Differences in Burnout Among Special Education Teachers

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Differences in Burnout Among Special Education Teachers

BY

Mike D. De Boer

1976-

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Specialist in School Psychology

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1998

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

Date

Thesis Director

5/1/98

Department/School Head

5/4/98
Differences in Burnout Among Special Education Teachers

Mike D. De Boer

Eastern Illinois University
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Abstract

A random sample of special education teachers in Iowa completed survey materials including the Maslach Burnout Inventory and a demographic and background information questionnaire (N=179). Results suggested that special educators in Iowa generally experience moderate levels of emotional exhaustion, low levels of depersonalization, and low levels of personal accomplishment. Demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, years of experience) did not predict burnout, nor did most job-related factors (e.g., number of students served, type of classroom setting). The only factor found to predict burnout in this study was the type of student served. Future research should focus on individual factors that may predispose particular individuals to burnout.
Chapter 1
Introduction

Freudenberger (1977) defined burnout as “to fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources (p. 73).” Maslach (1978) extended the concept of burnout to members of human service or “helping” occupations because their work requires intense involvement with people who have psychological, social, or physical problems. Maslach and Jackson (1981) later defined burnout as a psychological syndrome involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity. The first component, emotional exhaustion, refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of emotional resources. As emotional resources are exhausted, workers feel they are unable to give of themselves at a psychological level. The second component, depersonalization, refers to a negative, callous, or an excessively detached response to the recipients of the service or care. This perception of their clients can lead professionals to view their clients as deserving of their problems. Finally, reduced personal accomplishment, refers to a decline in feelings of competence and success in work. The workers negative evaluations of their performance, are often specifically related to their work with clients.

Kahill (1988) reviewed the empirical evidence
concerning burnout among human service professionals published from 1974 to 1984 and suggested that the symptoms of burnout could be grouped into five major categories. The first category is physical symptoms. A study by Belcastro and Hays (1984) suggested that burnout is related to physical health and certain illness and possibly to somatic complaints such as sleep disturbances.

The second category was emotional symptoms. Emotional depletion, irritability, anxiety, guilt, depression, and feelings of helplessness were the most common emotional complaints by subjects in various studies. Overall, the evidence suggests that burnout is associated with depression while data regarding other emotional symptoms are still tentative (Kahill, 1988).

The third category described is behavioral symptoms. Research indicates that burnout is associated with a number of unproductive behaviors. Job turnover has been clearly linked to burnout. Other behaviors such as poor job performance, absenteeism, alcohol and drug use, and overeating and smoking are suggestive (Kahill, 1988).

The fourth category is interpersonal symptoms. Qualitative data suggest that burnout subjects communicate with clients, friends, and family members in impersonal and stereotyped ways. Victims of burnout typically find it difficult to concentrate on clients, and attempt to withdraw from them. Data also suggest that burnout is related to having fewer friends and withdrawing from one’s
The final category is attitudinal symptoms. Negative attitudes frequently develop toward clients, work, oneself, and life in general. Qualitative data suggest that cynicism, callousness, pessimism, defensiveness, intolerance of clients, dehumanization of clients by the use of jargon and intellectualization, a loss of enjoyment in work, and a resistance to go to work are typically found in the burnout victim (Kahill, 1988).

Job satisfaction can also be considered an attitudinal symptom of burnout; however, some researchers suggest that the worker's degree of job satisfaction is a significant precipitating factor that ultimately leads the worker to burnout. Although numerous studies have consistently shown an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and burnout, correlational research in the burnout field makes ascertaining the causal relationship between these constructs impossible (Kahill, 1988). Most researchers seem to agree, however, that job satisfaction typically functions as a contributing factor to burnout. Therefore, burnout is considered a related but broader construct than that of job satisfaction (Leiter, 1988).

Many factors seem to affect teacher job satisfaction. Among the positive aspects are the joy of helping students learn and seeing them achieve and the enjoyment received from their relationships with their students (Hounshell & Griffin, 1989). Indeed, many teachers enter the teaching
profession because of a desire to help and serve others (National Education Association, 1982).

Relationships with other teachers is another source of satisfaction with teaching. Positive relationships with colleagues, a sense of collaboration and community among the faculty, and recognition from other teachers have been cited as factors in teacher job satisfaction (Chapman, 1983; Lortie, 1975).

Working conditions are also important. New teachers find that conditions in the school inhibit their ability to do what they most want to do which is to help children learn (Cresap, Mc Cormick, Paget, 1984; Lortie, 1975). Heavy paper work loads and other duties that are not directly a part of the teaching process have also been cited as sources of dissatisfaction (Mc Laughlin, Heiffter, Swanson-Owens, & Yee, 1986).

Several studies have focused on demographic variables and their relationship to job satisfaction. Researchers have focused on gender, years of teaching experience, certification level, college grade point average, and chronological age as possible predictors of job satisfaction. Of these demographic variables, studies have shown that chronological age is a reliable predictor. Clark (1985) confirmed previous studies that indicated a linear relationship existed between greater teacher job satisfaction and chronological age. This finding is expected because young teachers who dislike teaching may
still decide to leave the profession. On the other hand, there are fewer older teachers who dislike teaching because those who disliked teaching have already left the profession.

Another factor that may contribute to teacher satisfaction is the leadership style of principals (Kagan, 1989; Pitner & Charter, 1988). Many teachers cite that the administrative support they receive is an important component of job satisfaction (Brissie, Hoover-Dempsey, & Bassler, 1988). Adams and Bailey (1988) found evidence suggesting that the leadership of the principal also affects how teachers feel about themselves.

Teachers' perceptions of the esteem in which teaching is held is an additional determinant of job satisfaction. In their study of science teachers who left teaching, Hounshell and Griffin (1989) found that a lack of prestige and respect for the profession from parents, community, and the general public influenced teachers' ratings of their job satisfaction. Boganshild, Luritzen, and Metzke (1988) concluded that community support and parental respect are among the factors contributing to teacher attrition. In a related study, Friesen, Prokop, and Sarras (1988) found satisfaction with status and recognition to be one of the factors influencing teacher burnout.

The concept of teacher efficacy, the sense of satisfaction with one's performance as a teacher and confidence in one's ability to help children learn, is
considered an important element in teacher job satisfaction and retention (Hoover-Dempsey, & Bassler, 1988). In their advice to principals on enhancing the school environment, Adams and Bailey (1989) note that a teacher's sense of efficacy is important to the education of children and should be fostered.

In a study of self-efficacy, Pigge & Lovett (1985) sought to determine the relationship of various indices of job performance and job satisfaction in a sample of first year teachers. Job performance was determined by composite evaluation completed by: (1) the first year teachers themselves; (2) their principals or supervisors; (3) their students; and (4) faculty from Bowling Green State University who were sent on-site and observed their teaching. The results of the study showed a modest multiple correlation between first-year teachers' job satisfaction scores and four combined but independent estimates of their job performance. This finding was congruent with a study by Haywood (1988) which suggested that the job satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Georgia, who were in their first, second, or third year of teaching, was related to their job satisfactoriness as rated by their principal.

In sum, the complex of factors related to teacher satisfaction includes a positive view of one's performance as a teacher, the ability and opportunity to help students learn, working conditions, and the prestige and status
associated with teaching.

Crane and Iwanicki (1986), examined the severity of burnout among special education teachers using the normative data provided in the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) Manual (Maslach and Jackson, 1981b). The level of burnout experienced by a group can be categorized as low, moderate, or high. The scores exhibited by the special education teachers participating in the study generally fell into the moderate category.

McIntyre (1984) investigated the relationship between one personality variable, locus of control, and experienced burnout. Locus of control pertains to a person’s belief or disbelief that their own behavior, skills, or internal dispositions determine what reinforcements they receive. Individuals with an internal locus of control feel that they are effective in controlling their destiny and determining the occurrence of reinforcement. Conversely, those who have an external locus of control believe that forces beyond their control (e.g., chance, luck, others) determine the occurrence of specific events. In this study, locus of control was assessed by the Adult Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External Control Scale (ANS-IE) (Nowicki and Strickland, 1973). The ANS-IE scale consists of 40 yes-no questions which assess the degree to which an individual views him/herself as having a causal role in specific events. Burnout was measured by the three subscales of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and
personal accomplishment from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Each of these subscales was comprised of two dimensions; frequency of feelings, and intensity of feelings.

An analysis of the data using Pearson product-moment correlations revealed significant positive correlations between locus of control scores and the frequency of feelings of emotional exhaustion, and intensity of feelings of depersonalization. A significant negative correlation was also found between locus of control and frequency of feelings of personal accomplishment. These results are consistent with the Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979) finding that teachers with an external orientation report significantly more job related stress.

Zabel and Zabel (1982) examined the relationship between level of teaching responsibility (preschool, primary, intermediate, junior high, high school), the model of service delivery (intinerant, consulting, resource, self-contained, institutional), the larger categories of exceptionality---learning disability (LD), educable mental retardation (EMR), trainable mental retardation (TMR), emotional disorder (ED), giftedness (G), visual impairment (VI), hearing impairment (HI), and multiple/severe handicaps (M/S), and the three dependent measures of emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA) from the Maslach Burnout Inventory.
Analyses of the data indicated that teachers at the junior high level were at greatest risk for burnout; their mean scores were highest both on the Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and Depersonalization (DP) scales and lowest on Personal Accomplishment (PA). Teachers of preschool children also reported relatively high levels of EE but ranked highest for PA. Teachers of ED students reported the highest level of burnout among teachers of exceptional children. Teachers of hearing impaired students reported relatively high levels of EE, but less DP and greater PA. Even teachers of gifted students experienced a high degree of EE, but they also had the greatest sense of PA. Among the various service delivery models, consulting teachers reported the greatest EE and DP. These teachers typically have the demanding role of serving large geographical areas and numbers of students and meeting the high expectations of classroom teachers. Itinerant teachers scored significantly lower on EE and DP. These teachers work directly with students and are not expected to provide services to teachers and administrators (Zabel & Zabel, 1982).

In a similar study, Beer and Beer (1992) considered the degree of stress, depression, and self-esteem of male and female regular and special education teachers at the elementary and high school level. They found that grade school teachers reported higher burnout scores than high school teachers and that high school teachers reported
higher stress than elementary teachers. In regard to special education, they found that grade school teachers generally experienced more burnout than high school teachers.

Beck and Gariulo (1983) investigated the degree of burnout experienced by teachers of nonretarded, mildly retarded, and moderately retarded students using the Maslach Burnout Inventory. They hypothesized that the degree of teacher burnout would significantly increase as the students' level of intellectual functioning decreased. Differences in the degree of burnout experienced by teachers of retarded and nonretarded students were found on both the frequency and intensity dimensions of the Depersonalization subscale and the Personal Accomplishment subscale. However, contrary to expectations, teachers of mentally retarded students scored lower, suggesting that they experienced fewer and weaker symptoms of burnout. These findings are in slight contrast to a study by Crane and Iwanicki (1986) who found special education teachers in self-contained classrooms exhibited significantly higher levels of burnout than did resource room teachers.

Banks and Necco (1990) examined the relationship of two additional variables to job burnout: special education category and educational background. The categories of special education included: (a) behavior disorders, (b) mentally retarded, (c) learning disabled, (d) resource room, and (e) multilevel learning disabled/educable
mentally retarded. The teachers' educational backgrounds included the following four categories: (a) undergraduate degree only in the present teaching position, (b) both graduate and undergraduate degree in the present teaching job, (c) graduate degree only in the present teaching job, and (d) alternative certificate (degree out-of-field for present job). The three Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) factors of emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA), along with years of special education teaching experience were used as dependent variables.

The researchers found that years of experience was not related to job burnout. However, they did find a significant correlation between the area of exceptionality served by the teacher and the degree of job burnout. Teachers of students labeled behaviorally disordered and teachers in resource rooms experienced significantly higher levels of burnout than teachers of mentally retarded and learning disabled students (Banks and Necco, 1993). These data support Barner's (1982) study that found 70 percent of regular class teachers and 58 percent of special education teachers felt that maintaining discipline was a major concern. In regard to type of certification, results indicated that training background had a significant effect on job burnout. Teachers with alternative certification (certificates in areas other than the area in which they were presently working) had markedly lower levels of
burnout than teachers with either an undergraduate degree only in special education or with a graduate degree only in special education. Teachers who obtained undergraduate and graduate degrees in special education did not differ significantly from alternatively certified teachers.

Leadership style or supervisory behavior of principals is another factor that seems to be related to job burnout and retention of special education teachers. Cherniss (1988) found some suggestive evidence that compared principals from schools with high teacher burn out and principals with staff who were less burned out. The results suggested that principals with staff who were less burned out tended to interact with their staff less frequently, spent less time observing staff in their classroom, spent more time engaged in planning and coordinating activities, and provided more emotional support to staff, but spent less time in small talk with them. Karge and Dunnick (1992) also found evidence suggesting that administrative support may be an important variable in the retention of beginning special education teachers. Administrative support in the form of scheduling conferences and Individualized Education Plan meetings, providing information, giving authorization to act, allowing their participation in educational decision making and staff meetings, providing appropriate resources, and recognizing progress were significant factors to new special education staff.
Considerable attention has been given to the relationship between job burnout and age and experience. Zabel & Zabel (1983) found that age and number of years of experience had a negative correlation with all three MEI subscales. Crane and Iwanicki (1986) also found that older and more experienced teachers exhibited significantly lower levels of frequency and intensity of the three aspects of burnout than did younger, less experienced teachers. Banks and Necco (1990) supported the previous finding that age had a significant inverse relationship with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. However, they found that job burnout did not relate to the number of years of teaching experience. Based on their results, the profile of an "at-risk" candidate for job burnout was a young teacher with only an undergraduate degree in special education, who is teaching in either a resource room or a classroom of students with behavior disorders.

The effect of class size and its resulting effect on perceptions of burnout by special education teachers is another variable that has been given some attention. Fimian and Santoro (1981) conducted a survey in which the item "one's class and case load is too large", was found to be the eighth strongest stressor reported by the respondents. In another survey of special educators, Bensky et. al (1980) found self-contained room teachers reporting "pupil load" as the leading cause of job related stress. Resource room teachers in the same study perceived
pupil load to be the second strongest occupational stressor.

McIntyre (1983) further investigated the relationship between student load and burnout among teachers. Daily student load was determined by asking the teachers to count and add the number of students in their classroom during each period of the day. The degree of experienced burnout was measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory.

Analyses of the data found no significant correlations between the amount of daily student load and any of the aspects of burnout as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory. These results were supported by those of Zabel and Zabel (1981) who also found no significant correlations between class size and any aspect of burnout using the same burnout instrument. McIntyre noted that the disparity between teacher self-report surveys and empirical research could be due to not taking the number of classroom aids into account and the type and severity of the handicapping condition of the student.

Based on the literature review the following questions have been generated: a) What is the extent of burnout among a statewide sample of special education teachers? b) Do levels of burnout differ among teachers of primarily BD, LD, or MD students? c) Do levels of burnout differ between resource and self-contained special education teachers? and d) What is the relationship between certain demographic and background variables and burnout?
Chapter 2
Method

Participants

The participants in this study were bachelor through masters level special education teachers working in rural, urban, and suburban school districts in Iowa. Their ages ranged from approximately 22 to 60. Two surveys were mailed to each of 125 randomly selected school districts in Iowa. Of the 250 surveys mailed, a total of 179 surveys were returned and used in this study.

Materials

Participants received a cover letter, a self-addressed, postage paid return envelope, the Maslach Burnout Inventory Form Ed (MBI: Maslack & Jackson, 1986), and a demographic and background questionnaire modified for this study from its original design for a study of burnout among Illinois school psychologists (Niebrugge, unpublished thesis).

The MBI Form ED is a self report instrument consisting of 22 items designed to measure burnout syndrome among teachers. The survey produces three subscales which are thought to capture distinct components of burnout: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA). Each item is rated on a 7-point likert scale that measures the frequency with which the respondent experiences a particular attitude or situation. The Emotional Exhaustion subscale, consists of
nine items that assess feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work. The Depersonalization subscale consists of five items and measures an unfeeling and impersonal response towards recipients of one's service, care, treatment, or instruction. The Personal Accomplishment subscale is made up of eight items that assess feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people.

Maslach and Jackson (1986) conceptualize burnout as a continuous variable, and provide score ranges from low to moderate to high degrees of experienced feeling. High scores on the EE and DP subscales and a low score on the PA subscale indicate a high degree of burnout in the respondent. Conversely, a low degree of burnout is reflected by low scores on the EE and DP subscales and in high scores on the PA subscale. Average scores on the three subscales reflect an average degree of experienced burnout.

The MBI Form Ed is essentially the same as the MBI which was designed for all helping professions. The only modification of items has been to change the word "recipient" to "student". The authors suggest that the change was made to insure clarity and consistency in the interpretation of the items by teachers. Two cross validation studies substantiate the validity and reliability of the MBI Form ED. Iwanicki and Schwab (1981) reported the reliability of the subscales as .90 for
Emotional Exhaustion, .76 for Depersonalization, and .76 for Personal Accomplishment. Gold (1984) reported estimates of .88, .74, and .72, respectively. These reliabilities are very similar to those of the MBI reported by Maslach and Jackson (1986).

In addition to age and gender, the demographic and background questionnaire included items related to years of experience, degree attained, and special education category (See Appendix C). Participants also reported the number of students on their rosters.

**Procedure**

Survey materials were mailed to a random sample of 125 school districts selected from the roster of the Iowa Department of Education. The administrators of the school districts employing special education teachers were sent a packet containing two sets of survey materials. A letter requesting the administrator to distribute the survey materials to two special education teachers was included (See Appendix A). Each packet of survey materials included a cover letter (See Appendix B), the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and a demographic and background information sheet. The cover letter included with the survey materials provided only limited information about the purpose and hypothesis of the study to ensure a relatively accurate measure of burnout for each participant.
Chapter 3

Results

The 179 special education teachers in the study sample had a mean age of 40.56 ($SD = 9.89$) with 14.12 years in education ($SD = 9.29$) and 10.82 ($SD = 8.01$) years in special education. Eighty-nine percent were female and 11% were male. Fifty-five percent indicated having a bachelor's degree, 27% a master's degree, 17% a specialist's degree, while only one teacher had a doctoral degree. Forty-five percent were teaching grades K through 5, 27% were teaching grades 6-8, and 27% were teaching grades 9 through 12. Seventy percent taught primarily students with learning disabilities, 10% taught primarily students with behavior disorders, and 20% taught primarily students with mental disabilities. Seventy percent of the teachers in this study taught in a resource setting, while only 30% taught in a self-contained setting.

The Extent of Burnout in the Statewide Sample

Scores on the MBI scale indicate that the average level of emotional exhaustion experienced by the special education teachers was moderate ($M = 21.22$, $SD = 10.62$). Thirty-six percent of the teachers experienced low levels of emotional exhaustion, another 32% had moderate levels, while the remaining 31% had high levels.

On the other hand, the average level of depersonalization was low ($M = 21.22$, $SD = 10.62$). A majority of the teachers were experiencing low levels of
depersonalization (78%). Thirteen percent had moderate levels, while only 8% had high levels.

The average level of personal accomplishment was within the low range ($M = 39.45, SD = 5.70$). A majority of the teachers had low levels of personal accomplishment (77%). Fourteen percent had moderate levels, and 10% had high levels.

**Relationship Between Demographic/Background Factors and Burnout**

To examine the best predictors of burnout, a series of multiple regressions was conducted on the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment scores as a function of the following demographic and background factors: years in special education, years spent in education, age, and number of students served. Results of these multiple regressions show that none of these factors predicted the specific burnout subdomains.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted on the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment scores as a function of grade level taught. The results indicate that the specific levels of burnout did not differ significantly among the teachers serving the various grade levels.

Lastly, a series of t-tests was conducted on the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment scores as function of gender. The t-test results indicated that the specific levels of burnout did
not differ significantly between male and female special education teachers.

**Differences in Burnout Levels Between Resource and Self-Contained Special Education Teachers**

Three one-way analyses of variances were conducted on the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment scores as function of the classroom setting. The results, however, revealed that there were no significant differences in the specific levels of burnout between resource and self-contained special education teachers.

**Differences in Burnout Levels Among Teachers of Students with Behavioral Disorders, Learning Disabilities, and Mental Disabilities**

Another set of three one-way analyses of variance was conducted on the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment scores as function of three specific disability types. Results of these tests indicate the teachers' experience of depersonalization as well as the teachers' sense of personal accomplishment did not differ significantly among teachers of students with different disabilities.

However, the experience of emotional exhaustion differed significantly among these teachers, $F(2, 173) = 4.69$, $p < .05$. Post-hoc Scheffe's tests further revealed that teachers of students with behavioral disorders were more emotionally exhausted ($M = 28.65$) than teachers of
students with learning disabilities (M = 20.46) and teachers of students with mental disabilities (M = 20.50).
Chapter IV
Discussion

The first goal of the study was to examine the extent of burnout among participating special education teachers in Iowa. The results of the present study indicate that special educators in Iowa generally experience only moderate levels of emotional exhaustion and low levels of depersonalization. However, they have low levels of personal accomplishment. These results mirror Crane and Iwanicki's (1986) finding that special education teachers in Connecticut and Massachusetts experience moderate levels of emotional exhaustion, low levels of depersonalization, and low levels of personal accomplishment. Further studies in other geographic locations will determine whether the findings in these studies are representative of special educators as a whole in the United States. The lack of personal accomplishment experienced by the special education teachers as a whole may be a function of the perceived slow or lack of progress of their students. Such a perception may be thought of by special education teachers as a reflection of their own personal efforts.

A second goal of the study was to determine which demographic and background factors best predict burnout. Results of the study indicate that years in special education, years in education, age, gender, and number of students served did not predict burnout in the sample of Iowa special education teachers. These results contradict
Banks' and Necco's (1990) finding that older teachers exhibited significantly lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and Crane and Iwinicki's (1986) results indicating that older and more experienced teachers have lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and higher levels of personal accomplishment.

The results are also inconsistent with findings by Fimian and Santoro (1981) and Bensky, et al. (1980) revealing that teachers report pupil load as a leading cause of job stress, but lend support to Zabel and Zabel (1981) who found no significant correlation between class size and any of the burnout indicators. This disparity in results may simply reflect a difference in methodology. Fimian and Santoro (1981) as well as Bensky, et al. (1980) measured what the teacher perceived as stressors, while Zabel and Zabel (1981) and the present study focused on potential actual stressors (i.e., actual class size).

Another goal of this study was to determine whether levels of burnout differ between teachers in a self-contained setting and teachers in a resource setting. Results revealed no significant differences in experienced burnout. These results are also contrary to Crane and Iwinicki (1986) who found special education teachers in self-contained classrooms exhibited significantly higher levels of burnout than resource room teachers.

The last goal of the study was to determine whether
levels of burnout differ among teachers of students with learning disabilities, mental disabilities, and behavior disorders. Study results show that levels of depersonalization and personal accomplishment did not differ among teachers of students with various disabilities. However, teachers of students with behavior disorders experienced significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion. This confirms Banks’ and Necco’s (1990) finding that teachers of students labeled as behaviorally disordered experienced higher levels of burnout. This finding may be due to the fact that teachers of students with behavior disorders have less sense of control over their students and the learning environment than teachers of students with learning and mental disabilities.

In general, the study examined the degree of burnout in a state-wide sample of special education teachers in Iowa. Overall, the level of emotional exhaustion was in the moderate range (M = 21.22), depersonalization was in the low range (M = 5.65), and personal accomplishment was in the low range (M = 39.45). This suggests special educators may lack feelings of personal accomplishment and be at-risk for emotional exhaustion.

The study also examined certain demographic, background, and work-related factors (e.g., number of students, setting, type of students handled) that may predict burnout among special education teachers. Only
disability types handled by the teachers proved to distinguish teachers who experience high, moderate, or low levels of emotional exhaustion.

A major limitation of this study is the sole focus on demographic and work-related factors that may account for who is susceptible to burnout. The non-significant results of the study indicate these factors may not reliably predict burnout in this population. The previous literature review and the results of this study indicates that the experience of burnout may instead reflect individual differences in susceptibility and response to burnout. Perhaps, what may prove to be more predictive is the individual's personal vulnerabilities, personality traits, coping skills, personal sources of interpersonal support, and sense of personal control (e.g., external versus internal locus of control). Future studies should examine if these individual factors are better predictors or if they interact with demographic and work-related factors in accounting for burnout among special education teachers.
References


Gifted Child Quarterly, 28 (2), 65-69.


Dear School Principal,

I am a graduate student of school psychology at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois conducting a study regarding burnout among special education teachers. By participating in this study, your staff will be contributing to research which, in the past, has been limited both in scope and number.

I would very much appreciate your distributing the enclosed survey materials to two special educators employed at your school as soon as possible. All information will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only.

If you would like a summary of the results, please write to Dr. William T. Bailey, Psychology Department, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois 61920 and refer to the De Boer study. Thank you very much for helping us with this study.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Mike De Boer
Graduate Student
Eastern Illinois University
Dear Special Education Teacher:

I am a graduate student of school psychology at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois. Currently, I am conducting a study regarding burn-out among special education teachers. By participating in this study, you will be contributing to research which, in the past, has been limited both in scope and number.

In order to complete my study, I must gather pertinent data from practicing special education teachers. Will you please take a few moments and complete all items on the enclosed questionnaires? All information will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for prompt return. Please return no later than March 27, 1998.

If you would like a summary of the results, please write to Dr. William T. Bailey, Psychology Department, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois 61920 and refer to the De Boer study. Thank-you for helping with this study.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Mike De Boer
Graduate Student
Eastern Illinois University
Appendix C
Special Education Demographic Information Sheet

Your sex: _______ (1) male _______ (2) female  Your age: _______ years

Please indicate the highest degree level you have achieved:

_______ (1) Bachelor’s
_______ (2) Master’s
_______ (3) Master’s plus 30
_______ (4) Doctorate

How many years have you been in education? _______ years

How many years have you been a special education teacher? _______ years

Please circle your primary grade level(s) assignment(s):

pre-K  K  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12

Do you serve in a resource or self-contained setting?

_______ (1) resource
_______ (2) self-contained

If self-contained, do you primarily serve students with mental disabilities, learning disabilities, or behavior disorders? (please check one)

_______ (1) mental disabilities
_______ (2) learning disabilities
_______ (3) behavior disorders

Approximately how many students do you serve? _______ students

How many students with behavior disorders do you serve? _______ students

How many students with mental disabilities do you serve? _______ students

How many students with learning disabilities do you serve? _______ students