Promoting Teacher Retention And Increasing Job Satisfaction By Preventing Burnout In The Early Childhood Workforce

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PROMOTING TEACHER RETENTION AND INCREASING JOB SATISFACTION

BY PREVENTING BURNOUT IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

by

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To Ted, who keeps me going.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview of the Chapter

The field of early childhood education is notorious for its high rate of teacher turnover. Even highly qualified, well-educated early childhood teachers often decide to leave their programs and sometimes leave the field entirely due to the demanding, stressful nature of the work combined with poor compensation and unsupportive work environments. In addition, early childhood teachers are often perceived by the public at large as mere babysitters; their professionalism and contributions to society are often overlooked and undervalued.

While some of the above factors are beyond the control of individual early childhood programs (the capacity to pay teachers well usually depends on parents' ability to pay tuition, for instance), there are some programs that find success in retaining teachers in spite of these limitations. There are teachers of young children who find themselves in such consistently supportive programs that they happily dedicate decades of their lives to those programs. With this knowledge in mind, this capstone seeks to answer the question: *How can early childhood program leaders learn to implement supportive strategies to promote teacher retention and increase job satisfaction?*

This chapter will examine the ways in which this topic is personally significant to me. Following that, there will be a discussion of the relevance of this topic within the broader field of early childhood education, including the impact of teacher retention on children's care and education. Finally, the chapter will provide an explanation of the

project that I have developed with the goal in mind of strengthening teacher retention and job satisfaction in the early childhood field.

Personal Experience with Burnout

Although the term 'burnout' is often used casually, in reality it represents a serious condition. Burnout is characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, detachment, and feelings of inefficacy caused by long-term exposure to multiple stressors in professions that involve caring for others (Bourg Carter, 2013; Hozo, Sucic, & Zada, 2015; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). At the time I began writing this capstone, I had to come to terms with the fact that I was experiencing some of the symptoms of burnout as a result of ongoing stress at my job as a preschool teacher.

I entered my profession in the summer of 2011, excited that I had found what I had deemed my dream job: teaching young preschoolers in a small, uniquely progressive, cooperative child care center. Under the mentorship of highly skilled and experienced colleagues, I developed a strong philosophy of early childhood education. My colleagues and I worked collectively without a supervisor, sharing administrative duties and supporting each other professionally. My workplace, with its tightly-knit community operating under a set of shared values, felt like home. It ignited in me a passion for early childhood education and in particular a desire to contribute to the success of the field and to sustain my workplace as a model of early childhood excellence.

Over time, challenges unique to our cooperative model and shifts in our program's makeup began to have subtle yet tangible effects on staff engagement. The aforementioned mentor-colleagues gradually moved on to higher-paying jobs that

afforded them a better work-life balance. With six years of experience, I found myself the longest-standing teacher at our program in the summer of 2017. Of the remaining six teachers, four had been with us for less than a year. Without prior administrative experience, several of the teachers did not feel comfortable taking part in administrative duties. As a result of a series of gradual shifts, what was once a harmonious balance of collaborative effort among teachers became an inequitable distribution of responsibilities that largely fell to me. I accepted this in part because I felt confident in the quality of my work, in part because I didn't want to cause my co-workers additional stress by asking them to take on more than they felt they could handle, and in part because there didn't seem to be an alternative option. What I didn't fully admit to myself was that I was accepting a burden that would eventually become too great to bear.

The next several months saw me attempting to tackle a heap of administrative responsibilities while still performing all of my typical duties as a classroom teacher. At this time in my career I felt more confident than ever in my face-to-face skills as a teacher, yet I also experienced several barriers to realizing my full teaching potential, many of which had to do with insufficient time, lack of guidance, and overwhelming stress. I felt, as I always had - even when tasks had been shared equitably, that the thirty minutes I was allotted each day was never enough time for me to complete all of the planning, preparation, and reflection necessary to teach in a way that truly felt like best practice.

With our collective structure effectively dismantled but with no alternative in place, we lacked a system to provide support for struggling teachers, myself included.

Although I had a vision to address our struggles (More prep time! More collaboration! More reflective practice!), I did not have the power to create the structural change needed to implement that vision. By the time I realized that burnout was a risk for me, I was already well on my way there.

The same week that I began honing the research question for this capstone is when I finally acknowledged to myself that I was deeply in the throes of the emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion that characterize the first stage of burnout. This realization left me with a significant decision to make. Rather than attempting to ignore my serious burnout risk and carry on with my work, I accepted the fact that the only way for me to move on and recover from my emotional exhaustion was to resign from my position.

While my personal story of burnout is unique because it reflects the challenges of working in a cooperative preschool with no direct supervisor, I think it shares some common elements with other early childhood teachers' stories of burnout. There are many significant details that I've left out of my story for brevity's sake, but the themes that are most relevant to the discussion of burnout are clear: lack of support and lack of time. Had the collegial structure at my workplace remained one of reliable support, I most certainly would have remained in my position for a longer period of time. Likewise, had there been sufficient time allotted outside of the classroom for actions such as lesson planning, writing assessments, and engaging in collaborative reflection, I would have been more engaged and satisfied with my work. A supportive work environment and sufficient time to complete tasks are two factors that contribute to teacher retention (Boyd

& Schneider, 1997; Boyd, 2013; Kilgallon, Maloney, & Lock, 2008). Therefore, even though my specific story is unique, the factors that contributed most significantly to my experience are common in many cases of early childhood educator burnout.

Rationale: Sustaining Quality

The extremely high rate of teacher turnover has created a crisis in the early childhood field. According to Totenhagen et al. (2016), the annual rate of preschool teacher turnover ranges from 26% to 40%. By contrast, the annual rate of K-12 teacher turnover is reported to be about 8% (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). In order for children to thrive in early education environments, they need the consistency of caring, dedicated teachers. Children need stability in their routines and secure attachments to their caregivers in order to feel safe in their environments and develop the capacity for emotional regulation. Without having these basic needs met, children cannot be expected to learn the skills necessary to succeed in educational environments.

It is well documented that teacher retention in early childhood programs is linked to better social, emotional, and academic outcomes for children, while high rates of turnover have the opposite effect (Wells, 2015). Therefore, it is critical that early childhood programs examine the factors that contribute to teacher attrition and work diligently to incorporate supportive measures that will increase teachers' desire to continue in their positions.

Although poor compensation and benefits are a significant factor in preschool teacher turnover, individual programs have little power to change this particular problem.

Until governing bodies allocate sufficient funds to early childhood education, programs will have to make do with parent-paid tuition and meager external funding sources. In spite of this reality, there are low-cost measures that programs can take to ensure that their teaching staff are working in conditions conducive to long-term retention. For instance, as was mentioned above, allowing teachers enough time during their workday to complete essential tasks related to preparation, planning, reflective practice, and collaboration has the power to reduce teachers' stress levels and increase their sense of self-efficacy. Based on my experience and observations, programs that strive to create an atmosphere that promotes wellness, professional growth, and a shared set of guiding principles are those in which teachers feel most connected to and engaged by their work, resulting in less burnout and lower rates of turnover. Research supports this conclusion: even in low-paying situations, teachers are likely to remain dedicated to their roles and maintain a high level of job satisfaction as long as they feel supported by supervisors, have strong, positive relationships with children, families, and colleagues, and have opportunities for professional growth (Wells, 2015). In other words, although programs may not have significant control over teachers' income, they have the power to create a supportive work environment by promoting positive relationships, ensuring manageable classroom responsibilities, and respecting teachers as professionals.

Project Description

The quality of care and education provided to young children depends heavily on sustaining teachers' satisfaction with their jobs. With this fact in mind, I have designed a professional development course and corresponding handbook in order to teach early

childhood program leaders about the risk factors for burnout and the associated

consequences for children, teachers, families, and programs. In the same vein, the

resources deliver information on the benefits of creating an environment that is conducive

to retaining staff. The resources encourage participants to consider various supportive

strategies and make a concrete plan to implement the strategies that are within their locus

of control. Additionally, the professional development course offers participants an

opportunity to network with other program leaders in order to develop their own

supportive community of supervisors committed to teacher engagement and retention. I

plan to use my connections to organizations such as Think Small, Child Care Aware, and

the Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children to launch the course and

make it a reality.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the question: *How can early childhood program leaders*

learn to implement supportive strategies to promote teacher retention and increase job

satisfaction? After explaining my personal and professional reasons for creating this

capstone project, I have addressed this question by describing the plan to create

professional development resources for early childhood program leaders. Preventing

burnout by creating a supportive work environment for early childhood teachers is

essential to sustaining quality care and education for young children. Chapter Two will

take an in-depth look into the research on early childhood teacher burnout and strategies

that promote retention. Chapter Three will describe the project in detail, including the

design and intended implementation of the professional development course and

corresponding handbook. Finally, in Chapter Four I will explain what conclusions can be

drawn from the creation of this project, reflect on what I have learned, and consider

future action steps.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter examines the scholarly literature relevant to the research question:

How can early childhood program leaders learn to implement supportive strategies to

promote teacher retention and increase job satisfaction? The discussion of the literature

is divided into three sections: risk factors for burnout and turnover, consequences of

burnout and turnover, and strategies to promote retention and reduce burnout. Each of

these sections is further divided into subcategories in order to capture a comprehensive

view of the pertinent literature. The first section examines the many factors that

contribute to educator burnout and turnover in the early childhood field. The second

section discusses the specific detrimental effects of educator burnout on children,

teachers, and programs. Finally, the third section synthesizes recommendations from the

research on strategies to prevent burnout and support the retention of early childhood

teachers.

Risk Factors for Burnout and Turnover

Maslach (1982) defines burnout as a syndrome characterized by three primary

facets: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a low sense of personal

accomplishment. Consistent with the demands of early childhood education, burnout

typically occurs in jobs that involve a significant amount of social and emotional

interaction between caregivers and care recipients. Although the psychological condition

known as burnout should not be conflated with turnover, which refers to the phenomenon

of teachers leaving their positions, these concepts are explored jointly in this section

because of the close link between burnout and the likelihood that teachers will leave their

roles (Carson, Baumgartner, Ota, Kuhn, & Durr, 2017; Goelman & Guo, 1998; O'Brien,

Goddard, & Keeffe, 2008).

There are a variety of risk factors that contribute to early childhood teachers'

feelings of burnout and likelihood of leaving their positions. Risk factors may be

characterized either as personal or environmental. It is important to understand what the

environmental risk factors are so that they can be mitigated. This section will describe the

research pointing to the most significant contributors to burnout as well as the factors that

cause teachers to leave their jobs.

Compensation

It is well known that early childhood teachers are poorly compensated. With very

little public funding directed toward early childhood education, many programs cannot

afford to pay their teachers a livable wage or offer them benefits such as health insurance

and retirement plans. According to the National Association for the Education of Young

Children (NAEYC), the median salary for early childhood teachers in 2016 was $28,570,

while elementary teachers earned approximately twice that amount (NAEYC, 2016).

Similarly, the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) reports that early

childhood teachers with a Bachelor's degree earn roughly half the average hourly wage

of workers holding a Bachelor's degree across all professions (U.S. Department of Health

and Human Services, 2016). Further, in the majority of states, typical wages for early

childhood teachers are below poverty levels for a family of three (NAEYC, 2016).

Low wages and insufficient benefits are significant causes of stress for early childhood teachers. According to Whitebook, King, Philipp, and Sakai (2016), the majority of early childhood teachers reported worrying about their ability to afford basic living expenses such as food and housing. Several researchers have found that low compensation is associated with teacher turnover. For instance, Bridges, Fuller, Huang, and Hamre (2011) found that teachers with lower pay were significantly more likely to leave their programs over a two-year period than teachers receiving higher pay. In an extensive review of the research on factors influencing preschool teacher retention rates, Totenhagen et al. (2016) reported that low wages represented one of the most significant factors affecting teachers' decision to leave their jobs.

There is some discrepancy in the scholarly research with regard to the effect of compensation on teacher attrition. Holochwost, DeMott, Buell, Yannetta, and Amsden (2009) found no significant relationship between teachers' wages and their intent to remain in the field. However, the availability of benefits such as health insurance, disability insurance, and retirement plans did have a significant positive effect on teachers' desire to remain in the field.

A study by Shine (2016) yielded no correlation between teacher pay and burnout risk. This finding was accounted for by the idea that early childhood teachers' motivation to work in the field largely comes from intrinsic factors such as the joy of building relationships with children, rather than external factors such as compensation. In spite of this finding, the author argues that early childhood teachers are deserving of a substantial

increase in compensation to reflect the importance of their work and to honor their humanity by reducing economic hardship.

Qualification Level

Several researchers have found that experience and education can prevent teachers from burning out and can improve their desire to remain in the field. Shine (2016) found that teacher age and years of teaching experience were negatively correlated with job stress and emotional exhaustion and were positively correlated with sense of job control. Similarly, teachers' level of education was negatively correlated with feelings of burnout. Holochwost et al. (2009) also reported that teachers' level of education correlated to their intention to remain in the field. These findings suggest that teachers with more experience and education are more likely to have developed strategies to handle the stressors of the job, which may prevent burnout and increase job satisfaction.

However, Whitebook et al. (2016) explain that there is little incentive for teachers to increase their qualifications in the early childhood field. Not only is the cost of college-level coursework in early childhood education often prohibitive given teachers' meager wages, but teachers are unlikely to see any meaningful increase in their pay as a result of higher qualifications. In other words, professional advancement through higher education yields little to no financial reward.

In spite of the positive correlation some researchers have found between teacher qualifications and desire to remain in the field, Goelman (2001) discusses findings that suggest that teachers with higher levels of education and experience are more likely to want to leave the field when they perceive a discrepancy between their expertise and their

pay. This poses a problematic scenario for early childhood programs: if the most highly qualified teachers are dissatisfied in their roles due to inadequate compensation, this can undermine the quality of care and education that children receive.

Holochwost et al. (2009) found that years of experience correlated to teachers' intention to remain in the field, but only up to five years of experience, after which there was no longer a correlation. This finding seems to support Goelman's (2001) view that more experienced teachers may lose enthusiasm for their work as a result of compensation that fails to meet their level of expertise. Future studies might examine the relationship between expertise and burnout by taking into account both compensation and classroom efficacy as variables.

Preparation

As has been discussed, research points to the idea that advanced levels of education and experience help teachers develop greater self-efficacy in the classroom and therefore reduce the risk of burnout. It has also been found that the quality of teacher training programs and the expectations set by preparation programs for beginning teachers may influence their risk for burnout. According to Sumison (2003, as cited in Noble & Macfarlane, 2005), pre-service early childhood teachers are often exposed to idealized or romanticized images of early childhood education during their teacher preparation programs. These preparation programs, while operating with good intentions, create unrealistic expectations and fail to equip new teachers to handle the demands of a challenging classroom. The result is that early childhood teachers who are unprepared for

the complex reality of the classroom are at a heightened risk of feeling inadequate and becoming disillusioned when they experience unforeseen challenges.

Noble and Macfarlane (2005) suggest that a potential solution to this problem could be found in integrating teacher induction programs into college-level preparation programs so that beginning teachers are equipped with a system of support to help them engage in reflective practice and cope with workplace stressors. The authors emphasize the importance of the initial teaching experience in determining the trajectory of one's career.

Similarly, Brill and McCartney (2008) discuss the need for high quality teacher induction programs as a preventative measure against turnover. According to the authors, teacher induction programs should include a period of several weeks in which the new teacher can be thoroughly oriented to the school, as well as effective mentorship programs between experienced and novice teachers that focus on support and growth rather than judgment. These authors also caution against poorly managed and disorganized induction programs, which have the potential to create additional stress for both novice and veteran teachers and, in some cases, increase the likelihood of attrition. However, this study focused on K-12 induction programs rather than early childhood programs. Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, and Kipnis (2009) point out that such thorough induction programs are unfortunately rare in the early childhood field. Given the constraints of money and time, many early childhood program leaders feel ill-equipped to develop induction programs. Without sufficient onboarding and training, new teachers are susceptible to becoming overwhelmed by their work.

Working Conditions

Feeling overwhelmed is unfortunately common among the early childhood workforce. Working conditions such as long hours, large class sizes, inadequate resources, and lack of time all contribute to burnout. Several researchers have reported a trend among early childhood teachers involving unpaid overtime. Because teachers are expected to be with children for the vast majority of their workday, very little time tends to be allotted for essential tasks such as lesson planning, assessments, and preparation of materials. Teachers therefore spend significant time outside of regular working hours completing these tasks without pay. Shine (2016) studied burnout risk in early childhood teachers and found that 84.9% of teachers reported working unpaid overtime hours every week. Boyd (2013) found that many teachers spent two to three unpaid hours each day outside of their regularly scheduled workday attempting to complete all of the tasks required of them. In addition, in a study of early childhood educators' perceived stress, Wagner et al. (2013) noted that the majority of teachers felt that they did not have enough time to do their work, and that teachers commonly felt physically and emotionally exhausted by the end of their workday.

The perceived need for additional time to complete tasks combined with an already long workday in a stressful environment creates heightened risk for burnout. Al-Adwan and Al-Khayat (2016) discussed that working long hours, managing large class sizes, and attempting to meet parent expectations contributed to teachers' feelings of burnout. Brill and McCartney (2008) also indicated that large class sizes, long hours,

inadequate resources, and challenging child behavior put teachers at risk of wanting to leave their jobs.

Sjödin, Kjellberg, Knutsson, Landström, and Lindberg (2012) studied the causes of preschool teachers' stress level. They found that the number of children present in a classroom correlated to the level of cortisol in the teachers' saliva. In other words, teachers experienced a higher level of stress when more children were present. In addition, these researchers noted a correlation between burnout and perceived noise level: the teachers who experienced the classroom as noisier exhibited a greater risk of burnout.

Emotional Demands

Working conditions in the early childhood field are inextricably linked with emotional demands. Emotional exhaustion is an aspect of burnout that is particularly relevant to the early childhood teaching profession given the taxing nature of the work and the emotional relationships involved. Chiaromonte (1998) discussed the risk factors for emotional exhaustion. Teachers with high levels of emotional exhaustion worked more hours per week and more months out of the year than teachers with low levels of emotional exhaustion. Langher, Caputo, and Ricci (2017) found that working with children and families from poor socioeconomic backgrounds created additional risk of emotional exhaustion.

A further contributing factor to emotional exhaustion is that teachers often feel that they must favor the emotional needs of children and parents over their own emotional needs. This feeling manifests itself in teachers withholding the true expression of their emotions in order to project a sense of calm and positivity for children and

families. Corr, Cook, Davis, LaMontagne, and Waters (2017) describe this act as

adhering to the "feeling rules" of the workplace. Ching-Sheue (2015) and Corr et al.

(2017) found that this type of emotional labor increased teachers' stress and decreased

their job satisfaction. As one respondent in Corr et al.'s (2017) study commented, "It's

really hard when you have all these stresses because you've still got to put on this face

for the children" (p. 100). In a study of early childhood teachers' job satisfaction, Carson

et al. (2017) found that teachers' feelings of emotional exhaustion throughout the

workday were strongly correlated with a desire to quit. It is therefore evident that

emotional exhaustion is a facet of burnout that causes teachers to want to leave their

professions.

Perceived Support

A final notable risk factor for burnout that emerged from the literature is teachers'

perception that they lack sufficient support. Several researchers have explained that lower

levels of perceived professional support contribute to decreased feelings of personal

accomplishment and higher rates of emotional exhaustion, depression, and turnover

(Berrafato, 2017; Bridges et al. 2011; Langher et al., 2017; McLaughlin, 2013). Broadly

speaking, poor leadership is a frequent cause of teacher attrition (Brill & McCartney,

2008). Leiter and Maslach (2003, as cited in Shine, 2016) pointed out the importance of a

sense of fairness and equitable treatment by supervisors and colleagues. These authors

stressed that teachers are put at greater risk of burning out when they feel that they are

treated unfairly, such as when responsibilities are unevenly distributed. Whitebook et al.

(2016) found that one third of all early childhood teachers surveyed felt that the workload

was shared inequitably among colleagues and that supervisors set unfair expectations. The authors discuss that the resulting increased workload, undervalued effort, and perceptions of favoritism have a detrimental effect on teacher morale.

Whitebook et al. (2016) also discuss the need for teachers to have a voice in decision-making, both at the classroom level and the institutional level. According to these authors, teacher input cannot be overlooked when it comes to decisions that affect their daily work. If teachers do not have a way to let their voices be heard, or if their perspectives are not taken seriously, morale decreases and turnover increases. Berrafato (2017) also discusses the importance of teachers' ability to have a voice in workplace outcomes, referring to this ability as job control. The research resoundingly agrees that a poor sense of job control increases teachers' stress, emotional exhaustion, and desire to leave the field (Berrafato, 2017; Shine, 2016; Wagner et al., 2013).

In summary, there are several contributing factors to both burnout and turnover, including poor compensation, qualification level, quality of professional preparation, working conditions, emotional demands, and lack of perceived support. The following section will explore what the literature reveals about the effects of burnout and turnover.

Consequences of Burnout and Turnover

Feelings of burnout in early childhood teachers have far-reaching significance. Burnout has detrimental consequences on teachers' well-being, which in turn affects children's development and the stability and quality of early childhood programs. This section will examine the research on burnout with regard to its effects on teacher

well-being, program quality and outcomes for children, and costs to early childhood programs.

Effects on Teachers' Well-Being

As previously mentioned, burnout can be characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a low sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982). The high level of stress brought about by these facets of burnout can be damaging to teachers' mental health and wellness (Tang, Au, Schwarzer & Schmitz, 2001).

Teachers' well-being is also put at risk by stress over financial issues and working in an environment that they perceive to be disrespectful and emotionally unsupportive (Whitebook et al., 2016). Shine (2016) discussed risks to teachers' well-being and their detrimental effects, noting that teachers who don't have the opportunity to recover from workload-induced fatigue every day (due to working overtime without pay and taking work home either physically or psychologically) are at risk of seeing both their relationships and their quality of work diminish.

Effects on Quality of Care and Education

The literature shows that burnout and its associated symptoms can severely undermine program quality, both because of diminished classroom effectiveness and because of the deficits created by teacher turnover (Whitebook et al., 2016). The effects of burnout on program quality are explored below.

Classroom quality. Raver, Blair, and Li-Grining (2012, as cited in Neuenschwander, Friedman-Krauss, Raver, & Blair, 2017) posited that when teachers are experiencing the negative emotions associated with burnout, they have a hard time with

overall classroom management, which in part involves dividing their attention between the many demands of the classroom. Poor classroom management can lead to a chaotic environment in which teachers may become reactive, spending a disproportionate amount of time in negative interactions with children who exhibit challenging behaviors, while overlooking the needs of less demanding children and the classroom as a whole.

Relationships and emotional development. When burned-out teachers exhibit patterns of negative interactions with children, this can affect children's development of social and emotional skills. Buettner, Jeon, Hur, and Garcia (2016) found that teachers experiencing depression, stress, and emotional exhaustion were more likely to engage negatively with children, for instance, by giving punitive or otherwise unsupportive responses to children's emotions. These researchers discuss further implications for teachers' burnout symptoms on children's emotional development, stressing that the early years are crucial for the development of emotional intelligence. If children are not supported emotionally by adults who model compassion, children are at risk of developing a poor capacity for emotional competence.

Cazares reinforces this point, explaining that children are less likely to develop the appropriate social-emotional skills necessary for success in school and life without skilled early childhood teachers who are themselves emotionally prepared for the job. Children who do not develop emotional regulation and social skills such as cooperation, conflict resolution, and empathy in preschool are likely to go on to have social, emotional, behavioral, and academic problems that impact their ability to function in academic and social contexts (2008).

Depersonalization is a facet of burnout that can have particularly strong consequences in an early childhood classroom. According to Maslach and Leiter (2008), depersonalization is characterized by "a negative, callous, or excessively detached" (p. 498) attitude toward the people in one's environment. Depersonalization not only interferes with the potential for secure attachments to develop between caregivers and children, but also wears away the secure bonds that already exist before burnout sets in. This leaves children susceptible to developing a negative and potentially harmful self-image. Shine (2016) discusses that depersonalization may begin to manifest itself as social distancing, but in extreme cases can turn into "profound cynicism" (p. 100) and the eventual dehumanizing of children, which can have dangerous consequences for the social and emotional health of such a vulnerable population.

When teachers' level of burnout reaches the point of causing them to leave their jobs, it impacts both the potential for secure attachments between children and their teachers as well as children's social and emotional development. In a study of the impacts of teacher stability on low-income children's development, Tran and Winsler (2011) found that four-year-old children who experienced teacher change during the school year made fewer gains in adult closeness and attachment than children whose teachers remained with them. Further, these children also exhibited more behavior concerns and problems with self-control.

Learning outcomes. Because disruptions in secure attachments affect emotional stability, these disruptions can also affect children's learning. As Hale-Jinks, Knopf, and Kemple (2006) point out, children first and foremost need to feel emotionally safe in

order to be able to learn. Developing a secure attachment to a caregiver takes time. A well-developed sense of trust in the caregiver creates a secure foundation from which the child can explore and learn. When teacher turnover occurs, it disrupts these secure attachments and interferes with routines, creating conditions that are less conducive to learning as children are forced to expend their energy seeking out sources of security rather than engaging in exploration (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006).

Turnover is not the only source of undesirable effects on children's learning. Whitebook et al. (2016) reported on the relationship between adult well-being in the workplace and child learning outcomes. This research showed that higher levels of self-reported adult well-being in the workplace were related to more complex and stimulating conversations between teachers and children, which fostered more in-depth learning and higher order thinking skills. This implies that teachers who do not have a positive sense of workplace well-being are not as likely to provide an enriching learning environment for children.

Perhaps the reason for this relationship is that burnout is associated with a poor sense of self-efficacy. When teachers don't believe in their own ability to improve outcomes for children, particularly those exhibiting challenging behaviors, they avoid expending energy on such children (Maniadaki, Sonuga-Barke, & Kakouros, 2006, as cited in Cazares, 2008). Burnout can therefore be a detriment to children's learning when it causes teachers to lose confidence in their own skills.

Racial disparities. Even more consequential for children's well-being is the relationship between teacher stress and children's involuntary removal from early

childhood programs: when teachers do not have adequate access to professional support to cope with children's challenging behaviors, these children are more likely to be suspended or expelled (Gilliam, 2005). It is well documented that suspension and expulsion from early childhood programs disproportionately affect children of color, particularly African American boys. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (2014), black boys represent approximately 18% of children enrolled in preschool programs, yet make up almost half of all suspensions. Based on what the literature shows, a logical connection can be drawn between early childhood teacher burnout and racial disparities: because burned out teachers lack the resources to provide effective support to children with challenging behaviors (Cazares, 2008), and because implicit bias often causes teachers to focus their disciplinary action on children of color, these children are at disproportionate risk of suspension or expulsion (Wesley & Ellis, 2017). Burnout therefore exacerbates the already problematic school readiness gap between white children and children of color, particularly boys of color (Barbarin, 2015).

Costs

A largely unexamined yet relevant consequence of early childhood teacher turnover are the financial costs to programs. Hale-Jinks et al. (2006) cite information on the costs of replacing teachers when they leave their position: programs often need to spend money on long-term substitute teachers, orienting and training newly hired staff, and completing background checks. In addition, programs may also find themselves paying regular staff for overtime hours as they attempt to fill in the gaps in coverage

resulting from teacher turnover. In some circumstances, families may become frustrated by turnover and decide to seek alternate child care, thereby reducing a program's tuition income.

Strategies to Promote Retention and Reduce Burnout

While much of the research on the topic at hand paints a grim picture of burnout and attrition, there is some literature that casts a hopeful light on the situation. This section explores the research on the types of strategies that may help teachers remain in the field of early childhood education. The prevalent themes emerging from the literature include collegial support and mentorship, professional development, reducing stress and promoting health, and improving working conditions.

Maslach and Leiter (2008) discuss the idea of a "burnout-engagement continuum" in which each of the three negative components of burnout has a positive counterpart. Specifically, the negative experience of burnout is associated with exhaustion, inefficacy, and depersonalization/cynicism, while the positive experience of engagement is associated with energy, efficacy, and involvement. These authors suggest that any intervention aimed at reversing job burnout should begin by identifying how to address each dimension of the burnout-engagement continuum (exhaustion-energy, inefficacy-efficacy, and cynicism-involvement). This section of the literature review will therefore discuss supportive strategies as they relate to the elements of the burnout-engagement continuum.

Mentorship and Collegial Support

  Mentorship programs. The scholarly literature on teacher retention has

highlighted the benefits of mentor partnerships between teachers. Brill and McCartney

(2008) argue that high-quality orientation, training, and mentoring programs are the most

effective method to support teacher retention. According to these authors, receiving

positive feedback and encouragement from experienced teachers may help new teachers

develop a sense of calling for the work and strengthen their feelings of success despite

challenging classroom circumstances. Similarly, Buchanan et al. (2013) discuss that

collegial mentorship is important because experienced teachers' sharing of resources and

ideas gives new teachers tools to cope with the demands of the work. While this article is

not specific to early childhood education, the premise certainly applies: mentorship from

colleagues helps strengthen job satisfaction. These studies support the idea that

mentorship may reduce burnout and increase engagement by strengthening new teachers'

efficacy and sense of accomplishment.

  In a study by Ozgun (2005), novice teachers who felt satisfied with their

mentoring relationships adjusted more easily to their roles and had a more positive

perception of their first few years of teaching than teachers who did not have a mentor or

did not have a satisfying partnership with a mentor. According to the novice teachers in

this study, mentorship was seen as valuable because it provided an opportunity for them

to discuss their concerns and challenges in relation to their teaching goals. In addition,

novice teachers found value in utilizing their mentor teachers for classroom visits and

observations, both in their own classrooms as a way to receive feedback and in their mentors' classrooms as a way to gain new ideas.

However, the majority of teachers surveyed reported that they either had no mentoring relationship or that their mentoring relationship was inadequate to provide them the support they needed. The author emphasized the importance of thorough training and incentives for mentors in order to optimize the potential for both instructional and emotional support through these partnerships (Ozgun, 2005).

Collegial and administrative support. In addition to showing the positive effects of mentoring relationships, Ozgun's (2005) study revealed that administrative support was a significant predictor of both job satisfaction and positive experiences adjusting to the profession. Positive relationships with colleagues and perception of colleagues as supportive and friendly were also significantly related to job satisfaction.

Ozgun (2005) found several ways in which positive workplace relationships seemed to contribute to program quality. For instance, when teachers felt that they were receiving the professional assistance they needed, their self-efficacy beliefs increased. Support from administrators was related to the competence not only of individual teachers, but also of teachers working in teams. When teachers believed that they were working well as a team, they experienced a greater level of satisfaction with their ability to have a positive effect on children. The author of this study discussed the idea that by setting clear expectations and offering teachers supportive guidance, constructive feedback, and acknowledgment of their hard work, program administrators create a culture of community and sense of connection amongst their staff.

Collegial relationships were also a central predictor of teacher retention, job satisfaction, and efficacy in a study by Kilgallon et al. (2008). In this study, participants reported that receiving daily emotional support from colleagues helped sustain them within their teaching roles. Teachers emphasized the value of having a teaching assistant to share the workload and help cope with classroom challenges. In addition, developing close relationships with colleagues allowed some teachers to discover and hone their personal philosophies of early childhood education and deepen their level of involvement in the field through voluntary professional development activities. It can therefore be reasonably concluded that a supportive collegial environment minimizes burnout risk by increasing engagement along the dimensions of both efficacy and involvement.

Reflective supervision and transformational leadership. In contrast to traditional models of supervision that involve critical evaluation and top-down commands, reflective supervision provides a regular, reliable context for collaborative professional learning and growth. In reflective supervision, supervisors encourage teachers to reflect on the behaviors and interactions that occur in their classrooms by engaging in a process of inquiry into their pedagogical practice (Emde, 2009; Weiss & Weiss, 2001). Reflective supervision provides teachers an opportunity for continuous, collaborative learning. As Emde (2009) points out, many early childhood providers associate the term 'supervision' with negativity; they feel that supervision is something to be dreaded because it elicits judgment and an expectation of perfection. However, teachers who experience reflective supervision see it as a positive opportunity to seek help and develop awareness of their capacity for self-improvement and professional

growth (Emde, 2009). Research into reflective supervision in the early childhood field suggests that it may reduce stress and burnout by offering teachers a safe and supportive place to discuss their stressors while simultaneously helping to increase teachers' sense of personal accomplishment and classroom effectiveness (Brown, 2016). Reflective supervision may also help protect teachers against the stress of challenging parent-teacher relationships (Lepore, 2016).

Similarly, transformational leadership is a style of personalized supervision that helps teachers see their intrinsic value and encourages creative problem solving. Gong, Zimmerli, and Hoffer (2013) describe four essential qualities of transformational leaders: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Idealized influence refers to the act of modeling behavior that serves the organization's values and demonstrates a sense of purpose in positively impacting others. Inspirational motivation involves raising morale by helping to develop a shared sense of calling for the work and allowing teachers a high level of involvement in shaping the program's future vision. Intellectual stimulation refers to considering new perspectives, questioning the status quo, and encouraging creative approaches to the work. Finally, individualized consideration emphasizes attention to individual teachers' needs within the organization; transformational leaders tailor their supervision, coaching, and problem solving strategies to each teacher's strengths and areas for growth.

Gong et al. (2013) studied the relationship between transformational leadership and burnout in Special Education teachers. They found that transformational leadership was positively related to teachers' sense of personal accomplishment and negatively

related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, thereby minimizing each of the three core components of job burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Although the specific effects of transformational leadership in the early childhood field have not been widely studied, the study of Special Education teachers suggests that transformational leadership protects against burnout by reinforcing teachers' sense of calling for their work.

Consultation and Professional Development

Children's mental health professionals. Working with young children with emotional and behavioral challenges can be a contributing factor to teacher burnout. Several studies have illustrated that providing teachers the opportunity to consult with children's mental health professionals can strengthen job engagement by increasing both efficacy and energy.

Shine (2016) found that classroom support in the form of access to early childhood mental health consultants was associated with teachers' feelings of personal accomplishment. The research suggests that all early childhood teachers would benefit from school-based mental health consultation.

Zinsser, Christensen, and Torres (2016) studied the relationship between program-level social-emotional supports and teachers' well-being. They found that when teachers had more opportunities to access mental health consultation and other supports such as trainings and curriculum resources, they exhibited fewer signs of depression and higher levels of job satisfaction. Furthermore, these teachers rated their programs as having a positive workplace climate and reported that they felt supported in addressing difficult behavior.

Cazares (2008) also discusses the idea that access to mental health professionals and behavior consultants is beneficial for both teachers and children. Such consultation has been shown to improve teachers' sense of self-efficacy in handling challenging classroom situations (Gilliam, 2005), yet most early childhood teachers do not have access to mental health consultants. The author suggests that positive behavior workshops may be a helpful alternative, as they may lower teachers' risk of burnout due to increasing feelings of self-efficacy (Cazares, 2008). This idea is further explored below.

Professional development. Professional development opportunities may have a positive effect on teachers' ability to sustain themselves in their roles, particularly when it comes to helping teachers cope with job-related challenges and stress. In other words, professional development, depending on its focus, has the potential to increase job engagement along the dimensions of energy and efficacy while protecting against the exhaustion and lowered feelings of personal accomplishment that characterize burnout.

Gebbie, Ceglowski, Taylor, and Miels (2012) studied the impact of professional development supports on teachers' feelings of competence in handling challenging behaviors. Teachers in this study were trained in strategies to help them manage classroom behavior successfully. They also participated in an online learning community in which they could share ideas and support each other. As a result of these professional development opportunities, teachers felt a greater sense of competence in addressing challenging behavior in the classroom as well as an overall improved sense of self-efficacy.

Poyner (2016) studied the protective factors that contribute to early childhood teachers' resilience. The author recommends that teachers engage in professional development activities that focus on building resilience, such as participating in a particular online course designed to introduce teachers to stress-reduction strategies and protective factors that can be used to prevent burnout. The author stresses the importance of attending to the mental health and well-being of early childhood teachers.

Further emphasizing early childhood teachers' mental health needs, Biglan, Layton, Jones, Hankins, and Rusby (2013) conducted a study to determine whether a workshop on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) would reduce feelings of stress and burnout in early childhood program staff. ACT involves mindful awareness (attention to the present moment), acceptance of unpleasant experiences, and acting "in the service of [one's] values" (Biglan et al., 2013, p. 197). The researchers found that the workshop helped teachers more willingly confront unpleasant situations, increased their mindful awareness, and increased their self-efficacy.

Reducing Stress and Promoting Health

In addition to professional development opportunities, there are a variety of strategies and suggestions emerging from the scholarly literature that pertain to teachers' mental well-being. Similarly to Biglan et al. (2013), McLaughlin (2013) advocates for mindfulness-based stress reduction, suggesting that this practice could serve as a protective factor against depression in early childhood teachers. However, Corr et al. (2017) maintain that it shouldn't be solely up to the teachers themselves to identify and implement all necessary supports for mental well-being, given that the circumstances of

working in the early childhood field contribute significantly to teacher stress. Rather, early childhood programs should actively seek to care for teachers by supporting their mental health. In line with this thinking, Buettner et al. (2016) encourage programs to support teachers with stress management; just as teachers should create a positive atmosphere to support children's well-being, programs should create a positive atmosphere to support teachers' well-being.

Carson et al. (2017) examined the strategies that early childhood teachers used to keep themselves from burning out. Participants were surveyed three times per day over a one-week period, including once during a mid-morning break, once after lunch, and once at the end of the work day. They were surveyed on levels of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion as well as rejuvenation strategies. Teachers reported that the most effective methods for reducing stress during the workday were those that allowed them a brief reprieve (15 minutes or less) from their work in which to restore their physical or cognitive energy. Physical reprieves were activities such as going outside, taking a break to exercise, or consciously relaxing one's muscles. Cognitive reprieves were actions such as taking a "mental vacation" (p. 803), meditating, or engaging in a hobby such as reading or music. The authors suggest that allowing teachers some short breaks of 15 minutes or less to help restore physical and cognitive energy each day (in addition to regular longer breaks) may be effective in reducing the daily stress and exhaustion that contribute to burnout.

Improving Working Conditions

Just as poor working conditions can cause teachers to burn out, creating improvements in a program's organizational climate and structure may have a positive effect on teachers' job engagement and commitment to the field.

Program climate and shared decision-making. Several pieces of scholarly research have pointed to teacher voice and the climate of the organization as important factors in both staff retention and the quality of the educational environment. Jiang (2005) studied the effects of the organizational climate on teachers' job satisfaction and burnout. The findings illustrated that empowering teachers to have a voice in such matters as curriculum development directly increased job satisfaction, which in turn had the effect of increasing professional commitment and reducing burnout. In other words, giving teachers a voice increases their involvement, which helps protect against the cynicism that can lead to burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Similarly, Brill and McCartney (2008) discuss that involving teachers in programmatic decision-making serves as a protective factor against turnover. Berrafato (2017) also mentions that giving teachers a chance to influence outcomes through shared control helps build teachers' resilience.

Hur, Jeon, and Buettner (2016) found that a positive work climate and teachers' sense of influence within the program were related to both job-related well-being and the developmental appropriateness of teachers' beliefs about how children learn. It can therefore be inferred that giving teachers a voice within a positive collegial environment

not only improves teachers' job satisfaction (and therefore lessens the likelihood of burnout), but also increases the quality of the educational program.

Kilgallon et al. (2008) surveyed early childhood teachers on the factors that help to sustain them in their work and found that teachers' autonomy over classroom decision-making with regard to teaching methods, scheduling, and purchasing supplies contributed to teachers' job satisfaction, commitment, and motivation.

Planning and reflection. The study by Kilgallon et al. (2008) also revealed that teachers felt a greater sense of commitment to and satisfaction in their work when they had opportunities to thoroughly prepare for the day by planning lessons and gathering materials, as well as when they engaged in reflective practice to determine what was working well and what should change in their classroom routines and teaching practices. Although the effect of allotted planning and reflection time on teacher retention has received little attention in the scholarly literature, a look at the research on the causes of burnout serves as a reminder that teachers often find themselves using their own personal time and resources to complete tasks related to planning and preparation (Boyd, 2013; Shine, 2016; Wagner et al., 2013). It therefore stands to reason that more time within the workday for activities related to planning, preparation, and reflective practice could improve teachers' job satisfaction and intent to remain in the field, as Kilgallon et al. (2008) have illustrated. Boyd and Schneider's (1997) research reinforces the idea that teachers should have adequate time for planning and reflection built into their workday. These authors insist that time spent apart from children to engage in classroom planning and discussions with other staff members is essential to preventing burnout; such time

serves to increase engagement on all three dimensions of involvement, energy, and efficacy.

Wages and benefits. The scholarly literature seems to reflect the general opinion that early childhood teachers are paid far too little (Boyd, 2013; Goelman, 2001; Hale-Jinks et al., 2006; Shine, 2016; Whitebook et al., 2016). Goelman (2001) advocates strongly for pay increases in order to sustain the morale and longevity of highly trained teachers, suggesting that higher compensation improves job engagement. Although there has been some discrepancy in the empirical research as to whether pay has an effect on turnover, Holochwost et al. (2009) have documented that benefits including health insurance, disability insurance, and pension do correlate with teachers' desire to remain in the field. Given that these benefits are associated with retention, the researchers recommend implementing additional benefits such as paid leave, free child care, and financial aid for higher education in order to increase teacher retention.

Rationale for the Research

The review of the scholarly literature in this chapter will help answer the research question: *How can early childhood program leaders learn to implement supportive strategies to promote teacher retention and increase job satisfaction?* The discussion of the literature on risk factors for burnout and turnover is relevant to this question because it identifies specific problems that need to be addressed in order to resolve the broader issues of burnout and turnover. Without an understanding of the origins of these problems, there can be no hope of resolving them. The second section of this chapter details the consequences of burnout and turnover as described in the scholarly literature.

Understanding these effects is essential in order to provide the motivation for program leaders to take action toward preventing burnout. Finally, the research explaining effective strategies to enhance retention and reduce burnout is perhaps most relevant to the research question, since it provides information that can be translated into concrete actions for program leaders to take in support of the retention of teachers.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature on early childhood teacher burnout, turnover, and retention. The first section detailed risk factors that contribute to burnout and turnover, including compensation, qualification level, professional preparation, working conditions, emotional demands, and perceived support. It is evident from the research that burnout and turnover are complex phenomena brought on by a variety of factors.

The consequences of burnout, described in the second section of the chapter, are similarly multifaceted. As the literature reveals, teacher burnout is associated with several undesirable effects, including risks to teachers' well-being, diminished quality of care and education, and higher costs to early childhood programs.

On a positive note, the research presented in the third section of the chapter offers strategies that may be helpful in mitigating burnout and boosting early childhood teacher retention rates by increasing job engagement along three dimensions: energy, efficacy, and involvement. The broad topics prevalent in the literature include collegial support and mentorship, professional development, reducing stress and promoting health, and improving working conditions for early childhood teaching staff.

The scholarly literature explored in Chapter Two lays a foundation for my capstone project, a professional development course and corresponding handbook that are intended to help early childhood program administrators implement supportive strategies to reduce teacher burnout and increase retention. Chapter Three will provide an overview of this project, including the context and guiding frameworks, and will describe the implementation of the project in detail.

CHAPTER THREE

Description of the Project

Overview of the Chapter

Chapter Two presented an expansive array of literature on the subjects of teacher burnout and turnover in the early childhood field. Despite the wealth of research that has been conducted on these topics, relatively little information has made its way from the scholarly journals into the hands of those who need it most: early childhood professionals themselves. Without practical methods of delivering information to the workers on the ground, research findings cannot be put into practice. By describing professional development opportunities intended to bridge the gap between research and practice, this chapter gets at the heart of the question: *How can early childhood program leaders learn to implement supportive strategies to promote teacher retention and increase job satisfaction?*

This chapter presents the underlying framework for adult learning, followed by a description of the intended audience for the project and resources to help launch the project. The chapter then explains in detail the two manifestations of the professional development course and offers a description of the corresponding handbook on supportive strategies for teacher retention.

Framework for Adult Learning

In order to deliver meaningful professional development, it is essential to consider effective methods of teaching adults. Theories of adult education, popularized by Malcolm Knowles, provide a framework for constructing professional development that

is relevant to the learner and that promotes sustained professional change. According to

Knowles (1978), adults must understand the value of what they are learning and have the

opportunity to put their learning into practice and evaluate its effectiveness. Knowles was

an advocate for democratic processes in adult learning. In practice, this means that

learners have the opportunity to make contributions to the group by sharing their ideas

and that they have a choice in what information they take with them and how to

implement it within the contexts relevant to them (1978).

Relevance to the learner is an important facet of Knowles's adult learning

framework. Knowles (1980) emphasized that learners are most engaged by active

participation in realistic problem-solving scenarios and processes of meaningful inquiry,

rather than as passive recipients of information. My professional development sessions

are therefore designed to engage participants in active learning, discussion, and

exploration of the topic through a lens of their own personal and professional

experiences.

In addition to personal relevance of the material and the methods by which

participants are engaged in learning, it is important to consider the structure and format of

the professional development sessions. Time is a factor to consider not only in terms of

the amount of hours spent in professional development, but also in terms of the total span

of days, weeks, or months over which the professional development takes place. The

majority of professional development for those working in the field of education occurs

in the form of one-time workshops or conference presentations. However, research on

best practices for professional development points toward the relative ineffectiveness of

the workshop model for sustained, meaningful change. Rather, adults benefit from professional development that provides sufficient time to try out new strategies, reflect on the effectiveness of those strategies, and work in collaboration with others (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Therefore, the primary model for my professional development course will be a series of three classes taking place over the span of two to three months.

Although one-time workshops and conferences are considered less effective than in-depth courses of longer duration, the workshop model remains a common, accessible, and affordable form of professional development for early childhood professionals. It was therefore important for me to consider how the frameworks for adult learning could best be adapted to create an abridged version of the course. I turned once again to Knowles to find useful strategies for adult learning in the context of a conference workshop. Knowles (1992) explains how a single workshop can still embody the most important principles of adult learning, for instance, by fostering participants' interaction with the presenter and with each other to increase engagement.

More specifically, Knowles suggests structuring the workshop so that participants form small groups to pool their questions, problems, and concerns, then share their thoughts with the larger group in order to promote collaborative problem-solving and sharing of ideas. Because the limited duration of a workshop or conference presentation does not allow for contextual application of the learned material, Knowles recommends having participants work together once again in small groups to create action plans to transfer what they have learned to their own professional contexts. Participants are

encouraged to choose one or two ideas that they would like to try out in their workplaces, then plan the action steps necessary to execute their ideas, and finally anticipate potential obstacles. The collaborative structure of the workshop then allows participants to help each other think of ways to overcome those obstacles. The goal is for participants to leave the workshop feeling prepared to apply what they have learned, engage in thoughtful reflection, and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies they will implement (1992).

Course Participants

The intended audience for the professional development course are people working in supervisory or administrative roles within the early childhood field, such as directors, assistant directors, and education coordinators. The course is targeted primarily at this group because program administrators and supervisors are in direct control of several factors that impact teachers' job experience. This target audience has the most power to use information from the training to create positive change for the teachers in their programs.

The course could also prove useful for those working in supportive partnership with early childhood programs, such as early childhood consultants and program quality coaches. In addition, teachers themselves may find an interest in attending the course in order to gain inspiration and tools to effect change in their workplaces.

Professional Partnerships

In order to bring a professional development course to life, I needed to consider the organizations in my professional networks that could help make my project a reality. The first connection that came to mind was the Minnesota Association for the Education

of Young Children (MnAEYC). Serving on the committee that plans MnAEYC's annual

state conference allowed me a foot in the door in the process of launching my

professional development course. As a member of the conference planning committee, I

not only have the opportunity to help select workshops for the conference, but I also have

an opportunity to network with other early childhood professionals who have connections

to schools and organizations that could serve as venues for me to carry out the

professional development sessions. The state conference itself represents an opportunity

to deliver a ninety minute workshop to early childhood professionals from all over the

state of Minnesota.

While the statewide conference is an excellent venue for reaching a variety of

providers, the shortened time allotment for the workshop creates a challenge because it

limits the depth of exploration and discussion that can occur. As previously mentioned,

the workshop format, by its very nature, does not include contextual application of the

learned information, which makes it more difficult for participants to reflect on, evaluate,

and improve upon the recommended strategies. It was therefore important to me to design

a thorough series of professional development sessions that would encourage deep

reflection, collaboration, and sustained growth.

In order to bring the unabridged training series to fruition, I needed to consider

options beyond the state conference. MnAEYC remains a useful partner for this purpose,

serving as a host for several in-person professional development opportunities including

some training series that span several weeks or months. In addition to MnAEYC, there

are other local organizations that provide continuing education for early childhood

professionals, such as Think Small, which offers low-cost face-to-face trainings, and Child Care Aware, which offers online trainings in a variety of formats.

After exploring the various options for bringing my professional development course to life, it became clear that the format of the course would depend on the parameters set by the host organization. The following section of this chapter will therefore provide an overview of two potential formats for the professional development: a series of in-person training sessions and a single condensed workshop.

Overview of Professional Development Sessions

Series of Three Classes

A comprehensive three-part training series is the primary format for this professional development project. During the first session, participants will be introduced to the concept of burnout and its effect on teacher turnover. They will then explore the risk factors and consequences of both burnout and turnover, as well as the protective factors that increase the likelihood of job satisfaction and retention. This session will involve significant group discussion and collaboration in order to promote a sense of community among participants. Participants will each create an action plan that involves choosing one or two strategies to try out in their programs. Participants will be asked to keep a process journal of their efforts, detailing successes and challenges.

Taking place several weeks after the first session, the second session will largely serve as an opportunity for reflection and community-building. There will be a brief refresher on burnout and turnover, followed by group discussions to reflect on and evaluate the particular strategies that participants have tried. Using a reflective practice

worksheet, participants will reflect on their efforts and make a plan to go forward. Participants will identify people and resources to help them carry out their chosen strategies and discuss how they might support each other in their efforts to better support teachers.

During the following period of several weeks, participants will continue to work toward their chosen goals and keep their process journals up to date. The third and final session will then involve another opportunity for collaborative reflection and will prompt participants to consider what they might need to do in order to ensure the sustainability of their chosen strategies.

After each class meeting, participants will be asked to complete a brief evaluation of the class via an anonymous survey form. The evaluation will assess the content, delivery, and usefulness of information at each session. There will also be a final evaluation to assess the overall effectiveness of the course as a whole. I will use the information gathered from the evaluations to inform future improvements to the course.

Condensed Workshop

As mentioned above, although one-time workshops have their limitations, condensing the training series into a single workshop allows for even greater accessibility. The workshop format is designed for a ninety-minute block of time, during which participants will receive the basic information about the risk factors and consequences associated with burnout and turnover, as well as recommendations for supportive strategies. In small groups, participants will develop action plans involving one or two supportive strategies of their choice. They will then be asked to consider the

obstacles that might stand in the way of their success and brainstorm potential solutions.

Participants will again be encouraged to keep a process journal. They will also be

introduced to a reflective practice worksheet and will be encouraged to use the worksheet

in their professional practice as a way to keep themselves engaged in an ongoing process

of reflection. Participants will be encouraged to establish connections with each other

during the workshop and to check in with each other in the weeks and months following

the workshop so that they can maintain a community of support. Following the

workshop, participants will be asked to complete a survey to evaluate the workshop's

effectiveness.

Overview of the Teacher Engagement Handbook

A supplement to the professional development course comes in the form of a

handbook that I have written as part of this project, entitled *The Teacher Engagement*

Handbook: Tools to Reduce Burnout and Promote Teacher Retention in Early Childhood

Education. The purpose of this handbook is to provide continued guidance for early

childhood program administrators by outlining research-backed strategies that support

teacher retention and offering a list of recommended resources. The handbook will be

available electronically to all course participants.

Because the professional development series present several potential strategies

for participants to choose from, it is not possible to cover each strategy in depth during

the sessions. The handbook therefore points course participants toward specific resources

to support successful implementation of the strategies. For instance, if a participant

decides to focus on reflective supervision as their supportive strategy of choice, they will

be able to refer to the handbook for specific guidance on where to find more information on effective implementation of reflective supervision.

Chapter Summary

The goal of delivering research-based strategies into the hands of early childhood professionals was motivated by the question: *How can early childhood program leaders learn to implement supportive strategies to promote teacher retention and increase job satisfaction?* This question inspired the current project, which consists of a series of professional development sessions and a corresponding handbook aimed at preventing burnout and increasing retention.

This chapter examined Malcolm Knowles's theory of adult education, which lays the groundwork for the professional development course I have designed. After describing the intended audience for the course and the professional connections necessary to bring the project to life, this chapter has gone on to explain the two versions of the professional development course: a series of three face-to-face training sessions and a ninety-minute workshop. Each of these iterations of the course will promote group collaboration, the creation of detailed action plans using participants' choice of strategies, and personal reflection on the successes and challenges of the implemented changes. A handbook offering strategies for teacher support and resources for implementation will be provided to course participants as a supplement to the training.

Chapter Four will present my personal reflections on the process of creating this capstone project. I will discuss the implications and limitations of the project, revisit the

relevant scholarly literature, and describe how this project contributes to the ongoing

dialogue about teacher retention in the early childhood field.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Overview of the Chapter

This capstone project has explored the research question: *How can early childhood program leaders learn to implement supportive strategies to promote teacher retention and increase job satisfaction?* After conducting a thorough review of the literature on this topic, I have created professional development resources in the form of a three-session training course, a condensed workshop, and a companion handbook in order to give early childhood program administrators, supervisors, and other leaders in the field the necessary strategies and tools to enhance teacher engagement, reduce burnout, and increase retention.

The annual rate of teacher turnover in the field of early childhood education is alarmingly high - between 26% and 40% according to various studies (Totenhagen et al., 2016). Such a high rate of turnover undermines educational quality. The scholarly literature has found that teacher burnout - a serious psychological syndrome involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982) - is linked to teacher attrition (Carson, Baumgartner, Ota, Kuhn, & Durr, 2017; Goelman & Guo, 1998; O'Brien, Goddard, & Keeffe, 2008). Moreover, burnout itself undermines educational quality, threatens teachers' mental health, and detrimentally affects children's emotional development. Although a vast body of research exists on how these problems might be solved, very little of what can be learned from the research actually makes its way to those who need it most: early childhood professionals

themselves. This fact was the primary driving force behind my project. The professional

development resources I have created are designed to make research-based solutions

accessible to early childhood program leaders. Program leaders are well positioned to

implement strategies that have the potential to improve teacher engagement and job

satisfaction, thereby increasing the likelihood that teachers will remain committed to their

jobs.

This chapter includes my reflections on what I have learned throughout the

process of creating this capstone. I will revisit the literature review, highlighting the

scholarly research that proved most important to my work. Following that will be a

discussion of the project's policy implications, the limitations of the project, and potential

future directions. Finally, I will explain how I plan to share my project with others and

discuss the ways in which it will contribute to the profession.

Major Learnings

As with any significant undertaking, this project provided important learning

opportunities, both in terms of what I absorbed from the existing research as well as

understandings that grew out of my own creative and reflective process.

Burnout

Prior to exploring the scholarly literature, I thought I knew what the term

'burnout' meant, as it is often used in colloquial speech. However, my exposure to this

term through the scholarly literature helped me develop a more thorough understanding

of the seriousness of burnout as a psychological syndrome defined by three broad

dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal

accomplishment. I came to understand the characteristics of each of these dimensions, their interconnectedness, and the ways they manifest themselves in early childhood education settings. As I began this project, I was certain that fully established burnout was my reality. Months later, upon considering the extent of the three dimensions of burnout, I realized that my personal experience with burnout primarily revolved around emotional exhaustion. Upon reflection, I now understand that my decision to resign from my position was an effort to protect myself from moving toward the more serious stages of burnout.

Importance of the Handbook

At this project's onset, it was clear to me that professional development for early childhood program leaders could be an effective way to convey useful information gathered from the scholarly literature on preventing burnout and increasing retention. Although I had always planned to write a handbook to go along with the professional development presentations, the exact scope and function of the handbook were not well defined until I began the process of creating it. I had previously thought of the handbook as optional; in my mind its importance was secondary to the professional development sessions. Until creating the project resources, I did not understand just how instrumental the handbook would be.

As I incorporated research from the literature review into an organizational scheme for the professional development presentations, it became increasingly clear that the strategies I wanted to convey were too comprehensive to describe in a presentation, yet too important to exclude from the project. The handbook thus became an integral,

inseparable companion to the professional development sessions. The handbook was always intended to supply participants with supplemental information to help them achieve their program goals. The final manifestation of the handbook meets this intention and extends it further than I had initially envisioned, offering participants comprehensive background information and research-based rationales for each type of strategy, along with links to specific resources including books, articles, podcasts, and websites. Because the professional development sessions touch on such a wide range of information, they depend on the handbook for elaboration. The handbook has thus proven to be not of secondary importance, but of equal importance to the success of this project.

The creation of the handbook also benefited me as a writer because it forced me to carefully consider the organization and presentation of my information. Given the complexity of the research topic and its many intersecting and overlapping elements, there were several potential ways to organize the information on increasing teacher engagement. Wanting to present my recommendations in a logical and helpful manner, I considered the themes that emerged from my literature review and condensed them into five categories: Leadership Techniques, Structural Adaptations to the Workday, Adaptations to the Classroom Environment, Collegial Environment and Workplace Supports, and Outside Resources. Of many potential ways to present research-based suggestions, this option is well-suited for users of the handbook because it allows participants to focus on one workplace realm at a time without becoming overwhelmed by an abundance of information that may not be relevant to their particular situation.

Revisiting the Literature Review

Yet another indispensable learning experience came from compiling my literature review. The literature review for this project involved summarizing scholarly work on the risk factors for teacher burnout and turnover, the consequences of burnout and turnover, and strategies to promote retention and reduce burnout. The first two sections of the literature review were necessary in order to provide a rationale and background information for the project. The third section drew from sources that would provide the basis for the strategies recommended in my professional development resources. Several specific scholarly sources proved instrumental in the development of my project.

Burnout and the Burnout-Engagement Continuum

Any search involving the term 'burnout' will undoubtedly reveal the work of Christina Maslach, who has written extensively on the topic of burnout since the early 1980s. The two works that proved especially useful in the development of my project were Maslach's (1982) book *Burnout: The Cost of Caring* and an article entitled "Early predictors of job burnout and engagement" (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). The book strengthened my understanding of burnout as a psychological condition and familiarized me with the three dimensions of burnout and how they typically relate to each other. Maslach & Leiter's (2008) article introduced me to the concept of the burnout-engagement continuum, which proposes that each negative dimension of burnout has a positive counterpart. Specifically, on the other end of exhaustion, depersonalization, and inefficacy are three factors that comprise job engagement: energy, involvement, and efficacy.

Learning about the burnout-engagement continuum gave me a new perspective from which to consider particular strategies to include in my professional development resources. As Maslach & Leiter (2008) propose, if burnout is caused by negative experiences on one end of a continuum, then it stands to reason that efforts to overcome burnout should promote the positive experiences that characterize the other end of that continuum. The process of developing my project resources therefore involved identifying which dimensions of engagement related to each strategy for supporting teachers. This process proved useful for several reasons. It allowed me to create a system for labeling and organizing each strategy as well as a framework which enables early childhood program leaders to match an employee's particular burnout experience with an appropriate engagement strategy. The burnout-engagement continuum served as an essential guide for the creation of my professional development sessions and handbook. In fact, the titles of all three elements of the project contain the word 'engagement' as a result of the continuum's influence.

Consequences of Burnout and Turnover

In addition to Maslach's work on burnout, several other pieces of scholarly literature were important to the development of my project. In order to provide motivation for early childhood leaders to institute change in their programs, it was necessary to compile information on the consequences of burnout and turnover. My project refers to the work of Cazares (2008), who discussed the effect of burnout on children's emotional well-being and cognitive development, as well as Whitebook et al.

(2016), who demonstrated that teachers' well-being has direct and measurable effects on children's learning outcomes.

Supportive Strategies for Teacher Engagement and Retention

Additionally helpful were sources that offered information on specific strategies geared toward supporting teachers and increasing their job satisfaction. For instance, Ozgun (2005) discussed mentor relationships, a positive collegial environment, and administrative support as necessary measures to promote job satisfaction. Kilgallon et al. (2008) reported on the importance of planning time, reflective practice, collegial support, and teachers' autonomy over classroom decision-making as factors that help sustain teachers in their roles. Whitebook et al. (2016) also pointed to teachers' involvement in programmatic decision-making as an important factor in workplace well-being. Cazares (2008) advocated for teachers' ability to consult with children's mental health professionals and behavior specialists in order to strengthen feelings of self-efficacy. Additionally, research by Carson et al. (2017) provided useful information on specific types of rejuvenation strategies that teachers can implement in order to relieve exhaustion caused by work-related stress. These studies were all particularly helpful in shaping the content of my professional development sessions and handbook.

Complexity of the Topic

Beyond exploring the scholarly literature relevant to my project, the literature review provided me an opportunity to develop a thorough understanding of the intricate nature of the factors involved in burnout and turnover. I encountered a challenge in deciding how to organize pieces of information in the literature review, particularly in the

third section on strategies to decrease burnout and retain teachers. The challenge

stemmed from the fact that, regardless of how I defined my organizational categories, not

all research findings could fit into just one category. For instance, teacher mentor

programs might fit within the categories of leadership, collegiality, and structure of the

workday. Furthermore, even research that did fit clearly into a certain category might

influence or depend on research from a different category. In short, the literature review

process highlighted the interconnectedness of the findings that emerged from the

scholarly research. This observation informed the way in which I chose to present

information in my professional development sessions and handbook. Knowing that

participants might feel alienated or overwhelmed if presented with a large quantity of

complex information, I made a conscious effort to structure the professional development

activities in a way that is supportive of participants' learning process and emotional

needs. As mentioned previously, I also structured the handbook in a way that I felt to be

accessible and meaningful to participants.

Implications

Because the topic of teacher burnout and turnover involves so many factors, this

project has several policy implications. At the individual program or school level, the

project has the potential to influence several types of policies and procedures, such as

those involving workday structure or specifying teachers' allotted time for planning,

reflection, and collaboration. Other potential program policies and practices resulting

from this project include instituting mentorship programs, establishing partnerships with

specialists and consultants, and elevating teachers' voices in decision-making.

While individual programs have some power to implement helpful changes, the fact remains that many of the strategies promoted by this project would meet greater success with increased financial support from local, state, and national government. My hope is that the project will live up to its mission and create higher levels of teacher retention and engagement, which will result in a greater number of early childhood professionals feeling energized and motivated to advocate for more support for their field.

Limitations

Although there exists a wealth of research on the risk factors, consequences, and preventative strategies associated with burnout and turnover, I was surprised to find virtually no research on the relationship between the amount of planning time teachers receive during the workday and their levels of burnout or intent to leave their jobs. Although some studies mention that lack of paid time to complete essential tasks is a contributor to teacher stress, very little research has been conducted on how this specific type of stress interferes with teachers' job satisfaction and commitment. I was similarly surprised to find no research on the relationship between planning time and children's learning outcomes, nor on what constitutes an appropriate amount of paid planning time. I would have liked to be able to include empirical data on these relationships and concepts in the professional development resources as a way to demonstrate the concrete benefits of sufficient paid planning time.

Future Directions

Research on Paid Planning Time

Because my literature review yielded a negligible amount of information on paid planning time, I see this as a logical direction for future research. While there is research from K-12 settings that points to favorable outcomes as a result of increased planning time, such research seems not to exist for early childhood settings. I propose that future studies seek to answer four questions:

- *What is the relationship between early childhood teachers' paid planning time and children's learning outcomes?*

- *What is the relationship between early childhood teachers' paid planning time and burnout?*

- *What is the relationship between early childhood teachers' paid planning time and retention rates?*

- *How much paid planning time is sufficient to achieve significant desirable outcomes?*

Having research-based answers to these questions would provide a good foundation for programs to make informed decisions regarding teachers' paid planning time.

Creation of an Online Course

Although not created as part of the present project, an asynchronous online version of the training series could be developed in the future to increase accessibility to those whose location or schedule may not allow for in-person meetings. As with the in-person training series, the online version would be divided into three sessions or

modules. Module One would involve introducing participants to the concepts of burnout

and turnover as well as the associated risk factors, consequences, and supportive

strategies. Module Two would involve engaging in collaborative reflection and building a

support network amongst course participants. Module Three would focus on promoting

the sustainability of the professional change.

In an online course, discussion boards could offer prompts for participants to

collaborate and develop their action plans. The trainer would also participate in the

discussion boards to offer feedback and ideas. As with the in-person version, participants

would be asked to keep a process journal as a record of their efforts, successes, and

challenges. The online course would take place over a period of two to three months,

with an expectation that participants check in several times during each module to

contribute to discussion boards and share their progress. Participants would be asked to

evaluate each Module and the course as a whole via anonymous online survey, similarly

to the in-person course.

<p style="text-align: center;">**Communicating Results**</p>

I will present the workshop version of my project in February 2019 at the annual

conference of the Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children

(MnAEYC) and the Minnesota School-Age Care Alliance (MnSACA). Thereafter, I will

work with MnAEYC to launch the full three-session series. In order to create awareness

of and interest in my professional development sessions, I will submit the sessions for

approval with Develop, Minnesota's early childhood professional development registry.

Once the sessions are approved, early childhood providers in the state of Minnesota can

register for the sessions online and have their professional development training hours immediately logged in the registry. Finally, I will seek out partnerships with online training providers in order to make the previously described online course a reality.

Benefits to the Profession

As society becomes increasingly aware of the benefits of high quality early childhood education, the need for a strong workforce is apparent. The ultimate goal of this project is to support and empower early childhood professionals to remain in the field and to function as their best selves. By giving program leaders a variety of strategies to prevent teacher burnout and increase engagement, this project benefits the workforce by advocating for their mental and emotional health, promoting professional growth, emphasizing the importance of a positive work environment, and calling for supportive and reflective leadership.

By extension, this project benefits the children who are cared for and educated by an empowered workforce. As the background research for this project has demonstrated, when teachers feel supported and engaged in their work, they are able to care for children in enriching environments, allowing children to reap significant emotional and cognitive benefits.

Conclusion

Although the field of early childhood education faces challenges in the form of teacher burnout and turnover, the research on these subjects has illustrated that there is much that can be done to help teachers thrive. As I mentioned in the introduction to Chapter One, there are early childhood teachers who find such joy and fulfillment in their

work that they gladly dedicate decades of their careers to the field, and often to individual programs. The programs that find success in retaining teachers for such significant periods of time are those where teachers feel most supported and most engaged.

The knowledge that it's possible for early childhood teachers to remain happily committed to their jobs was one of the motivating forces behind this project. The other major motivating force was the understanding that the research on sustaining teachers in their roles is not making its way to the people on the ground who need it most. In other words, while the research on teacher engagement exists, the knowledge that can be gained from the research is not being put into optimal practice. This understanding led me to design professional development resources that bridge the gap between research and practice by teaching early childhood program leaders how to implement strategies to promote staff engagement. I have created this project with the sincerest optimism that it will inspire and equip program leaders to improve teachers' experiences, increase their job satisfaction, and strengthen their commitment to the field. I look forward to seeing what the future holds.

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