

Teacher Stress, Challenging Parents and Problem Students

Kees van der Wolf
Huub Everaert

University of Amsterdam
Utrecht University of Professional Education

With the influx of exceptional students into regular classrooms, teachers of non-handicapped children often incur new and additional duties for which they have either limited or no formal training. Due to the student's problematic behavior and lower abilities, the teachers also experience minimal and infrequent pupil progress. An additional, often mentioned mainstream-related stress factor is an increase in problems with parents (hostile, uncooperative, neglectful, fighting parents).

According to the goodness-of-fit-conceptualisation, behaviorally challenging children and parents evoke different levels and different types of subjectively experienced stress in teachers.

Continual exposure to challenging behavior, both from pupils and their parents, can seriously deplete the teacher's emotional and physical resources, leading to self-doubt, loss of satisfaction from teaching, impulsivity, rigidity or feelings of anger and guilt.

As a result teachers may react negatively and irritated to problem-children. Children then may not receive the human contact, attention and support they need. This in turn can result in problem-behavior.

We translated Greene, Abidin and Kmetz's (1997) Index of Teaching Stress (ITS) into Dutch. 59 teachers of Amsterdam-Southeast regular primary schools rated the degree to which they found problematic behaviors like ADHD, Emotional Liability/Low Adaptability, Anxiety/Withdrawal, Low ability/Learning disability, Aggressive/conduct disorder to be stressful or frustrating for themselves. We also asked them to assess feelings like Self-Doubt/Needs support, Loss of satisfaction from teaching, Disruption of Teaching Process and Frustration working with parents, working with problem-children.

We find that with respect to problem-children ADHD and aggressive/conduct disorder contribute to self-doubt in teachers and frustration working with parents, and, to a lesser degree to disruption of the teaching process.

Externalizing rather than internalizing (emotional liability, anxiety/withdrawal) behavior works as a stressor for teachers. We present some recommendations for practical applications and theory development.