THE INTERSECTION OF PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL STRESS IN THE LIVES OF

PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

Bridgette L. Wicke

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study is to examine the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. Many aspects of a teacher's professional life may contribute to stress and burnout, including pressures from administration, time pressures, observations, assessments, workload, classroom management, discipline, student learning, and motivational issues. Many aspects of a teacher's personal life may also contribute to stress and burnout, including family responsibilities, finances, and time pressures. In order to overcome pressures at work and home, teachers oftentimes develop successful strategies or coping mechanisms. Other times, teachers burn out and quit the profession. The central research question for this study was, how do public middle school teachers describe the stress that impacts them in their professional and personal lives? The theory guiding this study was burnout theory by Maslach and Leiter. Ten public middle school teachers in central Florida were examined in a case study. To gather data needed for this study, interviews were conducted, a focus group interview was used, and letters written by teachers were examined. Data analysis utilized open coding and the identification of themes or classifications. Understanding patterns and themes of teacher stress, burnout, and coping strategies can help to reduce teacher burnout and attrition.

Keywords: case study, middle school, teacher burnout, teacher coping strategies, teacher stress

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this to my son, Gavin Wicke. I remember going to my first doctoral meeting at the University of Virginia, to get more information on doctorate degrees in Educational Leadership, and Gavin was right by my side. He was the only child in the room, at about seven years old, and he behaved so well in order for me to take down all of the information from the speaker. That night, I found out how much time, dedication, and work it would take to reach my goal of a doctorate degree. Being a mom and working full-time is very time consuming, so my doctorate dream had to be put on hold for several years. Gavin is now nineteen years old and I am finally at the end of my doctoral journey. He is starting college as I am finally finishing my doctoral degree. I am so proud of all that he has accomplished and the well-rounded person he is today. I would never be where I am, nor would I be the strong and focused person that I am, if he was not the sweet, helpful, wise, funny, loving, and extremely mature person that he is. I love him so much. He will always be a major part of who I am and a driving force in all that I accomplish.

Acknowledgements

I cannot believe I am finally at the end of my doctoral journey. I have been praying for and working towards this goal for so many years, it is almost surreal that it is finally here. This would not have been possible without the help and support of several people. A huge thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. Nelson, who has been the best professor I have ever worked with. Whenever I was stressed or doubtful during this very long and arduous process, he was always encouraging and uplifting. I cannot thank him enough for being so positive, encouraging, knowledgeable, and helpful. A big thank you to Dr. Tierce for being a part of my committee and for his insightfulness, expertise, excellent feedback, and encouragement. Thank you to my son, Gavin, for giving me purpose, patience, and love. Thank you to Eric, my best friend, and my soulmate. He pushed me to work a little harder when I did not think I could write or read anymore. He always believes in me, encourages me, makes me laugh, and loves me unconditionally. Thank you to my mom for assisting me with proof reading, recording transcripts, helping me with Gavin, and for her love and encouragement. Thank you to my brothers, Craig and Tyler, for helping me with Gavin, for their love, their support, and for always keeping me on my toes. Finally, I want to thank all of the participants who kindly offered their time and energy to help me with this study, especially during the trying and stressful time of COVID-19. I could never have completed this without all of you and I am forever grateful.

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List of Abbreviations

Cognitive thoughts, automatic thoughts, learning to relax, mindfulness, exercise, resolving

conflict, strengths or positive psychology, and sleep (CALMERSS)

Collaboration, reflection, enhance, Atlanta, teacher, and effectiveness (CREATE)

Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE)

Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Teaching, both strenuous and dynamic with its ever-changing rules, regulations, curriculum changes, and atmosphere, has led to a high rate of burnout as compared to other professionals such as environmentalists, physicians, and engineers (Aguilar, 2018; Bernard, 2016; Rupesh & Bibhas, 2017). Conceptually, burnout is professionally related, with later stages of burnout being individually invasive and pervasively affecting non-work areas of life as well (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Szigeti, Balazs, Bikfalvi & Urvan, 2016). Many teachers experience an intersection of stress from both their professional and personal lives.

Chapter One includes the background, situation to self, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and summary pertaining to the study. The theory guiding this study is burnout theory by Maslach and Leiter. Maslach and Leiter (1997) define burnout as the prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job. Teachers, who are forced to contend with chronic stress, are highly likely to experience burnout (Aguilar, 2018; Bernard, 2016). Burnout and chronic stress are more common with teachers because their brain becomes locked in a recurring pattern, which may involve ruinations, pessimistic thinking, and depression (Shin, Noh Jang, Park & Lee, 2014; Taylor, 2018).

Background

Since 1985, the United States has made dramatic changes in the way it measures and evaluates teacher effectiveness (Rupesh & Bibhas, 2017; Ryan, Embse, Pendergast, Saeki & Segool, 2017). Changes in educational accountability policies at both the federal and state level trickle down to contribute to increased stress and adverse outcomes for teachers (Ryan et al.,

2017; Szigeti et al., 2016). The use of test-based accountability in performance evaluations, merit pay, and tenure decision results in increased stress in the environment, increased stress related to the curriculum, and increased teacher stress in general (Ebse, Pendergast, Segool, Saeki & Ryan, 2016; Glazer, 2018; Gray & Taie, 2015; Ryan et al., 2017). Teachers' personal perceptions of their work as well as their stress burden play a role in their teaching effectiveness. Identifying the sources of educator stressors is the first step in determining an appropriate plan to developing coping or resolution strategies. Although varying widely, there are a multitude of options available to alleviate the symptoms of burnout before it escalates.

The theory guiding this study is burnout theory by Maslach and Leiter. Maslach and Leiter (1997) define burnout as the prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and it is comprised of three dimensions including exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Burnout theory, as it relates so closely to depression and stress, is of great importance because it has been associated with diminished job performance, health problems, withdrawal behaviors, absenteeism, and depression (Glazer, 2018; Gray & Taie, 2015; Zysberg, Orenhtein & Robinson, 2017). Improvements need to be made on structural levels alongside with implementations of teacher training with special focus on stress, coping methods, and self-awareness to ensure all children's fundamental rights towards a healthy education (Huberman, Grounauer, & Marti, 1993; Szigeti et al., 2016).

Historical Context

A U.S. Department of Education study (Boser, 2000) of students who earned college degrees in 1992-1993 found that nearly one out of five who graduated from college in that year and began teaching in the public schools by 1994-1995 had left the profession by 1996-1997. This study was published 18 years ago, and today, teachers are still leaving the profession at

alarming rates (Bumen, 2010; Rupesh & Bibhas, 2017; Szigeti et al., 2016). More studies need to be performed in order to deepen our understanding of teachers' current job dissatisfaction (Benevene, Ittan & Cortini, 2018). There is a necessity to pay attention to prospective teachers' mental health, promote formal sources of help, and overcome seeking help obstacles (Uzman & Telef, 2015). The strenuous and dynamic occupation of teaching has led to a high rate of burnout as compared to other professionals (Harmsen, Helms, Maulana & Veen, 2018; Rupesh & Bibhas, 2017). Teacher stress has been linked with adverse professional outcomes, including burnout, absenteeism, stress, and attrition (Bowler & Curtiss, 2015; Ryan at el., 2018). Stress and burnout as well as attitudes towards the job might be influenced by several personal and situational characteristics like teachers' age, socioeconomic status, gender, teaching experience, educational background, weekly work hours at school, and class size (Bumen, 2010; Szigeti et al., 2016). Teacher longevity, or the amount of time a teacher remains in the teaching profession is an important issue for school climate and school resource allocation (Harmsen et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2017; Yu, Dong, Want & An, 2016). Those who report leaving because of job dissatisfaction cite low salaries, lack of support from school administration, lack of student motivation, student discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision making as factors influencing their decisions (Bosner, 2000; Embse et al., 2016; Herman et al, 2018).

Social Context

Teachers experience somewhat elevated or high levels of stress and burnout in their personal, their work, and their student-related life (Harmsen, Helms, Maulana, & Veen, 2018). The highest levels referent on the student-related burnout scale with teachers' most prevalent symptoms of stress as lack of energy, the feeling of giving more than getting back in the work with students, feelings of tiredness, physical, and emotional exhaustion (Harmsen et al., 2018).

Burnout is job-related with late stages of burnout pervasively affecting non-work areas as well (Szigeti et al., 2016). Teachers report feelings of pressure in the work and teaching difficulties, specifically concerns regarding the public funding of education, lack of public acknowledgement of teachers, and curriculum demands, deficient classroom facilities, and the problem of organizational structure in the classroom (Harmsen et al., 2018).

Recent evidence suggest that teachers may experience increased pressure to raise student test performance on large-scale assessments, leading to higher reported stress, poorer school climate, and changed instructional practices such as teaching to the test (Embse, et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2016). Teacher appraisals and school leadership can play a role in teacher stress and burnout. Principals, teachers, and students are all intertwined and interwoven. In order for leaders to increase workforce performance, commanding and dictating do not produce the same results as motivating individuals (Bernard, 2016). Effective leadership should always apply the principles of empowerment to create a positive workplace environment where the feelings of others are taken into consideration (Bernard, 2016). Poor teacher health and quality will lead to a poor school system (Bernard, 2016). Good teacher health and quality could potentially lead to a school that excels, that has happy teachers, happy parents, and happy students. Empowerment, both from internal and external motivators, is a powerful tool. Empowerment has the likelihood to elicit a profound ability to raise teacher well-being, in turn benefiting students with greater potential for positive interactions. Different types of leadership will affect the performance of teachers and their overall job satisfaction in different ways (Fullen, 2010; Fuming & Jiliang, 2007). High levels of stress and burnout are associated with generally increased aggression potential, and research on teachers' stress has shown that this can increase negative affect in

teachers as well as dysfunctional student relationships (Szigeti et al., 2016; Wolf, Torrente, McCoy, Rasheed & Aber, 2015).

Leadership is an important part of the overall balance of a school. The principal and the teachers work together for a common goal. The school turnaround movement, involving the restricting of school administration and staff, has gained widespread popularity and increases pressure on teachers, administrators, and staff to ensure student test scores (Embse, et al., 2016; Harmsen et al., 2018). A good principal with effective leadership provides the motivation needed every day. Types of leadership vary, and it is important to choose the best style to fit the school and classroom for maximum results. Authoritarian leadership style hinders performance and democratic leadership progresses school leadership (Fullan, 2016; Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Effective leadership should apply the principles of empowerment to create a positive workplace environment where the feelings of others are taken into consideration (Bednarz, 2012). A job satisfaction survey study showed a statistically significant, positive correlation between the teacher-perceived transformational leadership style and subscales of middle school principals to teacher efficacy (Fullan, 2016; Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Other leadership styles, like the transformational leadership style, showed a negative correlation. This suggests that middle school teacher perceptions of their principal's leadership style (transformational and transactional) overall had a statistically significant positive relationship to teacher efficacy (Fullan, 2016; Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Research suggests teacher efficacy is critical to student achievement and therefore it is important to investigate the relationship that school leadership has to teacher efficacy (Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Guidetti, Viotti, Badagliacca, Colombo & Converso, 2019). The style of

leadership used can affect how much energy teachers put in to teaching. Leadership styles can also impact how much students learn and enjoy learning.

Theoretical Context

In burnout research, a strong relationship between exhaustion and cynicism is found consistently across a wide range of settings (Maslach, 2003). Maslach (2003) has made many hypotheses about how burnout develops within the individual over time but there has been little research to test those theories because of the difficulties of conducting longitudinal studies. Burnout is a psychological response to stressor in the workplace, specifically the chronic strain that results from incongruence, or misfit, between the worker and the job (Maslach, 2003). For the present study, stress will be defined as a disparity between a person's perceptions of environmental demands and their perceived ability to cope with those demands (Winefield & Pignata, 2013). When there are chronic interpersonal stressors on the job, burnout is a psychological syndrome that emerges as a result (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Stress can be described as any activity that requires physical exertion or any intellectual activity that creates demands on your brain (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). Bernard (2016) found that highly stressed teachers have unhelpful ways of thinking about themselves, and stress-prone teachers hold beliefs about the high work demands they experience (hours of teaching, preparation, corrections, meetings, and general paperwork), which are concomitant with high stress and which may significantly exacerbate stress. It is clear that highly stressed teachers have unhelpful ways of thinking about themselves and stress-prone teachers hold beliefs about the high work demands they experience (hours of teaching, preparation, meetings, and general paperwork) which are concomitant with high stress and which may significantly exacerbate stress (Bernard, 2016).

Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined burnout as the prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job. Burnout, according to Maslach (2003), is comprised of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. This is a multidimensional model to stress that goes beyond the individual stress experience (exhaustion) to encompass (cynicism) and feelings of inefficacy (Maslach, 2003). The first dimension, the exhaustion dimension, is also described as wearing out, loss of energy, depletion, debilitation, and fatigue (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The second dimension, the cynicism dimension, is also called depersonalization, and is described as negative or inappropriate attitudes, irritability, loss of idealism, and withdrawal (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The third dimension, the inefficacy dimension, was originally called reduced personal accomplishments, and is described as reduced productivity or capability, low morale, and an ability to cope (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Burnout is broken down into six categories in order to properly assess individuals and organizations at risk of burnout. These six categories provide individuals and organizations with the framework, along with the necessary tools, to move from burnout towards engagement. These six categories of burnout include, workload (too much work, not enough resources); control (micromanagement, lack of influence, accountability without power); reward (not enough pay, acknowledgement, or satisfaction); community (isolation, disrespect, conflict); fairness (favoritism, discrimination); and values (ethical conflicts, meaningless tasks) (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). This six-area burnout framework has now been incorporated into assessment programs for organizations and individuals (Maslach & Leiter, 2000). The framework can be used to diagnose which categories are especially troublesome for them, and then design interventions that target the diagnosed problem areas (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). To alleviate burnout, organizations and individuals must identify the areas in which their mismatches lie and then

design solutions tailored to improve the fit within each area (Maslach & Leiter, 2000; Maslach & Leiter, 2005).

<div align="center">**Situation to Self**</div>

My motivation for this study is rooted in my experiences as a professional educator and seeing firsthand the effects of stress on teachers at work. I have been teaching for 13 years total and have been teaching mathematics at a public middle school for the past five years. Having experienced directly the current problems with teacher stress, teacher burnout, and teacher attrition, it feels like more must be done. At the school where I am presently employed, substitute teachers are filling classrooms because not enough full-time teachers can be obtained to hire. In the county where I am currently employed, there are many job openings for teachers; some positions will remain open all year, without finding anyone to fill the job. Increasing the body of knowledge pertaining to the causes of teacher stress, and further insight into addressing these stressors before they are allowed to advance to the later stages of burnout, will serve to establish more sound groundwork for maintaining organizational stability. The insight into mental, physical, and emotional well-being of teachers within the educational system, along with strategies to cope with the hardships of stress, are further motivational topics to discover.

It is important for researchers to take a position regarding their perceptions of how things really are (Scotland, 2012). Since the meaning of assumption is a supposition or a guess, paradigms can never be proven or disproven. Every paradigm is based upon its own ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions (Scotland, 2013). In educational research, each paradigm has its own purpose (Scotland, 2012). Ontology is the study of being or "what is" (Crotty, 1998). Ontological assumptions are concerned with what constitutes reality (Crotty, 1998). Epistemological assumptions are concerned with what it means to know or how

knowledge can be acquired and communicated (Scotland, 2012). Axiological assumptions are the study of values, encouraging the researcher to reflect on the intrinsic values inherent in their research (Pole, 1961). I will be the instrument of my qualitative study. I will have to be careful of my bias since I am a public middle school teacher and I have been personally affected by this topic. I will have to make sure to bracket out my own experiences and assumptions when I analyze my data. The data of my study must represent the participant's perspective. This determines that each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other (Patton, 2013). I am studying different people and gathering data on their relation to the world around them. As themes develop in my findings, I will report different perspectives (Creswell, 2013). I bring ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions to my study because of how I grew up, where I was raised, and based upon the personal experiences that I have as an educator. I have lived and taught in the United States all of my life, I am female, and my father was a principal (so I grew up around the education system). I was trained as an educator at the University of Florida. My values and the knowledge I have constructed in the course of my life, will guide my research, and will have an influence on the ways I conduct my research.

Paradigms are deeply embedded in the socialization of practitioners, telling them what is important, legitimate, and reasonable (Patton, 2013). My paradigm is constructivism. Constructivists seek to understand the world (Milacci, 2018). Constructivist researchers address the "processes" of interaction among individuals, and in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants, they focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work (Creswell, 2003). My case study is seeking to understand more about teacher stress and the ways in which it intersects in the personal and professional lives of teachers. Constructivists find

the importance in asking questions to participants that are broad and general and this is how I will ask my interview questions to the participants in my study. Conducting my interviews in this way, participants can construct meaning from a situation, a meaning that happens naturally when discussing or interacting with another person. I am brining constructivism to my study, as my participants will be constructing knowledge, which is the data I will collect. Often these meanings are negotiated socially and historically, as they are formed through interactions with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives (Creswell, 2003). In this study, I am seeking further understanding of the world in which I work and ways to reduce teacher stress and attrition. Individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work, by developing subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Constructivism points out the unique experience of each of us and I will seek to understand the unique experiences of each of my participants (Patton, 2013).

Problem Statement

Teacher shortage in the United States is one of the worst problems facing schools today (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). The teaching profession has steadily become less stable as teacher attrition rates have increased to the point that more teachers leave voluntarily rather than remain in the classroom until retirement (Day & Gu, 2010; Glazer, 2018; Ingersoll, Merrill & Stuckey, 2014). Teacher well-being is influenced by many factors, including school climate factors, administration factors, and student factors (Harmsen et. al., 2018; Hong 2012; Yu et. al., 2016). Burnout theory has proven that organizations and individuals do indeed burnout (Maslach, 2003). This case study will examine teacher burnout relating to the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. This study will also investigate the strategies and coping mechanisms, or lack thereof, used by middle school teachers dealing

with stress. The problem of this qualitative case study is the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study is to examine the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. For this study, stress will be defined as a disparity between a person's perceptions of environmental demands and their perceived ability to cope with those demands (Winefield & Pignata, 2013). The theory guiding this study is burnout theory by Maslach and Leiter. Maslach and Leiter (1997) define burnout as the prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job. Four aspects of a teacher's role may contribute to stress, classroom discipline and management, student learning and associated emotional and motivational issues, workload and time pressures, and experiencing problems with school administration (Bernard, 2016). Teachers who experience chronic stress experience this because their brain gets locked into a recurring pattern, which may include ruinations, pessimistic thinking, and depression (Taylor, 2018). Burnout theory by Maslach and Leiter (1997) is comprised of three dimensions, which include, exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. The strenuous and dynamic occupation of teaching has led to a high rate of burnout as compared to other professionals (Rupesh & Bibhas, 2017). Burnout theory is important, because as it relates to stress, burnout has been associated with diminished job performance, health problems, withdrawal behaviors, absenteeism, and depression (Zysberg et al., 2017).

Significance of the Study

This case study will provide an in-depth examination of the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers along with which strategies or coping mechanisms they use to minimize that stress. Many articles have been written on teacher

shortage in the United States as one of the worst problems facing our schools today but very few studies have been conducted on the causes of stress in the United States for public middle school teachers (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Furthermore, I found no studies focused specifically on the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. Therefore, a gap in the literature exists. Thus, this study is necessary to provide school and learning institution stakeholders with relevant information.

With little studies focused on well-being activities and trainings in public schools, this study will be a much-needed addition to the empirical research currently available. This case study aims to discover valuable information in efforts for schools and learning institutions to focus on teacher well-being in order to gain and retain teachers. Research suggests that the use of test-based accountability in performance evaluations, merit pay, and tenure decision results in increased stress in the environment, increased stress related to the curriculum, and increased teacher stress in general (Ebse et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2017). The benefits of minimizing professional stressors may include improved job satisfaction and higher teacher retention rates, as recent researchers have emphasized the role of school conditions and characteristics in teacher turnover (Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

The present case study aims to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation because of the lessons it might provide about the social processes related to theoretical interest. The rationale for selecting a single-case study rather than a multiple case study design is that the single-case study can represent the critical test of a significant theory (Yin, 2018). A single-case study design was selected because I am looking at a "common case" (Yin, 2018, p.50). The common case I will study will be the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. I will investigate strategies public middle school

teachers use to minimize stress and how public middle school teachers describe the stress that affects them in their professional and personal lives. I will analyze the data of my study by interpreting observations, interviews, and documents to find meaningful patterns and themes, thus extending the theory.

Research Questions

In a qualitative study, inquirers state research questions, which set specific goals for the research (Creswell, 2003). The qualitative research questions are broad questions that ask for an exploration of the central phenomenon or concept of the study. The inquirer poses these questions, consistent with the emerging methodology of qualitative research, as a general issue so as to not limit the views of participants (Creswell, 2003). This qualitative case study will be guided by one central research question and three research subquestions.

Central Research Question

How do public middle school teachers describe the stress that impacts them in their professional and personal lives?

The increasing levels of stress in schools for teachers calls for something to be done in order for teachers to get back to working at their optimal levels (Taylor, 2017). It is not only the beginning teachers that are leaving the teaching profession at alarming rates; it's the experienced teachers as well. The attrition rate seems to follow a U-shaped curve, with the highest attrition rate early and late in teachers' careers (Skaalvik, 2011). Accurate assessment of teachers' appraisals of their classroom demand levels and recourses could provide critical information about which teachers are most vulnerable to stress, even in similar school environments, that administrators and policymakers can use in improving the lives of teachers and their students (McCarthy, Lambert, Lineback, Fitchett & Baddouh, 2015).

Research Subquestions

SQ1. How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences at work that cause them the most amount of stress?

Teacher attrition has been studied in relation to working conditions as well as the personal characteristics of teachers, teachers' life situation, and teachers' roles, responsibilities, and status (Skaalvik, 2011). There is a strong association between teachers' perception of selected variables in the school context and their job satisfaction as well as their motivation to leave the teaching profession (Skaalvik, 2011).

SQ2. How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences at home that cause them the most amount of stress?

Teachers experience somewhat elevated or high levels of stress and burnout in their personal and their student-related life (Harmsen, et al., 2018). Teachers are shown to seldom speak to their health care providers about stress issues (Ferguson, Mang & Frost, 2017). While stress can be very personal and vary from person to person, teachers need to make self-care a priority, and teachers need to feel safe in talking about stress without fear of stigma (Ferguson et al., 2017).

SQ3. How do public middle school teachers describe the coping strategies used to minimize stress?

Learning to relax, mindfulness, exercise, sleep, resolving conflict, and positive psychology were all found as effective ways to reduce stress with teachers (Taylor, 2017). Allowing teachers to focus on their cognitive, physical, and emotional well-being could make a big difference in the happiness and job satisfaction of teachers. It could help in the job retention and shortage problem with classroom teachers, especially middle school teachers. In order to

increase the feeling of belonging and job satisfaction and decrease emotional exhaustion, it seems important to create a supportive school environment, to clarify and develop mutual goals and values, to reduce time pressure on teachers, and to establish school-based directions for student behavior (Skaalvik, 2001). Stress management efforts strengthen efficacy, self-concept, hardiness, resilience, and ultimately heighten teacher satisfaction and effectiveness (Bernard, 2016). More studies are needed to explore professional development activities and trainings to improve the cognitive, physical, and emotional well-being of teachers.

Definitions

1. *Anxiety* - an over activation of negative thought processes, particularly involving excessive worry and/or fear (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

2. *Burn out*- the prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is comprised of three dimensions, exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

3. *CALMERSS* - a four-week, multi-modal program intervention for teachers which involves interventions of cognitive training, learning to relax, mindfulness, exercise, resolving conflict, sleep, and other positive psychology interventions (Taylor, 2017).

4. *CREATE* – a program designed to combat teacher attrition, which includes mindfulness training, carefully matched mentor teachers, a site-based project director, and a critical friends group (Cross & Thomas, 2017).

5. *Depersonalization* - a psychological withdrawal, including the development of negative or indifferent attitudes toward students (Szigeti, et al., 2016).

6. *Emotional exhaustion* - the chronic feeling of tiredness and fatigue, which make teachers lose their enthusiasm (Szigeti, et al., 2016).

7. *Emotion-focused coping* - helps individuals deal with the emotions triggered by the stressor (for example, a teacher using deep breathing before addressing a student's misbehavior) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

8. M*ental health* - a state of well-being in which individuals successfully cope with the normal stresses of life, enabling them to work productively, and allowing them to contribute to their community (Canadian World Health Organization, 2006).

9. *Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS)* – used as a measure of stressful life events (Holmes & Rahe, 1967).

10. *Stress* - a disparity between a person's perceptions of environmental demands and their perceived ability to cope with those demands (Winefield & Pignata, 2013).

Summary

The study of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers is important because teachers that are forced to contend with chronic stress are at an increased risk to experience symptoms of burnout (Harmsen, et al., 2018). Burnout theory is the guiding theory to this study. Burnout is comprised of three dimensions, exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Maslach, 2003). Chapter One outlines the historical, social, and theoretical context of burnout theory and the effect of stress on teacher attrition rates. In this case study, focus is put on the impact of burnout on public middle school teachers. A gap in the literature exists with little study conducted on the causes of stress and burnout specifically related to public middle school teachers. This study aims to discover viable data to help generate valuable information on teacher stressors and teacher attrition. The purpose of this case study is to examine the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. Furthermore, the present study will examine the strategies and coping mechanism, or lack

thereof, used by public middle school teachers experiencing high levels of stress.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review provides a review of the theoretical framework of teacher stress and burnout. A thorough review of the research was conducted to identify studies that explore teacher stress and burnout. Several studies have been done on teacher stress and burnout, with few focusing on public middle school teachers, and with none focusing on how middle school teacher stress and burnout intersect between work and home. This chapter will provide an overview of the existing literature pertaining to the study. The theory framing the inquiry is Maslach's (1997) burnout theory that is defined by three dimensions, exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Burnout is broken down into six categories. These six categories are workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The first section will discuss the theory selected as a framework and how it relates to the central phenomenon. The second section will synthesize the recent literature pertaining to teacher stress and teacher retention. Finally, the review will consider studies regarding teacher stress management. After reviewing the literature, a gap in the literature will emerge and provide a focused area of need for this study.

Theoretical Framework

Conceptually, burnout is job-related with late stages of burnout pervasively affecting non-work areas as well (Szigeti et al., 2016). Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined burnout as the prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job. Burnout, according to Maslach (2003), is comprised of three dimensions. These three dimensions are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and negative relation to personal accomplishment. This is a multidimensional model to stress that goes beyond the individual stress experience

(exhaustion) to encompass (cynicism) and feelings of inefficacy (Maslach, 2003). The first dimension, the exhaustion dimension, is also described as wearing out, loss of energy, depletion, debilitation, and fatigue (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The second dimension, the cynicism dimension, is also called depersonalization, and is described as negative or inappropriate attitudes, irritability, loss of idealism, and withdrawal (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The third dimension, the inefficacy dimension, was originally called reduced personal accomplishments, and is described as reduced productivity or capability, low morale, and an ability to cope (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishments are each in part predicted by a unique interaction effect (Bumen, 2010; Rupesh & Bibhas, 2017; Schaufeli et al., 1993; Szigeti et al., 2016). For emotional exhaustion, the interaction is between reactivity and uncertainty, when uncertainty is low, individuals high and low in reactivity do not differ much in degree of emotional exhaustion (Embse, et al., 2016; Harmsen et al., 2018; Schaufeli et al., 1993). Emotional exhaustion is particularly found among highly reactive people who experience a high degree of uncertainty about how to feel and react (Hong, 2011; Schaufeli et al., 1993; Szigeti et al., 2016). Less reactive people cope better with uncertainty in their jobs than do highly reactive people (Harmsen et al., 2018; Szigeti et al., 2016). Less reactive individuals generally use more effective coping strategies, whereas highly reactive individuals do not (Harmsen et al., 2018; Szigeti et al., 2016). A very different pattern was found for depersonalization because this aspect of burnout is the only one that is directly related to self-esteem and is more characteristic of individuals with low self-esteem (Leiter & Maslach, 2004; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Schaufeli et al., 1993). An imbalance between investments and outcomes is directly related to all three burnout dimensions, with the relationship of the burnout

dimensions with the third stressor, lack of control, is somewhat weaker (Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993; Yu, et al., 2016).

Teachers' mental health has a widespread impact not only on teaching effectiveness; it also has a big impact on students' personal development, emotional development, and academic achievement (Ju, Lan, Li, Feng & Yu, 2015; Szigeti, et al., 2016). Emotional exhaustion is an obvious indicator of general job stress that is more common among individuals sensitive to stress in general; depersonalization as a way of coping with the problems arising out of relationships; and lack of control over the situation (Schaufeli et al., 1993). Emotional exhaustion was seen, more than the other burnout dimensions, as an indicator of general job stress. Of the three dimensions of burnout, only emotional exhaustion was related to the desire for information about others similar to themselves, along with the desire for affiliation, which is the desire to talk with others about problems at work (Schaufeli et al., 1993). Of the three stressors, only uncertainty, and not lack of control or imbalance, is related to the desire for information and affiliation. Both uncertainty and emotional exhaustion were correlated with the actual avoidance of coworkers. This avoidance, however, is also related to the other stressors and dimensions of burnout, providing strong evidence for the tendency to avoid others when under stress (Schaufeli et al., 1993).

According to burnout theory, burnout is broken down into six categories in order to properly assess individuals and organizations at risk of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). The six categories provide individuals and organizations with the framework, along with the necessary tools, to move from burnout towards engagement (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). The six categories of burnout include workload (too much work, not enough resources); control (micromanagement, lack of influence, accountability without power); reward (not enough pay,

acknowledgment, or satisfaction); community (isolation, disrespect, conflict); fairness (favoritism, discrimination); and values (ethical conflicts, meaningless tasks) (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). This six-area burnout framework has now been incorporated into assessment programs for organizations and individuals (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). The framework can be used to diagnose which categories are especially troublesome for them, and then design interventions that target the diagnosed problem areas (Maslach & Leiter, 2000). To fix burnout, organizations and individuals must identify the areas in which their mismatches lie and then design solutions tailored to improve the fit within each area (Maslach & Leiter, 2005).

Symptoms of burnout and symptoms of depression are similar and teacher burnout can lead to increases in depressive symptoms (Shin, et al., 2014; Szigeti et al., 2016). School climate can foster resilience or become a risk factor and has been linked to teacher burnout, work commitment, and school connectedness (Embse et al., 2016; Hong, 2011). The core aspect of burnout is the chronic feeling of tiredness and fatigue, which makes teachers lose their enthusiasm (Szigeti, et al., 2016). Other dimensions of burnout include depersonalization and low personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). Feelings of low personal accomplishment are when one loses the belief of ones' effectiveness (Szigeti, et al., 2016). Depersonalization is a psychological withdrawal, including the development of negative or indifferent attitudes toward students (Szigeti, et al., 2016).

In burnout research, a strong relationship between exhaustion and cynicism is found consistently across a wide range of settings (Maslach, 2003). Maslach (2003) has made many hypotheses about how burnout develops within the individual over time but there has been little research to test those theories because of the difficulties of conducting longitudinal studies. Burnout is a psychological response to stressors in the workplace, specifically the chronic strain

that results from incongruence, or misfit, between the worker and the job (Maslach, 2003). For the present case study, stress is defined as a disparity between a person's perceptions of environmental demands and their perceived ability to cope with those demands (Winefield & Pignata, 2013). When there are chronic interpersonal stressors on the job, burnout is a psychological syndrome that emerges as a result (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Stress can be described as any activity that requires physical exertion or any intellectual activity that creates demands on your brain (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). Bernard (2016) found that stress-prone teachers hold beliefs about the high work demands they experience (hours of teaching, corrections, meetings, and general paperwork), which are concomitant with high stress and which may significantly exacerbate stress. It is clear that highly stressed teachers have unhelpful ways of thinking about themselves and experience high stress during work tasks (hours of preparation, work with coworkers, student needs, and administrative needs) which may significantly exacerbate stress (Bernard, 2016).

Many studies have been done on teacher stress and attrition, but few studies provide an in-depth understanding of stress and burnout with public middle school teachers. This study aims to explore and analyze the intersection of personal and professional stressors along with the similarities and differences between stress among new and experienced middle school teachers. This study is necessary to provide school and learning institution stakeholders with relevant information in order to gain and retain teachers. With no studies focused on the intersection of personal and professional stress of public middle school teachers, along with their coping techniques and strategies used, the present case study will be a much-needed addition to the empirical research currently available.

Related Literature

Attrition rates of teachers have increased to the point that more teachers leave voluntarily rather than remain in the classroom until retirement (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Teachers who experience chronic stress experience this because their brain gets locked into a recurring pattern, which may include ruinations, pessimistic thinking, and depression (Taylor, 2018). Four aspects of a teacher's role may contribute to stress, which includes classroom discipline and management, student learning and associated emotional and motivational issues, workload and time pressures, and experiencing problems with school administration (Bernard, 2016). Criticism, critique and comparison can serve as additional sources of stress, including the constant comparison within schools trying to reach and maintain the required level of state testing and scores that match (Brewer, Myers & Zhang, 2015). This constant comparison can often pit teachers against one another (Brewer et al., 2015). The benefits of minimizing professional stressors may include improved job satisfaction and higher teacher retention rates, as recent researchers have emphasized the role of school conditions and characteristics in teacher turnover (Stauffer & Mason, 2013). Burnout is a psychological syndrome that emerges as a result of chronic interpersonal stressors on the job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Stress and Burnout

Persistent stress can result in professional burnout (Hermana et al, 2018; Maslach, 2003; Szigeti et al, 2016). The core aspect of burnout is emotional exhaustion, which makes teachers lose their enthusiasm (Maslach, 2003; Szigeti, et al., 2016). When teachers face high levels of stress at a job, they can potentially face burnout. Stress can be described as any activity that requires physical exertion or any intellectual activity that creates demands on your brain (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined burnout as the prolonged response to

chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job. Burnout, according to Maslach (2003), is comprised of three dimensions. The three dimensions are exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Another construct associated with burnout is over commitment (Szigeti et al, 2016). Overcommitted people are unable to withdraw from obligations and they become overwhelmed by investing too much energy into their work. This intense continuous effort and the lack of ability to withdraw from work results in burnout (Szigeti, et al., 2016).

Bernard (2016) found that highly stressed teachers have unhelpful ways of thinking about themselves, and stress-prone teachers hold beliefs about the high work demands they experience (hours of teaching, preparation, corrections, meetings, and general paperwork), which are concomitant with high stress and which may significantly exacerbate stress. When there are chronic interpersonal stressors on the job, burnout is a psychological syndrome that emerges as a result (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Symptoms of burnout and symptoms of depression are quite similar and teacher burnout can lead to increases in depressive symptoms (Shin, et al., 2014; Szigeti et al., 2016). Burnout is job-related whereas depression is context-free and more pervasive (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Szigeti et al., 2016). When it comes to teaching, burnout is associated with over commitment (Szigeti et al., 2016). Overcommitted people are unable to withdraw from work obligations (Szigeti et al. 2016). Teacher burnout has been linked to teacher turnover intentions and job absenteeism as well as irritability and diminished performance (Huberman et al., 1993; Herman et al., 2018).

Teachers on the verge of burnout might not greet their colleagues, avoid sharing their classroom experiences, have poor classroom management skills, and neglect to socialize with colleagues (Aguilar, 2018; Iancu, Rusu, Maroiu & Maricutoiu, 2017). One primary source of teacher stress is the experience of negative emotions in the classroom and the challenge of

managing these emotional experiences (Iancu, et al., 2017; Katz, Harris, Abenzvoli, Greenberg & Jennings, 2017). School climate can foster resilience or become a risk factor and has been linked to teacher burnout, work commitment, and school connectedness (Embse et al., 2016; Hong, 2011). The core aspect of burnout is the emotional exhaustion, the chronic feeling of tiredness and fatigue, which make teachers lose their enthusiasm (Szigeti, et al., 2016). Sixty to 70% of teachers show some stress symptoms and 30% have burnout symptoms (Bernard, 2016). It is clear that highly stressed teachers have unhelpful ways of thinking about themselves and stress-prone teachers hold beliefs about the high work demands they experience (hours of teaching, preparation, meetings, and general paperwork) which are concomitant with high stress and which may significantly exacerbate stress (Bernard, 2016). Teachers must simultaneously balance instructional support, classroom management, planning and organization, and the facilitation of high-quality classroom relationships (McLean et al., 2017).

Teachers face burnout because of time pressures, poor work environment, administrative problems, students' behavior issues, and changes in the educational system (Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012). Burnout in teachers is often caused by perception of work environment, workload, perceptions of senior management, and attitude towards change (Simone, Cicotto, & Lampis, 2016). There are also many exhausting obligations outside of the classroom for teachers such as working with parents and school officials, preparing class materials, and keeping up with the changing curricular and professional development demands (McLean et al., 2017). Teachers with higher levels of resilience show lower levels of emotional exhaustion and burnout (Katz, et al, 2017). In terms of personal accomplishment, teachers on the road to burnout don't set goals, seem uninterested in learning new things, and have low self-confidence (Aguilar, 2018).

Stress and Teacher Attrition

Teacher shortages and teacher attrition are the two main concerns in staffing America's schools (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). The MetLife Survey of The American Teacher (2012) noted that teacher satisfaction in the USA has fallen to a new 25-year low, with only 39% of respondents reporting that they are very satisfied (Taleb, 2013). Researchers have studied job satisfaction for a number of years as it has important implications including the intention to quit and burnout (Taleb, 2013). A U.S. Department of Education study (Boser, 2000) of students who earned college degrees in 1992-1993 found that nearly one out of five who graduated from college in that year had begun teaching in the public schools by 1994-1995 had left the profession by 1996-1997. Those studies were published several years ago and the statistics continue to gain momentum towards even higher attrition rates. For example, Cochran-Smith (2004) found that up to 30-46% of new teachers in the United States quit teaching within the first 5 years and nearly 8-14% of all teachers leave teaching in any given year. Today, the statistics continue to worsen.

Recently, in the United States, it is estimated that between 20% and 50% of public school teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their career (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014; Gray & Taie, 2015). It is not only the beginning teachers that are leaving the teaching profession at alarming rates; it's the experienced teachers as well (Glazer, 2018). During the first two years of teaching, which is referred to as the 'survival period,' teacher attrition rates are at its highest (Day & Gu, 2010). Teacher attrition does slow down after the first two years, but it does not stop there (Glazer, 2018). Though it slows down, teachers continue to leave the classroom at high rates and the profession has steadily become less stable (Glazer, 2018; Gray & Taie, 2015).

Not only are inexperienced, first-year teachers leaving the profession. Fully certified, successful, invested, former teachers are leaving the profession after many years of successful teaching (Glazer, 2018; Taleb, 2013). Themes emerged as invested teachers talked about their decisions to leave the profession. These three themes were imposed curricula, testing and accountability polices, and job insecurity (Glazer, 2018). Teachers reported leaving because of job dissatisfaction, low salaries, lack of support from school administration, lack of student motivation, student discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision-making (Bosner, 2000; Glazer, 2018; Taleb, 2013).

Interview studies with teachers who left the teaching profession revealed that high job demands, lack of support, lack of learning opportunities, poor working conditions, lack of work pleasure and pupil misbehavior contribute to explaining attrition (Buchanan, 2010). Workload, perception of work environment, teachers' perceptions of senior management, and attitude towards change are specific perceived occupational difficulties of teachers and potentially cause higher than normal attrition rates (Simone et al., 2015). The increased numbers of students and their lack of discipline were also found as major sources of stress for teachers (Simone, et al., 2015). It was concluded that stress causes and lack of resources result in emotional exhaustion, which significantly relate to intention to leave the profession (McCarthy et al., 2015).

Nearly all teachers fall into classes characterized by high levels of stress (Herman, Hickmon & Reinke, 2018). Only 7% of teachers were in a well-adjusted class suggesting that low stress and overall wellness were relatively rare in their sample of teachers (Herman, et al., 2018). The high levels of stress reported by nearly all teachers confirm that teaching is a stressful profession (Herman et al., 2018). Being more proactive and supportive of teachers'

mental health could be an important part of breaking the cycle of high levels of stress in the classroom (McLean et al., 2017; Woloshyn & Savage, 2018).

There is a psychology to why some beginning teachers leave the teaching profession and others stay (Hong, 2012). Teachers' values, self-efficacy, beliefs, and emotions are nurtured or hindered due to the school and classroom environments (Hong, 2012). Limited training in teaching methods and pedagogy during teacher preparation seems to be related to high teacher attrition (Cross & Thomas, 2017). The absence of support, challenging working conditions, and an overwhelming workload also contribute to high teacher attrition (Goldring et al., 2014). Teacher educators have a responsibility to provide information on teacher stress and coping strategies in teacher preparation courses in order to give teachers the skills to deal with stress and burnout in an effective manner (Cancio & Johns, 2013; Cancio, Larsen, Estes, Johns & Chang, 2018). School district administrators, who hope to find and keep competent teachers, should proactively search for the means to minimize or alleviate teacher stressors (Cancio et al., 2018).

What makes teacher attrition even worse is that teacher turnover is higher in high-poverty schools and seems to be the highest in urban middle schools (Cross & Thomas, 2017). Teachers that stay teaching oftentimes have better support from school administrators and they have developed stronger self-efficacy beliefs than teacher leavers (Hong, 2012). A positive school climate where students are showing academic achievement, there is an atmosphere of caring, students and teachers feel safe, and there is a feeling of connectedness between students and teachers are all critical for teacher well-being (Harmsen et al., 2018). Teachers who experienced emotional burnout and stress often contribute the sources of negative emotions to the immediate classroom context, such as students' disruptive behaviors and difficulty of classroom management (Hong, 2012; Iancu, et al., 2017). There is a strong relationship between mental

health and teacher attrition, so supporting teachers' mental health could be an important part of breaking this cycle, especially if this support comes early on when teaches are particularly vulnerable to negative experiences (McLean et al., 2017; Woloshyn & Savage, 2018).

Like stress, job satisfaction can be conceptualized as a personal appraisal of one's experiences in her or his role (McCarthy et al., 2015). School administrators control many variables that influence teacher stress including autonomy over classrooms, workload, motivation, and support (Harmsen et al., 2018). Administrations can benefit from being more sensitive to the aspects of classroom conditions in their buildings that teachers perceive as most demanding and to those individual teachers who perceive an imbalance between resources and demands (McCarthy, et al., 2015). Administrators should pay more attention to teachers' feeling of belonging, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction (Skaalvik, 2011).

Accurate assessment of teachers' appraisals of their classroom demand levels and resources could provide critical information about which teachers are most vulnerable to stress, even in similar school environments, that administrators and policymakers can use in improving the lives of teachers and their students (McCarthy et al., 2015). Appraisals therefore set the stage for the use of coping strategies, which occur after stressors have been engaged. Jointly run induction programs, with an eye towards teacher retention, could be particularly useful at the middle grades where teacher attrition is highest (Cross & Thomas, 2017). When administrators create a supportive, organized, and collaborative environment, it supports teacher well-being (Harmsen et al., 2018; Skaalvik, 2011).

Stress and Health

Health can be summarized into two categories, perceived physical health and perceived mental health (Bogaert et al., 2014). Physical health is determined to include physical

functioning, role limitations due to physical problems, bodily pain, and general perception of health (Bogaert et al., 2014). Mental health is determined to include energy and vitality, social function, mental health, and role limitations due to emotional problems (Bogaert et al., 2014; Merida & Rey, 2017). Teachers are found to have poorer perceived mental and physical health than a general healthy population (Bogaert et al., 2014; Uzman & Telef, 2015). Female teachers reported significantly lower perceived physical and mental health than their male colleagues, were more absent, and perceived a higher amount of occupational stress (Bogaert et al., 2014). Teachers who taught practical courses tended to have a poorer perceived physical health and more absent days (Bogaert et al., 2014). Teacher well-being is influenced by teacher factors, school climate factors, administration factors, and student factors (Harmsen et al., 2018; Hong 2012; Yu et al., 2016).

Workload and attitude towards change have effects on teachers' physical stress symptoms, with job satisfaction decreasing physical stress symptoms (Simone et al., 2015). When your body is under physical stress, it needs to rest and recharge (Aguilar, 2018). Recharging is dissimilar from rest. Hobbies, physical activities, and work-free weekends are ways to recharge (Aguilar, 2018). Recharging comes from doing things like taking lunch away from your desk, reading a book for fun, spending time with colleagues, or talking about a favorite TV show. Pushing yourself physically causes your body to be under more stress (Aguilar, 2018). Workload and attitude towards change have significant direct effects on the physical symptoms of stress in teachers, and indirect effects on physical symptoms of stress through job satisfaction (Simone et al., 2015). Job satisfaction was shown to decrease physical symptoms of stress in teachers (Simone et al., 2015).

Teachers most commonly determined mental symptoms were depression, anxiety, and hostility (Borrelli et al., 2014; McLean, Abry, & Granger, 2017; Uzman & Telef, 2015). Depression symptoms include a loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities as well as prolonged feelings of fatigue, irritability, worthlessness, and diminished capacities for concentrations and engagements (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Mental health is an important occupational health issues in teachers as work stress is a major risk factor for anxiety and depression (Borrelli, Benevene, Fioilli, Amelio, & Pozzi, 2014). Anxiety is described as an over activation of negative thought processes, particularly involving excessive worry and/or fear (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Even with a high severity of depression, distress, and anxiety detected in teachers, their mental health is neglected in their pre-service training and during selection for employment (Borrelli et al., 2014; Uzman & Telef, 2015). Teachers' mental health has a widespread impact not only on teaching effectiveness; it also has a big impact on students' personal development, emotional development, and academic achievement (Ju et al., 2015; Szigeti, et al., 2016). While analyzing teachers' mental health, two out of five teaches had high intensity of distress and 42.5% of teachers were at danger of burnout (Uzman & Telef, 2015).

Teachers report higher rates of mental health challenges compared to the greater population (McLean et al., 2017). There is a necessity to pay attention to prospective teachers' mental health, promote formal sources of help, and overcome seeking help obstacles (Uzman & Telef, 2015). The Canadian World Health Organization (2006) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which individuals successfully cope with the normal stresses of life, enabling them to work productively, and allowing them to contribute to their community. They emphasize that mental health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. In the realm of

preventive mental health services in the phase preparing prospective teachers for a stressful professional life, it may be useful to develop psychological support services in the teacher training facilities with a view to improve mental health, to advise prospective teachers to seek help, and to involve units to actively seek support (Uzman & Telef, 2015). Appreciating the dynamic nature of mental health, as well as developing a repertoire of effective coping mechanisms is especially important for teacher candidates as they prepare to enter a stressful and emotionally intense profession (Peterson & Grantham, 2016; Woloshyn & Savage, 2018).

During a normal, non-stressful day, cortisol levels of teachers decline throughout the day (Wolfman et al, 2012). During a stressful day, cortisol levels significantly elevate compared with the cortisol levels of a non-stressful day (Wolfman et al, 2012). Teachers who are experiencing chronic stress experience this because their brain gets locked into a recurring pattern, which may include ruminations and pessimistic thinking, this can result in depression (Taylor, 2017). Bernard (2016) identified that 60 to 70% of teachers show some stress symptoms and 30% have burnout symptoms.

It is clear that highly stressed teachers have unhelpful ways of thinking about themselves and stress-prone teachers hold beliefs about the high work demands they experience (hours of teaching, preparation, meetings, and general paperwork) which are concomitant with high stress and which may significantly exacerbate stress (Bernard, 2016). People that experience chronic stress experience this because their brain gets locked into a recurring pattern (Taylor, 2017). When teachers face high levels of stress in their job, they can potentially face burnout. Burnout can lead to teachers leaving the teaching profession (Maslach, 2003). There is a strong relation between mental health and teacher attrition, so supporting teachers' mental health could be an important part of breaking this cycle, especially if this support comes early on when teaches are

particularly vulnerable to negative experiences (McLean et al., 2017; Woloshyn & Savage, 2018).

Stress, and a lack of resources, can result in emotional exhaustion (McCarthy et al., 2015). Emotional exhaustion is an obvious indicator of general job stress (Schaufeli et al., 1993). Emotional exhaustion is also more common among individuals sensitive to stress, and amid individuals that typically lack control over situations (Schaufeli et al., 1993). Scholars note that highly reactive people, who oftentimes experience a high degree of uncertainty about how to feel and react, are more prone to emotional exhaustion (Hong, 2011; Schaufeli et al., 1993; Szigeti et al., 2016). For emotional exhaustion, the interaction is between reactivity and uncertainty, when uncertainty is low, individuals high and low in reactivity do not differ much in degree of emotional exhaustion (Embse, et al., 2016; Harmsen et al., 2018; Schaufeli et al., 1993). When it comes to job performance, less reactive people cope better with uncertainty in their jobs than do highly reactive people. Less reactive individuals generally use more effective coping strategies, whereas highly reactive individuals do not (Harmsen et al., 2018). The benefits of minimizing professional stressors may include improved job satisfaction and higher teacher retention rates, as recent researchers have emphasized the role of school conditions and characteristics in teacher turnover (Stauffer & Mason, 2013). If teachers are exposed to professional opportunities for sharing their emotional issues, and they are able to find better ways to handle emotionally charged situations, then they may stay in the classroom (Hong, 2012).

Teachers' emotion regulation strategies may affect their ability to cope with the stressors they experience in their work, so it is important to study the relationship between specific emotion regulation strategies and stress regulation (Katz, et al, 2017). Teachers with higher

levels of resilience show lower levels of mental exhaustion and burnout (Katz, et al, 2017).

Resilient people draw boundaries, recognize their limits, and know when to step back to avoid

overcommitting themselves (Aguilar, 2018). Understanding teachers' mental health is important

not only for the objective of supporting teachers, but also because these symptoms have

implications for students (McLean, et al, 2017). Results of studies support the efforts of

emerging teacher interventions targeting emotion regulation strategies to improve teachers'

ability to manage occupational stressors and promote their well-being (Harris, et al, 2015; Katz,

et al, 2017). The benefits of minimizing professional stressors may include improved job

satisfaction and higher teacher retention rates, as recent researchers have emphasized the role of

school conditions and characteristics in teacher turnover (Mclean et al., 2017; Stauffer & Mason,

2013).

The increasing levels of stress in schools for teachers calls for something to be done in

order for teachers to get back to working at their optimal levels (Taylor, 2017). A teacher's well-

being will have a big impact on a student's well-being (Hong, 2012). It is critical to have a

positive school climate where students are showing academic achievement, where students and

teachers feel safe, there is an atmosphere of caring, and there is a feeling of connectedness

between students and teachers (Harmsen et al., 2018). A teachers' interaction with her students

affect how they perform and how well they will score on tests (Durour & Marzano, 2013). A

teacher sees a student several hours every day and the teachers' well-being and health matters

(Durour & Marzano, 2013; Harmsen et al., 2018; Hong, 2012). In order to successfully reach

students, a teacher must be healthy and able. In an effective classroom, the students feel known

by the teacher, the teacher knows the dislikes and likes of the students, the teacher takes personal

interest in the students, the teacher supports the students with their problems, the teacher respects

and appreciates the students, the teacher values the differences of the students, and the teacher considers the feelings of the students (Durour & Marzano, 2013; Hong, 2012). When the teacher is a strong and caring leader, it is shown in the attitudes and work ethics of the students, and it is shown in the climate of the classroom. The building of relationships that are genuine and trusting allows for the opportunity for students to reveal personal and private situation in a professional, but caring, manner (Durour & Marzano, 2013). The perception of the relationships as being caring and supportive between the teacher and student are related to the satisfaction of the students (Durour & Marzano, 2013; Harmsen et al., 2018).

While stress can be very personal and vary from person to person, teachers need to make self-care a priority, and teachers need to feel safe in talking about stress without fear of stigma (Ferguson, Mang, & Frost, 2017). Teachers were shown to seldom speak to their health care providers about stress issues and they were not comfortable with talking to their principals about stress (Ferguson, et al., 2017). Scholars note the stigma of teacher stress appears to be a prevailing problem within the teaching profession but note that addressing stress during pre-service education could help alleviate some of the stigma of discussing stress in their future careers (Cancio et al, 2018; Ferguson et al., 2017). Teacher educators have a responsibility to provide information on teacher stress and coping strategies in teacher preparation courses in order to give teachers the skills to deal with stress and burnout in an effective manner (Cancio et al., 2018).

Stress and Leadership

Effective leadership can play a major role in teacher stress and burnout (Bednarz, 2012; Fullan, 2016; Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Only a capable leadership which is able to involve teachers in decision-making, is willing to listen and accept contributions

from everyone, uses comprehensive communication, enhances differences, recognizes results, and which offers opportunities for professional training, can produce quality and well-being of teachers (Simone et al., 2015). Effective leadership should apply the principles of empowerment to create a positive workplace environment where the feelings of others are taken into consideration (Bednarz, 2012). In order for leaders to increase workforce performance, commanding and dictating do not produce the same results as motivating individuals (Bednarz, 2013). When teachers have feelings of empowerment, that will cause a rise in teacher well-being, which will in turn benefit students. Empowering leadership encourages independent action, teamwork, and self-development (Tuckey, Dollard, & Bakker, 2012). Empowering leadership also encourages followers to look for opportunities in problems, encourages followers to monitor and reward their own performance, and encourages working together to make decisions (Tuckey et al., 2012). Different types of leadership will affect the performance of teachers and their overall job satisfaction in different ways (Fullan, 2016; Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Leadership styles relate directly to the mechanisms via which leaders' impact on teachers' experiences of work and teacher well-being (Tuckey et al., 2012). Types of leadership vary, and it is important to choose the best style to fit the school and classroom for maximum results (Fullan, 2016; Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Tuckey et al., 2012). There is a statistically significant, positive correlation, between the teacher-perceived transformational leadership style and subscales of middle school principals to teacher efficacy (Fullan, 2016; Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Other leadership styles, like the transformational leadership style, showed a negative correlation. This suggests that middle school teacher perceptions of their principal's leadership style (transformational and transactional) overall had a statistically significant positive relationship to

teacher efficacy. Leaders can empower workers and enhance well-being via their influence on and interaction with the work environment (Tuckey et al., 2012). Research suggests teacher efficacy is critical to student achievement and therefore it is important to investigate the relationship that school leadership has to teacher efficacy (Fullan, 2016; Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Leaders play an influential role in how employees experience their work and represent an important influence on worker happiness (Tuckey et al., 2012).

The style of leadership used can affect how much energy teachers put in to teaching and can also affect how much students learn and enjoy learning (Bednarz, 2012; Fullan, 2016; Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Tuckey et al., 2012). Authoritarian leadership hinders performance, while the laissez faire leadership does not assist in development, and only the democratic leadership had an effect on the progress of school leadership (Fullan, 2016; Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). Teachers, principals, school districts, and state educational systems can use these findings to increase training initiatives and programs that can improve principal leadership and teacher effectiveness, which in turn could lead to increased student achievement (Bednarz, 2012; Fullan, 2016; Gentilucci & Muto, 2007). In order to decrease workload and improve teachers' perceptions of senior management, leadership should become trained adequately in managing their staff based on the involvement of teachers in decision-making (Simone et al, 2015). Leaders can oftentimes determine determinants of vigor, dedication, and absorption in workers, like the lack of job resources (Simone et al., 2016; Tuckey et al., 2012). Stress caused by teachers' workload can be reduced through actions aimed at supporting a leadership style that will increase autonomy and individual empowerment (Bednarz, 2012; Simone et al., 2016). Scholars note that individual empowerment can oftentimes be

achieved through actions aimed at improving communication through participation and sharing (Simone et al., 2016).

School district administrators who hope to keep competent teachers should proactively search for the means to minimize and alleviate stressors and to encourage faculty to participate in those activities (Cancio et al., 2018). The principal and the teachers in a school system are there to work together for a common goal. Working together towards a common goal is what one would expect in a school system where you have a great deal of versatile and well-educated people. To promote work engagement, organizations should be interested in leaders who support followers to assume responsibility, encourage them to find their own solutions, guide team members to work with each other without direct supervision, and support them to seek out learning opportunities (Tuckey, et al., 2012). In order to excel and be satisfied with the professional organizational system, one needs to feel they have freedom to do what is necessary to get the job done. If teachers are forced to compete, and not work together, it is entirely likely that lesson plans and best practices may not be shared in a spirit of collaboration (Brewers, Myers, & Zhang, 2015). Accurate assessment of teachers' appraisals of their classroom demand levels and recourses could provide critical information about which teachers are most vulnerable to stress, even in similar school environments, that administrators and policymakers can use in improving the lives of teachers and their students (McCarthy, et al., 2015).

There are many ways schools and programs can build emotional intelligence in teachers, particularly new teachers. One way is by making sure teacher leaders, or mentors, have high emotional intelligence and resilience to model this to their new teacher mentees (Aguilar, 2018). Teacher leaders should also make sure that there are effective programs, which include instruction on how to recognize and respond to emotions, along with how to appreciate emotions

(Aguilar, 2018). Those supporting teachers need to know how to respond to symptoms of burnout, and prevent it, such as through building healthy, thriving staff communities (Aguilar, 2018). To increase teachers' job satisfaction and prevent occupational stress, it is crucial to assist teacher leaders in making sure there is involvement by all teachers in the decision-making process, proposals and contributions are listened to by all, there is clear and comprehensive communication, results achieved are shared by everyone, and opportunities for professional training is offered (Simone et al., 2016). Leaders can impact existing working conditions, as well as interrelate with the work environment, to determine how the work is actually experienced by workers (Tuckey et al., 2012).

Effective administrators must cultivate and communicate an acceptance of emotions and offer professional development tied to emotional resilience, incorporating emotional literacy, learning to understand, name, and engage with emotions in healthy ways (Aguilar, 2018; Tuckey et al., 2012). Administrators must also show the value of self-care by modeling and taking care of themselves (leaving school at reasonable hours, for instance), and they must give others permission to do so (Aguilar, 2018). There is a high importance, when it comes to educational systems, in putting better trainings and programs in place to better prepare principals and other educational leaders for the job at hand. School leaders can take a stance, and make a conscious effort, to diminish teacher stress. There are similarities and differences between empowering educational leaders and other types of leadership. Empirical work distinguishes empowering leadership from directive (which relies on position power to influence followers), transformational (which is characterized by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration), and transactional (which involves clarifying effort-reward relationships and achieving motivation through rewards) behavioral

styles (Aguilar, 2018; Tuckey et al., 2012). If a staff member is visibly ill, they should be told by administration to leave school and rest (Aguilar, 2018). Teacher educators have a responsibility to provide information on teacher stress and coping strategies in teacher preparation courses in order to give teachers the skills to deal with stress and burnout in an effective manner (Cancio et al., 2018).

Stress and Life Events

In 1967 psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe created a list of 43 life events based on a relative score (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). The 43-item Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale, now commonly known as Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS), is used as a measure of stressful life events. The 43 life events were empirically derived from clinical experience (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). Life events include things such as marriage, pregnancy, divorce, jail time, and change in living conditions. Each event, called a Life Change Unit (LCU), has a different 'weight' assigned to it that determines the stress factor (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). The higher the score, and the larger the weight of each event, the more likely the patient would become ill from stress related life events. The SRRS is surprisingly consistent despite the cross-cultural differences one would expect, and subsequent validation supports the links between stress and illness (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). The SRRS is one of the most widely cited measurement instruments in stress literature but it is old (Scully & Tosi, 2000). American life has changed substantially in the last several years and the original SRSS needed some revising to adjust the original weighting schema in order to account for changes in culture (Scully & Tosi, 2000). For example, divorce went from a weight of 73 to a weight of 58, marriage remained the same at 50, and pregnancies went from 40 to 27 (Scully & Tosi, 2000).

Negative affect, linked to stressful events, is considered a key trigger of nightmares (Rek, Sheaves, & Freeman, 2017). Nightmares are inherently distressing, prevent restorative sleep, and are associated with a number of psychiatric problems (Rek et al., 2017). Worry, depersonalization and hallucinatory experiences were significantly associated with the severity of nightmares (Rek et al., 2017. Worry is a cognitive style characterized by repetitive negative thinking about future events (Freeman, 2016). Of the variables tested, worry was the strongest associate of the occurrence of nightmares and also related to the severity rating of nightmares (Rek et al., 2017). It was found that pre-sleep worry increases distressing nightmares, and nightmares may trigger worry the following day, resulting in a self-perpetuating cycle (Rek et al., 2017). Surprisingly, no associations were found between nightmare occurrences and physical activity levels or alcohol use (Rek et al., 2017). Higher levels of worry, hallucinatory experiences, and longer sleep duration were significantly associated with whether or not participants experienced nightmares, even after controlling for negative effects and stressful life events (Rek et al., 2017).

Chronic and acute stress, and the demanding features of daily life, can serve as a blockade to good health practices and lead to an unhealthy lifestyle (Burg, Schwartz, Kronish, Diaz, Alcantara, & Davidson, 2017). There is a significant negative effect of exercise on stress but there is also found to be significant between-person variability (Burg, et al., 2017). The relationship of stress to exercise can be bi-directional and varies from person to person (Burg, et al., 2017). For some, regular physical activity can alleviate the physiological impact of chronic and acute stress while improving aspects of stress resilience (Burg, et al., 2017; Cancio, Larsen, Mathur, Johns, & Chang, 2018). For others, physical activity has no impact on stress, or the anticipation of exercising causes a heightened sense of stress (Burg, et al., 2017; Cancio et al.,

2018). Psychosocial stress contributes to poor health in part by adversely affecting maintenance of healthy behaviors (Burg, et al., 2017).

Stress and Coping Strategies

According to the transactional model of stress, there are two main types of coping strategies, which are, emotion-focused and problem-focused (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Problem-focused coping is directed at the stressor directly (for example, a teacher directly addressing a student's misbehavior), and emotion-focused coping helps individuals deal with the emotions triggered by the stressor (for example, a teacher using deep breathing before addressing a student's misbehavior) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; McCarthy et al., 2015). Research in coping strategies is necessary to inform interventions that support growth in teacher resilience, as well as continued positive school climate development through evidence-based approaches (Gray, Wilcox & Nordstokke, 2017).

In the analysis of coping strategies for teachers, it was found that listening to music, feeling supported by family and friends, and dancing were strategies that predicted lower stress (Berg et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018). Other coping strategies included counseling, eating, using prescription medication, using of alcohol, and use of recreational drugs, all of which increased teachers' stress (Cancio et al., 2018). During active coping strategies, teachers attempted to change the source of stress, or themselves, by engaging in leisurely activities such as dancing, yoga, exercise, and emotional support from family and friends (Burg, et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018). In contrast, in maladaptive coping strategies, teachers avoid or deny the source of stress (Cancio et al., 2018). Maladaptive coping strategies, like alcohol, drugs, and prescription medicine, were found to be predictors of stress (Mclean et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018).

Some teachers use prayer or religion as a strategy or coping mechanism to combat stress and reduce burnout (Hartwick, 2013). One study done on spiritual practices as a means of coping with stress to reduce teacher attrition rates found that of the 91.5% of public school teachers studied reported praying, 93.0% specified that they believe prayer has given them comfort during difficult times, 84.0% indicated that they believe prayer has helped them to better cope with job-related stress, and 70.4% specified that they believe prayer has helped them to maintain their enthusiasm for teaching and reduce professional burnout (Hartwick, 2013). These statistics indicate that many teachers draw upon prayer and religion to deal with burnout, to cope with stress, and to remain resilient in the face of professional difficulties (Hartwick, 2013).

Studies have shown that school-based implementation of mental health training and support for teachers can lead to positive outcomes for both teachers and their students through improvements in classroom climate, teacher sensitivity to student needs and behavior management, as well as diminished teacher burnout, anxiety, and depression (Cancio et al., 2018; Mclean et al., 2017). It has been found that the level of stress and its consequences for teachers can be reduced and prevented through an accurate identification of its sources, with a positive effect on individual and organizational health (Simone, Ciotto, & Lampis, 2016). A healthy work environment can be reached not only through the absence of negative factors, but also by promoting positive characteristics (Simone et al., 2015). While stress can be very personal and vary from person to person, teachers need to make self-care a priority, and teachers need to feel safe in talking about stress without fear of stigma (Ferguson, Mang, & Frost, 2017). Teachers were shown to seldom speak to their health care providers about stress issues and they were not comfortable with talking to their principals about stress (Ferguson et al., 2017). The stigma of teacher stress appears to be a prevailing problem within the teaching profession but addressing

stress during pre-service education could help alleviate some of the stigma of discussing stress in their future careers (Ferguson et al., 2017).

Learning to relax, mindfulness, exercise, sleep, resolving conflict, and positive psychology were all found as effective ways to reduce stress with teachers (Taylor, 2017). School-based implementation of metal health training and support for teachers can lead to positive outcomes for both teachers and their students through improvements in the classroom climate as well as diminished teacher burnout, anxiety, and depression (Roser, 2013 & McLean et al., 2017). Pre-service teachers could benefit from mental health training and support before they start their careers (McLean et al., 2017). Even a short, multi-modal approach to enhance well-being could be used to make significant changes to teachers' lives in the school setting (Taylor, 2017). It is critical for teachers to deal with the work stressors of their profession using coping strategies, work-life balance, meaningful collaboration, support from coworkers, and support from teaching staff (Harmsen, 2018).

In a response to the need to support teachers' well-being over the long term, the professional development program called CARE was created (Jennings, Doyle, Rasheed, Frank, & Brown, 2019). CARE stands for Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education. The program was designed to promote the social and emotional competence teachers need to manage stress (Jennings et al., 2019). It is a comprehensive adult learning model that combines emotion skills instructions and mindful awareness compassion practice taught sequentially over five six-hour days delivered across the course of a school year (Jennings et al., 2019). The findings of the study suggest that teachers participating in the CARE program increased in emotion regulation from the beginning of the first school year to the beginning of the second school year, while control teachers showed decline in their adaptive emotion regulation (Jennings et al.,

2019). The study also found a significant decrease in ache-related symptoms for CARE teachers compared to control teachers (Jennings et al., 2019).

Teacher self-care can be encouraged through promoting mindfulness, physical exercises, and encouraging work-life balance (Hong, 2012; Harmsen, 2018; Mclean et al., 2017). Some teachers may combat stress by reaching out to friends, family, colleagues, administrators, and their health care providers (Ferguson et al., 2017). Teacher self-care practices can be promoted into school climate by encouraging self-care group activities like morning staff yoga classes and providing healthy staff lunches (Gray et al., 2017; Harmsnen, 2018). Promoting self-care for teachers within the school is critical to provide an atmosphere that fosters teacher well-being (Gray et al., 2017; Harmsnen, 2018).

In an attempt to combat teacher stress, a teacher-training program called CALMERSS was created (Taylor, 2017). CALMERSS stands for cognitive thoughts, automatic thoughts, learning to relax, mindfulness, exercise, resolving conflict, strengths or positive psychology, and sleep. CALMERSS is a four week, multi-modal program intervention for teachers which would involve interventions of cognitive training, learning to relax, mindfulness, exercise, resolving conflict, sleep, and other positive psychology interventions (Taylor, 2017). The increasing levels of stress in schools for teachers calls for something to be done in order for teachers to get back to working at their optimal levels (Taylor, 2017). Another program designed to combat teacher attrition in order to retain highly qualified teachers in schools is called CREATE (Cross & Thomas, 2017). CREATE is a three-year model that stands for collaboration, reflection, enhance, Atlanta, teacher, and effectiveness (Cross & Thomas, 2017). The CREATE model includes mindfulness training, carefully matched mentor teachers, a site-based project director, and a critical friends group (Cross & Thomas, 2017).

Despite the importance of teachers' emotional experiences, most teachers have never experienced any professional development sessions that talk about how to handle emotions in the classroom or how to recover from emotional trauma (Hong, 2012; Woloshyn & Savage, 2018). Teachers' emotions play a significant role in the way teachers respond to challenging circumstances. If the teachers who have already left the teaching profession could have been exposed to professional opportunities for sharing their emotional issues and finding better ways to handle emotionally charged situations, then they may have made different career decisions (Hong, 2012). The benefits of minimizing professional stressors may include improved job satisfaction and higher teacher retention rates, as recent researchers have emphasized the role of school conditions and characteristics in teacher turnover (Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

Consultants offering stress management programs are another method to battle teacher stress (Bernard, 2016). Stress management consultants who concern themselves with teacher stress might wish to consider targeting the irrational beliefs of teachers for stress modification. Helping teachers to develop a rational mindset of self-acceptance, acceptance of others, and high frustration tolerance was key for preparing for and dealing with on the job adversity (Bernard, 2016). School-based implementation of mental health training and support for teachers can lead to positive outcomes for teachers through improvements in classroom climate, teacher sensitivity to student needs and behavior management, as well as diminished teacher burnout, anxiety, and depression (Mclean et al., 2017).

Mentors of beginning teachers should assist in helping novice teachers to maintain perspective, come to work prepared with a mindset of high frustration tolerance, be aware of the negative impact of demandingness, and not take things too personally (Bernard, 2016). Those supporting teachers need to know how to respond to symptoms of burnout, and prevent it, such

as through building healthy, thriving staff communities (Aguilar, 2018). This strategy could reduce teacher stress, reduce burnout, and reduce teacher attribution. Stress management efforts, using teacher mentors, strengthen efficacy, self-concept, hardiness, resilience, and ultimately heighten teacher satisfaction and effectiveness (Bernard, 2016).

Educators' physiological indicators of chronic stress are impacted over the course of the school year, but strategies as well as the summer break have positive effects (Katz, et al, 2017). Results of studies support the efforts of emerging teacher interventions targeting emotion regulation strategies to improve teachers' ability to manage occupational stressors and promote their well-being (Harris, et al, 2015; Katz, et al, 2017). Principals, teachers, and students are all intertwined and interwoven. If principals and teachers are stressed and unhappy, then the stress and unhappiness could potentially carry over to the students. Teaching is a cognitively demanding task and your brain needs a break from high states of mental arousal (Aguilar, 2018). Recharging comes from doing things like taking lunch away from your desk, reading a book for fun, spending time with colleagues, or talking about a favorite TV show. Recharging is different from rest. Hobbies, physical activities, and work-free weekends are also ways to recharge (Aguilar, 2018).

Mindfulness is another coping strategy to help combat stress and burnout. Mindfulness helps us be present so that we can make clearheaded decisions in the moment, like how to respond to challenging students, for example (Aguilar, 2018). Mindfulness is a popular intervention for stress, and is a practice rooted in Buddhist philosophy that involves paying attention to the present moment, intentionally and non-judgmentally (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Reiser & McCarhty, 2017). Current research suggests that individuals high in mindfulness display higher health and well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Reiser & McCarthy, 2017). Mindfulness helps

us recognize, understand, and respond to emotions as it strengthens our ability to recognize what we're experiencing before we react (Aguilar, 2018; Reiser & McCarthy, 2017).

Preparation programs and schools might invite all staff to participate in mindfulness work and integrate it into coaching programs (Aguilar, 2018). Teacher mindfulness groups offer potential as a low-cost, time efficient strategy for lowering teacher stress and strengthening relationships among colleagues, which could lead to positive outcomes for both teachers and their students (Reiser & McCarthy, 2017). Within the teaching profession, the interest in the role of mindfulness has generated a large number of training-based experiences aimed to reduce stress and burnout (Frank, Reibel, & Metz, 2015; Schlusser, Jennings, Sharp & Frank, 2016). Successful mindfulness abilities are self-regulated behaviors that allow teachers to be more aware of the ongoing occurrences in the classroom, paying close attention to students' needs and behaviors without being distracted by other work-related problems or acting using dysfunctional cognitive habits in front of stressful situations (Frank, Jennings & Greenberg, 2016; Frank, et al., 2015). It is not clear how job and personal resources can interact in predicting job burnout, and future research should invest more interest about the role exerted from mindfulness (Guidetti et al., 2019).

Summary

Chapter Two explained the theoretical framework and provided a related literature review of the research conducted on burnout to identify teachers' risk for stress and burnout. Several studies have been conducted on burnout and teacher stress; however, few studies have focused on public middle school teachers, and none on the effects of stress and burnout on personal and professional lives of middle school teachers. A thorough review of the research on the multidimensional model of burnout theory was given, further exploring the three dimensions of

burnout, exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Emotional exhaustion was seen more than other burnout dimensions as an indicator of general job stress. Further depth to burnout theory was provided giving a breakdown of six categories to properly assess individuals at risk of experiencing burnout. These six categories included workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. Chapter Two also covered related research literature outlaying data on teacher attrition rates as well as effects of burnout and stress on teachers' performance and mental well-being. Potential catalysts found were work demands on teachers, work environment, changes to educational systems, behavior issues of students, and administrative leadership issues. Leaders should empower workers and enhance their well-being via their influence on and interaction with the work environment (Tuckey et al., 2012). This chapters' focus on stress and health, gives insight into the demanding toll stress can have on one's mind and body, as well as one's ability to perform well personally and professionally. Chapter Two ends with a look into research on the benefits of coping strategies for individuals including emotional-focused and problem-focused types of coping strategies. Details are discussed about programs developed to further the mental well-being of teachers such as teacher mindfulness groups, CARE, Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education, and CALMERSS, cognitive thoughts, automatic thoughts, learning to relax, mindfulness, exercise, resolving conflict, strengths or positive psychology, and sleep.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to examine the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. The first part of this chapter presents the qualitative single case study research design, the central research question, and the three research subquestions. This study investigated strategies public middle school teachers used to minimize stress and how public middle school teachers described the stress that impacts them in their professional and personal lives. The participants and setting are described, which includes 10 total teacher participants in a large public middle school in the Southeastern United States. The data collection for this case study included a screening questionnaire, individual interviews, a single focus group interview, and analysis of letter-writing samples. Chapter Three also discusses step-by step procedures of the study, an explanation of the researcher's role, data analysis techniques, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Design

The present study is a qualitative single case study. The study was qualitative in nature because it represented the participant perspectives and I was the instrument of the study. A qualitative design was used because qualitative research is illuminating meanings by making sense of the world (Patton, 2015). Qualitative inquiry includes collecting quotes from people, verifying them, and contemplating what they mean (Patton, 2015). Qualitative analysis involves interpreting observations, interviews, and documents to find meaningful patterns and themes. According to Patton (2015) there are several types of qualitative data, some of which include interviews, observations/fieldwork, and documents. In the present study, three types of

qualitative data were used, individual participant interviews, a focus group interview, and document analysis of a letter-writing sample.

A single-case study design was used to discover more about public middle school teachers' causes of stress. One rationale for selecting a single-case study, rather than a multiple case study design, was that the single-case can represent the critical test of a significant theory (Yin, 2018). Another rationale for selecting a single-case study design was because the present study was looking at a common case. The objective in a single-case study that looks at a common case is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation because of the lessons it might provide about the social processes related to some theoretical interest (Yin, 2018). The common case studied here was the stress that impacts public middle school teachers in their professional and personal lives. The present study looked at strategies public middle school teachers used to minimize stress and how public middle school teachers described the stress that affected them in their professional and personal lives.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

How do public middle school teachers describe the stress that affects them in their professional and personal lives?

Research Subquestions

SQ1. How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences at work that cause them the most amount of stress?

SQ2. How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences at home that cause them the most amount of stress?

SQ3. How do public middle school teachers describe the coping strategies used to minimize stress?

Setting

The setting for this study is a large public middle school of approximately 1,100 students in the Southeastern United States identified by the pseudonym Florida Middle School. At Florida Middle School, 41% of students are reported as white and 59% of students are reported as minorities. Sixty-four percent of students at this school qualify as economically disadvantaged. This setting was chosen because there is a gap in the literature pertaining to causes of teacher stress in public middle schools. There are 54 teachers currently employed at Florida Middle School. Thirty-six teachers are female, and 18 teachers are male. The leadership structure is one principal, two assistant principals, two deans, two guidance counselors, and one resource officer. One assistant principal is in charge of curriculum and one assistant principal is in charge of student services. I live in Florida, I work at a different middle school in this county, and I see firsthand the effects of stress on middle school teachers.

Participants

Ten public middle school teachers are the participants of this study. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. Ten participants were selected who can best inform my research questions and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015). Cases for study are selected because they are information rich and illuminative, offering useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest; sampling, is then aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population (Patton, 2015). Each person identified and interviewed yields leads to additional key informants. Patterns, issues, and developments on middle school teachers' stress will emerge. The subjects sampled were able to

inform important facets and perspectives related to the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015).

The participants of this study are 10 public middle school teachers in central Florida. The selection criteria for this study was, public middle school teachers currently dealing with stress and/or burnout, willing to participate, teachers I do not know, teachers over the age of 18, both genders, and various races. Care was taken to make sure that there was a range of ages, both males and females, and different races represented. When selecting the 10 participants, I made sure not to know the teachers beforehand to eliminate bias, that they were all be over the age of 18, and I did my best to have a diverse group of participants.

Procedures

Before beginning the present study, I gained site approval from the school district by contacting the superintendent's office. I also sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). In order to gain approval from the IRB, I prepared the necessary documents online, submitted my IRB approval forms (Appendix A) for research, and awaited their approval. Once I gained IRB approval, I obtained my participants. I found 10 teachers willing to participate in the study. Once I had IRB approval for my study, I found the 10 participants by sending out an email to gain their informed consent (Appendix B). I gave every teacher a questionnaire (Appendix C) to ask their age, sex, number of years teaching, and race. This questionnaire (Appendix C) was also used to find out more about their levels of stress. The questionnaires were administered through email. Questionnaires were 7 questions long and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Questions were adapted from the Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Scully & Tosi, 2000). All participants' identities remained confidential for this study. The school is referred to as Florida Middle School and participants

are referred to using pseudonyms. I made sure all of my participants were over the age of 18. I attempted to include a wide variety of ages and experience levels. I made every effort to include various races and genders. When selecting the ten participants, I made sure that I did not know the teachers beforehand in order to eliminate bias.

Each one-on-one interview lasted about an hour. The one-on-one interviews took place through conferencing software. After each interview was conducted (Appendix D), there was a focus group interview (Appendix E) with all of the participants. The focus group was set up using online conferencing software, Zoom, where everyone chatted together online. The focus group interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. After the focus group interview was complete, participants were asked to write a letter to a first-year teacher (Appendix F). These letters explained the personal and professional stressors to expect as a first-year teacher.

The study employed individual people as the unit of analysis; the primary focus of data collection was on, what is happening to individuals in a setting, and how individuals are affected by the setting (Patton, 2013). The first technique of data analysis was open coding, which will be discussed in the analysis section. The second technique of data analysis was creating themes or classifications. In order to gain trustworthiness within my study, I clarified researcher bias, and I used generalizations.

The Researcher's Role

According to Creswell (2013), individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work; they develop subjective meanings of their experiences, meanings directed toward certain objects or things. I was the instrument of this qualitative study. I had to be careful of my bias since I am a public middle school teacher and I have been affected by this topic. Bracketing was used to attempt to remove presuppositions, and my own experiences, when I analyzed my

data (Patton, 2015). The researcher brackets out the world and assumptions to identify the data in uncontaminated form (Patton, 2015). My data represents the participant's perspective. The philosophical assumption that led to my choice of research was an ontological assumption. I studied different people and gathered data on their relation to the world around them.

As the researcher, I reported different perspectives as themes developed in my findings (Creswell, 2013). My epistemological assumptions are the personal experiences that I have as an educator. My personal experiences include the schools, colleagues, administrators, and students that I have come across throughout my training and teaching career. I have lived and taught in the United States all of my life, I have taught for 13 years, I have only taught in Florida and Virginia, I am a middle-aged female, my father was a principal (so I grew up around the education system), and my training to become an educator was at the University of Florida. The setting for the current study is a large public middle school in central Florida, which I have not worked at before, in order to eliminate bias. To further eliminate bias, the participants for the current study were teachers that I did not know beforehand. My methodological assumptions were the ways I gathered my research on stress and the ways I conducted my interviews. I like to make the people I'm interviewing feel comfortable and I am very agreeable when I conduct interviews. Even if the person I am interviewing seems rude, or does not answer my questions directly, I still maintain positivity.

Data Collection

The data for this case study included a screening questionnaire, individual interviews, a single focus group interview, and document analysis of letter-writing samples. The screening questionnaire served only to select the best participants for the study. There were 10 total teacher participants studied to gather data. Every participant received a screening questionnaire to find

out more about their levels of stress. Questionnaires were 7 questions long and were adapted

from the Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Scully & Tosi, 2000). Ten

interview and 5 focus group questions were developed to gather more data. All participants were

asked to write a letter to a first-year teacher in order to gain further insight into their stressors. In

my study, individual people were the unit of analysis; the primary focus of data collection was

on what was happening to individuals in a setting and how individuals were affected by the

setting (Patton, 2013). Data triangulation is the use of a variety of data sources in a study, which

strengthens the study (Patton, 2013). When I used data triangulation, my study's findings were

supported by more than a single source of evidence (Yin, 2018). There were multiple sources of

evidence in this case study. A screening questionnaire, individual interviews, a single focus

group interview, and analysis of letter-writing samples were the sources of evidence in this case

study, and they all provided multiple measures of the same phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The

screening questionnaire was not a source of data and served to select the best participants for the

study. Evidence from these multiple sources increased the confidence that my case study was

accurate and strong (Patton, 2013; Yin, 2018).

Individual Interviews

One of the most important sources of case study evidence is the interview (Yin, 2018).

While interviewing all participants, I went in-depth and made sure the conversations were fluid

(Appendix D). Case study interviews resembled guided conversations rather than structured

queries (Yin, 2018). During my data collection, I took care to be a high-quality interviewer.

Interviewers need special skills in order to be effective at interviewing participants. These skills

include asking good questions, being a good listener, staying adaptive, having a firm grasp of the

issues being studied, and conducting research ethically (Yin, 2018). Interview data was

supported with information from other sources. All of the participants in this study were

protected, free from harm, and they only participated if they gave consent.   Case study

interviews require you to operate on two levels at the same time, by satisfying the needs of your

line of inquiry while simultaneously putting forth friendly, non-threatening, relevant, open-ended

questions (Yin, 2018).

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me. Describe your profession. How long have you been
   teaching and what grade(s) and subject(s) do you teach?

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very low stress and 10 being very high stress, how
   would you rate the amount of stress you feel during your workday? (CRS, SQ1)

3. As you think about your workday, what are some events or situations that cause you a lot
   of stress? (CRS, SQ1)

4. As you think about your workday, which people cause you the most amount of stress?
   (CRS, SQ1)

5. What are some things you do, some coping mechanisms, or some strategies you have in
   place at work, to lower your stress levels? Please go into detail. (SQ3)

6. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very low stress and 10 being very high stress, how
   would you rate the amount of stress you feel at home? (CRS, SQ2)

7. As you think about your home life, what are some events or situations that cause you the
   most amount of stress? (CRS, SQ2)

8. As you think about your home life, which people cause you the most amount of stress?
   (CRS, SQ2)

9. What are some things you do, some coping mechanisms, or some strategies you have in place at home, to lower your stress levels? Please go into detail. (SQ3)

10. What final thoughts would like to add to this interview?

Question one serves as a way to get to know the participant and to establish rapport. The interview questions are intended to be straightforward, non-threatening and will ideally serve to help develop rapport between the participant and researcher (Patton, 2015). Case study interviews resemble guided conversations rather than structured queries (Yin, 2018). The purposes of these interview questions are to record the participants' perspectives as fairly and absolutely as possible (Patton, 2015). All while maintaining focus on gathering information that is applicable and valuable to the current study.

Questions two and six ask the participant to rate according to a scale. This will give me an idea of the intensity. It also gives the participant a clear idea of what is being asked. The interviewer bears the responsibility to pose questions that make it clear to the interview what is being asked (Patton, 2015). Unclear questions can make the person being interviewed feel uncomfortable, confused, or hostile (Patton, 2015). Asking singular questions helps a great deal to make things clear and also contribute to clarity (Patton, 2015). Teacher stress has been linked with adverse professional outcomes, including burnout, absenteeism, stress, and attrition (Bowler & Curtiss, 2015; Ryan at el., 2018). Stress and burnout as well as attitudes towards the job might be influenced by several personal and situational characteristics like teachers' age, socioeconomic status, gender, teaching experience, educational background, weekly work hours at school, and class size (Bumen, 2010; Louw, George & Esterhuyse, 2011; Szigeti et al., 2016).

Questions three, four, seven, eight and 10 ask for participants to go into further details on specific stressors. Probes are used to deepen the response to a question, increase the richness and

depth of responses, and give cues to the interview about the level of response that is desired (Patton, 2015). These questions will be focused yet flexible (Patton, 2015). Specific questions within the interview should have a connection to the overall purpose (Patton, 2015). I will make sure to communicate purpose to improve responses. Teacher longevity, or the amount of time a teacher remains in the teaching profession is an important issue for school climate and school resource allocation (Harmsen et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2016). Those who report leaving because of job dissatisfaction cite low salaries, lack of support from school administration, lack of student motivation, student discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision making as factors influencing their decisions (Bosner, 2000; Embse et al. 2016; Herman et al, 2018).

Questions five and nine explore the strategies and coping mechanisms with stress. When asking about a particular phenomenon or program component, it may be better to first find out what the interviewer believes that phenomenon to be and then ask questions about the descriptions provided by the person being interviewed (Patton, 2015). Despite the importance of teachers' emotional experiences, most teachers have never experienced any professional development sessions that talk about how to handle emotions in the classroom or how to recover from emotional trauma (Hong, 2012). Asking someone to tell you about an activity or situation they've drawn back from, or halted out of concern for their well-being, can provide insight into how they've managed stress, their sense of what is physically and emotionally healthy, and where their limits lie (Aguilar, 2018). Stress management efforts strengthen efficacy, self-concept, hardiness, resilience, and ultimately heighten teacher satisfaction and effectiveness (Bernard, 2016). The benefits of minimizing professional stressors may include improved job satisfaction and higher teacher retention rates (Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

Focus Group Interview

The focus group for my study will be conducted online using video chat software. The focus group procedure calls for me to recruit and convene a small group of participants, then moderate a discussion about some aspect of the case study, deliberately trying to surface the views of each person in the group (Yin, 2018). There will be one focus group with all participants. The focus group will last approximately 45 minutes. Focus group interviews have several advantages for qualitative inquiry, including cost effective data collection, highlighting diverse perspectives, and interactions among participants enhance data quality, topics avoided or silences are revealing, and analysis unfolds as the interview unfolds (Patton, 2015). My focus group questions (Appendix E) will be adapted from the Maslach (1981) burnout inventory. According to burnout theory, burnout is broken down into six categories in order to properly assess individuals and organizations at risk of burnout. These six categories of burnout include workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). They provide individuals and organizations with the framework, along with the necessary tools, to move from burnout towards engagement.

During the focus group interview, I will also be observing participants. Observational evidence is useful in providing additional information about the topic being studied (Yin, 2018). I will observe and write down data about whether or not the teacher participant seems tired, frazzled, upset, happy, positive, upbeat, angry, etc.

Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

1. Please describe how teaching impacts your stress levels during the workday. (CRS, SR1)

2. Please describe how teaching impacts your stress levels at home. (CRS, SR1, SR2)

3. Please describe how your home life impacts your stress levels at work. (CRS, SR1, SR2)

4. Please describe any coping mechanisms or strategies that you use to help alleviate work and/or home stressors. (SR3)

5.   What final thoughts would you like to add to this focus group interview?

These questions are meant to be open-ended to provide rich qualitative data. Open-ended responses are the heart of qualitative data, and they emerge from asking open-ended questions (Patton, 2015). The truly open-ended question permits those being interviewed to take whatever direction and use whatever words they want to express what they have to say (Patton, 2015). In qualitative inquiry, one of the things the inquiry is trying to determine is what dimensions, themes, and images people use among themselves to describe their feelings, thoughts, and experiences (Patton, 2015). Using focus group questions adapted from the Maslach burnout Inventory (Maslach, 1981), a multidimensional model to stress is explored, that goes beyond the individual stress experience (exhaustion) to encompass (cynicism) and feelings of inefficacy (Maslach, 2003). This multidimensional model to burnout has now been incorporated into assessment programs for organizations and individuals (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). To fix burnout, organizations and individuals must identify the areas in which their mismatches lie and then design solutions tailored to improve the fit within each area (Maslach & Leiter, 2000).

Letter-writing Sample

Each participant wrote a letter to a first-year teacher (Appendix F). In the letter, they were able to personalize their experiences and descriptions of teaching. In writing a letter, teachers should be able to think more informally, which will hopefully provide additional evidence not gathered during interviews or focus groups. These letters, one from each participant, served as case study evidence called "physical artifacts" (Yin, 2018, p. 125). Artifacts can be an important component in the overall case study (Yin, 2018). By examining the letters to a first-year teacher, the case study researcher is able to develop a broader perspective concerning all of the classroom stressors and applications over a much longer period of time, far beyond that which could be directly observed in the limited time of a classroom visit (Yin, 2018).

Data Analysis

The first technique during data analysis for this case study of public middle school teacher's description of the stress that affects them in their professional and personal lives, was open coding. The interview transcripts were read, reread, and analyzed with inductive coding methods (Creswell, 2013). A short list, with five or six categories, along with shorthand labels or codes were established. A computer coding software program, NVivo, was used for data analysis. This coding software program made it easy to organize data, and search for themes, along with the relationships between those themes. The categories were expanded as the database was read, reread, reviewed, and re-reviewed (Creswell, 2013). Three aspects of the phenomenon of teacher-stress were focused on in this study. These three aspects were professional stress, personal stress, and coping mechanisms of stress. The second technique of data analysis was creating themes or classifications. Themes in qualitative research (also called

categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea (Creswell, 2013). The common idea or theme of the present study was teacher stress. Themes were related within teacher burnout and stress.

In data analysis, I played with the data collected and searched for patterns, insights, or concepts that seemed promising (Yin, 2018). Strategies public middle school teachers use to minimize stress and how public middle school teachers describe the stress that affects them in their personal and professional lives were analyzed. Arrays, displays, tabulations, memos, and/or diagrams were created to help move towards a general analytic strategy (Yin, 2018). Analytic techniques of pattern matching, and explanation building were used to analyze the data. When case study methods are purposely designed to collect some overlapping data, the possibility for triangulation certainly exists (Yin, 2013). If the results are convergent, greater confidence may be placed in the evaluation's overall findings (Yin, 2013). Convergence, themes, and relationships emerging strengthen the studies overall validity. According to Yin (2013) case study evaluations frequently use logic models, initially to express the theoretical causal relationships between an intervention and its outcomes. Then, case study evaluations are used to guide data collection on these same topics (Yin, 2013). The collected data can be analyzed by comparing the empirical findings with the initially stipulated theoretical relationships (Yin, 2013). A match between the empirical and the theoretical adds to the support for explaining how an intervention produced (or not) its outcomes (Yin, 2013). Research suggests that the use of test-based accountability in performance evaluations, merit pay, and tenure decision results in increased stress in the environment, increased stress related to the curriculum, and increased teacher stress in general (Ebse et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness

The credibility of my findings and interpretations depends on my careful attention to establishing trustworthiness (Patton, 2015). In order to gain trustworthiness within my study, peer review or debriefing was used, generalizations were used, and researcher bias was clarified. According to Yin (2013) the strongest empirical foundation for these generalizations derives from the close-up, in-depth study of a specific case in its real-world context. During my case study analysis, I made sure to attend to all of the evidence I collected, I investigated plausible rival interpretations, I addressed the most significant aspects of my case study, and I demonstrated a familiarity with the prevailing thinking and literature about the case study topic (Yin, 2018). Time is another major factor in the acquisition of trustworthy data (Patton, 2015). I made sure to spend time researching the school site, time interviewing, and time spent building relationships with my participants in order to build trustworthy data. If I make sure to spend quality time with my research participants, they will less readily feign behavior and they will more likely be frank and comprehensive about what they tell me (Patton, 2015).

Credibility

The credibility of qualitative inquiry depends on four inquiry methods, which include, in-depth fieldwork that yields high quality data, systematic analysis of data with attention to issues of credibility, credibility of the inquirer, and readers and users' philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2015). I used in-depth fieldwork with all of my interviews and observations and attended to issues of credibility. One technique of maintaining credibility that I used was peer review or debriefing. I had a peer review my work. A peer reviewer is an individual who keeps the researcher honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically

listening to the researcher's feelings (Creswell, 2013). This process is important because it increases the reliability of the study by having someone double check your research, thinking's, and having to double check what you have done yourself.

Dependability and Confirmability

I made sure to clarify researcher bias. I commented on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to my study (Creswell, 2013). This process is important so that the reader understands any biases. I have lived and taught in the United States all of my life, I have taught for thirteen years, I have only taught in Florida and Virginia, I am a middle-aged female, my father was a principal (so I grew up around the education system), and my training to become an educator was at the University of Florida. I am the instrument of this qualitative study. I had to be careful of my bias since I am a public middle school teacher and I have been affected by this topic. I had to make sure to bracket out my own experience and assumptions when I analyzed my data. My data represents the participant's perspective. Interviewers need special skills in order to be effective at interviewing participants. These skills include asking good questions, being a good listener, staying adaptive, having a firm grasp of the issues being studied, and conducting research ethically (Yin, 2018). All of the participants in my study are protected, free from harm, and they only participated if they gave consent. I practiced my interviewing skills before my study to be as effective as possible with my interviews.

Transferability

This study shows transferability in that it can be applied to what other public school teachers are experiencing in similar environments. According to Yin (2013) the strongest empirical foundation for these generalizations derives from the close-up, in-depth study of a

specific case in its real-world context. When doing a single case study, I went in-depth and was very specific to the causes of stress that public middle school teachers face. Yin (2013) explains how this usually limits the number of cases that can be studied, which in turn, makes limitations on applying the conventional numeric, or sample-to-population generalizations when doing case studies. Convergence, themes, and relationships emerging strengthened the studies overall validity.

Ethical Considerations

As an ethical researcher, care was made not to have any preconceived ideas or evidence going into this study. To test my tolerance for contrary findings, I reported my preliminary data to two or three critical colleagues, also referred to as critical friends, so that they could offer alternative explanations and suggestions (Yin, 2018). I did not wrongly advocate towards any one position. I considered all data and evidence equally and without bias. I strove for the highest ethical standards while doing research (Yin, 2018). As a researcher, one has the responsibility to scholarship, such as neither plagiarizing nor falsifying information, and accepting responsibility for their own work (Yin, 2018). I considered the potential issue of asking permission to use the school site for this study. I made sure that I conducted the study as not to disrupt the daily activities of the school site. I did not pressure the participants into participating. I made sure they knew the nature of the study, that they were without harm, that they felt comfortable, and that they knew why I was asking them questions. I was respectful and thankful for their help and reciprocated the help as needed to show my appreciation. I did not ask questions with a bias or self-interest in the study. I kept my thoughts and feelings out of the study.

Before beginning this study, I first sought approval from the Institutional Review Board

(IRB). In order to gain approval from the IRB, I prepared the necessary documents online,

submitted my proposal for research, and awaited their approval. Once I gained IRB approval, I

obtained my participants. All participants had to sign the consent form. All participants'

identities remained confidential for this study. I made sure all of my participants were over the

age of eighteen. When selecting the participants, I made sure that I did not know the teachers

beforehand in order to eliminate bias. Research records were stored securely, and only the

researcher had access to the records. I may share the data I collect for use in future research

studies or with other researchers, but if I share the data that I collect, I will remove any

information that could identify participants before I share the data. I will be able to link

individual participants to the information they provide or are associated with, but I will not

disclose participant identities or how named or identifiable individuals responded. In order to

protect the privacy of the participants, participants were assigned a pseudonym. I conducted the

interviews in a location where others could not easily overhear the conversation. Data was

stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three

years, all electronic records will be deleted. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only

the researcher will have access to these recordings. I cannot assure participants that other

members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Participation in this study was voluntary. If a participant decided to participate, they

were free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time. If a participant chose to withdraw

from the study, they were asked to contact the researcher at the email address/phone number

included in the consent form. Should a participant choose to withdraw, data collected from them

(apart from focus group data), was destroyed immediately and was not included in the study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but that participants' contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if they choose to withdraw. The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Participants were compensated with a fifteen-dollar gift card for participating in this study.

Summary

The purpose of this case study is to examine the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. The strategies and coping mechanisms used by teachers to deal with personal and professional stressors were explored and analyzed. Ten teachers, from a public middle school in Florida, were studied. The selection criteria for this study is public middle school teachers currently dealing with stress and/or burnout, willing to participate, teachers unknown to me, teachers over the age of 18, both genders, and various races. The setting for this study was a large public middle school of approximately 1,200 students in the Southeastern United States identified by the pseudonym Florida Middle School. The study looked at strategies public middle school teachers use to minimize stress and how public middle school teachers describe the stress that affects them in their professional and personal lives. To gather the data needed for this study, individual interviews were conducted, a single focus group interview took place, and letter-writing samples were analyzed. One rationale for selecting a single-case study rather than a multiple case study design was that the single-case can represent the critical test of a significant theory (Yin, 2018).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter contains a brief description of each individual who participated in the study. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the participants. The purpose of this case study is to examine the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. Data collected from one-on-one interviews, a focus group interview, and a letter writing sample are presented. The data of the study is offered in the order in which the research questions were stated, in the form of themes, subthemes, tables, and figures. Themes and subthemes are developed from the data and presented in the form of a narrative. To support themes and subthemes discovered, responses from participants are presented in narrative form. Direct quotes from participants' letters and interviews are offered to provide further insight into examining the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers along with which strategies or coping mechanisms they use to minimize stress.

Participants

A total of 12 participants were recruited to participate in this study, but due to the withdrawal of two participants, data was collected from 10 participants. The selection criteria for this study was the following: (a) public middle school teachers currently dealing with stress and/or burnout, (b) willing to participate, (c) teachers I do not know, (d) teachers over the age of 18, (e) both genders, and (f) various races. Care was taken to make sure that there was a range of ages, both males and females, and different races represented. When selecting the 10 participants, I made sure not to know the teachers beforehand to eliminate bias. All participants were over the age of 18, and care was taken to include a diverse group of participants.

Teaching experience of the participants varied: (a) two had 0–5 years, (b) three had 6-10 years, (c) three had 11–15 years, and (d) two had 16-20 years. All participants experienced stress at work and at home, along with coping mechanisms used to manage stress. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants in this study. Included in Table 1 are participants' gender, years of teaching experience, the age range of each participant, their reported stress level at work, and their reported stress level at home.

Table 1

Stress Levels of Participants

Name	Gender	Years of experience	Age of participant	Stress level at work	Stress level at home
Anne	Female	0-5	18-28	10	1
Eric	Male	6-10	29-39	3-10	5-6
Gabby	Female	11-15	40-50	3-8	1-10
Gavin	Male	11-15	29-39	7-8	5
Heather	Female	0-5	18-28	7.5	6-7
Julia	Female	11-15	40-50	10	7-8
Kinsley	Female	16-20	40-50	5-10	3
Marissa	Female	6-10	29-39	3-10	8
Pam	Female	6-10	29-39	9	5
Val	Female	16-20	29-39	8	3

on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very low stress and 10 being very high stress

Anne

Anne self-reported experiencing high levels of stress at work and at home. When asked to describe some events or situations that cause a lot of stress during the workday, she responded:

I would say the thing that causes me the most stress, the kids are stressful, but I don't

necessarily blame the kids for it. You can't necessarily blame them because it's not like

they are trying to be stressful. It's just who they are, especially at middle school age. I think the most stressful is other teachers. They make my job harder, as they go out of their way to not help or not be a part of the community or anything like that because they just want to be in contention.

She has taught at the public middle school level for less than five years. All years taught were in the Florida school system. When asked about some coping mechanisms, or strategies, she had in place to lower stress levels at home she said:

> I guess my comfort person is my significant other. He really calms me down because he's a very calm person. He kind of mellows me out. I also play a lot of video games. They help calm me down and that's how I usually distress at the end of my day.

Eric

Eric has taught at the public middle school level for between 6 and 10 years. All years taught were in the Florida school system. Eric self-reported experiencing high levels of stress at work and at home. When asked to rate the amount of stress he feels during the school workday, he responded:

> Three because I'm relatively low stress at work. When there is a fight, I'm at a 10. When my class just won't stop goofing off, I'm at a 7. When I know I have to deal with an aggressive parent, I'm at an 8. Observation days, 7. But generally, it's low because I've developed good management skills, built relationships, and I try to be flexible and understanding.

Eric communicated to have developed specific strategies or coping mechanisms to handle or deal with stress at home:

At home, I can walk away from the situation and give myself some peace of mind, in that

respect. I also have my spouse, that's very supportive and wise. I'm very lucky, I really

lean on her for a source of strength and support. It keeps down the stress.

Gabby

Gabby taught at the public middle school level for between 11 and 15 years. More than

half of those years, but not all, were taught in the Florida school system. She conveyed to have

developed specific strategies or coping mechanisms to handle or deal with stress at work:

The official term is therapy, otherwise known as play dough, that's my go to. I also have

a diffuser, which I don't use when kids are here, but I will use before school or after

school. Also, dim lighting and I drink tea. These are strategies, I use in class throughout

the day.

Gabby reported experiencing high stress levels at work and at home. When asked to

describe some events or situations that cause a lot of stress during the workday, she responded:

Kids putting themselves in dangerous situations, like aggressing against each other is

probably the most stressful and then second to that would be aggressing against me, like

being oppositional, so defiance and reckless behavior.

Gavin

Gavin self-reported experiencing high stress levels at work and at home. He taught at the

public middle school level for between 11 and 15 years. All years taught were in the Florida

school system. He narrated to have developed specific strategies or coping mechanisms to

handle or deal with stress at work:

A way I have found to deal with work stress is to eat lunch by myself with low lighting

and calming music playing. After I have a quick snack, because there is never enough

time to have a full lunch at work, I do some stretches and meditation to clear my mind.

This helps me to destress and get ready for the rest of the day. I also look forward to this

time if I feel stressed early in the day.

Heather

Heather has taught at the public middle school level for less than five years. All years

taught were in the Florida school system. She self-reported experiencing high levels of stress at

work and at home. When asked to rate the amount of stress she feels during the school workday,

she responded:

I think it depends, some days, I'd say it's about a five or a six, other days it definitely

reaches that ten level. So, I guess, on average it would be a 7.5 or so.

She communicated to have developed specific strategies or coping mechanisms to handle

or deal with stress:

I, actually, was seeing a counselor for a while and she taught me coping mechanisms, just

making sure that I'm taking deep breaths and I'm understanding what exactly is stressing

me out about the situation. That usually makes it easier to just overcome I guess, to push

out of my mind.

Julia

Julia self-reported experiencing high stress levels at work and at home. She taught at the

public middle school level for between 11 and 15 years. All years taught were in the Florida

school system. When asked to rate the amount of stress she feels at home, she responded:

About a 7 or 8 because I am currently dealing with child support and health insurance

issues for my son. Not knowing if my son has health insurance is a huge stressor

throughout my day. His father is court ordered to pay for health insurance, but he has not

been reliable in the past to keep it up to date and paid for. I've had to find out the hard

way, taking my son to the doctor when he's sick, and then getting told that his health

insurance is no longer active.

She explained to have developed specific strategies or coping mechanisms to handle or

deal with stress at home:

Going to the gym, walking my dog, getting some fresh air, gardening, laying out in the

sun, things like that. Those things help my mind ease up a little and gain a fresh

perspective.

Kinsley

Kinsley self-reported experiencing high stress levels at work and at home. She taught at

the public middle school level for between 16 and 20 years. More than half of those years, but

not all, were taught in the Florida school system. When asked to rate the amount of stress she

feels during the school workday, she responded:

It kind of depends, on an average day, if I'm just teaching and everything is fine it's like

a 5, but if evaluations are coming up, or if there's an issue with a parent and that escalates

that could go from 8 to 10.

Kinsley reported to have developed specific strategies or coping mechanisms to handle or

deal with stress.:

If I had a bad day at work or just had a rough day, I come home and try and take a nap

and then just hit the reset button and then just spend the rest of my night enjoying my

house and my kitty and my family. Calling my mom, talking to her once a week, that

helps too.

Marissa

Marissa agreed to experiencing high stress levels at work and at home. She taught at the public middle school level for between 6 and 10 years. Less than half of those years were taught in the Florida school system. When asked which specific strategies or coping mechanisms she used to handle or deal with stress, she explained:

> I take medication for anxiety, I take medication when I feel like things are getting too overwhelming, I'll take a drive normally, normally I go for a walk in the park but that's not really something I'm willing to do right now, unnecessary possible exposure, so I take a drive, listen to some music.

When asked to describe some events or situations that cause a lot of stress during the workday, she responded:

> I would say lack of clarity and unity, and enforcing rules throughout the school, where there is sometimes not a united front among the teachers, and it causes some divisiveness. I would say some of my fellow collogues are nay-sayers and they're not necessarily folks that have been teaching for a long time, but they are kind of against any new change that might help benefit some.

Pam

Pam has taught at the public middle school level for between 6 and 10 years and she self-reported experiencing high stress levels at work and at home. Half of the years she taught were in the Florida school system. When asked to describe some events or situations that cause a lot of stress during the workday, she responded:

> I would say all of the extra interruptions during teaching. I only get about fifty minutes of instruction time with each class and that is almost always interrupted several times by

office calls, student aides delivering a message, fire drills, lockdown drills, etc. It is very

stressful when I have to stop in the middle of the lesson, the kids get all riled up, I have to

calm them back down again, get them engaged and focused again, only to be interrupted

again five minutes later. It's non-stop interruptions on a daily basis. And it's very

difficult when the students don't want to focus as it is.

Val

Val has taught at the public middle school level for between 16 and 20 years. Less than

half of those years were taught in the Florida school system. Val reported feeling high stress

levels at work and at home. She explained some specific high stress situations at work:

I think probably the biggest thing that stresses me out, I teach the co-teach classes, so I

have all the special education students that are in mainstream. And probably the biggest

thing that stresses me out is actually other teachers interacting with them that are not

familiar with the fact that they are ESE students.

She explained to have developed specific strategies or coping mechanisms to handle or

deal with stress:

I think the biggest thing as a teacher you have to remember is that you don't take things

personally in terms of working with students especially boys because they really know

how to get under adults' skin. So, you just take it as it is and move on, you can't take

things personally.

Results

The intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school

teachers were examined in this study. The first technique of data analysis for this case study was

open coding. The interview transcripts were read, reread, and analyzed with inductive coding

methods (Creswell, 2013). The second technique was creating themes or classifications (Creswell, 2013). Using different colored highlighters, a short list of categories, along with shorthand labels or codes were established. The computer coding software program, NVivo, was used for data analysis. This coding software program made it easy to organize data and search for themes, along with the relationships between those themes. Four major themes, which will be described later in this section, surfaced from the data to explore the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. To describe their lived experiences, direct quotes will be included from the participants.

Theme Development

All of the one-on-one interviews and the single focus group interview were carefully transcribed by listening to each interview recording several times. Once all of the interviews were transcribed onto individual Word documents, they were uploaded into the computer coding software program, NVivo. All of the letter writing samples were sent from the participants through email and were uploaded into the NVivo coding software program. This coding software program allowed me to develop nodes in order to organize data and search for themes. Memos were created in the NVivo program to connect the nodes and discover relationships or patterns. I worked with the data collected and searched for insights, concepts, or themes that seemed promising. Using the NVivo word frequency query, the top 100 words from all the data collected through the study, was gathered and displayed in a word cloud. The figure below displays the results of the top 100-word cloud.
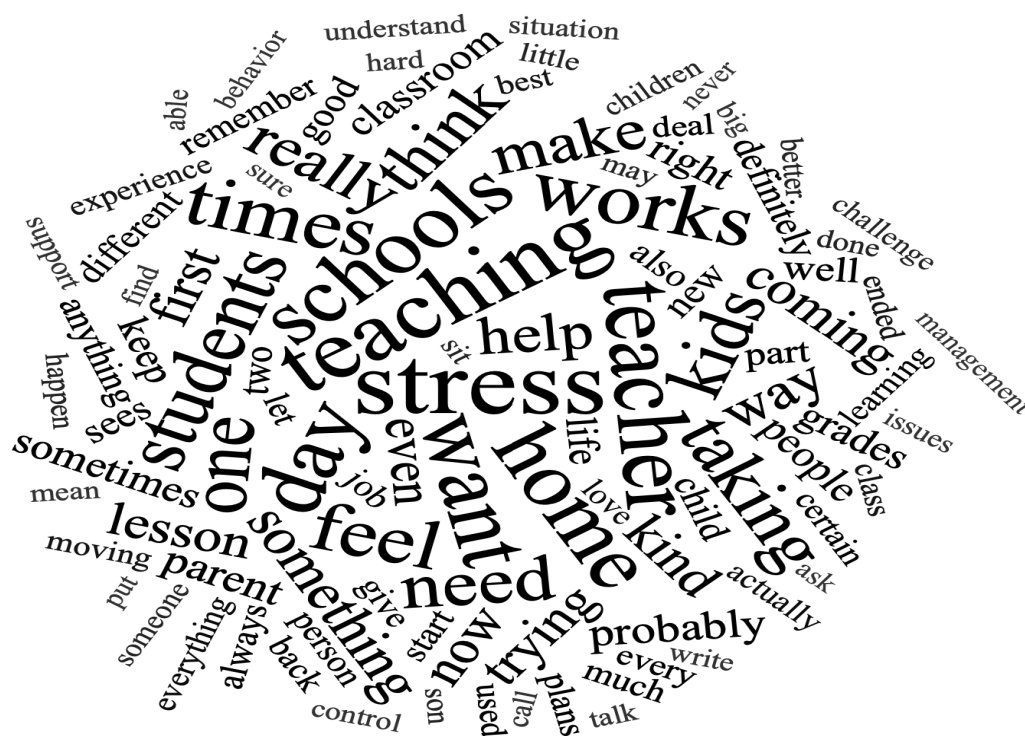
Figure 1. Word frequency query word cloud using the NVivo coding program.

When analyzing the word frequency query word cloud, the top words apparent in the data were teaching, teacher, schools, stress, students, kids, day, home, feel, want, need, really, think, works, times, make, lesson, parent, help, and kind. Other less frequent words, which also showed up in the top 100-word cloud, were management, challenge, better, children, understand, behavior, experience, different, support, issues, learning, control, plans, everything, love, life, and give. Two main categories of words stood out as they related to teaching and stress. These two categories were relationship and environment. Top frequency words like teacher, kids, students, parent, want, need, help, kind, give, and love all had ties to the theme relationships. Top frequency words like schools, behavior, management, challenge, lesson, plan, home, and life all had ties to the theme environment. Nodes and memos were created in the NVivo program to code, connect, and discover patterns or themes within the data. The major themes emerged

relating to relationships and the environment. The four major themes that surfaced were intersecting relationship stress, intersecting environmental stress, coping with relationships, and coping with the environment.

The first major theme developed was intersecting relationship stress. As teachers described their personal and professional stressors, relationship stress was a common theme. Participants discussed professional relationships and how some coworkers were difficult to work with, adding to the workday stress. Participants brought up relationship stress as it relates to students, moderating discipline issues and special needs students. Participants also mentioned relationship stress at home, with roommates, kids, and spouses. Stress with coworkers, stress with students, and stress with family members or loved ones were the reoccurring subthemes within intersecting relationship stress.

The second major theme established was intersecting environmental stress. Teachers reflected on stress in the hallways, stress in the afternoon areas, and the new teacher stress of navigating a new school building. At home, environmental stress was a common talking point, as participants described raising their children in a healthy environment. The COVID-19 virus, and keeping their loved ones safe, was an environmental fear and stressor mentioned by all participants. Navigating the school environment and navigating the home environment were two reoccurring subthemes within intersecting environmental stress.

The third major theme, coping with relationships, shed light onto the strategies or coping mechanisms used by participants to handle relationship stress. Teachers explained the significance of loved ones at home and professional therapists to lower stress levels. Relationships with coworkers and students were mentioned as other coping mechanisms used by

participants. Analyzing all of the data, two subthemes were formed within coping with relationships, coping with professional relationships and coping with personal relationships.

The fourth major theme, coping with the environment, described strategies or coping mechanisms used by teachers to handle environmental stress. Using tactile objects, scents, and music to lower stress were examples participants gave as coping mechanisms. Exercising, getting outside, cleaning, and other physical activities were other examples described by participants. Three participants explained their use of prescribed medications to lower their stress levels. Three subthemes emerged within the theme of coping with the environment; tactile objects, medication, and physical activity.

Major Theme 1: Intersecting Relationship Stress

Through all of the data, the first major theme that emerged was intersecting relationship stress. In the focus group interview, Julia mentioned relationship stressors, and many other teachers agreed and related to the statement:

> As teachers we're trained to deal with everything we deal with in the classroom, with the actual teaching itself, but they don't provide any instructions on interpersonal relationships with peers or dealing with the outside stresses that come along with teaching.

When there are chronic interpersonal stressors on the job, burnout is a psychological syndrome that emerges as a result (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Symptoms of burnout and symptoms of depression are quite similar and teacher burnout can lead to increases in depressive symptoms (Shin, et al., 2014; Szigeti et al., 2016). Of the three dimensions of burnout, only emotional exhaustion was related to the desire for information about others similar to themselves, along with the desire for affiliation, which is the desire to talk with others about

problems at work (Schaufeli et al., 1993). Stress with coworkers, stress with students, and stress with family members or loved ones were the reoccurring subthemes found in the data within intersecting relationship stress (see Table 2).

Table 2

Theme 1: Intersecting Relationship Stress

Theme 1: Intersecting Relationship Stress	
Subtheme	Code
Coworkers	Lack of communication (12)
	Lack of understanding (8)
	Lack of follow through (6)
Students	Classroom behavior (11)
	Hallway behavior (10)
	Lack of motivation (7)
Loved Ones	No time and/or no energy (9)
	Health concerns (8)
	Finances (5)

*The number in parenthesis represents the number of times each code was found in the data.

Subtheme 1: Coworkers. The first subtheme from the major theme of intersecting relationship stress was stress with coworkers. Participants discussed their relationships with coworkers in positive and negative ways. The positive ways will be mentioned under subtheme three (coping with relationships). The negative stressors with coworkers were described as lack of communication, lack of understanding, and lack of follow through. Many aspects of a teacher's role may contribute to stress, which include, classroom discipline and management, student learning associated with emotional and motivational issues, workload and time pressures, and experiencing problems with school administration (Bernard, 2016). Criticism, critique and comparison can serve as additional sources of stress, including the constant comparison within

schools trying to reach and maintain the required level of state testing and scores that match (Brewer, Myers & Zhang, 2015). This constant comparison can often pit teachers against one another (Brewer et al., 2015).

During the focus group interview, Anne explained job-related stress with coworkers: There's like this whole political, social aspect of it because that's your co-worker, someone you work with, it is supposed to be someone that you're friendly with and you can't, like there's a way to handle it and you might not have the words to handle it or the tool box or whatever it is. Like, I know in the past that I've run into situations where I've tried to have conversations with people like the way I thought I approached it and the way it was perceived were very different. And that can cause a bigger issue, like I was trying to be nice and it did not go that way. So, there's that big part of it too. We have a dynamic among us that I think can be very stressful.

When asked in the interview what caused her the most stress at work, Marissa stated: A lack of clarity and unity, and enforcing rules throughout the school, where there is sometimes not a united front among the teachers, and it causes some divisiveness. I would say some of my fellow colleagues are nay-sayers and they're not necessarily folks that have been teaching for a long time, but they are kind of against any new change that might help benefit some, you know.

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that emerges as a result of chronic interpersonal stressors on the job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Teachers on the verge of burnout might not greet their colleagues, avoid sharing their classroom experiences, have poor classroom management skills, and neglect to socialize with colleagues (Aguilar, 2018; Iancu, Rusu, Maroiu & Maricutoiu, 2017).

Subtheme 2: Students. During the interview, Gabby discussed how students can be the most stressful part of the workday:

> Kids putting themselves in dangerous situations, like aggressing against each other is probably the most stressful and then second to that would be aggressing against me, like being oppositional, so defiance and reckless behavior. The most amount of stress comes from a handful of the same students, who aren't even, don't necessarily need to be in my class, but they're kids I feel a responsibility for because I'm monitoring the campus. For example, like in between classes, every year, there will be a handful of kids who come looking for a fight, and the moment they do, literally and figuratively from the time they step foot on the campus, they are just looking for where they are going to find that tension.

Understanding teachers' stress levels and mental health is important not only for the objective of supporting teachers, but also because these symptoms have implications for students (McLean, et al, 2017). A positive school climate where students are showing academic achievement, there is an atmosphere of caring, students and teachers feel safe, and there is a feeling of connectedness between students and teachers are all critical for teacher well-being (Harmsen et al., 2018). A teacher's well-being will have a big impact on a student's well-being (Hong, 2012).

In her letter to a first-year teacher, Anne explained the intersecting relationship stress with students:

> I can have one student, calm and happy with me one minute, lose their mind in the hallway because of something unrelated the next. I can have a plan for how to teach my digital students in my hyflex classrooms, just to find out the following day that FERPA

won't allow it. I can have a child, a bright and sunny child, broken to pieces by some

incident at home that I can't help, see, or fix from here, happen in an evening. A

pandemic can change the face of education in a matter of weeks.

Eric also explained his views on intersecting relationship stress with teaching and

students:

My level of stress has significantly reduced since my first five years. Experience and

classroom management make a monumental difference. Flexibility and building

relationships also make a huge difference. So, I said a 3 because I'm relatively low stress

at work. When there is a fight, I'm at a 10. When my class just won't stop goofing off,

I'm at a 7. But generally, it's low because I've developed good management skills, build

relationships, and try to be flexible and understanding.

Teachers experience somewhat elevated or high levels of stress and burnout in their

personal, their work, and their student-related life (Harmsen, Helms, Maulana, & Veen, 2018).

The highest levels referent on the student-related burnout scale with teachers' most prevalent

symptoms of stress as lack of energy, the feeling of giving more than getting back in the work

with students, and emotional exhaustion (Harmsen et al., 2018). The core aspect of burnout is

the emotional exhaustion, the chronic feeling of tiredness and fatigue, which make teachers lose

their enthusiasm (Szigeti, et al., 2016).

Subtheme 3: Loved Ones. Burnout is job-related with late stages of burnout pervasively

affecting non-work areas as well (Szigeti et al., 2016). The Holmes and Rahe Social

Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) includes life events such as marriage,

pregnancy, divorce, and change in living conditions. Each event, called a Life Change Unit

(LCU), has a different weight assigned to it that determines the stress factor (Holmes & Rahe,

1967). The higher the stress factor, and the larger the weight of each event, the more likely the

patient would become ill from stress related life events (Holmes & Rahe, 1967).

During the focus group interview, Heather states, "I would say that my home life does

not affect my stress level at work as much as my work stress affects my home life." Many

teachers nodded in agreement, Kinsley also agreed to the intersection of work and home stress,

and stated:

> I cannot forget about that parent email when I get home or I'll try to figure out ways that
>
> I'll respond, like Eric said, ruminating about things throughout the day when you get
>
> home. It's the complete opposite when I get to school, I don't think about anything else
>
> other than school when I'm there.

Teachers openly discussed the new stressors of teaching and living with COVID-19,

Marissa explained:

> You know, I've got three kids, not just that, but all three of them, well two out of the
>
> three of them are in a high-risk category. And the third one just has other issues that I'm
>
> not equipped to handle on my own. So, balancing their care as well as not wanting to let
>
> that guilt of being a teacher in this time frame, wanting what's best for my students but
>
> not wanting to get my family sick. I can't turn that off. It's been a real struggle just the
>
> last several months.

During the one-on-one interview, Anne explained her stress with loved ones, "my

significant other didn't have a job for about a year, so that was adding a lot of stress and financial

troubles. Our house, our mortgage has been in forbearance for a while so that's kind of adding some stress."

Teachers who experience chronic stress experience this because their brain gets locked into a recurring pattern, which may include ruinations, pessimistic thinking, and depression (Taylor, 2018). Symptoms of burnout and symptoms of depression are similar and teacher burnout can lead to increases in depressive symptoms (Shin, et al., 2014; Szigeti et al., 2016). Appreciating the dynamic nature of mental health, as well as developing a repertoire of effective coping mechanisms is especially important for teacher candidates as they prepare to enter a stressful and emotionally intense profession (Peterson & Grantham, 2016; Woloshyn & Savage, 2018).

Major Theme Two: Intersecting Environmental Stress

The second major theme that emerged was intersecting environmental stress. School climate can foster resilience or become a risk factor and has been linked to teacher burnout, work commitment, and school connectedness (Embse et al., 2016; Hong, 2011).

During the interview, Gabby spoke about her environmental stress at work:

I hate hearing what I hear all the time from my coworkers, how we can't do anything anymore about the students that will wreak havoc on our campus. We have 1,000 students, when I think about the hallway, monitoring the hallway, and the bells about to ring and everyone has gone to homeroom, who do I see? I see three kids, in particular,

who constantly have their heels dug in and heaven forbid if I say anything, which I have

in the past, and they just refuse to listen to you.

Intersecting environmental stressors were discussed in Gavin's one-on-one interview:

Some days you go home and feel like you have nothing left, teaching can sometimes

drain the life out of you. It's an environment like no other, often full of chaos. That's

why I make sure that my home environment is very organized, quiet, and calm. That

keeps me balanced.

Promoting self-care for teachers within the school is critical to providing an atmosphere

that fosters teacher well-being (Gray et al., 2017; Harmsnen, 2018). Teacher self-care practices

can be promoted into school climate by encouraging self-care group activities like morning staff

yoga classes and providing healthy staff lunches (Gray et al., 2017; Harmsnen, 2018).

Navigating the school environment and navigating the home environment were the reoccurring

subthemes found in the data within intersecting environmental stress (see Table 3).

Table 3

Theme 2: Intersecting Environmental Stress

Theme 2: Intersecting Environmental Stress	
Subtheme	Code
Navigating the School Environment	Classroom management (12)
	Rules and regulations (10)
	Resources (8)
	Learning the layout (4)
Navigating the Home Environment	Time for loved ones (11)
	Time for yourself (9)
	Home organization (8)
	Family Organization (7)

The number in parenthesis represents the number of times each code was found in the data.

Subtheme 1: Navigating the school environment. Teacher well-being is influenced by school climate factors (Harmsen et al., 2018; Hong 2012; Yu et al., 2016). The absence of support, challenging working conditions, and an overwhelming workload contribute to high teacher attrition (Goldring et al., 2014).

In the focus group interview, Heather mentioned her environmental stressors at work, and many other teachers concurred and related to the statement:

> There's just a lot I didn't know in the beginning and it was definitely stressful trying to figure it all out. First, they gave us a huge play book about how everything worked, but unless you're going to sit there and read through all the hundreds of pages on how to navigate the school and how to navigate your resources, that was definitely something that was hard for me to get used to.

It is not only the beginning teachers that are leaving the teaching profession at alarming rates; it's the experienced teachers as well (Glazer, 2018). During the first two years of teaching, which is referred to as the 'survival period,' teacher attrition rates are at its highest (Day & Gu, 2010). Though it slows down, teachers continue to leave the classroom at high rates and the profession has steadily become less stable (Glazer, 2018; Gray & Taie, 2015). Teachers must simultaneously balance instructional support, classroom management, planning, and organization (McLean et al., 2017).

In his letter writing sample, Eric explains:

> The single most important thing that you can do is develop a system of expectations for your classroom that is simple, realistic, consistent, fair, and allows you and your students flexibility. Rigidity is your enemy! Establish this day 1 and reinforce it every day until

the end of the year. You will only be as effective a teacher as your classroom

management allows you to be.

Pam reflected on navigating her work environment during the one-on-one interview:

The worst and most stressful parts of my day are probably morning and afternoon duty,

it's the worst way to start and end my day. I wish teachers could focus on the lessons for

that day and not worry about the hallway areas and the before and after school areas.

Picking up trash after kids, things like that. We have enough to deal with and worry about

as it is.

School climate can foster resilience or become a risk factor and has been linked to

teacher burnout (Embse et al., 2016; Hong, 2011). Teachers on the verge of burnout have poor

classroom management skills and neglect to socialize with colleagues (Aguilar, 2018; Iancu,

Rusu, Maroiu & Maricutoiu, 2017). One primary source of teacher stress is the experience of

negative emotions in the classroom and the challenge of managing these emotional experiences

(Iancu, et al., 2017; Katz, Harris, Abenzvoli, Greenberg & Jennings, 2017).

Subtheme 2: Navigating the home environment. Health can be summarized into two

categories, perceived physical health and perceived mental health (Bogaert et al., 2014).

Teachers are found to have poorer perceived mental and physical health than a general healthy

population (Bogaert et al., 2014; Uzman & Telef, 2015). Psychosocial stress contributes to poor

health in part by adversely affecting maintenance of healthy behaviors (Burg, et al., 2017).

Intersecting environmental stressors at home were discussed during the group interview

and Heather stated:

I totally agree with you Julia, because when I get home, all I want to do when I get home

is sleep. I just want to go to sleep because I'm so tired and take a nap. My boyfriend, if

he's off work or I'll come home and he'll be like what do you want for dinner, I don't

care. Like every time I say I don't care because I really don't because I'm so tired and I

just don't want to think anymore and so, he'll be like what do you want to do, do you

want to watch a movie, and I'll watch a movie, but I'll fall asleep. He and I don't get to

do anything really after school because there's nothing I want to do. When I get home,

I'm just tapped out.

Kinsley discussed working a second job at a supermarket because she recently bought a

house and then her husband lost his job:

Now that I won't have my extra 6th period class, that's another thing, is making sure that I

can compensate for not having the extra money to put into my saving account. I work as

a produce clerk, so that kind of helps me take my mind off of school and make up for that

extra money that I won't be getting for my 6th period. So, it's nice to go there and do

something different because lettuce doesn't talk back when you put it someplace.

When your body is under physical stress, it needs to rest and recharge (Aguilar, 2018).

Recharging is different from rest. Hobbies, physical activities, and work-free weekends are ways

to recharge (Aguilar, 2018). Recharging comes from doing things like reading a book for fun,

spending time with friends, or talking about a favorite TV show. During a normal, non-stressful

day, cortisol levels of teachers decline throughout the day (Wolfman et al, 2012). During a

stressful day, cortisol levels significantly elevate compared with the cortisol levels of a non-

stressful day (Wolfman et al, 2012).

Eric discusses navigating the home environment during his one-on-one interview:

There are a lot of things at home that causes stress. I have young children and just having

young children is a source of stress in and of itself that is lots of stress. The daily grind

of bills and meeting expectations here at home and taking care of a family, I think that's a

source of stress. Global events are a source of stress that finds their way into home life,

not as much as they do in school. There's not a tv on in school where the news is

playing. So those things seep into home life more easily.

Major Theme Three: Coping with Relationships

The third major theme that emerged was coping with relationships. Teacher well-being is

influenced by teacher factors, school climate factors, administration factors, and student factors

(Harmsen et al., 2018; Hong 2012; Yu et al., 2016). In her letter writing sample, Anne explained

coping with relationships:

You'll have days where everything you do doesn't work and you feel like this might be

the wrong profession. And then, a child will come to you, give you a hug, thank you for

existing, or thank you for helping, and all of that disbelief will dissipate. Because they

make it all worth it. The students you come across who despite their bad attitudes, their

chittering and chattering, their defiance, and their tantrums, are genuinely happy to see

you, are genuinely concerned when you miss a day without notice.

Teacher educators have a responsibility to provide information on teacher stress and

coping strategies in teacher preparation courses in order to give teachers the skills to deal with

stress and burnout in an effective manner (Cancio & Johns, 2013; Cancio, Larsen, Estes, Johns &

Chang, 2018). Coping with professional relationships and coping with personal relationships

were the reoccurring subthemes found in the data within coping with relationships (see Table 4).

Table 4

Theme 3: Coping with Relationships

Theme 3: Coping with Relationships	
Subtheme	Code
Coping with Professional Relationships	Students (22)
	Colleagues (14)
	Administrators (11)
	Mentors (6)
Coping with Personal Relationships	Children (12)
	Oneself (10)
	Spouse (9)
	Therapist (5)

*The number in parenthesis represents the number of times each code was found in the data.

Subtheme 1: Coping with professional relationships. Like stress, job satisfaction can be conceptualized as a personal appraisal of one's experiences in her or his role (McCarthy et al., 2015). Administrators should pay more attention to teachers' feeling of belonging, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction (Skaalvik, 2011). Administrations can benefit from being more sensitive to the aspects of classroom conditions in their buildings that teachers perceive as most demanding and to those individual teachers who perceive an imbalance between resources and demands (McCarthy, et al., 2015).

During her one-on-one interview, Pam discussed how professional relationships with administration played an integral part in her everyday stress levels:

I've moved schools because of poor leadership and overly stressful administrators. Having an understanding and supportive administration can make or break your stress levels at work. For me, that is my number one stressor. Knowing that my boss, or the

school principal, has my back and trusts me professionally, means everything in the field

of teaching.

School administrators control many variables that influence teacher stress including

autonomy over classrooms, workload, motivation, and support (Harmsen et al., 2018). When

administrators create a supportive, organized, and collaborative environment, it supports teacher

well-being (Harmsen et al., 2018; Skaalvik, 2011).

Mentors of beginning teachers should assist in helping novice teachers to maintain

perspective, come to work prepared with a mindset of high frustration tolerance, be aware of the

negative impact of demandingness, and to not take things too personally (Bernard, 2016). Those

supporting teachers need to know how to respond to symptoms of burnout, and prevent it, such

as through building healthy, thriving staff communities (Aguilar, 2018).

In his letter writing sample, Eric explains coping with professional relationships:

Teaching is so demanding. Good teachers teach on their feet. It's an active job. You

circulate, listen, give individual attention, give "special" attention. You are fast on your

feet and fast in your mind. You are a teacher, a counselor, a parental figure, a mentor, a

mental health expert, a police officer, a kindred spirit and a hard ass. You are a colleague,

maybe a co-teacher, a shining example of how to be. You are all that and more every

period of every day, and if you're not exhausted by the end of the day then you have

superpowers that defy explanation.

Subtheme 2: Coping with personal relationships. Some teachers may combat stress by

reaching out to friends, family, colleagues, administrators, and their health care providers

(Ferguson et al., 2017). In the analysis of coping strategies for teachers, it was found that

listening to music, feeling supported by family and friends, and dancing were strategies that predicted lower stress (Berg et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018).

Val discusses coping with her personal relationships at home:

When it comes to my son and I, we just kind of separate ourselves. I'll give him something to go and do, and I'll go do something different. And just having that quiet time, and he likes to be with me which is fabulous. Sometimes it's stressing, but it's important to have time to yourself to do different things.

Eric added to the focus group discussion on personal relationships at home:

I also have my spouse, that's very supportive and wise. I'm very lucky, I really lean on her for a source of strength and support. It keeps down the stress.

Major Theme Four: Coping with the Environment

The fourth major theme that emerged was coping with the environment. In active coping strategies, teachers attempted to change the source of stress, or themselves, by engaging in leisurely activities such as dancing, yoga, exercise, and emotional support from family and friends (Burg, et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018). During the one-on-one interview, Val discusses coping with her home environment:

I work out in the yard a lot. The more stress I get, I tend to clean more. I'm kind of one of those if I need to distress, I'll go clean my house, so that's a big one for me, working out in the yard and cleaning are probably my two biggest stress relievers.

Gabby also described strategies she uses to cope with her stressors:

I live in a brand-new house. It's so cute. It's not extravagant, it's like minimalist and I love taking care of it. I get this long extension pole, and if I dip it into this stuff called Cutters Gutters, whatever, it takes this stuff right off and it's all clean. I'm kind of

obsessive about touching up paint if anybody runs into the wall wrong. I'm nesting,

that's what someone said I was doing. I'm nesting.

Three subthemes emerged within the theme of coping with the environment; tactile

objects, medication, and physical activity (see Table 5).

Table 5

Theme 4: Coping with the Environment

Theme 4: Coping with the Environment	
Subtheme	Code
Tactile Objects	Drinks (8)
	Toys (7)
	Home projects (6)
	Journaling (5)
Medication	Prescription (8)
	Over the counter (4)
Physical Activity	Working out (11)
	Cleaning (8)
	Walking dogs (4)

The number in parenthesis represents the number of times each code was found in the data.

Subtheme 1: Tactile objects. Chronic and acute stress, and the demanding features of

daily life, can serve as a blockade to good health practices and lead to an unhealthy lifestyle

(Burg, Schwartz, Kronish, Diaz, Alcantara, & Davidson, 2017). While stress can be very

personal and vary from person to person, teachers need to make self-care a priority, and teachers

need to feel safe in talking about stress without fear of stigma (Ferguson, Mang, & Frost, 2017).

During the focus group interview, Anne discussed using tactile objects to cope with stress:

When I'm at school, I'm definitely someone that is more tactile, I have little kinetic

animals, full of kinetic sand, things that I kind of squish. They're comfort things, I have

a blanket I keep at my desk that I wrap around me when I'm sitting at my desk. They're

things that make me feel safe in a way, because my desk is my space, especially for me, like my kids know this very well.

Gabby added how she uses tactile objects to also cope with stress:

I'm kind of obsessive about touching up paint, if anybody runs into the wall wrong. I also love coloring. It's very satisfying. I also love taking care of my dog who is in the custody battle.

Kinsley explained one of her coping mechanisms during her one-on-one interview:

I try to keep a refrigerator full of things I enjoy drinking like sparkling water or tea. Something that is a little bit homey so I can have some of that too while I'm at school.

Subtheme 2: Medication. Other coping strategies included counseling, eating, using prescription medication, using of alcohol, and the use of recreational drugs, all of which increased teachers' stress (Cancio et al., 2018). In maladaptive coping strategies, teachers avoid or deny the source of stress (Cancio et al., 2018). Maladaptive coping strategies, like alcohol, drugs, and prescription medicine, were found to be predictors of stress (Mclean et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018). In the one-on-one interview, Anne discussed her prescribed medications used to combat stress:

I started taking Lexapro. I was on a 10mg dose, but I had to back it off because I was almost like tuned out, I was having a really hard time crying or feeling anything. It did help me as far as school goes in helping me be able to process and thinking things through. I used to be a very angry person, a reaction person. I also have chronic

migraines and that would kind of manifest my stress that way too. I take medications for that.

During the focus group interview, Marissa shared with the group:

I am currently taking medication for my anxiety, because it's so bad. I knew I always had mild anxiety which usually could be dealt with by coping mechanisms, like listening to music, or taking my kids to the park, but now, it's kind of like all consuming, I can't focus on anything productive. Whether that's school or home or raising my kids the way I want them to be raised. So, anxiety medications.

Julia also shared her experiences with prescription medications for anxiety:

I went through that this summer. I've been taking medications for about a year, since that big school incident. You all know what I'm speaking of in the hallway and I became, what did they tell me, like when you used to something and it's not effective anymore, desensitized. So, they switched me recently and upped it even more recently. All right, this is good, this is good. I'm feeling excited and I'm feeling like I can be productive about stuff. There will always be stressors; it's just a matter of feeling like I can get passed it.

Heather added to the focus group interview about coping mechanisms:

I want to let you know that you're not alone there. My first year was last year. It was a lot for me, I had to see a counselor at one point, and she did teach me a lot of coping mechanisms. A lot of I think, what I suffered with was just accepting that things are new for me, and just excepting that and it's going to take a while for me to get used to it. It's important for people to know that they can ask others for help. And, that's something I

wrote about in my letter too. It's ok if you feel like you can't handle it all, then don't do it all, you're not alone, I'm in the same boat.

Subtheme 3: Physical activity. The relationship of stress to exercise can be bi-directional and varies from person to person (Burg, et al., 2017). For some, regular physical activity can alleviate the physiological impact of chronic and acute stress while improving aspects of stress resilience (Burg, et al., 2017; Cancio, Larsen, Mathur, Johns, & Chang, 2018). For others, physical activity has no impact on stress, or the anticipation of exercising causes a heightened sense of stress (Burg, et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018). Kinsley, in her one-on-one interview, explains how she copes with stress:

> Sleeping, I try to come home and take a nap. So that I can, like if I had a bad day at work, or just had a rough day, depending on what kind of kids I have, I come home and try and take a nap and then just hit the reset button, and then just spend the rest of my night enjoying my house and my kitty and my family. Calling my mom, talking to her once a week, that helps too.

Gabby explained her home environment coping strategies during the one-on-one interview:

> I love moving, I love working out, so, I do cross fit four times a week. I bicycle like all summer. I've been going on ten to fourteen-mile rides, two to three days a week. And I love gardening.

According to the transactional model of stress, there are two main types of coping strategies, which are, emotion-focused and problem-focused (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Research in coping strategies is necessary to inform interventions that support growth in teacher resilience, as well as continued positive school climate development through evidence-based

approaches (Gray, Wilcox & Nordstokke, 2017). Studies have shown that school-based implementation of mental health training and support for teachers can lead to positive outcomes for both teachers and their students through improvements in classroom climate, teacher sensitivity to student needs and behavior management, as well as diminished teacher burnout, anxiety, and depression (Cancio et al., 2018; Mclean et al., 2017).

Research Questions Responses. The research questions for this study were directed to fill in a gap in the existing literature surrounding personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers, guided by Maslach and Leiter's burnout theory (1997). The CRQ was asked to understand the lived experiences of public middle school teachers in central Florida and how they described the stress that affects them in their professional and personal lives. Furthermore, three research subquestions were included to address specific components related to teacher stress and burnout. SQ1 focused on public middle school teachers' experiences at work that caused them the most amount of stress. SQ2 concentrated on public middle school teachers' experiences at home that caused them the most amount of stress. SQ3 focused on public middle school teachers' coping strategies used to minimize stress. This section includes a final discussion and review of the association between the central research question, the three research subquestions, and participants' responses.

CQR. How do public middle school teachers describe the stress that affects them in their professional and personal lives? The purpose of this study was to examine the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. Participants shared their lived experiences in one-on-one interviews, a focus group interview, and letter writing samples. Through participants' responses, a detailed and explicable narrative was given. Four themes emerged from the data that offered greater insight into the lived experiences of

participants: intersecting relationship stress, intersecting environmental stress, coping with

relationships, and coping with the environment. The themes found within the study were

supported by participants. All teacher participants had a stress level at work of a 5 or greater,

with most rating their stress level at work between a 7 and 10. The stress level ratings at home

ranged from 1 to 10, with most study participants rating their stress level at home around a 5.

Pam described her stress level at work as "a 9 because as the years go on, students know how to

act less, and they get away with a lot more." Kinsley described her stress levels at work as

depending upon the day, "on an average day, if I'm just teaching and everything is fine it's like a

5, but if evaluations are coming up, or if there's an issue with a parent and that escalates that

could go from 8 to 10." When discussing her stress levels at home, Heather explained, "I'd say

about a six, sometimes a seven, but the most stressful part of it is just that I have a roommate

still."

    SQ1. How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences at work that

cause them the most amount of stress? Public middle school teachers' experiences at work that

cause them the most amount of stress are displayed in Major Theme 1: Intersecting relationship

stress and Major Theme 2: Intersecting environmental stress. Participants' descriptions shared in

these two themes clearly address SQ1. In Major Theme 1, teacher participants described

intersecting relationship stress with students and coworkers. Students were mentioned by every

participant as a major stressor to the school day. The most stressful students, however, were a

very select few, or students unbeknown to the teacher. One or two students in the classroom,

students in the hallways, and students before and after school were described by participants to cause a large part of workday stress.

During the interview, Gabby mentioned the intersecting relationship stress with students:

The most amount of stress comes from a handful of the same students, who aren't even, don't necessarily need to be in my class, but they're kids I feel a responsibility for because I'm monitoring the campus, for example, like in between classes. Every year, there will be a handful of kids who come looking for a fight, and the moment they do, literally and figuratively from the time they step foot on the campus, they are just looking for where they are going to find that tension.

Coworkers were also mentioned by several participants as a means of stress and tension for many teachers. Teachers warned against participating in coworker gossip and vowed to stay away from teachers who seemed to enjoy gossiping about others. Other coworkers were described as stressful because they were not doing their job correctly. For instance, coworkers who do not show up to hallway duty, and coworkers who are not standing by their door to greet students. These teachers, not doing their jobs correctly, were labeled as making it harder and more stressful on other teachers. Val portrayed her intersecting stress with coworkers:

In terms of working with those teachers, specifically, I feel like, you can't hold it inside. You have to go on and address it because if you don't it just seems to get worse. So, a lot

of open communication, kind of reminding myself that we are all different and just

because I understand how certain kids work differently doesn't mean other people do.

In Gavin's letter writing sample, he explained his view on gossip:

Avoid gossip! Listen more than you talk, and when you speak up or out then choose your

words carefully. Trust me, you will be tempted, but don't take the bait. It's more trouble

than it's worth. This applies to conversations with both students and colleagues.

Major Theme 2 conveyed teacher participants' intersecting environmental stress as they

navigated the school environment through rules, regulations, classroom management techniques,

and school resources. Rules and regulations brought on by school administrators caused teacher

stress as participants described the constant changing environment of public educational

institutions. The lack of classroom resources and the lack of strong classroom management

techniques were reoccurring explanations of participants on teacher stress.

Eric depicts his experiences on classroom management:

The single most important thing that you can do is develop a system of expectations for

your classroom that is simple, realistic, consistent, fair, and allows you and your students

flexibility. Rigidity is your enemy! Establish this day 1 and reinforce it every day until

the end of the year. You will only be as effective a teacher as your classroom

management allows you to be.

Kinsley discussed administrator evaluations and how they impact teacher stress:

The one time I did do a fun, engaging activity, which had everyone up and moving

around, I got marked down on my evaluation, because it wasn't what she wanted to see in

my lesson plan, and this was my former principal who is not even there anymore. So, if I

want them to do independent work, I can't really have them do independent work

because they need to see certain activities in our lessons.

SQ2. How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences at home that

cause them the most amount of stress? Public middle school teachers' experiences at home that

cause them the most of amount of stress are captured in Major Theme 1: Intersecting relationship

stress and Major Theme 2: Intersecting environmental stress. Participants' descriptions shared in

these two themes distinctly address SQ2. In Major Theme 1, teacher participants described

intersecting relationship stress with loved ones. At home, roommates, spouses, children, and

significant others were pronounced by teacher participants as key stressors. Lack of energy, lack

of time, and lack of finances were reoccurring concerns and stressors at home. Some teacher

participants described the needs and health of their children as major sources of stress, other

teachers described the difficulty of providing for the needs of anyone after a long day at work.

Heather clarified relationship stress at home with her roommate:

> As far as confrontation goes, she's a lot messier than I am. I definitely let myself get way
>
> too worked up about that, so, I'd say that's the most stressful part about it. I really
>
> shouldn't let it bug me as much as it does. Coming home to a mess is not fun.

Major Theme 2 expressed intersecting environmental stress and navigating the home

environment. Organizing the home, family organization, and making time for oneself were

common descriptors among participants. Organizing the home and family environment was

expressed as a very important way to carve out time for oneself to decompress, recharge, and

reset. Participants warned, that if you run yourself too thin, everyone and everything around you will suffer.

Anne describes the importance of organization for her in her home environment:

I have to have some kind of system, if there's no system, I just freeze and I can't, I just won't. I know that there is a way that I can go through this and I can tackle and work through it and it's not just a mountain of stuff that I don't know where to start.

Eric warns about saving some for yourself:

You are more than a teacher and you have a life beyond those walls. You need that life to be full and enriching if you are going to keep your sanity and make it as a teacher. Teaching can consume your life. It'll consume your thoughts at home in ways that home cannot consume you at school. Save some for yourself.

SQ3. How do public middle school teachers describe the coping strategies used to minimize stress? The coping strategies public middle school teachers' use to minimize stress are grasped in Major Theme 3: Coping with relationships and Major Theme 4: Coping with the environment. Participants' descriptions shared in these two themes clearly address SQ3. In Major Theme 3, teachers described their coping strategies with stress, which included coping using relationships. Participants described their coping strategies, stating both professional and personal relationships. Students, colleagues, administrators, and mentors were relationships used by participants to aide in coping with stress. Spouses, children, therapists, and oneself were mentioned as personal relationship coping techniques.

Heather describes her coping strategies:

I was seeing a counselor for a while and she taught me coping mechanisms, just making sure that I'm taking deep breaths and I'm understanding what exactly is stressing me out

about the situation. That usually makes it easier to just overcome I guess, to push it out

of my mind.

Several teachers mentioned their spouse or significant other as a way to cope with stress.

Anne mentioned her significant other when detailing her coping mechanisms for stress:

My comfort person is my significant other. He really calms me down because he's a very

calm person. He kind of mellows me out. I also play a lot of video games. They help

calm me down and that's how I usually distress at the end of my day.

In Major Theme 4, teachers described further coping strategies with stress, which

included coping using the environment. These coping strategies mentioned things like stuffed

animals, paper clips, home projects, journaling, medication, working out, and cleaning. Working

out, walking the dog, and going to the gym were common coping mechanisms for stress.

Heather describes her coping strategies for stress:

The gym always helps. I have a dog and going on walks with her is really a good way to

ease my stress. I just take fifteen to twenty minutes to myself with her and just go

outside. I'd say those are probably my three stress relievers.

Julia explains her love of working out in the outdoors and how that helps her to cope with

stress:

Anytime I can get outside, in the fresh air, near a bunch of trees, and very little people,

that makes me instantly happy and makes my stress melt away. I love hiking, biking,

swimming, anything like that to manage my stress levels. That's definitely my go to,

being outside, or anywhere near the water, that's even better.

Anne explains her coping strategies to combat stress:

I do crafts; I draw more like for my classroom other than just for myself. My dogs are

calming when they are not barking at things and when they actually will sit down with

me. I'll go water boarding a lot and that calms me down.

Summary

The lived experiences of public middle school teachers in central Florida were presented

in one-on-one interviews, a focus group interview, and letter writing samples. The NVivo

qualitative software program was used to analyze collected data. After analyzing all collected

data using the NVivo program, four major themes and ten subthemes were developed. The

acknowledged themes and subthemes distinctly addressed the central research question, along

with the three subquestions. The themes found within the study were supported by participants.

Teacher participants mentioned students as a key cause of stress to the school day. Highly

stressful students in the classroom, students in the hallways, and students before and after school

were described by participants to cause a large part of their workday stress. Coworkers were

also mentioned by several participants as a means of stress and tension because many coworkers

refused to work together as a team. The lack of classroom resources, the lack of strong

leadership, the lack of strong classroom management techniques, and the continuous changing

environment of public educational institutions, were reoccurring explanations of participants on

teacher stress. Teacher participants developed and described their coping strategies used to

minimize stress, stating both coping strategies with relationships and with the environment.

These coping strategies used to minimize stress included tactile objects, medications, exercise, family members, and mentors.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to examine the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. The theory guiding this study is burnout theory by Maslach and Leiter (1997). This reseracher sought to understand the intersection of personal and professional stressors that could potenitally lead to public middle school teacher burnout. Chapter Five includes a summary of findings from this study as well as implications, limitations, and delimitations within the study. Recommendations for future research are also provided.

Summary of Findings

This study examined the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. Participants' experiences were described and recorded through one-on-one interviews, a focus group interview, and letter writing samples. These data collection methods and the use of the qualitative software program NVivo were used to develop four major themes: (a) intersecting relationship stress, (b) intersecting environmental stress, (c) coping with relationships, and (d) coping with the environment. The themes and subthemes clearly addressed the central research question and the three research subquestions which will be addressed in the following sections.

CRQ

The central research question that guided this study was: How do public middle school teachers describe the stress that affects them in their professional and personal lives? This research question was used to understand the stress that affects public middle school teachers in their professional and personal lives. Intersecting relationship stress and intersecting

environmental stress were described by participants. Major Theme 1 helped to develop a deeper

insight into intersecting relationship stress. Participants brought up relationship stress as it

relates to classroom management, moderating discipline issues, and students with special needs.

Participants discussed professional relationships and how some coworkers were difficult to work

with, adding to the workday stress. Participants also mentioned relationship stress at home, with

roommates, kids, and spouses. Major Theme 2 provided insight into intersecting environmental

stress. At work, teachers described stress from monitoring the hallways, stress in the afternoon

areas, and the new teacher stress of navigating a new school building. At home, participants

described the stress of raising their children in a healthy environment, the unknowns of the

COVID-19 virus, keeping their loved ones safe, and financial stress.

SQ1

SQ1 was as follows: How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences at

work that cause them the most amount of stress? Major Themes 1 and 2 developed from the

collected data addressed this subquestion. All teacher participants had a stress level at work of a

5 or greater, with most rating their stress level at work between a 7 and 10. Participants

described their most stressful experiences at work to include dealing with coworkers, classroom

management stress, stress with difficult students, stress in the hallways, and stress monitoring the

morning and afternoon areas. Coworkers were mentioned by several participants as a means of

stress and tension. Teachers warned against participating in coworker gossip and vowed to stay

away from teachers who seemed to enjoy gossiping about others. Other coworkers were

described as stressful because they were not doing their job correctly. Kinsley described her

stress levels at work as depending upon the day, "on an average day, if I'm just teaching and

everything is fine it's like a 5, but if evaluations are coming up, or if there's an issue with a parent, and that escalates, that could go from 8 to 10."

SQ2

SQ2 was as follows: How do public middle school teachers describe their experiences at home that cause them the most amount of stress? Major Themes 1 and 2 developed from the collected data addressed this subquestion. The stress level ratings of participants at home ranged from 1 to 10, with most study participants rating their stress level at home around a 5. Stress with family members or loved ones, stress around the COVID-19 virus, and financial stress were the reoccurring subthemes within home stressors. Lack of energy and lack of time were reoccurring concerns and stressors at home. Some teacher participants described the needs and health of their children as major sources of stress, other teachers described the difficulty of providing for the needs of anyone, much less themselves, after a long day at work. When discussing her stress levels at home, Heather explained, "I'd say about a six, sometimes a seven, but the most stressful part of it is just that I have a roommate still."

SQ3

SQ3 was as follows: How do public middle school teachers describe the coping strategies used to minimize stress? Major Themes 3 and 4 developed from the collected data addressed this subquestion. The third major theme shed light onto the strategies or coping mechanisms used by participants to handle relationship stress. Relationships with coworkers and students were mentioned as coping mechanisms used by participants. Teachers explained the significance of loved ones at home and professional therapists to lower stress levels. The fourth major theme described strategies or coping mechanisms used by teachers to handle environmental stress. Exercising, getting outside, cleaning, and other physical activities were examples of coping

mechanisms described by participants. Three participants explained their use of prescribed medications to lower their stress levels. Using tactile objects, scents, and music to lower stress were other examples described by participants as coping mechanisms used to handle stress. Marissa explains some of her coping strategies with stress, "I'll take a drive normally, normally I go for a walk in the park but that's not really something I'm willing to do right now, unnecessary possible exposure, so I take a drive, listen to some music."

Discussion

The purpose of this case study was to examine the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. The study sought to understand the intersection of personal and professional stressors that can lead to public middle school teacher burnout and attrition. The study also sought to understand some coping strategies used by public middle school teachers to manage stress. The findings also relate to empirical and theoretical literature discuseed in Chapter Two. Empirical research was presented in the literature review to provide information on the intersection of professional and personal stress with public middle school teachers along with their established coping strategies. Theoretical literatre was guided by Maslach and Leiter's burnout theory (1997).

Theoretical Literature

The theory framing the study is Maslach and Leiter's (1997) burnout theory which is defined by three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. According to burnout theory, burnout is broken down into six categories in order to properly assess individuals and organizations at risk of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). The six categories of burnout include workload (too much work, not enough resources); control (micromanagement, lack of influence, accountability without power); reward (not enough pay, acknowledgment, or satisfaction);

community (isolation, disrespect, conflict); fairness (favoritism, discrimination); and values (ethical conflicts, meaningless tasks) (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The findings from this present study mentioned extended previous research and extended all six categories of burnout. The six categories provide individuals and organizations with the framework, along with the necessary tools, to move from burnout towards engagement (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). Teachers in this study described stress from workload, control, reward, fairness, and values. The categories of workload and community are described in the focus group interview, Eric mentions, "I cannot forget about that parent email when I get home or I'll try to figure out ways that I'll respond, ruinating about things throughout the day when you get home, and when I get to school, I don't think about anything else other than school when I'm there. Julia agreed, "I said the exact same thing about ruminating on parent emails, especially the negative ones, even though that's like a tiny percent of the communication you might have with the parent, I can't help but think about it and take it personally." The categories of reward and workload are expressed in Val's statement, "teaching is a rough profession because you get paid very little for the amount of work you do." This aligns with the research that low stress and overall wellness are relatively rare with teachers (Herman, et al., 2018). This six-area burnout framework has now been incorporated into assessment programs for organizations and individuals (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). The framework can be used to diagnose which categories are especially troublesome for them, and then design interventions that target the diagnosed problem areas (Maslach & Leiter, 2000). To fix burnout, organizations and individuals must identify the areas in which their mismatches lie and then design solutions tailored to improve the fit within each area (Maslach & Leiter, 2005).

Findings diverged from the previous research, because in this study, teachers turned the seemingly negative aspects of teacher stress into positives. Turning negative stress into positive

stress was a strategy some teachers used to overcome stress and burnout. As Pam states in her interview, "appreciate every experience as a learning opportunity." Gabby also explains turning negative stress into positive stress in her letter writing sample:

> Your administrators have much pressure on them and sometimes they may pass some of their frustration on you. Your students have much pressure on them and sometimes they may pass some of their frustration on you. Take heart, this means they believe you are stable enough to handle it!

Eric offers some advice in his letter writing sample of turning negatives into positives, as it relates to teacher stress, and explains this in his letter writing sample:

> Putting together good, standards-based lesson plans is hard work, they are definitely time consuming and 99% of the time do not go as planned. That said, they are really important. Write one great lesson per week and everything else will fall into place. Teach the standards and don't wing it, but you don't need to reinvent the wheel or overwork yourself to come up with effective lessons. One more thing, when it comes to lesson plans, save them! Keep a hard copy. This will save you hundreds of hours of planning and make them easy to tweak.

Heather adds to this same idea of turning negative stress into positive stress and explains, "Focus on your relationships and make sure your students know they are loved. Take a deep breath. You have chosen the most rewarding job. You can do this, and you will."

way that teachers adapted their daily teaching styles and habits as a strategy to overcome stress and burnout.

These findings contributed to the research, by shedding further light on teacher burnout and attrition, along with strategies used by pubic middle school teachers to fight against burnout.

All teachers recognized the very challenging, taxing and difficult job of teaching. Teachers face

burnout because of time pressures, poor work environment, administrative problems, students'

behavior issues, and changes in the educational system (Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012).

The teachers in the current study, however, were able to come up with strategies and different

ways of thinking about stress, in order to combat stressors leading to burnout. All participants

agreed that the first years of teaching are the most difficult, and very challenging to get through,

but that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. In her letter to a first-year teacher, Val explained:

> For the first year, just get through the year, accept each new challenge as it comes and
>
> understand that there is a really good chance you will not succeed at everything – and that
>
> is normal and good. You will make mistakes, and that will continue through your career,
>
> but you have to stay positive. Don't take things as personal attacks. Accept every new
>
> learning experience as just that. The challenges are meant to make you grow, not to grind
>
> you down. Stay focused, take time for yourself and those you love, and enjoy every
>
> moment. You will never be a first-year teacher again.

Teachers with higher levels of resilience show lower levels of emotional exhaustion and

burnout (Katz, et al, 2017). In terms of personal accomplishment, teachers on the road to

burnout don't set goals, seem uninterested in learning new things, and have low self-confidence

(Aguilar, 2018). As Eric explains in his letter writing sample, "my advice is simple, save some

for yourself. Teaching can consume your life. It'll consume your thoughts at home in ways that

home cannot consume you at school. Save some time for yourself."

Empirical Literature

Teachers described their personal and professional stressors along with the strategies

used to manage that stress. Chapter Two discussed various aspects of teacher stress which

included the following: stress and burnout, stress and teacher attrition, stress and health, stress and leadership, stress and life events, and stress and coping strategies. Data from this study extends previous research on the subject of teacher stress. Empirical literature on this topic has been predominantly focused on elementary schools and private schools. There is a gap in the literature concerning teacher stress and attrition of public middle school teachers.

Empirical literature suggests that workload, perception of work environment, teachers' perceptions of senior management, and attitude towards change are specific perceived occupational difficulties of teachers and potentially cause higher than normal attrition rates (Simone et al., 2015). This current study corroborated these same points concerning teacher stress. The teachers interviewed described the stressors of frequently changing teacher evaluation methods along with the recurring adjustments of administration. An example of this was emphasized in Kinsley's interview where she explained some of her highly stressful events at work as "being evaluated by three different administrators who see the evaluation tool differently and that give you an evaluation based on their personality." Gavin also mentioned attitude towards change in his interview, "There always seems like a new trend or best practice pops up every school year that administrators buy into and want to enforce and then it quickly fades away to the next new popular initiative that only serves to create extra work for teachers." The use of test-based accountability in performance evaluations, merit pay, and tenure decision results in increased stress in the environment, increased stress related to the curriculum, and increased teacher stress in general (Ebse et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2017).

Interview studies with teachers who left the teaching profession revealed that high job demands, lack of support, lack of learning opportunities, poor working conditions, lack of work pleasure and pupil misbehavior contribute to explaining attrition (Buchanan, 2010). As Pam

explained:

> Teachers have an insane amount of stress even in the hour before school even starts. \
> Teachers are expected to have all of their lesson plans and materials ready for students,
> with the lessons engaging and enriching. We often have stressful meetings in the
> mornings before school even starts and I also have morning duty at least once per week.
> I dread morning duty; I have to be out there watching students 45 minutes before my
> school day begins. Many of the kids I don't know so they are acting up, chasing each
> other, pushing each other, not listening to me, and getting my stress levels up before my
> teaching day even begins.

The increased numbers of students and their lack of discipline were found as major sources of stress for teachers (Simone, et al., 2015). During the one-on-one interview Eric described lack of student discipline as one of his major stressors, "hallway behavior is a regular source of stress, in school, especially around a classroom." It was concluded that stress causes and lack of resources result in emotional exhaustion, which significantly relate to intention to leave the profession (McCarthy et al., 2015).

The high levels of stress reported by nearly all teachers confirm that teaching is a stressful profession (Herman et al., 2018). Heather explains, "I definitely had a lot of trouble with classroom management my first year, that gave me the most stress." Nearly all teachers fall into classes characterized by high levels of stress (Herman, Hickmon & Reinke, 2018). Only 7% of teachers were in a well-adjusted class suggesting that low stress and overall wellness were relatively rare in their sample of teachers (Herman, et al., 2018). Being more proactive and supportive of teachers' mental health could be an important part of breaking the cycle of high levels of stress in the classroom (McLean et al., 2017; Woloshyn & Savage, 2018). Teachers

explained many strategies they used to manage their stress levels including, napping, exercising, cleaning, gardening, walking their dog, using medications, and mediating. During the discussion group interview, Marissa gave an example of strategies she uses to destress, "When I'm at school, some of the things from home that I will have to kid of help me to decompress, like something that I drink at home, I'll bring bubbly water or tea, something like that, to help remind me of home." The benefits of minimizing professional stressors may include improved job satisfaction and higher teacher retention rates, as recent researchers have emphasized the role of school conditions and characteristics in teacher turnover (Stauffer & Mason, 2013).

<div align="center">Implications</div>

This study comprised of one-on-one interviews, a focus group interview, and letter writing samples to provide information on the intersection of professional and personal stress with public middle school teachers along with their established coping strategies. According to the findings of this study, teachers all brought work home with them, and felt the lasting affects of the stress of the workday, but the opposite was not true. All teachers in the study described the stressors at home stopping once they arrived at work. Their home stressors did not carrying into their workday. Teachers in the study metioned all six categories of burnout according to Maslach and Letier's (1997) burnout theory. The benefits of minimizing professional stressors include higher teacher retention rates with public middle school teachers. The following sections include a discussion of the empirical, theoretcial, and practical implications.

Theoretical

The theory framing this study was Maslach's (1997) burnout theory that is defined by three dimensions, exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. A total of 10 public middle school teachers in Florida participated in this study. The experiences of these teachers contribute to the

burnout theory (Maslach & Leiter, 1997) and shed further light on the growing concern of teacher burnout and attrition. This study was dedicated to the intersection of teacher stress at work and at home, along with the coping strategies used to manage that stress. This study shows the connection between public middle school teachers' stress in Florida and Maslach and Leiter's (1997) burnout theory.

The present case study aims to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation because of the lessons it might provide about the social processes related to theoretical interest. Teachers on the verge of burnout might not greet their colleagues, avoid sharing their classroom experiences, have poor classroom management skills, and neglect to socialize with colleagues (Aguilar, 2018; Iancu, Rusu, Maroiu & Maricutoiu, 2017). There are also many exhausting obligations outside of the classroom for teachers such as working with parents and school officials, preparing class materials, and keeping up with the changing curricular and professional development demands (McLean et al., 2017). These same issues were warned about by all participants in the present case study. Their letter writing samples to first year teachers contained very similar warnings about the teaching profession that it is "ok to say no," make sure to "save some for yourself," do not forget that "as hard as you try you can't reach everyone," "it's important to build relationships," and "don't be afraid to try new things, even if it doesn't work out." Heeding these warnings from experienced teachers help to remove burnout. In terms of personal accomplishment, teachers on the road to burnout don't set goals, seem uninterested in learning new things, and have low self-confidence (Aguilar, 2018).

More focus and interventions need to be put in place towards teacher health, well-being, and retention. Teachers should not be so difficult to find and keep. The stress and demands on teachers are rising. In order to maintain teacher well-being, something has to be done to negate

the stress and negative impacts of teaching. School climate can foster resilience or become a risk factor and has been linked to teacher burnout, work commitment, and school connectedness (Embse et al., 2016; Hong, 2011). Teachers were shown to seldom speak to their health care providers about stress issues and they were not comfortable with talking to their principals about stress (Ferguson et al., 2017). The stigma of teacher stress appears to be a prevailing problem within the teaching profession but addressing stress during pre-service education could help alleviate some of the stigma of discussing stress in their future careers (Ferguson et al., 2017). School leaders can step up and make a conscious effort to diminish teacher stress. Stress caused by teachers' workload can be reduced through actions aimed at supporting a leadership style that will increase autonomy and individual empowerment (Simone et. al., 2016).

Empirical

Findings from this study confirmed and added to the empirical research on the topic of teacher stress. Empirical research has recognized a variety of factors that impact teacher stress. Burnout in teachers is often caused by perception of work environment, workload, teachers' perceptions of senior management, and attitude towards change (Simone, Cicotto, & Lampis, 2016). These factors include stress as it relates to burnout, attrition, health, leadership, life events, and coping strategies. School climate can foster resilience or become a risk factor and has been linked to teacher burnout, work commitment, and school connectedness (Embse et al., 2016; Hong, 2011). All teachers in this study described at least one of the six categories of burnout. In her letter writing sample, Marissa warned of several aspects of teacher stress, "During your first year, things will be hard, all things. Even going home at the end of the day will be hard. You will be asked to have just as much prepared, planned, managed, and expertise as those who have been teaching for a lifetime." In previous studies, it was found that teachers

face burnout because of time pressures, poor work environment, administrative problems, students' behavior issues, and changes in the educational system (Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012). These same work issues leading to burnout were found in the present study.

This study added to the empirical research on teacher burnout. Studies have found that burnout in teachers is often caused by perception of work environment, workload, teachers' perceptions of senior management, and attitude towards change (Simone, Cicotto, & Lampis, 2016). The present study found burnout to be related to these things, in addition to coworkers, students, and loved ones. In this study, the negative stressors with coworkers were described as lack of communication, lack of understanding, and lack of follow through. Eric states in his letter writing sample, "Avoid gossip! Listen more than you talk, and when you speak up or out, then choose your words carefully." The negative stressors from students were described as behavior issues in the hallways during transition times, behavior issues before and after school, and behavior issues in the classroom. Gabby explained in her interview, "the most amount of stress comes from a handful of the same students, who aren't even, don't necessarily need to be in my class, but they're kids I feel a responsibility for because I'm monitoring the campus." At home, teachers described the negative stressors with loved ones as financial issues, divorce related issues, lack of time, lack of energy, and health issues. As Anne stated, "A pandemic can change the face of education in a matter of weeks." The core aspect of burnout is the emotional exhaustion, the chronic feeling of tiredness and fatigue, which make teachers lose their enthusiasm (Szigeti, et al., 2016). Teachers experience somewhat elevated or high levels of stress and burnout in their personal, their work, and their student-related life (Harmsen, Helms, Maulana, & Veen, 2018).

In a prior study, it was found that a healthy work environment can be reached not only

through the absence of negative factors, but also by promoting positive characteristics (Simone et al., 2015). Promoting positive characteristics was something that was mentioned by almost all participants in the current study. Half of the participants mentioned creating a positive journal to help get through the stressful times of teaching. Journal writing was a new coping strategy that I did not find in previous research. Pam mentioned journal writing in her letter writing sample, "I encourage you to keep a sunshine folder or journal to write down your most positive experiences. It is always good to refer to the positive differences you have made when you have less than stellar days." As Anne explains in her letter writing sample, "take a notebook and a pen, keep it some place easily accessible, and every time something works well, write it down." In this study, it seemed that the teachers with higher levels of resilience show lower levels of emotional exhaustion and burnout (Katz, et al, 2017).

Practical

The existing literature has practical implications for those who work with public middle school teachers in Florida. Allowing teachers to focus on their cognitive, physical, and emotional wellbeing could make a big difference in the happiness and job satisfaction of teachers. It could help in the job retention and shortage problem with classroom teachers, especially public middle school teachers. The core aspect of burnout is the emotional exhaustion, the chronic feeling of tiredness and fatigue, which make teachers lose their enthusiasm (Szigeti, et al., 2016). When one considers the immensely important profession of a middle school teacher, it should not be an issue to focus more on teacher health, wellbeing, retention efforts, and on getting the best qualified. One primary source of teacher stress is the experience of negative emotions in the classroom and the challenge of managing these emotional experiences (Iancu, et al., 2017; Katz, Harris, Abenzvoli, Greenberg & Jennings, 2017).

Teachers must simultaneously balance instructional support, classroom management, planning

and organization, and the facilitation of high-quality classroom relationships (McLean et al.,

2017).

The main goal and focus for educators are on their learners and how they can better their

student's learning skills, thinking processes, and overall well-being. Teachers have to focus on

their health and well-being as well. Each school has its differing views and focus goals, but

every school also has a unifying goal of providing the necessary resources and tools in order to

teach to the students' full potential. If teachers are becoming stressed and burnout out, their

students' will suffer. Teachers' mental health has a widespread impact not only on teaching

effectiveness; it also has a big impact on students' personal development, emotional

development, and academic achievement (Ju, Lan, Li, Feng & Yu, 2015; Szigeti, et al., 2016). If

our best and most passionate teachers leave the profession because of burnout and stress build

up, it is the students that will miss out. All educators want their students to be lifelong learners,

goal setters, have strong moral values and beliefs, be well-rounded, thoughtful, and successful

contributors to our society. Learning to relax, mindfulness, exercise, sleep, resolving conflict,

and positive psychology were all found as effective ways to reduce stress with teachers (Taylor,

2017). The teachers in this study mentioned the use of exercise, journaling, mediation, cleaning,

and napping as ways to cope with stress. It is critical for teachers to deal with the work stressors

of their profession using coping strategies, work-life balance, meaningful collaboration, support

from coworkers, and support from teaching staff (Harmsen, 2018). If teachers are healthy and

happy, they can be present and involved in their students' educational learning. The increasing

levels of stress in schools for teachers calls for something to be done in order for teachers to get

back to working at their optimal levels (Taylor, 2017). Educators and educational leaders must

start putting health and well-being at the forefront of their to-do-list before teacher attrition keeps rising.

The stress and demands on teachers are rising. In order to maintain teacher well-being, something has to be done to negate the stress and negative impacts of teaching. Job satisfaction fully intervenes the relationship between teachers' happiness and health, as well as the relevant role played by job satisfaction and self-esteem (Benevene, Ittan, & Cortini, 2018). Policies need to be developed aimed at encouraging job satisfaction among teachers, and positively interfering with their work condition, in order to promote their health and well-being (Benevene at. el., 2018). Many things can be done to fix the problem before it gets worse. Recommendations for stakeholders include an interest and an investment in teacher health and well-being. Professional development opportunities for administrators and teachers should be put in place, along with well-trained coaches that know how to recognize signs of burnout. It can be hard to spot teachers who are beginning to burn out, for the reason that they tend to hide their condition or might not themselves be aware of what's wrong with them (Aguilar, 2018).

Delimitations and Limitations

It was important to set delimitations in this study to collect data that aligned with the purpose of examining the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers. This study comprised a set of boundaries that helped preserve the focus of examining the intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers, along with coping strategies to manage that stress. The selection criteria for this study was the following: (a) public middle school teachers currently dealing with stress and/or burnout, (b) willing to participate, (c) teachers I do not know, (d) teachers over the age of 18, (e) both genders, and (f) various races. All participants were required to have experienced stress at

work and at home. All participants were over the age of 18, and care was taken to include a diverse group of participants. When selecting the 10 participants, I made sure not to know the teachers beforehand to eliminate bias.

Along with the delimitations, limitations in this study were also set in place. For example, a total of 12 participants were recruited to participate in this study, but due the withdrawal of two participants, data was collected from 10 participants. The COVID-19 pandemic, along with the presence of Jerry Falwell Jr. in the news, caused two participants to withdraw. There was a gender bias present in this study as there were only two male teachers out of the 10 participants. An additional limitation to this study was the focus only on public middle school teachers in central Florida. Private schools, charter schools, and schools in other states were not focused on in this study.

Another limitation in this study was the use of online interviews through video conferencing software. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, meeting online was the safest option. In-person interviews would have possibly provided higher-quality data. Although teachers answered the interview questions in real time, and provided in-depth responses, in person interviews may have provided further insight into the questions asked. In person interviews can better resemble guided conservations and can be more personalized.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a necessity to pay attention to prospective teachers' mental health, promote formal sources of help, and overcome seeking help obstacles (Uzman & Telef, 2015). More studies need to be performed to deepen our understanding of teachers' current job dissatisfaction and burnout. More studies should be conducted to explore professional development activities and trainings to improve the cognitive, physical, and emotional well-being of teachers. Stress

management efforts strengthen efficacy, self-concept, hardiness, resilience, and ultimately heighten teacher satisfaction and effectiveness (Bernard, 2016). Despite the importance of teachers' emotional experiences, most teachers have never experienced any professional development sessions that talk about how to handle emotions in the classroom or how to recover from emotional trauma (Hong, 2012). There is currently a big problem with teacher shortage and teacher retention, especially in the United States. If more studies and interventions were done on teacher health, well-being, and retention, teacher attrition rates may improve.

A single-case study design was used with the present study to discover more about public middle school teachers' causes of stress. The objective in a single-case study that looks at a common case is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation because of the lessons it might provide about the social processes related to some theoretical interest (Yin, 2018). Future studies with more time and resources could take advantage of a more in-depth multi-case study design. A multi-case study design could be used to study, compare, and contrast other public middle schools as it relates to stress and burnout. Only two of the participants in this study were males, so using a multi-case study design, would allow for more variety of participants with differing viewpoints and experiences. A limitation was created when only the perspectives and experiences of mostly females were provided.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Summary</h2>

The data of the study is offered in the order in which the research questions were stated, in the form of themes, subthemes, tables, and figures. Themes and subthemes are developed from the data and presented in the form of a narrative. To support themes and subthemes discovered, responses from participant's are presented in narrative form. Direct quotes from participants' letters and interviews are offered to provide further insight into examining the

intersection of personal and professional stress in the lives of public middle school teachers along with which strategies or coping mechanisms they use to minimize stress.

Allowing teachers to focus on their cognitive, physical, and emotional wellbeing could make a big difference in the happiness and job satisfaction of teachers. It could help in the job retention and shortage problem with classroom teachers, especially middle school teachers. When you consider that teaching is one of the most important professions, it should not be an issue to focus more on teacher health, wellbeing, retention efforts, and on getting the best qualified. We need more studies conducted to explore professional development activities and training programs to improve the cognitive, physical, and emotional well-being of teachers. Stress management efforts strengthen efficacy, self-concept, hardiness, resilience, and ultimately heighten teacher satisfaction and effectiveness (Bernard, 2016). Despite the importance of teachers' emotional experiences, most teachers have never experienced any professional development sessions that talk about how to handle emotions in the classroom or how to recover from emotional trauma (Hong, 2012). Policies need to be developed aimed at encouraging job satisfaction among teachers, and positively interfering with their work condition, in order to promote their health and well-being (Benevene at. el., 2018). Many things can be done to fix the problem before it gets worse. Well-trained coaches need to know how to recognize these signs of burnout. It can be challenging to spot teachers who are beginning to burn out, due to the reason that they tend to hide their condition, or might not themselves be aware of what's wrong with them (Aguilar, 2018). The stress and demands on teachers are rising. In order to maintain teacher well-being, something has to be done to negate the stress and negative impacts of teaching. Job satisfaction fully intervenes the relationship between teachers' happiness and health, as well as the relevant role played by job satisfaction and self-esteem (Benevene, Ittan, &

Cortini, 2018).

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Form

IRB #: IRB-FY19-20-320
Title: The Intersection of Personal and Professional Stress in the Lives of Public MIddle School Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study
Creation Date: 4-17-2020
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Bridgette Ebel
Review Board: Research Ethics Office
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt - Limited IRB

Key Study Contacts

Member	Timothy Nelson	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	trnelson2@liberty.edu
Member	Bridgette Ebel	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	bebel@liberty.edu
Member	Bridgette Ebel	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	bebel@liberty.edu

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

The Intersection of Personal and Professional Stress
in the Lives of Public Middle School Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study
Bridgette Wicke
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study examining the intersection of professional and personal stress amongst public middle school teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 years of age or older and a classroom teacher at a public middle school in Florida with a valid teaching license. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Bridgette Wicke, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to examine the intersection of professional and personal stress amongst public middle school teachers.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, and you are chosen to be in the study, I would ask of you to do the following things:
1. A one-on-one interview. This can be done face-to-face or through online video chat (whichever you prefer). This can take place anywhere that is quiet and convenient to you. There will be about 10 questions and it will last approximately 45 minutes. I will record the interview with a voice recorder to further analyze my data.
2. A single focus group interview with all teacher participants. The focus group will be online using video conferencing software, like Webex or Zoom, where everyone will chat together online. There will be about 5 questions and it will last approximately 45 minutes. I will record the groups' discussion with a voice recorder to further analyze my data.
3. Write a letter to a first year teacher. The letter does not have a length requirement. The letter will take approximately 30 minutes to complete and will explain what personal and professional stressors to expect as a first year teacher.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Participants will each be compensated a $15 Target gift card for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- I will be able to link individual participants to the information they provide or are associated with, but I will not disclose participant identities or how named or identifiable individuals responded. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and the focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Bridgette Wicke. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at email: bebel@liberty.edu or phone: 571-449-1554. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Nelson, at trnelson2@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX C

Screening Questionnaire

Questionnaires will be given through email using surveymonkey.com. Questions are adapted

from the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Scully & Tosi, 2000). All

participants' identities will remain confidential for this study. The school will be referred to as

Florida Middle School and participants will be referred to as Teacher A, B, C, etc.

1. What subject(s) do you teach and which grade level(s) do you teach?

2. How many years have you been teaching total?

3. How many total years have you taught as a public middle school teacher in Florida?

4. What are your race, age, and sex?

5. Have you ever experienced highly stressful events at work? If so, did that happen this

    year, or how many years ago?

6. Have you ever experienced highly stressful events at home? If so, did that happen this

    year, or how many years ago?

7. Have you developed specific strategies or coping mechanisms to handle or deal with

    stress? If so, did that happen this year, or how many years ago?

APPENDIX D

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me. Describe your profession. How long have you been teaching and what grade(s) and subject(s) do you teach?

2. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very low stress and 10 being very high stress, how would you rate the amount of stress you feel during your workday? (CRS, SQ1)

3. As you think about your workday, what are some events or situations that cause you a lot of stress? (CRS, SQ1)

4. As you think about your workday, which people cause you the most amount of stress? (CRS, SQ1)

5. What are some things you do, some coping mechanisms, or some strategies you have in place at work, to lower your stress levels? Please go into detail. (SQ3)

6. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very low stress and 10 being very high stress, how would you rate the amount of stress you feel at home? (CRS, SQ2)

7. As you think about your home life, what are some events or situations that cause you the most amount of stress? (CRS, SQ2)

8. As you think about your home life, which people cause you the most amount of stress? (CRS, SQ2)

9. What are some things you do, some coping mechanisms, or some strategies you have in place at home, to lower your stress levels? Please go into detail. (SQ3)

10. What final thoughts would like to add to this interview?

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Questions

These questions have been adapted from the Maslach (1981) burnout Inventory.

1. Please describe how teaching impacts your stress levels during the workday. (CRS, SR1)

2. Please describe how teaching impacts your stress levels at home. (CRS, SR1, SR2)

3. Please describe how your home life impacts your stress levels at work. (CRS, SR1, SR2)

4. Please describe any coping mechanisms or strategies that you use to help alleviate work and/or home stressors. (SR3)

5. What final thoughts would you like to add to this focus group interview?

APPENDIX F

Letter to a First-Year Teacher

Please write or type a letter to a first-year teacher explaining what things they should anticipate seeing, feeling, and experiencing when they start working as a classroom teacher. Please describe your experiences as a public school educator to encourage and/or warn them of what to expect.   There is no required length limit, but please be thorough and provide as much detail, and as many suggestions/tips to a first-year teacher as possible.