BALANCE OR BURNOUT?

By Dr. Matthew Allen,
Director General
Center for Language Studies,
Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola
Lima, Peru
“Our dirty little secret”

- A personal perspective
- A look at the research
- Individual/ institutional assessment
- Competing paradigms of balance
- Practical suggestions & good examples
Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola

A rapidly changing environment

- Department of Languages (5,000 students)
- Department of Languages & Bilingual Studies (7,000 students)
- Center for Language Studies (9,000 students)
- 70-100 teachers, 7-10 coordinators
  3-4 assistants
“Burnout” is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress... Occupational burnout is typically associated with increased work experience and increased workload, but also absences and time missed from work. It shows up as an impaired empathy and cynical attitudes toward clients and colleagues, and thoughts of quitting. Revistas PUCP, Gallegos et al. (2013)
We either find balance or face burnout

Available online through Amazon, Barnes & Noble, iTunes, and on demand through Trafford
I began teaching in a British style boarding school. In addition to our teaching duties (including a half-day on Saturday), we were required to patrol the dorms, supervise study hall, and lead all-weather outdoor adventures. **Sixty hour work weeks were standard, rising to eighty hours during peak periods.** I was always amazed at how the boys bounced back after a frozen route march or an exhausting exam week; it was the masters who showed the strain.

What came to seem **an immutable law** was simply that the school always wanted more, the students always wanted more, and the parents always wanted more, but there was only so much of the staff to go around.

Thirty years later—having served as a teacher and administrator in schools and universities in North, South, and Central America—I understand the simple truth:

**As educators, we can never meet the endless demands of an increasingly complex profession.** We also suffer from **a serious professional handicap: as much as we care for our students, we don’t look after ourselves very well.**

“Introduction,” *Self-Care for Teachers* (Trafford, 2013)
The irony of good intentions
The grim reality we face
The pace of curricular change
The race for information technology
Constant time pressure
Do you agree?

Would you say that at your school / college, burnout is:

- A serious problem?
- A significant problem?
- Not much of a problem?
- A potential problem?
A glance at the research

In USA, some 30-40% of school teachers report being disheartened with the profession and retention is a severe problem in many jurisdictions (NCES 2011-003) with a 30% attrition rate among first year teachers (UBC 2015).

Educators experience overwhelming stress leading to a disproportionate incidence of illness and attrition—so much so that burnout has become known as “the teachers’ disease.” (BUT, 2011)

Teachers are sacrificing their physical and mental health, and in some cases their relationships, to maintain their programs and classes. This represents a severe and unsustainable imbalance in many teachers’ lives. (BCFT, 2006, 2010)

In a study of 300 UK Head Teachers, 1:3 were medicated for stress, 1:4 reported serious stress-related health problems, over half claimed their family lives suffered, and 1:6 said they were alcoholics (Times Educational Supplement, 2006, 2008)

“There is a curious conspiracy at work in over-work” Self-Care for Teachers
A Qualified Disclaimer

The American Institute of Stress is reluctant to rank occupations as most / least stressful because (paradoxically) the problem in so wide-spread and related to individual “fit.”

“Numerous studies show that job stress is far and away the major source of stress for American adults and that it has escalated progressively over the past few decades.”

http://www.stress.org/workplace-stress/
http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/99-101/

Main Causes of Stress

- Juggling work/personal lives: 20%
- Lack of job security: 6%
- People issues: 28%
- Workload: 46%

Source: EAP provider ComPsych's first half of 2005 StressPulse Survey.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
Revistas PUCP, Gallegos et al. (2013) “Burnout syndrome in educators of regular basic education in Arequipa”:

• 233 educators (127 male and 106 female) 20-65 years old working in private and public schools in Arequipa City

• According to the Maslach Burnout Inventory, 93.7% of male educators had a moderate level of burnout while 6.3% had a severe level; 91.5% of female teachers had a moderate level of burnout, 7.5% severe

• Burnout characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficiency
Relief in sight in the ivory tower?

College students now report being more stressed-out than ever before (National norms fall 2010, Higher Education Research Institute). Stress is the number one impediment to academic performance. (National College Health Assessment 2010)

- UK Association of Teachers and Lecturers (2013 member survey): 73% stated that their job was having a negative in their well-being, 64% feeling that their professional ability and confidence being damaged.
- An analysis based on 12 peer-reviewed studies in the United States, Britain, Canada, South Africa, Spain, Turkey and the Netherlands likens levels of burnout among those who teach in higher education to those of schoolteachers and health professionals.
- They have the best of intentions, but it is the most supportive academics that are most likely to suffer from work-related “burnout”

Robertson & Watts, “Burnout in University Teaching Staff: a systematic literature review, Educational Research (2011)
Focussing on American colleges

Only 34.2 percent of faculty overall believe they have established a healthy balance in their lives personally and professionally.

The three most commonly cited sources of stress by faculty were self-imposed high expectations (80.1 percent), lack of personal time (74.1 percent), and managing household responsibilities (72.7 percent). Additionally, nearly two-thirds of faculty (62.8 percent) report personal finances as a stressor.


Which leads me to ask... How are you holding up, and how would you know?
Taking your temperature

One handy way of assessing your well-being is to use a check-list—mental or otherwise.

- Shallow breathing / knotted muscles in neck
- Frequent headaches / stomach upset
- Requires medication / alcohol to relax
- Short-tempered / irritable in class
- Disappointed with self / colleagues
- Complains frequently about institution
- Arrives early / stays late at work
- Takes work home / works on weekend
- Driven to meet deadlines
- Does not plan holidays in advance
- Cannot find time for exercise / recreation
- Has not laughed out loud at work recently

Note: These are subjective measures—check your impressions with a colleague. Health care professionals might apply the Maslach Burnout Inventory
Limitations of the check-list

Burnout is a bit like

✓ Hypothermia because it is so stealthy and gradual that you may not recognize the signs and symptoms until it is (almost) too late to help yourself

✓ A relationship gone bad because people can come to love overwork so much that they cannot see its negative effects and may resent and resist and comments or interference

Recommendation: a buddy system and unvarnished truth
1. Salary incentives
2. Mentoring programs
3. Medical leave
4. Wellness programs

If we think of regaining and retaining our balance rather than avoiding burnout, we are more likely to consider self-care and wellness programs.

But what is balance and how do we know if we have it?
What’s wrong with this picture?
Balance: what does it look like?

What comes into your mind automatically if I say the word, “balance”?

- an acrobat?
- a teeter-totter?
- a pie chart?
- a quadratic equation?
- the scales of justice?
- the Tao?
- something else entirely?

Take a moment, and write down—or even better, draw—your image of balance. Consider why this is a telling image for you, and ask yourself how you feel as you contemplate it.
The teeter-totter

Up-down, right-wrong, good-bad
The scales of justice

Blind & blood-thirsty
Walking a tightrope

Lonely & precarious
Symmetry and Proportion?

Life’s not like that
An ideal state of being?

A distant prospect for the precious few
A process of dynamic harmony
Think of a river or the seasons

Calm responsiveness to ever changing circumstances
Assessing your balance
Be realistic but kind: life is not perfectly symmetrical by nature and is in a constant state of flux.
If your school / college were a building, what kind would it be? If it were an animal, which one would it correspond to? If it were a climatic zone or specific terrain, which would fit most accurately?

Is your school / college most like:

- A desert or a jungle?
- A life boat or a yacht?
- A factory or a country club?
- A hotel or a prison?
- An island or a continent?
- A marathon or an obstacle course?
- A little sister or big brother?
- A plane revving up on the runway?
- A car stalled in traffic?
- A train gradually grinding to a halt?
- A galloping horse or a determined turtle?
- An art gallery or a slave market?

If you could make one or two simple changes this year to improve your school / college climate or ethos, what would they be?
Models of balance / wellness

• University at Buffalo  *The State University of New York*  
  (Work-Life Balance page on website under HR)
• University of California, Riverside (Wellness Programs and Services For Faculty and Staff)
• University of Alberta, Canada  (Healthy Campus Unit and Wellness Project)
• Worklife Support, UK (Well-Being Program)
KEEP CALM AND GET BACK TO WORK
Mindfullness applied to time
Time... 
slips through my hands
How do you conceive of time?

• The relentlessly ticking clock?
• The right moment?
• The monastic hours (daily watches)?
• An occasional shot of espresso?
• A gently flowing stream?
NOW IS THE TIME
How do you conceive of your work?

As a classroom teacher, are you most like:

- a policeman?
- an animal trainer?
- a factory worker?
- an accountant?
- a slave driver?
- a prima donna
- a social worker?
- an orchestra conductor?
- a physician?
- an architect?

Now ask yourself which of these metaphors makes the most sense to you and why. (You may also wish to consider how you might appear to your students and colleagues.)
Best practices for wellness

• Know your limits
• Redefine “success”
• Set self-care goals
• Cultivate your spiritual life
• Share your own experience
• Look for good role models
• Unplug so you can reconnect
• Appreciate everyday beauty
Take whatever you need to look after yourself
Treat yourself to a good cup of coffee
RED ROSE
ORANGE PEKOE
Naturel 100% Natural
72 TEA BAGS
SACHETS DE THÉ
227 g
Write yourself into your to do list

Date_________________________ COMPLETED

1) ___________________________ □

2) ___________________________ □

3) ___________________________ □

4) ___________________________ □

5) ___________________________ □

6) ___________________________ □

7) ___________________________ □

8) ___________________________ □

9) ___________________________ □

10) ___________________________ □
## Things to do

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOR ME</th>
<th>FOR SCHOOL</th>
<th>FOR OTHERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Tai Chi</td>
<td>• Admin. Meeting</td>
<td>• Email Suzanne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Newsletter article</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Class observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Budget review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Exchange debrief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assessment form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Farewell dinner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parent meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Things to do

for me:
1. Bit hit prep
2. Marks entry
3. Email
4. Invitation to schools
5. Meeting prep
6. Cambridge follow-up
7. Bit hit presentation
8. Email to former teacher
9. Report from Rebecca
10. Art exhibition
11. Transfer codes
12. B18 debrief
13. Teacher issues (conduct)
14. Lab use meeting
15. Meeting w Superintendent

for the university:

for others:

under

tai Chi

Journal

stairs
Covet your vocation
Benediction

Your calling is urgent and breath-taking, for you carry the future in your hands every day. I take it for granted that you are armed with the latest pedagogy and information technology. I know that you are ready to give everything to your students in selfless service; I simply want you to learn how to care for yourself better so that you can continue to care for your students as you would like to.

--Self-Care for Teachers
Your calling is urgent and breath-taking, for you carry the future in your hands every day. I take it for granted that you are superbly professional, that you are highly idealistic, and that you are armed with the latest pedagogy and information technology. I know that you are ready to give everything to your students in selfless service; I simply want you to learn how to care for yourself better so that you can continue to care for your students as you would like to.

So begins Self-Care for Teachers, a perceptive and practical guide for educators everywhere who are facing the growing demands of an exacting profession. Gathering insights from 25 years of teaching and administration as well as his background in literary studies, international education, and the martial arts, Dr. Matthew Allen draws you into a warm and collegial discussion of both teachers and teaching.

Designed for both personal use and professional development programs, Self-Care for Teachers will help you to

- renew your sense of vocation
- redefine your view of success
- set reasonable goals for yourself
- regain control of your time
- enrich your teaching practice
- rebalance your personal and professional life.

Indeed, the quest for balance is at the core of Self-Care because:

As we become more balanced, we become more peaceful. I believe that we are meant to experience a deep, heart-felt sense of satisfaction in our work, and to experience a poised equilbrium in every aspect of our lives. This is our birthright and something which we urgently need to regain if it has somehow slipped through our grasp.