

TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE FACTORS WHICH LEAD TO TEACHER  
BURNOUT IN SPECIAL EDUCATORS APPLY TO  
REGULAR CLASSROOM TEACHERS?

MASTER'S PROJECT

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## Dedication

This project is dedicated to my family who encouraged me to further my education.

## Table of Contents

Approval Page.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Chapter One-Introduction.....	1
Purpose Statement.....	2
Definition of Terms.....	3
Limitations and Assumptions.....	3
Significance.....	4
Chapter Two-Review of the Literature.....	5
Burnout.....	5
Factors Leading to Burnout in Regular Educators.....	10
Burnout in Special Education Teachers.....	15
Ways to Avoid Teacher Burnout.....	19
Chapter Three-Design.....	22
Subjects.....	22
Setting.....	22
Instrumentation.....	22
Data Collection.....	23
Data Analysis.....	24
Chapter Four-Results.....	25
Table One.....	30
Chapter Five-Summary & Conclusions & Implications.....	31
Conclusions.....	32
Implications.....	33
References.....	34
Appendices.....	36
Sample permission letter to principal.....	37
Sample letter to regular educators.....	38
Sample survey.....	39

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The problems of stress, burnout, and resulting job change among educators have become areas of great concern in recent years. Teacher burnout has been discussed in the educational literature, and has been associated with a high level of stress experienced by teachers. The teaching profession is facing hard times. Many school districts are cutting back on funding. Additionally, teachers are faced with the stresses of students who have adverse attitudes. They experience verbal and emotional abuse all at a very low rate of pay. It is no wonder that teacher burnout is at an all time high.

“Teaching is a vulnerable occupation that is characterized by much higher-than-average rates of turnover,” (Dworkin 1978). Many educators today are not staying in the teaching profession. More and more, we are seeing teachers who are burnt out. Additionally, there is a sharp decline of recruitment into teacher training since 1982 (Wellington, 1986). Noted educational specialist Anthony Cedoline affirms that, “it becomes progressively more difficult to leave the job at work, because the pressure of the job follows the worker home (1982). He goes on to explain that these constant stressors tend to create repeated fight or flight reactions that drain the workers’ energies and affect their personal lives (Cedoline 1982). This seems especially true for teachers because they take their work and problems home with them.

The level of job satisfaction has been proved to be linked to the teacher’s perceptions of his/her students. Most teachers find their jobs to be very rewarding. However, other teachers are not finding their experience to be so fulfilling. Most teachers begin their career with a high energy level and positive attitude. They seem to want to make the subjects (that they are teaching)

exceptionally interesting to the students and show them (the students) that they really care. However, after a few years of teaching, a certain type of midlife crisis sets in. This crisis is surrounded by fear, insecurity, and anxiety. Gone is the joy of teaching. However, one question remains. What causes teachers to burnout and leave the teaching profession?

This project intended to answer the above question. Through the review of the literature, the author had identified which factors lead to burnout in special educators. However, it is unclear in the literature whether these factors lead to burnout in regular educators as well. The author designed a questionnaire to be administered to regular education teachers to compare and contrast burnout in regular educators and special educators. This questionnaire was distributed to regular education teachers *only* to find out whether the stated causes of burnout in special educators also cause burnout in regular educators. This information provided insight regarding burnout among educators generally, and determined possible ways of prevention.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between factors affecting burnout of special educators and burnout in regular educators. The research question investigated was, “to what extent do factors which lead to teacher burnout among special educators apply to regular classroom teachers?”

The author attempted to answer the above question by administering a seventeen question survey to a group of regular education teachers. Fourteen of the questions were asked to be rated on a four item Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Three of the items were short answer questions. The researcher asked subjects to complete and return the

questionnaire as a part of this study. The questionnaire provided insight regarding burnout among educators generally, and determine possible ways of prevention.

### **Definition of Terms**

Burnout- “Exhaustion, depersonalization, a sense of reduced personal accomplishment, chronic fatigue, depression, and a desire to withdraw” (Dworkin 1979).

Regular Education Teacher-Any teacher whose certification indicates no special training for working with children with disabilities.

Special Education Teacher- Any teacher whose certificate indicates training for working with children labeled learning disabled, developmentally disabled, or multiple handicapped.

Stress- “A mentally or emotionally disruptive or upsetting condition occurring in response to adverse external influences and capable of affecting physical health, usually characterized by increased heart rate, a rise in blood pressure, muscular tension, irritability, and depression” (Webster 1993).

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

This study was generalizable to teachers in schools which encompass grades 1 -6. Additionally, the population of the study was limited to one area of Ohio. This limited the study’s generalizability. Moreover, the teachers were filling out the survey based on self report. This could indicated personal bias. Lastly, the questionnaire was condensed to one page. It is feared that a lengthy questionnaire would discourage it’s completion.

## **Significance**

There are many benefits to this study. The most significant being that if teachers and administrators can see the warning signs of burnout, then measures can be taken to help the individual who is burnt out before they leave the profession. It also examined whether the same factors that cause burnout in regular education teachers, also caused burnout special education teachers. Additionally, inservice on prevention of burnout can be formulated and presented to the staff to help eliminate this problem. Those interventions may be the key to preventing burnout in teachers. Furthermore, this study can help administrators identify which regular education teachers would be suitable in the inclusion classroom and be not as likely to experience burnout from working with special needs students.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature related to teacher burnout. More specifically, the chapter covers the area of burnout in general. This section defines burnout, and identifies signs and symptoms of teachers who are burnt out. The next part of the review discusses the causes of burnout in regular educators. Burnout in special educators is revealed in the third division. This part of the literature review lists the causes of burnout exclusive to special education teachers. The last section suggests ways to prevent burnout.

#### **Burnout**

The concept of burnout began in the 1970's (Gold, 1985). Since then, one of the major concepts of understanding burnout is that "there is no one commonly accepted definition," (Gold, 1985). Dr. Christina Maslach (1985), an active researcher in the field of burnout, describes burnout victims as professionals "who lose all concern, all emotional feelings for the persons they work with, and come to treat them in detached or even dehumanized ways," . Anthony Dworkin (1982), educational researcher, defines job burnout as "exhaustion, depersonalization, a sense of reduced personal accomplishment, chronic fatigue, depression, and a desire to withdraw," . Still another definition comes from researchers Freudenberger and Richelson. They define burnout as a "state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, a way of life, or a relationship that failed to produce the expected reward," (Gold, 1985).

"Some persons who work in people-oriented jobs tend to experience more burnout than employees in other occupations," (Matthews, 1990). In other

words, since teachers work with people all day, they have a greater chance of burning out than professionals who do not work with people. Moreover, “people involved in prolonged, constant, intensive interaction with other people...are susceptible to a psychological malaise causing burnout syndrome,” (Holbrook, 1984). It has also been reported in the literature that the symptoms of burnout are similar to those of depression. Included are hopelessness, emptiness, helplessness, and sadness. “People burnout slowly, moving at their own pace along a continuum until they reach a breaking point and burnout becomes apparent,” (Matthews, 1990).

In a study conducted by the National Education Association, 1/3 of all teachers surveyed stated that if they were “starting over again” they would choose *not* to become teachers (Farber, 1984). Additionally, only 60% of teachers report that they plan to stay in the teaching profession until retirement (Farber, 1984). These statistics demonstrate that there are many teachers who are dissatisfied with their careers, but, who will become victims of this burnout syndrome?

Holbrook (1984) claims that secondary school teachers and those with less teaching experience exhibited the highest potential for burnout. This statement is reiterated by researcher Anne Lobosco (1992), who found that high school teachers reported low job satisfaction. Males also are more susceptible to burnout than females (Holbrook 1984). Holbrook goes on to explain that “males tended to show more negative attitudes toward their students than did females, while high school and middle school/junior high school teachers had more negative attitudes toward students than did elementary teachers,” (Holbrook, 1984).

There have been many causes of burnout in the teaching profession. Among the causes, job stress rates high on the list. “Teacher stress has been

attributed to the routine of the school day and the amount of time spent in non-instructional activities, the size of the school, low salaries, discipline problems, and mixed ability groupings," (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983). "Continual exposure to stressful situations seriously depletes the teacher's emotional and physical resources, this leaving the individual unable to cope successfully with further stress," (Beck & Gargiulo, 1983). Professor Lloyd Campbell, Dr. Alfred Bloch, and Dr. Christina Maslach (1983) have identified other effects of stress that lead to burnout.

Physical diseases, and disruption of personal and professional lives are cited as stress causers. (Campbell, Bloch, and Maslach, 1983). They are followed by destructive feelings, emotional stress, loss of concern and detachment from students, and a dehumanized view of students (Campbell, Bloch, and Maslach, 1983). According to educational researcher Barry Farber,

"teachers who display these symptoms and become burned out may be less sympathetic toward students, may have a lower tolerance for frustration in the classroom, may plan for their classes less often or less carefully, may fantasize or actually plan on leaving the profession, may feel frequent emotional or physical exhaustion, may feel anxious, irritable, depressed, and in general, may feel less committed and dedicated to their work."

However, stress should not be thought of as the equivalent to burnout. The difference is that "stress may have both positive and negative effects," burnout is a negative effect (Farber, 1984). Therefore burnout, can be caused by stress. By being stressed out, [having] no buffers, no support system, no rewards, burnout can occur (Farber, 1984). Stress in the work setting may result from uncertainty, role overload or under load, abrupt and unplanned organizational and role change, and changes and poor job design," (Bensky &

Colarelli, 1984).

Researchers Holland and Seyle (1982), describe numerous diseases associated with stress. They cite “diseases of the kidney, heart, and blood vessels as being closely related to the degree of stress being experienced by an individual,” (Holland and Seyle, 1982). Stress is also a factor in the cause of diseases such as arthritis, allergies, and other inflammatory diseases of the skin and eyes (Holland and Seyle, 1982). In a Chicago teacher’s union survey, 56.5% reported physical and /or mental illness as a direct result of their jobs and stress (Pajack & Blase, 1982). In the same survey, 84% of the teachers surveyed affirmed the existence of health hazards in their profession (Pajack & Blase, 1982). They targeted stress as the major force affecting their health (Pajack & Blase, 1982).

Costs are another factor related to stress and burnout. “Medical care costs of stress-related illness, compounded by the educations costs of absenteeism and decreased teacher effectiveness, are staggering,” (Pajack & Blase, 1982). The ultimate effect of this stress is that teachers tend to withdraw from the profession. They become victims of teacher burnout and can no longer cope with the stress caused by teaching (Pajack & Blase, 1982).

It is for this reason, that warning signs indicating teacher burnout have been identified. According to Anthony Cedoline (1982), there are five levels of burnout. They include physical, intellectual, social, psycho-emotional, and spiritual (Cedoline 1982). Physical burnout includes constant fatigue, physical drain, and minor illness (Cedoline 1982). Within the physical realm of burnout, are three stages of further burnout. The first is mild burnout and is described as “short bouts of irritability, fatigue, worry, and frustration,” (Holbrook, 1984). The second is moderate burnout which is described the same way as mild burnout, however, the symptoms of mild burnout last two weeks or more (Holbrook,

1984). Last, is severe burnout which is defined as, “ physical ailments, such as ulcers, chronic back pain and migraine headaches,” (Holbrook, 1984).

Teachers are most likely to experience mild to moderate burnout (Holbrook, 1984). However, severe burnout symptoms could lead to greater problems because the feelings have persisted and manifested themselves physically (Holbrook, 1984).

Intellectual burnout is also a problem prevalent in educators. Symptoms of this type of burnout may include obsessive thinking about work, time management problems, and deficiencies in processing of information (Cedoline 1982). Cedoline (1982), goes on to explain that many times, “individuals who are quite proficient in management of details are subject to distress when faced with an overload of information....”

Social burnout symptoms such as marriage to the job, social withdrawal, and disrupted relationships at home are reasons for burnout (Cedoline 1982). Many times the teacher brings home their anger and takes it out on the spouse, children, or the family pet (Cedoline 1982). As a person reaches this level of burnout, avoidance behaviors become common. These include telephone phobia and the fear of meeting or talking to other people (Cedoline 1982).

Psycho-emotional burnout symptoms such as denial, paranoia, and dehumanization are common to this stage (Cedoline 1982). Dehumanization can be especially damaging in the classroom situation. Cedoline (1982), explains that “persons who dehumanize others rob themselves of their own humanity by creating a wall around themselves.” This wall could negatively affect many children in the classroom and impair learning.

Finally, there is spiritual burnout. Symptoms of this stage include absenteeism and lower quality of work (Cedoline 1982). At this stage, the worker does not want to be in the work environment. If the stage persists,

vandalism and pilferage may be the final result (Cedoline 1982).

“In some ways, burnout is a type of future shock-not being able to cope with today’s youngsters or with changing educational philosophy,” (Campbell, 1983). Teachers that fall into this category complain that they do not understand the children. They claim they are “out of touch with the students because they do not know how to deal with [them] on drugs or with an increasing lack of respect for rules and authority,” (Campbell, 1983). Teachers who display this type of behavior usually also have low morale. Consequently, students may suffer from low self esteem because of the teacher. (Beck, 1983). This can cause job dissatisfaction. “If a teacher does not receive job satisfaction, his mental health as well as his teaching effectiveness will be jeopardized,” (Campbell, 1983). “...He or she is a serious problem to his or her students-as well as to himself or herself,” (Campbell, 1983).

### **Factors Leading to Burnout in Regular Educators**

“Certainly anyone in any profession is susceptible to these [burnout] symptoms, but research into this phenomenon has isolated certain variables that can increase the likelihood of teacher burnout,” (Holbrook, 1984). But, what is it that makes teachers burnout more than other professionals? Additionally, what are the characteristics of a regular education teacher who will likely burnout?

Anthony Dworkin (1991) describes the profile of a regular education teacher who will be a possible burnout candidate. He claims that teachers who are not committed to education are the first to burnout. Professor Yvonne Gold supports the above notion. She says, “employees most likely to burnout are young, inexperienced workers; those supervised by others; clerical, management, and professional staff; and perhaps male employees,” (Gold,

1985).

Regular educators who teach in very large school districts or very small districts will burnout (Dworkin 1991) . Incorporated with this is the student/teacher ratio. Regular educators tend to burnout “due to the number of pupils for which the teacher is responsible for,” (Beck, 1983). “Regular educators have historically served larger numbers of children,” (Beck, 1983).

Dworkin (1991) also cites low wages as a cause of teacher burnout . Anne Barner (1982), teacher of socially and emotionally disturbed children, also claims that, “65% of regular classroom teachers cite financial problems as a reason for leaving the profession.” The problem may not seem apparent, however, it becomes more of a larger problem if the career ladder concept is in effect (Frith & Mims, 1985). “Only a few states have formally accepted the career ladder concept...for educators,” (Frith & Mims, 1985). “Teachers are dropping out...because they cannot survive on their salaries, which in some states are near the poverty level...,” (Barner, 1982).

Another reason for burnout include red tape. Many regular education teachers feel that the amount of paper work that they must do is overwhelming. In a study conducted by Professor Jeff Bensky (1980), regular educators cited diagnosis and assessment (including paperwork) as the number one stressful condition they faced . In another study concurred with the above statement saying that, “overall, teachers tended to agree with items expressing negative attitudes about the preassessment process and to disagree with items expressing positive attitudes toward the preassessment process,” (Inman, 1988). Regular educators with the most negative attitude toward preassessment had six or more years of experience (Inman, 1988).

Along with red tape is the idea of the bureaucracy system. In a survey of regular educators, the teachers felt that, “ the system treated children as the last,

rather than the primary concern," (Farber, 1983). In addition, Anthony Cedoline claims that teachers are not trained "how to negotiate one's way through the bureaucracy," (Cedoline, 1982). This lack of training can be a cause for burnout.

Low morale and motivation is also a factor contributing to teacher burnout. Low morale can come from administrators and co-workers. In a survey of regular education teachers, 71% replied that supervisors are supportive, however, only 20% said that the support was at the building level (Barner, 1982). Morale is also an issue for most administrators. One of the administrators' goals is to keep staff morale high (Andrew 1985). The thought is that if morale is kept high, teachers will be less likely to burnout. "A teacher's motivation is most likely to infect students with interest in a subject," (Holbrook, 1984). "Ironically, maintaining this enthusiasm can be an exhausting feat that further aggravates burnout potential,"(Holbrook, 1984).

Usually morale is low in schools where there is little support from the administration (Campbell, 1983). In many cases, "psychological assaults against teachers (treats, harassments, intimidation, etc.) and the more serious physical assaults (Lacerations, bruises, etc.) show teachers just how vulnerable they are without protection or support from administrators," (Campbell, 1983). "Since some administrators make them (teachers) feel responsible for being the targets of violence, teachers can become anxious and fearful," (Campbell, 1983). They may feel outraged and frustrated because of the lack of support (Campbell, 1983). They often retreat to themselves because they feel as if no one can help them (Campbell, 1983).

Discipline problems also make the list of reasons for teacher burnout. In a study conducted by Anne Barner, 70% of teachers cited discipline as one of the hardest parts of a teacher's job (Barner, 1982). In that same study, 78% of



regular educators believed that students today do not show a high degree of respect for their teachers (Barner, 1982). A recent article in the National School safety magazine supports this theory as well. It stated “mis-behavior-induced stress is a principle cause of teacher burnout and is the main reason why teachers leave the profession (“School Safety,” 1995).

Public Law 94-142 is now considered a reason for regular education teacher burnout. The law states that, “children are to be placed in the least restrictive environment,” (Inman, 1988). However, “with the influx of exceptional students into the regular classrooms, teachers of non handicapped children often incur new and additional duties for which they either have limited or no formal training,” (Beck, 1983). In an attempt to provide the required services to special children, work overload is overwhelming (Beck, 1983). “School personnel are becoming more involved with team meetings; due process paperwork; and the development, administration, and monitoring of individualized education programs,” (Bensky, 1980). Additionally, many regular educators are forced into these situations with no training in working with exceptional children (Beck, 1983). “Consequently, these unfamiliar and different job responsibilities and expectations could lead to the development of stress,” (Bensky, 1980).

Public Law 94-142 has seemed to cause more stress for regular educators than special educators. The main reason for this is because the special educator’s role has not significantly changed. “They (special educators) are still providing direct service to handicapped children for most of the school day,” (Bensky, 1980). Regular classroom teachers are dealing with significantly modified role descriptions (Bensky, 1980). They are more involved with the paperwork (Individual Education Plans), but also with the direct one on one communication with special education students (Bensky, 1980). In a study of

regular educators regarding their attitudes toward special education, it was found that the “mainstreaming of students with learning difficulties is mandated by law, yet teachers are reporting this to have detrimental effects in terms of job satisfaction,” (Lobosco, 1992). “Working with students having learning difficulties is linked negatively to job satisfaction....,” (Lobosco, 1992).

Finally, training deficiencies are also a cause of teacher burnout. “Public professionals do not study the helping process and their own role in it,” (Cedoline 1982). In other words, Cedoline believes that teachers who are not properly trained, therefore burnout. Gold (1985) also agrees that “another factor which plays a part in bringing about teacher burnout is the inadequate professional training of the teacher.” “The teacher may be undertrained for his or her job or may be required to teach in a subject area other than his or her area of concentration during the teacher training period,” (Gold, 1985).

## **Burnout in Special Education Teachers**

Burnout in special education teachers varies from the typical reasons for burnout in regular education teachers. This fact is proven by the increase in time administrators are spending in recruiting, hiring, and providing orientation for new staff members, primarily due to the high turnover rate in special education personnel (Holland, 1982). But, how does one predict the burnout of the special educator? It has already been stated that stress is a cause of burnout in all educators. However, what specifically causes stress in special educators?

“The best predictors of perceived stress for special educators were clear role expectations and discrepancy between teacher’s perception of the role versus others’ expectations of the teacher’s role,” (Holland, 1982). A study conducted by Professor Richard Holland (1982), found that “the perception of job-related stress was increased by a discrepancy between special educators expectations and other’s expectations for the special educator’s educational role.” It is important to note “that...role clarity variables had more impact on stress...,” (Holland, 1982). Therefore the teacher’s role in the school needs to be clearly defined to avoid this type of stress which may lead to burnout.

Public Law 94-142 also is a leading cause of stress and burnout. This law states that children must be placed in the least restrictive environment possible (Inman, 1988). In other words, this act guarantees that every student who is identified as handicapped, to a free and appropriate education. Because of this law, many regular education teachers are forced to work with special needs children in their classroom. Many of these regular education teachers have agreed that, “working with students with learning disabilities has a negative effect on them,” (Lobosco & Newman, 1992). Due to this attitude, many *special educators* are faced with taking the “flack” from the regular

education teachers regarding the mainstreaming of special needs students.

Because of Public Law 94-142, there is a “growing role confusion, resentments, and interpersonal problems between regular classroom teachers and special educators, and administrators,” (Holland, 1982). Not only do these attitudes sometimes lead to resistance to the inclusion of special education students in the classroom, but resistance at the federal state, and sometimes local bureaucratic regulations and procedures related to the education of the handicapped (Holland, 1982).

Paperwork also topped the reasons for job burnout in special educators. A study conducted by Ann Barner (1982), revealed that, 63% of the respondents said that too much time is spent on paperwork exclusive to special educators. The majority of the paperwork included writing Individual Education Plans (IEP's). Prior to a student's placement in special education, an IEP must be written. “The IEP identifies specific goals and objectives that will be addressed within the special education setting,” (Sires, 1993). The level of mastery and the projected schedule for attaining the goals and objectives are also determined at the placement meeting. “This process marks the beginning of a long process of documentation and record keeping necessary to remain in compliance with the law,” (Sires, 1993).

“Special education teachers bare the brunt of this paperwork,” (Sires, 1993). They spend a significant part of their day on clerical tasks (Sires, 1993). “Special educators must fill out forms such as parent notification, IEP development and monitoring, local pupil referral and pupil data collection forms, and record-keeping procedures related to direct pupil instructional activities in addition to pupil grading and evaluation,” (Sires, 1993). “The documentation special educators must keep may be an overwhelming task for many teachers,” (Sires, 1993). In an exclusive interview, one special educator was quoted as

saying, "I'm overwhelmed with other responsibilities besides teaching," (Correa, 1990).

In addition to the paperwork, many special educators work with students who are not independent in self help skills, (Correa, 1990). The teacher then becomes involved in performing custodial tasks. In these cases, the teacher spends most of the day feeding, and toileting the children (Correa, 1990). These conditions are circumstances that a regular educator does not have to face. Therefore, it is an additional symptom of burnout exclusive to special education teachers.

Another cause of burnout in special educators is that "student progress is slow and characterized by the difficult task of determining effective instructional methods for individuals who have not met with success in regular education," (Sires, 1993). Many times, the special education teachers have "unrealistic expectations regarding pupil progress and perceived lack of success as a teacher," (Sires, 1993). "Due to the students' lower abilities, these teachers also experience minimal and infrequent pupil progress," (Beck, 1983). Special needs students, will learn and progress only under very specified and well-defined learning conditions (Dedrick, 1990). Additionally, "many students who receive special education services have experienced previous failure resulting in low self-esteem and an unwillingness to attempt new things," (Sires, 1993).

"Given the complexity and severity of many special education students' needs, it is quite a responsibility to educate such youngsters appropriately," (Sires, 1993). However, the teacher may not take all of these factors into consideration. Therefore, he/she may feel instead that "the student's poor progress is the result of his or her own inadequate teaching," (Sires, 1993). These factors also add to the stress of the special educator.

Isolation is also a cause of stress leading to burnout. Many special

educators feel isolated from their peers (Sires, 1993). "This is complicated by physical isolation: many special education classrooms (closets or basements) that are left over after regular education classes are placed," (Sires, 1993). "Despite the mandate of least restrictive environment and the wealth of research pointing to the success of integration, many handicapped students are served beyond the "mainstream of the school," (Sires, 1993).

Parent participation is also cited as a cause of burnout. In an interview with a special education teacher, she revealed that "lack of parental participation makes her job harder," (Godar, 1990). If parents will not reinforce what is going on at school, then it makes learning that much more difficult for the student (Godar, 1990). Because of the circumstances surrounding the special education student, many times additional work at home is required.

While lack of parent support is frustrating, so is lack of administrative support among special educators. Many times administrators, "fail to view problems of [special educators] seriously and [the administrator] overrules them without proper deliberation," (Frith & Mims, 1985). Additionally, 37% of special educators reported that they didn't have administrator [principal or vice principal] support in their schools (Barner, 1982). The teachers also felt that at the district level, the amount of support declined even further (Barner, 1982). In a randomly selected group of special educators, lack of administrative support rated in the top four reasons for burn out. (Sires, 1993).

What special educators look for in a supportive administrator are, "understanding of job requirements, support in disciplinary matters, and the same consideration n opportunities that are afforded to regular education teacher," (Sires, 1993). In a survey conducted by school psychologist Carolyn Sires (1993), special education personnel replied that "principals actively oppose central office decisions to place special education classes in their

schools.” These type of actions obviously set the stage for a poor working relationship.

There is no doubt that handicapped students have unusual needs that must be addressed. This often involves administrator involvement.

“Unfortunately, it appears that some of the frustration of the principal may be communicated to the teacher, and my contribute to the perception that the administrator is unsupportive and insensitive to teacher concerns,” (Sires, 1993).

### **Ways to Avoid Teacher Burnout**

Clearly, prevention and treatment of teacher stress and burnout should be paramount educational concerns, however, they are not. One of the most promising approaches to prevention is social support (Farber, 1984). “There is preliminary evidence to suggest that teacher centers and self help support groups for teachers are successful in reducing isolation, promising collegial super, renewing commitment and increasing teachers’ sense of professionalism,” (Farber, 1984). According to researchers Dedrick & Raschke (1990), There are six ways to avoid teacher burnout that encompass building on the social support system. They include:

“Establishing clear lines of authority and responsibility, soliciting teacher input for decision making, facilitating social support groups, involving staff in the selection process, involving teachers in the evaluation process by providing opportuneness for goal setting and self-evaluation, and encouraging mentoring relationships between veteran faculty and beginning teachers.”

“The support groups reduce teachers’ isolation and enable them to help each other cope with problems and fears,” (Holbrook, 1984).

Other ways to avoid burnout include involving the administrators. It is the administrator's job to make sure teachers, "understand job requirements [and] support [the teachers] in disciplinary matters..." (Sires & Tonnsen, 1993). School administrators play a vital role in teacher morale. Administrators can provide teachers with aides and administrative help, "offer guidance with curriculum, decisions, act as buffers in stressful situations, improve school/community relation reduce class size, foster increased communication, enforce school policies, and assure the physical well being of the faculty," (Campbell, 1983). By following these guidelines, teachers are less likely to burnout. Other suggestions include administrator sponsored workshops revolving around self-awareness and time management for the teachers (Holbrook, 1984). "The administrative support can go a long way toward relieving the sense of alienation many teacher under stress experience," (Holbrook, 1984). Additionally, workshops covering stress management have been found to be helpful. Some of the goals set for the stress workshops are "to reduce isolation that many teachers experience , to identify the sources of job related stress, to identify professional strengths and successful work experiences that participants can draw on to increase their satisfaction with teaching, and to form a plan to prevent or alleviate distress," (Campbell, 1983, p.113).

Other suggestions for the stress management workshops are based on the needs of the teachers and to demonstrate that no one solution to school stress exists (Campbell, 1983). Professor Yvonne Gold (1985) suggests that teacher awareness to stress is the key to preventing it. She suggests that teachers make a list to help them identify factors that lead to stress. Lastly, workshops focusing on teacher burnout and stress should be repeated often, no less than an annual basis (Frith & Mims, 1985).



Relaxation techniques are also a way to prevent burnout. "Meditation or relaxation is frequently mentioned in the literature as having stress reducing effects," (Gold, 1985). Furthermore, "physical exercise is recommended to relieve stress and tension that have built up during the day," (Holland, 1982). Physical exercise helps the body relax and relieve tension.

Hobbies and non school related activities also are a way to get away from it all. "Developing self expertise in another area enhances self esteem and self confidence, consequently rejuvenating the educator," (Holland, 1982).

Ironically, pre-service education is another area where burnout can be prevented. "Teacher education programs can help by preparing beginning teachers for the stress of a new job," (Holbrook, 1984). Teacher Janice Wendt suggests exploring and defining the teaching role clearly and simulating stress conditions during student teaching will help perspective teachers be more prepared and less likely to burnout (Wendt, 1980). Holbrook (1984), outlines a five phase model for alleviating stress for the use in preservice education."It entails identifying stress symptoms, analyzing their sources, developing a stress management plan, and implementing and evaluating the plan."

All in all, teacher burnout is a serious problem. "Our society cannot afford the loss of teachers from the teaching profession," (Campbell, 1983). Some ways of preventing burnout have been mentioned. However, more research is needed for this topic. "Field experiments need to be conducted to determine which preventative methods would be most beneficial in alleviating burnout among educators," (Holland, 1982). Teachers need to be aware of this problem before it has negative effects on their students.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Subjects**

The participants who were selected for this study were regular elementary teachers. These teachers were chosen randomly from a suburban elementary grade school which encompassed grades one through five.

#### **Setting**

The study was conducted in a suburban city of approximately 40,000 near Dayton, Ohio. The city was spread across 18.9 square miles. The community was established in 1810 and has grown since then. At present the areas contains approximately 650 businesses. Additionally, there are a total of nine public schools. Within this breakdown there are six elementary schools, one intermediate school, one junior high and one high school. The school district provides educational opportunities for almost 8,000 students.

The majority (89.3%) of the community is made of people of Caucasian origin. This is followed by African American (7%), Hispanic (1.6%), and other (2.1%). The average household income is between \$15,000 and \$24,000 according to the 1990 census. Most of the people in this area commute to Dayton for their jobs.

#### **Instrumentation**

After reviewing the literature, the author pinpointed factors that special educators cited as reasons for burnout. These factors were then formulated into questions to make up the survey that was to be given to the regular educators for completion.

To begin, the author constructed a questionnaire to collect data. The questions were related to the causes of burnout as identified in the review of the literature. Originally, fifteen questions were selected for the survey. They were asked to be answered using a four point Likert-type scale. The responses included the following categories, strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree.

Upon expert review, one question was omitted from the questionnaire to eliminate confusing or misleading questions and to ensure accurate interpretation of the results. Additionally, three open ended questions were added to the questionnaire. These questions were added to give the respondents the chance for listing personal reasons for burnout in case their reason was not listed in the original fourteen questions. These open ended questions were also added in hopes of giving the author more insight into what exactly makes teachers burnout. The questionnaire was designed so that the directions and the seventeen questions fit on a single side of one page. This was to encourage completion.

### **Data Collection**

Before distributing this questionnaire, the author first asked the principal's permission to do so. After approval was given, the author made copies of his approval letter along with an informational letter to be given to the teachers. A packet of both letters, the questionnaire, a pre-addressed envelope, and a sheet of incentive stickers were put together for the regular elementary teachers who were to complete the questionnaire.

Next, the author took the packets to the school and placed them in the regular education teachers' mailboxes. In the letter, the teachers were asked to complete the survey and return it to the author in the pre-addressed envelope.

The participants were given a time frame of two weeks to complete and return the enclosed questionnaire. Directions on the questionnaire for the first fourteen questions asked the teacher to circle the appropriate response to each question. Directions for the last three questions asked teachers to write in their responses. To ensure the return of as many surveys as possible, the author made a second request by sending a follow up letter with an attached questionnaire to remind teachers to please complete the questionnaire if they had not already done so. The follow up letter, along with a pre-addressed envelope were placed in the teacher's mailboxes one week before the questionnaires were due.

### **Data Analysis**

For the first fourteen questions, the author employed the use of percentage counts to help organize the data. These percentages were used on the questionnaire form for easy reference.

For the last three questions, frequency counts were used to see if additional forms of burnout could be added to the contrived list of fourteen factors. The author categorized these responses for the frequency counts and description.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

The results from the survey lead the author to many conclusions. A survey including fourteen Likert-type questions and three open ended questions was distributed to regular education teachers. The questions were formulated from the author's review of the literature and were based on the factors that cause burnout in special educators. It was the author's intent to determine if any of the factors already cited as causes of burnout in special educators also cause burnout in regular educators.

It was found that there were three common factors that lead to burnout in both regular educators and special educators. The review of the literature cited paperwork as one of the top five reasons for burnout in special educators. Furthermore, 100% of the respondents answered agree or strongly agree to the question asking if paperwork took up too much of their time. (Refer to Table One) These responses indicated that paperwork was a major cause of burnout for special educators and regular educators as well. The author was surprised at this result because special educators traditionally had more paperwork to complete compared to the regular educator. The additional paperwork included individual education plans in which the teachers decide upon goals for the student each year. This is in addition to grading and other clerical duties.

However, regular educators still cited paperwork as a major cause of burnout. Since they do not have the burden of completing the individual education plans, it was thought that their attitude toward paperwork would have been different than the special educator. However, regular educators as do special educators do feel overwhelmed with paperwork.

Another common factor between the two groups was the degree that

they felt support from central office personnel. Neither group felt that the central office supports them as teachers. None of the respondents answered strongly agree to the question asking about support from central office. (See Table One) It is possible that teachers do not feel support from the administration because they never hear any positive praise from the administration. Traditionally, administrators stay in their offices and never become personally involved in meeting the faculty unless there is another motive for doing so. Moreover, this fact leads to burnout in both regular and special educators.

Likewise, the third common element between the two groups emerged. Both special educators and regular educators agreed that they do not receive support at the building level from their principals. This fact can be seen in table one. As stated above, the lack of support seems to stem from the administrator who does not become personally involved with his faculty. This also is cited as a cause for burnout.

There were two factors that special educators cited as top five reasons for burnout that regular educators did not. The first referred to the question regarding number of students in the classroom. Special educators believed that they have too many students in their classes in order for them to work efficiently. Historically, special education classes are supposed to have less students than the regular education classroom. This is in order to ensure more individualized attention for the student. However, in recent years, the state has pushed the maximum number of students per class up to fifteen. Special educators believe that this is too many students in the class at one time. This factor is cited as a cause of burnout for special educators.

The other cause of burnout exclusive to special educators was whether special educators believed that they had respect from their peers. In the review of the literature, this was cited as a reason for burnout in special education

teachers. Regular educators all agreed that they did have respect from their peers (See Table One). The differences in opinions could be attributed to the fact that many regular educators do not believe that special educators are certified or that they teach anything of value to their students. This misconception is unfortunate, however tends to be a reason for burnout in special educators and not regular educators.

On the contrary are the two different factors that were exclusive to regular educators. Regular educators cited not having enough time to do all of their work at school as a reason for burnout. This difference could be attributed to the fact that traditionally, regular educators do have more students in the classroom. This leads to more grading, parent teacher conferences, and daily paperwork than a special educator might have to face.

Ironically, the other factor that burns out regular educators is having special needs students in their classroom. Many regular educators believe that they are not trained to work with these students. They find that fact that they are forced to work with them very frustrating. Regular educators are being forced more and more to keep special needs students in the classroom. Because of the passage of Public Law 94-142, students are to be placed in the least restrictive environment. Many times this environment is the regular classroom. Additionally, with the introduction to inclusion, more special needs students are being educated in the regular classroom. All of these factors allow for the onset of burnout in regular education teachers.

At the bottom of the survey the regular education teachers were given three open ended questions to answer. This part of the survey was designed to allow for more insight into the factors that burnout regular educators. The questions were also put there to see if there were any factors that made regular educators burnout that were not listed in the Likert-type survey.

The first question asked regular educators to define teacher burnout. While the responses differed, the majority of the respondents agreed that burnout included being tired of teaching. Other definitions that were mentioned were being overwhelmed and frustrated, having no support from administration, and teaching the same grade to many years in a row. All of these factors can be found as causes for burnout in the review of the literature. None of the responses were different than the information already researched by the author. It was the author's contention that this question did not lead to any additional help in determining causes of burnout in regular educators.

The second question asked teachers if they had ever experienced job burnout before. Nearly one-half (47%) of the respondents said that they had experienced burnout. Of the remaining respondents, 23% said that they sometimes felt burnout and 30% of the respondents said they have never felt burnt out. The author concluded that 70% of the respondents have felt teacher burnout at some point in their careers. This high percentage could be attributed to the fact that the majority of the teachers who filled out the survey had over 20 years of experience in the classroom.

The last question asked teachers to list three causes of burnout. The overwhelming majority of the teachers cited paperwork as a cause of burnout. The author concluded that this could be due to the fact that regular educators traditionally have more students in their classrooms than special educators. This would cause the regular educator to have more grading and clerical duties to complete.

The second cause of burnout most cited was administration. Regular educators believed that their administrators, (principals and central office) did not support their teachers. The author also found that this fact coincided with special educators. Stated simply, both groups of educators believed that they



had no support from their administration at any level.

The third factor regular educators cited as a cause of burnout was class size. Many regular educators felt that their classes are too large. They believe the classes must be smaller in order for effective instruction to take place. This fact also is a cause of burnout in special educators. They too believe the number of students in their classes must be reduced.

## Results Table One

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1) I have too many students in my class.	8%	31%	54%	8%
2) My principal provides me with encouragement.	8%	46%	38%	8%
3) My physical or mental health is negatively affected by my job.	23%	38%	23%	15%
4) Paperwork takes up much of my time.	46%	54%	0%	0%
5) I have too much parental involvement.	0%	15%	77%	8%
6) Morale at my school is low.	23%	54%	23%	0%
7) I believe central office supports the teachers.	0%	23%	23%	54%
8) I have enough time to get my work done at school.	0%	8%	23%	69%
9) My motivation for teaching has declined.	8%	15%	46%	31%
10) My room is physically isolated from other personnel.	8%	8%	38%	46%
11) I have respect from my peers.	38%	62%	0%	0%
12) I enjoy the challenge of working with special needs students.	15%	31%	46%	8%
13) I believe I am an effective teacher.	62%	38%	0%	0%
14) have a positive rapport with all of the teachers at my school.	15%	85%	0%	0%

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS**

In Chapter One, the author introduced the concept of teacher burnout in the form of an introduction. It was also in this chapter that the purpose of conducting the study was stated. The study's purpose was to determine the relationship between factors affecting burnout of special educators and burnout in regular educators. The research question investigated was, "to what extent do factors which lead to teacher burnout among special educators apply to regular classroom teachers?" Additionally, in this chapter terms were also defined. Those terms included burnout, regular education teacher, special education teacher, and stress. Furthermore, limitations and assumptions regarding the study were made. Finally, the significance of the study was determined to be that if teachers and administrators can see the warning signs of burnout, then measures can be taken to help the individual who is burnout out before they leave the profession.

Chapter Two involved reviewing the literature as a background for the study. This chapter was divided into the four subsections for easy reference. These sections included burnout, factors leading to burnout in regular educators, factors leading to burnout in special educators, and ways of preventing burnout. The author intended to use this section to determine whether factors causing burnout in regular educators had ever been coincided with factors that cause burnout in special educators. It was discovered that in the literature, these two groups of teachers had not been compared on the basis of burnout.

The exact design for the administering the survey was discussed in Chapter Three. The setting and subjects were described to give the reader a

more detailed description of the population being sampled. Next, the instrumentation and method of data collection were discussed. It was decided that a fourteen Likert-type survey would be used to distribute to regular educators. Additionally, the survey included three open ended questions to help the author further interpret the results. The author also decided that percentages and frequency counts would be used in order to interpret the data.

Chapter Four revealed the results of the survey. It was discovered that regular educators and special educators shared three causes of burnout in common. Moreover the three open ended questions reiterated causes for regular educator burnout that were already stated in the literature.

### **Conclusions**

It was discovered that regular educators and special educators shared three causes of burnout in common. They were paperwork, lack of support from central office, and little support from principals. Additionally, results indicated that regular educators attribute burnout to not enough time to do their work at school and the fact that they have special needs students in their classrooms. Moreover, from the review of the literature, it was determined that special educators attribute burnout to the lack of respect from their peers, and too many students in the classroom.

The three open ended questions revealed that teachers basically defined burnout the same way. This includes being tired, overwhelmed and frustrated. Seventy percent of the teachers surveyed said that they had been burnt out at one time or another. This burnout could be attributed to the three causes that were listed in this section. They were class size, administrative support, and paperwork.

## **Implications for Practice**

The results from this study can be used in many ways. The most important being that if teachers and administrators can see the warning signs of burnout, then measures can be taken to help the individual who is burnt out before they leave the profession. This study also examined whether the same factors that cause burnout in regular education teachers, also caused burnout in special education teachers. It was found that there are some common threads. Therefore, inservice on prevention of burnout can be formulated and presented to the staff to help eliminate this problem. Those interventions may be the key to preventing burnout in teachers. Furthermore, this study can help administrators identify which regular education teachers would be suitable in the inclusion classroom and be not as likely to experience burnout from working with special needs students in the long run.

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## **APPENDICES**



Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Kimberly S. Benham and I am a learning disability teacher at \_\_\_\_\_ . I am currently working on my master's thesis at the University of Dayton. As a part of my thesis, I would like permission to survey the teachers at your elementary school to find out their opinions on the topic of burnout.

I want to assure you that the information from the survey is totally **confidential**. Your school nor your teacher's names will not be used in the discussion of the results from this survey. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely

Kimberly S. Benham

\_\_\_\_\_

name date

give Kimberly S. Benham permission to distribute the enclosed survey to the teachers of my school.

Dear Educator,

My name is Kimberly S. Benham and I am a learning disability teacher at \_\_\_\_\_ . I am currently working on my master's thesis at the University of Dayton. As a part of my thesis, I am surveying teachers to get their reaction on the topic of burnout. I would like your help by completing the enclosed survey.

On the back of this letter you will find that your principal, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ , has approved my request for distributing these surveys. Also enclosed, you will find the survey and an envelope to return the survey to me through the mail. I ask that all surveys be returned to me no later than **Friday, October 20, 1995**.

I want to assure you that the information from the survey is totally **confidential**. Your name will not be used in the discussion of the results. If you have any questions regarding the survey, please feel free to call me at \_\_\_\_\_ . Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Kimberly S. Benham

Enclosure

## Survey

Please fill in the data below.

Number of years teaching \_\_\_\_\_ Grade currently taught \_\_\_\_\_

Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Circle the appropriate response to each question.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1) I have too many students in my class.	1	2	3	4
2) My principal provides me with encouragement.	1	2	3	4
3) My physical or mental health is negatively affected by my job.	1	2	3	4
4) Paperwork takes up much of my time.	1	2	3	4
5) I have too much parental involvement.	1	2	3	4
6) Morale at my school is low.	1	2	3	4
7) I believe central office supports the teachers.	1	2	3	4
8) I have enough time to get my work done at school.	1	2	3	4
9) My motivation for teaching has declined.	1	2	3	4
10) My room is physically isolated from other personnel.	1	2	3	4
11) I have respect from my peers.	1	2	3	4
12) I enjoy the challenge of working with special needs students.	1	2	3	4
13) I believe I am an effective teacher.	1	2	3	4
14) I have a positive rapport with all of the teachers at my school.	1	2	3	4

15) Briefly define teacher burnout \_\_\_\_\_

16) Are you currently or have you ever experienced job burnout? \_\_\_\_\_

17) List three causes that you believe lead to burnout. \_\_\_\_\_