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Phenomenological Insight on Being Hindered From Fulfilling One's Primary Responsibility to Educate Students

The research literature suggests that a major challenge facing teachers today is being thwarted from fulfilling their primary responsibility to help students learn. Teachers who continually encounter circumstances that hinder their efforts to educate students are likely to experience workplace frustration and stress. Following the existential-phenomenological research approach, I conducted in-depth, private interviews with eight middle school teachers to reveal the psychological effect of workplace hindrances and to gain a deeper understanding of the experience underlying frustration. The salient experiential themes identified in this study are feeling disrespected, powerless, hopeless, upset/anger, and guilt. It is argued that we need to address these phenomenological constituents of being hindered and the contexts in which they occur if we hope seriously to mitigate the elevated levels of frustration and stress currently plaguing the profession.

La littérature portant sur la recherche en éducation donne à penser qu'un des défis les plus importants auquel font face les enseignants de nos jours consiste à être empêchés de s'acquitter de leur responsabilité principale, soit d'aider les élèves à apprendre. Les enseignants devant continuellement confronter des circonstances qui entravent leurs efforts d'enseigner aux élèves sont aptes à devenir frustrés et tendus. Adoptant une approche existentielle phénoménologique à notre recherche, nous avons entrepris des entrevues détaillées et privées avec huit enseignants de l'intermédiaire. L'objectif de l'étude était de dévoiler l'effet psychologique des entraves sur le lieu de travail et de mieux comprendre les causes des frustrations. Les résultats ont permis d'identifier plusieurs thèmes importants reflétant l'expérience des enseignants : des sentiments d'impuissance, de désespoir, de colère, de culpabilité, ainsi que l'impression de ne pas être respectés. Nous insistons sur l'importance d'aborder les éléments phénoménologiques associés aux obstacles que confrontent les enseignants et d'analyser leurs contextes afin de pouvoir atténuer les niveaux élevés de frustration et de tension qui rongent actuellement la profession.

Teaching can be a rewarding profession, but it can also be challenging, as evidenced by the number of educators who are dissatisfied with or leaving the profession. In a 1983 study, 35% of teachers surveyed reported being dissatisfied with teaching, and 52% reported that they would not become teachers if they had the chance to do it again (Moracco, D'Arienzo, & Danford, 1983). Farber (1991) similarly estimated that 30-35% of teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs, and another study found that 26% of teachers considered their careers extremely or very stressful (Manthei, Gilmore, Tuck, & Adair, 1996; Manthei & Solman, 1988). Recent studies suggest an ongoing exodus of many educators from the profession because of challenges associated with teaching (Henke, Chen, Geis, & Knepper, 2000; McCoy, 2003).

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These reports of dissatisfaction with the teaching profession are similar to reports on teachers' workplace stress. Research on the prevalence of work-related stress among elementary, junior, and high school teachers revealed that workplace stress was increasingly becoming a problem decades ago (National Association of School Masters, 1976). These results were corroborated by a review of the literature on teachers' workplace stress by Gugliemi and Tatrow (1998). Gugliemi and Tatrow concluded that the prevalence of workplace stress among schoolteachers was reaching a critical level. More recent research suggests that teachers' stress continues to be an ongoing problem of considerable concern (Farber, 2000; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001).

Given these concerns, a modest number of studies have been conducted to identify the type of challenges that contribute to teachers' workplace stress and dissatisfaction. A large number of these studies implicate a certain type of stressor. Researchers have described or alluded to this stressor as being workplace events and circumstances that hinder teachers' efforts to fulfill their primary responsibility to educate students (Bardo, 1979; Blase, 1986; Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Manthei et al., 1996; Mazur & Lynch, 1989; Okebukola & Jegede, 1992; Rashke, Dedrick, Strathe, & Hawkes, 1985). Examples of hindering circumstances identified in the research literature include classroom interruptions, extracurricular activities, oversized classrooms, lack of support from parents and administrators, lack of time, student apathy, and student misbehavior, to name a few.

Considerable attention has been given to the effect that these hindering circumstances (stressors) have on teachers, or in other words, how educators respond to workplace hindrances. As noted above, many educators choose to leave the profession in response to the challenges and stressors associated with workplace hindrances. There are also physiological and psychological effects. Physiological manifestations include high blood pressure, peptic ulcers, headaches, exhaustion, and fatigue; and commonly cited psychological effects are job dissatisfaction, irritability, frustration, and depression (Gold, 1984; Halpin, Harris, & Halpin, 1985; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzen, 1987; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). Although these psychological manifestations give us a good overall impression of the psychological effect of being hindered, they lack specificity, refinement, and context. For example, what kinds of feelings underlie frustration? What personal experiences contribute to irritability and depression? And what types of circumstances most often lead to frustration?

Considerable attention has also been given to mitigating the effects of stress caused by workplace hindrances. Interestingly, despite professionally designed interventions at both the organizational level (Martin & Baldwin, 1996; Russell et al., 1987; Smith & Bourke, 1992) and personal level (McPherson, 1983; Riccio, 1983; Sparks, 1983; Van Dick & Wagner, 2001), teachers as a whole continue to be plagued by workplace stress and dissatisfaction. According to Farber (2000), a respected clinician and scholar who specializes in teacher stress and burnout, although many of the existing interventions are "likely to be at least moderately helpful … [most fail to] resolve the problems and symptoms associated with teacher [stress]" (p. 688). Farber argued that many interventions fail because they do not adequately take into consideration teachers'

personal experiences and phenomenological perceptions. By approaching workplace stress and burnout as a homogeneous phenomenon—an assumption on which many interventions are built—we are probably overlooking many of the crucial personal experiences associated with teacher stress, thus limiting our ability to mitigate its effects. Of paramount importance, he added, is the need for interventions to consider the "strong phenomenological perception … among those who feel [stressed] … that their efforts on their job are not met with commensurate rewards, satisfactions, or fulfillment" (p. 676).

In other words, Farber (2000) is suggesting that interventions be built around the personal meanings that constitute experiences that prevent teachers from feeling satisfaction and fulfillment. Because "the core rewards of teachers are related to feelings that … their students have learned what it is that the teachers have been trying to teach" (McPherson, 1983), we ought to take a closer look at teachers' experiences of being hindered from helping students learn. Specifically, we need an intimate understanding of teachers' phenomenological perceptions of being hindered from fulfilling their primary responsibility to educate students, an experience that, as explained above, plays a major role in preventing teachers from experiencing reward and satisfaction. The need for a thorough understanding of this experiential phenomenon is supported by Colaizzi (1973), who argued that "Without thereby first disclosing the [experiential] foundations of a phenomenon, no [significant] progress whatsoever can be made concerning it" (p. 28).

The purpose of this research is to expand our understanding of the experiential phenomenon of being hindered from fulfilling one's primary responsibility to educate students. To this end I employed the existential-phenomenological method in the tradition of Hüsserl and Heidegger. As I show, this qualitative approach, which is designed to capture the essence of a personal experience, provides a rich understanding of what it is like for teachers to experience being hindered. The findings of this study have implications for workplace stress intervention strategies.

Method

Participants

Eight middle school (grades 7-9) teachers volunteered to participate in this study. This number is consistent with Creswell's (1998) recommendation that phenomenologists choose between three and 10 participants. Of the eight participants, three are male and five are female. The teachers were selected from four middle schools located in a middle-class, socially conservative area. The teachers lived in the same area. At the time of the study, their years of teaching experience ranged from one to 31 years, and each participant taught a separate subject, namely, science, physical education, music, French, resource/special education, social studies, math, and geography or history. These differences in years of experience and subjects taught provided richly varied descriptions of the phenomenon, thus facilitating my ability to grasp the essential constituents of the experience. Also, I chose to focus on middle school (junior high school) teachers because as a group, middle school-aged students were considered more likely to act inappropriately and be intentionally nonconformist than elementary or senior/high school-aged students.

After receiving Institutional Review Board authorization, I gained approval from Utah's Jordan School District, to conduct human subjects research. Next I contacted school principals by telephone and arranged personal visits with them to describe my study and obtain approval to visit faculty lounges and recruit participants. During my visits to the faculty lounges, I conducted brief screening interviews with 16 teachers to determine if they would make ideal participants, that is, if they were willing to share personal experiences of being hindered. Teachers who were not selected were usually excluded because they demonstrated a lack of interest in the topic, discomfort in talking about workplace concerns, appeared reticent when sharing their experiences in the workplace, or did not have time to participate. Eight of the 16 teachers satisfied the participant selection criteria. I sent letters to these teachers requesting their voluntary participation and enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope and a consent form for them to sign and return. All eight teachers agreed to participate.

Design and Procedure

In an attempt to identify the salient feelings underlying teachers' workplace hindrances, I employed the existential-phenomenological research approach in the tradition of Hüsserl (as described in Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Hüsserl argued that because all our knowledge is given in consciousness regardless of the mode of inquiry, investigations of ourselves and the world must begin with an examination of human consciousness. The purpose of such an examination is to reveal the invariant structures of consciousness that constitute an experience and give it meaning (Polkinghorne, 1989; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). The existential-phenomenological researcher seeks to reveal the invariant structures of consciousness by exploring how events and entities are given in experience by the consciousness that beholds them. Consciousness beholds events and entities in the sense that we are always conscious of something, or in other words, "consciousness is always directed to something that is beyond the act of consciousness in which that something appears" (Giorgi, 1986, p. 12).

Because the things given in conscious experience should be understood exactly as they present themselves, the existential-phenomenological researcher should bracket his or her scientifically derived presuppositions about the phenomenon being investigated. Bracketing involves temporarily suspending personal biases and assumptions about the experience of interest so that they do not drive the interpretation of the data. Thus in order to understand more fully the experiential phenomenon of being hindered, I bracketed my assumptions about the experience throughout my analysis of the data. Bracketing enabled me more accurately to capture the essence of being hindered and understand it as it is given in the teachers' experiences. Bracketing also helped me to focus my attention on the essential constituents of the phenomenon and avoid becoming overly concerned with mundane facts and details, which might have clouded my awareness of the meanings of the experience.

The phenomenological data-gathering procedure that I chose was the one-on-one, open-ended interview. I preferred this method over other techniques such as the closed-ended questionnaire, which would have limited the range of responses or experiences that the teachers shared. The interview was also preferred to open-ended questionnaires because it allowed me more fully to

explore participants' experiences. Moreover, I did not adopt a focus group format because I wished participants to feel uninhibited in their responses. Also, by providing complete confidentiality in a private interview setting, I hoped to create an environment where participants would feel free to share their experiences, many of which as it turned out were personal and sensitive.

The interviews were conducted in private in teachers' offices or classrooms. In each instance, after establishing rapport, I began by asking the participants to describe in detail specific incidences of being hindered from fulfilling their responsibility to educate students. Throughout the interviews I asked questions that encouraged the participants to reflect on their experiences and give thoughtful, articulate expressions to those reflections. On average the interviews lasted about 50 minutes.

After transcribing the interviews, I followed the six steps of existential-phenomenological data analysis as outlined by Polkinghorne (1989). First I did an initial reading of the protocols (interview transcripts) to gain a sense of the whole. Reading all the protocols as one unit gave me a cursory understanding of what it is like to experience being hindered. This understanding increased my familiarity with the content of the protocols and helped me later to identify the meanings that teachers attached to their experiences.

Next I reread the protocols, and while doing so divided the participants' statements into units of meaning. The process of locating meaning units was accomplished by recording each time a transition in meaning was perceived. The transitions in meaning were those that naturally occurred in the protocol texts and represented divisions in meaning that were part of the participants' own experiences.

In the third step I identified the essence of each meaning unit in the context of the main question of the study, *What does it mean to be hindered from helping students learn?* This process involved reflection and imaginative variation. Imaginative variation is imaginatively altering aspects of the experience in order to capture the essential characteristics of the phenomenon.

Fourth, I transcribed the meaning units into the language of psychological science. Because phenomenological notions are somewhat foreign to the language of traditional science, each unit was rewritten in an academic way while preserving the phenomenological essence of what was being described. For example, a social studies teacher said,

> We're talking about other countries, [but] I haven't had enough background [in geography] to get into something that's going to be meaningful to them. In that case I feel like in many respects the kids have been shorted.… I don't feel like they've been able to get the material that will be meaningful to them.

This meaning unit was rewritten as: The participant regrets not being able to teach his students something interesting in geography class.

Next I related the meaning units to other meaning units in the same protocols and then synthesized them into a systematic, general description for each protocol. This process resulted in a coherent and systematic description that delineated the essential psychological structures that constitute the experience of being hindered for each participant and give it meaning.

In the final step I synthesized the general descriptions from each protocol to produce an overall description that captures the essence of the experience. Thus the final synthesis is a transituational description of what it is like for teachers to experience being hindered from fulfilling their professional responsibility to educate students.

Results

First, it should be noted that the participants in this study demonstrated positive attitudes and deep commitments toward their teaching careers. The negative experiences contained in these results should not be viewed as an overall reflection of the participants' careers. Being hindered from helping students to learn comprises only a small part of the teachers' vocational experience; yet it plays an important role in their teaching experience as evidenced by the rich detail and passion given to their stories. As I analyzed the protocols, it became clear that they felt frustrated when hindered. Yet the purpose of this study was to reveal other, less obvious, but equally salient personal meanings that constitute the teacher's experience of being hindered. I identified five underlying experiential themes as follows.

First, teachers experience feeling powerless to accomplish certain educational objectives because of obtrusive rules and regulations, a lack of disciplinary power, and insufficient administrative support. For example, recalling her experience of dealing with extreme student misbehavior in her physical education class, Mary lamented that she had too few disciplinary options available to her because, as she said, "They've [essentially] taken all power [and] authority from teachers." Also, reflecting on his failed efforts to influence how the educational system met the needs of parents and students, George stated, "I'm powerless! I can't do anything about it! I'm buried within the system and I have no power."

The experience of feeling powerless to bring about change and to do things in a way that facilitates one's ability to better educate students is an important issue for teachers. Powerlessness often engenders strong emotions because it is an attack on so many teachers' *raison d'être*, which is to help students learn. That powerlessness is a deeply personal issue is evident in Karen's comments on intrusive rules and regulations. She tearfully said, "The catch phrase this year has been just let me teach … because I know I am good at it." The experience of powerlessness may also put a strain on teachers' relationships with administrators and policymakers when the latter are viewed as blocking teachers' efforts to bring about positive change. For example, one participant recalled the experience of serving on a committee that was to identify problems and suggest solutions. His committee came up with resolutions that were accepted but never implemented because, as he said, they got "buried in the morass of management." This experience led him to conclude, "You'll never have power." His displeasure with policymakers' failure to implement his committee's resolutions is evident in the statement: "They give you the illusion of power which is even worse. Don't tell me you're going to change things and then not change them."

Second, teachers experience hopelessness because of an inability to remedy adverse situations caused by student apathy, student inattention, poor relationships with administrators, and a lack of time to catch up on duties, to name

a few. For example, regarding his inability to get his students to settle down and pay attention on picture day and after raucous assemblies, Mickey commented, “you basically have lost them.… [and] you’re basically babysitting.… [Sometimes] I just sit back and say, ‘it’s useless to even try.’” And reflecting on her inability to motivate some apathetic students, Julia said, “I feel like, why can’t I get to this student? … And then I start to think, ‘Well, I can’t because this student isn’t self-motivated—if this student doesn’t want to [work], he is not going to … no matter what I do.’”

Feeling hopeless is similar to feeling powerless in that both refer to being unable to bring about positive change. In fact these two feelings often co-occur in the sense that participants who experience powerlessness often feel a concurrent sense of hopelessness. However, comments by the participants in this study point out an essential difference in the meaning of these two experiences. With powerlessness, teachers could conceivably change a situation if they had the influence to do so, but in the case of hopelessness, teachers feel that there is nothing they or anyone else can do realistically to bring about positive change, at least not soon. Hopelessness creates a dilemma for many educators. Rather than risk burnout by expending valuable energy and resources pining over situations that cannot be changed, teachers often choose not to worry about unsolvable issues. But this approach may signal apathy, and teachers who are deeply concerned about helping students learn do not wish to feel that they do not care. This claim is evident in the following exchange between me (D) and Karen (K), which explored her experience with regulations and codes that limited her autonomy in the classroom.

> D. I get the sense that as an educator you really like seeing the kids understand, learn and grow, and enjoy science. And yet you have regulations that block you from accomplishing this? And that upsets you?
> K. Right.
> D What’s that emotion like for you? What’s that conflict?
> K. Hm. It has energy cost. It also makes you a poorer teacher because you get caught in the, “I don’t quite care” mode.
> D. And you don’t want to go there?
> K. Right.
> D. Why don’t you want to let yourself go there?
> K. Like every teacher, it’s for the kids.
> D. If the day came that you ever stopped really caring that much, then?
> K. Oh, I’d get out!
> D. Get out?
> K. Yeah. It’s too hard (emotional).

Third, participants feel angry or upset when administrators and support staff make decisions that undermine their efforts to educate such as failing adequately to discipline students who are sent to the office, not enforcing rules, and automatically taking the students’ side when teacher-student conflicts arise. For example, Katie was upset when new staff misscheduled her classes. As a result, a whole grade level could not attend her music classes for an entire year. She said, “It upsets me that the principal wouldn’t know [about it, and] give them a little guidance while they are doing the schedule. They just totally … screw[ed] it up royally and the rest of us have to suffer.” Also, regarding her experience with an administrator who apparently did not adopt tough

measures against a student who intentionally harmed another student, Mary commented, "What really made me go home that day with a killer headache.… was my interaction with that vice-principal who had no guts and no spine, who didn't say, 'Suspension right now!' … Nobody makes the kid accountable.… It makes you angry."

Teachers who experience anger as a result of interactions with administrators and staff feel largely that their expectations are not being met. Teachers tacitly expect administrators to assist them in a meaningful way, particularly when serious issues arise such as problems with student discipline. Most probably the anger that teachers occasionally experience when their expectations are violated is taking a toll on teacher-administrator relationships and leaving teachers to feel that they are on their own when serious problems arise. Such appeared to be the case for younger teachers like Katie, who pointed out that at one school, "I learned not to ask for help because you'd just get in trouble."

Fourth, teachers feel disrespected when administrators fail to consult them about decisions that influence the classroom such as when administrators failed to consult John about a major change in academic awards assemblies. In response to this situation, John said, "We'd like to be listened to.… We just wish that there would be a little more respect." Teachers similarly feel disrespected when students exhibit excessively unruly behavior or challenge their authority in class. For example, Mickey exclaimed, "How many times do you need to tell somebody to turn around and pay attention?" And commenting on disrespectful students, Julia stated, "It makes me mad when students do that. I don't want to be angry, but [sometimes I am]."

Feeling disrespected is associated with how teachers expect to be treated by those with whom they work. Although feeling disrespected may not be as detrimental to teacher well-being as anger, it appears equally damaging to teacher-student and teacher-administrator relationships. As one teacher commented, "Relationships are really important." Positive relationships not only help create a pleasant work environment, but also help teachers to achieve their objectives of helping students to learn. One teacher pointed out that teacher-student relationships are vital because when students are not giving her the proper respect, she feels frustrated, their relationship suffers, and then "the kids don't learn." When relationships suffer as a result of teachers feeling disrespected, the cost may be diminished personal satisfaction from not reaching educational goals and increased workplace stress.

Finally, teachers experience guilt and regret when they fail to meet educational goals such as failing students, and being unable to prepare adequately for classes due to a lack of time. For example, regarding her failure to help students succeed in her class, Julia said, "I don't like it when students fail because then I feel like I am not doing my job." Mickey similarly stated, "To me it's like I've failed"; and George said, "Whenever a student doesn't do his or her job, it's still my problem [and] responsibility." Last, Cathy stated that when she did not fully prepare her lessons due to a lack of time, "It's just extreme guilt because there's no way in the world I could plan those kind of lessons that I had been [taught] in college."

The guilt and regret that teachers experience when they fail to accomplish certain tasks may create an internal conflict: a conflict between not wishing to spend too much out-of-school time grading and preparing lessons and wishing to be adequately prepared so that students can get the most out of class. In particular, extracurricular responsibilities and events, or "ash and trash" as one teacher called it, that impinge on one's instruction and preparation time are considered somewhat of an annoyance. Faced with lack of time to fulfill responsibilities, teachers often resort to taking shortcuts, a choice with which many do not feel comfortable; but as John asserted, "Sometimes you have to take shortcuts in order to survive." Thus teachers who regret taking shortcuts and not completing tasks accept these circumstances as unfortunate consequences of not having enough the time to fulfill their responsibility to educate students.

Discussion

The results of this study support those of other studies that found that teachers exposed to workplace hindrances experienced frustration. This study also reveals other psychological constituents underlying frustration, namely, feeling powerless, hopeless, anger/upset, disrespected, and guilt. In this brief discussion I raise some points for consideration about the importance of interpersonal relationships and offer recommendations that might prove useful in minimizing teacher stress and enrich teachers' workplace experiences.

This study reveals that workplace relationships play a major role in teachers' efforts to educate students. Teachers often feel that they are better able to help students learn when they have a good relationship with their students and when they have the support of staff and administrators. When these relationships deteriorate, teachers experience being hindered. The finding that teachers are often frustrated when students are disrespectful and when administrators do not give them enough support underscores the importance of what I call *relational expectations.* Relational expectation refers to the type of conduct that an individual expects of another person with whom he or she is in relationship. Teachers tacitly expect a certain amount of courtesy and respect from both students and administrators. Specifically, teachers expect students to respect their position and authority and expect administrators to assist them in a meaningful way when serious problems arise.

This finding suggests that more attention should be given to professional workplace relationships and the unexamined expectations inherent in these relationships. By way of recommendation, school districts should evaluate teachers' expectations of administrators and consider whether these expectations are consistent with the professional guidelines set forth by school districts. This may be accomplished by having teachers and administrators enter into a dialogue about each other's work-related expectations. Administrators may have contrary expectations and believe that teachers should be able to deal with most student problems on their own or that because teachers want autonomy in the classroom, they should limit their involvement as much as possible when problems arise. Also, administrators may feel that because of their obligations to teachers, students, and parents, they should act as mediators when teacher-student conflicts arise rather than intervene on behalf of either

party. In any case, educators should openly discuss and evaluate these expectations, obligations, and assumptions.

Finding ways to minimize situations where students violate teachers' relational expectations (i.e., behave disrespectfully) may be more difficult because so much of what influences student behavior is beyond the reach of educators. These influences include social and personal values, lapses in discipline, and cultural and peer pressure from media and friends. To some extent these influences may be offset by positive teacher-student relationships. Several teachers in this study pointed out the value of building a relationship of trust with students in order to earn their respect and facilitate learning. Also, it would be helpful for teachers to remember that certain student disruptions such as occasional talking in class and not paying attention are typical of middle school-aged kids. As one participant expressed it, "That's the nature of the beast here at the junior high level."

Moreover, when appropriate, administrators and counselors should support teachers as much as possible when teacher-student conflicts arise, especially when the student is to blame. Although teachers want a large degree of independence in handling the affairs of their classrooms, they expect administrators to be involved meaningfully when they refer students to the office for disciplinary problems. Administrators who fail to discipline students adequately may be sending the message to teachers that they are on their own whenever problems arise. They may also be sending the message to students that treating teachers with disrespect is not a serious offense, thus undermining teachers' efforts in the classroom.

This study also provides some direction for teacher stress intervention programs. The results indicate that programs that address "teacher frustration" without considering other salient themes are probably operating at a superficial level with regard to experiential phenomena that hinder teachers' efforts. As pointed out above, the failure of interventions to consider the meaningful phenomenological experiences of teachers who feel stressed is a downfall of many programs (Farber, 2000). Thus when appropriate, stress intervention programs might take into consideration the salient feelings underlying teacher frustration identified in this study, namely, powerlessness, hopelessness, anger, feeling disrespected, and guilt and regret.

Practical approaches for addressing these experiential themes may include the following. Educators should more fully empower teachers to make decisions that influence what happens in the classroom, rather than leaving important decisions entirely to legislators, and avoid broad, sweeping changes to educational policies that limit teachers' autonomy. Educators should also encourage teachers and administrators to discuss their relational expectations and limit the workload and number of extracurricular responsibilities placed on teachers so that they have enough time to achieve educational objectives without sacrificing personal time. Last, when necessary, counselors should explore these experiential themes when helping to ease the burdens associated with workplace stress and burnout.

In sum, the purpose of this existential-phenomenological study was to uncover the nature of an experiential phenomenon implicated in teacher stress, namely, being hindered from fulfilling one's responsibility to educate students.

The results show that there is more to this phenomenon than just feeling frustrated. By addressing other meaningful experiences underlying teacher frustration and making relational expectations more transparent, educators may be able to mitigate the stress and burnout associated with workplace hindrances. Thus it is hoped that these themes and the contexts in which they arise will come to the forefront of efforts to reduce rates of teacher attrition.

Finally, a limitation of this study is the small sample size, which restricts the generalizability of the results. Also the participants and schools were fairly homogeneous with regard to socioeconomic status and cultural values. Teachers from varied economic and cultural backgrounds may differ in the types of hindrances they encounter and the meanings they attach to these experiences. Nevertheless, an essential benefit of this study is that it provides a unique and rich understanding of an experiential phenomenon implicated in teacher stress. Additional research in the form of focus groups designed to explore these issues further and identify potentially propitious prescriptions would be beneficial.

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