Professional burnout and compassion fatigue among early childhood special education teachers

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Professional burnout and compassion fatigue among early childhood special education teachers

by

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This study explored stress and coping as related to the phenomena of professional burnout, compassion fatigue, and resiliency in early childhood special education (ECSE) teachers. Interviews and observations were conducted with four ECSE teachers and the data were analyzed to identify stressors, coping strategies, and resiliency outcomes. First, ECSE teachers experienced stressors from teaming, working with families who face challenges, and carrying high caseloads and paperwork demands. Second, ECSE teachers coped in a variety of ways with the stress they experienced. It was difficult to attribute the use of specific coping strategies directly to less burnout and compassion fatigue for these ECSE teachers. However, teachers did experience varying degrees of personal and professional job satisfaction due to their ability to form supportive relationships with colleagues, their dependence on familiar routines, their practice of restricting boundaries with families, and their ability to balance their personal and work lives. Finally, implications for further research, policy, and practice are presented.
CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

This study explored stress and coping as related to the phenomena of professional burnout, compassion fatigue, and resiliency in early childhood special education (ECSE). Using qualitative methodology, this multi-case study examined four ECSE teachers’ experiences with work stress, their chosen coping strategies, and their job satisfaction. It is anticipated that the knowledge generated in this study will offer new insights to the ECSE field about helping teachers build an ability to bounce back from work stressors in order to maintain their dedication to teaching.

Previous studies have focused on professional burnout and compassion fatigue in general, describing the triggers and effects on individuals and the agencies where they work. Many studies concentrated on the help giving fields of nursing, counseling, social work, and teaching; burnout was found to be prevalent among helping professionals (Sprang, Clark, & Whitt-Woosley, 2007). Many of these fields have similarities to ECSE of working with families, adopting multiple roles while working, and performing a variety of responsibilities.

There was a large amount of literature on professional burnout among helping professions in general, however, that pertaining to ECSE teachers was very limited. Recent studies have primarily focused on elementary, secondary, and higher education teachers, whereas studies involving ECSE teachers are dated. For example, Krahn, Thom, Hale, and Williams (1995) conducted a review of available literature from the late 1980s to mid 1990s about professional burnout for early intervention professionals from the medical field rather than those with educational backgrounds.
Compassion fatigue in teachers was rarely the focus of previous investigators. At best, emotional labor has been related to the service fields, especially those that involve workers having extensive contact with clients or customers (Hochschild, 1983). Schaubroeck and Jones (2000) operationalized emotional labor as “the experience of workers in having to suppress negative emotions and express positive emotions in order to meet the demands of their jobs” (p. 165). In the service fields, workers may attempt to have emotional control in order to sustain positive relationships with those being served (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002).

Resiliency has been studied as a personality trait in youth, families, and trauma survivors, as well as the fields of nursing, marriage and family therapy, counseling and teaching. Most studies focused on coping with stressful conditions or circumstances, such as depression, abuse, living in foster care, various diseases (e.g., HIV, multiple sclerosis), or natural disasters. In relation to work, resiliency studies centered on overcoming job stress, building job satisfaction, becoming empowered, and possessing intent to stay in the current position or field. By taking resiliency into consideration, the focus has shifted from a negative outcome (e.g., professional burnout and compassion fatigue) to a positive outcome (e.g., coping strategies and job fulfillment) that builds on strengths (Howard & Johnson, 2004).

**Study Rationale and Significance**

The study was important because the resources for ECSE teachers continue to decrease whereas job responsibilities continue to increase. As a result, ECSE teachers may experience professional burnout from various job responsibilities, such as paperwork, long working hours, and caseload size. Additionally, ECSE teachers may experience compassion
fatigue from being in constant contact with families who face highly stressful living situations. In contrast, when ECSE teachers develop resilience, they are better able to cope with job responsibilities and stressors.

**Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the stressors that may lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue for early childhood special education (ECSE) teachers as well as how they cope and build strategies for resiliency. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are basic stressors that ECSE teachers face that may lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue?
2. How do ECSE teachers cope with stressors in order to help alleviate and prevent professional burnout and compassion fatigue?
3. How do stressors and coping strategies interact to influence resiliency or sustain personal and professional job satisfaction for ECSE teachers?

**Research Approach**

With the approval of the University’s Institutional Review Board, this researcher studied the experiences of stress and coping in the lives of ECSE teachers. Four ECSE teachers who served families with children, birth through age five years, with special needs were recruited from Area Education Agencies (AEA) around the state of Iowa. Qualitative research methods were used to gain in-depth knowledge about the ECSE teachers in the form of ethnographic case studies.

The methods of data collection included individual interviews and observations to achieve triangulation of data. Furthermore, all interviews were audio-recorded and
transcribed. Coding of data occurred on an ongoing basis in order to develop and refine codes as data were collected and analyzed. Finally, member checks and peer review were incorporated at different phases of the study to address trustworthiness and rigor of the study.

**Researcher Positionality**

As an early childhood specialist for 13 years, I am very interested in professional burnout, compassion fatigue, and resiliency for the early childhood special education (ECSE) field. I understand the many roles and responsibilities my colleagues in the field face in terms of serving multiple school districts and families, volunteering or being placed on various committees at the local and state level, and completing two different types of paperwork (the Individualized Family Service Plan for birth-to-three services and Individual Education Program for preschool services). As an advocate in the field, I am very interested in who and what keeps my colleagues in the field despite the overload of responsibilities and emotional toil the job can take on them. I am very concerned about the shortage of ECSE professionals and how detrimental turnover of staff can be on families, agencies, and the early intervention system.

Since I have been in the field as a service provider, I have a lot of insight about the system in terms of the process, teaming, and working with families. This was positive because I did not have to be learning about the system of ECSE over the course of this study. This was an advantage in terms of showing participants that I have a vested interest in ECSE and the families receiving supports from it.

**Definition of Terms**

*Compassion fatigue:* Figley (2002) described this as losing the capacity to work effectively due to dealing with the suffering of others. Professionals end up feeling helpless,
confused and isolated from sources of support. Compassion fatigue is treatable if professionals identify and take steps to alleviate its effects.

**Coping:** According to Folkman and Moskowitz (2004), coping is a process that is affected by personality traits and emotions. The process begins when a person believes her goals are being threatened. The person assesses the threat and determines the resources needed for resolution. If the person is able to resolve the threat using positive strategies, then positive emotions dominate. If the threat results in an ambiguous outcome, negative emotions dominate.

**Emotional labor:** Hochschild (1983) described this as the management of a professional’s emotions. In surface acting, the professional masks true emotions in order to display socially acceptable emotions (Zhang & Zhu, 2008). Deep acting involves the professional reframing the situation in order to restore empathy for a client.

**Professional burnout:** Freudenberger (1974) created the term to describe a condition causing physical and emotional decline due to work-related circumstances. According to the Maslach and Jackson (1981), burnout has been defined as a response to prolonged stressors resulting in feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of a sense of personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is the result of daily work responsibilities causing feelings of overextension and exhaustion. Depersonalization relates to negative thoughts and feelings for colleagues and clients. Lack of personal accomplishment is a sense of decreased self-esteem and ability to achieve. Finally, burnout may result in professionals leaving their job (Figley, 2002).

**Reflective supervision:** A “collaborative relationship for professional growth that improves program quality and strengthens practice” (Shahmoon-Shanok, 2009, p. 7). The
relationship between the supervisor and supervisee is built over time into trusting, reliable, and respectful exchanges that are regularly scheduled. The purpose of reflective supervision is to improve the quality of services to families and children by positively affecting interactions between the supervisor and the supervisee, supervisee and the parents, and the parents and the child.

Resiliency: Sumison (2003) described resiliency as “the ability to continue to find deep and sustaining personal and professional satisfaction in one’s work as an early childhood educator despite the presences of multiple adverse factors and circumstances that have led many to leave the field” (p. 143). Bobek (2002) reported that resiliency is the ability to differentiate stressful situations and choose the appropriate coping strategy for each situation based on previous experiences. Stanford (2001) equated resiliency to a reservoir.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section summarizes literature relevant to the phenomena of professional burnout and compassion fatigue. Each phenomenon is described in terms of what it looks like and potential effects on professionals. Furthermore, literature on the warning signs and triggers of professional burnout and compassion fatigue is presented. Resiliency is discussed as related to what professional and personal factors affect teachers’ ability to stay in the field of education. The literature review is organized as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Organizing the Literature Review.
Professional Burnout

The phenomenon of professional burnout is universal to employees in all organizations and has been studied for over 30 years (Cates Templeton & Satcher, 2007; Ghorpade et al., 2007). Freudenberger (1974) was the first to study professional burnout after noticing work-related warning signs in his patients. Professional burnout is a process resulting from work overload (e.g., high caseloads, and organizational stressors, work environment) (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006; Sprang, Clark, & Whitt-Woosley, 2007; Stamm, 1997). Various symptoms are indicative of professional burnout, including affective, cognitive, physical, behavioral, and motivational symptoms (Cates Templeton & Satcher, 2007). In their review, Krahn et al. (1995) reported professional burnout as a phenomenon of “physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and cognitive weariness” associated with chronic stress (p. 2). In the help giving fields, professional burnout is challenging because it tends to lead to a high incidence of staff turnover, which increases the costs of services, reduces cohesiveness among professionals, and weakens the functions of agencies (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006).

Not surprisingly, those who are more likely to exhibit professional burnout in the form of emotional exhaustion are women (Ghorpade et al., 2007; Sprang et al., 2007), which make up the majority of professionals in help giving fields. Female teachers are more likely to have higher levels of stress and experience professional burnout in comparison to male teachers (Antioniou, Polychroni, & Vlachakis, 2006). In addition, female teachers often allow job-related stress to affect their personal lives. Increasingly, teachers are reporting professional burnout characteristics, which cause effects that are emotional and physical for the teacher and costly for schools (Cano-Garcia, Padilla-Munoz, & Carrasco-Ortiz, 2005;
Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue affects help giving fields, but is different from professional burnout. The definition of compassion fatigue originated in the help giving fields, including teaching, social work, counseling, and healthcare. Professionals who go into the help giving fields may be inclined to a sense of responsibility for caring for others (Figley, 2002). Figley (1995) described compassion fatigue as the outcome of being in prolonged contact with someone experiencing trauma with the result(s) becoming apparent in the workplace and home. Not surprising, when professionals experience compassion fatigue, they tend to lose the ability to cope with the suffering of others (Figley, 2002).

As professionals act more benevolently toward their clients, they are even more apt to be affected by the clients’ situations to the point of emotional overload, which leads to the possibility of no longer being helpful (Conrad & Kellar-Guenter, 2006). Professionals who are experiencing compassion fatigue may express their feelings with terms such as: “no energy for it anymore,” “emptied, nothing left to give,” “not wanting to go there again,” and “why am I doing this?” (Wright, 2004, p.3). Consequently, compassion fatigue may eventually lead to professional burnout (Conrad & Kellar-Guenter, 2006). Finally, the recovery rate for a person experiencing compassion fatigue was commonly much quicker than that of professional burnout (Figley, 1995).

Warning Signs and Triggers

Most of the research related to triggers and warning signs for professional burnout and compassion fatigue has been conducted in the medical field. For example, Maytum,
Bielski Heiman, and Garwick (2004) used qualitative methods to interview 20 pediatric nurses who worked with children with chronic conditions and their families. The focus of their study was to identify triggers and coping strategies used by nurses in different settings to manage compassion fatigue and burnout. The findings showed that nurses suffer from a variety of symptoms, both physical and emotional, related to compassion fatigue and burnout. Most of the nurses were able to recognize the triggers for the progression of compassion fatigue, which lead to later, longer-lasting experiences with burnout. Interestingly, nurses felt it was possible to stay at their jobs while experiencing compassion fatigue by making changes to take care of themselves; the same was not said about burnout.

Triggers for compassion fatigue were both work-related and personal. Maytum et al. (2004) found the majority of triggers for professional burnout and compassion fatigue were work-related types as opposed to personal types in their study. The most common trigger related to professional roles was feelings of not being supported by a supervisor. Study respondents also reported unclear expectations and changes in the professional role as triggers. In relation to work overload, professionals described working overtime, work infringing on their personal lives, and not having enough time to provide adequate services. Finally, broader systems issues leading to professional burnout and compassion fatigue were related to unreasonable policies, staff shortages, excessive paperwork, and professionals feeling like they have to justify their positions. As far as personal triggers, professionals reported becoming too closely connected with families so that professional boundaries were blurred, taking things too personally, putting unrealistic expectations on themselves, and experiencing personal family issues.
In another study, Meadors and Lamson (2008) examined compassion fatigue in 185 health care providers for children with chronic illnesses in intensive care units using pretest and posttest surveys. Participants attended a four-hour seminar on compassion fatigue with objectives related to exploring personal and professional stressors, understanding symptoms of compassion fatigue, and managing stress and compassion fatigue. They found that professionals may endure a range of feelings while working with families, which could be warning signs for compassion fatigue. These feelings included, but were not limited to, sadness, fear, depression, avoidance, dissatisfaction, anxiety, and sensitivity (Hudnall-Stamm, 1997-2005; Meadors & Lamson, 2008). The most telling sign was feeling exhausted or tired beyond what sleep can remedy and restore (Wright, 2004). Finally, the effects of compassion fatigue could affect all aspects of the professionals’ life: personal, social, and professional (Meadors & Lamson, 2008). Health care providers, and professionals in general, are never immune to the effects of working with families and being able to recognize the warning signs was one of the most effective ways to prevent compassion fatigue.

**Professional Burnout and Compassion Fatigue in Teachers**

Very few studies examined professional burnout specifically to the population of ECSE teachers. ECSE teachers are at risk for professional burnout mostly due to the stress of their work settings and difficulties with responding to families’ needs (Brotherson et al., 2010; Krahn et al., 1995). In early intervention, ECSE teachers are serving families with more social concerns than ever before as well as infants and toddlers with more complicated developmental issues (Brotherson et al., 2010; Krahn et al., 1995). As these concerns and issues continue to increase, the resources available to support the teachers have decreased.
Another factor affecting professional burnout and compassion fatigue for ECSE teachers was longevity in the field. In their research review on teacher attrition, Noble and Macfarlane (2005) found that ECSE teachers who are just entering the field tend to report more professional burnout in their second year of work as compared to their first year. This second year of work was when the novice ECSE teachers reconcile their preconceived, idealized notions about working with families and children (Noble & Macfarlane, 2005). According to Antioniou et al. (2006), age differences are more likely to be a factor for younger, novice teachers as they focus much of their energy on initial goals and the demands of a new job. Furthermore, it was during the first couple of years of work that ECSE teachers also felt isolated demographically from being assigned to rural locations and a lack professional and personal support from others (Noble & Macfarlane, 2005). Besides working in rural areas, Sprang et al. (2007) also found that caseload numbers predicted compassion fatigue and professional burnout. Other work related factors included support from administration, time constraints, relationships with families, and amount of autonomy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

**Job Stressors for Teachers**

High stress may lead teachers to leave the profession; therefore, studying this issue was important for developing strategies that prevent high turnover (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Kyriacou (2001) defined teacher stress as “the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher” (p. 28). Kyriacou reviewed studies of teacher stress and compiled a list of the main sources of stress for teachers including time pressure and workload, coping with change, dealing with colleagues, self-esteem and status,
administration and management, role conflict and ambiguity, and poor working conditions. In addition, Austin, Shah, and Muncer (2005) studied stress by surveying 50 high school teachers and found that the main source of stress was work-related. Specifically, work-related stress was associated with excessive caseload, administration, preparation, parental involvement, and working evenings and weekends.

In another study on teacher stress and burnout, Howard and Johnson (2004) interviewed ten teachers who were ‘at-risk’ due to the nature of their work (p. 405). The main stressors for the ten teachers included having limited time and increased workload, enduring change, dealing with other staff and administration, working with families and children from disadvantaged and abusive backgrounds, and poor working conditions (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Teachers may experience each of these stressors regularly. In addition, teachers were more likely to become burned out when they were not recognized for their job efforts, which resulted in more stress.

In their study on teacher stress, Burchielli and Bartram (2006) used observations, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to gather information from teaching staff from an elementary school. The teachers recognized that some level of stress was part of being in the field, but all of them perceived their stress levels as above-normal. In addition, the teachers’ stressors were related to support structures within the school, administrative demands, and day-to-day experiences with conflict and other challenges (Burchielli & Bartram, 2006). Finally, the teachers described stress as making them feel anxious and fearful due to work experiences putting too many demands on their personal resources (Burchielli & Bartram, 2006).
Temperament and Personality Factors

Teacher temperament and personality has also been studied as a factor leading to professional burnout. Certain temperament and personality traits may increase or decrease the likelihood for teachers to experience burnout. Kokkinos (2007) sampled 447 elementary school teachers to explore job stressors and personality characteristics and how they are associated with professional burnout using surveys. Not surprisingly, both were linked to professional burnout, which lead to acknowledging the effects and interplay of both environmental and personal characteristics. In the environment, the primary job stressors were dealing with children’s misbehavior and not having enough time to do the job. Antioniou et al., (2006) concurred with their description of sources of significant stress as discipline problems and interactions with children and colleagues.

Teven (2007) examined teacher temperament and how it related to teacher caring, professional burnout, and organizational outcomes for 48 higher education faculty. Through the use of surveys, findings showed that teacher temperaments and personalities were related to whether or not an individual teacher would suffer from professional burnout. Conscientious teachers were more likely to care about completing job responsibilities and doing well in their field, which offsets the possibility of burnout occurring (Teven, 2007). In addition, Teven found that teachers’ motivation to do well at their jobs was grounded in how much they cared about their students and how greatly they perceived supervisors caring for them, which positively affected overall job satisfaction. Furthermore, teachers who were less determined in meeting their goals were more likely to act detached and emotionally unavailable in order to lessen stress and strain (Kokkinos, 2007).
Based on these findings, it may be easier to understand how different teachers could have a similar work context, but experience and respond differently to the similar contexts based on their personalities (Kokkinos, 2007; Teven, 2007). Consequently, Kyriacou (2001) reported that how teachers perceive the stressors depends on the interaction between their personality, values, skills, and the circumstances they are facing.

**Emotional Labor and Emotional Needs**

Teachers may also experience emotional labor, which involves two strategies for managing emotions known as surface acting and deep acting. With surface acting, true emotions are masked and socially-desired emotions are displayed instead (Zhang & Zhu, 2008). Hochschild (2003) reported that workers using surface acting are pretending to show feelings that they are not actually feeling and, thus, trying to deceive others. For example, a worker may display a fake smile to a client or customer but feel resentful inside (Cheung & Tang, 2009). On the other hand, deep acting involved the worker actually trying to feel the emotions being displayed by reframing the situation in order to restore empathy for a client (Zhang & Zhu, 2008). Hochschild called deep acting “deceiving oneself as much as deceiving others” (p. 33). For example, a worker changes the internal negative emotion (resentment) into a positive emotion (willingness to serve), which makes the fake smile look genuine.

In their study, Zhang and Zhu (2008) studied emotional labor by surveying a sample of 134 higher education teachers and found a relationship between emotional labor and professional burnout. With the higher education teachers, surface acting increased professional burnout and decreased satisfaction while deep acting increased satisfaction and decreased professional burnout. While using a single case study with an elementary teacher,
Isenbarger and Zembylasb (2006) reported the two main negative functions of emotional labor as suppressing feelings of sadness, disappointment and guilt as well as dismissing feelings of frustration from conflicts with colleagues. Positive functions included having higher self-esteem, doing things that benefited children, and feeling fulfilled and successful.

Lane (2005) examined emotional labor in 13 Early Head Start (EHS) home visitors with a variety of educational backgrounds (e.g., early childhood, social work, and psychology) through the use of focus groups and individual interviews. Deep acting was required in the case of early childhood providers who embraced the concept of family-centered practice, where the professional must take the perspective of the family, honor and respect cultural diversity, empower the family to make decisions, and provide support for families (Lane, 2005). Lane found that the home visitors had to manage their emotions, which included the negative emotions of frustration, feeling overwhelmed, and guilt. On the other hand, some of the home visitors also reported positive emotions such as pride and a sense of self-satisfaction. Home visitors learned how to either hide or reframe their emotions and be non-judgmental in their interactions with EHS families in an effort to keep an open relationship.

Interestingly, Lane (2005) found that as a secure, trusting relationship between the family and home visitor developed, emotional labor tended to decrease because the responses were more honest. This finding also tended to relate to how long the home visitor had been in the field. Other findings showed home visitors reporting the scope of their responsibilities going beyond their job descriptions and the needs of families going beyond the scope of the EHS program. Differences in values between the home visitors and the families they serve also lead to emotional labor. Further, Lane found EHS home visitors’ perceptions about a
In a study examining emotional supports in early intervention, Brotherson et al. (2010) addressed emotional labor as they described how both families’ and professionals’ needs may or may not be met depending on the partnership that had formed. Twenty-one professionals and 16 families were interviewed and when the partnership was considered a “match,” meaning similar needs and perceptions were shared, then the emotional needs of both the family and professional were met. On the other hand, when the partnership was a “mismatch,” neither had their emotional needs met, especially if the professional felt their skills could not meet the needs of the family. Not surprisingly, these professionals worked with families who were experiencing challenges and their caseload numbers continued to increase.

Brotherson et al. (2010) advised professionals to reach a sense of balance by showing awareness of their own emotional needs and meeting those needs in order to reduce the risk for professional burnout and exhaustion and to be available to the families they serve. Without that awareness and response to their own emotional needs, the partnerships with families suffered. In the end, Brotherson et al. reported that when professionals’ emotional needs are met, families will be better served within the field of early intervention.

Families Who Face Challenges

For ECSE teachers, the occurrence of serving families who are faced with challenging situations has continued to increase (Brotherson et al., 2010; Krahn et al., 1995). Friend (2007) sampled 21 professionals and 16 families in her study on families with
challenges and family supports in early intervention. Information was collected through individual interviews, focus groups, and observation during home visits. Friend found that challenging situations for families may be related to living in poverty, unsafe neighborhoods, and/or overcrowded housing. Furthermore, a challenged family may be headed by a single parent with low education, considered transient or homeless, and/or have a different cultural background than the ECSE teacher (Friend, 2007). Finally, other challenges included family members who have substance and/or other abuse problems as well as mental health, medical and/or legal issues.

Serving more families with challenges might lead to greater stress and eventually professional burnout and compassion fatigue for ECSE teachers. Due to the many challenges the families faced, ECSE teachers were likely to become frustrated when appointments were not kept, parents did not seem as invested in services, and there was a lack of “follow through” on recommendations to help the child with special needs (Friend, 2007, p. 48). In some instances, ECSE teachers drew boundaries and acted more “business-like” in their actions during time spent with families with challenges, especially when their backgrounds were different or they believed it was difficult to interact with the family (Friend, 2007, p.54). At times, the ECSE teachers felt they were not prepared to meet some of the families with challenges’ requests for support because the needs were beyond their expertise, especially when requests related to emotional issues (Friend, 2007).

**Effects of Colleagues**

Findings of some studies suggested that colleagues can influence the development and maintenance of professional burnout or, conversely, the prevention of burnout.

Professional burnout was visible and those suffering from it were able to communicate its
effects. In a study of 154 high school teachers surveyed by Bakker and Schaufeli (2000), there was a negative effect when teachers talked with colleagues who were burned-out. In a longitudinal study surveying 558 primary and secondary teachers, Carmona et al. (2006) also found that teachers who likened themselves to colleagues who were doing poorly in their jobs were more prone to experiencing professional burnout. On the other hand, if teachers related more to colleagues who were doing and feeling well in their jobs, they were more likely to also do well.

When teachers rarely talked with these colleagues, there was no impact on their own levels of professional burnout. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were affected by having interactions with colleagues who often talked about school and student problems. The frequency of the interactions did not necessarily lead to professional burnout in teachers. As expected, when a co-worker was developing professional burnout, female workers tried to alleviate the stress by helping the one suffering (e.g., easing their workload, protecting her from being bothered by others, acting as her spokesperson, and being by her side to listen and console; Ericson-Lidman, Norberg, & Strandberg, 2007). As a result, colleagues’ responses to co-workers were either positive in terms of preventing or reducing burnout or negative since they could become at risk for developing these symptoms themselves.

Another aspect of working with colleagues was the expectation for ECSE teachers to work within a team. However, many teacher preparation programs do not spend a lot of time providing training about working on a team (Knackendoffel, 2005). The main concept behind teaming was the ability to collaborate with others for the benefit of families and children (Hunt, Soto, Maier, Liboiron, & Bae, 2004). Previous studies on teaming have focused on both the benefits and challenges that team members face while trying to
collaborate. For example, Dinnebeil, McInerney, and Hale (2006) studied the roles and responsibilities of itinerant ECSE teachers working to serve children with special needs in inclusive early childhood programs. The participants were surveyed and consisted of 29 itinerant ECSE teachers, 24 ECE teachers, 29 parents, and 22 supervisors. The roles and responsibilities explored included assessing and monitoring children, acting as a consultant, providing direct services, and participating as a team member. For the most part, the ECSE and ECE teachers, parents, and supervisors agreed with the roles and responsibilities of assessing and monitoring children and consulting (Dinnebeil et al., 2006). However, both ECE teachers and parents felt that ECSE teachers should be providing direct services to children, which did not agree with perceptions of the ECSE teachers or their supervisors. The ECSE teachers felt that having an understanding of the impact of a disability on a child’s growth and development was more important. Finally, ECSE teachers, ECE teachers, and supervisors reported that teaming was an important role and responsibility of ECSE teachers (Dinnebeil et al., 2006).

In their study about collaborative teaming, Hunt et al. (2004) examined the educational teams of three children with severe special needs being served in inclusive programs using observations and interviews. The teams included the early childhood teacher, early childhood special educator, para-educator, speech-language pathologist, and the children’s parents. Hunt et al. found that collaborative teaming led to consistent implementation of support plans set in place for children in the preschool classrooms and at home. In addition, team members felt shared ownership, commitment, and pride in the children’s progress (Hunt et al., 2004). The team members in this study were able to reflect on their own professional growth based on how they collaborated with others, shared their
expertise, and listened to the ideas of others (Hunt et al., 2004). Finally, although regularly scheduled team meetings were considered beneficial, the team members also reported that teams must be allowed the time to meet as well as participate in professional development opportunities on how to collaborate within a team (Hunt et al., 2004).

In another study on teaming, McLeskey and Waldron (2002) interviewed teachers from six elementary schools in their study on perceptions of curricular and instructional adaptations. Each of the teachers was involved in the inclusive school programs (ISPs) developed by their schools. The teachers reported more teaming had occurred since the development of the ISPs and felt encouraged to share ideas, problem solve, and plan for instruction (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Many of the teachers also reported that teaming was the basis for gaining feelings of confidence and support as well as learning more instructional ideas from others. On the other hand, difficulties for teaming were also reported by teachers, including issues with communication, scheduling, and uncooperative teachers (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002).

Problems may arise when team members do not share the same goals, do not meet regularly as a team, or have a lack of communication (Hunt et al., 2004). Campbell and Halbert (2002) asked 241 early intervention providers what their “three wishes” would be if they could change early intervention services (p. 216). In relation to teaming, providers wanted to have an established system for communication. Additionally, providers also reported preferences for the frequency of team meetings and wanting to be supported for team building efforts (Campbell & Halbert, 2002). Based on previous research, there was an emphasis on the importance of teaming with colleagues despite issues of time, communication, and collaboration. When teams worked well together, team members gained
a sense of ownership, felt supported, learned how to problem solve, and acquired skills for meeting the needs of families and children.

**Effects of the Work Environment**

One aspect of the job that is likely overlooked for the ECSE teacher is their work environment and office space in terms of size and layout. Bodin Danielsson and Bodin (2008) used surveys to study different office types and their effect on job satisfaction and health for 469 employees. In this study, the different office types included a single room office, shared room office for 2 to 3 people, a small open plan for 4 to 9 people, medium-sized open plan for 10-14 people, large open plan for more than 24 people, and flex office with no individual workspaces. Findings supported single room offices and flex offices relating to better health and increased job satisfaction with open plan offices rating lower in both health and job satisfaction. Shared room offices had the highest job satisfaction because of the relationships that tended to form between office mates. Due to their layout, Bodin Danielsson and Bodin reported that small and medium-sized open plan offices have a lack of room and access to privacy when needed.

In their review of office environment literature, DeCroon, Sluiter, Kuijer, and Frings-Dresen (2005) examined office concepts (e.g., location, layout, and use) and work conditions (e.g., job demands and resources) and the effect on short- and long-term reactions (e.g., health and performance). Findings included an effect of an open office layout on worker job satisfaction and privacy depending on desk placement, the number of people in close proximity, and visual and acoustic isolation from stimuli. The research provided no significant effects of office location, especially working from home, on work conditions or worker reactions. Based on the literature, DeCroon et al. developed a list of the office
concepts that tended to have an effect on worker health and performance including desks and chairs, lighting and temperature, and indoor air quality.

In another study about office environments, Mahdavi and Unzeitig (2005) examined the interaction between the workplace and the outdoor environment as well as the effects of temperature and acoustics. Mahdavi and Unzeitig considered the several indicators when studying the workplace and outdoor environment relationship (e.g., having access to a window, orientation to the window, visual access to the outdoors). Their findings supported the importance for workers to have access to daylight, but also views of the sky, horizon, and ground. The effects of temperature in the workplace were dependent upon whether workers felt they had control over their own comfort zone. Finally, the effects of acoustics were dependent upon how many workers were working in the space at any given time. In summary, although ECSE teachers may not spend a lot of time in their office environments, they may still be affected by the office size and layout, number of people, lighting, acoustics, and temperature. Fortunately, ECSE teachers are usually itinerant and able to enjoy the outdoors during their workday.

**Coping Strategies**

The past 35 years has seen an influx of research on coping across a variety of fields including nursing, public health, and teaching (Carmona, Buunk, Peiro, Rodriguez, & Bravo 2006; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Howard & Johnson, 2004). In a study from another help giving field, Meadors and Lamson (2008) found that health care providers who reported low stress levels felt they had adequate resources to deal with stress in their environments, utilized more self-care strategies, exercised more, adopted healthier eating habits, and had massages or meditated regularly. The health care providers also were more likely to set
limits at work and separate their professional and personal lives. On the other hand, the health care providers who reported high levels of stress also reported not having the resources they needed to manage their stress (Meadors & Lamson, 2008).

Different models for coping with stress have been designed, for example, Folkman and Lazarus’ coping as a mediator of emotion model (1984) and Hill’s ABCX model (Hill, 1958). In the Folkman and Lazarus model, coping was seen as having two purposes referred to as emotion-focused coping or problem-focused coping. With emotion-focused coping, an individual tried to lessen her emotional responses, especially distress, to the stressor by becoming more tolerant of negative situations because she feels nothing else can be done. An individual may use different strategies, including avoidance, selective attention, distancing, and minimization in order to sustain optimism and a sense of hope.

When an individual used problem-focused coping, she tried to alter and minimize the source of stress. Problem-focused coping involved the individual utilizing problem-solving strategies (e.g., defining the problem, choosing a solution, and acting) both internally and externally. Both emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping are dependent upon how the individual interprets the situation as being stressful or not, which is known as primary appraisal. Next, the individual had to determine whether or not the situation was going to cause a loss, threat, or challenge. Interestingly, Baloglu (2008) surveyed 267 prospective teachers and found that most used emotion-focused coping strategies when facing stressful situations.

Another model designed for coping with stress was Hill’s ABCX model (Hill, 1958). Hill originally conceptualized the process of a family’s reaction to stressful events in his ABCX model of family crisis. In this model, A depicted the life stressor events, B involved
the resources and strengths available to the person to deal with the stressors as, C included the person’s perceptions of the events, and X was how the person adapts (Brannan & Heflinger, 2001; Hill, 1958). Within this model, individuals choose resources and draw on their strengths to minimize the stressors. To illustrate, Brannan and Heflinger (2001) described a conceptual Double ABCX model in their study on caregiver strain from meeting the needs of a child with emotional and behavioral needs. Stressor events (A) were divided into two categories, which involved child problems and symptoms and other life stressors the family experiences. The resources and strengths (B) included being able to access professional help for the child, having a social support system, and being able to give time and material resources. The perceptions of the events (C) were related to the family’s expectations about the child and other members of the family, thoughts about how others outside the family perceive the child, and how these circumstances happened. In this study, X was caregiver distress and psychological strain. When the appropriate resources and strengths were utilized, the probability for distress and psychological strain were lessened. In contrast, when inappropriate choices were made, the likelihood of distress and psychological strain were exacerbated along with additional stressor events.

Both of these models relied on individuals showing awareness of the stressors and utilizing appropriate coping skills to lessen or reduce the stressors’ effect. In a longitudinal study surveying 558 primary and secondary teachers, Carmona et al. (2006) found that teachers who used direct coping styles had lower incidence of burnout than those who used palliative coping styles. Direct coping styles could be described as problem solving processes and strategies whereas palliative coping styles were more related to ignoring or
disregarding situations. Teachers who used more direct coping styles were more likely to see themselves as more similar to well-functioning colleagues.

According to Kyriacou (2001), direct action techniques helped to eliminate the stressor because the teacher took action, such as managing oneself better, cooperating with colleagues, or acquiring new skills and information. On the other hand, palliative techniques are used to lessen the stress but not eliminate it. Kyriacou reported palliative techniques could be either mental or physical strategies. When mental strategies are used, teachers are trying to change how stressful they judge a situation. Likewise, with physical strategies, teachers are using activities that help them relax and relieve tension. Finally, Kyriacou also described the most frequent coping strategies used by teachers, such as putting problems into perspective, relaxing after work, taking action to deal with problems, trying to manage feelings, and debriefing about feelings and problems with others.

Gulwadi (2006) surveyed 71 elementary school teachers about sources of stress and restorative coping strategies. According to Gulwadi, teachers coped with stress through inward or outward strategies. The two aspects of inward strategies involved seeking stillness and seeking focus where teachers either wanted to have an absence of movement for awhile or focused on something very small in their immediate environment, respectively. Outward strategies involved seeking connections with social resources, seeking positive distractions to take their minds off the stressor, and seeking movement in order to feel better when stressed. Overall, the teachers chose to release their stress away from their school environment (e.g., home, church, nature, and other city places), which may mean that the school environment was not adequately responsive to teachers’ needs (Gulwadi, 2006). In addition, teachers used other activities or behaviors as means for coping with stress (Austin et al., 2005). These
included relaxing, deep breathing, sleeping, visiting with friends, listening to music, taking a long bath, and exercising (e.g., walking, jogging, and biking). Some of these activities or behaviors could seem unhealthy if done to the extreme, especially crying, screaming, eating, or throwing things. Finally, Boswell (2004) studied stress and work outcomes with 461 university employees using surveys. Some behaviors could suggest an inability for an employee to deal with job stressors, including taking excessively long lunches, using sick leave when not actually sick, and seeking employment elsewhere.

**Reflective Supervision**

Jones Harden (2009) reported that reflective supervision along with coping strategies can support teacher well-being and nurture the nurturer. As a process, reflective supervision involved teachers and supervisors developing a strengths-based relationship with the overall goal of improving practices and services for families (Jones Harden, 2009; Shahmoon-Shanok, 2009). The elements of reflective supervision included regularity, collaboration, and reflection (Gilkerson, 2004). Regularity involved having recurring meetings between the teacher and supervisor (e.g., once a week or month, instead of informal, unscheduled opportunities). Collaboration suggested shared power between the teacher and supervisor and resulted in a true partnership over time. Finally, reflection involved having an emotional and cognitive awareness of thoughts, feelings, and practices related to work in order to improve performance (Gilkerson, 2004).

According to Chamberlin (2000), reflective supervision was not a means of evaluating, but rather an ongoing conversation about teaching between a teacher and supervisor. Reflective supervision was intended to empower teachers and give them the opportunity to share their beliefs and values with their supervisor as a part of a trusting
relationship. Trust was one of the most important dimensions of reflective supervision since the teacher must feel that the supervisor was offering support in a willing and sincere manner.

Howes, James, and Ritchie (2003) examined reflective supervision in their study on pathways to effective teaching with 80 teachers through interviews and observations. Each teacher was asked how they were supervised in order to determine the presence of reflective supervision. Thirty-four percent of the teachers were experiencing reflective supervision from a supervisor or assigned mentor who observed their teaching, met regularly with them, and helped them reflect on their teaching practices. The researchers found that reflective supervision was a predictor for effective teaching.

**Resiliency and Job Satisfaction**

According to Parker and Martin (2009), the ability of teachers to overcome everyday life and work stresses affected their resiliency and job satisfaction. Sumison (2004) addressed resiliency by calling it “the ability to continue to find deep and sustaining personal and professional satisfaction in one’s chosen field despite the multiple adverse factors and circumstances” (p. 276). According to Bobek (2002), resiliency should be promoted in order to strengthen job satisfaction and prime teachers for the constant changes within the field of education. Bobek reported that job satisfaction relied upon teachers’ perceptions of autonomy, their accomplishments being acknowledged, and the ability to form positive relationships with colleagues. Resiliency has been studied as a means for lessening teacher attrition and increasing retention by gathering information on what factors affect teachers’ job satisfaction and intent to stay in the field (Albrecht et al., 2009; Bobek, 2002; Sumison, 2004; Sumison, 2003). In a number of studies, resiliency was based on teachers’
commitment to the field, their support systems, and personal traits (Albrecht et al., 2009; Bobek, 2002; Brunetti, 2006; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Stanford, 2001; Sumison, 2004). According to Gu and Day (2007), resiliency was a quality that differs from person-to-person and changes over time but is not innate. Overall, an individual’s ability to learn from previous experiences, even from childhood and into adulthood, helped foster coping resources leading to resiliency (Bobek, 2002; Howard & Johnson, 2004).

In a study surveying 776 teachers and related service providers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, Albrecht et al. (2009) found that teachers who had been working for ten or more years were likely to continue in the field. Based on their mixed-methods study with a sample of 300 primary and secondary teachers, Gu and Day (2007) concurred by reporting that where teachers were in their professional career stage (early, middle, and late) affected their ability to sustain commitment and fulfill their initial aspirations to enter the field. Not surprising, most teachers who persevered described their love for children and satisfaction from making a difference in children’s lives as one of the main reasons for staying committed to the field (Brunetti, 2006; Stanford, 2001).

At work, teachers received support from colleagues and administration where they could share experiences, debrief, or problem-solve issues (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Stanford, 2001). Teachers requested support from administration on a regular basis and ongoing communication was valued everyday and not just when crises arose (Albrecht et al., 2009). From the broader perspective, teachers received support and recognition for their expertise from their employer, the parents of the children they worked with, the community where they worked, and the field (Brunetti, 2006; Sumison, 2004). Outside of work, teachers reported having strong social networks from family, friends, and church (Stanford, 2001).
Sumison (2004) studied resilience and thriving in seven child care teachers using individual interviews and asking participants to represent their career experiences in a line drawing. The personal qualities of teachers who were resilient included being able to focus on what they have achieved, commit to being a lifelong learner, and make conscious career decisions that increased their job satisfaction (Sumison, 2004). Most of all, teachers who were resilient tended to stay hopeful and had a sense of optimism for the future (Brunetti, 2006; Stanford, 2001). Resilient teachers were goal-oriented who sought out professional development opportunities to further their learning (Sumison, 2003). Furthermore, resilient teachers have a positive sense of job fulfillment and self-efficacy and considered challenges as motivating and something to learn from rather than as something negative to avoid (Brunetti, 2006; Gu & Day, 2007). In addition, Howard and Johnson (2004) found resiliency in teachers who took pride in personal accomplishments and had confidence in their ability to do their jobs. Finally, the teachers reported having a sense of control over what happens to them professionally and personally.

**Summary**

This review of literature described different aspects of how ECSE teachers could develop professional burnout and compassion fatigue due to work stressors. The triggers and effects of the phenomena were described before discussing research related to the teaching field. Emotional labor and emotional supports were also introduced to discuss how ECSE professionals may try to hide or reframe how they are feeling in order to maintain relationships with families. Other factors related to the possibility of teachers developing professional burnout and compassion fatigue were working with families who are facing
challenges, teaming with colleagues, and being housed in different types of office environments.

By using different coping strategies, teachers tried to alleviate the effects of work stressors. The ability to deal with stressors was dependent upon the teachers’ awareness of the stressors, their coping resources, and their choice of coping strategy to use. Depending on the stressors, teachers chose from various coping strategies, such as spending time with friends, relaxing, exercising, or participating in professional development. Different types of coping and models were described (e.g., Folkman and Lazarus’ coping as a mediator of emotion model (1984), Hill’s ABCX model (Hill, 1958), and direct and palliative coping styles). Reflective supervision was also discussed as a means for building a strengths-based relationship between teachers and supervisors and supporting coping. With support from their supervisors, teachers were able to reflect on their values, beliefs, and practices with families and children. In addition, teachers’ resiliency was affected by how long they have been in the field, the support they receive from colleagues and administrators, and their personal traits. Resilient teachers were able to maintain their commitment to the field and experience job fulfillment.

**Present Study**

This study addressed professional burnout and compassion fatigue for ECSE teachers and how their efforts build resiliency to either phenomena. Implications of this research may lead to assisting ECSE teachers in learning positive strategies for managing and preventing the effects of professional burnout and compassion fatigue in their professional and personal lives. As a result of utilizing positive strategies, ECSE teachers may experience increased job satisfaction in order to thrive and remain in the field.
CHAPTER 3.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study explored the stressors that may lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue for early childhood special education (ECSE) teachers who serve families with children with special needs. In addition, the study explored how teachers coped and built resiliency to maintain their jobs.

The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What are basic stressors that ECSE teachers face that may lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue?

2. How do ECSE teachers cope with stressors in order to help alleviate and prevent professional burnout and compassion fatigue?

3. How do stressors and coping strategies interact to influence resiliency or sustain personal and professional job satisfaction in work for ECSE teachers?

This methodology section describes the process and criteria for recruiting participants. Also, participants of the study, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures used in this study will be described. Information related to establishing trustworthiness as well as ethical considerations is also presented.

Rationale for the Qualitative Approach

The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand the experiences of people and how they construct their world (Glesne, 2006; Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research recognizes there are multiple realities and ways of knowing. Therefore, the researcher utilized a naturalistic approach by accessing social contexts in order to gain participants’ multiple perspectives related to this chosen phenomena (Glesne, 2006). In
qualitative research, interpretation and analysis are based on the researcher’s own experiences and background (Lichtman, 2006) as well as closeness to the data collected. Qualitative methods were chosen for this study because the methodology matched the research purpose of exploring the phenomena of stress related to professional burnout and compassion fatigue and the coping strategies used by early childhood special education (ECSE) teachers. Qualitative methods elicited the rich descriptions from the participants essential to examining and understanding the phenomena.

**Methodology**

Ethnography with embedded case studies was chosen in order to better understand the culture of ECSE teachers as related to professional burnout, compassion fatigue, and resiliency. Ethnography with embedded case studies represents the methodological features of ethnography as applied to a set of cases (Visconti, 2010). The combination of the two methodologies matches well, because as Glesne (2006) reports, case study “data tend to be gathered through the ethnographic tools of participant observation and in-depth interviewing” (p. 13). In terms of analysis, ethnography with embedded case studies incorporates a holistic approach whereby the social group of ECSE teachers will be described in relation to the patterns and themes derived from exploring professional burnout, compassion fatigue, and resiliency.

Visconti (2010) described the purpose of ethnography to “decode, translate, and interpret the behaviors and attached meaning systems” of the social group being studied (p. 28). Within ethnography, the researcher is a participant observer who gains access to a social group and becomes immersed in the everyday happenings of the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Creswell (1998) described ethnography as a product of prolonged engagement
with a social group in order to gain the meanings of behavior, language, and interactions between group members. Accordingly, prolonged engagement in the work context was used to understand the culture of ECSE teachers in terms of their behaviors (e.g., what is expected as an ECSE teacher and coping strategies of each one), language (e.g., how they describe their experiences), what and who ECSE teachers report as providing and not providing support to them, and interactions (between the ECSE teachers, their colleagues and the families they serve).

Likewise, according to Yin (2003), case studies are an in-depth description of phenomena within the context of the participants being studied. Similar to ethnography, the researcher gains access to participants and secures their confidence through a “gatekeeper” (Creswell, 1998, p. 112). Case studies do not attempt to manipulate the behaviors of participants, but merely explain the experiences and events which occur. Cases are “bounded by time and place” and can be a “program, an event, an activity, or individuals” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). In some cases, the boundaries are blurred between the phenomenon and the context. As a result, Baxter and Jack (2008) and Lichtman (2006) recommend restricting what the case studies include so as to narrow the focus. Creswell (1998) also advises choosing between single or collective cases and multi-sited or within-site cases. In this study, collective, multi-sited cases were used to focus on the experiences of ECSE teachers with professional burnout, compassion fatigue, stress, and resiliency and the effects on their personal and professional lives.

**Participant Selection**

Purposive sampling was utilized in order to recruit participants who were licensed, ECSE teachers working for agencies and programs providing early childhood special
education services. Across the state, administrators, early intervention liaisons, and a physical therapist for ECSE programs (e.g., Area Education Agencies (AEA) in Iowa) were contacted via electronic mail (see Appendix A) and asked to approach ECSE teachers about participation in this study. In Iowa, ECSE teachers working for AEAs serve children with special needs who are birth to three years (Part C) and three to five years (Part B) as well as within early childhood education (ECE or general education). Therefore, the criteria for participation was to include ECSE teachers who believed they have a high number on their caseloads, experienced excessive work demands, and worked with families who experienced challenges.

Sixteen ECSE teachers from four different AEAs expressed initial interest in this study based on these criteria. I informed all ECSE teachers of the purpose of the study, consent, and time commitment (see Appendix A). In addition, I sent participants the interview questions (see Appendix B) beforehand in order to review and consider their responses. Of the 16 who expressed initial interest, 11 ECSE teachers decided not to participate after acknowledging the time commitment and expectations. Finally, one ECSE teacher had already participated in the pilot study conducted a year before this study and was not included.

The last four ECSE teachers agreed to participate and represented three AEAs from across Iowa. At the first face-to-face meeting, each ECSE teacher signed an informed consent form (see Appendix C) indicating her willingness to be interviewed and observed and was compensated with a $40.00 gift card for participation.

The four women selected for this study ranged in age from 26 to 53 years old and represented ECSE teachers who were at different levels of experience (novice to
“seasoned”), serving different areas (rural and suburban), and had different job responsibilities (e.g., service coordination, direct service, birth-to-five years assignment, birth-to-three years assignment). The settings in which these ECSE teachers typically worked included their automobiles, office buildings and spaces, families’ homes, preschool classrooms, and child care centers. Table 1 presents participants’ pseudo names, current job assignment and the data collected in relation to each woman’s participation.

**Michelle**

Michelle is in her mid-20s with four years of experience in her current position as a home interventionist. Michelle works for an Area Education Agency (AEA) covering a large demographic area that is mostly rural with some suburban areas. She was recently transferred from a small satellite office in another town to the main office of the agency, which used to be an old department store, and uses one of the many cubicles for her office space. Michelle has been involved with working with children for the past eight years. She

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Job assignment</th>
<th>Years Experience</th>
<th>Data collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Birth to 3 with 3 to 5 referrals; high birth to 3 caseload</td>
<td>8 total, 4 in current position</td>
<td>2 interviews, 2½ days of observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valerie</td>
<td>Birth to 3 with 3 to 5 referrals; low caseload for birth to 3 and 3 to 5</td>
<td>24 total, 21 in current position</td>
<td>2 interviews, 2½ days of observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>3 to 5 consultant with few birth to 3 referrals; low caseload, but a lot of 3 to 5 pending</td>
<td>18 total, 10 in current position</td>
<td>2 interviews, 3 days of observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Birth to 5; low caseload for birth to 3, but very high 3 to 5 caseload</td>
<td>30 total, 5 in current position</td>
<td>2 interviews, 2½ days of observation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
has a Bachelor of Arts degree in early childhood special education and is currently working on her Master of Arts degree. Michelle’s job assignment includes providing direct service for children who are birth to three years (early intervention services) and screening and assessment for three to five years (preschool services) for three school districts. Her current caseload includes 24 families receiving early intervention services and extended evaluations for four preschool children. She works a 192 day calendar during the school year and adds three to four days per week during the summer for families receiving early intervention services. In addition to her early childhood assignment, Michelle serves on a two agency committees and has specialized training related to infant and toddler development. Michelle reported that “I love my job. . . [but] there’s a lot of things that you know just kind of stink about it.”

Valerie

Valerie is in her early 50s with 21 years of experience in her current position as an early childhood special educator with 24 years total in the field. She has her Bachelor of Arts degree in EC/ECSE and elementary education. Valerie works for a large AEA that has a combination of rural and suburban areas. She works in one of the main offices, which used to be an elementary school. Her office space is one of the former classrooms that she shares with other ECSE colleagues. Her assignment includes serving children aged birth to five years by providing screening, assessment, and direct services. Although her agency has hired designated service coordinators, Valerie may still provide service coordination for one or two families on her caseload. In addition, Valerie is the team representative for two preschools in her assigned school district. Her current caseload includes 12 families receiving early intervention services and extended evaluations for four preschool children. She works a 194
day calendar over 12 months with a monthly mileage average of 200-250 miles.

Furthermore, Valerie participates on the autism team and was a board member for a local non-profit organization for children and families. When talking about her job, Valerie referred to flexibility:

As far as like with my current job it’s ideal in the flexibility. I couldn’t ask for anything that fits my lifestyle better right now with my kids gone and my husband travels and I go along. [I] rearrange my schedule and I also like the idea of not sitting in a desk all the time and getting out. So I do think there are aspects of my job that fit into my idea of an ideal.

Jean

Jean is in her early 40s with 10 years experience in her current position as an ECSE teacher and 18 years total in the field. She has her Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education and added her ECSE endorsement in order to take this position. Jean works for a very large AEA and works in one of the satellite offices in one of the rural areas of the agency. The office used to be an old store and was sectioned off for 15 colleagues to have their own space. Jean’s assignment includes serving children aged birth to five years by providing screening, assessment, and direct services. In addition, she is the team representative for all preschools and child care centers in her assigned school district. Jean’s current caseload includes two families receiving early intervention services, two preschool children who receive home visits, and 18 preschool children who need extended evaluation. She works a 194 day calendar over 12 months with a monthly mileage average of 350 miles. When talking about her job, Jean reported that she enjoys having one-on-one time with children more than having to consult with preschool teachers. If she had her choice, Jean
would change jobs: “I would be a kindergarten teacher, but you could complain about being with the kids more. I would do a preschool job. I prefer general education, but if it were special education, just [being] with kids.”

**Barbara**

Barbara is in her early 50s with five years experience in her current position as an early childhood consultant and 30 years total in the field. She has her Master of Arts in early childhood special education. Barbara works for a large AEA that is mostly suburban with some rural areas. She has her office in her home, but may use one of the satellite offices, as needed. For one of her assigned school districts, Barbara’s assignment includes serving children aged birth to five years by providing screening, assessment, and direct services. For the second school district, she provides preschool services. In addition, she is the team representative for all preschools and child care centers in her assigned school districts. Currently, Barbara has 10 families receiving early intervention and is the service coordinator for four of those families on her caseload. She also has 55 preschool children, which includes those who are in the process of extended evaluation. Barbara works 192 days over 12 months and has the opportunity to add more days during the summer for early intervention and preschool services. Her monthly mileage average is 300–350 miles. When referring to her job, Barbara felt most satisfied when she felt like she was making a difference. However, she considered looking at different jobs in another field frequently.

I don’t think I would ever want something where I didn’t have flexibility or where I wasn’t meeting with different people at different times. Those are things I like about my job. I like the people that I work with, I think you can find that in other fields. I couldn’t sit at a desk all day because I’ve also thought about just [being] somebody’s
receptionist. Where I’m just there from 9 to 5 and that’s it. I don’t take it home and I don’t think about it.

**Data Collection Methods**

I examined the culture of ECSE teachers, especially in relation to professional burnout, compassion fatigue, stress, and resiliency through observations and face-to-face semi-structured interviews. When interacting with my participants, I hoped to be seen as “one of them” and not a Ph.D. candidate gathering information for her dissertation. I informed my participants about my background and, by sharing that information, established a common ground of working in the ECSE field. Furthermore, I could relate to the experiences they have had and the feelings of being overwhelmed in their jobs. Most of my past work experience had dealt with establishing and maintaining relationships on a daily basis with colleagues, school personnel, families, and children. Therefore, I believed I had a strength in knowing about the jobs of my participants and this was reflected in my interview and observation skills during data collection. The amount of time spent with the participants was based on what the participant and I negotiated and mutually decided upon in terms of where and when the observations and interviews occurred. In addition, families verbally consented to the observations in one of two ways. Either the participants called the families beforehand to make sure they approved of my presence or participants asked the families once we arrived at their homes. Each of the methods will be discussed next.

**Observation**

The main method of data collection in this study was observation since it “often provides a direct and powerful way of learning about people’s behavior and the context in which this occurs” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94). Observations were conducted in order to gather
insight into the daily work of each of the ECSE teachers. With agency and family consent, ECSE teachers were observed for two and a half to three days during home visits, preschool visits, and meetings (e.g., team meetings and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meetings) in order to collect information, statements, and interactions that pertained to the presence or absence of professional burnout, compassion fatigue, stress, and resiliency. During observation days, time spent with participants ranged from two and a half hours to seven and a half hours depending on the home visits and meetings scheduled. Field notes were written during observations and after interviews in order to capture the interactions and summarize my observations and interpretations. As recommended in Sangasubana (2009), field notes contain running descriptions of “the setting, the people, individual actions and activities, group behaviors, and perspectives” (p. 211). The perspectives of my participants were captured as well as my own perspectives about what I had seen and heard.

**Interviewing**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), interviews elicit interaction between the researcher and participants, provide detailed perceptions and personal accounts, and describe complex processes. Each ECSE teacher was interviewed using a face-to-face, semi-structured format. Interview questions were developed based on the review of literature and background experiences of the researcher as well as current issues in the ECSE field. Interview questions addressed teachers’ job responsibilities and caseload size, teachers’ experiences with supervision, factors impacting teachers' perceptions of professional burnout and compassion fatigue, how teachers' perceptions affected how they work with families and children, teachers’ sources of support and stress management strategies, teacher resiliency, and teachers' overall job satisfaction (see Appendix B for interview protocol).
For all of the participants, initial interviews were conducted on the first or second day of contact. All of the interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription. The participants preferred to be interviewed in private rooms at agency offices. Initial interviews lasted approximately 80 minutes and resulted in 24–32 pages of transcription per participant. Each participant was also interviewed for a second time in order to check initial themes and gather more information about the phenomena. The follow up interviews lasted approximately 35–45 minutes and 4–10 pages of transcription per participant resulted. Again, most of the follow up interviews were completed in private rooms at agency offices. One participant requested that her follow up interview be completed at a coffee shop. After the initial and follow up interviews, interview summaries were completed in order to capture the interview setting, the responses of the participant, and impressions from the participant responses.

**Pilot Study**

In order to assess the value of the preliminary interview questions and the use of interviewing method, a pilot study was conducted during the fall of 2008. Via electronic mail, I approached three ECSE teachers who I knew from three different AEAs and asked them if they would be willing to be interviewed. The ECSE teachers were also informed of the purpose of the study, consent, and time commitment. In addition, all interview protocols were sent to participants in advance. Interview questions addressed factors impacting teachers’ perceptions of professional burnout and compassion fatigue, how teachers’ perceptions affected how they work with families and children, and teachers' overall job satisfaction (see Appendix B).

All three participants were females of European American descent who were employed as licensed ECSE teachers, two having earned their Master of Arts degrees and
one with her Bachelor of Science degree. The ECSE teachers signed an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved informed consent form (see Appendix D) indicating their willingness to be interviewed and demographic information was collected. ECSE teachers were interviewed once between September and November 2008. Due to two ECSE teachers’ schedules, I sent the interview questions to them via electronic mail and their responses were submitted when time was available. The third interview was face-to-face in a conference room at the participant’s workplace and took approximately 60 minutes to complete. The face-to-face interview was audio-recorded and transcribed.

**Pilot Study Analysis**

All interview data were submitted to several steps in the analysis process. In the fall of 2008, a coding framework was developed based on grounded theory design using the first interview and open coding identified initial categories and subcategories (Lichtman, 2006). If responses did not fit into the initial categories and subcategories while coding the second and third interviews, additional categories and subcategories were added to the framework. Next, axial and selective coding were used to develop themes by condensing related categories and developing a visual representation (see Appendix D) of the relationships among the categories or themes.

Based on the results of the pilot study, I decided to make additions to this study. For example, an ethnography with embedded case studies was used instead of grounded theory. With this methodology, I believed the phenomena of professional burnout and compassion fatigue for ECSE teachers was better explored, especially within the contexts of their professional and personal lives. Furthermore, although interviews were the primary means for gathering data in the pilot study, observations were also conducted so as to gather
information on the ECSE teachers’ varying work day schedules and the experiences they faced. Finally, all interviews were conducted face-to-face in order to ask additional questions that emerged based on their verbal responses.

Data Analysis Methods

According to Lichtman (2006), data analysis in qualitative research is inductive and iterative. Information from and about participants was examined in their natural settings in order to gain understanding of the issues being studied. Data collection and analysis influenced each other in an ongoing, simultaneous process, which lead to new questions and concepts to pursue with each of the subsequent participants (Lichtman). As an important step between collecting and analyzing the data, memo writing was used to capture my thoughts, ideas, and questions about the data and how to proceed with the process of collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Memos were also used to determine relationships between data, codes, and categories (Charmaz). From the start of data collection and analysis, I used memos to reflect on the process of conducting this study (see Appendix E for examples of memos). For example, memos were used to capture my reflections about my research questions, problems with my study, and personal or ethical dilemmas, which affected how I continued to collect and analyze the data. Additionally, I was able to reflect on my relationships with my participants and capture my perceptions on what they were telling and showing me as well as what their responses and actions might mean to them. Furthermore, I used memos to capture the major themes I had seen and heard throughout data collection in order to develop my codes and categories. Finally, I used memos to reflect on future research directions, research, policy and practice implications, and limitations of my study as it progressed.
Figure 2 presents a visual framework for the data analysis steps in this study. This figure was adapted from Bloomberg and Volpe (2008, p. 100). As an initial step in the process of data analysis, all face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The first step was the use of coding, which Lichtman (2006) describes as dissecting large amounts of information into something more manageable. After each interview was transcribed, open coding was completed by reading through each transcript and making notes of preliminary ideas and codes in the margins. From the open coding, initial codes related to preliminary themes and subthemes were created starting with the first transcript and looking for descriptive words about the phenomena. Indicative of my chosen methodology, the descriptive words were related to the behaviors and language the ECSE teachers were using in order to start understanding the meanings attached. The initial codes from the first transcript were applied to the subsequent transcripts and new codes were added, as needed. Once all of the transcripts were reviewed, an initial data summary table was developed by organizing the initial codes into themes and pulling key words and phrases from the transcripts and fieldnotes to describe the initial themes and subthemes. This process went through several iterations as new data were entered and themes developed. Based on the participants’ experiences, analytic interpretive memos were written for each of the themes and subthemes (see Appendix E for examples) in order to further develop the interpretations of the emergent themes and coding statements.
Figure 2. Process for Data Analysis.
The next step was organizing the initial themes and subthemes into a table according to the research questions. Prior to this step, the concept of resiliency was introduced and used, along with the research questions, to designate which of the initial themes and subthemes corresponded to the categories of supporting resiliency or preventing resiliency. When the categories did not provide a good fit, coping strategies and stressors replaced supporting resiliency and preventing resiliency, respectively. Next, selective coding was used to identify core categories and relate the remaining categories to the core categories as circumstances leading to the phenomena being studied (Merriam, 2002). Another data summary table was developed which described each participants’ experiences related to the categories and subcategories for the coping strategies and stressors themes. Member checks were conducted using this data summary table and participants were asked additional questions about the accuracy of their information. All of the participants agreed with the information presented to them in their individual tables.

The third step in analyzing the data involved using the ABCX model of stress and coping (Hill, 1958) to organize the categories and subcategories into a framework based on each of the research questions. The ABCX model was chosen because it provided the best fit based on the emerging themes on job stressors, coping strategies, and resiliency outcomes related to job satisfaction the teachers were experiencing. In addition, a third research question was added related to how the stressors and coping strategies interact to influence resiliency or sustain personal and professional job satisfaction. In this model, the A accounted for the stressors that ECSE teachers face; B/C, included the resources and perceptions of teachers related to the coping strategies used to deal with the stressors; and X was associated with the outcomes of ECSE teachers coping with the stressors.
The last two steps in data analysis occurred simultaneously and involved revising the coding scheme by eliminating and/or collapsing codes and recoding data based on the revised coding scheme. Using the ABCX model as a guide, the initial codes were revised by collapsing some of them into one code, eliminating others, and looking for redundancy. At the same time, the transcripts were reviewed and recoded to be consistent with the final coding scheme. In an attempt to simplify the recoding process, each of the categories and subcategories was assigned a color to use for marking text whenever they occurred in the transcripts and fieldnotes.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

Standards of verification address trustworthiness in qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). According to Creswell, there are eight standard verification procedures. The procedures are prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, peer checks, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, rich thick descriptions, and external audits. Creswell recommended using at least two of the procedures in a study. In this study, seven of the eight procedures were utilized and are described below.

Through the use of observations, I demonstrated *prolonged engagement* by observing each participant for at least two and a half to three days during typical work days. By spending time with the participants, I was able to understand their day-to-day work demands and stressors as well as their supports. *Triangulation* was utilized by collecting information from four different participants, different sources, and different settings. The sources of information included observations, interviews and additional materials provided by the four participants, which formed the basis for the emerging themes and subthemes. As previously mentioned, the settings included the ECSE teachers’ automobiles, office buildings and
spaces, families’ homes, preschool classrooms, and child care centers. All of the participants worked for AEAs that covered large geographic regions of the state that consisted of mainly rural and suburban areas.

Another procedure for verification built into this study was the use of member checks with the four participants. During interviews, I asked participants questions in order to clarify their responses and ensure that their experiences were represented accurately. Based on participants’ preferences, member checks consisted of one face-to-face meeting as well as informal contacts via electronic mail in order to gather feedback on the emergent themes and subthemes from their individual interviews and observations. During the face-to-face member checks, all of the participants identified and agreed with the information presented to each of them. They offered their responses to additional probing questions related to the themes and subthemes. The information from the member checks was used to ensure that I was interpreting the data accurately and further develop the categories and subcategories.

Along with the member checks, peer checks were conducted with my major professor in order to discuss the process and gather objective feedback. Later in the process of data analysis, two fellow graduate students were recruited to check the findings for understanding as well as offer suggestions for clarity. Finally, three colleagues in the field of ECSE were asked to review different chapters and offer their suggestions as well.

Starting with my pilot study, I have been very aware of researcher bias and how it could affect my interpretations for this study. I have many years of experience in the field of ECSE. It is through these experiences I see and have seen how things “work” in terms of service provision, teaming, and other roles and responsibilities for me. As a result, my prior assumptions and experiences were identified and recorded as well as acknowledged.
Analytic memos were also used to record researcher bias. For example, after one observation with each participant, most of the memos related to researcher bias were about how my participants’ day-to-day demands did not seem too different from my own experiences as an ECSE teacher. By acknowledging the similarities in our roles from the start, I was able to move past the mundane and really look at the larger phenomena being studied and the specific culture in which these participants worked. Researcher bias was also examined during peer checks with my major professor.

*Rich, thick descriptions* of all aspects of the study are the main strategy for allowing the reader to determine how well the findings of the study match the realities of the participants studied (Merriam, 2002). This study used rich, thick descriptions to help the reader relate to the similarities or differences in the ECSE teachers’ settings and situations as well as result in a relevant and realistic discussion of findings. Finally, this study recruited four ECSE teachers from three sites and used different methods of data collection, which also increased the influence of applying the findings to other settings and situations (Merriam).

Finally, in lieu of an external audit, I have made available an audit trail. According to Merriam (2002), an audit trail or “transparency of method” allows for others to judge the value of a study (p. 21). As a part of this study’s audit trail, I used analytic memos to detail how the data was collected, how codes and themes originated, and how data was analyzed and interpreted. Within the analytic memos, I also reflected on my thoughts and posed questions on ideas and issues that arose while collecting data. In addition, the audit trail consisted of all data collected from the beginning to the end of the study: field notes, interview transcripts, coded transcripts, drafts of initial findings, and evidence of peer checks.
and member checks. Based on the audit trail, I was able to chronicle the progression of my thinking and provide rationale for the choices made during the research process.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were addressed through a variety of means. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, methods for collecting data, and how data would be used. Participants also signed an informed consent prior to any study activities to indicate their willingness to participate.

I ensured confidentiality and the privacy of my participants by describing their job experiences with professional burnout, compassion fatigue, and resiliency accurately. At times small changes were made in participant descriptors to support confidentiality. Each participant was given a pseudonym to use throughout the data analysis and data presentation phases. I also respected the privacy of families and service providers encountered during observations. Since all of the participants are from one Midwestern state, one assumption affecting confidentiality refers to the issue that everyone knows each other. Therefore, if anyone was concerned about the issue of confidentiality they may have chosen not to participate.

I do not believe there was personal harm to my participants, in fact, they may have felt relief in sharing their experiences. On the other hand, when difficult memories or topics arose, I was prepared to deal with such occurrences (e.g., stopping the interview, providing consolation and time for the participant, and delving deeper into the memory in a delicate manner). Finally, approval for this study was obtained by the Human Subjects Review Committee at Iowa State University (see Appendix C).
Limitations of the Study

By choosing to use qualitative research, my subjectivity limits how the data was collected, interpreted, and analyzed, which leads to the issue of researcher bias (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Also related to this limitation is that of participant reactivity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) where participants’ responses are compromised from knowing the researcher beforehand. Since I was already acquainted with two of my participants from my previous working experience, they may have been more or less open with their responses and interactions during observations and interviews. It may have been possible for my participants to embellish the examples of their experiences with professional burnout and/or compassion fatigue, especially if they think that is what I wanted or expected to hear. On the other hand, participants may not have shared the seriousness of their experiences in order to downplay the effect and not make them seem weak or vulnerable to me. In addition, I was aware of how my presence biased and/or changed the naturally occurring interactions, strategies, and interventions between the families and professionals. Although, in my experience, the occurrence of having someone accompany an ECSE professional happens all the time, especially with supervisors and team members visiting the same family/classroom.

In order to make an attempt to resolve these limitations, I took the following actions. First, my assumptions and interests in this study were presented from the beginning. Initial coding and themes were discussed and scrutinized through peer checks. Lastly, in order to lessen participant reactivity, I used memos to reflect how I might be influencing all of my participants and made an effort to establish open and honest rapport with each one of them.

Based on the study’s research design, a limitation was the use of a purposive sample of four ECSE teachers from one Midwestern state. In addition, all of the ECSE teachers
were of European American descent, which presents limited diversity of my participants. It was possible that ECSE teachers who were truly experiencing professional burnout and compassion fatigue may not have participated due to their inability to take on one more responsibility. With such a small number of participants who voluntarily agreed to participate, the results of this study had limited generalizability to other ECSE teachers in other locations and their experiences with professional burnout, compassion fatigue, and resiliency. Although generalizability is not necessarily the aim of qualitative research, I anticipated that the use of rich, thick descriptions may make the results transferable and applicable to readers’ own experiences and contexts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). In addition, the short amount of time spent with each participant may not be indicative of what actually happens. Finally, another limitation of this study was restricting the participants to ECSE teachers and not tapping into the wealth of information that could have been gathered from their supervisors, colleagues, and families.
CHAPTER 4.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the stressors that may lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue for early childhood special education (ECSE) teachers as well as how they cope and build their resiliency. This researcher believed that a better understanding of how ECSE teachers cope with stressors would lead to an understanding of what keeps them in the field. This chapter reports the analysis of the data collected from each participant to answer the following research questions:

1. What are basic stressors that ECSE teachers face that may lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue?
2. How do ECSE teachers cope with stressors in order to help alleviate and prevent professional burnout and compassion fatigue?
3. How do stressors and coping strategies interact to influence resiliency or sustain personal and professional job satisfaction for ECSE teachers?

Table 2 provides a visual framework for the three major themes (stressors, coping strategies and resiliency outcomes) and the categories and subcategories that were identified for each. It is organized by research question and the ABCX model of stress and coping (Hill, 1958) with A being the stressors that ECSE teachers face; B/C including the resources and perceptions of teachers related to the coping strategies used to deal with the stressors; and X associated with the outcomes of ECSE teachers coping with the stressors.
Table 2.

**ABCX model for ECSE Teacher Stress, Coping and Resiliency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Three Major Themes</th>
<th>B/C</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stressors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do ECSE teachers cope with stressors in order to help alleviate and prevent professional burnout and compassion fatigue?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Strategies</td>
<td>How do stressors and coping strategies interact to influence resiliency or sustain personal and professional job satisfaction in work for ECSE teachers?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Categories and Subcategories**

- Working as a team with colleagues
  - Colleagues from their agency
  - Colleagues from other programs
- Providing services to families who face challenges
- Conforming to job aspects that are beyond control
  - Fluctuating caseload numbers
  - Completing paperwork
  - Lack of understanding for what I do
  - Trying to make the office a home away from home
- Moving beyond “colleagues” to “friends and family”
- Having a dependence on familiar routines
  - Home visiting format
  - Using toy bags
  - Working in dyads
- Restricting boundaries with families
- Balancing personal and work lives
  - Relieving stress outside of work
  - Taking mental health days
  - Separating home and work lives
  - Making an effort to be strengths-based with families
  - Using compensating strategies
- Job satisfaction
  - Having passion for the job
  - Looking for other work
  - Realizing work is overtaking their personal lives
  - Coping with stressful day-to-day situations
  - Enjoying good days at work

**The Stressors that ECSE Teachers Face**

This major theme describes the stressors that the participants faced. There are three categories with subcategories included in this theme. The first category examines how participants experienced stress from working with difficult team members and colleagues.
The second category describes how participants faced stress from providing services to families who they considered challenging. Finally, the third category shows how participants were expected to conform to job aspects that are beyond control, including fluctuating caseload numbers, completing paperwork, the agencies having a lack of understanding for what they do, and trying to adapt to their office environments.

**Working as a Team with Colleagues**

All of the participants shared their frustrations with colleagues whom they had to work with regularly. Although this category could be described as working with difficult colleagues, all of the examples the ECSE teachers shared were within the context of teaming.

**Colleagues from their agency.** There were instances when some of the participants portrayed stressful relationships with team members and colleagues who worked for the same agency. When asked a question about how often she feels supported in general, Michelle took a long time before she responded with, “In this office, I . . . I don’t feel nearly as supported or respected.” In her situation, Michelle was dealing with people she believed did not have an understanding of the importance of early childhood. She felt that early childhood was not as valued as school-aged services. Michelle also experienced stress when working with colleagues who she felt did not follow “best practice” or “do their best work.” For example, Michelle talked about colleagues who write an entire assessment report that amounts to a short paragraph whereas she is more meticulous and does more than what is expected with reports and paperwork. For Michelle, working with these colleagues was an added stress because of her perceptions about their ineptness.

Valerie also described stress she experienced with an office mate who worked as an interpreter. At first, Valerie felt the office mate “does have some good skills that we did very
much appreciate at one time,” but that changed when Valerie found out the office mate “cannot be trusted.” Valerie shared that the office mate continuously called in sick or could not account for days she was supposed to be working, which affected Valerie’s ability to serve some of her families: “Because she’s our interpreter numerous appointments have been cancelled and rescheduled. She’s been caught in numerous lies because she’ll call families and tell them to cancel, instead of through us.” Valerie acknowledged that the office mate had health problems, but felt she “plays into” them by telling families about her illnesses as a way of trying to get involved in the families’ lives. When they first started working together, Valerie shared how this office mate contacted Valerie’s families without her consent. Once she found out, Valerie immediately talked to the office mate and made sure she understood when it was appropriate for her to contact families (e.g., to schedule a home visit for Valerie). Now, when the vehicle of this office mate was in the office parking lot, Valerie dreaded going in due to the office mate’s “demoralizing” actions and words toward and about everyone.

People are feeling more and more hostile towards that person . . . but no one to her face has ever been unkind to her. We just don’t talk when she’s in the room. We really don’t talk anymore to each other. We don’t want her to overhear anything because she lies. . . . We don’t like her having confidential information about families, there’s no trust. She’s totally destroyed all trust.

Consequently, Valerie and the others in her office started documenting everything in order to have “proof” of what the office mate was doing.

We’ve tried to get our supervisor to document [what the office mate was doing].

We’ve gotten to where we document in case we need to mention it at some point.
When we have proof of things, we go in to the supervisor. We don’t get feedback really about what has happened. We’ve been told she’s had to account for some of her contract days. Our supervisor doesn’t really ask for all of the information that we have. We try to be real careful about not giving things, because then our supervisor will then go around and check on things and come back almost like she’s trying to catch us being wrong.

Valerie emphasized how her “office can sometimes be where the stress is,” which was a reference to this situation over the past year. Valerie has had some reprieve from working with the office mate who is on a leave of absence after sending electronic mail to the supervisor about working in a “hostile environment.” Valerie and the others were aware of the date the office mate was supposed to return and remarked about whether she would or not.

In Michelle’s case, she believed that a service coordinator’s actions were sabotaging Michelle’s efforts with families regardless of Michelle’s initial attempts to befriend her. This colleague would make appointments without first consulting Michelle for her availability, not share pertinent information about families with Michelle, and try to go beyond her job role and act as an interpreter for the Spanish-speaking families they served together. During one of my days of observation, Michelle drove around for an hour and stated sarcastically that it was a “good use of agency time” looking to meet the service coordinator at a family’s home. She tried calling the service coordinator’s cell phone five times. Finally, Michelle called and asked two other colleagues for directions and tried to use the GPS function on her cell phone. Feeling defeated, Michelle stated, “Nothing is going right today. I just want to go home.” We ended up missing that appointment and went to the next one scheduled for the afternoon.
The situation has continued to escalate and Michelle “kind of started to put a wall up and not share information with her.” Michelle shared, “We did kind of get into it last week. It wasn’t good. I finally went to our supervisor and said I have a huge issue with this and it’s not going away.” She reported that she does not tell the service coordinator about visits with families because she does not know how the information will be used. In addition, Michelle does not tell the service coordinator where she is going because “she doesn’t do that with me so I just said forget it. I’m not even going to try with that anymore.” Both Valerie and Michelle felt they had tried initially to form positive relationships with these colleagues, but felt their colleagues did not respond well to their attempts. Valerie and Michelle alluded to their respective agencies giving these uncooperative colleagues special treatment because of their bilingual skills with families. To demonstrate her point, Valerie stated that her office mate would be fired for her actions if she worked in any other job or field.

Another participant also experienced stress from working with a team member. For the first six years of her job, Jean worked on a team with a team member who she described as dominating and intimidating. As a new team representative for her assigned preschools, Jean would give information to the teachers at team meetings and perceived the teachers preferring information from this team member. As a result of working with this team member, Jean started to second guess herself and have doubts about her abilities. She reported, “I would almost weekly walk away from those meetings just feeling like crap.” Jean shared that she allowed it to happen because she was new and thought she was learning about how this team functioned. In the end, she recalls the situation working out because the dominating team member was re-assigned and now no longer works for the agency.
Relationships could be stressful when participants worked with team members who were pessimistic about their jobs or talked about how busy they were all the time. Valerie tried to silence one negative team member.

Sometimes I just wonder why she stays with this job since she feels so badly about everyone . . . it’s gotten to be so pervasive in how she works with families that I can count on her walking out [of a home visit] with her having picked up on the negative thing . . . For a while, she was constantly talking about quitting the job . . . finally, I said to her, “You know what? Probably nobody cares. We could quit today. We could quit tomorrow . . . but honestly, nobody cares . . . we’re replaceable.”

Since saying that, Valerie reported that her team member had not said anything about quitting to her. Valerie felt that what she said was “not very nice, but it’s true” and the team member should not always talk about quitting any time something goes wrong.

Most of the participants had experienced working within dysfunctional teams where conflict was evident due to difficulties with communication and power struggles among team members from their own agencies. When they were faced with conflict, participants reacted initially by trying to befriend the team member, giving the team member the benefit of the doubt, and/or second-guessing their own abilities. When those solutions did not work, participants acted in ways that may also be perceived as self-preservation and negative as well, for example, avoiding and ignoring the team member.

**Colleagues from other programs.** Participants also reported stressful experiences with colleagues who worked for other programs, such as preschool teachers and school administrators. The experiences were stressful due to the participants’ feelings of not having any power over whether or not preschool teachers were willing to try and carry out their
recommendations or collect data in order to monitor children’s progress. Also, experiences with school administrators could be stressful when participants felt as if an administrator was not allowing appropriate programming for children and families.

Jean’s stress primarily originated from working with preschool teachers who she perceived as uncooperative. After visits to some of her preschool classrooms, Jean said, “I go back to the office feeling defeated” because she advised the teachers all the time what they could be doing with children. She said she “doesn’t get anywhere. I sometimes just want to get them [the children] out of there.” She knew some of the children she screened and observed would qualify for special education and therefore said she did things “half-assed” just to get the data and get them in a better program. Jean shared that consulting with preschool teachers was not a favorite part of her job. She disclosed that her “first four years, I said that teacher sucks, that teacher sucks, and that teacher sucks. I try not to do that.”

When she offered teaching strategies, Jean remarked that some teachers say they have tried them all and they don’t work. Or, teachers stated they could not provide something for one child because all of the children would want it, too, and they could not provide it for all of the children. Most teachers did not collect data on the interventions they used with children, so that had been a struggle as well. Jean had asked her teachers, “Do you want me to come spend the afternoon with you to help collect data?” They always declined her offer.

In one stressful situation, Jean shared her interaction with a teacher, which did not go very well. She joked about, “With this job, you know, you kind of mellow. Last week, I was so pissed I wanted to quit.” While observing at this particular preschool, Jean noticed how the teacher did not seem to have a relationship with the little girl Jean was there to observe. Jean did not want to critique the teacher and tried to be supportive by modeling strategies and
using positive reinforcement when the little girl did what was expected. During this particular visit, the little girl’s non-compliant behavior kept escalating while Jean and the teacher became more frustrated with the little girl and each other. Once the little girl calmed down, Jean praised her and received a “look of hatred” from the teacher. Jean grabbed her bag and left without saying anything. She reported being so angry that it was a good thing that the preschool director was not there at the time because she would have gotten “an earful.” Later in the week, Jean had to meet with the teacher to discuss assessment information and interventions for the little girl. Not surprisingly, Jean said that she “didn’t want to go.” Fortunately, Jean knew “this little girl will qualify and will be out of the room soon.” However, she wondered “about all the borderline kids who don’t [qualify].” Jean wished that the preschool teachers would listen to her ideas, follow through with interventions, and collect accurate data. She felt like she explained things over and over to the preschool teachers, so it could not be that they do not understand.

Valerie served one preschool program where she said the teacher was very apprehensive about her observing in the classroom. According to Valerie, the teacher told her that having people come into the classroom was very disruptive and caused the children to have behavior problems. In response, Valerie had taken the position that, if she cannot observe, it would be very difficult to help the teacher with her concerns. Valerie felt like she cannot do her job if she cannot get into the classroom.

For both Jean and Valerie, the issue of power was apparent in their interactions with preschool teachers. Jean struggled because of her perceptions about some preschool teachers’ unwillingness to follow her suggestions despite the support she felt she offered them. For Valerie, her struggle was with a preschool teacher who seemed to have
insecurities about having other adults in her classroom for any reason. Neither Jean nor Valerie was licensed as ECSE consultants, yet their agency expected them to provide consultation services to preschool teachers. The assumption may be made they have not been trained to work through issues of conflict, negativity, and insecurity with preschool teachers.

Teachers were not the only source of stress for participants. For Barbara, working with an administrator from one of her assigned school districts could be very stressful because she perceived he had “drawn the line” about children not coming to them until their third birthday. Barbara reported that this school district “does not budge” and there was no one to get them “to understand these children are theirs from birth because it’s a birth mandate state.” Barbara goes on to say that usually, when there was a roadblock, it was due to “the lack of understanding of what a particular child’s needs are at the administrative level or . . . lack of what early childhood needs are.” When she hit these roadblocks, Barbara sometimes gave up the fight, but still got very frustrated because “it’s not like we’re saying let’s get the kids in when they’re two and a half [years old].” She reported that the early intervention team decided on what was best for the children on a case-by-case basis depending on the needs of the child and the resources available. At one point earlier in the school year, Barbara described being frustrated with an administrator and emotionally involved with the family and child. When she could not get services from the school in place, Barbara thought “I can’t do this anymore . . . it wasn’t because of the family . . . I wanted to take this child and quit my job . . . because that’s what the child needs.”

This category discussed the issues that arose from participants working on teams with colleagues from their own agencies as well as from programs they serve. One of the main
issues was dysfunctional teaming and difficulties with communication (e.g., Michelle and Jean sharing experiences with team members who they perceived as unsupportive and seemed to sabotage their efforts with families and other team members). Another teaming issue focused on participants feeling like they did not have any power (e.g., Jean trying to support children by consulting with preschool teachers in the classrooms). Jean wished that the preschool teachers would listen to her ideas, follow through with interventions, and collect accurate data. She felt like she explained things over and over to the preschool teachers, so it could not be that they do not understand. A third teaming issue included a lack of understanding for early childhood. Both Michelle and Barbara felt like their efforts for families and children were misunderstood by school–aged team members and administrators, which resulted in them not feeling valued for their work.

**Providing Services to Families Who Face Challenges**

A second category that developed as a stressor for ECSE teachers was dealing with families who they thought were challenging. Participants perceived families as challenging when families did not keep appointments, made demands, had differing values about education, or required too much of participants’ time.

All participants were affected differently by a family’s decision to cancel or miss appointments. Jean shared how angry she would get when a family cancelled home visits. She would think, “How dare they?” and said she would become very judgmental about the choices the families were making regarding services. Since having her own children, however, and taking poverty simulation training, Jean shared that she had been working on being more empathetic toward families and trying to respect the families’ values.
Similar to Jean, both Valerie and Barbara described their experiences when families needed to reschedule or miss appointments. According to Valerie, some families may have barriers that kept them from taking services including how they feel about their house [appearance] or themselves. Valerie also claimed that she tended to keep families on her caseload a lot longer and “not give up on them quite as quickly” as some of her colleagues. Despite wanting to give families “the benefit of the doubt longer,” Valerie said she became frustrated when she had to call families every couple of weeks and set appointments just to have them not be at home when she arrived. She felt sometimes the services were not really wanted in the first place.

It’s easier if they just say that they don’t want us from the very beginning and I usually tell people you’re not going to offend me. This has got to be about you and if you want us because don’t worry about my feelings. I’ve been doing this for a long time. I’m going to walk out the door and forget it, which is true. I really do. I don’t dwell on, “Oh, they should’ve had this because I could really tell them a thing or two.” If they know they don’t want us, then there’s no point.

Barbara added that she had tried to work with families who were supposed to receive weekly home visits and kept cancelling and rescheduling them. Barbara wanted to support these families, but also knew that one home visit a week would not make all the difference for the children. She believed that families sometimes have to meet their basic needs first in order to support their children’s education. In agreement, Jean mentioned that “those families that you thought needed the most help didn’t want [it] and the families that were awesome wanted you weekly.” Along with that, Barbara reported serving families who were
“huge advocates for their kids and hugely supportive of their kids, but just [as] needy in terms of my time and their expectations for what was going to be provided for services.”

There were situations where the participants had a difficult time being empathetic and understanding of families. Michelle reported that she tries “to accommodate their values as long as they are appropriate and ethical . . . I know it’s more important that I’m in there working with their kids than . . . sacrificing their values for what I think.” For example, Michelle does not agree with spanking, but had parents who choose to use it as their form of discipline. Although some of her families forget to call to cancel, Michelle said she went anyway and waited for them. One family, who tended to be a “no-show” despite reminders, lived in an apartment building with a security door. Instead of being “buzzed in,” Michelle said she waited for someone to come out and goes in to knock on the family’s door. Sometimes, Michelle said she would wait in the parking lot until the appointment time passed.

I just sit in another place [in a parking lot]. Sit until that appointment is supposed to be then I go to a coffee shop and wait [instead of going back to the office]. I don’t get paid enough to rush anywhere. [When sitting in parking lots] I look like I’m a crazy little blond girl in a fancy car waiting for my drug dealer to bring me my coke.

With a few families, Michelle felt like she had done everything for them. She had provided one family with diapers because they told her they did not have any money. Then, Michelle saw the family at the grocery store buying cigarettes with cash and became resentful. She also provided another family with toys.

I am not giving you stuff anymore. Because when you were evicted from this place, all the toys that I gave you from our office that we didn’t want any more were all out
on the curb. . . . I drive past your house every single day to get to my office. They’re out on the curb for a week and you never went to go pick them up and . . . with that family, it’s just I’m sorry but I just can’t do this anymore. You’ll just have to find somebody else to suck off of.

Michelle believed that families “deserve quite a few opportunities” and that it is her personality to “just give and give and give.”

I just keep getting up and doing it over and over again. One of these masochistic-type of things, where I know that it’s probably going to happen again. I know this family is probably going to crap out on me, but I just keep on doing it.

Michelle stated that most of her early childhood colleagues agree and “just keep doing all this stuff out of our own goodwill because of those kids.”

Jean concurred with the stress of supporting families who were challenging by saying “[there are] several families where I feel like, I’m not getting anywhere with you.” For example, she and other colleagues serving the same family felt like they had given so much to the family and assumed the family did not want the services. In addition, Jean reported making her own home visit form to keep track of activities in her working file instead of the agency’s three-part form. In the past, she used the agency’s form and left a copy with families, but eventually concluded that families either lost the sheet or did not care. Likewise, Michelle said she and colleagues would stop telling families something if they had to repeat it several times. Both Michelle and Jean wished parents would “follow through” with what they had recommended or suggested.

With one family, Michelle had felt “we know that the only time that kid ever gets anything, you know . . . is the only time that I’m there or the OT is there or speech therapist
is there” and she believed that the situation would continue until the child went to preschool. Michelle said she called the Department of Human Services to report the family but had not gotten action from the department: “And then I turn them in and apparently grinding a can of all these peas and putting it in a bottle is okay. And curdled milk in bottles is okay. Yeah, turned that family in twice.”

Sometimes the experiences with families included tragic situations, like Valerie describing the accidental death of a toddler who was on her caseload. With this situation, Valerie and other team members had warned the family about a television falling over onto the child. When it did happen, Valerie went over the situation in her head during several nights of sleep.

I even remember warning the family about it in the living room, but this happened with one I didn’t even know about in the bedroom. I mean, you just . . . but if there was something I should have done that could have prevented that.

Over the years, Valerie reported there were other children who have passed away and she felt sad for the grieving families. However, Valerie felt that the children were no longer suffering from their severe disabilities and poor quality of life.

In summary, this category included participants sharing their frustrations with and feelings about working with families they considered challenging. For the most part, participants’ frustrations were with families who cancelled appointments, did not follow through with suggestions for their children, and may not have wanted their services in the first place. Based on their perceptions about families’ choices, some of the participants were lead to believe that families did not value education for their children. In addition, there were feelings about children only getting stimulation when service providers were in the home.
For some of the participants, there were feelings of being taken advantage of by families (e.g., Michelle giving diapers and toys to families). For both Michelle and Jean, there were also feelings of doing everything they could for families. For Valerie, there were feelings of guilt when her warnings to a family still resulted in the death of a child. On the other hand, the participants who had been in the field longer tended to have the ability to be more empathetic and understanding of families’ situations, especially after they had their own children. Despite the efforts to be more empathetic and understanding, one of the issues resulting from this category was a lack of family-centered practices being implemented by the ECSE teachers.

**Conforming to Job Aspects That Are Beyond Control**

A third category of stressor that was identified in the data included the issues that all of the participants were affected by job responsibilities and other job factors they could not control. These included the size of their caseloads, completing demanding and tedious paperwork, the agencies having a lack of understanding for what they do, and the degree to which the office environment was stressful or a home away from home.

**Fluctuating caseload numbers.** Caseload size was another cause of stress for all of the participants, especially when it was very high and difficult to manage. All of the participants knew that their caseload numbers could fluctuate and change on any given day due to new referrals or dismissals. Inequity of workload also caused stress for some of the participants. For example, Michelle shared how there was disproportion between caseload sizes, especially between the eastern and western regions of her agency. While Michelle’s caseload had grown from 22 to 40 families in three months, colleagues serving the eastern region had caseloads between nine to 17 families and were very vocal when it neared 20
families. In response to hearing about these colleagues, Michelle joked, “I can’t take any more kids. Apparently, I can say no.” On my last day of observation, she was trying to figure out how many days she needed for the months of June, July, and August since those months are considered a separate summer contract. Michelle was trying to factor home visits, assessments for current families as well as new referrals, travel, and planning to come up with the number of hours to compute into days needed. At first, she came up with more days than were even available for all three months.

Another participant’s caseload was even higher than Michelle’s caseload. Barbara reported having 12 early intervention families and 55 preschool children on her caseload, which included children who were in the evaluation process. Barbara was also the primary contact person for six of the early intervention families. When talking about her caseload, Barbara talked about having a really busy time earlier in the fall and how she was starting to get busy again:

Most caseloads go up and down. This fall was just horrendous and then all of a sudden the month of February came and seemed to lighten up a little bit. But all of a sudden, as of today, I’m back to having five evals going on at the same time. So [laughter] . . . and I’ve been at times having 10 going on at the same time this year. So . . . it’s been a little crazy.

Two participants were not feeling as much of stress due to their caseloads at the time of this study. Valerie stated that she felt “very good about my caseload right now. I’m sure it will go up. Right now it’s low.” Valerie went on to say that caseloads cycle and that all of her colleagues would agree.
You have times when you keep up really well and then within a matter of weeks you
just get overwhelmed. It depends on how many transitions you have going on and
how many IEPs you’re trying to write. The caseload can go up and down kind of
quickly sometimes.

Valerie reported that her highest caseload was close to 30 early intervention families where
she was providing both service coordination and special instruction, plus she also received
preschool referrals. Since the designated service coordinator was hired, Valerie felt that all
of their caseloads were down. At the time of this study, Valerie was reporting 10 early
intervention families, four new early intervention referrals, and seven preschool referrals.

Although she also has a small caseload, Jean could remember what it was like when it
was higher and more stressful for her. Now, Jean’s caseload includes an early intervention
referral, three preschool children, and 14 referrals to process. When it was the most difficult,
Jean said she had 26 referrals processing at the same time. She reported that “either I was
swamped with birth to three or preschool.” When Jean would get new referrals, she would
react by getting mad or panicky about the days ticking away for getting everything done.

My secretary would give me one and I’d be like “Oh, gosh.” I would just be so mad
[that] I got another referral. When my caseload was unreal, I would get 11 referrals
from one teacher at one time. It was panic at how I was going to get it done. Or with
birth to three, “Oh my gosh, I got another one, I just got two yesterday. How am I
going to get this done?” And I do still have that panic even though my case load isn’t
high this year.

Initially, Jean felt guilty for not offering help to a colleague who kept getting new
referrals and adding to her caseload. However, Jean remembered how busy she was in the
past and did not receive any help. Plus, Jean felt this particular colleague would not be as busy and have more time if she would “cut the cord” with her preschool teachers and not spend all day in their classrooms. As Jean said, many people are wearing a badge saying, “I’m busy, busy, busy, busy, busy,” and ‘Oh, my caseload.’”

**Completing paperwork.** Demanding and tedious paperwork emerged as a major aspect of stress on the job that was beyond participants’ control and most would say that their jobs were paperwork-driven. The participants felt their agencies overstressed the importance of the paperwork almost to the point of taking focus away from serving families and children. Not surprisingly, Barbara wished there was a better balance between paperwork and “being face-to-face with kids.” Barbara went on to say that the agency she works for provides constant training and reminders about paperwork details and making sure everybody is getting it “right.” When asked about whether or not her caseload responsibilities exceeded her work week, Barbara stated,

> It’s not the numbers and the caseload that take the time, it’s the amount of paperwork and the amount of details in the paperwork that takes the time and there’s the reason that you end of putting in lots of extra time.

Both Barbara and Jean wished there were not so many changes every year for paperwork. Jean said she would like the agency to “keep things consistent for a change.” Barbara went even farther by saying, “Let’s start by saying we’re freezing changes to procedures for three years [laughter] and then we don’t need all these people out there training.” For Barbara, the effort to develop training for new paperwork procedures and train agency staff was wasted time and money. A lot of times, she felt the new procedures could have been shared without having a face-to-face meeting.
I’ve sat in a half day meeting before where materials were sent to us electronically . . . and if I’ve had a chance to read through those . . . you know the thought has crossed my mind that maybe we didn’t need to sit through the meeting to get the information because I do know how to read. And I’m not saying there isn’t some benefit from getting together with your colleagues, your team to talk about some of those things. I feel like we repeat some of the same conversations.

With all paperwork, the participants tried to be timely for completion in order to be in compliance with the law, especially for the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) within 45 days of referral and Individualized Education Program (IEP) within 60 days of referral. As Jean described, families and children who may need an IFSP are priority over older children because there are fewer days to get everything done. Before a designated service coordinator was hired, Valerie reflected on her dual role with families:

There were years past when I handed in IEPs and IFSPs that were a month to six weeks, to even at my worst, two months late. I’m talking about when the IFSPs are at 30 and you’ve got, you’re a service coordinator, and you just can’t find the time. She went on to say that she is contacted if she does not turn in an IFSP within two weeks and an IEP within four to five days; however, she does not think this practice happens in all of the agency’s offices.

At least three nights a week, Valerie stayed late at the office to complete her paperwork “when it is still fresh in my mind” or planned an entire day in the office to catch up. Since Barbara home offices, she shared how she planned days into her calendar for paperwork:
I look at my calendar and . . . been blocking off days where I have a whole day set aside for catching up on paperwork. If I designate an entire day to home office, I’m very efficient getting things started and working straight through the day. That, in of itself, helps me figure out what it is I don’t have done or gets me organized. What I have found is that, if I take those days to do that everything goes smoother after that. Just knowing that that’s coming up I can kind of say, yeah, I know I’m behind but in a couple of days I’m going to have the opportunity to play catch up.

Unfortunately, Michelle did a lot of paperwork and reports from home, because “it takes me a little bit more time and I understand that and so that’s why I take some of my work home with me to get it done.” Michelle reported, “I wish I could home office, then I could do paperwork in my pajamas.”

All of the participants had been trained and were hopeful about the new web-based IFSP once it was available for use. However, they did raise some concerns about the ease of access and all of the “bugs” being worked out.

It will be wonderful in getting pieces of information together but we have so many troubles with the web IEP . . . the frustrations that go along with that we’re not looking forward to. There’s times we can’t get onto the IEP. There’s been times when I’ve had an ER [evaluation report] to write and you know I’m at home the night before and can’t get on the web, so that part of it we’re not looking forward to because there are so many bugs with the IEP. So hopefully it won’t be that way, but we’re concerned.
Medicaid paperwork was not a priority for any of the participants who had to complete it. When asked about Medicaid, Michelle sighed and talked about a letter from their director of special education. The letter said, “If you get Medicaid you HAVE to do it.” I felt I didn’t . . . I just didn’t do it. I didn’t have time. And getting my outcomes written and evaluations done. Getting, you know, going out and seeing those families was so much more important than sitting there and doing my Medicaid forms.

Because I have . . . you know, how they come out it’s just like a single-space excel sheet and I have, you know, at one point I had a page and a half of Medicaid and it’s like is this really important for $10? I don’t know how much it is but that’s what it seems like pennies and it changes all the time and one second we can bill for this and the next we can’t bill for that.

Michelle ended up shredding a year’s worth of Medicaid paperwork because she did not want to go back and just started with the current month. In agreement, Valerie stated that Medicaid was her last priority and how sometimes she turns in three to four months at a time after taking a day to get it all done.

Lastly, each participant reported not being able to count the time they spent completing paperwork. For example, they were not able to use a snow day for completing paperwork. They were still expected to make up that day because only direct service to families and children counted as work time. According to Valerie, paperwork started to take priority over planning time for home visits when her caseload increased, which she thought was unfortunate. Valerie claimed, “The paperwork has changed the quality of the services,” insinuating the time and effort required to complete paperwork took time away from families. In fact, Valerie stated that there is much more paperwork and documentation that has to be
done now than when she started in the field. Both Valerie and Jean talked about not having enough time to plan and just throwing things into their toy bags to go see children.

Typically, a toy bag is a large bag filled with toys that belong to the agency or ECSE teacher to use during the home visit with children. During the years when she had a higher caseload, Jean added that “going and playing with the kids . . . sometimes it’s not even enjoyable anymore because you have to squeeze them in.”

**Lack of understanding for what I do.** Another stressor for participants believed to be beyond their control was feeling like their agencies did not understand their jobs and all of the demands they face. Michelle stated that her agency as a whole did not support her in her job “not even close” and that she did not have enough time to provide services to families. In addition, Jean thought her agency verbally acknowledged job demands as if to appease employees by listening, but would tell employees, “There’s not a lot that we can do. We’ll try the best we can.” Valerie believed her agency tried to understand, but may not be aware of current inequities.

Right now, there’s one person and I’m in the middle, but there’s another person whose load is high. . . . I don’t think they really are aware of that. Part of it is the fault of the people for not bringing that to their attention but it’s kind of the way it is. Finally, Barbara said that, in terms of job demands, “it depends on who in the agency you’re talking about . . . the people on the frontline, they understand.” She felt that beyond the frontline, the administrators acknowledge the demands and how hard she and her colleagues work, but there is not anything that can be done. Barbara remarked that “the more you’re removed from it and the more time you’ve been removed . . . [you] really don’t understand what we deal with on the frontline.”
Another aspect of a lack of understanding for their jobs stems from the participants’ experiences with supervisors. When asked how they were supervised, they reported the process for how their performance was evaluated, which occurs every three years with a performance plan every year. Other than their formal evaluation, none of them stated that their supervisors used practices of reflective supervision, such as scheduling regular meetings, building a trusting relationship, and focusing on their strengths (Weatherston & Barron, 2009). All participants had received some help with job demands, but supervisors were just as busy and did not have the skills or time to provide reflective supervision.

When asked how often they had approached their supervisor for help, each participant had asked for help at different times over the past year. For example, Valerie reported going to her supervisor with paperwork questions a couple of times and said that her supervisor was “helpful in giving her opinion in how to proceed.” Overall, Valerie felt like she could go to her supervisor to talk about different issues, but that her supervisor covered a large area and had a lot of other people she supervised, too. Thus, Valerie mentioned that her supervisor is “putting out fires usually.” Interestingly, Valerie also stated that her supervisor had been very vocal lately about how frustrated she was with her own job. Finally, Valerie claimed that she has no idea of what her supervisor puts into her file following evaluation and that “with her I have no clue, absolutely none.”

After Michelle transferred to a new office, she was working two positions with territories that were an hour apart since no one had been hired for her old position yet. During those three months, Michelle went to her supervisor and threatened to quit if someone was not hired soon. Once someone was hired, Michelle asked for and received help with three to five referrals and evaluations.
It was taken care of, I didn’t have to do anything . . . I asked for help . . . I had like five more kids and I hadn’t transitioned anybody yet to the new teacher . . . And I just said I can’t do this, you know, somebody else needs to do this because my [early intervention] kids are going to suffer from it. So, you just talk to somebody else and another person in the office took care of it.

When that supervisor retired, Michelle and her colleagues were “really apprehensive and afraid of what’s to come” from the new supervisor. They had an idea of who it was and it was “not good news.” Fortunately, Michelle reported the new supervisor had been very supportive and was the only supervisor in the agency who took a vested interest in how much ECSE teachers do to provide early intervention services. On a regular basis, her supervisor asked her how she was doing and wanted to know her caseload size. In addition, Michelle reported that her supervisor’s door was always open and she could go in and talk to him at anytime. When she talked to her supervisor about an issue, Michelle stated that he helped her talk through the situation and figure out the solution on her own. Finally, Michelle reflected that before “I felt like I was just kind of talking to a wall and nothing would happen.” Now, her supervisor was more of a “go-getter” and she felt like “something might actually happen” if she told him something.

Barbara reported going to see her supervisor for help with problem-solving, especially concerns and issues with school districts. At those times, Barbara felt free to stop in to her supervisor’s office and stated that she did not want someone to listen to her “like I do with my spouse.” Usually, she wanted something to happen. In addition, Barbara felt that her current supervisor was willing to learn and understand more about early childhood and what teachers do, whereas a past supervisor was more apt to defend school districts and
“leave me in the dust” when issues arose instead. There were times when Barbara talked to her supervisor “to just blow off steam about something” or asked for some help, although she knew everybody was busy.

Occasionally, I’ll go in and . . . take some weight off my . . . talk about I’m a little overwhelmed again . . . I go in and say there’s too much happening too fast. I’ve got too many evals going on. They’re not getting done effectively. I’m not effective in what I’m doing. You know, I’m doing things but I’m doing them poorly. I need some help.

Overall, Barbara felt the conversations she has with her supervisor were “reflective . . . about what’s going on and what could be done differently.”

With a previous supervisor, Jean did not feel supported, especially when she would ask for help. With her current supervisor, Jean said she could go in and ask her questions about procedures and concerns. However, Jean mentioned that she tried not to because she knew her supervisor was busy. Her supervisor always responded with, “That’s my job.” Finally, Jean felt a lot of support from her supervisor after her second child was born. The supervisor acknowledged that Jean’s priority was as a mother first since the baby had significant health problems. At the time, Jean worked part time and someone was hired for a couple of months to help. Jean reflected on that time with:

My supervisor has been very generous or good about however I can make it work.

So, if I need to work at home or I need to work, say come into the office on the weekends, she’s been great about that over the last three years.

Most participants talked about how their agencies do not celebrate their successes. For the most part, agencies scheduled times during the year when employees were
acknowledged for years of service and new degrees (e.g., during Orientation Day at the beginning of the school year). Valerie mentioned her agency’s newsletter and how something may be written in it. She also noticed that, when people retired, others would talk about the successes they had over the years. However, Valerie stated, “But as far as feeling like you get feedback on a regular basis, probably not. I think we’re more likely to hear when we do something wrong, unfortunately. And that’s the current trend.” Likewise, Barbara reported that her agency “encourages us to send in acknowledgements about staff we work with” to be published in the monthly newsletter.

I think it’s... an attempt to celebrate our successes... I think it’s more... patronizing than it might be beneficial... I see more the focus on getting things right and more talk about getting things right than actual saying you did a good job.

Michelle talked about a display out in the reception area with note cards where colleagues can write a personal note and give it to another colleague. Michelle went on to say, “So it’s basically take care of yourself or say something to your own co-workers,” because the agency itself was not going to do anything. She also joked about writing herself a note.

All of the participants reported that their agencies did not recognize the demands of their jobs or celebrate their successes. Both Valerie and Jean thought their agencies tried to understand their job demands, however, at times it seemed that all supervisors could do was listen. In another example, Barbara seemed to talk about a hierarchy of understanding with colleagues serving families and children more likely to be sympathetic of job demands. On the other hand, supervisors and administrators who were removed from the frontlines were less able to be sympathetic, especially if they had never provided direct service or had not for...
a very long time. Again, Barbara felt her concerns were acknowledged by supervisors and administrators, but nothing could be done to help alleviate job demands.

As far as celebrating successes, the participants said they received most of their kudos from team members instead of agency administration. Both Michelle and Barbara were sarcastic as they talked about how their agencies try to celebrate staff accomplishments with note cards and putting them in the newsletter, respectively. Furthermore, Valerie reported that she and colleagues were more likely to hear from administration when they were doing something wrong and not positive feedback on a regular basis.

**Trying to make the office a home away from home.** Another aspect of the participants’ jobs that was beyond their control and potentially stressful was their office space and layout. All of the participants had different types of offices and personalized their areas for added comfort. Depending on the day’s schedule, the participants spent varying amounts of time in the office. Some of the participants started or ended their day in the office, but sometimes the schedule warranted going straight from home to the first appointment or meeting. Each of the participants’ offices will be described along with their spaces.

With the largest office observed in this study, Michelle’s office space was a cubicle among many cubicles in a huge room with high ceilings that used to be part of an old Target store. Like the others, she had a desk, bookcase, filing cabinets, and an extra chair for visitors. In addition, Michelle had decorated her cubicle with photographs of family and friends as well as seasonal items, for example, Christmas décor. Since Michelle and a lot of her colleagues were itinerant, most of the cubicles were empty at different times of the day, which contributed to the quiet noise level. Within that huge room, there were also offices for
administration and small meeting rooms. Toward the entrance of the building, there was a large reception area with restrooms and larger meeting rooms as well as the only access to natural lighting due to the ceiling-to-floor windows by the front door.

Also housed in a large building, Valerie’s office space was shared with five others in the classroom of an old elementary school. Each space was defined using desks, bookcases, cabinets, and filing cabinets. Like Michelle, each space was decorated with personal pictures and knick knacks. There was also a round table placed in the center of the room with chairs. The noise level in the room depended on who was present and what they were doing, especially since all of them were itinerant, too. Due to the overall use of space and personal touches in each space, the feel of the room was cozy and comfortable.

The other classrooms in the building were also assigned as office spaces with at least two to five people in each one. For the most part, each classroom seemed to be assigned by discipline (e.g., early childhood, speech-language pathology, occupational and physical therapy). Throughout the building, natural lighting could be accessed in some of the classrooms where there were windows and in all of the hallways because of the doors going outside. By the main entrance, there was a reception area, large meeting rooms, administrator’s offices, and restrooms.

With the smallest office building, Jean’s office space was shared with 14 others in an old store along a busy street. The only access to natural lighting was through the front door. The reception area right inside the door included a desk for the secretary and a small seating area with pictures of everyone who works out of the office on a small table. All of the individual spaces were in one room and defined again by desks, bookcases, cabinets, and filing cabinets and decorated with personal pictures, knick knacks, and posters on the wall.
The space was also sectioned by discipline and seemed inviting and relaxed. Even with everybody in one room, the noise level was manageable since most colleagues were not in the office during the day. There was one entrance in the front with a small reception area and a small meeting room. In the back of the room, there was a kitchenette and stairs to the basement for the restrooms and extra storage.

Unlike the others, Barbara’s office was in her home. She had her desk and a chair in the room and had easy access to her garage to load and unload her car. With a window overlooking the woods in her office, Barbara has access to natural lighting and could enjoy looking outside at wildlife in her yard. At times, Barbara chose to go to the local satellite office to use the copy machine or work in between appointments. The satellite office was a newer building with natural lighting coming only from the front door. Inside the front door, there was a wide hallway leading to a reception area, meeting rooms, and kitchenette to the right. To the left, there was a large room for the secretarial staff, mail room, and administrator’s office. Farther down the hallway were the assigned office spaces. Depending on her purpose for being there, Barbara would work in one of the meeting rooms or “try to hide” in the back so that she was not bothered by anyone.

**Summary**

Within this overall theme of stressors, several categories and subcategories were identified. This theme showed participants trying as much as possible to deal with stress from a number of sources that may lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue. Participants shared experiences with colleagues who were difficult to work with as well as families they felt were challenging to serve. Instead of reflective supervision, they all mentioned the evaluation cycle, but felt comfortable going in and talking to their supervisor
at any time. All of them discussed paperwork and commiserated in the laborious task of completing it, which affected their planning time for families and children. All of them felt as if their agencies did not always recognize their job demands or celebrate job successes. Finally, their office environments were a potential source of stress. According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009), teachers’ feelings of cognitive and emotional support from the school leadership decreased with size of school. In this study, this was also apparent in the size of the offices the participants were housed.

The Coping Strategies ECSE Teachers Use

This major theme describes the coping strategies that the participants used. There are three categories with subcategories included in this theme. The first category describes the participants forming positive relationships with colleagues. The second category relates how participants have a dependence on familiar routines during service provision, including the format for home visits, using toy bags, and working in dyads. The third category shows how participants restricted boundaries with families. Finally, the fourth category explains how participants were trying to strike a balance between their personal and work lives by relieving stress outside of work, taking mental health days, separating their home and work lives, making an effort to be family-centered with families, and using compensating strategies.

Moving Beyond “Colleagues” to “Friends and Family”

Positive relationships with colleagues were reported by all participants. For the most part, positive relationships equaled friendship with participants enjoying their time with colleagues during the work day. In some cases, participants considered the colleagues they were the closest to as family. For example, Valerie said, “There are days when somebody’s chatty, and you just think, ‘Oh, I’ve got too much to do.’” Moreover, it was apparent that
Valerie and those four office mates have shared the office area for a long time. On most days, she shared how they are very considerate of each other’s needs and preferences, especially when an office mate requests quiet time or few interruptions. They acknowledged each other when leaving or returning, asked how their nights or weekends were, and supported each other through tough times, for example, a death in the family. Jean’s experience with her colleagues was very similar when her youngest child was born with significant health problems and her husband lost his job within a short period of time. Lastly, Michelle reminisced about her previous office by saying, “That group down there in [city name] were definitely my family. You know . . . I moved down there not knowing a single person . . . and they helped me find a place to live.” At first, Michelle did not feel supported or respected in her current office. However, in the last three months, some new relationships had been forming and she felt “like a little more part of the group” and that her opinion was more welcome.

All participants described going out to lunch with colleagues during the work day. When talking about her previous office, Michelle joked about spending a lot of money because she was going out for lunch all the time. Additionally, she mentioned missing her colleagues from the previous office and meeting them for lunch when she could, especially when she was in the area. Interestingly, Valerie and her colleagues made it a rule not to talk about work when they go out for lunch. Jean and her colleagues liked to meet at a café near their office whenever they got the chance. Finally, Barbara joked that “I do, and not that we often have more than 20 minutes for that. But . . . occasionally we will . . . I’d say every couple of weeks I’ll be doing something with somebody.” Barbara was more likely to have lunch with two of her preschool teachers who work part-time and have the afternoon off.
When they did get together for lunch, Barbara said they rarely get through the entire time without “talking business” and “problem solving something” because there is “only so long we’ll sit and talk about each other’s kids.”

Beyond the work day, there were occasions when one participant spent time with colleagues. After meetings, Michelle and a small group of colleagues occasionally met for cocktails to rehash the topics and issues discussed, which she said “helps once in awhile.” Furthermore, she shared how she and colleagues have done other social activities together (e.g., scrapbooking and going out to eat on the weekends). Lastly, Michelle described a “mental health” day she had taken with a colleague to go shopping, but neither one could tell anybody about what they did or saw since both of them were supposed to be sick. Jean mentioned that if she had the time, she would spend time with colleagues outside of work, too. Finally, Barbara said she was more likely to spend time with colleagues outside of work if she had a relationship with them before working together.

For Valerie, Jean, and Barbara, the relationships with colleagues seemed more work-related. Other than sharing information about their families, the relationships did not necessarily reach into their personal lives. For Michelle, however, personal time beyond the work day was spent with her colleagues.

**Having a Dependence on Familiar Routines**

For early intervention, home visits for families and children were the primary mode of service provision for all of these participants. In most cases, participants had a similar routine for seeing the families on their caseloads related to the frequency and length of visits, using a toy bag, and working in dyads with the child. All of these aspects of home visits may be considered a form of coping with work stressors.
**Establishing the home visiting format.** Home visits for families and children were the primary mode of service provision for all of these participants. Typically, participants scheduled visits twice a month that lasted 30-45 minutes in length. Although not always the case historically, this practice has been occurring more frequently in early intervention. When she first started in the field, Valerie used to do weekly home visits for at least an hour. Now, she takes the families’ cue to determine the frequency and length as well as considering the purpose of the visit. In addition, Valerie stated “The paperwork has changed the quality of the services,” insinuating the time and effort required to complete paperwork has taken time away from families. She feels she does not get as close to the families on her caseload and is just one of the entourage of service providers coming in. On the other hand, Michelle rationalizes her 30 minute home visits twice a month with families as the most time children can work (play) and anything longer than that is mostly talking with the parent. Within her agency, Michelle stated there are others conducting home visits twice a month for an hour.

**Using toy bags.** All of the participants used toy bags during home visits, however, they all said that they do not always take one to every home visit. Jean said that using a toy bag depended on how well she knew the family in terms of what they had for toys and the goals for the child. According to Jean, there is “something about the bag that gets the children interested, even if they have the same stuff.” In addition, Valerie claimed that sometimes she takes nothing and other times she takes a couple of things. Plus, Valerie said she did not always get everything out of her bag because she did not feel it was necessary to play with everything. In addition, Michelle reported that “I don’t necessarily use it with every single one of my kids. There are a few that I don’t bring anything at all and we do just
fine.” Most of the participants had a variety of sizes of toy bags to use, as Valerie reported, “I have all sizes now.”

Valerie rationalized the use of the toy bags by explaining that a benefit of their use was that families could see toys that are age appropriate and learn different ways to use the toys. In addition, Valerie reported the children got to have experiences with toys that were new to them. During her home visits, Barbara often took a new book or toy and provided ideas for families to use with children. Michelle stated that she used toy bags for a variety of reasons. For example, Michelle said that with one little girl, the team was trying to get her to use a picture exchange system to request toys. Since her toys were always available to her, the team had decided to bring in novel toys to use. In another situation, Michelle was looking for something very specific and had exactly what she needed to elicit that skill from the child, despite the family having many toys for the child. Likewise, Valerie and Barbara always brought toys with them when conducting assessment activities because they needed certain toys that the family might not have.

Michelle claimed that some families did not have any toys for their children and “there’s only so much preaching that I can do to tell parents, you know, these are appropriate toys. Let’s go to the library because the books are free.” Similarly, Valerie mentioned that some of her families did not have any toys or books, so she said, “I need to get to the dollar store and get some because I really can’t leave that many.” For Barbara, she has found that some families did not have the means to purchase toys or the house was so clean and “the toys might be in a whole other room and sometimes we’ll just say, ‘let’s go play where the toys are.’”
Michelle said that a lot of her families liked her toy bag and were used to her bringing one. In addition, she reported that when she brought toys, she had the opportunity to leave something with the family to use until the next visit. Ideally, Michelle said she would like to have a bucket of toys that she could leave with families between visits and “then that way I know by them using this specific material then it’s foolproof for some families.” In addition, Valerie still left toys from her agency’s toy library with families, unless they lost toys more than once. When Valerie packed her bag to leave, the children were sometimes disappointed at first, but they knew it was going to happen after a couple of visits. Finally, Barbara usually left books and sometimes toys with families.

Participants were also asked about the drawbacks of using a toy bag. Jean and Michelle said they could understand how using a toy bag may be considered a crutch because ECSE teachers were used to using them. In general, Michelle said she did not consider the toy bag a drawback, but said it would be worse to go to a home visit without a toy bag and find out the family did not have anything.

I’m going to be digging through their stuff . . . I feel like with some of my kids, if I’m only seeing them twice a month, that’s almost a waste of my time. That’s a waste of their time. It’s a waste of the child’s time if I don’t come prepared . . . if I’m going there and you know looking for their things then that’s wasting probably 10 minutes trying to figure out to get what I needed out of what materials they don’t have or what materials they do have.

Valerie thought some families might not like to have “fancy toys” used in their home and then taken away at the end of the visit, especially those who do not have a lot of resources. Barbara added that families would not be able to “follow through” with the ideas she
provided if she used toys the families did not have or could not keep. Finally, Valerie worried about the bags being “the biggest germ thing carrying from house to house.” She used a roller to remove pet hair, sprayed them with disinfectant, and washed them periodically.

**Working in dyads during home visits.** During the home visits, most participants worked primarily with the children in dyads using the materials from their toy bags despite what was already available in the homes. Typically, the parents observed the interactions without being directly involved. For example, Michelle played at the kitchen table with a little girl as her parents watched while sitting on the floor. When Michelle and the little girl moved to the floor to play, the parents became more verbally engaged. Toward the end of the home visit, Michelle debriefed with the parents and reinforced activities they were doing with the little girl. At another home visit, Michelle, the mother, and a little boy sat at the kitchen table. Although the mother was there, the interaction was mostly between Michelle and the little boy as they looked at books. While driving away, Michelle said “[We] want parents to play with their kids . . . a lot of them just don’t know what to do.”

Similarly, Jean and one of her colleagues shared a home visit with a little girl and infant brother, respectively, where each of them brought toy bags. Jean did not give the little girl a choice of what they were going to play with and insisted they play her game. When the little girl would not give up her own toys, Jean asked the mother to take them away. During the game, the mother stood and watched from behind the couch while Jean and her colleague each played with a child on the floor in front of the couch. At the same time, the father sat on the end of the couch and played a video game. At the end of the visit, Jean gave the little
girl permission to have her toys back before debriefing with the mother and scheduling another visit.

During her home visits, Valerie also focused on the child, however, the parents were always nearby and engaged the entire time. At one visit, Valerie and the mother sat on the floor with the infant laying on his blanket. While Valerie modeled how to get him in and out of different positions, she asked the mother questions about her son, checked his reactions to each position, gave reinforcement for what the family had been doing with him, and offered suggestions for developmental next steps. In addition, the mother asked Valerie a lot of questions and she responded with more ideas and information.

At a home visit with a little girl, Barbara and her colleague each brought their toy bags and sat on the floor while the mother sat on the couch. During play, Barbara and her colleague focused on the child but were also engaged in conversation with the mother about an older sibling, family activities from the week before, and transition to preschool in the fall along with summer services. In addition, Barbara and her colleague shared the task of tracking the little girl’s utterances depending on who was interacting with her. Toward the end of the home visit, the mother was given a book to keep and offered activities related to the book.

Notwithstanding, all of the participants believed they are offering the best services they are capable of providing for the families on their caseloads. When necessary, participants provided families with materials, for example, dry erase boards for scheduling, and information about community and state resources. During home visits, most of the participants worked directly with the child in dyads with the parents as observers.
Restricting Boundaries with Families

Another way for participants to cope with work stressors was to develop boundaries between them and the families they served. Boundaries between participants and the families on their caseloads ranged between less restrictive and more restrictive. When the boundary was less restrictive, participants reported that they sometimes tried to befriend family members, especially mothers. For example, Michelle related an experience with a mother whom she and colleagues were trying to get to relocate to the town where they lived:

We had all given her so many opportunities to get away from that community and said, “You know, come live up here. We’ll call you on Friday nights when we do, you know, when us girls get together and you can come scrapbook with us and we can go have lunch on Sundays together,” you know. We had given her so many opportunities to make friends in a different community and, you know, using and being around her mom, who was also a user, was just too important.

Michelle also talked about how much personal information she shares is different for every family. With some families, she shared about her family (e.g., her husband’s name and stories about her nieces), whereas with other families, they may only know she is married because she wears a wedding ring. Michelle went so far to say that she has formed close friendships with some families.

If I was doing something outside of work there’s you know chances are that I may invite somebody you know some of these other families there. You know it’s what I thought about my wedding. There’s some of my families that I thought you know I’d really like to invite them to my wedding because I feel like they are a part of my life
and part of my family. You know just a different family like my work family just like
I would invite co-workers to my wedding.

For Barbara, her social life was not always separate from her work life. There had been families she has “done things socially with and usually the social came before the work piece.” Finally, Jean described interacting with families outside of work, but it depended on the timing and situation.

When she was new to the field, Valerie mentioned giving monetary and material support to families, which she no longer does. Now, Valerie felt like “giving [families] all kinds of personal help yourself can and often ends up backfiring on you” and would rather connect families to appropriate resources. She strived to keep her relationships with families on a professional basis so that she would not set herself up to have them take advantage of her. Besides, Valerie thought families ended up having more respect for her and were connected to resources for when she was no longer working with them.

Most of the participants would provide home visits in the evening with parents who were not able to meet during the day. For example, Michelle stated, “I have quite a few families who are working families so I just schedule those later because that’s my job.” For her agency, anything past four o’clock is considered flex time, which she can use on a different day to come into work later or leave work early. In addition, Valerie reported that she does not “have a problem with late night visits,” either, because “if I feel I need the time back, I can ask for it.” Finally, Barbara expressed that she will schedule home visits with parents who cannot meet until after work, but she typically does not schedule anything after five o’clock.
When boundaries were more restrictive with families, participants expressed the different ways they kept families at a distance. This included not accepting food or chatting about anything other than topics related to the child during home visits. Most of the participants did not give their cell phone number to families, although Michelle said some of them “get it from somewhere or someone else” and “call me at all times of the day.” In addition, participants used the office telephone to call families and not their cell phones, when possible. On the other hand, Barbara used a separate cell phone designated just for work purposes and gave that number to families. Valerie protected her weekends by declining invitations from families.

I get invited to a lot of parties on the weekend. A lot of birthday parties, and typically and it’s a rare thing where I say that I would do that. I usually just say, “Oh, we have, our family is getting together.” Even if I don’t, I’ll say I have a family thing. I’ll be very appreciative of being invited, but I do draw the line on the weekends. I will have a reason for why I cannot be at something that they invited me to on the weekend.

All of the participants had ways to create boundaries between themselves and the families they served. For example, Michelle shared varying degrees of information with her families and considered some families to be her friends. On the other hand, Valerie chose to keep her relationships with families very professional and separate from her personal life. The same was true for Jean and Barbara. Typical boundaries that were mentioned included not giving out personal cell phone numbers, refusing food and drinks during home visits, and declining families’ invitations for parties.
Balancing Personal and Work Lives

All of the participants were able to disclose their personal strategies for trying to alleviate the effects of work stressors. Within all of the participants’ lives, they have realized something needed to change in their work life and were slowly making the changes.

Relieving stress outside of work. One of the strategies for dealing with stressors was engaging in different activities outside of work. Most of the participants enjoyed spending time by themselves as well as with family and friends. For example, Valerie listened to music and Jean enjoyed reading and called herself a “book worm.” Barbara also mentioned reading and “watching stupid sitcoms on TV,” although she said she did not usually watch a lot of television. Michelle talked about spending time with her husband and going shopping with friends: “It’s just playing video games with my husband. That’s what we like to do. We’re kind of dorks like that but we sit home and play Wii.” In addition, Valerie mentioned that after a stressful day at work, she and her husband would go out to eat because she did not feel like making a “home-cooked meal.” She felt fortunate that she and her husband could do that since their grown children no longer lived at home. At other times, Valerie and her husband decided they “need a friend night. Like, if we feel like people have been stressed at work, we’ll plan a night, that we’re going out to eat and to a movie.”

Coping with stress was also facilitated through belief in a higher power. Most of the participants stated they have spiritual faith that helps them deal with work stress. Michelle stated that her “faith . . . remind[s] me why I love this job.” In addition, Valerie shared that she attends church regularly and has “prayer and hope in her life.” Finally, Jean said that she was raised as a Christian and has that background instilled in her. With all of the things she and her family have gone through, Jean felt by relying on her faith that “everything will be
okay.” Jean went on to say that she tried to stay calm and kept her peace by saying a quick
prayer or grabbing her devotion book and reading a story, which she said helped her feel
better.

As another way of coping with stress, participants have tried to make their physical
and emotional self-care a priority. All of them reported using exercise, for example, walking
and running. Valerie walked up to five miles a day when the weather was nice or on a
treadmill when she could not get outside. Jean reported that she loved to exercise, especially
on her treadmill, and her children liked to exercise with her. She also enjoyed sleeping in
and napping on her days off. Finally, Barbara said she always made sure she was able to go
running. “I have a group of people that I run with that aren’t related to education so I can get
away from it entirely. I can get away from things that are related to the job.”

Taking mental health days. Emotionally, participants have been able to realize
when they need to take a “mental health” day from work. Typically, Barbara said she did not
take more than one mental health day a year. Barbara home offices, so work was always
accessible. Due to the previous winter resulting in a lot of snow days, Barbara was able to
choose whether or not to work.

On those snow days where we couldn’t go anywhere, they closed our office. They
say you can’t go to work, you can’t go to the office, you can’t go to any of your sites.
I’m able to take that as a sick day and I even though I might get some work done
while I’m at home, I’m not feeling the pressure to do that. So I can actually sit down
and read a book or sit by the fire and not worry about whether I’m getting my work
done because I can take that as a sick weather related day.
Michelle sometimes planned for a mental health day by not scheduling any home visits or meetings and making sure she had all her paperwork finished. Michelle said that she might decide to take a day off when she wakes up in the morning, especially if she was tired and did not want to get out of bed. Valerie said she did not take mental health days very often, but would rearrange her schedule if she felt she needed a day off. After having issues with an office mate last fall, she reported being “really at a point where I thought, I need to get away” and rearranged her schedule and went shopping for a day. Jean said she used to take more mental health days because she was very dissatisfied. There have been times when Jean has taken a mental health day and her husband felt like it was his day off instead because he stayed home to care for their son. Not surprising, this situation caused even more stress for her. Jean reported that her husband has learned not to do that anymore, but also that her children cannot know she is at home because they would want her. Recently, she took 10 days off of work and went to visit her parents. “It was a situation that, like there was a lot of stress. There had been a lot of stress in my family, and it was just something that I felt had to be done. I thought I was going crazy.”

**Separating home and work lives.** In other ways, all of the participants made an effort to separate their home and work lives in order to help with work stressors. For instance, Michelle used to have an hour drive to and from work and turned off everything in her car in order to drive in “dead silence.” On very stressful days, she would call her husband on the way home and talk to him. By the time she got home, she was done thinking about whatever was bothering her. At home, she said she liked to just sit and watch television for 15-20 minutes and “be able to wind down or de-stress from the day” before doing anything else. Valerie said she did not take work home with her, but would rather stay
late to finish tasks (e.g., paperwork). Once home, she tried not to talk about work. In addition, Jean made her family a priority and tried to not stress so much about work anymore. Before having children, she obsessed a lot about work then “had something else to focus my mind on” with the birth of her first child.

Since Barbara office\d at home, she decided to make a New Year’s resolution about not working on the weekends in an effort to cut back and has, so far, kept it. Barbara had the realization that as far as work, “it’s not getting done, but it’s never going to all be done.” In addition, Barbara used a cell phone just for work purposes and turned it off at the end of her work day. Sometimes, her colleagues would catch her before it was turned off and remark about it not being off yet.

**Making an effort to be strengths-based with families.** One coping strategy used to work with families they considered challenging was reframing and transforming a difficult situation to look at the positive. With families they considered challenging, participants said they found it difficult to be strengths-based. For Jean, focusing on strengths comes back to how “you feel about yourself . . . and if you feel good.” She continued by saying that “let’s focus on the positives . . . that everyone has strengths . . . even though sometimes it’s really hard to find them.” Jean admitted that at first she was really negative and being positive is something that she had to teach herself. With maturity, Jean has been able to change her attitudes about families from very judgmental to more empathetic. She now believes that families “have more on their plate than I even knew of” and make their own choices, although she may feel they are poor choices. Another participant used to get frustrated when she would see “really bad things going on or the lack of things going on” with families she
considered challenging. As a result, Michelle has tried not to become frustrated with things families do that she does not have any control over.

In her attempt to be strengths-based, Valerie said she always tried to make it a conscious effort to find something she could compliment families on (e.g., a rare positive interaction between the parent and child). In addition, she described having “an attitude of looking” for the positives. Barbara adopted the perspective of “trying to put myself in their shoes . . . where they’re coming from” with families. During one of her undergraduate classes, Barbara remembered the professor telling the class that “everybody does the best they can in the moment they’re in and I really come back to that all the time.” Finally, Barbara has come to the conclusion that each family provides its own challenges.

**Using compensating strategies.** Despite having positive strategies, the participants also used strategies that may be considered negative. For example, Michelle mentioned gaining weight from eating a lot of fast food, especially when she first started her Master of Arts degree and was going from work to class. Besides that, she said she sometimes cried, particularly “if I bottle a lot of stuff up.” During a very stressful time, Michelle was “crying after work more than what was needed. It was really bad.” Barbara also reported eating and internalizing a lot as a way to deal with her work stress. Not too long ago, Barbara was having issues with sleeping due to “dealing with the frustrations of [my] day.” When she would wake up, Barbara would get up and try to work, which she claimed made the sleeping issue worse. Barbara’s work stress not only affected her sleep but also her health, including problems with blood pressure and blood sugar. Furthermore, she reported that her emotional stability was “off balance.” In the end, she chose to explore medication.
Other participants used different strategies. Valerie said that she has gotten caught up with complaining about different work situations, especially the issue with the office mate. She and the other office mates have tried to realize when they are “feeding into it and making it worse.” In addition, Jean mentioned avoiding something by running away from it. Finally, she talked about being a “people pleaser” and perfectionist: “Probably just that people pleaser in me, that ‘Oh, I don’t want to get in trouble,’ that I want to do the best that I can do. Just to please everyone.”

Summary

In summary, all of the participants had strategies to help alleviate the effects of work stressors while at work as well as in their personal lives. All of them enjoyed spending time with family and friends, doing hobbies, and having spiritual faith. They also engaged in behaviors that helped them separate their personal life from work, i.e., Valerie does not take work home with her. In addition, participants had different strategies at work to help them with stress, these included knowing when they need a break, reframing situations related to families, and attending professional development opportunities.

Resiliency Outcomes of Stress and Coping That ECSE Teachers Experience

This major theme describes the resiliency outcomes that ECSE teachers experienced. Resiliency is defined as “the ability to continue to find deep and sustaining personal and professional satisfaction in one’s work as an early childhood educator despite the presences of multiple adverse factors and circumstances that have led many to leave the field” (Sumison, 2003, p. 143). Bobek (2002) reported that resiliency is the ability to differentiate stressful situations and choose the appropriate coping strategy for each situation based on previous experiences.
There are five categories included in this theme. The first category examines participants’ original and ongoing passion for their jobs. The second category describes how participants looked for different jobs every year. The third category shows how participants’ professional and personal stress became intertwined as they realized work was overtaking other aspects of their lives. Next, the fourth category relates to the participants’ ability to cope with stressful day-to-day situations they encountered. Finally, the last category describes participants enjoying good days at work.

The ability to identify a direct outcome from coping with stress was difficult because the stressors change over time and the coping strategies are varied and contextual. However, one thing that was evident was the cyclical and circumstantial nature of how stress and coping interacted to influence the participants’ personal and professional job satisfaction with the job.

Cyclically, the interaction between stress and coping seemed to affect job satisfaction most around the time job contracts for the following year were supposed to come out and resulted in many of the participants wanting to look for another job. On the other hand, the circumstantial nature of the interaction tended to occur more frequently (e.g., daily, weekly, or monthly), due to different situations the participants encountered and how they affected their personal lives. Depending on how participants felt about their jobs on any given day, their levels of personal and professional job satisfaction could build their resiliency or potentially lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue.
Having Passion for the Job

In relation to personal and professional job satisfaction, all of the participants talked about the children and families as the reason for what made them want to go to work every day. For example, Michelle shared that it is the children that make her job worth it:

I’ve noticed there’s so many families that I get really stressed out about. Like it’s that one kid on that one day that just gives you that high. I get goose bumps just thinking about it. It’s that one kid that keeps me going through all of the other garbage.

Jean’s response to what made her want to go to work was also related to the children, which she claimed was “the reason I took the job [was] to work with kids.” For Valerie, the families, children, and her colleagues made her job enjoyable. In addition, she also appreciated the flexibility of not having to “sit at a desk all day. I’m up and down and doing things and moving.” Finally, Barbara concurred with everything the other participants talked about but also added that the paycheck kept her working.

All participants reported being satisfied with their jobs in different ways. For example, Valerie simply said she was very satisfied and started talking about characteristics of her job that made it satisfying:

It’s got a lot of things that I would want in a job. Flexibility is huge. Friends [and] coworkers. Change of pace, lots of change of pace, not just sitting at a desk. I enjoy the children. Obviously that’s huge. I also like the families. I like working with and being right there with the parents. They know what I’m doing. Hopefully there’s communication if they have a question. If there’s an issue it can be resolved right there.
However, when asked later about her ideal job, Valerie said she “did not know what my ideal job would be. Did I find the job that I have a passion for? Probably not.” Valerie also reported years when she felt more dissatisfied with her job in the past, especially when her caseload was overwhelming and she was working only part time. During that time, Valerie was serving a full time caseload on part time pay. It was not until she went full time that she felt satisfied with her job because she was able to manage her time better and felt more compensated.

Another participant reported being satisfied with her job only in the last couple of years. When Jean and her husband moved to the area, they decided that she would just get anything for a job. Within the first week, she hated her job and thought that she would find something else for the next year. Jean was very vocal to family and colleagues about wanting to leave. Jean said that it had been a struggle, but 10 years later, she was still in the job. In the last two years, Jean reported that “I’m okay now. I’m at peace now with some things.” However, Jean also shared that she is not as satisfied she could be:

I would say it’s fine. I don’t get up in the morning like, “Yeah! I get to go to work.”

There was a time when I was a preschool teacher that I did do that. You know, so, it’s not there. Sometimes I do get in my mind, “Yeah, I get to do something to help people” and see kids, hopefully.

One of the participants described her job satisfaction on a scale of 1–10. Barbara shared, “You can ask me that every day and it might be different. I’m probably a six or seven on job satisfaction. Some days it might go up.” She also added there were times over this year that she would have given herself a lower rating. Barbara would not give herself a 10 and consider herself fully satisfied, because she wanted to allow for growth.
Another participant reported her job satisfaction with a percentage. When she first started, Michelle had wondered, “What the hell am I doing? Do I really know what I’m doing?” Now, Michelle acknowledged that her job satisfaction probably fluctuated, but gave it a high rating. “For the most part, you know, if I were to give it a percentage of something, you know, probably like 80 or 90%. I’m satisfied with my job. You know, I enjoy what I do.” When asked about her ideal job, Michelle described wanting to continue providing early intervention services because “I just love it.”

Looking for Other Work

Despite feeling some personal and professional job satisfaction, all of the participants mentioned looking for a different job every year. In some ways, this may be considered a positive strategy for participants, especially if they stay in the field of education and maintain their dedication to teaching. However, it can also be an indicator for not being resilient to work stressors. According to Michelle, she has been looking at jobs that are not in the special education field. She really enjoyed her student teaching experience in a kindergarten classroom, but early intervention kept “dragging her back.”

I’ve looked and you know I do it regularly. I get the paper on Sunday and skim through it and see what jobs are available. I’ve never taken that next step of actually pursuing it more than just looking in the paper.

On my last day of observation, Michelle disclosed that she had applied for a different job with a school district, but had not received a callback yet. Michelle also referred to some of her colleagues being on school year contracts, which end when schools recess for the summer. Since she works a year round contract, Michelle becomes more stressed when
colleagues are trying to plan meetings toward the end of the year because after that “we’re on break.” She responded with, “Well, tough cookies, I’m not. I’m working all the time.”

Valerie has considered looking for a different job a couple of times over the years. She even had a principal contact her about a job and she turned it down. Valerie reported that the flexibility of her current position keeps her there.

Over the years when I actually considered it, when I had it handed to me, I didn’t take it because of the flexibility that this job has. It all comes down to that that at this point in my life. My husband travels. I’ve gone with him a few times because I’m able to rearrange my schedule. Even though during the winter when it’s really cold and icy and I think ‘oh I don’t want to go out’ the classroom would be wonderful, I really like the flexibility of this job and being out and about.

For Jean, she really wanted to leave her position during the first five years. During that time, her husband used to say, “Oh, gosh. Here comes this time. We go through this every year. . . . Is she going to sign her contract?” Although she has found other positions, Jean never applies for them because of the flexibility of the position. Plus, she feels that going back to the classroom would be even more stressful since she has not worked in one for a long time.

Finally, Barbara has also looked for a different job and reported that this year it started even earlier than usual. Typically, she would start looking in the spring, but this year it was in the late fall or early winter where she was “really questioning whether I would even finish the year.” Furthermore, Barbara had been thinking about changing jobs much more frequently and even looking at a different field.
I probably think about that weekly. I think should I have gone into engineering? [laughter] I mean I actually have thought about all kinds of different things. I’ve toyed with some things, you know, you ask yourself that question when you hit 50 you ask yourself lots of questions. Am I too [old] for a new career? But I have thought about other careers not related to education. I mean I think if I was going to make a career change, it would be out of education entirely.

This category discussed the cyclical nature of how stress and coping interact to affect participants’ job satisfaction, which tended to occur less often or during certain times of the year. All of the participants were able to share experiences where their job satisfaction fluctuated. In addition, participants shared how they looked for a different job every year and how they would described their ideal jobs, which did not always match with their current job.

**Realizing Work is Overtaking Their Personal Lives**

Participants’ job satisfaction was also affected by the circumstantial nature of the interaction between stress and coping. The participants reported how their professional lives affected their personal lives, for example, relationships and health. During a three month period last fall, Michelle reflected on working two positions an hour away from each other and having to deal with expectations of two different early intervention teams. At the time, she was also attending graduate school. As a result, Michelle reported being “too stressed out” and that “it was carrying over into my relationship with my husband.” Michelle’s health was also affected since she was “getting more headaches than normal.” Recently, Michelle had seemed to reach a breaking point with work stressors:
This last week has been terrible, all I want to do is sleep. Almost this last year, I just want to sleep all the time. I can never get enough sleep and I know it’s because I’m stressed out. And, especially this morning, I just felt kind of groggy like I couldn’t think straight. I was just so sick of everything.

Another participant also felt the effects of trying to cope with work stressors infringing on her personal life. Before Barbara made the New Year’s resolution not to work at home on weekends, she estimated working 60–70 hours per week and was now down to 45 hours. All of those hours of working affected her home life, Barbara remarked that her “whole life was centered around eating, sleeping, and working.” In addition, Barbara was experiencing health problems with elevated blood pressure and the effects from not getting a full night of sleep for over a year. Consequently, all of the participants reported waking up in the middle of the night due to worrying about their job and what needed to be done. Along with that, participants labeled the emotions they have felt due to work stressors as panic, frustration, anger and anxiety.

One participant remembered her personal life being more affected when the demands of both work and home were high. When Valerie’s children were young, she was also experiencing a higher caseload and paperwork demands.

I would usually have to find a way to catch up at work whether it be telling my husband you have to have the kids all day today because I’m going to work. But I don’t find that as much of a problem for me now without a family at home. Valerie felt that “home is huge with any job.” She went on to say that it was difficult to keep work and home separate, especially if there was a lot of stress in both places. Both Valerie and her husband have demanding jobs and work a lot, but do not feel as if they were ignoring
each other. As far as health ailments, Valerie suffered from shingles a couple of years ago, which can be brought on by stress.

For one participant, the stressors of her personal life were affecting her professional life. Jean talked about having to take unpaid leave due to her son’s health issues, which was very stressful for her. In her family, Jean was the only one working and her husband was unable to drive. Last fall, she was having a “really tough time” between home and work. As a result, Jean has tried to do “the best I can while I’m at work and be the best employee that I can be, but my family comes first. I’ve had people say ‘well, you need to come first,’ and I’m working on that, too.

**Coping with Stressful Day-to-Day Situations**

Stressful day-to-day situations at work also increased the likelihood of not being satisfied with their jobs. All of the participants described what a day would look like where nothing was going well and how it could be improved. For the most part, the participants described situations related to families they served or the preschool teachers they collaborated with regularly. For Michelle, such a day consisted of “seeing the wrong family” or “having a family get really upset with me or confrontational with me.” Michelle was referring to a recent situation with a mother who yelled at her and another team member at a home visit. Michelle shared, “I just kind of shut down. I don’t normally do that. A lot of times, I can deal with it a little bit better but I tried to talk to her about and it just didn’t work.” Unfortunately, Michelle’s day started with a stressful morning at home:

This morning I was running late I couldn’t find the shirt that I wanted to wear. I ripped apart my dresser every single t-shirt that I have is on the floor because I was so angry and my hair was wet and it was just like starting off that way. Then, I called
my husband and he was saying the wrong thing. I was tired and have a little bit of a headache and so I was driving to work and I ran in here and grabbed my stuff. Michelle stated some days could be saved by going home and relaxing or finding the right song to listen to on the radio or her iPod. Michelle enjoyed listening to songs written and sung by a friend that had passed away. By listening to his songs, she was reminded “that he’s thinking of me.”

For a couple of the participants, having families cancel was one indicator of a day that was not going to go well. Barbara did not like having cancelled visits and Valerie agreed by saying, “If I pack up and plan for a couple hours and then none of my appointments show.” When there were cancellations, Barbara remarked about having to waste time going from place to place and having no place to do anything. Both Barbara and Valerie were able to do different things to help when they were having days that were not going well. For example, Barbara mentioned having an unexpected conversation with somebody or finding a place to work in between visits. Sometimes, Valerie was able to go to the next visit and change her outlook about the day unknowingly.

I can have a bad day and then go out on a home visit and have a nice time and then leave that home visit going okay this day’s okay. This saved the day. I got away from the office and those morning visits didn’t go well but this is why I do this. Fortunately, before that hour is over, I’ve actually without even realizing it somewhere along the way have let it go.

For another participant, a day that was not going well at work could start if she had not gotten enough sleep and was very tired. On those days, Jean tried to make an effort not to let “my circumstance dictate my whole day.” In other situations, Jean shared that being
frustrated with teachers who do not “listen or they whine and complain” affected her day. As a result, Jean found herself wanting to be the teacher instead. Jean joked that her day could be saved with “food! cheeseballs!” or taking a break to read. Jean also felt that maturity and her spiritual beliefs have helped her with getting through a bad day.

But I think with maturity you just kind of let it go. And I try to calm down and just keep my peace. So I’ll say a quick prayer. Sometimes I think I’m going to go in here and just be grumpy so everybody knows that I had a bad day or bad night and I can never do it. Because then I go in and I’m like hi and feel like I’m being fake but just seeing other people and then you just kind of come out of it.

**Enjoying Good Days at Work**

There were also day-to-day situations that positively influenced participants’ job satisfaction. For example, Michelle described a day that was going well at work as “the sun shining through the sun roof . . . and being able to go home and know that I’m ready for the next day.” In relation to families she serves, Michelle said, “All my families being there or some of my families not being there. Sometimes that can be a good day if they are not there.” Besides getting some paperwork finished, Valerie described a favorable day at work as having appointments with families go well and “maybe if I feel like actually I had something to offer an idea that a family thought might be helpful or work for them.” Barbara concurred by talking about having all of her families show up for visits, that she was able to pass on information to families or gotten information from them, and that she connected with the families and children.

Some participants talked about consulting with preschool teachers and seeing them doing the interventions they recommended so that children made progress. Barbara felt good
about consulting with preschool teachers in a manner the teachers felt was useful. For Jean, seeing her recommendations in motion made her feel more confident, competent, and valued.

You know maybe that’s more about myself. I need that positive reinforcement that things are going well. I’m helping them and I know what I’m doing. Or a meeting that goes really well and I sounded good. Yeah, I do know what I’m talking about and it sounds very self-centered and it is but . . . when things seem to go okay like that.

**Summary**

This theme discussed the circumstantial nature of the interaction between coping and stress and how it affected resiliency and personal and professional job satisfaction. The circumstantial nature of the interaction happened more often, for example, daily, weekly, or monthly. All of the participants were able to share experiences where professional situations they were facing at work affected their personal lives. In addition, participants shared how working with families and day-to-day situations affected their job satisfaction and increasing their chances of potentially suffering from professional burnout and compassion fatigue.

In some ways, the circumstantial nature was dependent on how much the participants perceived the stressors could or could not be resolved by their coping strategies. As a result of resolving the stressors, the participants had what could be considered ”good days” or “bad days” when stressors could not be resolved.

**Summary of Findings**

This chapter presented the findings uncovered in this study. Findings were organized into categories based on the research questions and the ABCX model (Hill, 1958) for stress, coping, and resiliency outcomes. Data was gathered from participants using observations
and interviews in order to gain their perceptions about the stressors that may lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue for early childhood special education (ECSE) teachers as well as how they cope and built their resiliency. Typically in qualitative research, quotations from the participants are included to assist with representing the reality of the people and situations being studied.

The first main theme was comprised of the stressors that ECSE teachers faced. The stressors included teaming, working with families they considered challenging, and having no control over job aspects. For most of the participants, working within teams with colleagues was stressful. Colleagues may be from their own agencies or may work for different programs as preschool teachers or administrators. Dysfunctional teaming and issues with communication and power were common for these ECSE teachers. When faced with teaming issues and conflict, participants reacted in different ways. At first, they may try to befriend colleagues or give them the benefit of the doubt. However, when those efforts did not work, participants tried to avoid colleagues and only interact with them when necessary. At different times, participants may second-guess their own abilities or become critical of their colleagues, especially when they felt families and children were being affected.

A second stressor mentioned by participants was working with families they considered challenging. Families were considered challenging when they did not keep appointments, made demands, had differing values about education, or required too much of participants’ time. Participants also reported situations when they felt families were taking advantage of them, like they were not getting anywhere with families, or had done everything for families. In these situations, participants may become critical of families and change their approach to services. On the other hand, most of the participants were trying to be more
understanding and empathetic to families’ situations and choices, which tended to happen with more experience in the field or once they had their own children.

The third stressor included job aspects that were beyond the participants’ control. This theme encompassed the size of their caseloads, the amount of paperwork required, the agencies having a lack of understanding for what they do, and trying to adapt to their office environments. Participants expressed their frustrations with high caseloads and the related paperwork involved. Participants understood and accepted how caseloads could fluctuate, but wished the paperwork could stay consistent from year-to-year and was not as time consuming. In addition, participants did not always feel valued in their jobs by others in their agencies and felt that many did not understand early childhood. Participants also reported supervision mostly as their evaluation cycle and yearly performance plans. All of them felt as if they could go in a talk to their supervisors about different work-related questions or issues, but not all of the participants felt as if their supervisors were able to help them in a manner other than listening. In addition, the office environments of some of the participants could be stressful, especially very large spaces and sharing space with many colleagues. Finally, the office environment could also be stressful when participants did not have much access to natural lighting or the ability to see outside.

The second theme was related to how the participants coped with the stressors they faced. Coping strategies included being around supportive colleagues, relying on familiar routines, restricting boundaries with families, and trying to keep a balance between their work and personal lives. Most of the participants had colleagues they considered friends and enjoyed spending time during the work day with them. One of the participants felt that some of her colleagues were her family and spent time outside of work with them.
Familiar routines for service provision included using the same frequency and duration for home visits, using toy bags, and working in dyads during home visits. Typically, participants saw most families twice a month for 30-45 minutes per visit. They also reported taking their cues from the families and providing more frequent visits for some families. In addition, toy bags were used by all of the participants, although all of them reported not taking one with them for all families. When asked, participants reported their opinions on the benefits and drawbacks of toy bags. For the most part, toy bags were used for assessment and when participants felt families did not have play materials available. Finally, some of the participants worked directly with the child during home visits as the parents observed. Based on this practice, it may be very difficult to expect parents to follow through with recommendations being provided.

Furthermore, participants set boundaries with some of the families they served by making choices about what information they shared about themselves. Participants made choices about sharing personal information, their cell phone numbers, accepting food and drinks during home visits, and spending time outside of home visits with families. Although they wanted to build rapport and form relationships with families, all of the participants were conscientious about what they shared with families. For example, one of the participants preferred to focus on the families and not share personal information. Another participant shared that some of her families know more about her family than others. In addition, participants did not give out their personal cell phone numbers or call families with their cell phones. One participant used a work-only cell phone. Finally, participants reported how they would decline food, drinks, or invitations from families.
The third theme was related to the resiliency outcomes resulting from the interactions between the stressors and coping strategies and how they influenced personal and professional job satisfaction. Although a direct outcome could not be determined, there was definitely an influence on participants’ job satisfaction. Effects on job satisfaction were both personal and professional and cyclical and circumstantial in nature as a result of the stress and coping interaction. The cyclical nature typically happened at or around the same time every year, which corresponded to contracts for the following year being distributed. For some participants, this occurrence happened earlier in the year. Consequently, all of the participants reported looking for a different job, but most of them had not taken the next step and applying. Furthermore, different circumstances could also affect participants’ job satisfaction based on the interaction between stress and coping. The circumstantial nature of the interaction happened more frequently, for example, daily, weekly, or monthly. Although they had tried to cope with work stress, participants reported how their jobs often affected their personal lives and described day-to-day situations, which shaped their perceptions of job satisfaction.
CHAPTER 5.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored the stressors that may lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue for ECSE teachers and how they coped in order to serve families with children with special needs. The following discussion addresses the key findings of the study. First, ECSE teachers experienced stressors from teaming, working with families who face challenges, and carrying high caseloads and paperwork demands. Similar findings were reported in the study by Maytum et al. (2004) with a description of broader systems issues (e.g., excessive paperwork) and personal triggers (e.g., maintaining professional boundaries with families). Second, ECSE teachers coped in a variety of ways with the stress they experienced. It was difficult to attribute the use of specific coping strategies directly to less burnout and compassion fatigue for these ECSE teachers. Teachers did experience varying degrees of personal and professional job satisfaction due to their use of coping strategies. Following is a discussion of the key findings, implications for research, practice and policy, and my final reflections.

Stressors

Teaming

In this study, ECSE teachers lacked the skills to work effectively with colleagues and team members from their own agencies as well as from preschool programs, which lead to dysfunctional teaming. Although it is hard to determine where the dysfunction lies, all of the ECSE teachers were experiencing stress from the relationships with colleagues and team members that could lead to professional burnout. In addition, the relationships may become more stressful because ECSE teachers have to continue to work with these colleagues and
team members depending on their assignment. Both Howard and Johnson (2004) and Kyriacou (2001) found that dealing with colleagues, especially on a regular basis, was a major stressor for teachers and may put them at higher risk for professional burnout. Finally, some of the ECSE teachers felt as if they had to justify their positions with team members, which was also found in Maytum et al. (2004).

The title of team member and colleague implies regular contact between people and not just a onetime occurrence. Although, the act of putting people together does not automatically mean a team has been formed. McLeskey and Waldron (2002) described teaming as a process with members working together continuously for the benefit of the team. According to Knackendoffel (2005), colleagues must be willing and ready to collaborate. At times, ECSE teachers may encounter colleagues who are not willing to collaborate or whom they consider less competent or cooperative. Based on the data, the ECSE teachers were susceptible to getting caught up in the contagiousness of negativity when presented with team members who did not respond positively to their attempts. Despite the negativity, Knackendoffel suggested forming an amicable working relationship, which starts with treating others with respect; acknowledging the “realities” of colleagues’ situations, for example, having a large number of children in their program or limited time; recognizing colleagues’ ideas and participation; and allowing colleagues to accept or reject the suggestions offered (p. 3). Knackendoffel recommended that ECSE teachers relinquish any attitudes of superiority and build equality with preschool teachers by valuing their ideas and concerns.

At times, relationships with colleagues and team members were not difficult and friendships were formed. All of the ECSE teachers were able to report positive relationships
with colleagues and described how they supported each other. Both Howard and Johnson (2004) and Stanford (2001) reported that teachers were more apt to maintain their dedication to the field when they felt supported by colleagues at work. In addition, some of the ECSE teachers in this study felt cared for and supported by their supervisors, which coincides with Teven (2007) and his study about teacher motivation and job satisfaction. Despite the positive relationships, this key finding indicates the need for training on teaming, conflict resolution, and coaching.

**Families Who Face Challenges**

Overall, the ECSE teachers struggled with daily stressors that many people face during work, however, serving families who faced challenges was especially frustrating. For the most part, families who cancelled visits, did not follow through with recommendations, and took advantage of or abused help were considered challenging and stressful by the ECSE teachers. This finding is consistent with research by Friend (2007) regarding families who did not keep appointments or seem as invested in the services being provided.

Fortunately, most of the ECSE teachers in this study were able to reframe their judgments and try to be more understanding and empathetic to families’ situations. Lane's research explored the need for teachers to manage their emotions and even reframe what they are feeling in order to be less judgmental of families (Lane, 2005). Although not confirmed, the possible factors for these ECSE teachers’ ability to reframe may be their age, maturity, experiences with their own families, and longevity in the field. This assumption coincides with the study by Antioniou, Polychroni, and Vlachakis (2006), which showed that work stressors were much more likely to affect younger teachers. In addition, Billingsley (2004)
found that age and experience have an effect on teachers’ intent to leave or stay with younger teachers being more likely to switch jobs.

Depending on their perceptions of families, ECSE teachers determined how much personal information they shared with families. When families seemed more like them, the ECSE teachers shared more about their own families and personal lives. However, when families seemed different, ECSE teachers protected themselves by talking about child-focused topics. Friend (2007) also reported ECSE teachers setting boundaries with families according to the perceived similarities in backgrounds. In addition, ECSE teachers’ caseloads may have an influence on their levels of stress, especially if they feel most of the families are challenging or they cannot devote enough time to their families’ needs. This key finding indicated the need for ECSE teachers to review the practices involved with being family-centered and strengths-based when serving all families. In addition, ECSE teachers should examine and explore their own culture and those of the families they serve through self-reflection.

**Caseload Size and Paperwork Demands**

Despite a fluctuating caseload, all of the ECSE teachers reported that paperwork has become the most demanding and time consuming part of their job and a major stressor. As a result, planning for services to families and children on their caseloads has suffered because the ECSE teachers seemed paralyzed by the demands of the paperwork. Not surprising, both Kyriacou (2001) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) reported time constraints and workload as a major stressor affecting teachers. In addition, Maytum et al. (2004) described one of the triggers for professional burnout and compassion fatigue as professionals putting unrealistic expectations on themselves, especially when ECSE teachers are trying to meet the needs of
families and children as well as complete the necessary paperwork. Unfortunately, with continuous changes and additions to the paperwork required in ECSE, this responsibility will not be lessening any time soon. In the meantime, ECSE teachers need to understand the significance for completing IFSP and IEP paperwork. In order to hold ECSE teachers accountable, they must remember that the IFSP and IEP are legally binding documents that include individual accommodations and services for children in order for them to meet their goals. In all actuality, caseload size and paperwork demands are inter-related. If the caseload size was low, then paperwork demands should be lessened. On the other hand, higher caseload size equaled more paperwork demands. Unfortunately, for some ECSE teachers, caseload size and the demands that go with it may never be considered manageable.

Coping in a Variety of Ways

In this study, the ECSE teachers’ job satisfaction varied depending on how well their chosen coping strategies influenced the effects of the work stressors they faced.

Dependence on Familiar Routines

In order to cope with stressors, ECSE teachers may slip into a dependence on familiar routines to provide services to families on their caseload in a cookie cutter format, which helped them avoid using best practices. Although ECSE teachers reported following the lead of the families, the most common home visit frequency and duration was twice a month for 30-45 minutes each. During home visits, ECSE teachers were observed working in dyads with the child with the parents watching. Although there was conversation between the ECSE teachers and the parents, few interactions between the parents and child were supported. In their study on enhancing parent-child interactions in home visiting, Peterson, Luze, Eshbaugh, Jeon, and Ross Kantz, (2007) found that ECSE teachers spent the majority
of the time (51%) directly teaching the child, introducing activities, and controlling the materials being used. As a result, very little time was dedicated on enhancing the parent-child relationship using coaching or modeling (Peterson et al., 2007). Recommendations for best practice in ECSE would emphasize supporting the interactions between the parent and child using triadic strategies in order to strengthen and enhance the parent-child relationship (McCollum, Gooler, Appl, & Yates, 2001). It was difficult to understand how, when ECSE teachers worked primarily in dyads with the child, they could be critical of families not following through with recommendations, especially when few triadic strategies for supporting parent-child interactions were observed.

Furthermore, the ECSE teachers in this study used toy bags with some families, depending on what toys they perceived the families to have available. Currently, toy bags are also not supported in early intervention nor considered best practice. McWilliam (2009) described toy bags as addictive props that ECSE teachers used to manage home visits by centering the time around the toys they brought. When ECSE teachers always provided the toys, McWilliam claimed that families may get the impression that their toys are not acceptable. In addition, some families may become defensive and decline toys that ECSE teachers may want to leave in their homes. Best practice encourages ECSE teachers to use the materials in the families’ natural environment. By using materials the families already have, ECSE teachers do not have to worry about families not “following through” with their recommendations because the materials are always accessible and they are familiar with them. If anything, ECSE teachers could provide families with ideas for different ways to play and use the materials.
Ability to Balance Personal and Work Lives

ECSE teachers tried to balance their personal and work lives by using a variety of personal and professional coping strategies to deal with stressors. The findings show that ECSE teachers choose different coping strategies based on their purpose (e.g., relaxation and meditation). Thus, they knew what strategies would best support them in their personal lives as a reaction to their work lives. In addition, ECSE teachers used professional coping strategies when they took a class or training related to a work issue they were facing or to have a change of pace.

This key finding was consistent with previous research. Hunter and Schofield (2006) categorized coping strategies into self-care and professional strategies. Self-care was described as engaging in relaxation and meditation, being self-nurturing, and balancing the personal and professional life. Self-care also included having close relationships and social support as well as participating in social and physical activities (Hunter & Schofield, 2006). According to Albrecht et al. (2009), teachers should develop strategies which help them cope with job stress, which may include eating the right diet, exercising, and getting enough sleep. Austin et al. (2005) cited similar activities and behaviors used for coping with stress, for example, visiting with friends, listening to music, and exercising. Unfortunately, other strategies were not as helpful (e.g., eating as a coping strategy). Austin et al. referred to these behaviors as unhealthy if done in extreme. Finally, professional strategies included becoming more experienced by gaining more knowledge; having a positive outlook; structuring weekly workloads; and becoming an advocate (Hunter & Schofield, 2006).

The resources and strategies used to cope with stress are dependent upon what the teacher hopes to accomplish. For example, Kyriacou (2001) looked at stress and coping with
teachers. When more direct coping strategies were used, teachers were trying to take action against the stress by acquiring new skills and knowledge to use or trying to be more organized (Kyriacou, 2001). Early childhood teachers may participate in professional development opportunities to further their learning in order to build and maintain resiliency (Sumison, 2004). Palliative strategies dealt with lessening the stress and were either mental, as in reappraising the stress, or physical, as in trying to relax and relieve tension (Kyriacou, 2001). This interpretation was congruent with Folkman and Lazarus (1984) and their concept of primary appraisal where an individual must interpret the situation as being stressful or not.

**Office Environment**

As another factor of job satisfaction, the ECSE teachers were housed in different types of offices, ranging from in the home to a cubicle in a very large office. All of the ECSE teachers were able to personalize their work spaces with pictures and other personal items. For the ECSE teachers in office buildings, the work space was defined by either a cubicle or with desks, bookcases, and cabinets. Bodin Danielsson and Bodin (2008) found with office size and layout that there was an effect on job satisfaction for workers. In their study, larger offices resulted in less job satisfaction. In addition, the ECSE teachers in office buildings did not have direct access to natural lighting in their work spaces, other than in the hallways or near the doors going outside. On the other hand, Barbara had a window in her office so she could enjoy her views of the woods behind her home. In their study, Mahdavi and Unzeitig (2005) found access to natural lighting and the ability to see the sky, horizon, and ground important for workers.
Implications

Implications for Research

This study focused on the experiences of four ECSE teachers of European American descent from one Midwestern state. Therefore, future research should include ECSE teachers from various backgrounds and states in order to gain more perspectives on experiences with professional burnout, compassion fatigue, and resiliency over a longer period of time. ECSE teachers from various backgrounds and states may be facing different stressors and using other coping strategies based on their beliefs, values, and settings. In addition, since only ECSE teachers participated, it would be beneficial to obtain the perspectives from other ECSE professionals, supervisors, and families on these phenomena.

Further research may also focus on why some ECSE teachers are more likely to experience professional burnout and compassion fatigue based on personal characteristics (e.g., temperament and personality), pre-service and professional development experiences, and longevity in the field. It would also be interesting to study at what point in ECSE teachers’ careers they felt the most threatened by the effects of stressors and when they discovered the coping strategies that worked best for them.

Implications for Policy

Based on the findings of this study, implications for policies result from having a better understanding of professional burnout, compassion fatigue, and resiliency in ECSE teachers’ lives. Policies may include limiting the caseload size of each ECSE teacher to one that is more manageable, incorporating an objective “weighting” system for assigning new referrals to each ECSE teacher, and/or devising a more accurate method for determining
ECSE teacher assignments. Finally, implications for policy include accountability for best practice within the ECSE field.

Although a manageable caseload size may be different for each ECSE teacher depending on the needs and issues of the families being served, the “weighting” system would take each issue and need into account when new referrals are made. In addition, there could be a revised policy for ECSE assignments. In some AEAs across the state of Iowa, a school-based equation (number of children kindergarten through 12th grade divided by 13 years) is used to determine the full time equivalent (FTE) of how many ECSE teachers are needed for each school district. This equation should be revised since it only reflects the ECSE teacher going to one place (the school) and not the homes, child care centers, preschools, and other locations also within that school catchment area.

Another policy could involve setting up a system for supporting ECSE teachers who are experiencing increased job stress at the national, state, and local levels in order to identify and alleviate the effects of professional burnout and compassion fatigue. At the national level, conferences could offer sessions on building resiliency and awareness of professional burnout and compassion fatigue. At the state level, these phenomena could be introduced during pre-service teaching programs and regular professional development opportunities. Finally, at the local level, more resources and support could be offered for building resiliency in ECSE teachers, including through their Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).

Policies for accountability should be considered because all of these ECSE teachers struggled with some aspect of recommended practice. Implementing best practice was a systems issue with several entities holding responsibility for accountability, for example, Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs), Departments of Education (DE), and Area Education
Agencies (AEAs), sharing responsibility for better training, support, and supervision. Faculty at IHEs should stress the importance of best practice and teach it throughout pre-service development. In addition, faculty should introduce and expect self-reflection from students in pre-service programs, which can also affect best practice in the field. Technical assistants and staff at the DE should support the implementation of best practice by developing and providing related training and programs. In addition, supervisors and ECSE teachers at the AEAs could implement best practice through engaging in reflective supervision and self-reflection. Unless there is better supervision, sustainability for best practice will not be in place. Finally, although competencies for ECSE teachers have not been developed, all of the ECSE teachers must adhere to the Iowa Teaching Standards (Iowa Code, 2009) which discusses best practice in the standard related to demonstrating competence in content knowledge appropriate to the role and responsibilities of the position.

**Implications for Practice**

The ECSE teachers in this study were responsible for carrying out special instruction for children and families receiving early intervention and preschool services as well as supporting early childhood preschool teachers with general education issues. Since their job responsibilities and roles were so vast, the implications for practice include training on teaming, reviewing family-centered practices, and engaging in reflective supervision and self-reflection in order to help alleviate work stressors for ECSE teachers.

**Teaming.** Based on the findings of this study, there was a need for better team functioning. According to BusinessDictionary.com (n.d.), a team is a group of people with complementary skills who share a common goal and work interdependently to accomplish required tasks. Teams are more than a collection of people because there is shared
responsibility and authority. According to Knackendoffel (2005), “teaming is a process rather than a service delivery model” (p. 1). Looking at it as a process, teaming should encompass training on how to build communication, coaching, and conflict resolution skills among team members over time. Finally, it is important to realize that good teams develop over time together based on each and every member feeling a sense of ownership and involvement (Pain & Harwood, 2009). Team cohesion results from an “open and honest environment” in order to bring about team effectiveness (Pain & Harwood, 2009, p. 539).

**Communication.** One of the main aspects of teaming relates to learning how to communicate better with other team members. Teams thrive and function better when there is open, respectful, and honest communication among members (Pain & Harwood, 2009). As reported by Campbell and Halbert (2002), ECSE teachers want established communication with other professionals working with families and children. When engaged in regularly scheduled face-to-face meetings, ECSE teachers may have to work on strengthening their interpersonal communication skills (Knackendoffel, 2005). Communication skills involve being able to successfully convey a message to others. In addition, communication involves active listening skills and effective questioning skills. Training on effective team communication may be helpful in order to review and practice necessary skills as well as discuss roadblocks and expectations. When new teams are created or new team members join, it may be helpful to establish a set of team guidelines that address communication and overall functioning. Ultimately, team members should feel comfortable and valued when contributing during team meetings, which originate with mutual ownership and involvement in team activities.
Coaching. Instead of placing children in other settings for special education services, ECSE teachers should consider using coaching. As a result of coaching, ECSE teachers will no longer need to blame preschool teachers for failing to get across the skills needed for working with children. Coaching may be used by ECSE teachers to help preschool teachers hone their skills while working with children with special needs (Knackendoffel, 2005; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). In addition, when ECSE teachers learn how to coach effectively within preschool classrooms, the possibility of feeling like an outsider will be reduced.

Coaching involves the ECSE teachers “sharing a teaching routine” or “demonstration teaching on a one-time or short term basis” in order for the preschool teachers to learn how to implement a new technique in their classroom (Knackendoffel, 2005, p. 7). Coaching is very concrete and involves a change process for the preschool teacher learning the new routine. Thus, Knackendoffel (p. 10) suggests the following process:

Step 1: Set stage for collaboration, and introduce teaching routine.

Step 2: Gain commitment to listen to teaching routine.

Step 3: Describe teaching routine.

Step 4: Model teaching routine.

Step 5: Gain commitment to try teaching routine.

Step 6: Offer assistance for initiating the routine.

Step 7: Collaborate on effectiveness of routine in content class.

Step 8: Provide for maintenance and adoption of teaching routine.

Conflict resolution. Most of the ECSE teachers in this study experienced conflict stemming from communication issues and power struggles with other team members and
reacted in a variety of positive and negative ways. However, the conflict was not directly addressed nor resolved. When people work together, conflict is bound to happen sooner or later (Knackendoffel, 2005). Instead of avoiding conflict, ECSE teachers should try to understand the causes and influences as a means for managing conflict situations. Either positive or negative outcomes result from conflict, for example, higher quality decisions or more trusting relationships (Knackendoffel). Many things may affect the process of conflict resolution. Personal characteristics of a team member can affect conflict and how ECSE teachers react (e.g., walking away and ignoring; Knackendoffel). In addition, there are different styles for dealing with conflict that affect the outcome. The different styles include competitive, avoidance, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating (Knackendoffel), which are value neutral but have benefits or drawbacks depending on how they are used in different situations.

Knackendoffel describes the process for conflict resolution:

1. Identify and define the problem (conflict) using active listening to reduce anger or defensiveness in the other person.
2. Don't rush; take time to understand the other person's point of view.
3. Generate several alternative solutions, taking care not to evaluate until all possibilities are out on the table.
4. Evaluate the alternative solutions by examining flaws, barriers, difficulties in implementing, and so on. Make a decision.
5. Make a mutual commitment to one solution. Don't persuade or push a solution.

If it is not freely chosen, it is unlikely to be carried out.
Clear communication and negotiation skills are also important during conflict resolution (Knackendoffel). Team members should try to understand and paraphrase the conflicting perspective in order to help with resolution. In addition, being able to negotiate an agreeable alternative is another helpful technique in conflict resolution resulting in mutual gains for team members involved.

**Family-centered practices.** Most ECSE teachers would say they are family-centered and strengths-based with families. However, based on the findings of this study, there is a need for a review of the family-centered practices. Training on family-centered practices should involve families as co-presenters in pre-service teaching programs, conferences, and professional development opportunities (Brotherson, Summers, Bruns, & Sharp, 2008). When given the opportunity to share their stories, families can help ECSE teachers become more family-centered by revealing how they were or were not supported by ECSE professionals. In addition, agencies should have a policy for regularly reviewing and discussing family-centered practices during team meetings and ECSE discipline meetings.

Family-centered practices acknowledge how children learn and grow within the context of their families (Bruder & Dunst, 2005). Thus, ECSE teachers could provide information on services and resources to the entire family in order to best support and nurture children. In addition, ECSE teachers should recognize that all services are planned and implemented jointly with families (Vacca & Freiberg, 2000). From the beginning, ECSE teachers should be sensitive to incidents that result in the family having to cancel visits or change their priorities (Vacca & Freiberg). Finally, ECSE teachers ultimately want to treat all families with dignity and respect.
Reflective supervision. Reflective supervision could help lessen professional burnout and compassion fatigue as well as build resiliency for ECSE teachers. Overall, the ECSE teachers in this study did not know how to seek support from their supervisors. Then again, even if the ECSE teachers did seek support, most of their supervisors did not know or make attempts to understand ECSE. There were times when ECSE teachers received mixed support from their supervisors. When asked about supervision, the ECSE teachers described their agency’s process for evaluation and did not make reference to reflective supervision.

Chamberlin (2000) reported that reflective supervision is not evaluative in any way. According to Howes, James, and Ritchie (2003), reflective supervision is one of the keys to effective teaching, but it seldom occurs in early childhood. All of the ECSE teachers were able to talk to their supervisors about procedural questions and issues with families. However, using reflective supervision helps to support teacher well-being, which results in the implementation of best practice and improved services for families and children (Jones Harden, 2009). In addition, reflective supervision could also result in coping strategies that are specific for work, for example, problem solving how to work better with colleagues and coping with resorting to familiar routines for service provision.

Within the field of early intervention, McWilliam and Scott (2001) described a three-part framework including informational support, material support, and emotional support, which were provided by teachers to families and just as applicable to the teachers themselves. In this framework, the supports listed could provide ECSE teachers with strategies for coping with professional burnout and compassion fatigue by exploring available strategies, resources, and services. Informational support involves the ECSE teachers wanting information about strategies and resources in relation to professional
burnout and compassion fatigue, including learning about what these phenomena are as well as the triggers and warning signs. This may also result in the ECSE teachers talking to someone within their agencies about policies and procedures related to these phenomena. Material support includes the ECSE teachers engaging in services and resources to help meet their needs, including mental health services. Finally, emotional support entails building a social network of informal supports with colleagues, friends, and family members. A formal social network may include the ECSE teachers’ supervisor or administrator, who may provide support through reflective supervision.

**Self-reflection.** When ECSE teachers are able to self-reflect, they are better able to understand their own culture, relationships with colleagues and families, and teaching practices. Self-reflection is especially important for ECSE teachers because of their backgrounds. Most ECSE teachers are middle class and from European American descent who may have limited experiences working with different cultural groups, including families with challenges. Through self-reflection, ECSE teachers are able to think about their own cultures, especially in relation to the colleagues they work with and the families they serve. Being aware of their own culture will help ECSE teachers to understand their values, beliefs, and biases toward aspects of colleagues’ and families’ cultures that seem similar and different. In addition, ECSE teachers will be able to reflect on how well they are teaming with colleagues and demonstrating family-centered practices with families.

According to Garmon (2004), self-reflection is “an awareness of one’s own beliefs and attitudes, as well as being willing and/or able to think critically about them” (p. 205). In addition, Gay (2005) reported that teachers must “be conscious of their own cultural values and beliefs . . . how these affect their attitudes and expectations towards [families]” (p. 233).
Self-reflection is about identifying areas of growth and struggle (Garmon, 2004). Lewis (n.d.) reported that self-reflection involves a change process where ECSE teachers consider their pasts to affect their futures. If ECSE teachers do not self-reflect, they are more likely to become stagnant and no longer enjoy their jobs. Lewis claimed “times change, perspectives change, and you must change in order adapt and remain relevant in the ever-changing world of education” (para. 5). In addition, Lewis suggested potential questions to help guide ECSE teachers in self-reflection (para. 3):

1. What is my top teaching goal?
2. What resentments to I need to resolve in order to move forward more optimistically?
3. What practices am I continuing to perform out of habit or laziness?
4. Am I being a cooperative team member?
5. Are there any aspects of my profession that I am ignoring out of fear of change or lack of knowledge?
6. Do I still enjoy teaching? If not, what can I do to increase my enjoyment in my chosen profession?
7. Do I bring additional stress upon myself? If so, how can I decrease or eliminate it?

Summary

The implications focus on recommendations for research, policy, and practice. Future research should consider recruiting ECSE teachers from different backgrounds and states in order to gather more information on stressors and coping strategies being used over a longer period of time. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to broaden participant recruitment to other
ECSE professionals, supervisors, and families. Future research should also consider looking at ECSE teachers’ personal characteristics, professional development experiences, and longevity in the field. As far as policy implications, recommendations were related to limiting the caseload size to one that is more manageable for ECSE teachers and establishing a system for support at the national, state, and local levels. Finally, practice implications included recommendations for teaming, reviewing family-centered practices, and reflective supervision, and self-reflection. Teaming recommendations encompassed learning skills in communication, coaching, and conflict resolution.

**Final Reflections**

Based on my experience and background in the field of ECSE, many of my assumptions about professional burnout, compassion fatigue, and resiliency were supported with the findings from this study. ECSE teachers are faced with many stressors from their colleagues, the families they serve, and overall work roles and responsibilities. If ECSE teachers perceive negative support from colleagues and supervisors, they may be more likely to have a negative sense of well-being and feel a more negative sense of help giving with the families they serve. On the other hand, I believe the opposite could be true if they are perceiving positive support from colleagues and supervisors.

I believe most ECSE teachers are working with more families who are facing challenges and taking a majority of their energy (professionally, physically and emotionally). Due to high caseload demands, many ECSE teachers take their jobs home with them (doing anything work-related on non-contract days or in the evening and worrying about children and families) and their personal lives suffer from it. They have a difficult time separating themselves from work, which may be related to going into this help giving field in the first
place. Including me, some ECSE teachers use the mantra, “You have to take care of yourself first, otherwise, you cannot take care of anyone else” with caregivers and often do not take that advice to heart in their own lives.

Finally, I believe most ECSE teachers enjoy the ECSE field, but stay in their positions despite everything because they may not feel there are other options for them, especially if they are grounded with a family within the community. Plus, most teachers are working 192 to 194 day contracts (4 day weeks during the school year and 2-3 day weeks in the summer), which, along with other benefits, would be difficult to find in another profession.
APPENDIX A. RECRUITMENT

*Example of Electronic Mail for Program Administrators*

Dear Program Administrator:

Hello, my name is Lisa A. Naig and I am a doctoral student in Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University. Professionals in our field are experiencing greater challenges in their work. I am working on a study to understand burnout and compassion fatigue for early childhood special education professionals and how they cope with that aspect of their jobs. I am interested in exploring the perceptions of your ECSE staff on these phenomena.

As a part of this study, I will be conducting observations, individual interviews, and document analysis in order to discuss this topic. I am looking for staff who are experiencing work stress, using a variety of ways of coping with stress, and working with families with challenges. If your staff are interested in participating, please forward their names to me in response to this email. Participation in this study is voluntary and all identifying information will be kept confidential.

I believe we need to address these challenges in our field in order to keep our ECSE workforce vibrant and productive so that we ultimately have the positive outcomes we want for children and families.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at ###-###-####. Thank you so much for your consideration and time. I look forward to hearing from you and your staff.
Example of Electronic Mail for ECSE Professionals

Dear ECSE Professional:

Hello, my name is Lisa A. Naig and I am a doctoral student in Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University. Professionals in our field are experiencing greater challenges in their work. I am working on a study on burnout and compassion fatigue for early childhood special education professionals and am interested in exploring your perceptions on these phenomena.

As a part of this study, I will be conducting observations, individual interviews, and document analysis in order to discuss this topic. I am looking for ECSE teachers who are experiencing work stress, using a variety of ways for coping with stress, and working with families with challenges. If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email or call me at ###-###-####. Participation in this study is voluntary and all identifying information will be kept confidential.

I believe we need to address these challenges in our field in order to keep our ECSE workforce vibrant and productive so that we ultimately have the positive outcomes we want for children and families.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I am attaching a copy of my informed consent document for your review. Thank you so much for your consideration and time. I look forward to hearing from you.
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions

1. What do you enjoy about your job? What makes you want to go to work every day?

2. Tell me about your job assignment (Birth-5 years, teams, caseload size, Community School Districts, travel time, etc.).

3. How often do you feel supported in the work you do? How? By whom? In what ways?

4. Do you feel your caseload responsibilities exceed a 40 hour week? How often do you work longer than an 8 hour day? Do you have time to do your job?

5. Which responsibilities have to be done at the expense of others? How do you prioritize?

6. How often have you asked your administrator for help in the last month? Last 3 months? Last year? What kind of help did you ask for?

7. In what ways does your agency support staff who request help?

8. What other responsibilities do you have as a part of your job? (trainings, committee memberships, etc.)

9. How often do you wake up in the middle of the night thinking or worrying about your job? What emotions do you feel? How do you handle these emotions?

10. How often do you take “mental health” days? How often are you sick? What makes you call in sick? What prevents you from calling in sick?

11. How often have you considered looking for a different job in a different field in the last year? Why or why not?

12. What comes to mind when you hear the term professional burnout? What about compassion fatigue?

13. How often have you ever experienced professional burnout or compassion fatigue?

14. How satisfied are you with your job? What is the most satisfying?

15. How do you deal/cope with job stress? What part of your job is the most stressful?

16. How do you feel about whether or not the families and children you work with are getting your best services?

17. Describe the families you serve. What challenges do they face? How does that affect you?
Additional Probe Questions

1. In what ways does your agency support you to do your job effectively?
2. How does your agency celebrate staff successes?
3. Do you feel like the agency recognizes the demands of your job?
4. (How often do you feel supported in the work you do? How? By whom? In what ways?) Is it enough support?
5. How are you currently supervised? Is this regularly scheduled?
6. What kinds of work challenges do you discuss? What’s the focus?
7. Do you know about reflective supervision? What are your experiences with it?
8. What helps you be resilient to the stresses of your job?
9. Describe the benefits of using a toy bag. Describe the drawbacks of using a toy bag.
10. What boundaries do you set with the families you serve? What about colleagues you work with?
11. How would you describe your ideal job?
12. What makes your job easy now? What would make it easier?
13. Can you think of a time when you experienced physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and cognitive weariness from being so stressed out because of work?
14. Have you always felt supported by your supervisor?
15. Do you think you have enough time to provide adequate services?
16. Have you experienced any of these emotions because of work: sadness, fear, depression, avoidance, dissatisfaction, anxiety, and/or sensitivity?
17. Some families may have different values than you do, how does that affect you?
18. Can you describe a family that you felt was challenging to work with?
19. What makes a good day at work for you?
20. What makes a bad day at work for you?
21. What can save a bad day?
APPENDIX C: IRB AND CONSENT FORMS

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

DATE: 2 November 2009

TO: Lisa Naig
60 LeBaron Hall

CC: Mary Jane Brotherston
51A LeBaron Hall

FROM: Roxanne Bappe, IRB Coordinator
Office for Responsible Research

TITLE: Professional Burnout and Compassion Fatigue in Early Childhood Special Education Teachers: What It Looks Like and How It Affects Their Lives

IRB ID: 08-255

Approval Date: 29 October 2009
Date for Continuing Review: 2 July 2010

The Chair of the Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has reviewed and approved the modification of this project. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use the documents with the IRB approval stamp in your research.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by completing the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office for Responsible Research website [www.compliance.iastate.edu] or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Professional burnout and compassion fatigue in early childhood special education teachers: What it looks like and how it affects their lives

Investigators: Lisa A. Naig, M.S
               Mary Jane Brotherson, Ph.D.

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experiences of professionals in early childhood special (ECSE) for professional burnout and compassion fatigue, the coping strategies they use, and how their lives are affected. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a professional in ECSE who works with families with children birth to age 5 years with special needs.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately 3-7 days for observation during work hours and 60 minutes to complete three interviews. During the study, you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: you will be observed during regular work day activities (home visits, preschool consults, team meetings, etc.); field notes will be written to reflect the happenings during all observations, the interview will occur at a location and time that is private and convenient to you; the interview will be recorded on audiotape for later analysis; the audiotape will be transcribed and then erased after 5 years; the transcripts will be stored in locked cabinets or on password protected computers. You will also be consenting to access to the following documents: 1) the Information Management System in order to get information on the your “official” caseload size; 2) your mileage sheets to look at the amount of time spent on the road to get to each assigned school district and family in the last three months; 3) your logs of new referrals and pending cases; 4) the job description provided by the agency; and 5) individual contracts with the agency to look at the number of total days and school districts and responsibilities assigned.

RISKS

While participating in this study, risk is minimal. During the interviews, you may encounter questions that may cause you some discomfort. You may choose not to respond to such questions.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by achieving a better understanding of
these phenomena, how professionals in ECSE serve families with children with special needs, and how to support professionals in ECSE to stay in their positions.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will be compensated for participating in this study with a $40.00 gift card. We will ask for your social security number to comply with federal and state tax and accounting regulations.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: 1) all information gained from participants will be strictly confidential; 2) the reporting of results will not include any identifying information of any of the participants; 3) names of participants will not be identified on any of the audiotapes or subsequent transcripts and will be kept in a secure location; 4) all tapes will be erased once analysis is complete. Files will be kept until my doctoral dissertation is completed. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Lisa A. Naig (712-326-4720; lnaig@iastate.edu) or Dr. Mary Jane Brotherson (515-294-3677; mjbrothe@iastate.edu)

- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iaastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Research Assurances, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

******************************************************************************
PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ____________________________________________

(Participant’s Signature) ____________________________________________ (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent) ____________________________ (Date)
APPENDIX D. PILOT STUDY DOCUMENTS

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Professional Fatigue in Early Childhood Special Education Teachers: What It Looks Like and How It Affects Job Performance
Investigators: Lisa A. Naig, M.S

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experiences of professionals in early childhood special (ECSE) for professional burnout and compassion fatigue, the coping strategies they use, and how their lives are affected. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a professional in ECSE who works with families with children birth to age 5 years with special needs.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately 90 minutes in order to complete a total of 2 interviews and/or electronic mail contacts. During the study, you may expect the following study procedures to be followed: I will interview you at a location and time that is private and convenient to you; the interview will be recorded on audiotape for later analysis; the audiotape will be transcribed and then erased after 5 years; the transcripts will be stored in locked cabinets or on password protected computers.

RISKS

While participating in this study, risk is minimal. During the interview, you may encounter questions that may cause you some discomfort. You may choose not to respond to such questions.
BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by achieving a better understanding of these phenomena, how they affect how professionals in ECSE serve families with children with special needs, and how to support professionals in ECSE to stay in their positions.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information. To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: 1) all information gained from participants will be strictly confidential; 2) the reporting of results will not include any identifying information of any of the participants; 3) names of participants will not be identified on any of the audiotapes or subsequent transcripts and will be kept in a secure location; 4) all tapes will be erased once analysis is complete. Files will be kept until my doctoral dissertation is completed. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.
For further information about the study contact Lisa A. Naig (712-326-4720; lnaig@iastate.edu) or Dr. Mary Jane Brotherson (515-294-3677; mjbrothe@iastate.edu)

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office of Research Assurances, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

***************************************************************************
PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ________________________________

________________________________________________________
(Participant’s Signature) (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

________________________________________________________
(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent) (Date)
Challenges are shown as the central point because, depending on ECSE teachers’ response, professional burnout or compassion fatigue may result. In terms of professional burnout, if the ECSE teacher receives positive support, it may be possible that feelings of well-being could result. Feelings of well-being would be based on the ECSE teacher adopting more positive strategies for coping with stress and not looking for a different job. In the case of these ECSE teachers, positive supports typically came from colleagues and supervisors. With compassion fatigue, if ECSE teacher have positive strategies for coping with stress and continue to have job satisfaction, my assumption would be that they are also receiving the appropriate supports. On the contrary, if the ECSE teacher is not receiving the appropriate supports or exercises negative strategies for coping with stress, there is a direct line to professional burnout and compassion fatigue, respectively. I believe there may be incidents that lead directly from challenges to professional burnout or compassion fatigue depending on the issue the ECSE teacher is encountering. I also believe in the possibility of compassion fatigue eventually leading to professional burnout, but I do not think the opposite may occur.
APPENDIX E: EXAMPLES OF ANALYSIS

Interview 12/16/09

This is and we are going to start this interview. So let's just jump right in, how does that sound? What do enjoy most about your job? And a sub section of that is what makes you want to go to work every day?

Well, obviously the children and the families. And what I've noticed is there's so many families that I get really stressed out about. Like, it's that one... it's that one kid on that one day that just gives you that high. And it's like, oh, well I get goose bumps just thinking about it. It's just like that one kid that finally started walking and you know, it's just that one kid that keeps me going through all of the other garbage. And you know it really is the kids pulling me back.

One of the criteria for being a participant in this study was working with families that may be considered challenged or challenging to you. Does it matter what that one kid's family is like or is it just the gains that that child is making that makes it fine dandy working with...

No, it doesn't matter we work with a very you know down here in southern Iowa we work with a very low income population and it's very different. I grew up in WDM and seen a lot of that stuff but it was you know very different moving down here and seeing these kind of things for the first time. And but now, it really doesn't matter and it could be that family that I have that has dirt floors and you know the kids are dirty all the time but you know it's just that one day the parents obviously listened to the suggestions that I had and followed through and you see the progress the child can make just by their...just by what they're living in most of the time.

Do you find that it's...you said that you get goose bumps...is it the same kids that are giving you goose bumps?
No, it's... it's different ones. It's really just... in 4 years that I've worked here I've had such a turnover in my caseload even though I keep kids for 3 years for the most part. And, you don't... no, there's quite a few little kids that make it worth it.

I understand that. You've already told me about your assignment. I've got that all written down. What school district is the farthest? I'm trying to get a picture of the 4 districts that you serve. Right? How far to you have to go to get to them?

Well, right now I just serve... well, I guess I'm serving SD now that I'm in this office. And then, after I transitioned, I kept a few kids that are receiving intensive services. One of which is in MD and that takes me 40-45 minutes to an hour to get there. And then I have... 3 kids in... and that's just a ½ hour. That's where I was this morning. That I'm keeping.

See I'm so used to central Iowa and SW Iowa. (H laughter) I need to get the layout of... Yeah.

When you are working, how often do you feel supported in what you're doing?

(Long silence). In this office, I... I don't feel nearly as supported or respected.

Really.

In my profession as I did in the office I was in previously. Um... there's been some issues with other EC teachers in this office or other service coordinators that don't necessarily do the best work or do what's best practice. And, you know, that has really left a bad impression on people who work in this office. Um... it's... it's definitely something that has really challenged why I still work here. And... you know, it's... that's been the hardest part. There's... the people that I work directly with are support services the OTs
and PTs that I work with in EA, my service coordinator, we have designated service coordinators down here.

Great.

Those people all tell me all the time, you know, I'm appreciated and that they enjoy working with me here. You know, let me know that you know that I'm respected and that what I do is good work. So that's been nice.

Do you think it's the size of this office? Because it seems quite large. And, how many other EC people are out of this office?

For home interventioniest is what our title is but we call ourselves EC teachers because we didn't get to pick that letter. (laughter)

Right.

But HI, there's 3 of us right now. One of the 3 is retiring in a week. She took an early retirement package. Um...

What are they going to do about her position?

They're not going to replace her. I was hired on here. There was always 2 teachers. Um...I...they added this new position because they were...they average about 90 kids total...um...just for the [inaudible] and [inaudible] which is just the [inaudible] And that's just south of here. I don't cover that, I'm just in [inaudible]. Um...because in [inaudible] County there's usually like 10 kids...8-10 kids. There aren't very many. Um... and so we're not going to replace that 3rd person for this year. Um...

What...next year?

We don't know about next year.

Of course, because you have... (laughter).
I...I...think that in some closed door conversations that we've had with our supervisor it's important that we don't just...the 2 of us that will still be working here, you know, the way that both of us work they know that we'll just pick it up and do it and get it done. Because that's, you know, the 2 of us are very, you know, that's what happens for the children. That's what happens for the families and it just has to get done and it will get done. And...we just have to make sure that we let somebody else some other teacher will come down and help us just to prove that we still need 3 people.

So...

I forgot where we were going with this...(laughter)

_We were talking about how you feel supported and I asked you how many there were here and the size of this office._

Oh, yeah. There's quite a few people in this office, I believe, who do not understand the importance of EI.

_Right._

Even though they've been around it for a long time. And a lot of them take part in it, they just...don't think they quite understand why it's so important what we do...and how that makes their job easier when they get those kids in preschool or when they get those 3 year olds transitioning up. And, you know, they've already had the experience of this is a structured routine and the parents know, you know, they know there's going to be meetings and they've kind of...most of them have come to terms with the fact their child may have delays and may need special instruction later in life. So...yeah.

_It's a K-12 world._

It really is.

_I felt the same way in 13 as well. So...you have your team members that are providing you the most_
supports in terms of the support services with the OT, 
PT...

Hmmm hmm

How do they support you besides verbally? I mean, is 
that...how else do they?

Yeah, the other teacher...she'll pick up when, you 
know, she sent me a message this morning that she 
was staying home with her daughter and her daughter 
was sick, you know, something came in I would just do 
it. I would take care of it for her. I got married this last 
summer and took a month off in the summer, and, you 
know, it shouldn't be a big deal. But, you know, I was 
working almost 4...3-4 full days a week and the other 
service coordinators and teachers picked up when new 
referrals came in. They just did it for me and because 
that's just what we do.

Makes sense. Do you feel your caseload 
responsibilities all the kiddos you are serving on your 
caseload as well as the pending ones as well as 
whatever else exceed a 40 hour week or whatever 
your week is?

Hmmm hmm. Yeah.

Your work days.

Oh...(long silence). It would if I let it.

Okay.

Um...(long silence). You know, I've heard so much 
about teachers burning out at...after 5 years. You 
know, that first 5 years is so important, you know. You 
just got to make it through those first 5 years and then 
see how it goes after that. But, um, it's...yeah. If I let it 
go I would. It would...it would take over everything and 
of course I think about it every time I go to Target and I 
go to WM and see toys and you think, my gosh, that'll 
be perfect for so and so. It's just my life as a teacher. 
But, yeah, I'm very busy if I added even more
responsibilities like the other teacher. She's really active on the autism team and she has a lot of extra trainings and all this other stuff. And she still carries a caseload of 35-40 kids and I'm sure mine will be as soon as I start picking up more kids here. But...yeah.

So, how often do your days last longer than 8 hours?

I would probably say at least 2 times a week. At least, you know, and that's...I'm not always the most morning type of a person, but, you know, a lot of the times I start at 7:30 and our day goes from 8 to 4 M-R and 8-3:30 on F. So, it's nice to be done at 4, but, you know, I'm usually here until about 4:30 or 5. And then, depending on home visits and, you know, I have quite a few families who are working families so I just schedule those later because that's my job. That's what I have to do.

Does it actually say in the contract that it's 8-4?

Yeah, that's the contract. Our work days are 8-4 and any time past 4 in 1/2 hour increments are considered comp time or flex time. We just take it off here and there.

Okay, so then you can come in a little later in the morning, which is good...

Yeah. (laughter)

Do you take work home with you then?

Sometimes, especially with all the new paperwork that comes along with everything and reports and um...I'm very meticulous about things that I do...I feel that I try and maintain best practice in what I do. And, um...sometimes, I may do more than what's expected or do more than what other teachers are doing. I like my...you know, the reports are a big thing here, your reports and your outcomes. And, I do the eval and assessment page for most of these kids but then the DSC do the other IFSP paperwork for us, which is
always helpful, but, you know, some people write their report for an initial staffing or an annual review is just a little paragraph blurb and I really don’t think that that’s best practice so that’s not... that’s not what I do. So, it takes me a little bit more time and I understand that and so that’s why I take some of my work home with me to get it done and that’s not comp time. Paperwork is not comp time, only direct service with families and children.

Have you ever done service coordination? Or, have you always had the DSC here your 4 years?

I have never done SC. Never. That is an absolute luxury, because then I don’t have to worry about timelines. I don’t have to worry about meetings. I don’t have to worry about paperwork. Yeah, I don’t have to worry about any of that stuff and I think that it allows me to spend a lot more time with families. And, it also gives those parents if they don’t like me or if they don’t like another service provider they don’t come to me as their service provider and their service coordinator. You know, they can go to Kim over here who’s the SC and say I have issues with Hannah, she’s not showing up for visits. Or, you know, that type of thing. I think it’s a... it’s a good service for families at least to have somebody different.

Is that AEA-wide?

Yes. We just merged... years ago with. And they weren’t doing that over there, but they’ve started this year and they have a few more people and I think they enjoy it too, I hope. It’s nice.

I wore both hats. I’m a control freak and I like knowing when things are going to happen.

Uh-huh. (laughter)

Which ones of your job responsibilities do you think have to be done at the expense of letting other things
go? I think most of the EC people I've talked to say it's the services to families.

My home visits. Um, yeah, by far. Home visits and services to families.

I think that's probably going to be a pretty standard answer for that. Where does Medicaid fit in that whole thing?

(Sigh)

I know that I had colleagues that were saying I'm 3 months late and the office is starting to say can you get on that. (laughter)

We all got a lovely little reminder from [redacted]. He's our sped director here. But a lovely little reminder. If you get Medicaid you HAVE to do it. I felt I didn't... I just didn't do it. I didn't have time. And getting my outcomes written and evaluations done. Getting, you know, going out and seeing those families was so much more important than sitting there and doing my Medicaid forms. Because I have, you know, how they come out it's just like a single space excel sheet and I have you know at one point I had a page and a half of Medicaid and it's like is this really important for $10? I don't know how much it is but that's what it seems like pennies and it changes all the time and one second we can bill for this and the next we can't bill for that. Well, these 2 people can't bill for that because they're paid on federal funds and now the OTs and the PTs in our office and speech I think so too. They don't bill for Medicaid because they're jobs are now federally funded. It's all just a money thing. It just gets in the way.

We always got the threat that's a position you're threatening.

Hmmm hmmm
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<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Descriptions/Definitions</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Dysfunctional Teams</td>
<td>Individual Team Members (secretaries, interpreters, speech-language pathologists)</td>
<td>Taking on more than role</td>
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<td>Doesn't communicate or share information</td>
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<td>Sabotages others</td>
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<td>Demoralizing</td>
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<td>Doesn't do job</td>
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<td>Keeps job although calls in sick all the time or doesn't show up</td>
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<td>Talking behind others' back</td>
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<td>Support from Team Members Continuum</td>
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<td><strong>Mismatch between their words &amp; actions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Say</strong></td>
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<td>&quot;Best practices&quot;</td>
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<td>Critical of families</td>
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<td>Child only gets stimulation when they are there for visits</td>
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<td>Critical of team members</td>
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<td><strong>Do</strong></td>
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<td>Use of toy bags</td>
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<td><strong>Observe</strong></td>
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<td>Direct service to child</td>
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<td>Debrief with parents at end of home visit</td>
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<td>Reinforce what parents are doing</td>
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<td><strong>Boundaries families do have or not change</strong></td>
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<td>&quot;Girlfriends (Anna)&quot;</td>
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<td>Wanting to become social circle for mothers</td>
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<td><strong>More Restrictive</strong></td>
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<td>Doesn't chat a lot about things not related to child</td>
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<td>Doesn't give cell number</td>
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<td>Declines invitations</td>
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<td>Uneasiness with accepting food</td>
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<td><strong>Helping</strong></td>
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<td>Can't say No to colleagues</td>
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<td>Willing to help colleagues despite own workload</td>
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<td>Regret for saying will help</td>
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<td>Attitude &amp; Relationships</td>
<td>Support to Participants</td>
<td>Social Environment</td>
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<td>[Handwritten notes]</td>
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- **Attitude & Relationships**
  - Friendly
  - Supportive
  - Helpful

- **Support to Participants**
  - Team Members
  - Administrative Support
  - Paperwork

- **Social Environment**
  - Office Environment
  - Work Environment
  - Family Environment

- **Support to Families**
  - Emotional Support
  - Financial Support
  - Practical Support

**Notes:**
- Sarcasm?
- Boredom?
- Disinterest?
- Lack of engagement?

- **Values:**
  - Integrity
  - Respect
  - Responsibility

- **Supporting Activities:**
  - Giving up on families
  - Considering each other's days
  - Not talking about work outside of work time
  - Asking for help and expecting it
  - Going out to lunch

- **Supporting Resources:**
  - Web tools
  - Deadlines
  - Medical

**Additional Notes:**
- Used to have four-hour visits each week.
- 30-45 minute home visits.
- Providing resources: toys, books, games.

**Handwritten Notes:**
- Cursive writing
- Underlined text
- Red pen

**Other Notes:**
- [Handwritten notes on the page]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Descriptions/Definitions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Striving to Form Relationships with Colleagues</td>
<td>Keeping Certain Colleagues at a Distance</td>
<td>Take on more than their assigned role</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Stressed</td>
<td>Doesn’t communicate or share information about caseload families</td>
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<td>Working</td>
<td>Sabotage others by telling wrong information about families</td>
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<td>Difficult Colleagues</td>
<td>Make colleagues feel demoralized</td>
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<td>Doesn’t do job well</td>
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<td>Keep job although calls in sick all the time or doesn’t show up</td>
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<td>Make colleagues feel like they need “proof” to take to supervisor</td>
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<td>Talk behind others’ back</td>
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<td>Receive “special treatment” from agency due to skills (bilingual)</td>
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<td>Make colleagues feel uncomfortable and not want to go into office if certain team member is there</td>
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<td>Critical of colleagues’ abilities</td>
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<td>Moving Beyond “Colleagues” to Friends and Family</td>
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<td>Go out for lunch all the time</td>
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<td>Social Support</td>
<td>Ask about each other’s lives beyond work</td>
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<td>Don’t talk about work outside of work</td>
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<td>Have “chatty” days</td>
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<td>Considerate of each other’s needs and preferences</td>
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</table>
| Determining Boundaries with Team Members/Colleagues | Unable to Say No | Known each other for a long time
Consider each other friends
Support each other when difficult times arise (death in family, financial hardship)
Had previous social relationship before working with the person

| 2. Managing Service Provision | Providing Visits with Families and Children in the Home | Deciding the Length of Visit | Take cues from families
Used to have hour long visits each week
Conduct 30-45 minute home visits
Visit 2 times per month
Most visits last longer than 45 minutes (30 min play, 15+ min talk with parents)
Sometimes sees child 2 times per week or 1 time per month: whatever have to do to support the team

| Offering Support to Families During Visits | Play in dyads (teacher and child) instead of triads (parent and child with support from teacher)
Provide materials: toys, dry erase boards
Provide resources: community programs
Provide evening visits |
| Determining Boundaries with Families | Less Restrictive | Want to become social circle for mothers  
| | | Act like "Girlfriends"  
| | | Give monetary or material support  
| | | *Had previous social relationship before working with the family*  
| More Restrictive | Doesn't chat a lot about things not related to child  
| | | Help family find other resources  
| | | Doesn't give cell number  
| | | Would like agency to provide  

- Debrief with parents at the end of home visits
- Reinforce what parents are doing when not at their home
- Keep on providing services, but don’t see follow through
- Give up on families
- Critical of families
- Use toy bags: stigma, yet still in use
- Provide direct service to child
- Refers to and expects "Best practices", but doesn’t implement them
- Does not provide HV activity sheet anymore because family loses or doesn’t care
- Say child only gets stimulation when they are there for visits
- Critical of some families' follow through
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Providing Visits with School Staff and Children in Programs</th>
<th>Deciding the Length of Visit</th>
<th>Conduct 30-45 minute visits</th>
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<td>Offerings Support to School Staff and Children During Visits</td>
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<td>Typically do screening and observation</td>
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<td>Consult with school staff to support child</td>
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<td>Pull child out of classroom</td>
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<td>See child informally, but will stop once caseload increases (because he is not identified)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Conforming to Job Aspects That Are Beyond Control</td>
<td>Making the Office/Environment a Home Away From Home</td>
<td>Support of secretarial staff</td>
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<td>Feel of the office (cozy, noisy, quiet, busy)</td>
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<td>Size of office (large vs. small)</td>
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<td>Consider a source of stress</td>
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<td>Access to natural lighting</td>
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<td>Use and amount of space</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Respect confidentiality for families and colleagues</td>
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<td>Offices at home</td>
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<td>Experiencing Supportive</td>
<td>Ask for help and getting it</td>
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<td>Supervision</td>
<td>Ask for help and not getting it</td>
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<td>Evaluation cycle</td>
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<td>Wants action when go in to talk</td>
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<td>to supervisor</td>
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<td>Completing Paperwork</td>
<td>Use of the new Web IFSP:</td>
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<td>&quot;bugs&quot;, access, ease, hopeful,</td>
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<td>access, ease</td>
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<td>Obey deadlines</td>
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<td>Submit Medicaid: hassle, easier</td>
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<td>with DSC</td>
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<td>Cannot “count” paperwork time,</td>
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<td>only direct service to children</td>
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<tr>
<th>4. Using Personal Strategies to Alleviate Job Stress</th>
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<td>Having spiritual faith</td>
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<td>Exercising (walking, running)</td>
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<td>Using “mental health” days</td>
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<td>Not talking about work</td>
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<td>Keeping resolution about not working on weekends</td>
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<td>Making physical and emotional self-care a priority</td>
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<tr>
<th>Unhealthy Tactics</th>
<th>Complaining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overeating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Binge drinking (once in a while)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The emerging theme of relationship factors between the participants and their colleagues was evident through their comments and observations. In the following paragraphs, positive examples as well as stressful examples of relationship factors will be discussed.

Positive relationships with colleagues were reported by all participants. For the most part, positive relationships equaled friendship with participants enjoying their time with colleagues during the work day. In some cases, participants considered the colleagues they were the closest to as family. For example, Valerie and four of her office mates have “chatty days” every so often and do not get a lot of work done. Moreover, it was apparent that Valerie and those four office mates have shared the office area for a long time. On most days, she shared how they are very considerate of each other’s needs and preferences, especially when an office mate requests quiet time or few interruptions. They acknowledged each other when leaving or returning, asked how their nights or weekends were, and supported each other through tough times, e.g., a death in the family. Jean’s experience with her colleagues was very similar when her youngest child was born with a chronic disease and her husband lost his job within a short period of time. Lastly, Michelle reminisced about her previous office by saying “That group down there in [city name] were definitely my family. You know, they... I moved down there not knowing a single person...and they helped me find a place to live.”

All participants described going out to lunch with colleagues during the work day. When talking about her previous office, Michelle joked about spending a lot of money because she
was going out for lunch all the time. Additionally, she mentioned missing her colleagues from the previous office and meeting them for lunch when she could, especially when she was in the area. Interestingly, Valerie and her colleagues have made it a rule not to talk about work when they go out for lunch. Finally, Jean and her colleagues like to meet at a café near their office whenever they get the chance.

Beyond the work day, there were occasions when one participant spent time with colleagues. After meetings, Michelle and a small group of colleagues may get together for cocktails and rehash the topics and issues discussed, which she said ‘helps once in awhile’. Furthermore, she shared how she and colleagues have done other social activities together, e.g. scrapbooking and going out to eat on the weekends. Lastly, Michelle described a “mental health” day she had taken with a colleague to go shopping, but neither one could tell anybody about what they did or saw since both of them were supposed to be sick.

Unfortunately, there were also instances when participants portrayed stressful relationships with colleagues. In most of these situations, the participants would describe colleagues who were not doing their jobs, taking on more than what their roles entailed, and/or acting unprofessionally. More than once, Michelle was very critical of colleagues who she described as “not very good” at their jobs with children and families. For Michelle, working with these colleagues was an added stress because of her perceptions about their ineptness.
Despite getting along with the other four office mates, Valerie described a fifth office mate who kept her job as a translator even though she continuously called in sick or could not account for days she was supposed to be working. In addition, Valerie reported how this office mate contacted Valerie’s families without her consent and tried to develop personal relationships with them. Once she found out, Valerie immediately talked to the office mate and made sure she understood when it was appropriate for her to contact families, e.g., to schedule a home visit for Valerie. When the vehicle of this office mate was in the office parking lot, Valerie dreaded going in due to the fifth office mate’s “demoralizing” actions and words toward and about everyone. Consequently, Valerie and the others started documenting everything in order to have “proof” of what the fifth office mate was doing. Sadly, their supervisor started scrutinizing all of them as if trying to catch them doing something wrong, too. Valerie emphasized how her “office can sometimes be where the stress is”, which was in reference to this situation over the past year.

In Michelle’s case, another colleague’s actions were sabotaging Michelle’s efforts with families regardless of Michelle’s initial attempts to befriend her. This colleague would make appointments without first consulting Michelle for her availability, not share pertinent information about families with Michelle, and try to go beyond her job role and act as a translator for Spanish-speaking families they served together. With both of the colleagues just described, Valerie and Michelle alluded to their respective agencies giving the colleagues...
special treatment due to their bilingual skills with families. To demonstrate her point, Valerie stated that her office mate would be fired for her actions if she worked in any other job or field.

In summary, the participants experienced friendship and support with many of their colleagues. Despite that, two of them had at least one colleague who was difficult to work with because they were very unsupportive overall and/or did not act like a "team player".

Factors that help make resilient, more positive than negative relationships

One neg. relationship that overshadows all the positive relationships

Research questions

- Resilience
- Keep in job
- Protective factors?
- At risk factors?
For the families and children on their caseloads, home visits were the primary mode of service provision for all of these participants. In this section, information regarding the frequency and length of home visits, support for the families and children during home visits as well as the mismatch between the participants’ words and actions will be presented.

Typically, participants scheduled visits twice a month with families that were 30-45 minutes in length. Although not always the case historically, this practice has been occurring more frequently in early intervention. When she first started in the field, Valerie used to do weekly home visits for at least an hour. Now, she takes the families’ cue to determine the frequency and length as well as considering the purpose of the visit. In addition, Valerie stated “The paperwork has changed the quality of the services,” insinuating the time and effort required to complete paperwork has taken time away from families. She feels she does not get as close to the families on her caseload and is just one of the entourage of service providers coming in. On the other hand, Michelle rationalizes her 30 minute home visits twice a month with families as the most time children can work (play) and anything longer than that is mostly talking with the parent. Within her agency, Michelle stated there are others conducting home visits twice a month for an hour.

Mostly, the participants were able to provide visits when families were available. For example, Michelle stated “I have quite a few families who are working families so I just schedule those later because that’s my job.” For her agency, anything past four o’clock is
considered flex time, which she can use on a different day to come into work later or leave work early. Participants also provided families with materials, e.g. dry erase boards for scheduling, and information about community and state resources, when necessary.

During the home visits, most participants worked primarily with the children in dyads using the materials from their toy bags despite what was already available in the homes. Typically, the parents observed the interactions without being directly involved. For example, Michelle played at the kitchen table with a little girl as her parents watched while sitting on the floor. When Michelle and the little girl moved to the floor to play, the parents became more verbally engaged. Toward the end of the home visit, Michelle debriefed with the parents and reinforced activities they were doing with the little girl. At another home visit, Michelle, the mother, and a little boy sat at the kitchen table. Although the mother was there, the interaction was mostly between Michelle and the little boy as they looked at books. While driving away, Michelle said “[we] want parents to play with their kids...a lot of them just don’t know what to do.”

Similarly, Jean and one of her colleagues shared a home visit with a little girl and infant brother, respectively, where each of them brought toy bags. Jean did not give the little girl a choice of what they were going to play with and insisted they play her game. When the little girl would not give up her own toys, Jean asked the mother to take them away. During the game, the mother stood and watched from behind the couch while Jean and her colleague each
played with a child on the floor in front of the couch. At the same time, the father sat on the end of the couch and played a video game. At the end of the visit, Jean gave the little girl permission to have her toys back.

During her home visits, Valerie also used toy bags and focused on the child, however, the parents were always nearby and engaged the entire time. Depending on the type of visit, her toy bag was either filled with toys or screening and assessment materials. At one visit, Valerie and the mother sat on the floor with the infant laying on his blanket. While Valerie modeled how to get him in and out of different positions, she asked the mother questions about her son, checked his reactions to each position, gave reinforcement for what the family had been doing with him, and offered suggestions for developmental next steps. In addition, the mother asked Valerie a lot of questions and she responded with more ideas and information.

Notwithstanding, all of the participants believe they are offering the best services they are capable of providing for the families on their caseloads. Despite these beliefs, there are differences between what the participants say they do and what they are actually doing. For example, Michelle stated “um...there’s been some issues with other early childhood teachers in this office or other service coordinators that don’t necessarily do the best work or do what’s best practice.” Be that as it may, most of the participants did not use best practice during their home visits with families and children. Most of the participants worked directly with the child
Managing the Changing Landscape of Service Provision (HVs)

Lisa Naig

February 8, 2010

in dyads with the parents as observers. Best practice would emphasize supporting the
interactions between the parent and child using triadic strategies in order to strengthen and
enhance the parent-child relationship. In addition, some in the field may or may not consider
the use of toy bags a lack of best practice.

In some instances, participants were critical of their colleagues and the families on their
caseloads. As previously mentioned, Michelle felt some of her colleagues “don’t necessarily do
the best work” or were not “very good” at their jobs. When talking about families, both
Michelle and Jean wished parents would “follow through” with what they had recommended or
suggested. Despite this criticism of families, Jean reported making her own home visit form to
keep track of activities in her working file instead of the agency’s three-part form. In the past,
she used the agency’s form and left a copy with the family, but eventually concluded that
families either lost the sheet or did not care. Michelle had also felt that “we know that the
only time that kid ever gets anything, you know...is the only time that I’m there or the OT is
there or speech therapist is there.” Lastly, Jean reported “[there are] several families where I
feel like, I’m not getting anywhere with you.”

To review, participants primarily scheduled home visits twice a month for 30-45 minutes
each. Most participants believed they were providing quality services using toy bags and
interacting with the child rather than supporting interactions between the parent and child.
Based on current practices, the participants’ criticism of families to “follow through” with services and recommendations may not warranted nor a shortcoming of the families.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Support Resiliency</th>
<th>Prevent Resiliency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How do ECSE teachers stay resilient to professional burnout and compassion fatigue?</td>
<td>Striving to Form Relationships with Colleagues</td>
<td>Receiving social support and friendship</td>
<td>Having boundary issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Considering each other's needs</td>
<td>Being critical of colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting each other when difficult times arise</td>
<td>Being vulnerable to other colleagues' negative attitudes, work ethic, and practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having boundaries</td>
<td>Not being able to say &quot;no&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) What prevents ECSE teachers from being resilient to professional burnout and compassion fatigue?</td>
<td>Managing Service Provision</td>
<td>Offering support to families Consulting with programs</td>
<td>Deciding on length of visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Serving families/children a priority</td>
<td>Using toy bags</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being a part of a team assisting families</td>
<td>Having difficulty with being family-centered and strengths-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hooking families up with the appropriate resources</td>
<td>Having boundary issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Keeping professional boundaries</td>
<td>Becoming desensitized to plight of some families (???)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Becoming desensitized to plight of some families (???)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conforming to Job Aspects That Are Beyond Control</td>
<td>Making the office a home away from home</td>
<td>Being in a large office makes feel less family-like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having access to natural lighting</td>
<td>Considering office a source of stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good use of space</td>
<td>Having no access to natural lighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Receiving support of secretarial staff</td>
<td>Receiving supervision for evaluation purposes and daily grind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experiencing supportive supervision</td>
<td>Worrying about completing paperwork (IFSPs, IEPs, Medicaid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding the value of paperwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Officizing at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Using Personal Strategies to Alleviate Job Stress | Spending time with family and friends  
Having spiritual faith  
Exercising (walking, running)  
Using "mental health" days  
Keeping a promise to herself about not working on weekends  
Making physical and emotional self-care a priority  
Not talking about work  
Reading  
Sleeping/napping  
Being less judgmental  
Making to do lists  
Realizing can only do the best she can while at work  
Separating home and work  
Realizing something needed to change in work life and slowly making the changes | Complaining  
Overeating  
Drinking in excess (once in a while)  
Avoiding the issue  
Wanting to leave job every year |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Stressors</th>
<th>B/C Coping Strategies</th>
<th>X Outcomes (Experiencing Resiliency or Burnout/CF)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are stressors that ECSE teachers face that may lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue?</td>
<td>How do ECSE teachers cope with stressors in order to help alleviate and prevent professional burnout and compassion fatigue?</td>
<td>How do stressors and coping strategies interact to influence resiliency or burnout/CF for ECSE teachers (their exceptions)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Working with Difficult Colleagues
2. Providing Services to Families Who Are Challenging
3. Restricting Boundaries with Families
4. Having a Dependence on Familiar Routines
5. Using Personal Strategies
6. Having Supportive Colleagues
7. Having Good Days and Turning Around Bad Days

- Energy to continue dedication to children and families
- Continued commitment
- Look for other jobs
- Self-in-field
- Contracts come each year

**Note:** Put in initial codes for each theme and more focused coding.
### 4/7/10

| D   | I spent the morning with D and went over the themes and everything was right on except for the actual time spent at HV, so I made that change. I also asked her the additional probe questions and she reiterated about the flexibility of the job. I was surprised about her answer about her ideal job, especially since she is not doing something she feels passionate about. She does not feel supported by her supervisor and feels the agency is giving them lip service about understanding how busy they are. The issue with the colleague has tapered off, which was the most stressful things happening a couple of months ago. She attributes a lot of how she copes to maturity and being in the field so long. She has great coping strategies and I think some of them are due to her longevity. |

### 4/9/10

| C   | I spent the day with C and got to see a couple of visits to child care and a staff meeting where some interesting news was shared regarding contracts, moving, and layoffs. We covered the themes and she thought everything was okay. When asked the additional probe questions, she really talked about her coping strategies. She feels supported by her supervisor and has felt a little guilty for not being as busy right now when she knows a colleague is, but has realized that she has been there, too. |

### Date: 1/27/10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflections on My Research Questions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have to believe that the interview questions, observations, and information about their jobs all relate to my research questions at this time. But...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Date: 2/10/10

| I like MJ's suggestion about changing my research question to "what keeps ECSE teachers in the field despite all the stressors, etc., they face?" |

### Date: 2/19/10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I have been thinking about the resiliency question and changed my research questions to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What helps make ECSE teachers resilient?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What protective factors have they developed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. What at-risk factors do they resort to when faced with job stress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Question about home visiting and toy bags?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Date: 2/23/10

| 1. How do ECSE teachers stay resilient to job stressors? |
| 2. In what ways do ECSE teachers demonstrate resiliency in their jobs? |
| 3. What helps make ECSE teachers resilient? |
| 4. What deters ECSE teachers from being resilient? |

### Date: 3/2/10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The new questions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do ECSE teachers stay resilient to job stressors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What prevents ECSE teachers from being resilient?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Analytic Memos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reflections on My Emergent Patterns, Categories, Themes, and Concepts and Possible Networks Among Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3/8/10</td>
<td>Better questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. How do ECSE teachers stay resilient to professional burnout and compassion fatigue?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What prevents ECSE teachers from being resilient to professional burnout and compassion fatigue?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/25/10</td>
<td>1. What are basic stressors that ECSE teachers face that may possibly lead to professional burnout and compassion fatigue?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. How do ECSE teachers cope with stressors and build resiliency in order to alleviate and prevent professional burnout and compassion fatigue?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/8/10</td>
<td>We have now talked about adding another research question to look at the outcome of stressors and coping. I think that fits the so what? aspect of this study, especially since we have teachers who continue to stay in the field despite everything they are facing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reflections on My Emergent Patterns, Categories, Themes, and Concepts and Possible Networks Among Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/13/10</td>
<td>K I have read through and made initial notes on the first transcript. I keep wanting to get out the initial codes/themes from my pilot study. I will refrain for a bit longer!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/20/10</td>
<td>I met with MJ yesterday and talked to her about H. We came up with some initial themes: dysfunctional teams, mismatch (between what they say/do/see), boundaries/&quot;girlfriends&quot;, helping, and service provision. I need to start defining each of these and go back through K's interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/27</td>
<td>I have made an initial table of themes, sub codes, and descriptions/definitions. It was really helpful to talk to MJ last week and get her input based on what she was hearing me talk about from K's observations/interview. I really need to go back through K's interview and check the themes/subthemes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/28/10</td>
<td>After meeting with MJ today, I have a lot of work to do on my themes table. Wow! This is so exciting to find I AM finding out different types of information from my participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/8/10</td>
<td>I am starting to write up about my relationships with colleagues and team members emergent theme. I am not usually a procrastinator, why does it happen now?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2/14/10| D I read through D's interview transcript and made notes in the margin. She talked a lot about the issue with the co-worker that has been going on for a year and how stressful it has been. I had forgotten about the child who had been killed by the TV and how guilty she and her co-workers had felt about it. She is always so professional and confidential and really considers her answers before speaking. I thought it was interesting how she at
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reflections on Problems with My Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/6/10</td>
<td>I am having difficulty with really knowing what I am supposed to be doing during the observations. Although I have only had one full day, it seems to me that what I'm seeing is very typical for an ECSE teacher. I hope this continues to be the case, however it would be interesting to see something different (I don't know what that would be). I think it would be insightful to take pictures of my participants work areas/desks to show &quot;stress inducers and helpers&quot;, etc. Also, I do not see any problem with only conducting interviews with some of the participants. I think I would recruit more that way. I could incorporate questions about their &quot;typical&quot; day in order to get a feel for their routine/schedule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/13/10</td>
<td>Again, today's observation seemed &quot;typical&quot;, even with going to the 2:00 pm home visit first and not being able to find the 1:00 pm home visit. (K made several calls to try and get directions after the GPS on her phone was not helpful. When we finally did find the street/house (we think!), the SC was already gone. We finally caught up with her at the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analytic Memos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reflections on Personal or Ethical Dilemmas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/15/10</td>
<td>How do I not work while doing these observations? It’s not that I have been offering suggestions or anything, but I was asked after a visit today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/27/10</td>
<td>Seemed weird at lunch today when they were talking about families and children at the restaurant. I’m sure the woman at the table next to us could hear everything. I know that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Field Notes

Date: 12/16/08

Member Check: No Yes When conducted?

Send initial themes

Name of Participant: [redacted]

Description of Interviewee/Setting:
Office is in old Target Store - a lot of cubicles. Office space has desk filing cabinets, chair. Decorated for holiday: files stacked on desk. Pictures of family/friends?
on overdesk file cabinets.

Office

Few people in cubicles. Support staff friendly and helpful. Seemed like "typical" ASL office environment.

Impressions of Interview/Observation:

Very articulate. Answered questions with a lot of detail. Interesting how "new" office not as supportive as "smaller" office transferred from last August. Almost seemed to tear up when talking a couple of times.

Seems to have a lot of similar habits of mine: eg: neatness, need office to go to, etc.

Will be insightful to see her on Jan 5 and discussion on Jan 8. Really looking forward to seeing how she, colleagues, react to new EC administrator with Karie M retirement. Also want to see how their habits differ from ours.

Need to ask about service provision: how often and how long. Wonder about what she takes to chv.- bag?!
Field Notes

Date: 3/10/10

Member Check: No ☐ Yes ☑
When conducted? 

Name of Participant: 

Description of Interviewee/Setting:

9:30-2:00

Impressions of Interview/Observation:

Eating balance will continue later today or on another day. Very thoughtful responses noticed notes on protocol and bed bath:

Talked about keeping his family colleagues are support as well as knowing the next step. Supervision needs more for 3yr to 5yr.- want action when 66 and child to supervision. Systems issues- notes surprise about 21/2 days ago when not clear that Wilson, also NY’s resolution of not working animals. Still works a lot of NY’s - couldn’t go to SHP or pictures EC to EC- many ups in classroom. Just got trained in web IEP. Thinks will be helpful- had to get out glitches. 3 disc- in-VOs- lecture in Nov. Next over pull.

Talked about first day- mom cried the whole time when discussing need for EC. Like when get to deal with school then have date (Northwood) couldn’t go back to classroom—likes flexible.
Field Notes

Date: 4/7/10
Member Check: No Yes When conducted? 4/7/10

Name of Interviewee: [redacted]

Description of Interviewee:

Review of themes & did mini-interview
Talked about colleague issue & being gone for 2 mo - contractor and
e-mail "hostile environment," knows whom supposed to be back
earning, nobody ever said anything bad to her

Supervision - not happy in job, used to be P, many not in mentor - supervisor
But hit one who sees a P - should have stayed

Feet but for saying not feeling supported

Ideal job - no passion

Impressions of Interview:

#1: PR/IT -> SC, ECS, sup, m, 2 kids, ECSE Team Rep.

10:00 - Discussion of #5 visits -> ECS always somebody here but said
would go by what prof. said

10:30 - Describing EC classrooms - P-ES ratio

3 people programs in town's visits

Fegy is based on eligibility because of 3. Ages he can get into district prog.

#2: MA, 2 kids

10:40 - Don't know: Mamma very engaged (no infant). Encouraged to "show Mom"

Song work. Talking woman. Recognizing preferences. Sharing into. Strength

Reinforcing mom. 7's, needing materials, using more - bringing better

of simple signs

Doesn't dwell
REFERENCES


