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# The Phenomenon of Teacher Burnout: Mitigating its Influence on New Teachers

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*RUNNING HEAD: Teacher Burnout*

The Phenomenon of Teacher Burnout: Mitigating its Influence on New Teachers

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

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**Signature Sheet**

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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### **Abstract**

Burnout is a psychological condition with physical, emotional, and mental dimensions. Burnout often includes feelings of exhaustion, long-term fatigue, negative self-concept, despair or hopelessness, frustration, and a lack of productivity at work.

Teacher burnout is a well-known and researched field. It has been documented in the literature that teachers experience high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion, which leads to high levels of burnout and professional attrition. This study examined the incidence of burnout in new elementary school teachers and offered recommendations for changes to organizational structure that may reduce professional burnout.

For the purpose of this study five new elementary-level teachers, with fewer than five years of experience, from several school districts in the San Francisco Bay Area were selected. I, as the researcher, conducted informal as well as formal surveys of self-reported stress levels using the teachers' own descriptions of their daily stressors. Teachers completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (1981). The researcher then synthesized these findings and use this information to suggest ways in which organizational change can alleviate teacher burnout. Results indicated that new teachers are feeling significant burnout to the point where they are considering leaving the field. Suggestions from participants include hiring more paraprofessionals, providing material resources, and increased opportunities for mentorship and professional development.

**Keywords:** Teacher burnout, engagement, stress, new teachers, elementary education



## **Chapter 1 Teacher Burnout**

Teaching is a challenging career with substantial stressors that can lead to professional burnout. As a largely isolated profession—being the lone adult in the room for many hours each day—many teachers feel burdened by the large amount of responsibilities and stressors they encounter. New teachers, who have not yet developed coping mechanisms to help themselves feel less stressed and exhausted, are particularly at risk of experiencing burnout. While some schools and districts have implemented professional development instruction for stress reduction, these solutions often only target daily stress and do not address the more serious long-term condition of burnout.

Burnout is a syndrome with physical, emotional, and mental dimensions, including negative attitudes toward life, towards other people, or towards a career (Akbaba, 2014). Burnout almost always includes feelings of exhaustion, long-term fatigue, despair or hopelessness, negative self-concept, and lack of productivity at work (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980). Research suggests that new teachers feel the effects of burnout more strongly than do teachers with many years of experience (Reichl et al, 2014). The effects of this can be seen in high turnover rates, with as many as one third of new teachers leaving the profession within their first 3 years on the job (Carroll & Foster, 2008).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to gather information from new teachers to identify symptoms and antecedents of burnout. Information from study participants about their personal experiences as new elementary school teachers assisted the researcher in suggesting structural changes to reduce teacher burnout and thereby increase retention.

### **Research Question**

This research examined professional burnout in new teachers. Specifically, the researcher collected information to identify factors that influence burnout. The aim of this study was to add to the current research on burnout by looking at how specific factors lead to burnout in new elementary school teachers. The intent of the study was to gather information and collect teachers' suggestions about how schools and districts can make organizational changes to reduce burnout in their staff.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

Freudenberger (1974) was the first scholar to examine professional burnout as a syndrome. His work is widely considered to be the basis for the theory of burnout. Freudenberger defines burnout as a condition with both physical and behavioral symptoms. The physical signs of burnout include feelings of exhaustion and fatigue, lowered immune function, and frequent psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches and muscle tension. Behavioral signs of burnout include quickness to anger, difficulty holding in feelings, depression, reluctance to share emotions, and a lack of productivity at work. Freudenberger lists several risk factors for burnout, including excessive dedication and commitment to work that is psychologically taxing, such as working in free-clinics, crisis help lines, homeless shelters, and similar professions. Beyond the requisite external pressures these employees experience, people who work in these fields tend to feel obligated to give more of themselves to their work than they would in more conventional work settings. They tend to feel internal pressure to work and to help.

Freudenberger and Richelson expand on the 1974 article with their book, *Burn-Out: The High Cost of High Achievement* (1980). This expansion of the burnout theory mentions the

phenomenon in other helping careers, including teaching. Symptoms of burnout in their analysis of teachers include feeling uninvolved even in the midst of family and friends, detachment from areas of life that used to be fulfilling, and a sense of inner conflict. In describing what a burned out professional looks like the authors describe, “someone in a state of fatigue brought about by devotion to a cause that failed to produce the expected reward” (p. 13).

Importantly, Freudenberger and Richelson draw attention to a critical point about the individuals who suffer from burnout. They assert that sufferers are not underachievers nor are they carefree people with modest aspirations. Sufferers from burnout are charismatic, dynamic, goal-oriented, and idealistic professionals. When trouble sets in, it is usually, “because they’ve pushed themselves too hard for too long” (p. 12).

Teachers who burn out are often suffering from over-commitment and over-dedication to their work. Sadly, if these professionals do achieve their goals, they often find little pleasure in the results because they are too overdrawn to appreciate their success.

In their descriptions of the beginning signs of burnout, the authors describe several of the signs that later become scales on the Maslach Burnout Inventory of 1981 (MBI), which are exhaustion, detachment, and cynicism, later referred to in the educator’s subscale (MBI-ES) as lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997). They explain that, while exhaustion is nearly always the first symptom, detachment is the symptom that can lead to the most serious of effects. These are: disengagement, distancing, dulling and deadening. Cynicism occurs once a person feels detached from their job, because at that point they feel less invested in their organization. Less professional investment leads to

questioning the value of activities, friendships, work, and sometimes even life in general. By this time, burnout is at a critical point and needs to be addressed immediately.

### **Assumptions**

Many of today's teachers are feeling overburdened and overly stressed. This strain causes these hardworking professionals to abandon their teaching careers in search of more fulfilling and less exhausting positions. It is possible to change the structure of school to improve teacher retention and quality of life.

### **Background and Need**

Maslach and Jackson (1997) report that burnout is becoming increasingly prevalent in today's society, not because there has been a change in us as humans, but rather that there have been major fundamental changes in the jobs that individuals are now performing. This change is being compounded by similar and related changes in the physical and ideological spaces that we work in. The researchers assert that the main reason that burnout has become a critical issue for today's workers is that human values, such as kinship and engagement, have been superseded by economic values, which have become overemphasized as goals in corporate structure. Secondly, with the changes that have taken place in today's careers, individuals increasingly experience a mismatch between their personalities and the natures of the jobs available.

The factors mentioned by Maslach and Jackson are as critical now as they were when this book was published in 1997. As human values continue to be trumped by economic values in today's workplaces, employees are reporting increasing amounts of exhaustion, feelings of overload, and diminishing quality of life.

Burnout is a concern for many people today and emerges from a slow, “erosion of feelings and skills over time” (p. 21). Many people tend to misjudge the severity of the burnout situation, and avoid addressing the problem in its early stages. Sometimes, employees displaying symptoms of burnout are blamed for attempting to, “cop-out” (p. 21) and do less work. This kind of thinking, judging the individual rather than the situation or organization, is pervasive.

Maslach and Jackson explain this tendency for blame assigned to the individual. Sufferers tend to see their feelings of burnout as personal failings, thus tend to seek personal solutions. This reconfirms one’s burnout by adding isolation and contributes to depression (Shin, Noh, Jang, Park, & Lee, 2013).

### **Summary**

Burnout among teachers has been reported in the literature research for over 40 years. Rather than being eliminated, the syndrome is becoming increasingly common in teachers, and is a contributing factor leading to high attrition and high rates of turnover in school staffing. This dynamic leads to problems within schools, particularly in building stability for teachers, for students, as well as for the community at large. More research is needed to determine ways to recognize and prevent symptoms of burnout in new teachers. The following is a review of the literature on teacher burnout.

## **Chapter 2 Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

This section is an examination of the research literature on teacher burnout. Information was gathered from academic library searches using media, print, and online resources. Research information is organized in the categories of Historical Context, and Review of the Academic Research.

### **Historical Context**

Burnout as a syndrome arose through recognition of social issues, rather than through medical research. Perhaps for this reason, burnout has never been recognized as an official psychological condition in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders (DSM) (King & Smith, 2016). Thus, more than 40 years after Freudenberger's initial publication describing burnout, employers and psychologists do not have an established protocol for how to treat an employee displaying symptoms of burnout. Employers and mental health care workers may be able to address the symptoms of burnout by helping their employees make lifestyle changes in order to buffer their individual stressors or triggers. These approaches may work on an individual scale, but they do not serve to address the condition at large.

While interventions targeting symptoms of burnout are undoubtedly helpful in reducing the immediate psychological strain on employees, they do not address the organizational structures that cause burnout in the first place. This is a gap in the literature that the current study hopes to address.

## **Review of Academic Research**

### ***Burnout in Teachers***

Although researchers have tried many ways of studying burnout in teachers, there is only one reliable and valid measure for studying burnout: the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

Other notable measures used in addition to the MBI include the following:

1) Measuring the Big Five personality traits using the NEO-Five Factor Inventory to assess if certain personality types are more prone to burnout;

2) Applying the Measure of Coping Capacity Questionnaire, MECCA, to assess the strength of coping mechanisms by those affected and unaffected by burnout;

3) Using the SCL90R measure to assess the psychological health and psychosomatic symptoms exhibited by burnout sufferers;

4) Implementing the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, UWES, to measure possible parallels between burnout and levels of professional engagement.

The examination into the association between personality and teacher burnout performed by Kokkinos (2007) studied the relationship between teachers' personalities, job stressors, and the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA). This study is noteworthy because of its foundation in the transactional model of burnout, the result of the interactions between environmental triggers and intra-personal traits such as personality. The researcher emphasized, "the manifestation of burnout is a function of stressors engendered at both the environmental-organizational and personal levels" (p. 230).

Many contextual factors were identified that relate to occupational stress in teachers. Broad considerations such as paperwork, heavy workload, and time pressure indisputably cause stress in their lives. Kokkinos' study also looked at the variables of interpersonal demands, lack of professional recognition, diversity of required tasks, classroom behavior management, and administrative bureaucracy.

To assess personality, the researcher used the five-factor model (Costa & McCrae, as cited in Kokkinos, 2007), sometimes called the Big Five personality traits. These traits are Neuroticism, the susceptibility to psychological distress; Extraversion, the proclivity towards sociability, high energy; Openness, intellectual flexibility and curiosity, sense of aesthetics; Agreeableness, the inclination to trust and hold consideration for others; and Conscientiousness, industriousness, persistence, and organization (p. 230).

Previous research has shown neuroticism associated with and sometimes a predictor of burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). A meta-analysis of over 250 studies on burnout reported that of the Big Five, neuroticism correlated strongly with burnout, especially in its dimension of emotional exhaustion (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Thus, researchers expected to see a relationship between high levels of neuroticism linked to high levels of emotional exhaustion.

Results of this study focused on environmental factors and burnout showed significant correlation between teachers' years of teaching and levels of emotional exhaustion. Educators with more than ten years of experience demonstrated more greatly elevated levels of emotional exhaustion than did newer teachers. Additionally, female participants, whether married or single, were more emotionally exhausted than their male counterparts, regardless of educational levels



attained or years of experience. The dimension of personal accomplishment, feeling low levels of accomplishment, was associated with teachers having fewer than 10 years of experience, particularly if they had postgraduate degrees, and even more so if they were female. Seven of the examined job stressors had significant negative correlations with personal accomplishment: students' misbehavior, managing students' behavior, students' opinions of teachers, work overload, appraisals by other teachers, time constraints, and specific teaching demands. No significant effects were found with the dimension of depersonalization in correlation with environmental factors.

Personality results indicated that neuroticism was a common predictor of all three dimensions of burnout, as it was hypothesized to do. Neuroticism showed the strongest positive correlation with emotional exhaustion, but was positively correlated with depersonalization, and negatively correlated with personal accomplishment. Conscientiousness had a significant positive correlation with personal accomplishment and a negative correlation with depersonalization. Extraversion was negatively correlated with depersonalization and emotional exhaustion, but was positively associated with personal accomplishment. Openness was negatively correlated with both depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

Overall, the burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were more related to environmental stressors than they were to the teachers' own personalities. The dimension of personal accomplishment was found to be more related to personality variables, specifically the trait of conscientiousness. Results showed women as particularly prone to burnout, which has been demonstrated in other studies (Bauer et al., 2006; Calgar, 2011; Grossi, Perski, Evengård, Blomkvist, & Orth-Gomér, 2003).

A study by Bauer, Stamm, Virnich, Wissing, Müller, Wirsching, and Schaarschmidt (2006) examined the correlation between burnout and psychological and psychosomatic symptoms in teachers. Using measures for psychological health, SCL 90 R, and coping capacity, MECCA, researchers examined burnout and its connection to and deviation from psychological health.

Similar to Kokkinos (2007), researchers in this study found gender specific results. Bauer et al. found elevated levels of burnout in female teachers. The other demographic factors found to influence burnout in this survey were marital and employment statuses: teachers who were single and/or teaching part time exhibited greater levels of burnout. Interestingly, years of teaching experience did not have an effect on level of burnout in this study. Almost universally, the external variables cited most by participants as leading to distress and burnout were class size and student behavior.

In this study, which took place in Germany, 32.5% of respondents met the criteria for experiencing burnout, with just slightly less than half of that group, 20.5% of total participants, meeting the diagnostic criteria for clinical mental illness. Not surprisingly, burnout sufferers had the highest rate of psychological and psychosomatic symptoms, with a common symptom of depression. Psychological distress has been a persistent symptom noted in the historical development of the concept of burnout, particularly burnout's link to depression (Freudenberger, 1974; Freudenberger & Richelson, 1981; Shin, Noh, Jang, Park, & Lee, 2013).

Successful studies of longitudinal change in levels of burnout largely reflect burnout's stability over time (Burke & Greenglass, 1995; Shin, Noh, Jang, Park, & Lee, 2013). In one such study, Burke and Greenglass (1995) examined antecedents and consequences of psychological

burnout in teachers over multiple school years. As expected, they found the phenomenon largely consistent over time. This study varied from the previous body of research as it included administrators and teacher-leaders along with regular classroom teachers.

In this study, all three dimensions of burnout had significant and independent correlations with measures of job satisfaction. Occupational stress factors contributed significantly on four of the nine dependent variables: job satisfaction, psychosomatic symptoms, life satisfaction, and quality of daily life activities. Researchers found that psychological burnout was negatively associated with job satisfaction, life satisfaction, psychological symptoms, and use of medicine. Thus, both occupational stress and burnout had separate but significant effects on the wellbeing of teachers. This further supported the necessity of a transactional model when addressing burnout in intervention protocol.

### ***Burnout in New Teachers***

With teaching being such a rigorous and stress inducing profession, it comes as no surprise that new teachers, in particular, must cope with daunting challenges at the start of their careers. There has been some research performed linking the syndrome of burnout to new teachers, although this is an area deserving of more analysis and provides motivation for the current study. Researchers have found evidence that new teachers have much higher levels of work pressures than do other professionals (Goddard, O'Brian, & Goddard, 2006), and are especially prone to job dissatisfaction, (Perie & Baker, 1997), and even burnout (Fernet, Trépanier, Austin, & Levesque-Côté, 2016; Fernet, Lavigne, Vallerand, & Austin, 2014; Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007). The following studies examine the roles that motivation, coping behavior, and behavior management experiences play in moderating burnout for new teachers.

A recently published longitudinal study conducted in Montreal, Canada (Fernet, Trépanier, Austin, & Levesque-Côté, 2016) performed an analysis of new teachers' tendency toward burnout in the start of their careers. The authors of this study aimed to examine how motivation, both internal and external, relates to burnout in new teachers, and how that burnout affects attrition. Participants were 589 new teachers, each with fewer than three years of experience. Assessments measured occupational commitment, student behavior patterns, emotional exhaustion, sense of community, feelings of control and recognition, and work motivation.

This 2-year study underscores the importance of the quality of motivation behind teachers' job functioning. In the initial reports, approximately 99% of the participants reported feeling primarily autonomous motivation. That is, virtually all of the teachers felt their actions were dictated by their, "interest in teaching, enjoyment of the subject matter...desire to make a social contribution and to work with children or adolescents" (p. 488). By the end of the teachers' third year of teaching, that number had dropped to 90%. Although this is still a high percentage, authors' data analysis found this decrease to be significant. The teachers who reported higher rates of controlled motivation reported feelings of obligation to accomplish work by pressures either internal, such as to avoid feeling anxious, or external, such as to avoid constraints, or to receive social or material reward.

When examining correlations, researchers found some interesting trends. Work overload positively predicted teachers' experiencing controlled motivation. Controlled motivation positively predicted emotional exhaustion and negatively predicted student attentiveness. Therefore, in new teachers, work overload predicted burnout and decreased student attentiveness.

These results indicate that the quality of teachers' motivation can influence their students' attitudes and behavior. The authors conclude that, "autonomous motivations appear to support teachers' ability to create a classroom that fosters student attentiveness [and] a climate that is conducive to learning" (p. 488).

In the previous section we learned that managing student behavior is regularly cited as a major stressor for teachers. Fernet's study links burnout caused by controlled motivation to a lack of student attentiveness, which can lead to misbehavior.

A recent German study investigated the relationship between new teachers' "reality shock" (Dicke, Elling, Schmeck, & Leutner, 2015, p. 1) and classroom management skills. Citing evidence that strain and low levels of wellbeing in new teachers is in large part caused by student misbehavior (Friedman, 2006), the researchers created a classroom management training intervention program specifically designed for new teachers. To rule out the effects of increased attention, the researchers also had a control group of teachers who received no intervention, and a placebo control group of new teachers who received general stress management training.

The stress management group was predicted to show increases in wellbeing, as measured by decreased emotional exhaustion, less engagement rumination, and improved quality of sleep. The classroom management intervention addressed the dimensions of self-efficacy, perceived success, target achievement, pro-social issues, positive feedback, and handling classroom disturbances. Both interventions consisted of two training days of eight hours each, and a three-hour follow up 12-14 weeks later.

As predicted, the teachers in the stress management program showed increased signs of wellbeing over the control group. However, the participants in the classroom management

training showed the most improvement in wellbeing. Particularly, teachers who received classroom management training showed significantly lower levels of emotional exhaustion, rumination, classroom disturbances, and higher target achievement, and positive feedback. These effects were stable over one year later. The findings of this study suggest that a short classroom management intervention can have a significant effect on new teachers' wellbeing and perceived classroom management skills thus, "helping to prevent reality shock, support teacher retention, and further foster the cultivation of high-quality teachers" (p. 10).

### ***Job Satisfaction and Attrition related to Burnout***

In the United States and internationally, teachers leave their field in rates much higher than do employees in other professions (Schaarschmidt, as cited in Bauer et al., 2006). Many researchers tie lack of retention to the high levels of stress teachers must face on a daily basis (Shin, Noh, Jang, Park, & Lee, 2013) as well as lack of job satisfaction (Perie & Baker, 1997). Although researchers disagree on the actual percentage of teachers quit within the first few years on the job, estimates range from as low as 5% to as high as 50% (Clandinin et al., 2015). Reported rates of teacher attrition in the United States usually range from 30-50% within the first 5 years on the job (Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012) and have increased with time (Carroll & Foster, 2008).

Burnout is either cited by teachers themselves or presumed by researchers to be the primary reason for the elevated rate of premature retirement due to psychosomatic disorders and symptoms (Bauer et al., 2006). Even more educators abandon the profession early; with as many as one quarter of beginning educators in the United States leaving the field within three years due to high levels of dissatisfaction (Martin, Sass, & Schmitt, 2012).

The financial costs associated with this high level of professional attrition have been conservatively estimated at millions of dollars per year nationwide that could be otherwise spent within our classrooms (Sass, Seal, & Martin, 2011). Research in teacher attrition has focused on many variables. Discussed below are examples of research on teachers' job satisfaction, professional engagement, and value consonance.

In his 2014 study, Akbaba investigated whether professional satiety, referred to here as job satisfaction, predicted burnout in teachers. 478 Turkish elementary school teachers were chosen randomly from a larger sample to be the research group. When analyzing the results of teachers' responses, Akbaba separated participants into 10 different groups according to their reported reasons of job satisfaction. These groups were based on reasons such as; being most satisfied by teaching due to personal interests, personal strengths, a feeling of deep meaning, or the career suits their personal interests or abilities. The group with the most participants (n. 90) reported feeling most satisfaction with their job because, "it's generating the possibility of helping individuals." The group with the least participants (n. 30) chose, "the profession has social honor" as their primary source of career satisfaction (Akbaba, p. 1256).

Participants' responses concerning the sources of burnout were categorized into five main groups. Those reasons included: 1) concern for a promotion, 2) difficulty with classroom management, 3) isolation from colleagues and peers, 4) insufficient professional and administrative support, and 5) insufficient support with personal issues. In data analysis, Akbaba found that participants with high levels of job satisfaction experienced lower levels of burnout. Conversely, teachers who were dissatisfied with teaching as a career scored higher on the MBI.

While not all teachers facing loss of professional satisfaction left their positions, the teachers with the highest levels of burnout were at higher risk for attrition.

A 2015 study conducted in Alberta, Canada, approached early teacher career attrition as a process of interaction between individual and contextual factors (Clandinin, Long, Schaefer, Downey, Steeves, Pinnegar, & Wnuk, 2015). Individual factors included burnout and feelings of belonging, while contextual features included salary and instructional and emotional support. Through semi-structured interviews, researchers sought to understand teachers' experiences, with attention to their future intentions. Results revealed seven factors most likely to predict new teachers' future plans of retention or attrition. They were: 1) support, 2) belonging and a sense of identity, 3) tension around contracts, 4) the desire and pressure to do anything asked due to newness, 5) work-life balance, 6) the struggle to remain distinct from their work, and 7) the feasibility of ability to continue in the position.

Other individual factors that have been studied as precursors to burnout are teachers' professional identity (Hong, 2010), emotional regulation (Ghanizadeh & Royaei, 2015; Mearns & Cairn, 2003), levels of professional knowledge (Dicke et al., 2015), and self-efficacy in specific teaching methodologies (De Neve, Devos & Tutyens, 2015). These studies have added value to the field of teacher burnout, but don't reveal a holistic picture of the teachers' experience. External factors contribute to the syndrome of burnout as much as do individual characteristics and traits.

A recent Norwegian study performed by Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2011) sought to examine the, "assumed antecedents of teacher attrition, namely teacher job satisfaction and motivation to leave the teaching profession" (p. 1030). Like Clandinin et al. (2015), authors of this study



approached teachers' attrition as an interaction between individual and contextual factors.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik proposed that school context variables and teachers' job satisfaction were, at least partly mediated through teachers' feelings of belonging as well as their physical and emotional exhaustion.

In a stratified random sample of 2,569 Norwegian teachers from 127 elementary and middle schools, researchers measured ten variables. The variable in this study not previously examined is the concept of value consonance.

Value consonance refers to teachers' ability to teach in congruence with their own educational beliefs and values. Because teachers tend to go into their field because of their values and ethical or intrinsic motivations (Chang, 2009), and must communicate and represent values to their students, researchers expected teachers who felt as though they were teaching in congruence with their personal beliefs to be more comfortable in their roles. This satisfaction is referred to as having value consonance. It is important to note that the researchers did not measure specific values or beliefs, just the degree to which teachers reported being able to teach in accordance with their own values, or conversely, the amount to which they felt unable to do so.

Along with measuring value consonance, the researchers measured contextual variables including supervisory support, relationships with colleagues, relationships with students' parents, time pressure, discipline problems and occurrence of disruptive behavior, and personal variables including feelings of belonging to the school, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and motivation to leave the profession. Return rate to this 60-minute questionnaire was 84%, which is unprecedentedly high in the field of educational research.

Results of this study demonstrated that value consonance, supervisory support, relationships with colleagues, and relationships with parents were all significant and independent predictors of feelings of burnout. Discipline problems in the classroom and time pressure were significant predictors of job satisfaction. Not surprisingly, motivation to leave the profession was negatively correlated to job satisfaction and positively correlated to emotional exhaustion. Contrary to the researchers expectations, feelings of burnout were not directly related to motivation to leave the profession; this relationship was mediated through job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion.

Implications of these results demonstrate that school administrators should pay more attention to teachers' feelings of belonging in order to reduce professional attrition. In this particular analysis, researchers found that emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and feelings of belonging explain 52% of the variance in teachers' reported motivation to leave the profession. In order to improve job satisfaction and feelings of belonging, it is important to develop a supportive school culture that develops and promotes collective values and goals, and reduces time pressure on teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2011). These contextual enhancements would logically increase teachers' job satisfaction, thereby reducing professional attrition.

A Finnish study (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006) took a different approach towards teacher burnout. This study used a positive psychological standpoint and looked at burnout as the converse of work engagement. The authors make the important point that in Finland, educators have the highest burnout levels when compared to all other social-services professionals (Kalimo & Hakanen as cited in Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006) yet the majority of teachers are not overly anxious or burned out (Farber, as cited in Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006).

However, because the rate of burnout in teachers is so high, the negative aspects of teaching have dominated scientific research efforts. The researchers in this study make a point to examine both the condition of teacher burnout and the positive motivational processes involved in career satisfaction.

In a large-scale survey sent to all teachers in the Education Department of Helsinki, researchers heard back from 2,038 participants. Participants completed the MBI, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, the Healthy Organization Questionnaire, and answered several self-related organizational commitment, health, and work ability questions.

Researchers put forth 6 hypotheses. 1) Burnout mediates the relationship between job demands and ill health 2) work engagement mediates the relationship between job resources and occupational commitment, 3 and 4) job resources and organizational commitment are independently negatively related to burnout, 5) job demands and job resources are negatively correlated, and 6) job resources are related to work engagement through burnout. All six of the researchers' hypotheses were confirmed.

In this study, job resources refer to positive factors at work such as job control, supervisory support, positive social environment, and innovative climate. Job demands refer to challenges teachers face such as pupil misbehavior, work overload, and the quality of their physical work environment. It is no surprise that the authors of this study demonstrated a link from job demands to burnout and from burnout to ill health. The converse motivational process demonstrated in this study has had less scientific examination: that job resources lead to increased organizational commitment, which in turn leads to increased work engagement. If

work commitment is a true converse of burnout, this positive process gives insight into ways to reduce teacher burnout and its associated negative effects such as ill health and attrition.

In analysis of teachers' job satisfaction, it is important to look at ways to prevent attrition by way of reducing burnout. The following section addresses the factors that mitigate or reduce incidence of burnout.

### ***Mediating Factors of Burnout***

A mediating factor in research is a factor that either defines or changes the outcome of a situation. In the context of this paper, mediating factors are factors that reduce the incidence of burnout. Some of the mediating factors explored in the research are; clear organizational goals, improved communication, psychological health, career resources, social support, and individual and collective efficacy.

A large longitudinal study conducted by Berg (1994) in Washington State studied strategies that teachers reported using to prevent or cope with burnout. He also sought to ascertain the burnout levels of the area's nonadministrative teachers, to clarify their career goals and intentions, and to determine if any organizational interventions were currently in place to combat burnout.

In this study, 48.9% of the participants reported high scores on one of the three dimensions of the MBI: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or personal accomplishment. Of the three categories, the most commonly experienced dimension was emotional exhaustion. Compared to the norms reported with the MBI, this study's participants reported significantly higher numbers of emotional exhaustion and lower scores of depersonalization.

In his analysis of coping strategies Berg found that, on average, teachers use between 0-25 strategies to mitigate burnout, with a mean of 11.5 strategies per educator. The top eleven strategies reported were: engaging in a non-work hobby or interest, maintaining a balanced perspective on life, getting appropriate amounts of sleep, eating a nutritionally balanced diet, associating with psychologically healthy colleagues, getting away on weekends, setting realistic goals for students, getting away during summers, structuring the work day to include breaks from continuous student contact, exercising regularly, and developing more effective time-management skills. Interestingly, eight of these eleven popular strategies are focused on manipulating non-work aspects of the individual's life. Only three strategies involve direct action that changes a stress-producing aspect of the teacher's day.

Berg asked participants for their suggestions of interventions to improve teacher wellbeing. More than half of respondents, unsurprisingly, recommended increasing teachers' salaries. The top five most suggested ideas were; annual staff retreats, workout centers at or near school, caseload ceilings, hiring more paraprofessionals, flextime opportunities, and professional training focused on, "dealing with difficult people" (p. 187). Most of these interventions are direct actions aimed at altering the stress producing aspects of the teachers' work environments. While some of these would be easy solutions, ideas such as implementing flextime opportunities and enforcement of caseload ceilings might require systemic changes at the school or district levels.

One example of an organizational level change comes from an international comparison. Ahn's (2016) study was a qualitative analysis of how, in the Japanese school system, the teacher's room could be a central gathering place supporting new teachers' development. The

author proposed that this collaborative system is a factor in Japan's unusually high teacher retention rate.

Ahn drew a contrast between the United States' high levels of professional attrition, reported at approximately 30% in a 2008 report by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (Carroll & Foster, 2008) and Japan's impressively low turnover rate of 1.35% of first year teachers in 2006 (MEXT, as cited in Ahn). She posited that this noteworthy difference has several origins, but one in particular is Japan's widespread use of a dedicated teacher's room.

In Japanese public schools, students remain in one classroom while teachers rotate between periods. This allows teachers to have their own desks in a centralized teacher's room, called a *shokuin shitsu*. These teachers rooms are strategically organized to provide mentorship and support to new professionals while grouping teachers of similar departments or grade levels together. Administrators dictate desk arrangement in order to facilitate optimal mentorship opportunities for new teachers. Between class periods and outside school hours, teachers convene in these rooms to discuss student behavior as well as teaching strategies. Professional development, formal and informal, occurs in this space.

In Ahn's qualitative analysis, notable findings revealed three primary uses for the *shokuin shitsu*: 1) information exchange between teachers, 2) development and maintenance of collegial relationships, and 3) a safe environment to gain support from colleagues. Ahn believes that the low turnover rate of teachers in Japan is directly connected to teachers using the teacher's room in the former three ways. Thus, the *shokuin shitsu* is a moderating factor to Japanese teachers'

burnout. The teachers' room in this case study functions as an organizational structure directly increasing the wellbeing of teaching professionals.

Another mediating factor in burnout, self determination, was studied by Desrumaux, Lapointe, Ntsame Sima, Boudrias, Savoie, & Brunet (2015). These researchers define psychological health as a condition with both an absence of negative states as well as the presence of positive states. Their study looked at the extent to which job demands, individual resources, and organizational structures are linked to teachers' wellbeing and distress at work. Using self-determination theory as a basis, researchers sought to analyze teachers' self-reported levels of autonomy, competency, and relatedness. They posited that these three independent variables would indicate the extent to which teachers were experiencing wellbeing and distress at work.

Results of this study indicated that feelings of autonomy do not necessarily correspond to teachers' psychological health due to the individualistic nature of the profession. However, competency and relatedness were still important factors in teachers' perceived wellbeing. Their hypothesis that increases in work demands might be correlated with increasing distress and decreasing wellbeing was confirmed.

The researchers made several suggestions for increasing the wellbeing of teachers. Desrumaux et al. (2015) suggested that districts should invest in more attention to human resources: teachers by necessity are very self-reliant, thus tend to deplete their natural coping resources. Having more resources available to teachers, such as compensated leadership opportunities, accessibility of administration, enforcement of school rules, and material support for classroom supplies, would allow teachers to use more of their energy on matters other than

stress reduction. At the school level, the researchers suggest that administrations do their best to encourage moments of exchange between teachers. This would help resolve conflicts between staff and students, and would aid in satisfying teachers' need for relatedness and demonstration of competence. The above suggestions, as well as enhancing opportunities for optimism, would aid in the development of pleasant and supportive job climates and work atmospheres.

Importantly for this study, Desrumaux et al. (2015) emphasize that a person's work environment, particularly climate, plays a, "critical role in matters of occupational health" (p. 186). Thus, the encouragement of wellbeing in the workplace is not just an individual matter. By addressing the issues from an organizational level and enhancing optimism, relatedness, and competence, schools can enhance the psychological health and wellbeing of their teachers.

An Italian study (Avanzi, Schuh, Fraccaroli, & Dick, 2015) sought to examine the underlying processes behind organizational identification and burnout. Citing established research demonstrating a link between organizational identification and burnout, researchers specifically looked at the mediating influences of social support and collective efficacy on teacher burnout. Previous studies have looked at personal or self-efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) but this study took the unique approach of identifying group or contextual efficacy, thus creating a dynamic analysis of individual and contextual variables. The authors of this study hypothesized that employees who strongly identify with their organization are more likely to receive social support from their colleagues, which will promote collective efficacy, and in turn, reduce burnout.

For this study, 192 Italian high school teachers responded to a questionnaire measuring organizational identification, social support, collective efficacy, and burnout. Results were in line



with the researchers' hypotheses. As predicted, organizational identification significantly and negatively correlated with all three variables of burnout. Organizational identification correlated positively with social support, which in turn, correlated negatively with burnout. Both organizational identification and social support correlated positively with collective efficacy. Lastly, collective efficacy correlated negatively with burnout.

The findings of this study are important because they provide support to the idea that social support and cooperation based on shared identity can mitigate factors leading to burnout. Social cooperation and shared efficacy limit the isolation and lack of control that teachers may feel when they are on the road to burnout. Authors of this study suggest that it is important to, "take a process-oriented perspective involving multiple mediating steps to adequately understand social identity dynamics of stress" (p. 8).

### **Summary**

In examination of teacher burnout, the author has presented research aimed at examining individual factors such as teachers' personalities, coping mechanisms, and professional identity. Also included in the research is analysis of external factors that lead to burnout such as job resources, social relationships, and classroom management.

Successful mediating factors that limit burnout are mentorship opportunities, flexibility of teaching time, facilitated communication strategies, and collective efficacy. Unfortunately, little research has been done requiring organizational changes that eliminate burnout before it begins. With the exception of research by Berg (1994) and Ahn (2016)'s studies, none of the reviewed research asked teachers of their opinions on how to reduce their and their colleagues'

burnout. Thus, the author seeks to ask new teachers, the less studied and more at risk individuals, about their ideas of how to reduce the syndrome of teacher burnout.

## Chapter 3 Method

### Research Approach

The researcher selected a mixed methods approach in order to best address the dual desire for detailed interview analysis as well as structure, validity, and reliability. Mixed methods research is a methodology that combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques into a single study. This methodology has been described as the, “third wave or third research movement” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). It has been hailed as a successful methodology as it, “moves past the paradigm wars by offering a logical and practical alternative” (p. 17) to strictly qualitative or quantitative research.

The goal of mixed methods research is not to replace either qualitative or quantitative data collection, but rather to, “draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both in single research studies and across studies” (p. 14-15). A key feature of mixed methods research is its methodological pluralism which, “frequently results in superior research” (p. 14) than monomethodological research.

Selecting a small sample size allowed for the researcher to spend more time getting to know each participant in order to better understand his or her responses in the qualitative interview process. Each type of data, quantitative data from the MBI and qualitative data from the interviews, gives a different perspective of how the phenomenon of burnout is being experienced. The two types of data combine to generate a more complete demonstration of burnout in new teachers.

**Ethical Standards**

This paper adheres to the ethical standards for protection of human subjects of the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally a research proposal was submitted and reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved and assigned number 10544.

**Sample and Site**

The participants in this study were selected as a sample of convenience. Some participants were the author's peers at a university in the San Francisco Bay Area. Graduate students in the field of education volunteered after hearing a verbal description of the research project presented in class. Some of the participants were solicited via email.

While a convenient choice of participant selection, this choice was made deliberately. Rather than examining all teachers at one particular school-site, this collection procedure allows for participant self-selection as well as for exposure to a diversity of experiences. As each teacher works in a different school setting, each has different exposure to job resources and administrative support, earns salary on a different pay scale, and implements different systems of curriculum with varying degrees of autonomy. As demonstrated in the literature review, these variables independently affect job satisfaction and therefore each individual's likelihood of burnout. Were the participants all members of the same school-site, these variables would be more similar, thus differences in results would be more dependent on participants' personality and interpretation.

Each subject was given the choice of interview site in which they would feel comfortable; their classrooms, their home, the university library, or a public meeting place such as a café. The primary interview site was in the library at the university.

## **Measurement**

### ***Validity***

The MBI manual (Maslach, Jackson, Leiter, Schaufeli, & Schwab, 1981) describes validity for the MBI. The authors noted patterns that appear across studies in the fields of educational as well as other social-scientific research. For example, that male teachers tend to score higher than female teachers in the dimension of depersonalization, which is consistent with studies from other helping professions. The authors also demonstrated convergent validity by correlating MBI scores with behavioral ratings by participants' close contacts such as spouses or coworkers. This provided external validation of a participant's experience.

### ***Reliability***

An oft-cited study by Iwanicki & Schwab (1981) supports the reliability of the MBI. Internal consistency estimated by Cronbach alpha ratings were reported as 0.90 for emotional exhaustion, 0.76 for depersonalization, and 0.79 for personal accomplishment. These three ratings were all within one hundredth of the ratings provided in the MBI manual (1981). Additionally, in a meta-analysis of over 200 studies, researchers Wheeler, Vassar, Worley and Barnes (2011) confirmed that

The EE subscale consistently produces the largest and most consistent coefficient alpha estimates, with 98% of studies sampled reporting values at or above .80

***Procedure***

For each participant, the researcher administered the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Scale (MBI-ES) via computer. After looking at a summary of the results, the interview took place. A total of 11 qualitative questions were asked to each participant, with five demographic questions and six open ended questions.

**Access and Permissions**

The researcher completed an application the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Dominican University of California in accordance with federal and state guidelines for research. This application was approved, granting the researcher permission to interview participants as individual agents.

Before emailing classmates asking for volunteers, permission was granted by the professor and advisor of the researcher. All participants signed a letter of consent and were assigned a pseudonym based on the order of participation.

**Data Gathering Procedures**

The independent variable, the construct examined in this study, is the incidence of burnout in new elementary school teachers. The dependent variables were the factors adding to and mitigating the effects of burnout on these teachers.

**Data Analysis Approach**

The researcher examined the computer generated results of the MBI-ES and handwritten notes detailing each interview. Secondly, the researcher reviewed each interview's notes carefully to identify common concepts and trends. The researcher then focused on identifying the five most common interventions suggested by participants.

In order to be as accurate as possible, the researcher typed each suggestion into a spreadsheet and counted repetition in words as well as concepts. All quantitative data points were entered into a spreadsheet in order to measure similarities and differences across participants and across questions. Common themes were examined and reviewed by a second reader to maintain objectivity and increase reliability.

### **Interview Questions**

#### Demographic Questions:

Age

Gender

Degrees and Credentials Earned

Years Teaching

Years in Current Position

#### Preliminary Questions:

1. What does burnout mean to you?
2. Do you see burnout in anyone at your school?
3. What do you do to help manage your feelings of burnout? Do these strategies work?

#### Long Answer Questions:

4. Does your administration provide help to manage teachers' burnout? How? Do these actions come from your school or from the district?
5. Burn out is a significant problem in educational settings. Teachers leave the profession within a few years, often exhausted. What do you think can be done to reduce the incidence of burn out in school settings?

6. The research literature identifies that, on average, teachers use 11 different strategies to reduce burnout. The most commonly used ones focus on the individual and are not directly related to their job, such as exercise and meditation. There is little reported on strategies for the job setting. What would you suggest as ways to reduce teacher burnout by changing the school setting?



## Chapter 4 Findings

### Description of Site, Individuals, Data

Participants in this study were six teachers, each working at different schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. All participants were female and were currently employed as a full time elementary school teachers. Three teachers worked at public schools and three worked at private schools. Two of the three teachers at private schools had previously worked in public schools and had chosen to move out of the public school system. Two of the teachers taught first grade, two teachers taught kindergarten, one teacher taught fourth grade, and one teacher taught in a multi-grade resource room for mild to moderate special education students. The median age was 28.667 with a standard deviation (SD) of 4.966. The amount of time participants had been employed as teachers ranged from slightly less than one full year to four years. The average time employed as a teacher was 2.167 years with a SD of 1.169.

All interviews took place during March, 2017. Three interviews occurred in the library of the local university. Two interviews took place in a quiet student lounge and one interview took place in a classroom on the university campus. Although all participants were given the opportunity to be interviewed elsewhere, the university proved to be a mutually convenient meeting place.

**Themes*****Teachers Felt Burned Out***

Table 1

*Burnout Inventory Scores*

Participant	Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	Depersonalization (DP)	Personal Accomplishment (PA)
P1	3.10	0.60	5.90
P2	5.10	1.40	4.80
P3	5.30	2.80	4.40
P4	2.40	0.20	4.50
P5	3.30	0.20	5.60
P6	2.80	0.20	5.80
Mean	3.67	0.90	5.17
SD	1.23	1.04	0.67

The two teachers in the study who were the most enthusiastic about participation, Participants 2 and 3, also had the highest scores on the MBI-ES of the total of six respondents. Likewise, the participants who were least eager to participate, Participants 5 and 6, had some of the lowest scores of EE and DP and some of the highest scores of PA. Scores of emotional exhaustion were the highest of the three dimensions of burnout across responses. This finding is supported in the review of the literature.

The question with the highest score was the second question: “2. I feel used up at the end of the work day” with an average score of 5.50 on a scale of 0-6. This quantifies participants’ initial reaction to discussion of their burnout.

Conversely, a reverse scored dimension, the scores of PA were higher in this sample than were reported in the study’s norms. This may be attributed to the participants’ status as students

enrolled in the final stages of a master's program. Therefore they may have experienced increased feelings of personal/professional efficacy that led them to this advanced step, beyond requirements for earning a teaching certificate.

The Depersonalization (DP) dimension was lower compared to the initial normed group. The review of the literature indicated that this score is trending lower over time. At least in the field of education, teachers are not experiencing high levels of DP compared to when the scale was developed in 1981. This may be explained in part by teachers' increased emotional involvement in their field. As teachers experience more emotional connection to their students, they feel less disconnectedness in their work. Thus, the dimensions of EE and DP have an inverse relationship to one another that is increasing over time.

### ***Participant Interest in Inventory Results***

Most of the participants actively demonstrated interest in discussing the results of their MBI. They wanted to share their stories. They indicated a need to describe their experiences and how strongly they felt about the importance of this research. They verbalized that they perceived burnout as a real problem, not adequately examined in the research data. Participants reported having frequent discussions with colleagues about the existence of burnout among teachers in general. They reported a lack of evidence based research in this area, and lack of scientific suggestions about solutions to this pervasive issue.

Teachers in this study with the highest scores on the MBI-ES were the ones most interested in learning their own results from the inventory. These teachers were clearly seeking solutions for their elevated levels of burnout. These interviews took longer than the others did, as these participants expressed their concerns and sought validation of their feelings. Interestingly,

these participants also offered the greatest amount of suggestions for how to change the teaching profession in order to reduce burnout.

In interviews during the data collection phase, teachers verbalized comments such as the following:

“The teaching profession seems doomed... It would really impact my happiness if my needs were taken into account.”

“I don’t plan on teaching much longer. I feel like I am drowning every day.”

“I feel like I am up against the other teachers.”

“Most administrators try to help, but there is no transparency.”

“The biggest part of burnout is behavior in my classroom.”

“You can’t go anymore. You’re stuck.”

“I’m empty. I’m done giving all I can give. It is almost impossible to keep going.”

In response to the question, *Do you see burnout in your school?*

“Yes, that is the experience of the elementary school teacher.”

Comments from participants indicated that an important contributing factor to the teacher shortage in the United States may be due in part to the high levels of burnout experienced by new teachers. Burnout has been thought of as a long term issue, a cumulative condition that builds up over years of experience. While that can be true, there is an immediate effect that may occur in the initial stages of one’s teaching career. Participants in the present study personally experienced burnout as well as watched it develop in their colleagues.

### *Suggestions for the Future*

Although all teachers reported seeing burnout in their colleagues, only one teacher reported a comprehensive program at her school-site aimed at reducing the incidence of teacher burnout. The participant taught at a public charter school, which received specialized Federal Title 1 funding. The school structure includes a Self Care Committee with the responsibility of helping teachers set goals to improve their wellness. They also identify an accountability partner, someone assigned to each teacher to help each one adhere to goals. This may be a useful strategy to employ for new teachers, which is low cost, or elaborate organizational change.

Commonly suggested interventions to limit incidence of burnout were largely related to lowering daily workload. Participant 2 stated it simply, “less on my plate would be better”.

Suggestions also included the following:

1. Smaller class sizes, mentioned by four participants. Participant 6 expressed this desire as, “improving the student to teacher ratio.”
2. Requiring fewer additional responsibilities beyond classroom teaching.

Participant 4 expressed this emphatically with the comment that she was required to volunteer on, “so many committees!” Participant 2 lamented the loss of prep time while participating in frequent mandated recess duty.

3. All six participants mentioned the importance of hiring more paraprofessionals.

This largely stemmed from a desire to meet the needs of each of their students adequately. Teachers felt unable to do this appropriately because the highest needs students in their classes require so much attention. Participants 1, 2, and 4

all mentioned the need for more “push-in” support from resource teachers or counselors to help with behavior management.

4. Surprisingly, few of the participants mentioned raising their pay levels. The author posits that this was not because they didn’t think it would help, but rather that they felt this suggestion to be pointless; that it would never happen. However, Participant 5 thoughtfully remarked on this point, noting that she didn’t feel, “appreciated by the pay scale.” She said that in the back of her mind she thinks, “I work so hard and I don’t make much. I wonder... if I got paid more, if it would change the way I feel” (about the profession). And that a big part of, “feeling appreciated is having a salary to reflect that.”

### **Summary**

New teachers reported feeling burned out, despite the common held assumption that the condition intensifies over a period of time. Teachers new to the profession, report feeling overwhelmed at the emotional toll of their responsibilities at their school sites. Qualitative and quantitative data support the existence of burnout as a factor that has an impact on teacher quality of life and teacher decisions to leave the profession.

Participants’ responses include low cost suggestions for addressing the issue of teacher burnout. The research data identifies teacher burnout as a factor in the school setting that needs further attention.

## **Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis**

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Evidence from this study indicates that burnout is a reality for new elementary school teachers. Acknowledging this as a concern within the teaching profession is important, as are identifying ways to address burnout, with an emphasis on improving support to teachers new to the profession.

### **Comparison of Findings to the Literature**

The literature suggests that school teachers are practicing strategies to reduce burnout that target symptoms rather than causes of the syndrome (Berg, 1994; Desrumaux et al., 2015). However, in this study participants presented balanced suggestions; revealing the deep level of thought they had put into their and their colleagues' wellbeing and professional satisfaction. Many of the participants' suggestions dealt with concrete changes of the causes of most stressful aspects of their jobs before the researcher suggested to do so.

Although burnout among teachers has been documented in scientific research for over 30 years, (King & Smith, 2016) only one participant reported a school or district sponsored program to reduce burnout among its teachers. With such a breadth of documented incidence and consequences of burnout, it is surprising that few schools are addressing the issue. In fact, participants in the study identified several ways that their schools' requirements were directly adding to the teachers' burnout.

Behavior management is a significant contributing factor to the burnout of new teachers. While this is reflected in the literature, relatively few studies have addressed preparation for this challenge through professional development (Dicke, Elling, Schmeck, & Leutner, 2015). With

five of the six participants reporting behavior management as one of their greatest challenges, it is clear that more programs targeting this challenge are needed. The experiment conducted by the above researchers showed a significant reduction in teacher burnout following a short, low-cost intervention. These results persisted over time, indicating this to be an effective intervention for this issue.

Participants in the study appeared motivated as teachers. A concern emerged in analyzing data. If, with a select population of knowledgeable people entering the teaching profession, people who have made a series commitment to educating children in the school setting, yet are already entertaining thoughts of leaving the profession, then what is the message to others who are considering a career as a teacher?

Participants in this research were competent and clearly care a great deal about the wellbeing of their students. They quantitatively demonstrated high levels of personal accomplishment and low levels of depersonalization of their students. These are the types of teachers that community members want to have educating their children; yet these teachers are burning out and already considering leaving the field after only a few years on the job. The reality of the effect of burnout on people who initially were committed and passionate about entering the teaching profession sends a distressing message to the community. Who will accept the social responsibility and the demands of teaching in our schools? What support systems need to be in place for teachers to feel respected, valued and supported in their careers?



**Limitations/Gaps in the Research**

While the MBI has proven to be a reliable and valid measure for burnout, it only addresses the existence of the syndrome, not the causes. Valid measures assessing the cause of the condition are needed in order to begin to solve this widespread issue.

Limitations of this study in particular include its small sample size. With such a small, localized group, the ability to generalize to teachers in general is limited. Moreover, all participants were female, which does not give a demographically representative picture of all new teachers.

Additionally, this study relied on a sample of convenience. This is problematic because of its limitations in diversity of experiences. The fact that participants were a self-selected group leads the researcher to assume that these teachers were feeling more burned out than were other new teachers, thus expressed more extreme conditions than would their less burned out colleagues. This limitation could have been addressed by the inclusion of a comparison group of teachers self-reporting low levels of burnout.

Lastly, this research did not measure participants' personalities. Certain individual traits, particularly the personality trait of neuroticism, have been linked to burnout in teachers. With more measures in place, a more robust picture of the data would have emerged.

**Implications for Future Research**

There is a demonstrated need more research directed specifically at new teachers. Goddard and Goddard (2006) suggest that burnout in new teachers may begin in the university programs that prepare students for the career of teaching. More research is needed to verify this suggestion and to present solutions to this issue.

Most specifically, research measuring burnout in pre-service teachers before and after implementing behavior management interventions is needed. This research would add valuable insight into a substantial cause of burnout in new teachers.

### **Overall Significance of the Study**

As a student in a rigorous teacher preparation program, I saw burnout in the majority of teachers working at my student teaching school-site. The lunch room was not a place of community building or engagement; but rather a gathering of collective misery and disappointment. Rather than being inspired to join these professionals in their noble cause of educating our nation's youth, I was discouraged by what I perceived as apathetic negativity. However, this teaching experience inspired me to learn more of the state of the profession from teachers' own perspectives and to investigate ways to improve it.

My student teaching experience made me want to explore the causes of burnout and find solutions in order to prevent future new teachers from sharing my experience. The aim of my research is to improve wellbeing for teachers with the goal of increasing retention by making teaching a more fulfilling career.

### **About the Author**

Kaila Sanford graduated from Mills College with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in 2011. Following rewarding work as a caregiver to two wonderful children, Kaila was motivated to become a teacher in 2014. After completing her Multiple Subject Teaching Credential in December 2015, she was inspired to complete her Master's of Science in Education. Upon graduation Kaila is excited to see where her passion for learning and professional engagement will take her.

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