

Teacher Stress and Classroom Structural Characteristics in US and German Elementary School Settings



Lambert, R.
UNC Charlotte

Ullrich, A.
University of Colorado – Denver

Britt, H.
UNC Charlotte

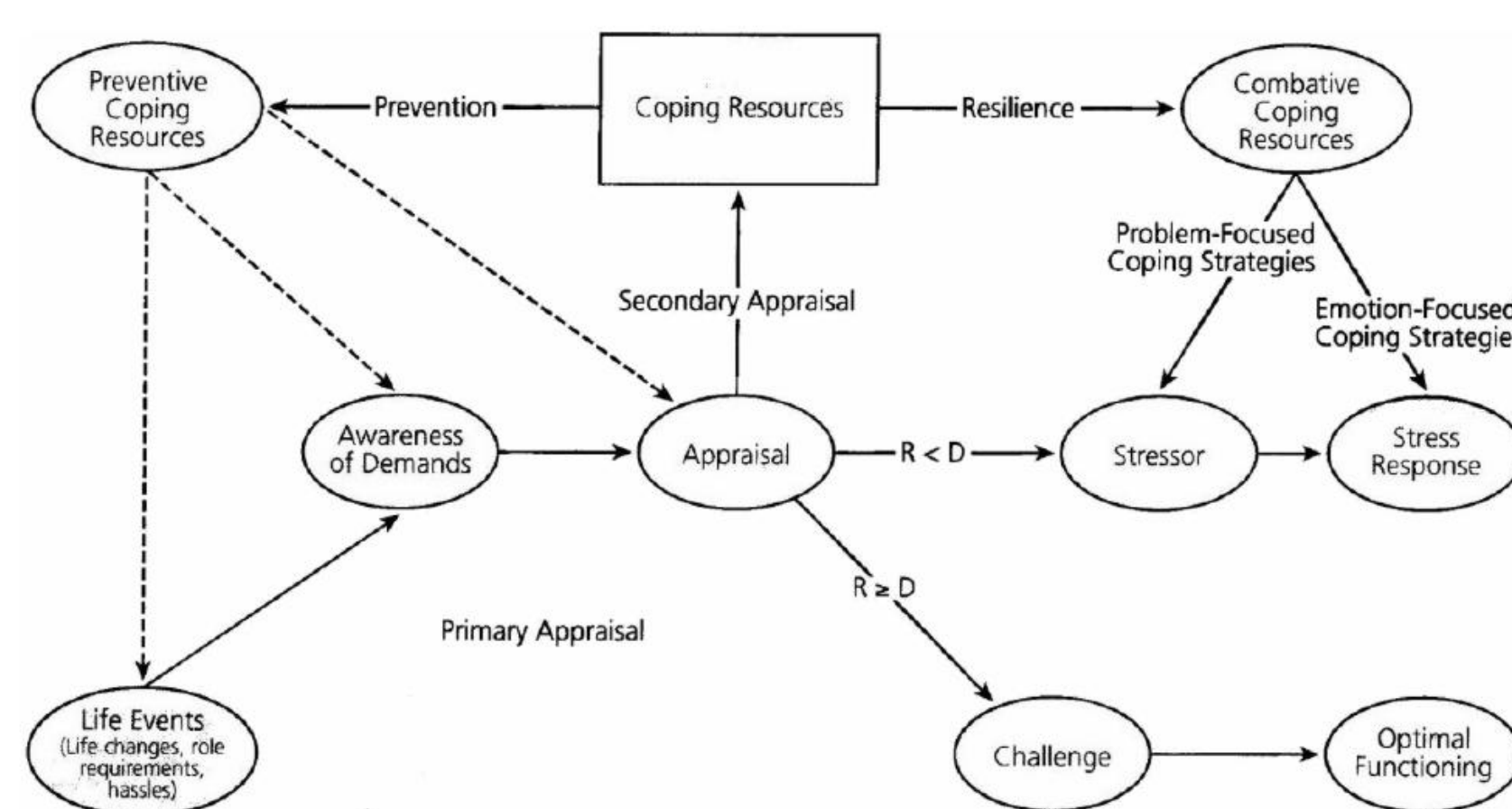
For additional information, contact:

Richard G. Lambert
Department of Educational Leadership
UNC Charlotte
rglamber@unc.edu

Background

United States: high teacher turnover rate (25-33%), national shortage, every second teacher quits after 5 years.

Germany: 74% of all teachers retired early compared to 46% of early retirements in other professions (Schaarschmidt, 2005), often due to mental health issues; >50% of teachers exhibited work-related behaviors, putting them at risk for burnout.



To examine relationship of elementary teachers' years of experience, perceived occupational stress, and preventive coping/self-acceptance to burnout symptoms in the United States and Germany.

To explore which type of factors/predictors (teacher- or school-specific) is more strongly associated with burnout in both samples.

Analysis

US Sample

451 elementary teachers (grades K-5) from 13 schools within three adjacent counties in North Carolina
Response rate: 77.62% (59.26% to 96.77%).

German Sample

469 elementary teachers (grades 1-4) from 62 Baden-Württemberg schools in four districts (Freiburg, Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, Tübingen)
Response rate: 60.56% (17.65% to 100.00%).

Independent/Predictor Variables

Perceptions of classroom demands
CARD measure (Lambert et al., 2001)
Perceptions of occupational stress (D-R)
CARD measure.
Self-acceptance, PRI Self-Acceptance Scale (McCarthy & Lambert, 2001).
Years of experience (number of years at current school, number of years in profession).

Dependent Variable

Burnout: Measured by *Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educator Survey (MBI-ES; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996)* and *MBI-D (Enzmann & Kleiber, 1989; German version)*.
Emotional Exhaustion (EE): feeling of being overextended emotionally
Depersonalization (DP): a cynical stance towards others.
Personal Accomplishment (PA): lowered feelings of competence.

Results

What percentage of teachers are at risk for stress?

Based on their CARD scores, teachers were classified into 3 groups

| Groups | U.S. Sample | German Sample |
|---------|-------------|---------------|
| (1) R>D | 33.00% | 40.00% |
| (2) R=D | 34.40% | 27.40% |
| (3) D>R | 32.60% | 32.70% |

| | U.S. Sample | German Sample |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) | | |
| Emotional Exhaustion (EE) | 20.56* | 14.96 |
| Depersonalization (DP) | 4.46 | 3.90 |
| Personal Accomplishment (PA) | 13.28 | 13.68 |
| Total Score | 38.10* | 32.51 |
| Preventive Resources Inventory (PRI) | | |
| Self-acceptance | 4.01* | 3.82 |

| Predictors | U.S. Sample | German Sample |
|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Years at current school | EE ↑ | EE ↓ |
| Years at current school | -- | DP ↓ |
| Years at current school | Burnout ↑ | Burnout ↓ |
| New to teaching (1-2 years) | -- | EE ↓ |
| Years of experience | -- | DP ↑ |
| Stress | EE ↑ | -- |
| Stress | DP ↑ | -- |
| Stress | -- | PA ↑ |

| Classroom Characteristics | U.S. Sample | | German Sample | |
|--|--------------------|---------|--------------------|---------|
| | Mean | Percent | Mean | Percent |
| Classroom Feature | Number of Children | | Number of Children | |
| Class size | 21.84 | | 19.23 | |
| Learning the language of instruction | 2.71 | 12.41% | 5.85 | 30.42% |
| Developmentally behind most other children | 4.30 | 19.69% | 3.75 | 19.50% |
| Learning disabilities | 2.94 | 13.46% | 2.77 | 14.40% |
| Physical disabilities | 0.35 | 1.60% | 0.12 | 0.62% |
| Gifted or talented | 2.02 | 9.25% | 0.29 | 1.51% |
| Homeless or transient | 0.26 | 1.19% | 0.03 | 0.16% |
| Poor attendance | 1.57 | 7.19% | 0.75 | 3.90% |
| Behavior Problems | 3.59 | 16.44% | 3.88 | 20.18% |
| Performing below grade level | 5.69 | 26.05% | 4.08 | 21.22% |

Conclusions

Self-acceptance is the strongest predictor for burnout in both samples.

Results are consistent with previous research findings on stress and coping for teachers.

Number of years in current school is strongly associated with level of burnout (U.S. sample ↑; German sample ↓).

For teachers in German sample, higher stress level is associated with lower sense of personal accomplishment and self-acceptance.

It is important to address individual teacher development (e.g., coping and teaching skills).

It is beneficial to promote organizational improvement of schools (e.g., provision of resources, leadership development, social support).

Future Research

Explore differences in teacher support and induction programs in both countries.

Collect observational data to explain differences found in the study regarding teachers' coping skills and perceptions of resources and demands.

Include school level variables, cultural work values, job satisfaction.

Examine different grade levels.