BOOK REVIEW


Reviewed by Shelina Adatia, PhD Candidate, University of Ottawa.

Regardless of where you are in your teaching career, there may come a time when burnout rears its ugly head. Fatigue and frustration make the urge to walk away from the daily challenges of the classroom all too tempting. In fact, according to Ingersoll, Merrill and Stuckey (2014), 8-15% of teachers leave the profession every year. Moreover, approximately 40% of new teachers leave within five years (Ingersoll, 2012). Author and educator Chase Mielke (2019) experienced burnout himself after ten years of teaching, and in his book, The Burnout Cure: Learning to Love Teaching Again, he shares how “to not simply survive as an educator but to thrive, personally and professionally” (p. 3).

The book is divided into ten chapters, each focusing on a key concept from Mielke’s (2019) course, Positive Psychology for Human Flourishing. This was a course Mielke designed for high school students questioning “the ‘why’ of adversity and the ‘how’ of happiness” (2019, p. 2) – questions many adults continuously ask themselves. In these chapters, Mielke breaks down concepts such as mindfulness, gratitude, empathy and altruism, followed by life assignments, which include useful suggestions for putting these concepts into practice. For instance, mindfulness has of late become a buzzword frequently heard in different social settings, but what does it actually mean to be mindful? According to Mielke, it’s about focusing our attention, being in the moment and pushing our judgements aside. While these are all easier said than done, Mielke recommends getting started by using mindfulness triggers: “a common event or situation in which you go into either rambling mode or negative rumination mode” (2019, p. 44). An example of the former could be students entering your class in the morning, while an example of the latter could be being stopped at a red light. Rather than questioning why you didn’t speed ahead before the light turned red, Mielke suggests intentionally re-directing your attention towards your breathing – a technique which has been proven to reduce stress levels (Jerath, 2006).

At this point, you may be thinking to yourself, “this sounds a lot like a self-help book for teachers”. While you would not be wrong, in my opinion what distinguishes Mielke's
(2019) book from others in this genre are his personal stories. These stories often comically combine the realities of teaching with the realities of adulting; “when I came home after an exhausting day of teaching, mindful awareness helped me keep a calm head, be patient with my colicky newborn son (and distraught wife), and still find joy in being a dad” (Mielke, 2019, p. 43).

“But what is the link to action research?” – you may find yourself asking. After reflecting on that question, I found myself returning to the purpose of action research: change – often in one’s own context (Armstrong, 2019). Armstrong and Moore (as cited in Armstrong, 2019) further specify that action research is about addressing issues related to one’s current practice with the goal of creating strategies for change. Additionally, Winter and Munn-Giddings (2001) describe action research as “a process which alternates continuously between inquiry and action” (p. 5). Linking this information to Mielke’s (2019) book, I believe that his burnout was the focus of his action research project. His purpose was to restore his love for teaching, which he was able to do through his commitment to, as well as his research into, positive psychology. Mielke’s life assignments, which he himself practices, are thus strategies for change. Indeed, as Mielke notes, these strategies are “supported by a multitude of peer-reviewed research studies and it helped me (and countless others) improve well-being in real life, particularly regarding teaching and coaching” (2019, p. 3). This book is thus a result and a reflection of Mielke’s action research.

One question remains: Should you read this book? In my opinion, Chase Mielke’s (2019) The Burnout Cure: Learning to Love Teaching Again is definitely worth a read. Juggling the dual role of educator and researcher makes me an ideal candidate for burnout. Yet, if burnout does eventually rear its ugly head, I now have practical strategies to overcome it. Mielke’s strategies for change such as practicing meditation, writing gratitude letters and life checks, and organizing a day or week of kindness may initially seem unappealing, trivial and even unnecessary to yourself and your students. However, my recommendation is to try them. After all, the potential long-term benefits of these practices cannot be overlooked. As Mielke so wisely notes, “we give our best when we are at our best” (2019, p. 12). The Burnout Cure: Learning to Love Teaching Again thus receives my stamp of approval!

REFERENCES


**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:**

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Shelina Adatia is a Ph.D. candidate in the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa. Shelina is an educator and researcher. Her research interests include French as a Second Language (FSL), plurilingualism and inclusive education. Her doctoral study will focus on the inclusion of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) learners in French Immersion in elementary and secondary publicly funded schools in Ottawa.

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