The effects of transformational leadership education essay

In recent years, educational leaders have been voicing concerns about higher burnout rates among special education teachers as compared with teachers in general education (Fore, Martin, & Bender, 2002). Many factors contribute to burnout in special education. Increased teaching workloads, shrinking school budgets, increasing demands for accountability, and disruptive students are often blamed (Byrne, 1994; Fore et al., 2002). The recession that took place in the United States in 2007 has significantly exacerbated these issues. Teachers, including special educators, must cope with the issues that come from difficult economic times. As budget tightens, teachers have to face layoffs or are being forced to take pay cuts and unpaid furlough days (Oliff & Johnson, 2010). They have to worry about providing for themselves and also putting in the time and effort to promote a conductive learning environment for their students. This makes them stressful and reduces their morale to teach to the best of their capabilities (Reeves, 2010). Furthermore, special education teachers are asked to do more with less than before – this includes rising teacher pupil ratios (Center for Public Education, 2010). In special education, this means teachers have to teach students with a broader range of disabilities and grade levels. Moreover, teachers are unable to use as many of the same resources that they used before, and the school supplies, materials, and other resources that have previously been given are slowly being taken back (Center for Public Education, 2010). With the end of the federal stimulus funds that helped prevent severe education cuts, many school districts will face a more stressful budget shortfall in the next few years (Husch, Banton, Cummings, Mazer, & Sigritz, 2010). All these problems can make special educators more vulnerable to burnout.

Burnout has been defined as " a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment" (Leiter & Maslach, 1988, p. 297). Emotional exhaustion refers to the feelings of being drained or used up by the clients (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion also is identified as " feelings of strain, particularly chronic fatigue resulting from overtaxing work" (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006, p. 498). Teachers who have experienced this sense of emotional exhaustion report feeling " dread at the thought of having to put in another day on the job" and often put distance between themselves and coworkers and students (Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler, 1986, p. 15). This distancing of oneself from the students is the second aspect of burnout, depersonalization (Schwab et al., 1986). Leiter and Maslach (1988) defined depersonalization as developing an unfeeling and callous response toward clients. Depersonalization is also referred to as cynicism, indifferent, or a distant attitude toward work in general and the people with whom one works (Hakanen et al., 2006). The third aspect of burnout is reduced personal accomplishment (Leiter & Maslach, 1988). Workers tend to have a negative appraisal of themselves as well as their work with clients (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Teachers who suffer from burnout are unable to function effectively in their jobs, unable to give much of themselves to students, and frequently exhibit negative, cynical, and callous attitudes toward their jobs (Byrne, 1993). A number of studies have shown that teacher burnout may lower student achievement. Teachers who experience job burnout are more likely to criticize students, which in turn reduce students' self-efficacy, motivation to learn, completeness of understanding, and creativity (Huberman & Vandenberghe, 1999; Maslach & Leiter, 1999). Researchers found teachers who experience

burnout have reduced motivation, impaired performance, and higher rates for leaving the teaching profession (Byrne, 1993; Fore et al., 2002; Schwab et al., 1986).

The vital role that supervisors play in affecting teachers' propensity towards burnout was observed in research (Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzen, 1987; Sarros & Sarros, 1992; Zabel & Zabel, 2001). Supportive supervisors are likely to provide positive feedback concerning supervisees' skills and abilities, which may make them less vulnerable to burnout. Russell et al. (1987) reported teachers who felt support and received positive feedback from supervisors were less vulnerable to burnout. Zabel and Zabel (2001) showed special education teachers were less likely to experience burnout when they receive more support from administrators, peers, and parents. According to Sarros and Sarros (1992), the importance of supervisor and principal support cannot be underestimated as a critical resource for addressing teacher burnout. Rose (1998) found that incidence of burnout can be reduced by high-quality leader-member exchange relationships.

Positive contact with supportive supervisors is also a strong deterrent to the factors that lead to burnout. According to Leiter and Maslach (1988), unpleasant contacts with supervisors were associated with all three aspects of burnout. Their research showed that stressful interactions with supervisors lead to emotional exhaustion that causes depersonalization, which in turn leads to diminished feelings of personal accomplishment.

However, little research has focused on the relationship between transformational leadership style of supervisors and burnout dimensions, and

the empirical evidence is inconclusive. One possible reason for the inconclusive evidence is that previous literature overlooks a psychological mechanism that may be a powerful mediator to account for the relationship. In addition, very few studies have investigated the effect of transformational leadership style of supervisors on burnout among special education teachers. The purpose of this paper was to fill the gap by examining the relationship between transformational leadership style of supervisors and teacher burnout in special education while accounting for the mediating role of teacher's calling.

Literature Review

Transformational Leadership and Job Burnout

Transformational leadership. Transformational leadership theory is central to understanding the relationship between transformational leadership style of supervisors and the levels of burnout among special education teachers in this study. According to Fry (2003), transformational leadership is " an intrinsically based motivational process whereby leaders engage followers to create a connection that raises the level effort and moral aspiration in both" (p. 702). Northouse (2004) proposed " transformational leadership refers to the process whereby an individual engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower" (p. 170). Transformational leaders inspire followers to achieve positive outcomes by giving meaning to their work and understanding their personal needs (Boerner, Eisenbeiss, & Griesser, 2007).

The transformational leadership theory identifies four behaviors such as inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration that motivate followers intrinsically to give their best efforts and change their attitudes toward their work (Bass, 1999). Bass described idealized influence as shown by leaders whose behaviors can serve as an example to be emulated by followers and encourage followers to perform their best (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). Furthermore, transformational leaders provide one with a sense of making a difference through service to others by emphasizing " the importance of purpose, commitment, and the ethical consequences of decisions. Such leaders are admired as role models; they generate pride, loyalty, confidence, and alignment around a shared purpose" (Bass, 1997, p. 133).

Bass (1997) described that inspirational motivation is displayed by leaders who " articulate an appealing vision of the future, challenge followers with high standards, talk optimistically and with enthusiasm, and provide encouragement and meaning for what needs to be done" (p. 133). In doing so, transformational leaders lift up the efforts and work morale of their followers through enhancing the sense of calling, which in turn help improve individual productivities and organizational outcomes. Transformational leaders empower their followers " by developing them into high involvement individuals" (Bass, 1999, p. 9) and followers will " transcend their own self-interests for the good" of the organization (Bass, 1985, p. 15).

Individualized consideration is described as " leaders [who] deal with others as individuals; consider their individual needs, abilities and aspirations; listen attentively; further their development; advise; teach; and coach" (Bass,

1997, p. 133). Transformational leaders pay attention to followers' needs and support and coach their growth through individualized consideration. The leaders can help followers analyze their work-related problems and seek possible solutions. As a consequence, the transformational leadership helps prevent the feeling of being strained (i. e., emotional exhaustion) or distancing themselves from coworkers and students (i. e., depersonalization), and increase the assessment of their personal accomplishment.

Intellectual stimulation is demonstrated when " leaders [who] question old assumptions, traditions, and beliefs; stimulate in others new perspectives and ways of doing things; and encourage the expression of ideas and reasons" (Bass, 1997, p. 133). Transformational leaders stimulate followers to be innovative and creative in approaching old situations in new ways through intellectual stimulation (Bass et al., 2003). This transformational behavior lessens the burnout symptoms such as cynicism and negativism and a tendency to be rigid, and inflexible in thinking (Freudenberger, 1977). These four transformational leadership behaviors can ease followers the feelings of emotional depletion and loss of motivation and commitment.

Transformational leadership and burnout. Research is mixed on the relationship between leadership styles and burnout. Seltzer, Numerof, and Bass (1989) showed that transformational leadership style helped reduce burnout, while management-by-exception leadership did the opposite in a sample of employed MBA students. Corrigan, Diwan, Campion, and Rashid (2002) found that transformational leadership had a negative relationship with burnout among mental health professionals. However, Stordeur,

D'hoore, and Vandenbergh (2001) contended that transformational leadership and contingent reward had no relationship with emotional exhaustion among hospital nursing staff. Hetland, Sandal, and Johnsen (2007) found that transformational leadership was not related to emotional exhaustion, and transactional leadership had no relationship with any of the three dimensions of burnout. Existing literature indicated a need for further study of the mechanism through which transformational leadership had an impact on burnout, particularly in the school setting (Gill, Flaschner, & Shachar, 2006; Griffith, 2004; Hetland et al., 2007).

Calling and Burnout

Calling. Calling, as defined by Fry (2003) is " the experience of transcendence or how one makes a difference through service to others and, in doing so, derives meaning and purpose in life" (p. 703). Fry posits that calling is a critical part of workplace spiritual well-being that provides one " a sense of making a difference and therefore that one's life has meaning" (p. 714). Followers who experience a sense of calling are more committed to their organization and more productive in their workplace. Markow and Klenke (2005) defined calling as " work performed out of a strong sense of inner direction" (p. 12). Calling is often described as something that pertains to careers that an individual sees as promoting the greater good or being meaningful to society (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Baumeister (1991) discussed the job-career-calling concept in Meanings of Life. Baumeister stated that those who view work as a job perform tasks solely to obtain things that they want. He also stated that this attitude is often prevalent among lower classes, who tend to be people with less education. In contrast,

a person with a calling feels compelled to perform a kind of work, whether it is from a higher calling (as is often stated in association with religion) or a calling to meet a societal need (for example, higher military enlistment rates after Pearl Harbor). A calling might also come from an individual's inner sense of having a special talent or gift. A calling satisfies the need for being valuable to others and society. A calling engenders a great deal of personal meaning, linking a vocation and an individual's value base. According to Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (2008), a calling is when work becomes inseparable from the individual's life and character. The person works for the fulfillment that doing the work brings to the individual. A calling links a person to the larger community, and the person is making a contribution to the entire community. In Fry, Nisiewicz, Vitucci, and Cedillo (2007) study, calling can be enhanced by " giving employees recognition can do this, along with giving them a sense of worth through service and a positive attitude" (p. 20).

Transformational leadership and calling. Transformational leadership is a motivation-based theory of how to move the organization toward its desired future. Transformational leaders motivate followers by raising their levels of consciousness about the importance of goals (Northouse, 2004). The most important role that the transformational leader plays is to " paint a vision of a desired future state and communicate it in a way that causes followers to believe and have faith in the vision of organizational transformation to make the pain of change worth the effort" (Fry, 2003, p. 702).

A literature review revealed that the vision exhibited by spiritual leaders is predictive of one's sense of calling (Fry, 2003; Fry et al., 2007; Fry, Vitucci, &

Cedillo, 2005; Malone & Fry, 2003). Fry (2003) suggested creating a compelling vision that has a " broad appeal to key stakeholders, defines the destination and journey, reflects high ideals, encourages hope/faith, and establishes a standard of excellence" provides followers with a sense of calling that motivates them to believe that they make a difference to other people (p. 695). A transformational leader who also possesses these qualities develops a vision and communicates it effectively through exemplary leadership behaviors such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation to their followers. Consequently, followers have hope and derive meaning and purpose in their experiences. For example, Fry (2003) explained that the vision displayed by a spiritual leader includes establishing a standard of excellence which builds followers' confidence and trust in leaders. As mentioned earlier, this behavior is a characteristic of idealized influence. Transformational leadership moves followers beyond immediate self-interests to a shared vision and mission in the organization through idealized influence. The vision also " vividly portray a journey that, when undertaken, will give me a sense of calling, of one's life having meaning and making a difference (Fry, 2003, p. 718). This quality is a characteristic of inspirational motivation that awakens intrinsic motivation of followers (Boerner et al., 2007). According to Bass (1999), followers under transformational leaders are generally more self-assured and find more meaning in their work. Consequently, teachers will find personal meaning in their work or feel called to their work.

Coladarci (1992) posited that teaching is viewed as a profession with high initial commitment and is a calling for many entering the profession.

Teachers who find personal meaning in their work or feel called to their work have a deep commitment to their profession (Hakanen et al., 2006). The great value they find in teaching and the feeling that they are helping others and working toward the greater good of society may reduce the feelings of strain and distancing of themselves from the students (i. e., depersonalization), and raise the evaluations of their personal accomplishment. Fry proposed a causal framework that the follower's sense of calling is predictive of the organizational outcomes, such as commitment and productivity. Based on the theory of calling, the present study hypothesizes that teachers who have a high level of calling will experience low emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and high personal accomplishment.

Mediating effect of calling. Though existing literature indicated a direct effect of transformational leadership on levels of burnout, this study proposes that the linkage between transformational leadership and burnout may be indirect, or intervened by the sense of calling. According to Fry (2003), the follower's sense of calling mediated the relationship between the vision exhibited by a spiritual leader and the organizational outcomes, such as commitment and productivity. Fry et al. (2005) examined a newly formed Apache Longbow helicopter attack squadron and found strong empirical evidence that calling is a mediator between the qualities of spiritual leadership and organizational outcomes, such as loyalty and productivity. Followers who have a higher sense of calling are more committed to their organizations and more productive. Malone and Fry (2003) conducted a longitudinal field study of elemental schools and found that spiritual

leadership had a significant impact on organizational commitment and unit productivity mediated by the sense of calling. In Markow and Klenke's (2005) study, calling mediates the relationship between personal meaning and organizational commitment. Fry et al.'s (2007) study of a municipal government revealed that one's sense of calling is a mediator of the relationship between the vision of a leader and organizational commitment and productivity. Fry, Hannah, Noel, and Walumbwa (2011) found that organizational commitment and unit performance were fully mediated by the sense of calling by studying a sample of cadets at the United States Military Academy. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that transformational leaders exert their effects on job burnout among special educators through the sense of calling.

Given that teaching is a field where many express a sense of calling, the extent that calling accounts for the relation between transformational leadership and burnout among special educators needs to be explored. One of the most powerful influences that transformational leaders have on followers is to create a compelling vision that provides one with a sense of calling through service to others, and therefore find meaning and purpose in life. Transformational leadership fosters a positive work attitude and provides followers with a sense of meaning in their work, which in turn boosts their intrinsic motivation and energy and enables them to perform their best.

Control Variables and Burnout

Studies on demographic variables, i. e., gender, age, and race, and their relation to burnout have shown differing outcomes. Maslach (1982) stated

that women tended to experience more emotional exhaustion, yet men are more likely to exhibit depersonalization behaviors. Brewer and McMahan (2004) also reported that women were more prone to job stress and burnout than men. However, Maslach and Jackson (1981) reported no relationship between gender and burnout. Several studies have associated burnout with age, with burnout usually affecting the younger employees (Brewer & McMahan, 2004; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Russell et al., 1987). No findings have supported a difference in burnout among ethnic groups (Brewer & McMahan, 2004; Maslach, 1982). In Kilgore and Griffin's (1998) study, they found less experienced special educators had more burnout.

Method
Hypotheses

Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses were formulated for testing the mediating effect of calling on the relationship between transformational leadership and burnout of special educators:

H1: Transformational leadership is negatively related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and is positively related to personal accomplishment among special educators.

H10: Transformational leadership is not negatively related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and is not positively related to personal accomplishment among special educators.

H2: Transformational leadership is positively related to the calling.

H20: Transformational leadership is not positively related to the calling.

H3: Calling is negatively related to special educators' emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and is positively related to personal accomplishment.

H30: Calling is not negatively related to special educators' emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and is not positively related to personal accomplishment.

H4: Calling mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and each of the three dimensions of burnout.

H40: Calling does not mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and any of the three dimensions of burnout.

Participants and Data Collection

The sample in the study consisted of special education teachers who exclusively teach special education students in Maryland non-public and public separate day schools in Anne Arundel County. Separate day schools refer to those that enroll students between six and 21 years old who spend greater than 50% of the school day in a separate day facility that does not serve students without disabilities (Maryland State Department of Education, 2010). These schools are primarily self-contained facilities, not residential facilities. The subjects were recruited through the MANSEF (Maryland Association of Nonpublic Special Education Facilities) network of non-public private special education schools as well as public separate day schools in Anne Arundel County. This population of teachers works with students with disabilities that preclude them from receiving education services in regular education classrooms within public schools. Initial contact was made through the MANSEF director and the Director of Special Education of Anne Arundel

County. Further contact was made with the educational directors of these schools to discuss the proposed study. The directors were informed of all of the information that would be required of the teachers (e. g., signature on Informed Consent, a short demographic questionnaire, the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Teachers, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, and the Calling Scale). Once the directors agreed to have the study conducted in their schools, the survey packets were disseminated to the directors for distribution to the teachers. Each packet had a cover letter that provides an introduction of the research project and invites teachers to participate in the study. Teachers were asked to sign the Informed Consent prior to their participation of the study. Stamped addressed envelopes were provided in each packet for teachers to return their completed surveys. Teachers who declined to participate or partially complete the surveys were not included in the study.

Each of the surveys was distributed and collected in the same manner to ensure consistency in data collection. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003), consistency in data collection procedures is essential for reliability. It was estimated that it would take approximately twenty minutes to complete these three measurements and the short demographic questionnaire. To ensure confidentiality, all questionnaires were completed anonymously, and only a coding number rather than a name was used to designate each respondent. No other personal identification information such as social security numbers, telephone numbers, and addresses were solicited on these questionnaires. All survey forms were locked up in a safe place.

The size of the population was estimated at 700 non-public special educators in MANSEF schools and an additional 100 special educators in Anne Arundel County separate day schools. That makes the total estimated population of 800 special educators. Although all of the directors granted permission for the survey to be administered in her or his school, actual teacher participation was voluntary. As a result, a total of 256 teachers from 35 MANSEF schools (n = 250) and two Anne Arundel County separate day schools (n = 6) returned their completed surveys anonymously, which yielded a 32% response rate of the estimated population.

Measurements

Maslach burnout inventory for teachers. The construct of teacher burnout was measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Teachers (MBI Form Ed: Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986). The MBI consists of 22 statements regarding attitudes and feelings about work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). There are nine items relating to emotional exhaustion, five items relating to depersonalization, and eight items relating to personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The participants responded to the statements based on a 7-point frequency scale (0 = never, 6 = every day). Examples of statements included in the survey include " I feel emotionally drained from work" and " I feel very energetic" (Maslach et al., 1986). The MBI produces three areas of scores: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Leiter & Maslach, 1988). As discussed earlier, these factors have been identified as major indicators of burnout and the MBI has been used extensively in studies examining burnout (Byrne, 1993; Fore et al., 2002; Gill et al., 2006; Hakanen et al., 2006; Leiter & Maslach, 1988; van

Dick & Wagner, 2001). Maslach and Jackson (1981) reported that the reliability of the subscales range from . 71 to . 90 using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The test-retest reliability ranges from . 53 to . 89 (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Multifactor leadership questionnaire. The construct of transformational leadership was measured by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ Form 5X-Short) developed by Avolio, Bass, and Jung (1999). The subordinates rated their leaders on 45 leadership items on a 5-point frequency scale (0 = never, 4 = frequently if not always). The MLQ is comprised of nine subscales, which assess a full range of leadership styles such as transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leaderships. Although measured, the constructs of transactional and laissez-faire leadership behaviors were not included in the regression analyses as the preliminary analysis did not show a correlation between these two leadership styles and job burnout. According to de Vaus (2001), a correlation between two variables is " a pre-requisite for establishing a causal relationship" (p. 179).

The five subscales used to identify transformational leadership style are: (1) idealized attributes, (2) idealized behaviors, (3) inspirational motivation, (4) intellectual stimulation, and (5) individualized consideration (Bass et al., 2003). For the subscale " idealized attributes", an example item is "(my supervisor) goes beyond self-interest for the good of the group." An example item pertaining to the subscale " idealized behaviors" is "(my supervisor) specifies the importance of having a strong sense of purpose." An example item that measures the subscale " inspirational motivation" is "(my

supervisor) articulates a compelling vision of the future." The subscale "intellectual stimulation" includes items such as "(my supervisor) seeks differing perspectives when solving problems." An example item for the "individualized considerations" subscale is "(my supervisor) spends time teaching and coaching." The supervisor received a score on each of the five subscales, and together, those allowed for describing how frequently he or she engaged in transformational leadership behaviors. For example, high scoring supervisors displayed transformational leadership behaviors more frequently than those low scorers. Bass and Avolio (2000) reported reliabilities of the subscales ranging from . 74 to . 91 based on Cronbach's coefficient alpha.

Calling. The construct of calling was measured by the Calling Scale developed by Markow and Klenke (2005) based on Baumeister's (1991) work. Respondents provided ratings on twelve items that assess three subscales such as job, calling, and career on a seven point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = a great deal). As discussed earlier, the major purpose of this study is to examine the mediating role of teachers' calling on the relationship between transformational leadership and job burnout, therefore, only the calling subscale was included in the analysis. The subscale of calling was measured by six items, such as " I feel that I must do the work I do – it is part of who I am" and " the work that I do expresses truths and values that I believe are important" (Markow & Klenke, 2005). Markow and Klenke reported that the scale demonstrated an internal consistency reliability of . 88.

Control variables. Teachers were asked to fill out a short demographic questionnaire. It included items asking about gender, age, and years in teaching. There was also a question asking whether the teacher was a public or non-public employee. Based on the research, demographic variables do not have a consistent relationship with burnout.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using one SPSS file combining all instruments to examine the effects of transformational leadership and calling on job burnout among special education teachers. Descriptive statistics were produced to summarize the demographic data as well as survey measurements in this study. Pearson Product-Moment Coefficients were also computed to determine the correlation among study variables.

To determine whether transformational leadership has an indirect effect mediated by calling on the various dimensions of teachers' burnout, a mediation model was tested (Baron & Kenny, 1986). A mediation model is to identify the mechanism through which an independent variable accounts for the variation of a dependent variable. To clarify the meaning of mediation, a path diagram was used to describe the relationship among independent variable, mediator, and dependent variable. Panels A and B in Figure 1 illustrated the designated paths of a direct effect and a total effect, where transformational leadership is the predictor variable, burnout is the outcome variable, calling is the mediating variable. a is the pathway from transformational leadership to calling, b is the pathway from calling to burnout, c' (Panel A) is the direct effect of transformational leadership on burnout, controlling for the effect of the mediator, calling, and c (Panel B) is

the total effect of transformational leadership, without controlling for the effect of the mediator. R2 was reported to measure the faction of the total variance explained by the model. To get over the overestimation problem of R2, adjusted R2 was also reported to measure the variability in the outcome that the model explains in the population rather than the sample (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

This study conducted two methods to examine the extent to which calling accounts for the relationship between transformational leadership and burnout. First, this study followed the four-step procedure recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) to assess the mediation hypothesis of calling. Second, this study performed a more statistically rigorous bootstrapping method to examine the mediating effect of calling on the relationship between transformational leadership and job burnout. Bootstrapping is " a nonparametric approach to effect-size estimation and hypothesis testing that makes no assumptions about the shape of the distributions o