the table, Part B, presents the effect of teacher burnout on support for student centred teaching. In our analyses in Table 2 we list all the variables used in the initial regressions, but display the coefficients for a revised (trimmed) model that contains only the significant relationships.

The predictors of teacher burnout, shown in Part A, parallels prior work by Dworkin (1987, 1997), but Table 2 further incorporates the role of perceived democratic personnel policies, including teacher involvement in school decision-making, perceived principal collegiality and support, and perceived principal non-authoritarianism. The OLS model incorporated the blocks of variables that described the constructs in the previous section. The full regression equation with all 13 variables produced a significant adjusted \( R^2 \) value of 0.427 (unadjusted \( R^2 = 0.431 \)). Trimming the model to include only the six significant predictors yielded an adjusted \( R^2 \) value of 0.430 (unadjusted \( R^2 = 0.428 \)).

The trimmed model in Part A revealed that for each standardized increment in the perceived democratic style of the principal, teacher burnout is reduced by a third of standardized unit (\( \beta = -0.338 \)). This variable is the strongest in the model and the relationship is consistent with previous research findings. Additionally, burnout is reduced by the perception that one’s students are academically able (\( \beta = -0.179 \)); and that discipline policies on the campus are effective (\( \beta = -0.197 \)). On the other hand, irrespective of principal management style, racial tokenism or racial isolation of the teacher decreases burnout slightly (\( \beta = -0.048 \)). Collegial support by co-workers and support by parents each reduced burnout slightly (\( \beta = -0.048 \) for colleagues and \( \beta = -0.089 \) for parents). The constructs of perceived principal

5 Initial analyses examined the effect of each of the three components of democratic personnel policies (non-authoritarian principals, principal support, and teacher involvement in policy planning and implementation) on teacher burnout. The \( \beta \)s for the three did not contribute more to the total variance explained than did the combined measure used in the paper. The \( \beta \) for non-authoritarian principals on burnout was -0.097, the \( \beta \) for principal support was -0.147, and the \( \beta \) for teacher involvement was -0.154.
efficacy, school safety and orderliness, and each of the demographic characteristics of the teachers played no significant role in burnout.\footnote{In an alternate model not reported here, where the dummy variable ‘white teacher’ was included, that variable was associated with slightly less burnout (\(\beta = -0.059\)). In early work on teacher burnout, white teachers were more likely to experience burnout than minorities. However the several waves of school reform, following the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), have heightened the degree of burnout among minority group teachers.}

### Table 1. Constructs and Measured Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Burnout</strong></td>
<td>Teacher Burnout Scale (Dworkin 1987, forthcoming), 10 items</td>
<td>0.806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role-specific alienation (based on Seeman 1959, 1975)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democratic Schooling (Two Constructs)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Personnel Policies</td>
<td>Principal Support and Collegiality, 7 items</td>
<td>0.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authoritarian Principal (reverse coded), 4 items</td>
<td>0.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Involvement in Decision-Making, 7 items</td>
<td>0.763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Instruction Practices</td>
<td>Student-Centered Instruction, 7 items (including teachers’ emphasis on problem solving, efforts to make students independent learners, stress on engaging and involving students in the learning process, efforts to go beyond the textbook, and attempts to discover students’ talents &amp; interests)</td>
<td>0.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional Instruction (reverse coded), 5 items (including an emphasis on lectures over group discussions, rote memorization, and drills)</td>
<td>0.740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal Efficacy</strong></td>
<td>Principal seen as garnering resources, articulate goals, define expectations, regardless of perceived level of authoritarianism, 8 items</td>
<td>0.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collegial Support of Co-Workers</strong></td>
<td>Perception that teachers support one another, 8 items</td>
<td>0.892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental Support and Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Parents seen as ensuring that homework is completed, students arrive at school ready to learn, 8 items</td>
<td>0.801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Abilities and Performances</strong></td>
<td>Perceptions of student enthusiasm with learning, concerned about grades, work hard, capable of learning, 9 items</td>
<td>0.804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived national academic ranking of students (Democratic schooling is based on trust and respect. Low teacher appraisals should be linked to undemocratic instructional practices)</td>
<td>0.711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safe and Orderly School</strong></td>
<td>Effectiveness of disciplinary policies necessary for democratic schooling (Tse, 2000), 11 items</td>
<td>0.862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception of risk of physical harm at hand of students, which heightens burnout, 3 items (Dworkin 1987)</td>
<td>0.775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Racial Isolation and Tokenism</strong></td>
<td>Actual percentage of teachers and students not of the respondent’s race; tokenism heightens alienation (Kanter, 1977)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Demographics</strong></td>
<td>Teacher’s Gender (dummy coded female =1, male = 0) Teacher’s Race (coded as individual 1,0 dummy variables for African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and White Years of Teaching (These are structural variables that describe what the teacher brings to the job setting. They are commitment ‘sidebets,’ or factors that are extrinsic to the work role, but which make role abandonment costly. Dworkin 1987, 1997; Cherniss 1980, 1992; Cedoline 1982; Jackson, et al. 1986; and Schaufeli et al. 1993 demonstrate how they affect burnout)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The right side of Table 2, Part B, incorporates the 13 variables initially used to explain teacher burnout, and adds teacher burnout as an additional explanatory variable with attitudes toward student-centred teaching, now considered the dependent variable. This is the second aspect of democratic education in our model. The untrimmed analysis produced a
small, but significant adjusted $R^2$ value of 0.097 (unadjusted $R^2 = 0.104$). Trimming the model to eliminate non-significant variables yielded an eight-variable result with an adjusted $R^2$ of 0.099 (unadjusted $R^2 = 0.103$).

Table 2. Trimmed models of the effect of democratic personnel policies on teacher burnout and the effect of teacher burnout on teacher support for student-centred instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct and Variables</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>b(se)</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part A Dependent Variable: Burnout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Personnel Policies</td>
<td>-0.340</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>-0.338</td>
<td>-15.194</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Efficacy</td>
<td>-0.049</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>-0.048</td>
<td>-2.385</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-worker Collegiality and Support</td>
<td>-0.091</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>-3.864</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Support and Involvement</td>
<td>-0.180</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>-0.179</td>
<td>-8.047</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Abilities and Performances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Abilities</td>
<td>-0.180</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>-0.179</td>
<td>-8.047</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe and Orderly School</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>1.748</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Disciplinary Policies</td>
<td>-0.197</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>-0.197</td>
<td>-7.955</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Isolation and Tokenism</td>
<td>-0.030</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.048</td>
<td>-2.447</td>
<td>0.015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Burnout</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>1.748</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$R = 0.656$, $R^2 = 0.430$, $R^2(adj.) = 0.428$, $F = 174.05$, d.f. = 6, $p = 0.000$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part B Dependent Variable: Student-Centred Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct and Variables</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>b(se)</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Personnel Policies</td>
<td>-0.082</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>-0.084</td>
<td>-3.107</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Abilities and Performances</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Abilities</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.151</td>
<td>5.073</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparative Rating of Abilities</td>
<td>-0.064</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>-0.065</td>
<td>-2.374</td>
<td>0.018</td>
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<td>Safe and Orderly School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Safety (Fear)</td>
<td>-0.161</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>-0.159</td>
<td>-2.374</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Demographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Teacher</td>
<td>0.275</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>5.048</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Teacher</td>
<td>-0.262</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>-0.112</td>
<td>-5.027</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Burnout</td>
<td>-0.121</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>-0.124</td>
<td>-4.393</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-0.131</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>-2.511</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R = .321$, $R^2 = 0.103$, $R^2(adj.) = 0.099$, $F = 26.44$, d.f. = 7, $p = 0.000$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each standardized increment in teacher burnout there was a small decrease in support for student-centred teaching ($\beta = -0.124$). The perception that one’s students were hard working increased support for student-centred instruction ($\beta = 0.151$). However, the higher the teacher ranked her or his students relative to the nation, the less the support for student-centred instruction to a slight degree ($\beta = -0.065$). Women are more likely than men to

7 Clearly in Table 2 the teacher attitude toward student-centered teaching is less well specified than the explanation of burnout (adj. $R^2 = 0.096$ and 0.414 and respectively). However, given that student-centered teaching is an essential element in our definition of democratic schooling, our primary focus here is to assess the impact of burnout on the attainment of this aspect of a democratic school.
endorse student-centred instruction ($\beta = 0.113$), while African American teachers are less likely to endorse student-centred instruction ($\beta = -0.112$).\(^8\) Teachers who manifest high levels of fear regarding their physical safety at school are less likely to endorse student-centred instruction ($\beta = -0.159$). Contrary to our expectation, teachers whose own treatment by the principal is perceived to be democratic (democratic personnel policies) are slightly less likely to endorse student-centred instruction ($\beta = -0.084$). The multivariate relationship for this variable is negative even though the bivariate relationship was positive, but not statistically significant ($r = 0.018$). We were surprised at this finding because the items that made up the democratic instructional practice scales did not include activities that would require the teachers to abrogate very substantially their authority. Rather, as noted in Table 1, the items stressed such modestly democratic practices as helping students to become independent learners, engaging and involving students in the learning process, and attempting to discover the talents and interests of students. Thus, in this urban, high-poverty school district, with children who bring few academic resources from home, teachers are not inclined to afford their students democratic treatment even when their principal follows a democratic management style.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Democratic education is usually based upon mutual respect and trust and is often seen as liberating both teachers and students. By contrast, teacher burnout is often viewed as the product of more autocratic practices and thus can be conceptualized as the result of the antithesis of the democratic school. In the present study we sought to raise two questions about the relationship between teacher burnout and democratic education.

- What is the effect of democratic personnel policies on teacher burnout?
- What is the effect of teacher burnout on support for democratic teaching practices?

The statistical models we advanced to account for teacher burnout represent those used in some of the current literature on burnout in the public schools. To those models we added the elements of democratic education to determine whether they incremented the explanatory power of the analysis.

Some of our findings were predictable, while others surprised us. The significant role that principals played in teacher burnout was not unexpected. Democratic personnel policies and practices exerted the strongest effect in lowering the burnout scores of the teachers. Collegial support of co-workers, while significant, had a much weaker effect. Prior work by Dworkin, Haney and Telschow (1990) found that the effect of co-workers was near zero under conditions where the principal was unsupportive.

The finding that racial tokenism had a weak negative effect on burnout seemed counterintuitive. An examination of which teachers were tokens helped to account for the results. White teachers were most likely to be tokens when race of student body was considered. However, their higher societal status likely counteracted the effects of being tokens relative to their students. Dworkin, Chafetz and Dworkin (1986) found that tokens with high societal status tended to be more satisfied with their jobs than those who were not

\(^8\) A preliminary model in which white teachers were not the reference group it was found that white teachers endorsed student-centered instruction ($\beta = 0.088$).
tokens because their relative scarcity allowed them to accrue personally their dominant racial or ethnic group status.

In contrast to the above, the relative weak effects of burnout on democratic instruction was unanticipated. While burned-out teachers were unsupportive of student-centred instruction, as might be expected, teachers who were not burned-out, as well as teachers who perceived their principals to be supportive of democratic management practices, also were unsupportive of student-centred instruction. The relatively low level of variance explained for the endorsement of student-centred instruction (adj. $R^2 = 0.10$) means that the model is poorly specified. Factors other than democratic principal style, belief in the ability of students, school safety, or teacher demographics remain to be identified for the endorsement of this aspect of a democratic school. Therefore the reduction of burnout among teachers, even in an environment that is supportive of democratic personnel policies, will not automatically result in higher support for the democratic treatment of students.

Further considerations need to be taken into account in the interpretation of our findings. The data came from a sample of teachers working in a high-poverty school district in a large Texas metropolitan area. It is important to recognize that Texas schools are under substantial pressure due to the state’s high-stakes testing to raise scores of disadvantaged children on the state’s compulsory achievement test. While this pressure is universal throughout the state, and in many other states in the United States, it is especially high in school districts where most of the children participate in the federal subsidized lunch program due to family poverty, and where the percentage of minority-group children is high. The pressures due to the confluence of state accountability standards and children with few resources that they can bring from home often serve as stressors on teachers and principals. These stressors can exacerbate burnout and could lead to fears over the potential negative consequences of democratization, or even the willingness to try democratic school processes.

Why have we been able to predict effectively burnout from perceptions related to democratic and supportive management practices, but have not been able to effectively predict support for democratic student-centred instructional practices with these same variables, controlling for teacher burnout? Could it be that under the conditions of high-stakes testing democratic principals and non-burned out teachers remain unwilling to subject themselves to the risk of greater student participation in their learning experiences. An accountability system that places all or most all of the emphasis on a standardized test also places real limits on the potential for the full measure of democratic education. Student-centred instruction in the light of accountability systems requires enormous levels of skill on the part of teachers and no small amount of confidence in the real skills of the students. The ultimate indicator of democratic education is mutual respect and trust. Can democratic education and the current systems of school accountability co-exist? That may well be the focus of future research in the study of democratic education.

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9 We were not able to determine the extent to which the perceived emphasis on the TAAS test by the principal affected the support for student-centered teaching. This variable was highly skewed in that it contained extreme items with small variances, that is, most teachers perceived the emphasis on TAAS to be very high.
REFERENCES


