

Teacher Burnout Revisited: Introducing Positive Intervention Approaches Based on Gratitude and Forgiveness

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The recent positive psychology movement has given a new impetus to revisiting the perennial problem of teacher burnout, suggesting that intervention efforts could be more productively shifted from coping with symptoms or components of burnout to promoting or enhancing the antithesis of burnout. It is argued that the components of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment) are diametrically opposites of the good life (the pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life), which is led or lived by people who build and cultivate positive character strengths. Based on the review on the connection of well-being with forgiveness and gratitude, it is further suggested that strength-based interventions based on forgiveness and gratitude are effective and could be integrated into the positive approaches to combating burnout.

*Key words: burnout, character strength, forgiveness, gratitude,
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Inspired by the seminal work of Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978a, 1978b), three decades of research studies on teacher stress have brought into focus the severity and prevalence of this worldwide global problem of the teaching profession. Indeed, various survey studies have indicated that as many as one third of the teachers under study reported that they found teaching to be highly stressful (Borg, 1990). Given that teacher stress could have serious consequences on teachers' well-being and their teaching as well as students' learning, there has been a constant call for the development of effective intervention efforts to help teachers combat or cope with stressors in the school environments (Boyle, Borg, Falzon, & Baglioni, 1995; Kyriacou, 2001; van Dick & Wagner, 2001).

Across different school settings, researchers have identified a diversity of common stressors that include, among others, students' misbehaviors and discipline problems, poor motivation for work, heavy workload and time pressure, role conflict and role ambiguity, conflicting staff relationships in school administration and management, and pressure and criticisms from parents and the wider community (Dunham, 1992; Hastings & Bham, 2003; Travers & Cooper, 1996). In confronting these common stressors, teachers however could react very differently. Some might develop mild frustration, anxiety, and irritability to emotional exhaustion. Others might develop more severe psychosomatic and depressive symptoms that require therapeutic interventions (Dunham, 1992; Kyriacou & Pratt, 1985; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978b; Schonfeld, 1992; Seidman & Zager, 1991). In general, researchers often refer to the more severe individual negative affective experience as burnout (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach, 1986, 2003).

Conceptualization of burnout became clearer and studies on burnout more systematic when Maslach and Jackson (1981) developed a multidimensional standardized measure for research, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). This framework defines burnout as having three distinct components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to the feelings of being emotionally drained by the intense contact with other people; depersonalization refers to the negative attitude or callous responses toward people; and reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in one's sense of competence and of successful achievement

in working with people (Maslach, 1986; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). The extensive interest in research on teacher burnout has led to the development of a special MBI version, the MBI-Education Form, for research on teacher burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

Studies on Teacher Burnout in Hong Kong

Perhaps, Mo's (1991) study is the first pioneering Hong Kong study of teacher burnout using the MBI. He studied burnout among secondary school teachers, and related their levels of burnout with background variables. He found that teachers with higher levels of emotional exhaustion had five or less years of teaching experience whereas teachers with lower levels of burnout were characterized by Type A personality and strong social support. Subsequent studies by other researchers have by and large replicated some of these findings, such as the higher level of burnout reported by less experienced teachers (e.g., Lau, Yuen, & Chan, 2005). Other studies have added other variables to the list of burnout correlates or predictors, variables such as coping strategies (Chan & Hui, 1995), hardiness (Chan, 2003), self-efficacy (Chan, 2005), emotional intelligence (Chan, 2006), triarchic abilities (Chan, 2007), and pedagogical self-concept and purpose in life (Lau et al., 2005).

In comparing these studies of Hong Kong Chinese teachers with large-scale studies of American and Canadian teachers (e.g., Byrne, 1991; Maslach & Jackson, 1986), it was found that Hong Kong Chinese teachers generally had comparable scores on emotional exhaustion, but they generally scored lower on depersonalization (e.g., Chan & Hui, 1995; Lau et al., 2005), and to a lesser extent on personal accomplishment (e.g., Chan & Hui, 1995). Regarding subgroup differences, there were consistent gender differences on depersonalization, with Hong Kong male teachers scoring significantly higher than Hong Kong female teachers (Chan, 2005; Chan & Hui, 1995; Lau et al., 2005), similar to findings from studies in non-Chinese settings in Western countries (e.g., Byrne, 1991).

Developing Intervention Strategies to Cope with Teacher Burnout

In reviewing these past studies, one could conclude that most if not all studies on teacher burnout in Hong Kong to date could be characterized by their emphasis on the search for antecedents causally prior to burnout or predictors of burnout, or for variables that might mediate or moderate the influence of stressors on burnout. The identification of significant predictors, mediators, or moderators has great implications for intervention, as their enhancement or attenuation could lead to corresponding changes in the levels of burnout. For example, Chan and Hui (1995) reported that escape-avoidance or avoidant coping significantly predicted all components of burnout, thereby suggesting that teachers should refrain from using avoidant coping. Instead, they suggested that the strategies to be encouraged and promoted among teachers should be cognitive-interpersonal coping that significantly predicted emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment, and seeking social support that significantly predicted depersonalization, all in the direction of reducing the levels of burnout. In addition, the promotion of adaptive or non-avoidant coping strategies could be linked to the personality variable of hardiness or dispositional resilience as indicated in another study (Chan, 2003), suggesting that intervention efforts could also be directed to the cultivation of hardiness as coping resources to combat burnout.

In yet another study, Chan (2005) investigated self-efficacy as a predictor, a mediator, or a moderator in the stress-burnout relationship. The differential impacts of teacher stressors and self-efficacy on different components of burnout suggested that maneuvering stressors in the school environment might be effective in combating emotional exhaustion, but could be less effective in coping with depersonalization, whereas the promotion of self-efficacy might be more effective in enhancing personal accomplishment and in reducing depersonalization. On this basis, it was suggested that in developing effective intervention strategies for combating burnout, Bandura's (1997) conceptualization of the four sources of efficacy beliefs (enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and affective states) might be

useful. Given that enactive mastery experiences could have the greatest influence on enhancing self-efficacy, one might induce success experiences through, for example, inoculation training (Meichenbaum, 1985).

The self-efficacy focus in intervention strategies to combat burnout marks an important shift in emphasis from efforts to reduce burnout to efforts to enhance the antithesis of burnout. Studies that connected teacher burnout with emotional intelligence (Chan, 2006) and with successful intelligence or triarchic abilities (Chan, 2007) exemplified this emphasis. With a similar view, Kelchtermans and Strittmatter (1999), for example, have commented that the symptoms of burnout would be reduced when teachers experience professional growth, self-efficacy, and perceived success in their career progression. Indeed, this shift of emphasis is consistent with the reasoning that it is more productive to focus on job engagement to promote vigor, involvement, and self-efficacy rather than on burnout to reduce emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and the lack of personal accomplishment (Leiter, 1992; Maslach, 2003; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Schwarzer & Greenglass, 1999). Accordingly, effective intervention strategies need to be centered on providing opportunities for individual development, and this could be achieved through the cultivation of abilities and strengths and the adoption of a positive attitude or orientation to life. Interestingly, this shift of emphasis from tackling burnout to promoting the antithesis of burnout corresponds closely to the positive psychology movement that advocates shifting the traditional emphasis of scientific psychology from distress and pathology to positive aspects of health and well-being (see Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Keyes & Haidt, 2003; Seligman, 2003; Snyder & Lopez, 2007).

Burnout and the Good Life

The positive psychology movement spearheaded by Seligman and his colleagues represents efforts to shift the traditional emphasis on the study of human weaknesses, deficits, and pathologies to the study of positive emotions, positive characters, and positive institutions as well as individual, community, and societal factors that promote positive

human functioning and contribute to a good and fulfilled life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, what constitutes a good or fulfilled life remains somewhat controversial among philosophers, religious leaders and psychologists throughout history (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Historically, two distinct perspectives seem to have emerged (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993). One perspective views pursuing pleasure as the way of achieving life satisfaction. This view is rooted in hedonism (maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain) first articulated by ancient Greek philosophers (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999). A second perspective views pursuing meaning in life as the way to achieve life satisfaction. This view is also rooted in ancient Greek philosophy under the notion of eudaimonia (being true to one's inner self) that specifies that true life satisfaction entails identifying, cultivating, and living in accordance with one's virtues (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). Accordingly, individuals should develop their best skills or talents and use them to serve the interests of the common good in the pursuit of a meaningful life. More recently, Peterson, Park, and Seligman (2005) added a third perspective of engagement in pursuing a good life, based on Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow that accompanies highly engaging activities. They defined a good life in the context of the pursuit of happiness that broadly included hedonic features as well as fulfillment and contentment, and distinguished engagement from pleasure and meaning as three distinct orientations to happiness. Support for engagement as a distinct orientation could be gleaned from research findings that flow occurred more likely at work than during leisure activities (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989), and that engaged involvement at work was associated with job satisfaction (see Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997), which in turn was associated with an individual's overall satisfaction or happiness (Diener & Lucas, 1999). In a survey of internet users, Peterson et al. (2005) found that the three orientations contributed interactively to life satisfaction, suggesting that the greatest life satisfaction was associated with the "full life" (high scores on all three orientations), and the least life satisfaction was associated with the "empty life" (low scores on all three orientations).

Interestingly, the components of burnout seem to characterize a life that is in stark contrast to the full or satisfying life described by Seligman (2003) in relation to happiness (see Peterson et al., 2005; Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006). Specifically, the satisfying life implies a life that successfully pursues the positive emotions about the present, the past, and the future (the pleasant life), or a life that pursues engagement, involvement and absorption in work, intimate relations, and leisure (the engaged life), or a life that pursues meaning, and consists in using one's strengths and talents to belong to and serve something that one believes is bigger than the self (the meaningful life). However, burnout in terms of the three components is precisely the antithesis of the pleasant, engaged, and meaningful life. Thus, teachers experiencing burnout are emotionally exhausted and dominated by negative emotions rather than positive emotions, feel detached or alienated rather than engaged in teaching activities, and have a sense of reduced personal accomplishment rather than a sense of meaning. Considering the three orientations as antithetical to the burnout components, it seems appropriate, under the positive psychology perspective, to shift the focus of coping with teacher burnout from repairing deficits or pathologies to positive intervention efforts to help teachers lead the pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life (Seligman et al., 2006; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Indeed, researchers have theorized that interventions that cultivate the good life to prevent burnout might target engagement and meaning (Linley & Joseph, 2004), as they might be more under deliberate control (Frankl, 1984; Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000). Nonetheless, how general orientations to happiness could be translated into specific workplace positive interventions remains an important research area in the development of positive interventions to combat teacher burnout.

Character Strengths and Strength-Based Interventions

One positive approach to combating burnout is to focus on strengths in cultivating the good and fulfilling life. In this connection, Peterson and Seligman (2004) have attempted a classification of 24 character strengths grouped under six overarching virtues claimed to be shared

across culture and human history (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005). It is argued that character strengths are natural capacities within individuals, and these strengths, when cultivated and promoted, would allow individuals to achieve optimal functioning and performance, and lead individuals to have better, more satisfying, and more fulfilling life (Linley & Harrington, 2006). Indeed, studies with participants using their best or signature strengths in new ways as an intervention have yielded findings that the intervention could help these participants increase happiness and reduce depressive symptoms during the six-month period under study (see Seligman et al., 2005). This and similar strength-based intervention efforts are effective because they allow individuals to recognize, develop, and celebrate their natural talents and abilities, and to restructure their lives to do more of what they are best at doing for a good or more satisfying life. Considering that the experience of burnout would include the experience of intense negative emotions associated with working with people (emotional exhaustion), the experience of poor interpersonal relations and reduced positive emotions (depersonalization), and a reduced sense of accomplishment (see Maslach, 2003), it is likely that specific strengths most strongly linked to interpersonal interactions are well-suited as targeted strengths to include in intervention efforts.

Since teacher stress and burnout has a lot to do with teachers' emotional reactions and experience in their interactions with students and colleagues, how teachers respond or react to the ways they are being treated is of great interest. Of particular relevance are the underlying character strengths that might predispose teachers to react or respond in certain ways especially when they are confronting stressors and experiencing burnout in relation to interacting with others. Among the different character strengths, forgiveness and gratitude emerge as two important strengths in interpersonal situations, and people could build resources for their well-being based on these positive responses of forgiveness and gratitude (Bono & McCullough, 2006). Responding positively with forgiveness instead of negatively with avoidance or vengeance when one is wronged, hurt or attacked could help reduce negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, and hostility, and replace them with more positive or benevolent attitudes, feelings, and

behaviors (McCullough, 2001; McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). Expressing gratitude or appreciation of adverse life circumstances could be adaptive and would allow one to positively reinterpret stressful or negative life experiences (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). Indeed, forgiveness and gratitude as character strengths and positive responses have been empirically explored in their applications to the promotion of well-being. In the following, I intend to examine this relevant body of evidence on forgiveness and gratitude interventions in relation to well-being, and provide suggestions on how they could be integrated into the practice of coping with teacher burnout.

Forgiveness and Well-Being

Although forgiveness is defined slightly differently by different scholars, the common view is that it is beneficial to people (see McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; Worthington, 2005). In general, forgiveness is conceptualized as both character strength or disposition and state or emotion. As a disposition, it represents a willingness to forgive when one is harmed by others (Berry & Worthington, 2001). As a state, forgiveness could be conceptualized in the context of transgression-related changes toward a transgressor (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). It is believed that forgiveness occurs when victims' motivations to revenge or to avoid subside despite initial experience of hurt and righteous indignation, and their motivations toward benevolence increase with the desire to restore goodwill with the transgressor.

To apply forgiveness to intervention, it is important to examine the connection between forgiveness and well-being. For physical well-being, it is well-established that unforgiveness that includes attributing blame to others for one's misfortunes and sustaining hostility and anger are harmful (Affleck, Tennen, Croog, & Levine, 1987; T. Q. Miller, Smith, Turner, Guijarro, & Hallet, 1996; Tennen & Affleck, 1990). In addition, negative emotional states have been found to hinder immunological and cardiovascular functioning (McCarty, Atkinson, Tiller, Rein, & Watkins, 1995).

More direct evidence that forgiveness might improve health was provided by studies that examined forgiveness leading to less stress-related cardiovascular and neuroendocrine reactivity when people think about transgressions. In one study, Witvliet, Ludwig, and Van der Laan (2001) asked participants to imagine forgiving or not forgiving a real-life transgressor, and assessed their psychophysiological responses and self-reported emotions. They concluded that responses accompanying unforgiveness (e.g., negative, aroused, angry, sad, and less in control) could, if chronically exhibited, adversely affect physical health through increased susceptibility to disease. In another study, Lawler et al. (2003) interviewed participants who recalled and discussed their forgiven transgressions and participants who recalled and discussed their unforgiven transgressions. Their findings suggested that forgiven transgressions elicit less cardiovascular reactivity than do unforgiven transgressions. In a similar vein, Berry and Worthington (2001) also found that forgiveness was related to lowered cortical reactivity when participants imagine a close relationship partner.

Given the established relationship between forgiveness and physical well-being, Thoresen, Harris, and Luskin (2000) suggested possible psychosocial mechanisms to explain the connection. Specifically, they suggested that forgiveness might enhance physical health through decreased hopelessness, and increased optimistic thinking, self-efficacy, and levels of perceived social and emotional support. Moreover, they suggested that forgiveness, for some people, might lead to a greater sense of transcendent consciousness and communion with God, which might also promote physical health.

Beyond physical well-being, there are studies that focus specifically on people's mental and relational well-being in relation to forgiveness (see Bono & McCullough, 2006). Specifically, some studies have suggested that forgiveness could lead to greater mental well-being as represented in the greater life satisfaction of forgiving people as compared with less forgiving people, and in the greater sense of self-acceptance and purpose in life of divorced or permanently separated mothers who had forgiven the fathers for their transgressions (see Bono & McCullough, 2006). Other studies have suggested that forgiveness could be beneficial for relational well-being, considering that the lack of

supportive relationships has been associated with a host of psychological and physical diseases (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). It has also been suggested that forgiveness could contribute to well-being mainly from its potential to help people repair and preserve supportive and close relationships, especially in highly committed relationships (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003), and in romantic relationships (McCullough et al., 1998).

Developing Forgiveness Interventions

In developing forgiveness interventions that impact well-being, past research studies have identified certain cognitive and emotional factors that could be operative in facilitating or deterring forgiveness. Among the major facilitative factors, empathy for the transgressor has been identified as of primary importance (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Another factor is the recognition of one's flaws and shortcomings, especially in similar transgression circumstances (Takaku, 2001). A third factor relates to generous attributions and appraisals for the transgressor's behavior, such as considering possible mitigating circumstances related to the transgression (Fincham & Beach, 2002; Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002; Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991). A fourth factor is suppressing rumination about the transgression, as rumination could be one major cognitive factor sustaining the desire for revenge and deterring forgiveness for specific transgressions (McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). Given that these factors are amenable to change, they should be incorporated as much as possible into forgiveness interventions to render these approaches more effective.

A variety of forgiveness intervention experiments helping people forgive important relationship partners have been applied with success, suggesting that these interventions can successfully promote forgiveness (Worthington, Sandage, & Berry, 2000). These people as targets for intervention became more likely to forgive, showed increased self-esteem, lower levels of depression and anxiety (Hebl & Enright, 1993), improved attitudes toward the people who hurt them, and increased

levels of hope (Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995). In addition, studies have indicated that the forgiveness intervention has reliably produced such benefits (McCullough et al., 1997), and that these benefits could be enduring (Coyle & Enright, 1997; Freedman & Enright, 1996).

Gratitude and Well-Being

Like forgiveness, gratitude has also been conceptualized as both character strength or disposition and state or emotion. As a disposition, gratitude is viewed as an enduring characteristic of thankfulness that is sustained across situation and over time (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). Accordingly, grateful individuals would more likely experience and express thankfulness in responding to benefits or gifts from others. As a state, the occurrence of gratitude is typically associated with the perception of receiving an undeserved personal benefit due to the good intentions of another person (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Similar to the case of forgiveness, numerous studies have established the connection between gratitude and well-being. For example, studies have indicated that dispositional gratitude was incompatible with negative emotions and pathological conditions, and could even offer protection against psychiatric conditions. Specifically, dispositional gratitude has been found to be associated positively with optimism and hope, and negatively with depression, anxiety and envy in nonclinical samples (McCullough et al., 2002).

Research findings have also indicated that gratitude as an emotion could help consolidate and secure supportive social relationships. Specifically, the expression of gratitude could elicit more kindness from a benefactor, as in reinforcing kidney donation (Bernstein & Simmons, 1974), volunteering behavior toward people with HIV/AIDS (Bennett, Ross, & Sunderland, 1996), and making more visits in a residential treatment program from case managers (Clark, Northrop, & Barkshire, 1988). Thus, experiencing gratitude could be adaptive because it serves to validate the efforts of the benefactors and reinforce more of such efforts. Moreover, it could help the recipients of benefits to reciprocate kindness to benefactors (Bono & McCullough, 2006).

Developing Gratitude Interventions

Comparing with forgiveness, there is relatively less systematic research that specifically focuses on uncovering cognitive and emotional factors that might be operative in eliciting gratitude. People experience gratitude when they recognize that someone intend to promote their well-being, and they experience higher levels of gratitude when the benefits are described as intentionally provided, costly to the benefactor, and valuable to the recipient (Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968). In contrast, people experience less gratitude when benefits are expected or considered obligatory, as in family relationships (Bar-Tal, Bar-Zohar, Greenberg, & Hermon, 1977).

Gratitude interventions to increase the experience of gratitude in people have been applied with success. Emmons and McCullough (2003), in their pioneering set of three studies, have shown that self-guided exercises designed to induce gratitude could lead to enhanced well-being over time in participants, compared to those who focused on daily hassles, on downward social comparisons, or on neutral life events. Taken together, these studies suggested that gratitude has a beneficial impact on well-being, and that an effective strategy to enhance well-being is to lead people to count their blessings or to reflect on those aspects of their lives for which they are grateful. The effectiveness of this count-your-blessings and similar approaches has also been supported by subsequent studies (e.g., Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Seligman et al., 2005, 2006).

In view of the positive benefits that can accrue from the conscious practice of gratitude, there are specific programs developed for nurturing or cultivating gratitude in one's life. For example, T. Miller (1995) provided a simple four-step cognitive-behavioral approach for learning gratitude through identifying nongrateful thoughts, formulating gratitude-supporting thoughts, substituting the gratitude-supporting thoughts for the nongrateful thoughts, and translating the inner feeling into outward action. Interestingly, some interventions developed for other purposes have also been shown to increase gratitude or thankfulness. For example, gratitude or thankfulness can be increased or promoted by meditation (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Santerre, 2002), by

progressive muscle relaxation (Khasky & Smith, 1999), and by imagining being forgiven by one's victim (Witvliet, Ludwig, & Bauer, 2002). Indeed, these efforts that seem to increase one's focus on the mind-body relationship could help generate grateful mindsets in people. This focus is consistent with Naikan therapy, a Japanese form of meditation that orchestrates the techniques of expanding people's awareness in terms of giving, receiving, and hurting, thus inducing a strong sense of gratitude through self-reflection (Hedstrom, 1994; Reynolds, 1981).

Integrating Forgiveness and Gratitude Interventions into the Positive Approaches to Combating Burnout

Many years of research on teacher stress and burnout in Hong Kong and elsewhere has enhanced our understanding of the nature and dimensions of burnout, the articulation of the interrelationships among burnout components, and a host of correlates, predictors, mediators, and moderators, which suggest avenues for the development of interventions to combat burnout. The emerging positive psychology movement that emphasizes the positives or strengths instead of the negatives or deficits suggests that it is timely to make a shift of perspectives from the focus on burnout to the focus on the antithesis of burnout, given that strength-based and positive interventions have been demonstrated to be effective and beneficial for the well-being of teachers.

Recent theorizing and research studies from the positive psychology perspective have also expanded our understanding of character strengths, and the orientations to happiness or the good life. Interestingly, the burnout components (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment) are diametrically opposite views of the good life (pleasant, engaged, and meaningful life), suggesting promoting the good life or well-being could be an effective positive approach to combating burnout. In examining forgiveness and gratitude as character strengths or dispositions and as states or emotions, it is suggested that the cultivation and practice of forgiveness and gratitude provides viable intervention options that could be integrated into the positive approaches to helping teachers cope with the

experience of burnout. Indeed, some preliminary data have been gathered in developing gratitude interventions using the count-your-blessings format with Naikan-like self-reflection questions for meditation (see Chan, 2010), and this approach has been extended to the development of forgiveness interventions using a modified count-your-misfortunes format with corresponding Naikan-like self-reflection questions. It is believed that these positive approaches based on forgiveness and gratitude, already existing in some forms as a part of Chinese cultural practice, could be well-suited treatment options for Chinese teachers in helping them cope with the experience of burnout in relation to working with others (see Chan, 2008). Specifically, forgiveness could help minimize the negative consequences of interpersonal harm for teachers' health, well-being, and social relationships, whereas gratitude could help teachers to savor the benefits that are received from others, thereby enhancing the emotional benefits from their positive interactions with others. From the perspective of the narrative approaches to therapy, forgiveness and gratitude could provide the counterplots to allow teachers to construct a new life story after ridding themselves of the victim roles in their burnout experience or in the aftermath of the experience (Payne, 2006). Nonetheless, the effectiveness of a positive approach integrating forgiveness and gratitude interventions that focus on the antithesis of burnout warrants careful exploration, and calls for rigorous investigations in future research.

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