

Chapter 45

Defective Decision Making: Beginning Teacher Early Burnout From Catastrophic Career Choices

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ABSTRACT

Teacher burnout as the result of poor career choice and decision making plagues new teachers in the field of education, as well as special education. This chapter introduces theories of moral development and self-efficacy that explain the thought processes of teachers whose expectations in the field do not match the reality of teacher practice. Therefore, their decision making to enter the field contributes to early teacher burnout. Three case studies are described as examples to understand how the psychology of choice determines the factors that result in burnout. The chapter describes how the teachers' decisions relate to the psychology of moral development theory and self-efficacy theory for their career choice. Their behavior and attitude as a teacher relates to their catastrophic choices. The chapter presents suggestions that teachers can implement to make better decisions for their career choice.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher burnout as the result of poor career expectations and decision making plagues new teachers in the field of education (Fernet, Lavigne, Vallerand, & Austin, 2014) especially teachers in special education (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014). According to Fernet, et al., (2014) the question of people entering a profession with the passion to teach who experience burnout, perhaps as early as the first 1-3 years, may be related not only to their passion, but their perception of what they thought teaching would be for them. This result was not what they expected.

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Defective Decision Making

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the conflict some teachers face and decide teaching is not a viable career path for them. The three individual case studies from the literature (Brownell, Smith, McNellis & Miller, 1997; McCann & Johannessen, 2004; Schaefer, Downey & Clandinin, 2014) explain how their conflict contributes to burnout and decision to leave the profession. Additionally, the purpose of this chapter is to review the research on teacher burnout and those who believe they have a mismatch of career choice. Suggestions are provided how teachers can identify their decision arising in response to their burnout and change their outlook to move to a new career direction.

Teacher conflict has a basis in the literature. Fernet, et al. (2014) addressed the feelings of people who have a passion to teach and pursue the teaching profession because of their passion. When a teacher thinks he or she has decided on the right career path, but becomes frustrated, disappointed and unsure of what to do, their decision results in blaming themselves as a failure which is a symptom of burnout.

BACKGROUND

Teacher Conflict

There are teachers' perceptions regarding factors that contribute to their stress level which cause teacher burnout. Collingsridge (2008) reported that even with passion to teach, teachers are leaving the profession because of a myriad of issues. They are overrun with paper, harassed by the administration, (Makala, Hirvensalo, & Whipp, 2014) and experience isolation (Bardo, 1979; Wong, Ruble, Yu, & McGrew, 2017) interfering with teachers' psychological investment in their job.

Blasé's (1986) qualitative study interviewed teachers who expressed deep feelings of stress that contributed and interfered with their psychological well-being. Examples of these 77 categories or themes were related to negative descriptors of the teacher's experiences in the classroom and association with administration. These included anger, resentment, disgust, distrust, exploited, abused, hostile and irritated. Blasé (1986) also identified elements of a depressive state within the various categories. These factors most frequently stated by teachers included apathy, alienation, loneliness, isolation, discouragement, and disappointment. Another category that expressed the teachers' physical states of stress referred to exhaustion, fatigue, overwork and burned out. One specific teacher example reported by Blasé, (1986) was expressed by this statement:

When I first started teaching I was excited.... I would try all kinds of things to make the class interesting. I was learning, growing myself.... Teaching drains you! I've lost a lot of my enthusiasm for the subject. It's hard to keep up a facade of excitement when so many kids and parents don't give a damn about education.(p. 32)

Fernet, et al (2014) supported the premise of job autonomy and passion for teaching. However, the reality was teachers believing, as a classroom teacher, they have job autonomy and find that there are so many factors that challenge their autonomy (Skaalvik, & Skaalvik, 2017). These factors include an overabundance of paper work, long meetings that are not satisfying, and administration that doesn't understand the child with special needs (Richards, Levesque-Bristol, Templin, & Graber, 2016). Teachers' expectations of their job as a teacher are tarnished. The teacher perceives an inability to perform in spite of the decision to choose education as their career. This perception reinforces the conflict in their

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