

Running head: teacher burnout

Profession, Teacher



Running head: TEACHER BURNOUT Teacher Burnout Daphnie Barriss, Ruth Polonio, Susan Tkatch California State University, San Bernardino Abstract Special education teachers in today's workplace are experiencing stress and burnout more than ever. Teacher burnout is one of the major causes special education teachers leave the profession or find employment in other education fields. This article suggests that special education teachers experience more teacher burnout compared to general education teachers within the first five years. This study surveyed K-12 general education and special education teachers and identified three key factors contributing to teacher stress and burnout. These three major factors are due to lack of administrative support, personal lifestyle, and paperwork overload.

Keywords: burnout, stress, administrative, overload Table of Content Pages

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References 14 Introduction Current studies of teacher burnout in special education indicate that teachers leave the teaching profession within the first five years. However, in the area of special education, there exists a shortage of qualified teachers (DeMik, 2008). This study investigated fifteen special educators and general educators using ten survey questions. These fifteen teachers are interviewed to determine the causes of teacher burnout with special educators leaving the field within the first five years of teaching.

Literature Review In special education there is evidence of special education

teacher burnout. In a study investigating reasons why special educators remain in the teaching profession but transfer to general education (DeMik, 2008), 1500 special educators were surveyed. The authors found that administrative factors, (e. g. excessive paperwork, disagreement with special education policies/practices, lack of teaching materials and resources, and lack of support from administrative personnel), and stress from the working conditions (such as too much diversity in student needs, too much time with the same students, too many students on a caseload, and lack of student progress) were the primary reasons for teacher burnout in the first five years (DeMik, 2008). Studies of beginning special educators give evidence of struggles regarding issues of job responsibilities, time management and professional support as well as lack of administrative support, style and philosophy of the administrator and organizational structure of the school that can have a negative effect on the beginning special education teacher's satisfaction with the job ((DeMik, 2008). Teacher Burnout in Special Education From a research perspective, teacher burnout has been studied for many years. There are many causes that may contribute to a teacher burnout. In recent years it appears that special education teachers are experiencing more teacher burnout and therefore the retention of special education teachers is a concern in many schools across the nation (Fore III, 2002). A quantitative research was done on the causes of teacher burnout for both general education and special education teachers'. The result includes surveys done by different people over a course of several years on the topic of teacher burnout. The purpose of the study was to investigate the reasons teachers were experiencing burnout. Special education teachers

were found to experience more teacher burnout than general education teachers. The study is important because there is a problem with teacher burnout for all beginning teachers. It is important for beginning teachers to have realistic expectations, to gain support from other teachers, parents and administrators, and to form a strong support team for themselves and for administrators to support teachers and get to know about the behaviors and difficulties of students and teachers in special education; so as to offer the appropriate management and discipline techniques to both teachers and students. Research have documented higher turnover among special education teachers, and suggest a number of reasons for the cause. Of the teachers who left their education profession, 12% were special education teachers, and 7% were general education teachers (Fore III, 2002). The study offers solutions to teachers, administrators, and school districts to help avoid the problem of teacher burnout and more importantly the decline of special education teachers. If the current trend continues, then there will be a shortage of special education teachers. A national survey was conducted during 1987-1988 and includes private and public schools general education and special education teachers. It also includes some that were out of the teaching profession, those that were disgruntled and non-disgruntled teachers. The result of the survey that was a statistical data analysis indicated that special education teachers experience burnout more than general education teachers due to work load, stress, lack of support, dis-empowerment, unprepared, lack of planning time, lack of proper staff development training, working with behaviorally disordered students, limited decision making power, and lack of support from administrators. The

conclusion is that there is a need to enhance the retention and decreasing burnout of special education teachers. How Principals Can Help the Beginning Special Education Teacher The beginning teacher can achieve maximum success with the help of school principals, in developing instructional skills and to become more effective in the classroom (McCabe, 1995). In case studies conducted by associate professors at four universities in southern California, three first year special education teachers, proved to be successful with the help of the school district, the site principals, and their universities. This research indicated that principals believe that beginning teachers have too unrealistic expectations, and teachers blame principals for lack of support as the cause of increasing stress (McCabe, 1995). It is believed that principals play a key role in the success of beginning special education teachers and helps them to experience fewer stress symptoms than expected with their support. Lack of a support system for beginning special education teachers' lead to an increased level of stress and, therefore teachers tend to leave special education and look for employment in other fields of education. This action has cause a tremendous drop in credentialed special education teachers. Studies showed that nationwide many special education classes are not serviced with qualified teachers (McCabe, 1995). Teachers who receive support from site administrators who were competent receive less stress symptoms than those who did not receive support from site administrators who were knowledgeable about special education. The proper support for teachers in their first few years could improve their teaching abilities and gain self-confidence to continue teaching as special education teachers. Some of the questions raised in the

study are the unrealistic expectations of special education teachers, lack of support from principals or administrators as a major concern for teacher burnout, and the level of support an administrator with little knowledge in special education background can provide. In addressing the common problem affecting special education teachers and the burnout issue, some source of support was given to address the problem. Intensive support was given to the teachers from the team who met formally every four to six weeks and informally more often. Interviews were done, scenarios were addressed, and key issues and problem solving methods were put in place. While there are many difficulties facing a beginning special education teacher, support in the first couple of years can be realistically enabling a teacher to achieve success and remain in their profession. The methods and experiences were simplistic and can be developed at every school site, as these issues seemed to be the major plague for special education teachers. A study (Schlichte, 2005), involved five first year teachers, who volunteered, were interviewed about whether or not they felt that they received the support they needed during their first year of teaching. The teachers' were asked how they would characterize their experience and what did they attribute, if any, noted problems or difficulties in their beginning experience. The results showed that they indeed had not received the proper emotional support they felt they should have during that first year. Research Questions For the purpose of this study the following questions were asked to all fifteen teachers. Definitions of Terms Burnout- exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration b: a person suffering from burnout. Stress - a physical, chemical, or emotional

factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation. Administrative - have or relating to administration or an administration. Overload - in an excessive manner

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study relates to the importance of understanding the stress and burnout that special education teachers experience during the first five years of their teaching career. Given the fact that all teachers may experience stress and burnout during some point in their teaching career, special education teachers are experiencing more stress and burnout and are leaving their jobs (Fore III, Martin, & Bender, 2002). It is suggested that if this trend continues there will be a shortage of special education teachers in the near future. It is also strongly believed that with administrative support the retention and decreasing burnout of special education teachers can be achieved. Through examining the cause of stress and burnout by special education teachers and offering help to alleviate these causes, more special education teachers can remain in their profession. Finally, this study will also provide a framework from which future research on stress and burnout of special education teachers can be developed.

Methodology

Instrumentation/Data Collection

The data for this study was collected from fifteen teachers working in K-12 grade levels in the county of San Bernardino, California. Each group member had five teachers to interview, three being special education teachers and two being general education teachers with a total of 9 special educators and 6 general educators. There was one special education teacher that was not working as a teacher that recently quit the field of teaching a year ago. Schools were randomly selected since we all live in different cities in the county of San Bernardino.

Many of the teachers interviewed we have known from being in the field as teachers. The teachers were asked would they like to provide information on a survey about teacher burnout and of course all fifteen teachers agreed. The response rate was 100%. The teachers interviewed for this study on special education teacher burnout provides current research on this topic. After each group member interviewed their five teachers for this study, we took the information and calculated the three factors that had the highest number of occurrences. Out of the fifteen teachers that we interviewed, special education and general education, 11 said that personal life/home is the biggest factor of teacher burnout among special education teachers. The next highest factor was administrative support and paperwork overload which both had 9 out of 15 teachers saying it was a factor for burnout.

Data Treatment Procedures The interviews were scheduled in many of the teachers' classrooms with one teacher meeting in the library at California State University, San Bernardino. The interviews were tape-recorded using hand written paper notes for other observations during 40 minutes sessions. All fifteen teachers were asked ten questions and four variables were entered into these ten questions as predictor variables in questions numbers 3, 4, 8, and, 10. These four variables help find the important three factors of teacher burnout that was overwhelming by many after we reviewed tape-recordings and notes from these interviews. Is there any new statistically significant results found that have not been disclosed from other researches? No. However, it did indicate that these same results found in earlier studies still exist today; lack of administrative support for special educators, personal life and home circumstance, and paperwork overload. After the

interviews, five of the teachers in this study said personal life/home are the biggest factor for special education teacher burnout. One comment was that new teachers are so overwhelmed with all the work they end up taking it home with them leaving them less time in their personal life. One teacher said "work at work and home at home" which sums it up for a successful home and work life. We had an advantage collecting data since we are in the teaching profession and our questions were straight to the point to find the information needed to complete this section of our study. Findings The finding of this study suggests three key factors in teacher burnout of special educators leaving the field of teaching within the first five years. The major factors found are lack of administrative support, personal life/home circumstances, and paperwork overload findings that are not new and that have been identified by early researchers. Having interviewed fifteen teachers, nine special educators and six general educators we found: 1. Eleven special educators and general educators responded saying personal life and home circumstance is the biggest factor for special educators burnout. 2. Nine out of fifteen responded saying administrative support and paperwork overload is another high factor for teacher burnout. This demonstrates that special education teachers are aware that teacher burnout for special educators is considered a high-risk stress job. It also finds that special educators leave teaching special education to teach in general education (Stempien, & Loeb, 2002). These finding did not demonstrate new evidence of teacher burnout, but it did demonstrate that teacher burnout is still posing problems for special educators. The content of the teacher interviews were reflected based on what is happening in today's society.

Their fears now are that general educators and special educators are stressing about whether or not they are going to lose their jobs due to their district failing finances. The chart below shows the descriptive statistic findings of this study.

Teachers Burnout	Most	Least	Total
Special and General Personal Life/Home	11	4	15
Special and General Administrative and paperwork Overload	9	6	15
Special and General Educators	-10	-5	15

Limitations There were limitations in our study. All of the data collected from the fifteen teachers were a small amount considering the research study of this size. Teacher burnout is basically a national problem that could take years to get better results. Also, teachers that were interviewed where in their classrooms environment preventing allotted time because of other responsibilities necessary to keep the classroom functioning. For example students interruptions prevented teachers from expanding on topic questions making it difficult to gather more data for this study.

Conclusion This research project was designed to investigate the effects of teacher burnout with special educators. Traditionally, burnout is considered as a three-dimensional syndrome (i. e. emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) that is measured with the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey. Teachers who participated in this investigation were able to elaborate on causes, affects, and current problems of stresses that bring about burnout in the teaching profession. The overall implications of this research project developed a proven fact that special educators indeed are burnout from teaching more so than general educators. However, special educators are in a more severe environment

with disabled children, overloaded with paperwork, with daily duties more severe than general educators, which make research on this topic unable to evaluate concrete circumstances of teacher burnout between the two. This suggests that special educators most likely will become burnout within the first five years of teaching. Further Research Future research on this subject matter should include a more diverse research composed of more teachers from more schools using a mail out survey questionnaire for a broader result. It would be useful to examine the differences in individual experiences of teacher stresses among men and women and across a varying ethnic background. In addition, it would be helpful to examine how teachers perception of stress differs between both special educators and general educators with one being more of a severe environment than another, students levels, and professors of universities who also teach and experience burnout. This would help separate specific stressors that occur at the different grade levels, which could help us establish effective coping mechanisms for teacher burnout at all levels. I recommend that further studies should be done to deal with the subject of special education teacher burnout. It should further address the issue why most beginning special education teachers feel that they don't get the proper administrative support that they feel they should have as beginning teachers. References Busch, T., W., Pederson, K., Espin, C. A., & Weissenburger, J. W. (2001). Teaching students with learning disabilities: Perceptions of a first-year teacher. *Journal of Special Education*, 35, 100-104. DeMik, S. A. (2008). Experiencing Attrition of Special Education Teachers Through Narrative Inquiry. *High School Journal: The University of North Carolina Press*, 23-32. Embich, J. L. (2001).

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1. How many years have you been teaching special education/ general education?
2. What subjects do you teach?
3. What do you think is the main cause of teacher burnout among special education teachers within the first 5 years?
4. Do you think there is adequate support for beginning special education teachers?
5. Do you feel that today's special education teachers are properly prepared for teaching? Why or why not?
6. What coping skills do you think beginning special education teachers should use to meet their job demands?
7. What advice would you give to beginning special education teachers?
8. Do you think that home/personal life factors into teacher burnout?
9. How much do you think student behavior plays into teacher burnout among special education teachers?
10. Have you ever suffered from symptoms of teacher burnout?