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Compassion Fatigue and Burnout:

Precursors to Elementary Special Educators' Exodus from Teaching

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Abstract

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine the relationship between compassion fatigue and elements of burnout among nine in-service elementary special education teachers in Michigan for the purpose of addressing the attrition rate common in special education. The objectives of the study were twofold: (a) to determine if novice elementary school special education teachers exhibit symptoms of burnout and to establish the most prevalent issues related to the subject and (b) to ascertain if elements of compassion fatigue are present and the needed recommendations in response to these symptoms. A script designed to identify how the participants personally and professionally respond to the demands of their elementary level special education teaching position guided the semi-structured, ninety minute interviews with each participant. The analysis process identified the language of burnout and compassion fatigue, as identified in the reported literature review, to determine symptoms of both constructs and suggestions for remedial strategies.

Compassion Fatigue and Burnout:

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Valent (2002) reported that since the 1970's the research community has accepted the premise people can be secondarily affected by the sufferings of others. The dedication and effort needed to help others in trouble may provide great rewards for helpers when they meet with success. But when they are strained, or worse, fail, helpers may be the next dominoes who follow primary victims in suffering themselves.

Any profession that takes on the role of healer, helper, or rescuer is at risk for experiencing "compassion fatigue," somewhat new concept that has only appeared in the literature since 1992 (Figley, 2002). The helping profession of special education is at stake for receiving this type of secondary affection. At the core of potential victims in this field are special education teachers who have direct contact with recipients and service providers of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). It is of growing concern that the rapid turnover rate in special education is due to the concept of compassion fatigue and/or burnout. According to Zabel and Zabel (2002), younger, less experienced special education teachers experience greater burnout than older, more experienced teachers.

An analysis of the core reasons for burnout as an associate of compassion fatigue is necessary to identify the critical problems that emergent special education teachers (less than 5 years) experience and that are indicative of their consistent pre-mature exodus from the teaching profession.

Literature Review

Reducing attrition and increasing retention of special education teachers are of grave concern due to current and projected shortages and the distressing statistics regarding attrition (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002). Although there is no evidence burnout is higher in special education than in other education or business areas (Retish, 1986), “the most essential challenge for special education in the 21st century is to attract and retain potentially competent special educators” (Zabel & Zabel, 2002, p.67.)

Burnout is “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that frequently occurs among individuals who do ‘people work’ – spend considerable time in close encounters with others under conditions of chronic tension and stress” (Platt & Olson, 1990, p.192). Likewise, it is “a syndrome of physical and emotional exhaustion produced by excessive demands on the energy, strength, and resources of the individual” (Banks & Necco, 1990, p.187). The essence of burnout among teachers is the sense of professional failure as a result of the gap between actual feelings of personal and professional competence and ideal competence to which the teacher aspires (Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005).

Symptoms of burnout are physical, emotional, and behavioral ones that cause exhaustion (Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005). However, only stress frequency, not stress strength, can predict burnout intensity (Fimian & Blanton, 1986). In addition, the literature reports significant poor performance, frequent absenteeism due to illness, and early retirement as symptoms of burnout among teachers (Retish, 1986; Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005).

The symptoms of burnout and compassion fatigue overlap. Compassion fatigue is a combination of burnout, plus the elements of post traumatic stress disorder as described in the DSM-IV without the direct personal experience of the traumatic event (Figley, 1997). Compassion fatigue is further distinguished from burnout by an individual's assessment of the nature of the stressor, the corresponding unique acute stress response, and the subsequent adaptive or maladaptive response (Figley, 2002). Whereas burnout is a product of the human drive to attain goals, compassion fatigue originates from the natural human desire to save another (Figley, 2002). Thus, while similar to burnout, compassion fatigue originates from different human needs and prescribes different human reactions and behaviors. Although there is thorough analysis of the causes of burnout for special education teachers (described below), to date an analysis of burnout as an associate to compassion fatigue in the realm of special education is inexistent.

Causes of Stress

As Fimian and Blanton (1986) reported, the existing literature that discusses the sources of environmental, personal, and organizational factors associated with stress and burnout levels can be summarized into four categories of predictors: (a) personal (teacher's age, length of teaching); (b) academic/performance (teacher preparation experience, pre-service and in-service experiences, teacher disposition); (c) univariate organizational (age of students, disability area, service delivery model, caseload); and (d) role organizational variables (administrative support, poor quality of feedback, lack of professional guidance, poor supervision). These same categories are indicative of the multiple recommendations for schools' and individuals' responses to stress, as reported in the literature.

The personal causes of stress are apparent in two categories: (a) the age of the teacher and (b) the length of teaching experience. Banks and Necco (1990) reported that older teachers had lower burnout scores on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), designed to assess the frequency and intensity of perceived burnout among persons in the helping professions (Crane & Iwanicki, 1986). Data analysis with the MBI is based on emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (with depersonalization separated into job related and student related factors). In addition to the Banks and Necco (1990) study, other researchers have discovered that older teachers exhibit significantly lower levels of frequency and intensity of the three aspects of burnout than do younger teachers (Crane & Iwanicki, 1986; Zabel & Zabel, 2002). It is important to note that measuring how susceptible teachers are to stress has not appeared in the literature.

While Banks and Necco (1990) have stated age has a significant relationship with job burnout, they found that burnout did not relate to the number of years of teaching experience. Crane and Iwanicki (1986) and Zabel and Zabel (2002) confirmed the contrary. Although the first five years of teaching and after fifteen years of teaching have been reported to be the most stress occurring times (Retish, 1986), the findings of teaching experience and its relationship with job burnout is inconsistent.

The academic-performance causes of stress are apparent in three categories: (a) teacher preparation (certification) experience, (b) the transition from pre-service to in-service, and (c) teacher's disposition to their own and their students' performance. Few studies have examined training background, including differences between teacher

trainees and first year teachers, demographic characteristics, and teacher perceptions of the work world.

Research Absentness

Fimian and Blanton (1986) examined the difference between trainees and their first-year teaching stress levels. The authors found that trainees reported significantly stronger manifestations than they did as teachers. The authors had assumed the more “talented” the trainee, the better their pre-professional performance would be, and that better performance would be related to reduced teacher stress and burnout levels. However, the findings did not parallel the original hypothesis and posed the need for additional research to determine if a relationship between job burnout and trainees and first-year teachers’ experiences exists.

Research about the age of pupils taught and related impact on teacher stress is also limited. Williams and Gersch (2004) found that the age of students taught is a significant factor correlated with stress. The authors noted how younger students equate with less paperwork, and thus, less teacher stress. Talmor, Reiter, and Feigin (2005) stated that educating older students creates an additional teaching burden for teachers, and contributes to a greater sense of burnout.

Banks and Necco (1990) researched and reported that specific types of student disabilities may contribute to accelerated burnout. Teachers of students with learning disabilities (LD) and behavioral disorders (BD) have significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion than teachers of students with cognitive impairments (CI) or classroom teachers of students with varying disabilities (Banks & Necco, 1990). Consistent with these findings was the work of Nichols and Sosnowsky (2002) who

found that as the proportion of students with BD increased, special education teachers experienced significant levels of depersonalization, a characteristic of burnout. To the contrary of the findings regarding teachers of students with LD mentioned, Platt and Olson (1990) found that teachers who work with this population appear to stay in special education longer. These inconsistent findings require additional study.

In addition to specific disability areas of the students, the literature reports a relationship between service delivery models and accelerated burnout (Necco, 1990; Zabel & Zabel, 2002). Special education teachers in self-contained classrooms exhibit significantly higher levels of burnout than resource room teachers (Crane & Iwanicki, 1986; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002). It is important to note that the elimination of categorical programs indicates an increase in heterogeneous student groupings and thus renders further research about the impact of student disability areas and service delivery models on teacher stress.

The literature further discusses research about caseload size and its cause of stress and related exit from the profession (Fimian & Blanton, 1986; Platt & Olson, 1990; Schlicte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005). Increase in student caseload size may pose frustrating and stressful challenges to individualize programs given the temporal constraints necessary to meet students' unique and multiple needs.

Recommendations to Prevent and Cope with Stress

The best prescription for stress reduction is prevention at the personal level – the level at which the teacher has the most control. Educators must assume a more proactive stance in safeguarding their emotional and physical well-being (Crane & Iwanicki, 1986). William and Gersch (2004) deciphered between direct and indirect coping strategies.

Direct coping strategies teachers may employ to prevent stress are: (a) utilizing time management skills, (b) having clear and simple weekly plans, (c) prioritizing and making lists, (d) having a positive attitude while reflecting on past achievement, and (e) remaining realistic about what can be achieved. Indirect strategy recommendations include: (a) attending social events, (b) traveling, and (c) engaging in relaxing techniques (e.g., yoga, acupuncture, aromatherapy).

It is unfortunate that few pre-service or in-service teacher education programs include stress identification, burnout management, or role clarification interventions based on real world experiences (Fimian & Blanton, 1986). More opportunities are needed for special education teachers to develop the ability to identify sources of stress in the instructional setting, as well as to cope adequately with these sources of stress (Crane & Iwanicki, 1986; Williams & Gersch, 2004). In addition to identifying stress situations, special education teachers should be able to generate appropriate adaptive responses to undercut anxiety, restore motivation, clarify priorities, increase risk taking, and shift attention from future-oriented to living creatively in the present (Fimian & Blanton, 1986).

Role organizational variables, such as administrative support, poor quality of feedback, lack of professional guidance, poor supervision, and other administrative issues are some of the reported sources of stress, poor job morale, and teacher recidivism (Fimian, 1986). These 'social' aspects of functioning within a school may have a negative impact on teachers' decisions to leave the profession. The degree to which they experience role conflict and ambiguity has significant relationships with predictions of stress strength, frequency, and burnout intensity (Fimian & Blanton, 1986; Platt & Olson,

1990). More specific findings show the ultimate cause of teacher resignations to be fatigue that results from “hassles” between teachers and administrators (Fimian, 1986, p. 50). Administrators’ and supervisors’ perceived incompetence, unavailability, lack of support, and poor communication skills may increase stress and burnout levels (Fimian, 1986). Without emotional support, special educators have reported their feelings of disempowerment, immobility, and consumed thoughts of failure (Platt & Olson, 1990). The byproduct of hopelessness may turn into exhaustion, frustration, and guilt. Although researchers have equated administrators with teachers’ increased stress and job burnout, evidence has also emerged that have supported administrators’ interventions and their impact on teachers’ reduced stress. It is this area of role organizational variables that needs further investigation to assist in remedying this largest contributor of job burnout.

Purpose

The purpose of this multiple case study was to provide a contribution to the literature about the aforementioned undeveloped discussion about organizational variables’ impact on teacher burnout. Specifically, the study examined the relationship between compassion fatigue and elements of burnout among nine in-service elementary special education teachers in Michigan for the purpose of addressing the attrition rate common in special education. The objectives of the study were twofold: (a) to determine if novice elementary school special education teachers exhibit symptoms of burnout and to establish the most prevalent issues related to the subject and (b) to ascertain if elements of compassion fatigue are present and the needed recommendations in response to these symptoms.

While analysis about compassion fatigue and burnout and how they relate to families has occurred, the same combination study is needed in the field of special education and this study sought to fill that gap. Since compassion fatigue and burnout correlate an analysis is required to look at both and how they relate to special education collectively. Studying one without the other would leave a gap in the literature.

The specific research questions that guided the study included:

1. What are elementary special education teachers' experiences in the field (i.e. workload, support, stress inducers)?
2. What physical, mental, and emotional symptoms do elementary special education teachers experience due to their career?
3. What recommendations do elementary level special education teachers offer administrators in response to teacher stress?
4. What recommendations do elementary level special education teachers have for teacher preparation programs to train students for the inevitable stress common in special education teaching?
5. How do the experiences of elementary level special education teachers relate to the concept of compassion fatigue?

As the professional role of a special education teacher differs at each grade level, this study was bound to the experiences of elementary level educators.

Method

Since this the exploration of compassion fatigue among special education teachers has yet to appear in the literature, the present study employed qualitative methodology as the best means to initiate a discussion about the topic. Specifically, the focus of the

present study was on elementary-level special education teachers, a necessary bound parameter given the unique nuances of special education instruction at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Recruitment of nine participants employed as elementary special education teachers in the state of Michigan ensued. A distribution of both male and female participants was purposefully sought with the intent to note similarities and differences among male and female in-service teachers, a data analysis that has otherwise not appeared in the literature.

A script designed to identify how the participants personally and professionally respond to the demands of their elementary level special education teaching position guided the semi-structured, ninety minute interviews with each participant. Hard copy transcripts ensued. The analysis process identified the language of burnout and compassion fatigue, as identified in the reported literature review, to determine symptoms of both constructs and suggestions for remedial strategies. Participants included:

- Mike, a self-contained classroom of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at the upper elementary level located in a K-5 school. His school has approximately 600 students. Mike's caseload is 6 students.
- Ellen, a self-contained classroom of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at the lower elementary level located in a K-5 school. Her school has approximately 715 students. Ellen's caseload is 5 students.
- Doug, a teacher in a center-based program that serves students with severe behavioral disorders within his district and that contracts services with neighboring districts. His total caseload is 16 students.

- Roberta, a teacher of students with an Emotional Impairment (EI) in a self-contained classroom located in a K-5 elementary school. Her school has approximately 650 students. She has 9 students on her caseload.
- Molly, a resource room teacher in the same building as Roberta. Her caseload is 15 students.
- Joan, a lower-elementary resource room teacher. Her caseload is 11 students. She works in the same building as Diane.
- Bob, a K-5 resource room teacher. His school has approximately 500 students and services both general and special education students. His caseload is 12 students.
- Virgil, a teacher of students with Severe Multiple Impairments. His school services approximately 250 general and special education students. His caseload is 8 students.

Findings

Theme I: Student Aggression

I asked participants to explain a situation with a particular student that had elicited a stressful response. They described the student, the situation, proactive actions taken in response to the stressful experience, and evaluated their proactive approaches.

Six out of the nine subjects identified a student's physical aggression as their stressful situation. They described physical aggression towards objects, students, and staff members. The students were either diagnosed with EI or ASD.

When describing his stressful situation in which a student with ASD and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) had to be physically restrained, Mike explained:

Anytime you have to be physical with a student, there's a lot your brain has to process. You have to be physical with a student without hurting them. You have to remember the training that you've received. You have to be aware of the safety of the other students in the room.

Ellen expounded upon the stress of physical management needed to manage a student with ASD and Bipolar Disorder, and transferred her emotions rapidly from calmness to anger and frustration. Having to keep the emotions under control, while handling the specific situation in a professional manner, protecting herself, and not causing injury to the student added additional stress to the situation.

Doug described his daily need to physically manage a student with an Emotional Impairment (EI). In addition, he shared his frustrations about the parents not following through with consequences at home. Doug identified that his stress of physical management is compounded by the student's lack of parental involvement.

Roberta, a teacher of students with EI, has had to deal with physical management frequently. She suggested documenting the proactive strategies utilized in stressful events and then evaluating their effectiveness. Roberta considers such an approach helps reduce teacher stress levels in subsequent occurrences of negative student behaviors.

Diane attributed her stress to a student's participation in physical violence as a result of her perception of poor student placement of the school district. She suggested the student would benefit from a more structured environment, not the design of the resource room where he was assigned. Her stress came from an extensive amount of energy utilized to protect this child and others, while having fourteen students on her caseload.

Joan explained her stress came from a lack of preparation to deal with students with EI and their need for physical management. It was not until half way through the school year that she and other professionals interacting with the student were trained to physically restrain him. In the interim, the building principal did not permit “all calls” to be performed in the building in case of emergency, and thus, her stress was a result of not knowing how to protect the student, herself, and her co-workers.

Other participants explained their stress was from their lack of ability to control a student’s disruptive actions in a large classroom setting (for example, yelling), and not being able to assist students develop positive behaviors due to a lack of comparable proactive measures in the students’ homes.

Theme II: Supervisor Support

Participants were asked to describe how their IEP team, district, community, and administrators intervene and support them with their caseload population. The central organizational cause of stress was a perceived lack of supervisor support. It appeared that participants who had supportive relationships with their building principals had less experience with job stress. Likewise, participants that had unsupportive relationships with building principals noted frequent experiences with job stress.

Mike described his building principal as his central organizational cause of stress:
There are a lot of things that go to an administrator and the administrator has a lot to deal with. If they don’t support you, or they make you feel bad, then you probably contemplate quitting.

However, when asked if he has ever contemplated the idea of applying for another job in a different district, Mike responded:

I don't think it's realistic for me – especially in our economy – to give up a job in a good district and go start over somewhere else. I mean, why would I give up my tenure?

Mike does find support from other teachers in his building: “They're your peers because they have students that they have trouble with, too. So you're in the same boat.”

Ellen, accused of being too emotionally invested in her students by her principal, shared the same sentiments as Mike. Preventing her from discussing her concerns with her building administrator is the principal's lack of interest, and repetitive responses to support of “that's your job; deal with it.” Ellen undergoes “isolation” and has requested a teaching/building placement change due to the lack of support.

Bob, a learning resource center teacher, stated: “If there's one area of my job I would like a magic wand to change, it would be at the principal level.” His frustration arises with his principal's “lack of understanding” and “a distrust of what's going on [in special education].” Bob's hope is his “building principal will see that the [special education] kids want to be at school and that they are making gains. Unfortunately, that just hasn't happened.”

Joan, who has contemplated applying to work in other districts, loves the people with whom she works, feels supported, and is mainly stressed by the misalignment of her and her school district's special education beliefs. However, unlike other participants, she receives support from her building administrator:

My principal used to be a resource room teacher, so I feel like she has a good understanding of what my job entails. Every time we've had issues with difficult

students, my principal has always been available. She's very hands on with that and it feels easier to manage some of those more difficult students.

Diane, who works in the same building, stated: "The building principal is and has always been very supportive of my work."

Roberta and Molly work in the same building and attribute stress to individual situations, and reported "a low stress level." Roberta explained that the building principal "always helps me at a crisis level. If I need help during a crisis, there's always help available either through the principal or someone the principal has designated to help."

Molly agreed:

We have the best administrator building principal I've ever seen in terms of support. She is always available, ready and willing to drop what she's doing to listen, and always has ideas or a different way to recommend how one looks at things.

Virgil, a self-proclaimed low-stressed, seasoned teacher, affirmed that his administrator "helps intervene and support the teachers' goal of reaching an inclusive community. She hires the right people, supports issues with parents, and helps build community." Nothing would prevent Virgil from seeking support from his building principal. Virgil advises teachers to admit they are stressed to the building principal.

Doug attributed his low stress level to those who support him. When describing the building administrative support he receives, he reported:

We've had two principals since I've been here, and both the old and current have been wonderful. They have an exact 50/50 way of dealing with us [teachers].

They trust us. They will come to us and ask for help with kids that have behavior

issues in the school. We don't feel that we're being glared over. There's a trust and they know that we work hard and do our job. At the same time, we've had a handful of crisis situations where fire departments, hospitals have been called because kids threaten suicide. In every situation, both principals have been here, had our backs, and had an answer when we ask them for what they feel we should do. Both principals have known exactly what to do and what to recommend.

Theme III: Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs

Culminating questions of the interview offered participants the opportunity to suggest ways pre-service training programs could better support teachers. The most frequent recommendation for pre-service training programs was to include stress management and role expectation courses. In addition, earlier participation in special education teaching experiences during pre-service years was also recommended to help teachers learn the reality of their job.

Mike criticized pre-service training programs:

They do not deal with a lot of issues that teachers are going to deal with. You don't learn how to manage a team, run an Individualized Education Program (IEP), physically deal with students, and effectively show empathy towards parents and staff. There are a lot of things that don't get touched on.

Ellen suggested pre-service training programs "bring up" the potential stressful situations a teacher could encounter. For example, programs could explain how teachers can prepare themselves for situations involving intense students. She said the greatest need is to learn coping mechanisms for dealing with the high level of stress that "comes with the job."

Although Doug expressed there is no education that can prepare one for the intense student population, he recommended student teachers get assigned to a classroom with the most severe behaviors and with the best (mentor) teachers as possible. “The more you live it, the more you see, the more you have up your sleeve.” Doug also advises pre-service teachers to learn more in a case-study setting. This design would require discussion about proper protocols for responding to “different situations that could possibly happen in a classroom.”

Virgil recommended having “practical experiences in good programs” where pre-service teachers not just come into visit, but have actual “work experience. Reading and learning about best practices is good, but you need to put them into practice, so you actually know before you go into the classroom what students are like, how they react.” Roberta agreed with this position of getting the most “hands-on experience as possible.”

Molly suggested it is impossible for a pre-service training program to be realistic. “Every kid you come across is an individual and presents unique problems,” and even if a scenario is presented in a case-study format in training, it is not the real situation. In response, she recommends “actually being out there [in the field].” She wants to see teachers knowing how to deal with “real people, real parents, real students, and getting it from a classroom” throughout their pre-service career, not a textbook or lecture.

Bob “could have used more specific time in actual special education classrooms for pre-student teaching hours. I had extensive time working with special education students,” but not in an educational setting. “I felt a need for specific training about how to work with students in academics.” He summed his recommendations by stating that

programs should teach “research-based programs” and have preservice teachers “spend more time in actual classrooms prior to getting into their own teaching positions.”

Diane recommended that “student teaching start early on” in a teacher-training program and “be longer than what it currently is.” Doing so “would give young teachers the opportunity to decide whether or not they’re appropriate for the field, and if it is really what they want to go into.” She added:

When student teaching is done at the end of the educational career, it’s a little too late. People have invested time and money, and they kind of drag themselves into a profession they may not really enjoy or want to be in.

Joan shared Diane’s viewpoint:

Probably the best training was my student teaching and field experiences, when I got to just visit and spend some time in the classroom. It would be nice if that could happen earlier on in training programs so one could relate to what is being taught in their teacher-preparation courses. It would be helpful to have realistic questions to ask professors. Information that they [professors] are giving would make more sense if seen in action.

She further recommended having earlier, authentic experiences in different settings, with different kinds of students so one would be “more prepared when getting into the real world.”

Discussion

Similar to Banks and Necco (1990) findings, both verbal and physical aggression as characteristics of behavior (and not indicative of the student’s educational disability) produced the most emotional exhaustion (stress) in the present study. Having to provide

physical management to a student elicited the most stressful teacher reaction from a student trigger. Special education teachers need to be made aware of this stress source in their pre-service training.

Currently, Michigan special education teachers must be certified to perform physical management. To prevent students from hurting themselves and others, they must be in a safe area, away from objects that can hurt them or can be used as weapons. With laws becoming stricter as to where students can be placed for a “time out,” how a student can be physically managed, as well as the currently increasing cross-categorical model where children of varying disabilities are placed in the same classroom, it is crucial that this aspect of job description be offered at the collegial level. Teachers, who may or may not have students requiring physical management at times, will, at some point, require the skill-set of physical management. Not only do teachers need to be trained in the proper manner to physically manage a student, they need to be taught when to properly utilize the skill and how to debrief on situations calling for this type of management. Physical management can be stressful to both the staff and student alike. It is imperative that this characteristic of the teaching profession be explored early on in one’s teaching career.

This research complemented profiles of abundant and positive supervisor support in literature (e.g., Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005) accounting for a less amount of teacher burnout in special education. The data identified in the interviews is similar to Fimian’s (1986) explanation that “lack of administrative support, poor quality of feedback, lack of professional guidance, poor supervision, and other administrative issues were some of the most frequent reported sources of stress, poor job morale, and teacher recidivism” (p. 50).

As this research demonstrated, positive building principal support results in special education teachers' lower stress levels. Therefore, it is imperative administrative education focus on methods to support special education teachers. It is recommended that this education take place at both the administrative pre-service level and in-service district level. If administrators are not required to have a special education background, and yet expected to govern the relationships amongst professionals in their building that works with this population, it is an injustice to both the administrator and staff to have a lack of knowledge straining the potential support, relationship, and cohesiveness of this group.

Participants' recommendations for teacher preparation programs matched Fimian and Blanton's (1986) conclusion that "few pre-service or in-service teacher education programs include stress identification, burnout management, or role clarification interventions actually drawn from 'real world' experiences" (p. 9). Recommendations also correspond to Crane and Iwanicki's (1986) conclusion:

More effective pre-service and in-service opportunities are needed for special education teachers to help them develop the ability to identify sources of stress in the instructional setting as well as to cope adequately with these source of stress.

(p.30)

The implications of such findings call for teacher preparation programs to restructure their curriculum and place student teaching and field experiences closer to the beginning of one's educational career. Although student teaching and internships require knowledge of instruction traditionally offered early in one's program, a design that allows pre-student teachers to observe and participate in a classroom setting early-on in

their career is imperative. Currently, a requirement for observation and fulfillment of pre-clinical hours early in the teacher preparation experience exists, however, reform in the design of how college students are held accountable for their participation is recommended. Suggestions would include allowing students to observe IEP meetings with staff and parents, teacher “shadow” days to examine workload aspects of the job, and teacher interviews to learn the “reality” of specific positions.

After teacher candidates receive a realistic view of their potential career through early position experiences, teacher preparation programs should provide case study opportunities that require teacher approaches beyond instructional strategies. Teachers need to know how to work with adults. Curriculum taught to students can be instilled in a college setting, however, instinctual reactions to difficult exchanges and situations with students, parents, staff, and administrators need to be addressed. Stress from the unknown of the career was threaded throughout data collection in this research. If teacher candidates prepare for many encounters they will experience, relationships, and thus support, would flourish more rampantly throughout the field.

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