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# Teacher Burnout: Locus of Control and its Correlation to Teacher Burnout and Job Satisfaction

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TEACHER BURNOUT: LOCUS OF CONTROL AND ITS CORRELATION TO  
TEACHER BURNOUT AND JOB SATISFACTION

Thesis submitted to  
The Graduate College of  
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Education Specialist  
In School Psychology

By

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August 6, 2008

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### Abstract

Teacher burnout is a significant problem in education today. While studies have researched the possible reasons behind it and the effect it has on students and teachers, this study proposed to investigate the correlation between teacher burnout, locus of control and job satisfaction. Surveys were sent to 102 teachers who taught kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in two school districts in Southeastern Ohio. Of the 53 surveys that were returned, 28% of the teachers demonstrated burn out, 40% were dissatisfied with their jobs, and 20% had an external locus of control. There was a moderate correlation between the Rotter IE Scale, which measures locus of control, and the Teacher Burnout Scale. There was no significant relationship between the Rotter IE Scale and the Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire.

## Chapter I

### Literature Review

Teacher burnout has been an ongoing problem in school systems worldwide. When teachers experience burnout, they become less effective and often leave the profession. Thus teacher burnout leads to teacher retention issues (Fore, Martin, & Bender, 2002). School districts are in need of suggestions as to how to retain these teachers. Research in this area may lead to new policies being implemented in order to help all teachers adjust to the field and therefore elevate their job satisfaction.

The purpose of this study was to determine how teacher locus of control, burn out and job dissatisfaction are related. Hopefully this information will help educators determine what will help the teacher to be more resilient to burnout.

#### *Locus of Control*

Locus of control can be described as a continuum ranging from internal to external (Lunenburg & Cadavid, 1992). It is a personality orientation characterized either by the belief that one can control events by one's own efforts (internal locus of control) or that the future is determined by forces outside one's control (external locus of control) (Strickland, 2006). An external locus of control may cause teachers to feel like everything that is happening in their classrooms is out of their control. Yet teachers with internal control feel that they can be the change agents in their lives and have control over what is going on in their environment (Lunenburg & Cadavid, 1992)

Teachers with an external locus of control, feel as if they have no control on what direction their lives are taking. If teachers are stressed they are likely to have less job

satisfaction. Whether one believes that one has control over their world has a significant impact on how the stress in their life affects them. The teacher with an external locus of control may be affected more negatively by stress in the workplace because the teacher perceives the stress as something he or she cannot make stop or go away (Hoyos & Kallus, *n.d.*).

Locus of control has been the focus of much research. Locus of control may help to explain much about one's perceived stress in the workplace. If a teacher is feeling stressed in the workplace but feels that they have no control over this stress, it is more likely that they will be impacted more negatively by this stress (Hoyos & Kallus, *n.d.*). Teachers who feel they are more burnt out have been found to have an external locus of control. They felt like they have fewer coping strategies or perceived past reinforcement strategies as outside their control (Lunenburg & Cadavid, 1992).

On the other hand, there are teachers who believe they control what happens in their lives, those with internal locus-of-control, report lower anxiety and higher self esteem (Schultz, 2001). These teachers are less negatively impacted by stress in the workplace than teachers with an external locus of control. This appears to be because they are more apt to attempt to change whatever is causing the stress (Rydell & Henricsson, 2004).

Stress in the workplace has a direct effect on one's job satisfaction. Stress in the workplace and low job satisfaction can result in burnout. Teacher burnout consists of three stages: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. In the first stage the teacher feels no emotional strength is left and cannot help others emotionally. The next stage consists of developing a negative and

callous attitude towards others in the school. Finally in the last stage the teacher is no longer able to fulfill his/her school responsibilities effectively (Iwanicki, 1983) is Career burnout is a threat to members of the workforce (Teven, 2007). Burnout in teaching is a topic that has received considerable attention in research and is responsible for the loss of many teachers from the profession (Friedman, 1995).

Several research studies have investigated teacher burnout (Bibou, Stogiannidou & Kiosseoglou, 1999; Cunningham, 2006; Fore III, Martin & Bender, 2002; Forey, Christensen & England, 1994; Friedman, 1991; Friedman & Farber, 1992; Hoyos & Kallus, *Academic Search Premier*; Ishiyama, McClure, Hart & Amico, 1999; Lunenburg & Cadavid, 1992; Pines, 2002; Rottier, Kelly & Tomhave, 2001; Rydell & Henricsson, 2004; Schwab, Jackson & Schuler, 1986; Stern & Cox, 1993; Teven, 2007; Waugh & Judd, 2003; Whiteman, Young & Fisher, 2001). These studies focused on the reasons behind burnout, the situations when it occurs and information on speed of burnout. burnout and who burns out fastest. There is literature on what to do when a teacher burns out and how to take steps to keep from burning out.

#### *Why Do Teachers Burnout?*

Role conflict, role ambiguity, colleague social support, contingent punishment, participation in decision making, autonomy and individual expectations for the job are factors which have been tested and found to have a significant relationship with burnout (Schwab, Jackson & Schuler, 1986). Teacher burnout is affected by the relationship that is established with their administrators, their school districts and their communities as well as their students (Rottier, Kelly, & Tomhave, 2001). The majority of teachers agree that students are less respectful than they were in the past. More experienced teachers

state that they do not enjoy teaching like they used to and blame that on the discipline of students, the lack of support from the administration and the lack of caring and involvement of the community (Rottier, Kelly & Tomhave, 2001).

Teacher burnout is related to the teacher's perceptions of their work environment (Bibou Nakou & Kiosseoglou, 1999). The teachers in this study have been found to be ambivalent about the effectiveness of their strategies, since no clear pattern and consistency of actions emerged when they were considering dealing with specific misbehavior problems. For instance, the teachers that were the most ambivalent and had no clear discipline strategies experienced more symptoms of teacher burnout (Bibou-Nakou & Kiosseoglou, 1999).

#### *Effects of Burnout on Teachers*

Teacher burnout leads to emotional exhaustion, low levels of depersonalization and low levels of personal accomplishment. Male teachers have been found to be consistently more burdened with emotional exhaustion than female teachers (Bibou-Nakou, & Kiosseoglou, 1999).

Teacher's health, mental and physical, is affected by burnout. When experiencing burnout, teachers experience a sense of depersonalization with a diminished sense of accomplishment. They become frustrated and exhausted. Teachers with a high incident of burnout have shown deficits in their mental states (Hoyos & Kallus, *n.d.*).

Some studies have indicated that years of teaching experience was not significantly related to job satisfaction. Low job satisfaction has been an indication of teacher burnout (Hoyos & Kallus, *n.d.*). However, a study conducted by Friedman



(1991) indicates that the level of teacher burnout rises with age and years of experience in teaching and reaches a peak at the age of 41-45 and then declines.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between locus of control, burnout, and job dissatisfaction.

Hypothesis: It is hypothesized that teachers with an external locus of control as indicated on the Rotter I-E scale will have a lower job satisfaction and higher burnout than teachers with an internal locus of control.

1. There is a significant relationship between locus of control, as measured by the Rotter Scale and level of teacher burnout as measured by The Teacher Burnout Scale.
2. There is a significant relationship between locus of control, as measured by the Rotter Scale and teacher job satisfaction as measured by the Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire

## Chapter II

### Method

#### *Participants*

Primary and Secondary teachers that were employed in two Southeastern Ohio school districts participated in this study. The teachers were both male (21%) and female (79%) and ranged from 24 years of age to 66 years of age. One hundred and two surveys were distributed and 53 teachers returned the surveys; 14% were between the ages of 20 and 30, 38% were between the ages of 31 and 40, 29% were between the ages of 41 and 50 and 2% were over 61. Their teaching experience varied from one year to 36 years. The 53 teachers that returned the surveys had the following makeup: 41% had 1-10 years experience, 35% had 11 to 20 years experience, 10% had 21 to 30 years experience and 12% had 31 to 40 years experience. There were more teachers that taught regular education as opposed to special needs; 32% of them were Special Education teachers and 68% were Regular Education teachers, 47% had a Bachelors Degree and 53% had a Masters Degree. All teachers from two school districts in Southeastern Ohio were surveyed. The school districts are rural districts with a low socioeconomic status. The students are mainly white with less than 1% being a minority.

#### *Instruments*

Several measures were used to assess teacher burnout and locus of control. The Teacher Burnout Scale, developed by Seidman Zager in 1987, was used to assess teacher burnout. This survey contains 21 self-report items on a six point likert scale. This survey takes about 10 minutes to complete and assesses four factors that authors found relevant

to burnout: career satisfaction, perceived administrative support, coping with job-related stress, and attitudes toward students.

The original Teacher Burnout Scale contained 65 items which were factor analyzed into the existing 21 items. Test-retest reliability coefficients were reported as; .82 for career satisfaction, .78 for perceived administrative support, .56 for coping with significant on all three factors. For the purposes of this study, the Revised Teacher Burnout Scale was used with a total of 21 items.

The Teacher Job Satisfaction questionnaire, developed in 1984 by Paula Lester, was used to assess job satisfaction. The TJSQ contains 77 self-report items on a five point likert scale. This questionnaire takes about 20 minutes to complete and explores nine factors that the authors found to be significant to teacher job satisfaction; supervision (14 items), colleagues (10 items), working conditions (7 items), pay (7 items), responsibility (8 items), work itself (9 items), advancement (5 items), security (3 items), and recognition (3 items). Half of the 77 statements in the final questionnaire were written in the positive form, while the other half were written in the negative form to avoid response bias. The Reliability coefficients of each factor was significant; .92 supervision, .82 colleagues, .82 work itself, .83 working conditions, .80 pay, .73 responsibility, .81 advancement, .71 security, and .74 recognition.

The Rotter Internal-External Scale is a 29-item forced choice scale. This questionnaire was developed by Julian Rotter in 1966 and takes about ten minutes to complete. Original research in formulating this scale used correlations from the questionnaire answers to a person's behaviors and personalities. It is a generalized measure of internal vs. external locus of control. Questions are intended to focus

exclusively on an individual's belief about the nature of the world, in other words, how one perceives his or her control of reinforcement. Rotter's data indicated that scores on the I-E scale exhibited sufficient convergent and discriminant validity and satisfactory internal and test-retest reliability (Beretvas, Suizzo, Durham, & Yarnell, 2008) The scale is scored by summing the number of external responses, that is, the higher the score, the more external the person is.

### *Procedure*

Permission to solicit teacher participation was obtained in a meeting with the principals of each school. A letter was drafted by the researcher and distributed to each of the teachers explaining the process of the survey and the confidentiality therein.

A description of the study was then given to the principals of each participating school. The principle investigator discussed the study's participation requirements (completion of the three rating scales). Participating teachers read an anonymous informed consent form (see Appendix A). The participating teachers were given the questionnaires to complete. The teachers indicated on the forms what grade level they taught. Confidentiality of the responses was ensured because the teachers did not put their names on the forms and deposited the completed rating scales into a designated box. The principle investigator scored the completed rating scales and analyzed the results.

## CHAPTER III

### Results

The correlational study included 53 nonrandom participants. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to conclude if a correlation existed between an external locus of control and/or teacher burnout and job satisfaction. This study is considered correlational because the researcher was trying to identify a relationship between the two variables as compared to the Rotter IE Scale.

After all instrumentation was collected from participants, the researcher analyzed the data using a correlation coefficient which was computed using the Pearson's Product Moment. The correlation coefficient was analyzed to determine if the prediction study supports the hypothesis that an external locus of control is related to teacher burnout and/or job satisfaction.

When examining The Teacher Burnout Scale and its correlation to The Rotter IE Scale, it was determined that there was a correlation ( $r=0.450$ ) which is considered a moderate relationship. This correlation is significant ( $p<.05$ ). As shown in Table 1.1 a higher frequency of teacher burnout was correlated with an external locus of control.

Table 1.1

Correlation Between Locus of Control and Teacher Burnout

|         |                     | Rotter | TchBurn |
|---------|---------------------|--------|---------|
| Rotter  | Pearson Correlation | 1      | .450**  |
|         | Sig. (2-tailed)     |        | .001    |
|         | N                   | 53     | 53      |
| TchBurn | Pearson Correlation | .450** | 1       |
|         | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .001   |         |
|         | N                   | 53     | 53      |

When examining The Teacher Job Satisfaction questionnaire and The Rotter IE Scale, it was determined that there was no relationship ( $r=-.211$ ). There is not a significant relationship between the two scales as shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

Correlation Between Locus of Control and Job Satisfaction

|         |                     | Rotter | JobSat |
|---------|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Rotter  | Pearson Correlation | 1      | -0.211 |
|         | Sig. (2-tailed)     |        | .129   |
|         | N                   | 53     | 53     |
| TchBurn | Pearson Correlation | -0.211 | 1      |
|         | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .129   |        |
|         | N                   | 53     | 53     |

Calculations were performed to determine the incidence of burn out and external locus of control. Of the 53 teachers that completed surveys, 28% of them reported that they were burnt out and 20% reported having an external locus of control. Further

inspection revealed that 36% of the teachers were dissatisfied with their jobs. Of the 36% of those teachers, 40% of those teachers had an external locus of control.

### *Discussion*

As anticipated, it was determined that teacher burnout is moderately correlated with an external locus of control. When teachers feel situations are not under their control, they appear more likely to suffer from burnout. Some respondents to the survey made unsolicited comments to some of the questions asked on the questionnaires. A teacher that had displayed an external locus of control according to the Rotter IE Scale, stated that at one point, she had a “nervous breakdown.” She blamed her problems on the total lack of discipline throughout the entire school. She was frustrated by the fact that students had no consequences for their actions. She said she felt that she was teaching in an insane asylum and the inmates were in charge. This teacher also scored as having teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction. While this teacher may reflect an extreme example, it shows how devastating burnout can be for teachers.

Other teacher comments reflected internal locus of control. When one respondent was asked if behavior problems interfered with her teaching, she simply stated, “I do not allow it.” This teacher has been teaching for 15 years in the same grade level as a special education teacher. While other teachers blamed the socioeconomic status on whether or not their students come to class prepared. They handled this problem by keeping supplies in their classroom for the students who do not have what they need for class, so that the

issue of not being prepared is eliminated. These teachers are an example of an internal locus of control.

While there was no correlation between teacher satisfaction and locus of control, 40% of those who were dissatisfied with their jobs had an external locus of control. There appears to be some relationship which should be investigated further.

#### Recommendations

Teaching is stressful, and there are not many teachers who would tell you otherwise. Findings from this study suggest that there is a relationship between locus of control and teacher burnout. Teachers suffering from burnout may be helped through counseling or mentoring to change their attitude about their ability to change their environment. Preventative measures which empower teachers in decision making may help to reduce teacher burnout. Further studies are needed to examine the relationship between locus of control and teacher burnout.

#### *Limitations*

This study was limited by a small sample size. Two districts were assessed which limits the generalizability of this study. Results of this study may have been influenced by the sample district's socioeconomic status and geographic region. There may also have been situations specific to this district that prevents the results from being generalized to the general population of teachers. Also the study was voluntary; participants who chose not to answer may have different characteristics.

As an addition to this study, the effects of health and well-being could be surveyed and its correlation to teacher burnout and job satisfaction. Specific causes of



stress and the degree to which the stress is felt could also be examined to explore how they contribute to teacher burnout and job satisfaction.

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## Appendix

### **Anonymous Survey Consent**

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “Teacher Burnout: Locus of Control and its Correlation to Teacher Burnout and Job Satisfaction” designed to analyze how teachers with an external locus of control experience burnout quicker and have less job satisfaction. The study is being conducted by Dr. Sandra Stroebel and Kimberly Bevis from Marshall University. This research is being conducted as part of the thesis class requirements for Kimberly Bevis.

This survey is comprised of The Teacher Burnout Survey, The Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire and the Rotter Internal-External Scale. It will take approximately 10 to 20 minutes to complete each survey. Your replies will be anonymous, so do not put your name anywhere on the form. There are no known risks involved with this study. Participation is completely voluntary and there will be no penalty or loss of benefits if you choose to not participate in this research study or to withdraw. If you choose not to participate you may either return the blank survey or you may discard it. You may choose to not answer any question by simply leaving it blank. Returning the survey in the envelope that will be provided in the counselor’s office indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply. If you have any questions about the study or in the event of a research related injury, you may contact Dr. Sandra Stroebel at 304-746-2032 or Kimberly Bevis at 606-371-0224

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-4303.

By completing this survey and returning it you are also confirming that you are 18 years of age or older.

Please keep this page for your records.