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## A Study to Identify Stress Factors of Early Childhood Special Education Teachers

Brenda Marie Hanken-Crawford

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A STUDY TO IDENTIFY STRESS FACTORS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD  
SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Specialist in Education

Brenda Marie Hanken-Crawford  
University of Northern Iowa  
December 1990

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## ABSTRACT

Stress, an everyday fact of life, can be either positive or negative (Bradfield & Fones, 1985a; Truch, 1980). When faced with too little stress, a lack of productivity may occur, however, when faced with too much stress, anxiety and unhappiness may result (Johnson & Harkins, 1984).

A growing interest has developed concerning factors contributing to the stress of special education teachers (Fimian & Santoro, 1983). While the literature on stress has grown, research is very limited in the area of stress and early childhood special education teachers.

The purpose of this study was to identify (a) the stress producing variables of early childhood special education teachers; and (b) the ways early childhood special education teachers cope with the stressors they encounter.

A survey of 320 early childhood special educators in Iowa was conducted to determine the stressors of this group. Of the 320 teachers surveyed 256 (80%) responded.

The survey instrument designed by Dedrick and Raschke (1988) was used to generate the information covering stress producing variables of early childhood special education teachers.

Results from the study suggested that the greatest sources of stress for early childhood special education teachers were paperwork, and lack of preparation time. The number one way early childhood special education teachers deal with stress is through laughter and humor.

Because of the paucity of research addressing stress and the early childhood special education teachers further research is warranted.

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This Study By: Brenda Marie Hanken-Crawford

Entitled: A STUDY TO IDENTIFY STRESS FACTORS OF EARLY  
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has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the Degree of Specialist in  
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

A certain amount of stress is an essential part of life. It is needed for growth and change. Some level of stress can be found in every occupation. Concern for teacher stress dates back to 1933 when the first studies on teacher stress appeared in the literature (D'Arienzo, Moracco, & Krajewski, 1982). More recently, a number of studies have drawn attention to problems related to teacher stress (Beasley, 1983, 1984; Beck & Gargiulo, 1983; Bradfield & Fones, 1985a, 1985b; Cherkes & Fimian, 1982; Crane & Iwanicki, 1983, 1986; D'Arienzo et al., 1982; Dunham, 1983; Fass, 1984; Fimian, 1986a, 1986b, 1987, 1988; Fimian & Santoro, 1983; Hudson & Meagher, 1983; Johnson, Gold, & Vickers, 1982; Johnson & Harkins, 1984; Linn, 1984; Pont & Reid, 1985; Raschke, Dedrick, & DeVries, 1988; Stile et al., 1987; Sutton & Huberty, 1984; Truch, 1980; Wheeler, Reilly, & Donahue, 1982).

A growing interest has developed concerning stress factors related to special education teachers (Fimian & Santoro, 1983). Bradfield and Fones (1985a, 1985b) and Dedrick and Raschke (1988) believe that special educators might be under more stress than regular educators as a result of the extra responsibilities, demands, and pressures of the day-to-day paperwork, meetings, and student challenges in the classroom.

While the general body of literature has grown in regard to stress, research is very limited in the area of stress and early childhood special educators. Currently, only one article, Stile et al. (1987), could be located in the area of stress and early childhood special educators. Stile and colleagues conducted a two part study to determine (a) the extent to which 25 selected environmental characteristics and events were perceived to be stressful by early childhood special education (ECSE) personnel and (b) to compare the perceptions of two independent populations. In the first part of the study a 149 personnel from 10

Head Start Programs in New Mexico were given a 23-item two-part prototype instrument developed for the study addressing (a) the child, (b) physical facilities, (c) staff roles, (d) resources, (e) personal support systems, (f) temporal conditions, and (g) child's family. One hundred percent of the Head Start programs returned the instrument, which included 60% of the personnel. The results showed that salary and benefits, level of family support, time management, multiple responsibilities, and attitudes towards programming were rated highest in terms of perceived stress. In the second part of the study 76 early intervention personnel from 18 preschool programs working with 3-5 year olds in Oregon, were given the same instrument. There was again 100% of the programs return rate which included 94% of the early intervention personnel. The results showed that time management, multiple responsibilities, level of family support, attitudes toward program, and academic growth opportunities were highest in terms of perceived stress.

Because of limited available literature it appears evident that more research needs to be conducted to further examine and identify stress producing variables of early childhood special educators. The focus of this study, therefore, will be on stress factors for professionals who work with young children with handicaps.

### The Statement of the Problem

Since there appears to be limited research relating to stress producing variables for early childhood special education teachers the issue should be further investigated. Based on general research findings it is patently clear that special education teachers are not immune from stress. Since there is a paucity of research addressing stress variables impacting the ECSE teacher the present investigation focuses on a the identification of stress producing variables among teachers serving youngsters with special needs, ages birth through seven. In short, the research project identified (a) the stress producing

variables of early childhood special education teachers and (b) the ways early childhood special education teachers cope with the stressors they encounter (Smith, 1980).

In a study by Dedrick and Raschke (1988) conducted for the purpose of (a) identifying the major stressors of special educators, (b) identifying ways special educators dealt with job-related stress, and (c) identifying what special educators cite as desirable and undesirable aspects of their work environment, 480 k-12 special education teachers of a central midwestern state were sent an instrument designed by Dedrick and Raschke. This instrument consisted of four major sections (a) prioritizing stressors, (b) identifying strategies for coping with job-related stress, (c) open-ended questions about desirable, and (d) open-ended questions about undesirable work environments.

The results of the Dedrick and Raschke study showed that students with unmet needs, lack of preparation time, regular teachers attitudes, and unhelpful administrators were identified as the major stressors. Humor, focusing on accomplishments, and active participation in a variety of hobbies were identified as ways of dealing with stress. Better room accommodations, more administrative support, development of better working relationships with regular education teachers, more planning time, less paperwork, and increased integration of special students were identified as needs which were causing stress among special educators. The desirable characteristics of special educators included student progress, freedom to implement programs, small student-teacher ratios, and challenges in matching the student needs with the appropriate instructional programming.

It is assumed that the information gained from this study will be useful in identifying stress producing variables of early childhood special educators, which in turn will benefit teachers and schools. Identification of stress producing variables could assist school systems in targeting wellness activities which would be most beneficial to teachers. Various wellness activities could be designed to help early childhood special education

teachers learn coping strategies and effective mechanisms to alleviate stress. Ultimately, preschool handicapped children could be beneficiaries of teachers who are aware of and can cope with the day-to-day stress encountered in educational settings. Furthermore, these educators would be modeling, on a day-to-day basis, constructive techniques that others could utilize to reduce stress.

### Research Questions

There are several questions that will be addressed relating to stress and ECSE teachers. These questions are:

1. What are the variables that contribute to the stress of early childhood special educators?
2. What techniques are ECSE teachers utilizing to reduce or alleviate stress?
3. Are differing degrees of stress experienced by ECSE teachers associated with age, gender, years of experience, educational level, and marital status of early childhood special education teachers?
4. Are differing degrees of stress experienced by ECSE teachers associated with the location of the classroom (rural vs. urban)?
5. Are differing degrees of stress experienced by ECSE teachers associated with their assignment of home-based teacher as compared to center-based teacher?
6. Is stress of early childhood special educators associated with the operation of who is running the early childhood special education program (area education agencies as compared to the local school districts)?

### Limitations

This study was limited to early childhood special education teachers currently teaching in the state of Iowa.

The current study is descriptive in nature and was designed to obtain information concerning the status of stress in relation to early childhood special education teachers. Descriptive research is not generally directed toward hypothesis testing (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1985).

### The Definition of Terms

Early Childhood Special Educator (ECSE)--An ECSE is a professional employee who is certified by the State of Iowa Department of Education to teach in classrooms for preschool children who are handicapped.

Stress--There are numerous definitions of stress. Physiological manifestations of stress include physical exhaustion, headaches, migraines, fatigue, physical weakness, stomach cramps, back pains, ulcers, colitis, sleeplessness, chronic colds, dizziness, and neurodermatitis (Fimian & Santoro, 1981a, 1981b; Hudson & Meagher, 1983; Dunham, 1983; Jones, 1987; Truch, 1980; Welch, 1983). Emotional manifestations of stress can include depression, discontent, detachment, dehumanization or robot-like behavior, negativity or cynicism, anger, rigidity, suspiciousness, silence and withdrawal, low morale, absenteeism, inability to concentrate, lower self-esteem, disorganization, overreacting, boredom, attrition, irritability, paranoia, disorientation, and self-doubt (Dunham, 1983; Hudson & Meagher, 1983; Jones, 1987; Shaw, Bensky, & Dixon, 1981; Stiles et al., 1987; Truch, 1980). For the purpose of this study stress is defined to mean an alteration of psychological homeostasis which is usually accompanied by physiological changes (D'Arienzo et al., 1982).

Rural Educators--For the purpose of this study rural educators are defined (by the researcher) as those educators serving youngsters in towns of a population of less than 65,000 people.

Urban Educators--For the purpose of this study urban educators are defined (by the researcher) as those educators serving youngsters in towns of a population of more than 65,000 people.

### Assumptions

If it is known that both regular and special educators of the elementary and secondary level experience stress, (Beasley, 1983, 1984; Beck & Gargiulo, 1983; D'Arienzo et al., 1982; Faas, 1984; Fimian, 1983, 1985; Fimian & Blanton, 1986; Hudson & Meagher, 1983), then it could be assumed that a representative sample of early childhood special educators may also be experiencing some form of stress. Because of the limited research on stress and the early childhood special educator it is assumed that the stress producing variables have not been identified for the ECSE teaching population. It is also assumed that honest responses were given by participants with an awareness that a response represents an individual's perception at one point in time.

### The Importance of the Study

As noted earlier a great deal of research has been done in the area of stress with professional educators. Stress producing variables of regular and special educators at both the elementary and secondary level have been identified through the findings of several research studies. Early childhood special education teachers, however, have been virtually ignored in terms of research focusing on stress variables that affect them (Stile et al., 1987). There is a need to identify variables that contribute to the stress of early childhood special education teachers since there has been little research reported in this area. Once the



stress factors are identified, then efforts may be directed toward assisting ECSE teachers in developing stress management strategies.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Background

According to a poll (Truch, 1980), one-third of teachers at the elementary and secondary level contacted said that they would not go back into teaching if they had the chance to make the decision over again. In addition, only 60% of those surveyed said they plan to teach until retirement. Furthermore, the number of teachers with 20 years or more experience has dropped 50% in the last 15 years.

Hudson and Meagher (1983) surveyed a random sample of special and regular educators from the midwest. Sixty-five percent of those teachers responding said they would not encourage their children to begin a career in education. Such research dealt primarily with teachers at the elementary and secondary level.

Teaching has long been recognized as a stressful occupation (Fimian & Blanton, 1986). Evidence on research regarding stress in education dates as far back as 1933 (D'Arienzo et al., 1982). It has been estimated that teaching may be the third most stressful occupation following air traffic controllers and surgeons (Truch, 1980).

#### Factors Contributing to Stress

While it appears numerous factors can contribute to the stress level of educators, according to Beasley (1983) there is virtually no difference in the level of stress experienced by both regular and special educators. Crane and Iwanicki (1986), however, indicate that the levels of stress among special educators varies significantly depending upon the age, experience, gender, or type of classroom (i.e., resource room or a self-contained room) the teacher is assigned. Crane and Iwanicki collected data using the Stress Survey for Special Educators along with the Maslach Burnout Inventory and a Role Questionnaire from 443 special education teachers in Connecticut. The findings of this

study revealed that younger teachers experience more stress than older teachers. More experienced teachers have less stress than new teachers. Female teachers experience more stress than male teachers. Teachers of mildly handicapped children experience somewhat less stress than teachers of the severely handicapped. Teachers in resource rooms experience less stress than teachers in self-contained rooms.

Demographic characteristics are one place to look for stress producing variables. There are, however, other related factors that can contribute to stress. Other related factors contributing to the stress among special educators have been noted in studies by Fimian and Santoro (1981a, 1981b), Hudson and Meagher (1983), and McIntyre (1983). In one study conducted by Fimian and Santoro 365 special education teachers again from Connecticut were given a Special Education Teacher Stress questionnaire. In another study conducted by Hudson and Meagher (1983) a Stress and Burnout questionnaire survey method was used to gain information from regular and special educators in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. In another study conducted by McIntyre (1983) the Maslach Burnout Inventory was used. All three of these studies revealed similar findings. The results of their data collection indicated that a common cadre of stress variables were consistently targeted by special education teachers. These variables included inadequate salary, lack of professional recognition, time-limitations for paperwork, inadequate discipline procedures for students, poor attitude and behavior of administrators towards teachers, high student-to-teacher ratios, and feelings of isolation.

In a study by Beck and Gargiulo (1983) the Maslach Burnout Inventory was used to collect data on 997 special education teachers in Ohio. The findings of this study revealed that there appeared to be additional contributing stress producing variables to special education teachers. These additional stress producing variables included the performance

of custodial and managerial tasks such as increased "house keeping" and increased paperwork.

Supervisors and administrators are also on the list of contributing stress producing variables to special education teachers as can be noted in many studies (Bradfield & Fones, 1985a, 1985b; Cherniss, 1988; Crane & Iwanicki, 1986; Fimian, 1986a, 1986b; Wallace & Kass, 1986). According to Bradfield and Fones (1985a, 1985b) administrators ranked in the top 10 stress producing variables among 60 special education teachers in northern California. The information was gathered using the Life Stress Scale questionnaire and the Wilson Teacher Stress Profile. Cherniss (1988) conducted a study using the Maslach Burnout Inventory to collect data along with several observations of administrators and special education teachers in two school settings. The results revealed that "hassles" with administrators were believed by special education teachers to be the number one cause of resignations. Administrators' lack of support, lack of initiating structure, unclear goals, infrequent feedback, and lack of two-way communication with staff are just a few reasons why administrators were viewed to be high on the stress variables list among special education teachers.

Administrators were found to be among the list of stress producing variables among 502 special education teachers in Connecticut according to Crane and Iwanicki (1986). The data in this study were collected through the use of a three-part questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of the Stress Survey for Special Educators, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and the Role Questionnaire. The findings revealed that administrators were the cause of stress to special education teachers through their lack of administrative support, excessive time demands, increased regulatory paperwork, along with being unclear about what the expectations of special education teachers were. Role conflict and ambiguity

accounted for most of the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization felt by the special education teachers in this investigation.

Fimian (1986a) also noted, through a study using the Teacher Stress Inventory with 1107 special education teachers in Connecticut and Vermont, that administrative behavior was a leading cause of special education teachers perceptions of stress. The administrative behavior that was causing stress included the lack of competence, lack of availability to teachers, lack of support, lack of communication skills, poor supervision, and lack of feedback.

In a survey conducted by Wheeler et al., (1982) 410 teachers in the southwestern and midwestern United States reported administration as their common source of stress. Administrators were viewed as stressful because of their inconsistencies, lack of leadership, and disorganization. Wheeler et al., (1982) also found that dishonesty, gossip, hostile or apathetic parents were among the variables that contributed to the stress of special education teachers. Lastly, in a study conducted by Dedrick and Raschke (1988) a survey of 240 special education teachers throughout the midwestern United States indicated that lack of administrative support was among the stress producing variables for these special education teachers along with uncooperative regular education teachers, and the lack of planning time.

### Demographics and Stress

Some general findings concerning stress and the educator have been noted by Maslach (1982) and McIntyre (1983) who used the Maslach Burnout Inventory to collect data. These findings include:

1. Educators with 15 or more years experience have less stress than those who have less than 15 years experience.

2. Educators who work in self-contained rooms experience more stress than those who work other types of settings.

3. Educators teaching in overcrowded rooms experience more stress than those who teach in undercrowded rooms.

4. Educators who are married experience less stress than those who are single.

5. Women experience more emotional exhaustion than men.

6. Men experience more depersonalization than women.

7. There was no significant difference in the levels of stress of educators when it came to the types of disabilities of the students, the size of the school, or amount of post graduate education.

It is possible that these general findings would not apply to educators who work with preschool handicapped children. Since the age of youngsters being served is relatively young, the interventions provided more diverse, and the services utilized more comprehensive, different stress variables may influence teachers who work with preschool children who are handicapped.

### Summary of Literature Review

There appears to be a variety of variables that contribute to the stress of educators. Research findings have been consistent concerning the stress producing variables of special education teachers at the elementary and secondary level. Administrative behavior appears to be the most common source of stress among elementary and secondary special education teachers. There has been little information relating to identified stress factors of early childhood special education teachers in the current literature.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Subjects

The subjects included 320 Early childhood special educators currently teaching in the state of Iowa.

#### Instrumentation

A survey instrument, designed by Dedrick and Raschke (1988), consisting of four major sections was used to collect data for this study. In Section 1, ECSE teachers were asked to rank 12 items according to the relative contribution that each item plays in the educator's perception of job-related stress. Section 2 required teachers to focus on 16 strategies for dealing with job-related stress which had been previously identified in the literature according to Dedrick and Raschke (1988). Participants were requested to rank the 16 strategies for dealing with stress from items perceived as "most like me" to items perceived as "least like me". Sections 3 and 4 of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions asking teachers to elaborate comments regarding desirable and undesirable aspects of their work environment. See Appendix A for a copy of the instrument.

#### Procedure

A current list of early childhood special education teachers was obtained from the Iowa Department of Education. A letter explaining the purpose and procedure of the study was sent to each of the ECSE teachers along with the four page survey and a self-addressed envelope for easy return of the survey. See Appendix B for a copy of the introductory letter. A month later the survey was again mailed out to those early childhood special education teachers who had not yet responded. See Appendix C for a copy of the follow-up letter.

Once the surveys had been returned they were sorted to identify the following information:

1. The predominant stressors of early childhood special educators.
2. The ways early childhood special educators cope with stress.
3. The differing degrees of stress in relation to age, gender, years of experience, educational level, and marital status.
4. The similarities and differences of stress producing variables of ECSE teachers in rural areas as compared to ECSE teachers in urban areas.
5. The stress producing variables of ECSE home-based teachers as compared to ECSE center-based teachers.
6. The similarities and differences of stressors between ECSE teachers who were in programs operated by the area education agency (A.E.A.) as compared to ECSE teachers who are in programs operated by the local education agency (L.E.A.).

#### Data Analysis

The predominant stressors of early childhood special educators were determined in the following way:

1. Each stressor (uncooperative students, insufficient resources, students unmet needs, large teacher/pupil ratio, isolation from colleagues, regular classroom teachers' attitudes, lack of preparation time, unhelpful administrators, lack of support from specialized services, paperwork, nonsupportive parents, lengthy meetings) was counted to determine how many times it was ranked number one, number two, number three, and so on. An example of this can be seen using the stressor "Paperwork." Forty-one teachers completing the survey ranked paperwork as the number one stressor; 50 teachers ranked paperwork as the number two stressor; 35 teachers ranked paperwork as the number three stressor; 33 teachers ranked it as the number four stressor; 24 teachers ranked it as the fifth



stressor; 16 teachers ranked it as the sixth stressor; 20 teachers ranked it as the seventh stressor; 11 teachers ranked it as the eighth stressor; 10 teachers ranked it as the ninth stressor; four teachers ranked it as the tenth stressor; four teachers ranked it as the eleventh stressor; and three teachers ranked it as the twelfth stressor.

2. Each of the 12 rankings were then given weightings. Because the number one ranking represented the greatest source of stress in the survey, it was given a weighting of 12. The number two ranking was given a weighting of 11. The number three ranking was given a weighting of 10, and so on.

3. The sum under each ranking of each stressor was then multiplied by the weighting assigned to that ranking. An example of this can be seen using the stressor "Paperwork." Forty-one teachers ranked paperwork as the number one stressor. The number one ranking had been given a weighting of 12, so 41 is multiplied by 12 equalling 492. Fifty teachers ranked paperwork as the number two stressor. The number two ranking had been given a weighting of 11, so 50 is multiplied by 11 equalling 550.

4. The 12 numbers obtained in step 3 were then added together to get one number which would represent the relative strength of that stressor. Using the 12 numbers of the stressor "Paperwork" as an example revealed that  $492 + 550 + 350 + 297 + 192 + 112 + 120 + 55 + 40 + 12 + 8 + 3 = 2231$ . This was done for each of the 12 stressors (uncooperative students, insufficient resources, students unmet needs, large teacher/pupil ratio, isolation from colleagues, regular classroom teachers' attitudes, lack of preparation time, unhelpful administrators, lack of support from specialized services, paperwork, nonsupportive parents, lengthy meetings).

5. The numbers representing each stressor were then placed in order from highest to lowest. This yielded the strength of each stressor, from greatest source of stress to least stressful.

The ways early childhood special educators cope with stress was determined in the following way:

1. Each coping strategy was counted to determine how many times it was ranked as "most like me," "very much like me," "like me," "undecided," "unlike me," very much unlike me," and "most unlike me."
2. The strategy which appeared most frequently under each category was then placed in that category (using each strategy only one time).
3. Moving in to the "very much like me" and "very much unlike me" categories the second highest strategy utilized was noted.
4. Again, moving in towards the "like me" and "unlike me" categories the second and third highest strategies utilized were noted.
5. Moving in to the "undecided" category, the remaining three strategies utilized were noted.

The stress producing variables in relation to age, gender, years of experience, educational level, and marital status were determined by the following method:

1. Each of the categories listed above were broken down into divisions of that category, for example "Age" was separated into the following six divisions: 22-25 year olds, 26-30 year olds, 31-35 year olds, 36-40 year olds, 41-50 year olds, and 51-60 year olds; "Gender" was separated into "male" and "female" divisions; "Years of experience" was separated into the following divisions: first year, second year, third year, fourth year, fifth year, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 21-25 years; "Educational level" was separated into the following divisions: bachelor's degree, bachelor's + 15 hours, master's

degree, master's + 15 hours, and master's + 30 hours; "Marital status" was separated into the divisions of: single, married, divorced, separated, and widowed.

2. Each stressor (uncooperative students, insufficient resources, students unmet needs, large teacher/pupil ratio, isolation from colleagues, regular classroom teachers' attitudes, lack of preparation time, unhelpful administrators, lack of support from specialized services, paperwork, nonsupportive parents, lengthy meetings) was accounted for in each division of each category (age, gender, years of experience, educational level, marital status).

3. The top three stressors in each division in each category were selected. The same three steps mentioned above were also used in determining the stressors of early childhood special education teachers in relation to the geographical area in which the teacher taught (rural or urban), their teaching assignment (home-based or center-based or a combination of both home and center instruction), and the administrative organization responsible for the operation of the program (area education agency or local education agency).

The desirable and undesirable aspects of the work environment (the environment that the early childhood special education teacher works in) were determined in the following way:

1. Twenty-two characteristics representing desirable and undesirable aspects of the work environment were chosen by the researcher, an example of a desirable characteristic was children and families, and example of an undesirable characteristic was inadequate facilities, materials, and mainstreaming.

2. Each response given by the participants in this study was assigned to one of the 22 characteristics.

3. A count of responses under each characteristic was then made. For example, 287 responses revealed that children and families were desirable aspects of the work

environment, while 107 responses revealed that inadequate facilities, inadequate materials, as well as inadequate mainstreaming procedures were undesirable characteristics of the work environment.

4. The top six desirable and undesirable characteristics were then identified. Once all the data from the survey had been analyzed, a final letter thanking the respondents for participating in the survey was sent out along with some of the results of the survey. See Appendix D for a copy of the final letter.

## CHAPTER 4

## RESULTS

Summary of Results

Using the current list of early childhood special education teachers obtained from the Iowa Department of Education 320 early childhood special education teachers from the state of Iowa were mailed a four-page questionnaire. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Respondents	
<u>Teaching Assignment</u>		
Home-Based Instruction	63	(24.6%)
Center-Based Instruction	174	(67.9%)
Both Home & Center Instruction	15	(5.8%)
Nonrespondents	4	(1.5%)
<u>Years of Experience</u>		
First & Second Year	26	(10.1%)
Third-Fifth Year	59	(23.0%)
6-10 Years	79	(30.8%)
11-15 Years	66	(25.7%)
16-20 Years	16	(6.2%)
21-25 Years	6	(2.3%)
Nonrespondents	4	(1.5%)
<u>Gender</u>		
Female	244	(95.3%)
Male	8	(3.1%)
(table continues)		

(table continues)

Characteristics	Respondents	
Nonrespondents	4	(1.5%)
<u>Educational Level</u>		
BA/BS	84	(32.8%)
BA/BS + 15	112	(43.7%)
Master's	38	(14.8%)
MA + 15	10	(3.9%)
MA + 30	7	(2.7%)
Nonrespondents	5	(1.9%)
<u>Age</u>		
22-25 Years Old	22	(8.5%)
26-30 Years Old	53	(20.7%)
31-35 Years Old	73	(28.5%)
36-40 Years Old	68	(26.5%)
41-50 Years Old	27	(10.5%)
Nonrespondents	5	(1.9%)
<u>Marital Status</u>		
Single	59	(23.0%)
Married	169	(66.0%)
Divorced	18	(7.0%)
Separated	2	(.07%)
Widowed	1	(.03%)
Nonrespondents	6	(2.3%)
<u>Employment</u>		
A.E.A	119	(46.4%)
L.E.A.	113	(44.1%)
Nonrespondents	24	(9.3%)
<u>Location</u>		
Rural	179	(69.9%)
Urban	69	(26.9%)
Nonrespondents	8	(3.1%)

Each participant was asked to respond to questions that addressed: (a) the rank ordering of stressors they perceived in the profession, (b) ways of dealing with job-related stress, (c) sources of job satisfaction, and (d) suggested changes in the workplace. Respondents were also encouraged to respond to two open-ended questions and to provide any other comments they believed appropriate. A total of 256 teachers (80%) returned completed and usable questionnaires.

Table 2 presents the rankings of predetermined job stress items as perceived by early childhood special education teachers in general. An overview of the data displayed

TABLE 2

Rank Order of Identified Stressors of Early Childhood Special Education Teachers

Rank	Stressor
1	Paperwork
2	Lack of Preparation Time
3	Nonsupportive Parents
4	Students with many unmet needs
5	Unhelpful Administrators
6	Lack of Support from Specialized Services
7	Uncooperative Students
8	Large Teacher/Pupil Ratio
9	Lengthy Meetings
10	Insufficient Resources
11	Regular Classroom Teachers' Attitudes
12	Isolation from Colleagues

indicates that paperwork was a major source of stress for this group of early childhood special education teachers as was lack of preparation time. Stressors exerting a moderate degree of stress included concerns about unhelpful administrators, and lack of support from specialized services. The respondents were least concerned about isolation from colleagues, and regular classroom teachers' attitudes.

Comparisons were made among early childhood special education teachers and the differing stressors associated with age, such differences can be seen on Table 3. The

TABLE 3

Identified Stressors in Relation to Age

Age Range		Highest Stressors
22-25	(8.5%)	Paperwork Unhelpful administrators Isolation from colleagues
26-30	(20.7%)	Paperwork Nonsupportive parents Unhelpful administrators
31-35	(28.5%)	Lack of preparation time Paperwork Students with unmet needs
36-40	(26.5%)	Unhelpful administrators Lack of preparation time Nonsupportive parents
41-50	(10.5%)	Unhelpful administrators Lack of preparation time Paperwork
51-60	(3.1%)	Paperwork Uncooperative students Insufficient resources



major source of stress among 22-30 year olds was paperwork. Lack of preparation time was the major stressor among 31-35 year olds, while unhelpful administrators were the most important concern of the 36-50 year olds. Paperwork was once again the major source of stress among 51-60 year olds.

Comparisons made among early childhood special education teachers stressors associated with gender (Table 4), revealed that the major source of stress for females was paperwork, while the major source of stress among males was unhelpful administrators.

TABLE 4  
Identified Stressors in Relation to Gender

Gender		Highest Stressors
Female	(95.3%)	Paperwork Unhelpful administrators Lack of preparation time
Male	(3.1%)	Unhelpful administrators Students with unmet needs Paperwork

Table 5 shows a comparison of stressors of early childhood special education teachers related to years of teaching experience. First-year teachers reported paperwork as the major stressor. Second-year teachers believed large student-teacher ratios to be most stressful. Nonsupportive parents were the major concerns of third year teachers.

TABLE 5

Identified Stressors in Relation to Teaching Experience

Years/Respondents		Highest Stressors
1	(16)	Paperwork Isolation from colleagues
2	(10)	Large student-teacher ratios Lack of preparation time Uncooperative students
3	(23)	Nonsupportive parents Uncooperative students Unhelpful administrators
4	(14)	Unhelpful administrators Highest Stressors Lack of preparation time Paperwork
5	(22)	Unhelpful administrators Paperwork Lack of support from specialized services
6-10	(79)	Lack of preparation time Paperwork Unhelpful administrators
11-15	(66)	Unhelpful administrators Paperwork Lack of preparation time
16-20	(16)	Unhelpful administrators Uncooperative students Students with unmet needs
21-25	(6)	Paperwork Lack of preparation time Uncooperative students

Unhelpful administrators were the source of stress for fourth and fifth year teachers. Those with teaching experience of 6-10 years reported not having enough preparation time as the major stressor. Unhelpful administrators were again the major stressor for those with experience levels of 11-20 years. Paperwork however, was seen as the greatest stressor for those with 21-25 years experience.

Table 6 displays stressors associated with the educational level of early childhood special education teachers. As can be seen on Table 6 early childhood special

TABLE 6

Identified Stressors in Relation to Educational Level

Educational Level	Highest Stressors
Bachelors (32.8%)	Paperwork Uncooperative students Lack of preparation time
Bachelors + 15 (43.7%)	Unhelpful administrators Paperwork Lack of preparation time
Masters (14.8%)	Lack of preparation time Paperwork Unhelpful administrators
Masters + 15 (3.9%)	Unhelpful administrators Lack of preparation time Paperwork
Masters + 30 (2.7%)	Students with unmet needs Unhelpful administrators Lack of support from specialized services

education teachers with a B.S./B.A. degree found paperwork to be the major source of stress. Teachers with a B.S./B.A. + 15 hours report unhelpful administrators as their major source of stress. Lack of preparation time was the highest stress concern of teachers with a Master's degree. Unhelpful administrators were the greatest stressor for teachers with a Master's + 15. Teachers with a Master's + 30 reported that students with many unmet needs were their main stressor.

Table 7 shows a comparison of early childhood special education teachers stressors related to marital status. Paperwork was the major source of stress for single early childhood special education teachers. Lack of preparation time, however, was the greatest stressor among married teachers. Unhelpful administrators were reported to be of most concern among divorced teachers. Isolation from colleagues was ranked the highest for teachers who were separated from their spouse. Lack of planning time was the major stressor among teachers who were widowed.

Table 8 presents the comparison of early childhood special education teachers sources of stress related to the geographical area in which they taught. Early childhood special education teachers in the rural areas found paperwork to be the major source of stress, while teachers in the urban areas viewed lack of preparation time as the major source of stress.

Comparisons of stress of early childhood special education teachers associated with their teaching assignment appear in Table 9. Home-based teachers as well as center-based teachers reported paperwork as the major source of stress. Early childhood special education teachers who worked both as home and center teachers reported that unhelpful administrators were the main source of stress.

TABLE 7

Identified Stressors in Relation to Marital Status

Marital Status		Highest Stressors
Single	(23.0%)	Paperwork Unhelpful administrators Students with unmet needs
Married	(66.0%)	Lack of preparation time Unhelpful administrators Paperwork
Divorced	(7.0%)	Unhelpful administrators Lack of preparation time Paperwork
Separated	(.07%)	Isolation from colleagues Paperwork Lack of planning time
Widowed	(.03%)	Lack of planning time Paperwork Large student-teacher ratios

Table 10 shows the stressors of early childhood special education teachers in relation to the administrative organization responsible for the operation of the program. Those teachers who were in programs operated by the area education agency indicated that paperwork was the major stressor. While those teachers who worked in programs operated by the local school district reported unhelpful administrators as the main source of stress. In terms of the overall research

TABLE 8

Identified Stressors in Relation to Geographical Teaching Area

Area	Highest Stressors
Rural (69.9%)	Paperwork Unhelpful administrators Nonsupportive parents
Urban (26.9%)	Lack of preparation time Unhelpful administrators Paperwork

sample Table 11 shows that the use of laughter/humor was identified by respondents as the most prominent strategy for dealing with job-related stress. Hobbies and focusing on accomplishments were identified as "very much like me" ways of dealing with job-related stress. Additional activities such as reading, planning, and exercising were seen as "like me" ways of handling job-related stress.

The strategy which was least frequently utilized by early childhood special education teachers to alleviate job-related stress was yelling at students. Use of punitive control, and late arrival to work were identified as "very much unlike me" ways of dealing with job-related stress, while confronting other staff members, complaining to administrators, and joining a support group were placed in the "unlike me" cluster.

TABLE 9

Identified Stressors in Relation to Assignment

Assignment	Highest Stressors
Home-based (24.6%)	Paperwork Unhelpful administrators Nonsupportive parents
Center-based (67.9%)	Paperwork Lack of preparation time Unhelpful administrators
Both Home & Center (5.8%)	Unhelpful administrators Lack of preparation time Large student-teacher ratios

TABLE 10

Identified Stressors in Relation to the Administrative Organization Responsible for the  
Operation of Program

Operation	Highest Stressors
Area Education Agency (46.4%)	Paperwork Lack of preparation time Unhelpful administrators
Local School District (44.1%)	Unhelpful administrators Uncooperative students Lack of preparation time

TABLE 11

Order of Placement of Ways Early Childhood Special Education Teachers Deal with Job-Related Stress

Placement	Strategy
Most Like Me	Laughter/Humor
Very Much Like Me	Hobbies Focus on accomplishments
Like Me	Reading Plan Exercise
Undecided	Solicit positive comments Ventilate frustrations Leave profession Overeat/Overdrink
Unlike Me	Confront other staff members Complain to administrators Support group
Very Much Unlike Me	Use punitive control Arrive late
Most Unlike Me	Yell at kids

Table 12 shows that the research sample unanimously identified working with the students and their families as the most enjoyable and fulfilling aspect of their job. Other job satisfiers identified by the teachers in this group included competent and supportive co-workers, the freedom to be flexible and diverse, vacations and breaks, as well as being located in elementary buildings.



TABLE 12

Desirable and Undesirable Aspects of the Work Environment of Early Childhood

Special Education Teachers

List the aspects of your job that you like	If you could change aspects of the environment in which you work, what would these changes be?
1. Working with the children and their families	1. Better facilities, materials and accommodations for integration
2. Competent and supportive co-workers	2. More consistent support from administrators and co-workers
3. The flexibility, diversity, and autonomy of the job	3. More planning time available
4. Vacations and breaks	4. More professional meetings
5. Location of classrooms	5. Less paperwork
6. Salary and benefits	6. Lower student/teacher ratio

With regard to suggested changes in the workplace, respondents emphasized the need for better room accommodations as well as more materials and opportunities for integration, more administrative support, and more consistency from specialized services. In addition, the need for more planning time, more professional meetings, less paperwork, and lower student-teacher ratios were all identified as targeted aspects of the work environment in need of improvement.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Summary of the Findings

##### Demographic Characteristics

In viewing the demographic characteristics of those responding to the survey it can be seen that the majority were center-based teachers. This is probably due to the age of children the centers serve. The age range of children attending early childhood special education centers is anywhere from two-and-one-half to seven years old. Home-bound teachers serve children in the age range of birth to three years of age. Because of the age ranges served, it could be assumed that there were a greater number of children in the two-and-one-half to seven years age range than in the birth to three-year-old age range. This finding would account for the larger percentage of center-based teachers as compared to the home-based teachers. A small percentage of teachers were considered both home and center teachers. The small number of teachers who were in situations requiring them to be both home and center instruction teachers could possibly be due to a small number of children requiring early childhood special education services. A small number of children ranging in age from birth to seven years may require a part-time home-based teacher for the birth-to-three-year-olds, and a part-time center-based teacher for the three-to-seven-year-olds; or one full-time teacher with the dual responsibilities of being a part-time home-based teacher and a part-time center-based teacher.

A majority of respondents were teachers with 3-15 years of teaching experience. These teachers would probable be in the age range of approximately 25-40 years old. After 15 years of experience the percentage of teachers still teaching drops off dramatically possibly due to early retirement, or as previously mentioned because teaching is a stressful occupation.

Female early childhood special education teachers far out number the male teachers. One reason for this could be due to the lower salary that teachers make. Another possible reason could be in line with the stereotype that women are teachers, nurses . . . while men are doctors, and lawyers. This stereotype may account, in part, for the large numbers of women who are ECSE teachers.

It appeared that the majority of respondents were working towards a master's degree. Few, however, advanced past that degree. This finding could be due to the time and money involved in earning an academic degree beyond a master's. Most teachers probably continued to teach while taking night classes and summer classes in order to obtain their master's degree. Acquiring a degree in this manner could cause a significant drain on personal and energy resources. A majority of the teachers responding to the survey were married, which may be another reason for not pursuing academic work beyond a M.A. degree. The time-management skills of these teachers would have to be very good in order to accomplish all that they needed to in the limited time available to them.

The number of teachers employed through either the area education agency or the local school district was generally even. Far more teachers, however, taught in rural settings than in urban settings. Teachers may be teaching in rural settings more than urban settings due to the fact that Iowa is a rural state.

### Stressors

The results of the present study indicated that the major stressor of early childhood special education teachers in general was paperwork. This finding differs somewhat from previous studies conducted with elementary and secondary special education teachers. An example of this can be seen in the study conducted by Dedrick and Raschke (1988). A survey of 240 special education teachers throughout the midwestern United States showed

that lack of administrative support, along with uncooperative regular education teachers, and lack of planning time were the major stress producing variables.

Unlike the Dedrick and Raschke (1988) study, unhelpful administrators were ranked fifth, on a scale from 1-12 (one being the most stressful) among early childhood special education teachers in the present study. Early childhood special education teachers indicated paperwork as being the major stressor. There is a tremendous amount of paperwork to be completed anytime a child, no matter what age, is referred for special education. By the time students reach elementary or secondary special education, chances are that much of the initial paperwork had already been completed. Preschool children, however, are almost always new to a program. While a few elementary and secondary students may go through the initial referral procedure, all of the preschool children go through this process.

Lack of preparation time was ranked as the second highest stressor for teachers in this study. This finding could be true for any teacher. There is never enough preparation time. There are only so many working hours in a day. As a result of limited preparation time many teachers take their work home in order to get their plans and preparations caught up. Taking work home can be a major stressor since many of these teachers also have a spouse, and possibly children at home which compete for available time.

Nonsupportive parents ranked third as a stressor for teachers in this study. This finding is probably a major stressor since many of these parents may not have acknowledged their child's disability and are still in the denial stage of the grief cycle. Believing that nothing is wrong with their child, parents may be resistant to such news. It is normal for parents to go through the grief cycle and return to any stage in the cycle at any time.

### Stressors and Age

A shift of the predominant stressors can be seen as age changes. Paperwork is the major stressor among teachers 22-30 years old. This group of teachers may be new to the profession, and may not be accustomed to the paperwork needed for children entering early childhood special education programs.

Teachers 31-35 years old reported lack of preparation time as the major stressor. These teachers may have shifted focus after mastering paperwork. Since paperwork may be more manageable with experience, they may tend to be concentrating on the instructional aspects of their work.

Unhelpful administrators were the main stressors of 36-50 year olds. This finding could be due to the fact that these teachers are older, more educated, and have a better understanding of how their programs should operate. Perhaps these teachers had ideas and suggestions concerning their program but find little support to implement them, thus the resulting frustration and resentment combines to create stress.

Teachers who were in the 51-60 years old age range reported paperwork as the major stressor. These teachers were probably accustomed to the existing paperwork, and may be resistant to the changes taking place as a result from new legislation and subsequent procedures leading to a greater volume of paperwork.

### Stressors and Experience

First year teachers found paperwork to be the major stressor. This finding could be due to problems associated with being new to the profession. By the second year, the major stressor had shifted to large student-teacher ratio. This finding could be due to the number of individualized educational programs that need to be developed and updated, the planning and preparing of materials and activities for the wide range of abilities of the

students or the inappropriate and disruptive behavior that may exist from having many students.

By the time teachers were in their third year, nonsupportive parents were the major stressor. These teachers have probably had the chance to try to get the families more involved in school and in home activities with their child. Through all the teacher's efforts of getting the family more involved with their child they have probably met some resistance, or not seen the expected progress.

Fourth and fifth year teachers reported unhelpful administrators as major stressors. This finding could be due to frustrations from not receiving the support needed from administrators. Some administrators may not have much special education training in their background creating limitations in their ability to respond to special education related problems. Early childhood special education teachers may have been expecting more from their administrators than they were able to give.

Once teachers reached the 6-10 year experience level lack of preparation time was the major stressor. Perhaps these teachers realized they were not getting what they needed from their administrator in the past so they tried to deal with problems on their own and in doing so they found there was not enough preparation time to take care of and meet all the needs that they would like to meet. These teachers care very much about the children and want to give them quality education. To plan and prepare activities to meet the needs of every individual takes a great deal of time. It can become very stressful when teachers want to do so much for the children but because of the limited time only a little can be done. Teachers take on the "caring" role and want to always "do more" for the children.

Unhelpful administrators were once again the major stressor for teachers with 11-20 years experience. Teachers have certain expectations of their administrators and when these administrators fail to meet some of these expectations teachers become stressed.

Teachers with 11-20 years experience have definite ideas of how programs should operate and why there are problems, but when there is not anyone to listen and support them, or someone who is knowledgeable and able to remedy situations, then the stress level is likely to escalate.

Teachers with 21-25 years experience reported paperwork as the major stressor. For them the paperwork may be viewed as tedious. The forms, jargon, rules, and policies may be changing, so there could be new "paperwork" to learn. They may be expressing some difficulty in adjusting to changes, especially when school operations appear to be running smooth.

### Stressors and Education

Teachers with a bachelor's degree found paperwork to be the major stressor. This could be due to several possibilities such as being new, becoming accustomed to the forms, lesson planning, and the day-to-day challenges of new teachers.

Teachers with a bachelors + 15 hours found unhelpful administrators stressful. This finding could be due to understanding how the system works through additional coursework and realizing what administrators could be doing to facilitate instructional and program management.

Those teachers with a master's degree reported lack of preparation time a concern. These teachers were probably trying to give the children the best education they are able, but express frustration because of limited time.

Teachers with a masters + 15 hours viewed unhelpful administrators as their source of stress. Based on their experience and training these teachers probably experience more frustration than their peers because they may see administrative deficiencies that limit their own effectiveness.

Teachers with a masters + 30 found students with unmet needs as the greatest stressor. This finding could be due to having a greater understanding of the child as a "whole" and what can affect the child's educational programming and progress. The teachers, because of their education and experience, are able to see how the instructional program, as well as the family dynamics, determine the child's educational growth. Frustration may be expressed by teachers who see a child with potential being destroyed by the family.

### Stressors and Marital Status

Single teachers reported paperwork as the major stressor. Majority of these teachers are probably younger teachers with less experience. According to Crane and Iwanicki (1986), younger teachers experience more stress than older teachers. Less experienced teachers have more stress than more experienced teachers.

Married teachers viewed lack of preparation time as the major stressor. This finding might be connected with time management skills as well as the demands made on their time other than those associated with school.

Divorced teachers identified unhelpful administrators as the main stressor. This finding may be connected with their personal lives. Perhaps these teachers were expressing resentment of authority figures especially if administrators were seen as marginally competent.

Separated teachers found isolation from colleagues stressful. Again, personal lives may be influencing their professional lives. These teachers may feel the need to have a co-worker or colleague around to discuss the positive and negative events of the day, to get as well as give emotional support that is needed in the teaching profession.

### Stressors and Geographical Area

Teachers in rural areas thought that paperwork was the main stressor while teachers in urban areas ranked lack of preparation time to be the main stressor. There may be a link



between paperwork and lack of preparation time. Paperwork and preparation time both require the teacher's time away from students.

### Stressors and Assignment

Home-based teachers as well as center-based teachers ranked paperwork to be the major stressor. As mentioned earlier, paperwork is a major stressor for a variety of reasons. Perhaps these teachers found paperwork to be a major stressor because they are busy with children most of the day. Home-based teachers spend a lot of time on the road driving from one home to another home leaving little time for paperwork. Center-based teachers may have children arriving at 8:00 a.m. and not leaving until 3:35 p.m., leaving little time for paperwork.

Teachers who work as both home and center-based teachers reported unhelpful administrators as the major stressor. This could be due to being assigned the dual role of home-based teacher and center-based teacher. There are a lot of responsibilities and work involved in each of these assignments. Perhaps these teachers were expressing frustration due to the vastly different roles they take on in being both a home-based teacher as well as a center-based teacher. Perhaps there are feelings of resentment towards their administrators for having a position requiring remarkably different skills for the teachers to exhibit in daily routine.

### Stressors and Operation of Program

Teachers who are employed through area education agencies reported paperwork as the major stressor, while teachers employed through their local school district reported unhelpful administrators as the main stressor.

Teachers with the area education agencies have many forms to fill out on every child as well as to write individual educational programs, lesson plans, progress notes, reports, and

much more. This could account for the abundance of paperwork being viewed as stressful among these teachers.

Some local school districts have administrators who have limited knowledge regarding special education policy and procedures. Uninformed administrators can be very frustrating especially to teachers with limited experience because they may be looking to their administrators for guidance concerning their special education classroom as well as special education policies and procedures.

### Coping with Stress

This group of teachers reported choosing positive techniques for dealing with job-related stress. Laughter/humor was chosen as the "most like me" way of dealing with stress, while yelling at students was viewed as "most unlike me". This finding appears to be a healthy perspective for teachers working with young children who have special needs.

### Desirables and Undesirables

Teachers in this study enjoyed working with children. They would like to have more done for the children, including better accommodations for integration. There appeared to be some contradiction over whether co-workers were competent and supportive. Competent and supportive co-workers were ranked second among the desirable characteristics of the work environment, while needing more competent and consistent support from co-workers was ranked second under the undesirable aspects of the work environment.

Teachers found the flexibility and diversity of their jobs rewarding but needed more planning time. Flexibility and diversity gives variety to the day-to-day routine. Teachers indicated the breaks and vacations a desirable aspect of the job, but would like to participate in more professional meetings. Respondents liked

having their classrooms located in elementary buildings but would like to have less paperwork and lower student-teacher ratios.

### Conclusions

Stress has been identified as a significant problem in special education (Cherniss, 1988). All teachers are under some stress, the frequency and strength with which stressful incidents occur vary from teacher to teacher (Fimian, 1983). As special educators experience stress, students can be affected. Highly stressed teachers may think only of their own survival needs in the classroom. The daily lives of special education teachers are made up of complex interrelationship problems for which simple solutions may be difficult to find.

It can be concluded from the present study that early childhood special education teachers are not immune to stress. An example of correlating stress producing variables of early childhood special educators can be seen when comparing the two categories of age and years of teaching experience. ECSE teachers who were 22-30 years old with anywhere from 1-5 years of teaching experience reveal varied stressors. These stressors included paperwork, large student-teacher ratios, nonsupportive parents, and unhelpful administrators. As teachers got older and gained more teaching experience there was a shift in the amount of and source of stress. Teachers who were 31-35 years old with 6-10 years of teaching experience found the lack of preparation time to be the greatest stressor. Another shift can be seen among teachers who were 36-50 years old with 11-20 years of teaching experience. These teachers reported unhelpful administrators as the major source of their stress. Then one last shift can be seen among teachers who were 51-60 years old with 21-25 years of teaching experience. These teachers reported that the stress producing variable of greatest concern was paperwork. The major stressor of early childhood special education teachers appears to be paperwork and lack of preparation time, with unhelpful

administrators trailing closely behind. However, early childhood special education teachers have chosen positive means, such as laughter and humor, for dealing with the job-related stressors that they encounter.

### Implications and Recommendations

Stress is a condition of life (Johnson & Harkins, 1984). Emotional, behavioral, and physiological manifestations of stress can be the end result of prolonged or unrelieved stress (Fimian & Santoro, 1983). Stress among special education teachers is not a temporary phenomenon that can be easily eradicated through short term approaches. Stress of teachers may have an impact on the manner in which the teacher is able to teach thereby having an effect on the students and the learning that is actually taking place. Teachers must identify coping strategies to include in their personal stress prevention program, keeping in mind that each person is unique and that an effective coping strategy for one person may not yield positive results for another (Dedrick & Raschke, 1988)

This study, although constrained by the limitations of the questionnaire, focused on the identification of factors that contribute to job-related stress among early childhood special education teachers in Iowa as well as the delineation of strategies employed to relieve stressors in the workplace.

As noted earlier, little research has been done in the area of early childhood special education teachers and stress. Stress is and always will be a reality of the teaching profession. Local education agencies as well as area education agencies need to become aware of the stress producing variables of early childhood special education teachers and the effect this has on the classroom. Efforts need to be directed toward assisting early childhood special education teachers in the development of stress management strategies unique to their own situation. At the present time there appears to be a greater demand than

supply of ECSE teachers, hence making it an important issue to retain those currently teaching at the early childhood special education level.

Stress management strategies may include but not be limited to diet and exercise, relaxation techniques, social support systems, goal setting, networking, separating job from personal life, and being good to one's self (Raschke et al., 1988). There continues to be a need for further research in the area of stress and early childhood special education teachers. This study has raised the following questions:

1. Why in this study was "paperwork" found to be the main stressor when in previous studies of special educators "administrators" were cited as the major source of stress?
2. Why in this study do the stressors shift with the age of the teachers?
3. What, if any, are strategies utilized by local education agencies and area education agencies to reduce or alleviate stress producing variables of early childhood special education teachers?

To nurture humanness in schools means first to nurture humanness in those who staff the schools (Fimian & Blanton, 1986).

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Appendix A  
Survey Instrument

Early Childhood Special Education  
Teacher Survey:  
Factors Affecting Professional Practice

Introduction:

This survey is being directed towards Early Childhood Special Education Teachers for the purposes of identifying stress producing variables as well as identification of how ECSE teachers cope with the stress encountered in their profession.

Neither individual nor institutional names are requested and individual responses will be treated with complete confidentiality. Your cooperation in this matter is greatly appreciated.

Teaching Responsibilities:

- ☐ Home-Based Instruction (part-time employment)  
☐ Home-Based Instruction (full-time employment)  
☐ Center-Based Instruction (part-time employment)  
☐ Center-Based Instruction (full-time employment)  
☐ Home-Based Instruction (part-time) Center-Based Instruction (part-time)

Instructional Environment:

- ☐ Home-Based Instruction (all day)  
☐ Home-Based Instruction (morning) & Classroom Instruction (afternoon)  
☐ Classroom Instruction (morning) & Home-Based Instruction (afternoon)  
☐ Classroom Instruction - same group all day long  
☐ Classroom Instruction - morning group & afternoon group

Specific Student Population:

Disability	Same Group All Day	a.m.	p.m.
Multi-Categorical	yes/no	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mentally Disabled	yes/no	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Severe & Profound	yes/no	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Behaviorally Disordered	yes/no	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Current Classroom Teaching Assignment:

Employment through (circle): Area Education Agency Local School District  
 Physical location of classroom (circle): School Other  
 # of children in classroom (circle): 1-5 6-8 9-10 11-13 14-15  
 # of children weighted: 2.4 \_\_\_\_\_ 3.6 \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Full-Time Teaching Experience(circle):

1 2 3 4 5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 25+

Marital Status(circle):

single married divorced separated widowed

Sex: ☐ female ☐ male

Age(circle): 22-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41-50 51-60 61-70

Highest Degree Held:

☐ BA/BS ☐ BA/BS+15 ☐ Master's ☐ MA+15 ☐ MA+30 ☐ Ed.S ☐ Ph.D/Ed.D

Certifications Held:

☐ 53(kindergarten) ☐ 09(early childhood special ed.) ☐ 59(severe)  
☐ 10(k-9) ☐ other

Location:

☐ Rural(pop. under 65,000) ☐ Urban(pop. over 65,000)

### SURVEY QUESTIONS

Given your experience as a special educator, please rank the following items in terms of the degree of stress each item causes you. The item of greatest stress would be ranked #1, next #2, and so on. Please be certain to use all twelve ranks and assign only one rank to each item.

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Source of Stress</u>
_____	Uncooperative and disruptive students
_____	Insufficient resources (materials/physical plant)
_____	Students who have too many unmet needs
_____	Large teacher/pupil ratio
_____	Isolation from colleagues (special/regular education teachers)
_____	Regular class teachers who either do not understand and/or resent the role of the special education teacher
_____	Lack of sufficient preparation time
_____	Administrators who are neither knowledgeable nor helpful with regard to needs/problems faced by special educators
_____	Lack of competence/support from specialized services in designing and implementing comprehensive programs to meet the needs of exceptional learners
_____	IEP's and general <u>paperwork</u> which reduce the time required for planning and instruction
_____	Parents (of special education children) who are either non-supportive of special education programs or who do not follow through on suggestions made by special educators
_____	Lengthy and frequent meetings and staffings addressing the needs of exceptional students

## WAYS OF DEALING WITH JOB-RELATED STRESS

Please examine the 16 items listed below which represent some of the ways that people deal with stress in the workplace. Then place a number which corresponds to one of the 16 descriptors in an appropriate box on the Q-sort. For example, the item which best illustrates the way you deal with work-related stress would go in the "most like me" box, the phrase which least represents how you would handle stress would go in the "most unlike me" box. Proceed in this fashion until there is a corresponding number for each of the 16 boxes.

1. Tell at kids
2. Complain to administrators/supervisors
3. Exercise
4. Focus on accomplishments
5. Recreational reading
6. Confrontations with other staff members
7. Overeating/overdrinking
8. Outside hobbies
9. Arrive late
10. Laughter/humor
11. Join a support group
12. Ventilate frustrations on loved ones
13. Spend more time in planning activities
14. Solicit positive comments from students
15. Utilize more punitive control measures
16. Entertain thoughts about leaving the teaching profession

A pyramid diagram consisting of seven horizontal rows of boxes. The top row has one box labeled "UN-DECIDED". The second row has two boxes labeled "LIKE ME" and "UNLIKE ME". The third row has three boxes labeled "VERY MUCH LIKE ME", "UN-DECIDED", and "VERY MUCH UNLIKE ME". The fourth row has four boxes labeled "MOST LIKE ME", "LIKE ME", "UNLIKE ME", and "MOST UNLIKE ME". The fifth row has five boxes labeled "MOST LIKE ME", "VERY MUCH LIKE ME", "UN-DECIDED", "VERY MUCH UNLIKE ME", and "MOST UNLIKE ME". The sixth row has six boxes labeled "MOST LIKE ME", "LIKE ME", "UN-DECIDED", "UNLIKE ME", "VERY MUCH UNLIKE ME", and "MOST UNLIKE ME". The seventh row has seven boxes labeled "MOST LIKE ME", "VERY MUCH LIKE ME", "LIKE ME", "UN-DECIDED", "UNLIKE ME", "VERY MUCH UNLIKE ME", and "MOST UNLIKE ME".

3. List three things about your job that you like:

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(3) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. If you could change two things about the environment in which you work, what would these two changes be?

(1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Additional comments:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B  
Introductory Letter



April 25, 1990

Dear Early Childhood Special Education Teacher:

We need your help! Clearly, you are challenged every day and encounter a variety of stressors in your profession as you work with special need preschoolers and their families. In order to identify the major stressors encountered and ways early childhood special education teachers cope with the stressors, we are requesting (PLEASE) that you take 10 minutes to fill out the enclosed survey. The compiled information will help us target ways your job could be altered to be less stressful. We promise to send you a copy of the compiled results next fall for your time and effort in completing the survey. A stamped, self addressed envelope is enclosed for you to return your survey. Your cooperation and support is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely, —

Donna Raschke, PhD and  
Brenda Hanken, MAE

Enclosures  
DR/mb

Appendix C  
Follow-Up Letter





May 22, 1990

Dear Early Childhood Special Education Teacher:

We still need your help, PLEASE! We know this is a busy time of the year but could you take just 10 minutes to fill out the enclosed survey. The compiled information will help us target ways your job could be altered to be less stressful. We promise to send you a copy of the compiled results next fall for your time and effort in completing the survey. A stamped, self addressed envelope is enclosed for you to return your survey. Your cooperation and support is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Donna Raschke, Ph.D. and  
Brenda Hanken, MAE

Enclosures  
DR:js

## Appendix D

### Final Letter



Dear Early Childhood Special Educator,

Last spring you used some of your valuable time to fill out a survey regarding stress variables and coping mechanisms in relation to your profession. We thank you for completing the survey and as we promised last spring, want to provide you with the results of the survey. We found the results extremely interesting (i.e., paperwork, lack of preparation time and nonsupportive parents as the major three stressors; laughter, hobbies and focus on accomplishments as predominant ways of coping with stress; while yelling at kids, use of punitive control and arriving late as most infrequent ways of coping with stress) but even more challenging to our profession are the concerns many of you expressed in long narrative comments regarding the need to better communicate across service providers and the frustrations and challenges many of you are facing with regards to the need for better facilities, materials and accommodations for integration.

Now that Brenda has successfully completed her thesis with Ed.S. in hand, our plans are to write up the results for publication, hopefully at the national level, and to disseminate the results obtained in an adjudicated early childhood special education journal. Our thanks to you in helping us obtain this information. Tables tabulating the results are enclosed.

Sincerely,

Donna Raschke, PhD  
Brenda Hanken

TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Respondents	
<u>Teaching Assignment</u>		
Home-Based Instruction	63	(24.6%)
Center-Based Instruction	174	(67.9%)
Both Home & Center Instruction	15	(5.8%)
Nonrespondents	4	(1.5%)
<u>Years of Experience</u>		
First & Second Year	26	(10.1%)
Third-Fifth Year	59	(23.0%)
6-10 Years	79	(30.8%)
11-15 Years	66	(25.7%)
16-20 Years	16	(6.2%)
21-25 Years	6	(2.3%)
Nonrespondents	4	(1.5%)
<u>Gender</u>		
Female	244	(95.3%)
Male	8	(3.1%)
Nonrespondents	4	(1.5%)
<u>Educational Level</u>		
BA/BS	84	(32.8%)
BA/BS + 15	112	(43.7%)
Master's	38	(14.8%)
MA + 15	10	(3.9%)

(table continues)

Characteristics	Respondents	
MA + 30	7	(2.7%)
Nonrespondents	5	(1.9%)
<u>Age</u>		
22-25 Years Old	22	(8.5%)
26-30 Years Old	53	(20.7%)
31-35 Years Old	73	(28.5%)
36-40 Years Old	68	(26.5%)
41-50 Years Old	27	(10.5%)
Nonrespondents	5	(1.9%)
<u>Marital Status</u>		
Single	59	(23.0%)
Married	169	(66.0%)
Divorced	18	(7.0%)
Separated	2	(.07%)
Widowed	1	(.03%)
Nonrespondents	6	(2.3%)
<u>Employment</u>		
A.E.A	119	(46.4%)
L.E.A.	113	(44.1%)
Nonrespondents	24	(9.3%)
<u>Location</u>		
Rural	179	(69.9%)
Urban	69	(26.9%)
Nonrespondents	8	(3.1%)

TABLE 2

Rank Order of Identified Stressors of Early Childhood Special Education Teachers

Rank	Stressor
1	Paperwork
2	Lack of Preparation Time
3	Nonsupportive Parents
4	Students with many unmet needs
5	Unhelpful Administrators
6	Lack of Support from Specialized Services
7	Uncooperative Students
8	Large Teacher/Pupil Ratio
9	Lengthy Meetings
10	Insufficient Resources
11	Regular Classroom Teachers' Attitudes
12	Isolation from Colleagues

TABLE 3

Order of Placement of Ways Early Childhood Special Education Teachers Deal with Job-Related Stress

Placement	Strategy
Most Like Me	Laughter/Humor
Very Much Like Me	Hobbies Focus on accomplishments
Like Me	Reading Plan Exercise
Undecided	Solicit positive comments Ventilate frustrations Leave profession Overeat/Overdrink
Unlike Me	Confront other staff members Complain to administrators Support group
Very Much Unlike Me	Use punitive control Arrive late
Most Unlike Me	Yell at kids

TABLE 4

Desirable and Undesirable Aspects of the Work Environment of Early ChildhoodSpecial Education Teachers

List the aspects of your job that you like	If you could change aspects of the environment in which you work, what would these changes be?
1. Working with the children and their families	1. Better facilities, materials and accommodations for integration
2. Competent and supportive co-workers	2. More consistent support from administrators and co-workers
3. The flexibility, diversity, and autonomy of the job	3. More planning time available
4. Vacations and breaks	4. More professional meetings
5. Location of classrooms	5. Less paperwork
6. Salary and benefits	6. Lower student/teacher ratio