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A COMPARISON OF BURNOUT LEVELS
BETWEEN SPECIAL EDUCATORS AND REGULAR EDUCATORS

by
Andrea Liddle

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in School Psychology
of Rowan University
May 6, 1997

Approved by

Date Approved 5/6/97

ABSTRACT

Andrea R. Liddle
A Comparison of Burnout Levels
Between Special Educators and Regular Educators
1997
Dr. John Klanderman
School Psychology

The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers who work with mentally and physically handicapped children in special education schools have a higher incidence of burnout than teachers who work in regular education schools.

Twenty regular educators from a public school, k-12, and twenty special educators from two private special education schools, k-12, participated in the study. The special educators taught children with moderate levels of mental retardation and multiple handicaps. Each participant completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Educator's Survey.

Three two-tailed t-tests were computed to compare the means of the three subscales of the burnout survey:

Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. The data did not indicate any significant differences of higher levels of burnout among special educators as opposed to regular educators on all three subscales. The depersonalization subscale did show significantly higher scores of burnout among regular educators, which was in direct contrast to the hypothesis.

MINI ABSTRACT

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This study was designed to determine if teachers who work with physically and mentally handicapped children would have a higher incidence of burnout than teachers who work with normal children. Results did not indicate any significant differences of higher levels of burnout among special educators as opposed to regular educators.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Chapter I..... | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Purpose..... | 2 |
| Hypothesis..... | 3 |
| Theory..... | 3 |
| Definitions..... | 6 |
| Assumptions..... | 7 |
| Limitations..... | 8 |
| Overview..... | 8 |
| Chapter II..... | 10 |
| Review of Literature..... | 10 |
| Burnout and Special Educators..... | 11 |
| Contributing Factors..... | 13 |
| Factors and Consequences of Stress..... | 15 |
| Prevalence of Burnout and Special Educators..... | 20 |
| Burnout and Regular Educators..... | 22 |
| Attrition..... | 23 |
| Special Educators and Regular Educators..... | 26 |
| Summary..... | 28 |
| Chapter III..... | 29 |
| Sample..... | 29 |
| Measures..... | 30 |
| Design..... | 35 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Testable Hypothesis..... | 35 |
| Analysis..... | 36 |
| Summary..... | 36 |
| Chapter IV..... | 37 |
| Restatement of Hypothesis..... | 37 |
| Statements of Significance..... | 37 |
| Summary..... | 41 |
| Chapter V..... | 42 |
| Summary..... | 42 |
| Conclusions..... | 43 |
| Discussion..... | 44 |
| Implications for Future Research..... | 46 |
| References..... | 49 |
| Tables 3.1..... | 31 |
| 4.1..... | 38 |
| 4.2..... | 39 |
| 4.3..... | 39 |

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first thank Dr. Dihoff and Dr. Klanderma for providing me with academic guidance and support while working on my thesis.

In addition, I extend great appreciation to all of the teachers who took the time to fill out the survey for my thesis. I extend special thanks to Dennis and Jane for distributing the survey amongst their fellow co-workers which made this study possible.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my parents, and my future husband Michael for being so understanding and supportive over the past year. They have allowed me to focus all of my attention towards my academic achievement.

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

NEED

A major problem today in the area of special education is the high attrition rate of teachers. Every year thousands of special educators leave their careers (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990). Data indicates that the need for special education teachers is increasing with an increasing amount of children being born to teenage mothers, to abusive and neglectful parents, to parents addicted to drugs, and in low socio-economic areas (Brownell & Smith, 1992).

The high attrition rate is often attributed to a phenomenon referred to as "burnout". Burnout occurs when professionals lose their sense of empathy for the individuals they work with on a day to day basis. Special educators will continue to leave the profession and schools will face a major crisis if burnout is not pinpointed and addressed. Teachers who are burned out and continue to teach in the system, have very short attention spans, use harsh punishment too often, and have a very pessimistic outlook towards life. Therefore, burned-out teachers have a negative effect on their students as well. (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990).

In order to combat high attrition rates and promote positive psychological health of special educators and their students, measures need to be taken to detect burnout. Once burnout is detected, school systems can implement coping techniques to overcome burnout.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to examine if teachers who work in special education schools have a higher incidence of burnout than teachers who work in regular education schools. The focus of the literature review is to explore and compare the causes of burnout of both special education and regular education teachers. The Maslach Burnout Inventory, Second Edition for Teachers is the instrument administered to measure the presence of burnout among teachers. If this study does determine a higher incidence of burnout among special education teachers, it is intended to contribute to studies which may someday initiate special education school systems to monitor the levels of burnout in their schools and implement some type of workshop on coping and overcoming burnout.

HYPOTHEESIS

Teachers who work with mentally and physically handicapped children have a higher incidence of burnout than teachers who work with normal children, as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Educator's Survey.

THEORY

The phenomenon "burnout" is not based on psychological theory, but originated through research on disturbing mental and physical symptoms of people in the helping professions. The symptoms were clustered together to form the diagnosis of burnout. Four individuals have researched burnout in depth and have come up with very similar definitions. Christina Maslach (University of California) defines burnout as, "a loss of concern for the people with whom one is working with, which includes emotional fatigue and a lack of positive feelings, sympathy, or respect for clients" (Cedoline, 1982, p.21). Herbert Freudenberger (Covenant House in New York City) defines burnout as, "those who become worn out by trying to accomplish the impossible" (Cedoline, 1982, p.19). Martha Mattingly (University of Pittsburgh) describes burnout as, "an inherent stress-producing conflict between professional requirements of giving and the reality that he or she can never give enough" (Cedoline, 1982, p.21). Finally, Leroy Spaniol and Jennifer

Caputo (Human Services Association, Massachusetts), describe burnout as, "an inability to cope adequately with the stresses of work or personal life" (Cedoline, 1982, p.21). All four researchers have found that burnout negatively effects both the professional and the recipient of his/her services.

There are three main components of burnout. Each component has a number of debilitating physical and mental symptoms. The first component is physical exhaustion. Symptoms include lack of energy, headaches, backaches, overeating, and insomnia. The second component is emotional exhaustion. Symptoms include feeling depressed, trapped, helpless, nervous, and non-stop crying. The third component is mental exhaustion. Symptoms include a pessimistic outlook, a loss of interest in hobbies, and feelings of failure (Aronson, Ditsa, & Pines, 1981).

Although burnout is not based on any psychological theory, one can apply Rollo May's Existential theory on society and morality to the phenomenon of burnout. The theory discusses factors in society that induce emptiness and apathy in human beings, which are the same factors that contribute to burnout. May describes a number of values that no longer exist in today's society which cause negative experiences for many individuals. If a person is faced with a problem, it is not appropriate as it was in the past to use both logic and feeling to solve the problem. Today, one is supposed to handle obstacles in a calm and rational

manner (Ryckman, 1993). May's view on how today's society dictates how individuals should approach problems supports Herbert Freudenberger's view on burnout. Freudenberger states that professionals in human services have to help those in need while appearing calm and rational in very emotional situations (Cedoline, 1982). A few examples of these professions are: hospice care workers, social workers, and teachers of the handicapped.

May continues to say that people today have very low self-concepts and feel as if they have no control over their destinations in the work world (Ryckman, 1993). Martha Mattingly discusses the need for individuals to feel that they can accomplish tasks at work and to feel good at what they do. If they do not feel this way, they are at a high risk for burnout. Unfortunately, one can not be successful every day if one's success depends on a child's success for the day, especially when children need more help than the teacher can give (Cedoline, 1982). Poor support from administrators and large amounts of work that are not manageable in the workplace have been found to be major factors in burnout as well (Alan & Robert, 1993). The professional will lose a sense of control and self-esteem in these types of environments.

A breakdown in society's morality, May states, will lead to feelings of, "emptiness and loneliness" (Ryckman, 1993, p.437). Apathy will also occur when people feel like they cannot take control of their life, change things, or

help others. If feelings of apathy continue, an individual will become stagnant in his/her psychological health or develop "authoritarian" ways (Ryckman, 1993, p.437). May's lonely and apathetic state parallels with one who is burned-out. People who are burned-out feel, "helpless, hopeless, drained, and are negative to others" (Aronson, Ditsa, & Pines, 1981, p.15). A teacher who is burned-out will experience apathy as well as everyone the teacher interacts with. The teacher will also begin to use harsh punishment, have a short attention span, and focus a great deal more on oneself and ignore others (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990). May's focus on the role of the environment on feelings of low self-esteem and helplessness illustrate how burnout is a phenomenon due to environmental stresses in contrast to internal conflicts.

DEFINITIONS

Apathy- One who does not experience emotion.

Attrition-An organization with a high number of employees leaving their positions.

Dehumanization-A professional looks at their recipients in an objective manner, lacking emotion (Cedoline, 1982).

Depersonalization-(Dp)-A lack of feeling or caring in one's interactions with his/her clients.

Detachment-A professional becomes too involved in the

recipient's life and the professional increases
the amount of distance between the two.

Emotional Exhaustion-(EE)-One who feels emotionally drained
from his/her work.

Intellectualization-A teacher refers to students as objects
rather than describing them as people.

MBI- Maslach Burnout Inventory, Educator's Survey

Personal Accomplishment-(PA)-How one feels about one's
accomplishments in work.

Psychological Withdrawal-A teacher decreases the amount of
time spent with students and increases time spent
on paperwork, breaks, and socializing (Cedoline,
1982).

Special educators-Special educators in this study are
teachers who work with children with moderate
levels of mental retardation and multiple
handicaps.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. The Maslach Burnout Inventory is a valid measure of
"burnout".
2. Teachers who participate in the study have not had
previous exposure to the Maslach Burnout Inventory.
3. All teachers will fill out the Inventory truthfully.

LIMITATIONS

1. Teachers in schools who participate in the study will have the option to complete the Inventory or decline to do so. The sample size may be effected.
2. Two special education schools, one public grammar school, and one high school will be administered the Inventory. These schools are located in rural areas of southern New Jersey. This sample may not be representative of the overall population.
3. There is a higher number of female teachers than male teachers in the special education schools and the public schools.
4. Each participant will complete the Inventory in his/her own free time. Therefore, the Inventory will not be filled out in a controlled environment.
5. The previous work experience of each teacher will be different.

OVERVIEW

The following chapter contains a review of the literature on special educators and burnout. Issues on the presence of burnout and contributing factors in the special education field are stated. In addition, attrition rates are looked at as evidence of burnout. The review ends with four specific studies comparing teacher's of the handicapped

and regular education teacher's burnout levels.

The design of the study is presented in Chapter III, which contains information on the sample group, the measure used to assess burnout, the design, and how the data will be analyzed.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Becky has been a special education teacher for the past ten years. She has worked in a resource room with students who have had a number of different handicaps. In addition to having handicaps, most of these students come from abusive and neglectful environments at home. Through the years, Becky has noticed that she has had her share of good days and bad. In the past few years however, Becky has noticed almost all of her days could be described as bad. She almost always has a disagreement with co-workers, she does not feel as sensitive towards meeting the many individual needs of her students, and conferences with parents leave her feeling quite frustrated. In addition, she feels completely exhausted after the day is over, and has used up all of her sick days due to a back pain problem which will not go away. Becky is what many would label your A-typical "burned out teacher" (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990).

Although the phenomena of "burnout" is a fairly new one, there has been quite an extensive amount of research done on the topic. Many studies have used the Maslach Burnout Inventory to measure burnout. The Inventory measures emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and

personal accomplishment, which are three factors in burnout. The field of special education has been a major area of focus in relation to burnout. The many negative factors that special educators have been describing for years has now been termed, "burnout." The majority of research in this area focuses on proving that burnout does indeed exist among special educators to the degree that action needs to be taken to overcome and prevent future incidences of burnout. Some studies also focus on the high attrition rate of special educators and it's relevance to the presence of burnout. There have only been four studies which actually compare the level of burnout amongst special education teachers and regular education teachers.

BURNOUT AND SPECIAL EDUCATORS

A number of studies and articles have been documented on the presence of burnout among special education teachers and the factors that may contribute to the presence of burnout. A very recent article on the topic of burnout states that many individuals who go into special education do not have a realistic outlook of what they will encounter. The students tend to be very needy due to a number of social, emotional, or learning problems. In addition, many of these children have additional problems such as, drug abuse, pregnancy, or are dependent on welfare (Luckner, 1996). The teacher gives so much to the students that the

teacher feels exhausted and has no energy to focus on oneself when the day is over. In the area of teachers of the visually impaired, 103 teachers were sent questionnaires on their feelings of being a special educator. Many stated that they were lacking training, since many of the children had multiple disabilities other than visual impairments. Teachers felt as though they received little support from regular education teachers and 79% felt isolated in their workplace. One-fourth of the teachers also said that they would not become special education teachers if they were to go to school all over again (Seitz, 1994). The Maslach Burnout Inventory was used in a study and was sent to a group of special educators twice a year for five years in order to monitor the development of burnout over time. Emotional exhaustion (a key factor in burnout) was the only factor found to be significant over the five year period. The mean for the first year was 14.54 and went up to 18.98 by the fifth year of teaching. Teachers who had taught children with behavioral disorders (BD) had the highest levels of emotional exhaustion (EE). The study did show an increase over the years in (EE), which could be considered partial burnout (Frank & McKenzie, 1993). One study sent a survey out to both special education directors and special education teachers. The survey asked directors and teachers to list factors relating to poor job satisfaction. Factors listed were: too much paperwork, student learning very slow, feelings of isolation, and little administrative support.

Special education teachers felt as though regular education teachers gave them little support as well (Sires & Tomnsen, 1993).

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

The National Dissemination Forum of Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention, and Attrition designed a report from research which discusses the factors which contribute to burnout and attrition. The report discusses five main areas of dissatisfaction among special educators. The special educator has a variety of roles. The teachers must act as an advisor on mainstreaming, a counselor to parents, and develop Individualized Education Plans (IEP'S). The roles of the special educator are not always clearly defined, which causes the teacher conflict. Teachers in special education also experience role overload quite often, due to large class sizes and increased amounts of paperwork. Many times, the teacher's autonomy is weakened since he/she is not allowed to use methods he/she would like and feel would benefit the child more than the ones that are presently in the curriculum. Last, issues of the school culture, such as regular education teachers not cooperating with suggestions or ideas made by special educators contribute to burnout and attrition (Billingsley, Garsten, Gillman, & Morvant, 1993).

The next study used the MBI as a measurement to assess

the presence of burnout in relation to the category of children with which one works. Special educators who worked with behavior disorders had the highest levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The age of teachers has been seen to play a role in burnout. Older teachers scored the lowest on burnout scales, and it was hypothesized that these teachers were more mature in psychosocial situations (Banks & Necco, 1990). Therefore, the category of the children and the age of a teacher have been shown to contribute to burnout. The presence of burnout among teachers, therapists, special education teachers, and nurses was measured through a questionnaire which contained some items from the MBI. Seven factors of burnout were felt by these professionals. The factors were: stress, exhaustion, pressure, discontent with their quality of work, negative emotions, depersonalization, and depression (Strassmeier, 1992). Those in special education working with the profoundly retarded had the highest levels of physical stress. The teachers also stated that they did not feel "competent" in their area of work in this study (Strassmeier, 1992).

Two studies found that administrative support was a major factor in the presence of burnout. In the first study, two schools for the mentally retarded were examined. One school had very high levels of burnout and the other had very low levels of burnout. In both schools, the principals were followed two days for three weeks straight. In the

school with low levels of burnout, the principal spent more time supporting staff members, interacted more with supervisors and clerical staff, kept staff updated, and spent more time in her office than did the principal in the school with high levels of burnout (Cherniss, 1988). In the second study, special education teachers felt as though their main causes of stress during the day were a result of differences between themselves and their administrators. Three groups of teachers were administered the Teacher Stress Inventory. The Teacher Stress Inventory measures six subscales of stressors in strength and frequency of their occurrence. Two-thirds of each group stated that poor supervisory support was a main cause in teacher stress. Ratios for personal and professional stressors, as a result of poor administrative support, were significant in both strength and frequency. F Ratios for the three groups in frequency were 14.55, 11.01, and 30.58. F Ratios for the three groups in frequency were 12.90, 18.17., 20.14 (Fimian, 1986).

FACTORS & CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS

The literature from the past on burnout among special educators focused on basically the same issues as the more recent articles have, such as the presence of burnout, the symptoms one experiences with burnout, and the factors that cause burnout. White and Phair have done research and have

written an article on eleven feelings a person will feel when working with handicapped children. Teachers have felt denial at first when they have overlooked many of the child's handicaps. Then, they state they have felt sad because they couldn't help the child make fast progress. Next, they have felt anger towards the administration for taking on such difficult children. Guilt occurs because it seems the child cannot reach his/her goals. Next, they have become afraid of the handicap and that the child might hurt someone. As a result, they become overprotective since they were unsure of the child's capabilities. They become defensive, since so many others have given them advice on the special child. Teachers have become jealous of others working and suggesting new ideas on how to work with the child. At this time the teacher has become frustrated and has attended many special meetings. Finally, the teacher is exhausted and has had feelings of hopelessness, that they have not made a difference. All of these factors will occur if not attacked by positive thinking and one will become burned out (White & Phair, 1986). A Teacher Stress Inventory was used in an experiment to measure the frequency and intensity of stress that occurs among teachers of non-learning disabled handicapped students, such as the mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, and learning disabled students. Teachers of learning disabled students experienced greater levels of stress in areas such as: not feeling adequately trained for their job, poor

administrative help, lack of time to prepare, and the difficulty with management of time. Non-learning disabled handicapped teachers experienced greater levels of stress in areas such as: number of days off due to stress, the amount of counseling due to stress, oversized classes, and no recognition for their work. Final results show that both groups of teachers experience moderate levels of stress simply due to different factors (Fimian, Pierson, & McHardy, 1986).

According to Crane and Iwanicki, Public law 94-142 has created a great deal of role conflict and role ambiguity for the special educators with an increased amount of responsibility (1986). Role conflict and role ambiguity lead to poor job satisfaction. Therefore, a role questionnaire and the MBI was sent to 443 special education teachers in the Connecticut area. Role conflict accounted for most of the variance in burnout scales of emotional exhaustion, and in depersonalization (Crane & Iwanicki, 1986). Additional factors that have contributed to stress in special educators were found after a Stress Scale, Stress Profile for Teachers, A Health Status Questionnaire, and an Exercise Questionnaire were administered to sixty special education teachers in three school districts in a survey. Seventy-five percent of the teachers were under moderate amounts of stress due to their work. Ten percent were under high amounts and ten percent were under low amounts of stress. The three main factors contributing to stress were

poor parent support, lack of preparation time, and student behavior (Bradfield & Fones, 1985). Bradfield and Fones did a similar study to their first one, in which they handed out a Stress Questionnaire, Health and Exercise Questionnaire, and a Social Readjustment Scale. The group that scored in the top 20% for the highest levels of stress took an average of 6 sick days and 42% said that they would like to change their career. In comparison, the group who scored in the lowest 20% for the lowest levels of burnout only took an average of 1.8 sick days and only 8% had an interest in switching careers. Role ambiguity accounted for the most variance in personal accomplishment. Teachers who had taught in self-contained classrooms had higher levels on all three scales of the MBI than resource room teachers. Overall, the teachers were experiencing moderate levels of burnout (Bradfield & Fones, 1985). Special education physical educators have also been shown to show presence of burnout. Twenty-seven special physical educators were given the MBI. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization scales were found to be present and correlated to the amount of physical activity the students required, the type of handicap they had, and the amount of students in one class (DePepe, French, & Lavay, 1985).

A number of studies have also focused on the population of the children that teachers work with and its effect on burnout. Johnson and Gold performed a study to evaluate the frequency and intensity of burnout of teachers of the mildly

handicapped. The MBI was handed out to Learning disability teachers, teachers of the educable mentally retarded, and teachers of the emotionally disturbed. Teachers of the emotionally disturbed had the highest F ratios in frequency (8.54) and intensity (5.45) of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. They also had the lowest F ratios of personal accomplishment. Male teachers were found to feel "depersonalized" more often than female teachers and felt as though they had poor role classification (Johnson, Gold, & Knapper, 1984). Behavior disordered children, again have been shown to play a major role in special educator's stress. A model of burnout among these teachers has been described in a journal article. The article states that teachers of emotionally or behaviorally disturbed children are at a greater risk of burnout. It is a cycle in which children react to stress in the home and in school, which results in the teacher reacting emotionally, which creates a vicious circle. The factor which contributed to burnout was changes in negative behaviors took a very long time and teachers received no positive feedback despite their exhaustive efforts. Teachers get little support when they become so negative towards their careers and, therefore, they eventually feel alone. The teacher loses the ability to achieve a balance between reality and their expectations for the child. The result is feelings of hopelessness, hostility, depression and anger (Zabel, Boomer, & King, 1984).

One unique study focused on learned-helplessness and the phenomenon of burnout in the teaching profession. The study discussed burnout and how learned-helplessness occurs among special education teachers. Learned-helplessness occurs when a person is in an environment for a long period of time in which they have no control over what happens no matter what action they take. Teachers who have learned helplessness lose their sense of self-esteem, become depressed, and give up their efforts to try and make a change in their surroundings. Special educators are subjected to experiences beyond their control almost every day. Student progress is very slow, if any, and many children have very difficult behaviors and cannot always be controlled. In addition, the field of special education is always changing, which threatens teachers' security of their positions (Greer & Wethered, 1984).

PREVALENCE OF BURNOUT & SPECIAL EDUCATORS

The last group of studies focuses on surveys that have been done to show the prevalence of burnout among special educators. The Teacher Stress Inventory was given to 365 special education teachers in Connecticut. Data indicated 87.1% of the teachers had moderate levels of stress, and 45.6% had very high levels of stress. Sick days were taken due to stress by 49.3% of the teachers. Teachers who were burned out suffered from emotional manifestations, such as

feeling pressured and anxious all of the time. Behavioral symptoms included sleeping more often, defensive attitude towards others, and dealing with students on a more formal level (Fimian & Sontoro, 1983). The Response to Environmental Stressors was a different inventory used in a survey to assess stress and burnout among 135 learning disability teachers, teachers of behavior disorders, and teachers of educable mentally retarded students. Although none of the 66 items were identified as significant causes of stress, 6 were rated relatively high. The six factors were: "fear of a lawsuit, poor acceptance of special students by regular education teachers, poor administrative support, poor psychological services, disputes over student placement, and lack of motivation in students" (Johnson, Gold, & Vickers, 1982, p.555). One last finding indicated that teachers of students with behavior disorders feared violent attacks and threats by their students (Johnson, Gold, & Vickers, 1982). A study done by Cooper looked at the role of age, grade level, and the classification of students in relation to special educator stress and burnout. Special education teachers of learning disabilities, educable and trainable mental retardation, emotionally disturbed, and visually and hearing impaired were given a questionnaire on demographics and an MBI. Overall, teachers of the emotionally disturbed had the highest levels of stress and burnout. Junior high teachers scored the highest on burnout levels of emotional exhaustion and

depersonalization and the lowest on personal accomplishment. Lack of support by parents and administrators had significant correlations with burnout (Cooper, 1995). An additional study looked at sex roles as a possible predictor of being at risk for burnout. Many jobs in the helping professions require one to be assertive, yet caring and empathetic at the same time. An androgynous personality has been considered the perfect type of personality in these types of jobs. Therefore, 78 female special educators were given the MBI to measure burnout, the Hoppock Job Satisfaction Blank #5 to measure job satisfaction, and the Bem Sex Role Inventory to assess the teachers sex role. The androgynous group of teachers who displayed both feminine and masculine characteristics of their personalities had the lowest stress levels and the highest job satisfaction scores. The study did show a relationship between sex roles and the level of burnout in special education teachers which may help in future prevention of burnout in the field (Eichinger, 1991).

BURNOUT & REGULAR EDUCATORS

In closing, there have been studies which have shown burnout to be present in regular education teachers. Two studies exhibit burnout, yet the factors which contribute to their burnout were quite different than factors among special educators. In Colorado, 223 regular education

teachers were given the Teacher Stress Reaction Inventory. The factors listed most often as causes of burnout in teachers were time management, problems with the curriculum, and class size (French, 1991). The MBI was used in a study with regular education teachers in order to assess the presence of stress and burnout among their staff over a period of time. The second analysis of the second inventory that was administered showed a regression in work attitude, and emotional and physical factors. Burnout developed in regular education teachers as well over time (Burke & Greenglass, 1995). Therefore, burnout does exist in regular education, but due to different external influences.

ATTRITION

An area of interest in burnout and special education has been the high attrition rates in the special education field. These high rates support studies which claim special educator's high incidences of burnout. Next to bilingual education, special educators are the second most needed professionals, as shown by the shortage rates across the country (Brownell & Smith, 1993). Brofenbrenner has proposed an ecological model which focuses on factors in the environment that play a role in high attrition rates. First, the microsystem, or classroom, if too difficult to handle with too many behavior problems and different learning abilities could lead to burnout. The mesosystem,

or administration, which does not provide adequate support could lead to burnout. The exosystem, or laws made by the government, which constantly change in special education, causes less job security which could lead to burnout. Finally, the macrosystem, or value system of the school, if not supported by parents and regular educators, could lead to burnout (Brownell & Smith, 1993). A study performed in Florida used phone interviews of special educators who had left their professions to find out more about why the attrition rate was so high. Ninety-six individuals were interviewed and most stated that they left special education to go into regular education. The leading reasons given for leaving special education were: poor support from supervisors, behavior problems, no help, no materials, and lack of control (Brownell, Smith, Miller McNellis, & Landry, 1995). In 1991, the office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services stated that it was in need of 28,000 special education teachers. A longitudinal study was done in Michigan and North Carolina on 6,600 teachers from 1972-1983. Twelve percent of the teachers were most likely to leave their profession after their first year of teaching. The percentage dropped to only five percent if the teachers made it to their eighth year. Teachers under the age of thirty were found to be twice as likely to leave the field than older teachers. Teachers of the hearing and vision impaired were the most likely to leave the profession with teachers of emotionally disturbed second and teachers of

mentally retarded third. Experience tends to play a major role in the high attrition rates of special educators (Singer, 1992).

There are additional reasons given in studies for the high attrition rates of special educators. According to the National Data Base, special educators have a 7.3% attrition rate as opposed to regular educators who have a 5.3% attrition rate. A critique done in 1992 states a number of reasons for the high attrition rates which are similar to factors related to burnout. Special educators leave because of: little preparation time, special education students with difficult learning and behavior problems, large classrooms, poor support, no control over the decisions in school, and last, poor salary (Brownell & Smith, 1992). A study done in Florida asked 76 ex-special educators why they left the field. Forty-one percent said they left due to stress and fifty percent said that they would not encourage their children to go into special education. Forty-three percent had gone into regular education (Platt & Olson, 1990). One study was performed in Alaska due to high attrition rates in that area. Four hundred and eighty-four special educators responded to a survey on why teachers leave special education. The responses were: 71% too much paperwork, 64% too many students in one class and, 48% too much stress (Schnorr, 1995). Attrition rates in special education have been said to occur to certain personality types, such as friendly, empathetic, and motivated

individuals (Greer & Greer, 1992). Those who view these personality types as high risk state that these new teachers need to find some type of balance by helping the children and being understanding. While doing this they cannot allow themselves to become too close to the children. (Greer & Greer, 1992). The last study focuses on attrition in regular education. The study looked at "withdrawal cognition", (when one has thought about changing one's career) of 350 students who were student teaching. The study showed that poor job satisfaction, status, autonomy, and competency were directly correlated with career withdrawal (Lan, Foong, & Moo, 1995). These factors have been mentioned as factors of burnout.

SPECIAL EDUCATORS & REGULAR EDUCATORS

The last section of the literature review focuses on four specific studies which have compared stress and burnout levels of both special educators and general educators. The first study that was performed had researchers administer a questionnaire on attitudes of teaching, future plans, physical and mental problems, and burnout. One hundred and five regular and special educators filled out the questionnaire. There were no physical or mental problems reported. However, both groups of teachers complained about their salary, behavior problems of the children, lingering thoughts of work at home, and stated that most teachers will

become burned out eventually. Special education teachers felt as though they experienced higher levels of burnout due to "red tape" (Barner, 1982). The next study had researchers hand out a questionnaire which contained parts of the MBI to 218 general educators, 111 educators of the moderately retarded, and 133 educators of the mildly retarded. Surprisingly, general educators felt as though they were, "less successful and competent and were more detached with their students" (Beck & Garguilo, 1983). The following study exhibited different rates of burnout between general educators and special educators at different grade levels. The Beck Depression Inventory, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, and the Staff Burnout Scale for Mental Health Professionals were given to 59 regular educators and 33 special educators in elementary and secondary levels. Burnout ratios were significant. General education teachers at the secondary level experienced higher levels of burnout than special educators at the secondary level with F ratios of 81.90 for women and 89.50 for men. Special educators at the elementary level experienced higher levels of burnout than general educators with F ratios of 92.00 for women and 89.20 for the men (Beer & Beer, 1992). The next study found no difference of job stress between special educators and regular educators. A 36 item Stress profile was given to 10 special educators and 10 general educators. There were no significant differences found on sources of stress or how teachers dealt with this stress (Sutton, Geoffrey, &

Huberty, 1984). The final study compared teachers of the mentally retarded and nonmentally retarded handicapped students (LD, ED, ED). Teachers experienced stress due to different stressors. Teachers of the mentally retarded experienced more stress due to behavior problems with students and little support from supervisors. Teachers of the nonmentally retarded handicapped students experienced more stress due to lack of time to prepare, large classrooms, and low salaries (Fimian, 1983).

In summary, there has been quite an extensive amount of research that has indicated that dangerous levels of burnout exist among special educators. The studies that have focused on the high attrition rates have supported the research on the existence of burnout in the field. Specific studies on burnout rates between general educators and special educators are sparse and inconsistent. The purpose of this study is to bring out more consistent and conclusive data on the levels of burnout of special educators as opposed to general educators.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF STUDY

SAMPLE

The sample of this study consists of 20 teachers of the handicapped and 20 teachers of regular education. Thirteen of the 20 special educators teach children with moderate levels of mental retardation in a small private school. The remaining seven special educators teach children with multiple handicaps in another private school. The total number of teachers who teach are: primary 7, elementary 5, middle 3, and secondary grade levels 5. All teachers are white and between the ages of 25-52. There are only 4 teachers under the age of 30. There are a total of 18 female and 2 male. Four teachers have a maximum of a MA education level and sixteen have a maximum of a BA education level. Five teachers have been teaching less than 8 years. The remaining 15 teachers have been teaching longer than 8 years. The total number of students in a classroom ranges from 3-12. The two private special education schools are located in Gloucester County, southern New Jersey.

The 20 regular educators teach in a regular public education school district teaching children in the general education system. The number of teachers who completed the survey who teach in each grade level are: 9 grammar school

level, 8 junior high level, and 3 senior high level. A total of 18 teachers are white, 1 Asian, and 1 Hispanic. All teachers are between the ages of 26-57. There are a total of 13 females and 7 males. Five teachers have a maximum of a MA education level and 15 have a maximum of a BA education level. Twelve teachers have been teaching for more than 8 years and the remaining 8 have been teaching for less. Fifteen teachers have more than 25 students. The 3 schools are in the same district located in Gloucester County, New Jersey.

MEASURES

The survey used to measure levels of burnout is the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Educators Survey. The survey was developed by Christina Maslach and Susan E. Jackson. The test is published by Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc. The survey consists of three subscales and a total of 22 items which measure each of the three aspects of burnout. The subscales are: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (Dp), and personal accomplishment (PA). The emotional exhaustion subscale measures feelings of being emotionally drained from one's work. The depersonalization subscale measures a cold, uncaring, and distant attitude towards those with whom one works. The personal accomplishment subscale measures one's feelings of accomplishment in one's work. Participants answer a Likert

type scale on their feelings towards the statements which ranges from 0-6. The inventory takes 5-10 minutes to complete.

Table 3.1

Likert Scale

- 0-Never
 - 1-A few times a year or less
 - 2-Once a month or less
 - 3-A few times a month
 - 4-once a week
 - 5-A few times a week
 - 6-everyday
-

Each subscale is scored as a high, moderate, or low level of burnout according to normative samples of burnout on educators.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory seems to be a fairly reliable and valid measure of burnout. Reliability coefficients for the subscales are: .90 (EE), .79 (Dp), & .71 (PA). As you can see, coefficients range from very high

to fair. In addition to reliability, the survey has been tested in terms of convergent and discriminant validity. To measure convergent validity, scores from the MBI were compared to ratings by people who were very close to the participants of a study. Forty co-workers were asked to rate each other on emotional exhaustion and physical fatigue. Correlations between the personal ratings and the MBI scores were found to be significantly correlated on two subscales. The subscale (EE) had a correlation of .42 at the .01 level. Subscale (Dp) was .55 at the .001 level. An additional study was done by comparing housewives ratings of their husbands (policemen) to their MBI scores. The subscale (EE) correlations with wives ratings were .34 angry, .27 tense, .20 physically exhausted, and .26 complaining at the .001 level. Policemen who were rated as happy and full of pride had correlations with (PA) of .25 happy, and .24 work = pride at the .01 level.

The size of one's caseload is an area which is said to play a part in burnout. Studies have been done which have compared subscale scores on the MBI and workload sizes. Physicians who have large caseloads and do not take part in other roles had significant correlations with MBI subscales. Correlations between high levels of (EE) and more direct contact were .31 at the .05 level., and less teaching -.26 at the .05 level. Social service workers and mental health workers were given a job diagnostic survey and the MBI. Scores that were high on the job diagnostic survey

correlated as predicted with very low scores on (EE) and (Dp) subscales and high scores on (PA). On the (EE) subscale, there was a negative correlation between less feedback from jobs and (EE) $-.24$ at the $.05$ level. This factor also had a strong negative correlation with the (Dp) scale $-.44$ at the $.001$ level. Finally, more feedback from the job correlated very strongly with the (PA) scale $.38$ at the $.001$ level.

An additional area which is evidence of convergent validity is the hypothesis that people who are burned out are not happy if they are given new opportunities on the job. Scores on a growth satisfaction scale were negatively correlated with subscales (EE), (Dp), and positively correlated with (PA). Less growth satisfaction had a correlation of $-.24$ at the $.001$ level (EE) and $-.47$ at the $.001$ level (Dp). More growth satisfaction had a correlation of $.41$ at the $.001$ level (PA). The next study done was based on the idea that the less information a person has about their job the more burned out they will be. Factors such as less knowledge of results was, $-.31$ at the $.01$ level (EE), and $-.31$ at the $.01$ level (Dp). More knowledge of results was $.20$ at the $.05$ level (PA).

Burned out individuals usually express a desire to leave their jobs, which is another factor used to test the survey's convergent validity. Police officers with high levels of burnout who took the MBI, had high predictive validity $R(6,315)=.68$ at the $.001$ level. In addition,

burned out people do not seem to relate well to others. Ratings by co-workers of health care workers had strong correlations with MBI scores. Poor co-worker satisfaction had a correlation of $-.16$ at the $.05$ level (EE), and $-.41$ at the $.001$ level (Dp), and high co-worker satisfaction had a correlation of $.40$ at the $.001$ level (PA).

Last, the theory that individuals who are burned out have problems with their relations with their family and friends was tested in comparison to the MBI. Policemen who have reported becoming angry with their family often had correlation scores of $.16$ at the $.05$ level (EE) and fewer friends $.22$ at the $.01$ level (Dp) and finally, felt children were emotionally close to them $.38$ at the $.001$ level (PA). All of these studies show evidence that the survey does measure aspects of burnout.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory has been tested for discriminant validity as well. Scores on the MBI were compared to scores of the JDS General job satisfaction scale of mental health and social service workers. Job satisfaction had a fair negative correlation with depersonalization $r = -.22$ at the $.02$ level and emotional exhaustion $r = -.23$ at the $.05$ level, and a positive correlation with personal accomplishment $r = .17$ at the $.06$ level (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Hypotheses on why correlations were so low were the, "social desirability response set" in which people respond to how the status quo feels a successful person should answer (Maslach, Jackson, &

Leiter, 1996).

DESIGN

The design of this study uses a between-subjects approach that will compare the levels of burnout between the special educators group and the regular educators group. The study consists of a single independent variable (presence of handicap among children). The study consists of a single dependent variable (burnout score) which has three levels: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. A comparison of the mean scores between-groups is done through three two-tailed t-tests. One t-test is performed for each level of the dependent variable.

TESTABLE HYPOTHESIS

Null Hypothesis: Teachers who work with mentally and physically handicapped children will not have a higher incidence of burnout than teachers who work with normal children.

Alternate Hypothesis: Teachers who work with mentally and physically handicapped children will have a higher incidence of burnout than teachers who work with normal children.

ANALYSIS

Three two-tailed t-tests are used to analyze data. Mean scores on the three levels of the dependent variable (burnout level) for the two groups are compared between-subjects. It is hypothesized that the special educator's group will have higher levels of burnout than the regular educator's group.

SUMMARY

The Maslach Burnout Inventory is a reliable, valid measure of "burnout" in the education field. It is an appropriate measure to use to assess the levels of burnout between the two groups of educators. The design of this study is very basic and works well with the samples and measures being used. The two-tailed t-test between-subjects design gives very clear and valid results. Burnout scores of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment are compared between the two groups of educators.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

RESTATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

Teachers who work with mentally and physically handicapped children will have a higher incidence of burnout than teachers who work with normal children.

STATEMENTS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Three independent t-tests were performed to measure the differences of burnout levels between group 1, the regular educators and group 2, the special educators. Although the MBI is designed to measure the dependent variable, burnout, the dependent variable has three levels which are measured by three subscales. Three t-tests were done to calculate three separate scores for the three separate subscales of the MBI: (EE), (DP), & (PA).

Emotional Exhaustion (EE)

The emotional exhaustion subscale displays no significant difference between the levels of burnout for group 1, regular educators, as opposed to group 2, special educators. The analysis of data fails to reject the null hypothesis on the (EE) level of the dependent variable of burnout, $t(38) = -.27$, $p > .786$.

Table 4.1(EE)

| | teachers | Mean | SD |
|---------|----------|---------|--------|
| Group 1 | 20 | 14.6500 | 6.209 |
| Group 2 | 20 | 15.5000 | 12.429 |

Depersonalization (Dp)

The depersonalization subscale displays significantly higher levels of burnout for group 1, regular educators, as opposed to group 2, special educators. Although there is a significant difference between the two groups, the analysis of data fails to reject the null hypothesis on the (Dp) level of the dependent variable of burnout. The significance of the data shows significantly higher scores in the opposite direction than was hypothesized, $t(38)=3.69$, $p<.001$. Group 2, special educators were hypothesized to have higher burnout scores for the (Dp) scale, however, data shows group 1, regular educators, had higher burnout scores.

Table 4.2(Dp)

| | teachers | Mean | SD |
|---------|----------|--------|-------|
| Group 1 | 20 | 4.8000 | 3.156 |
| Group 2 | 20 | 1.5500 | 2.350 |

Personal Accomplishment

The personal accomplishment subscale displays no significant differences between the levels of burnout of group 1, regular educators and group 2, special educators. The analysis of data fails to reject the null hypothesis on the (PA) level of the dependent variable of burnout, $t(38) = -.43$, $p > .670$.

Table 4.3(PA)

| | teachers | Mean | SD |
|---------|----------|---------|-------|
| Group 1 | 20 | 38.8000 | 6.787 |
| Group 2 | 20 | 39.7000 | 6.441 |

The special educators and the regular educators scored low on all three subscales of the MBI. There are three cut-off points on each subscale which classify the participant as having low, moderate, or high levels of burnout. The (EE) subscale cut-off points are: High 27>, moderate 17-26, & low 0-16. Group 1, regular educators scored in the low range with an average score of 14.65. Group 2, the special educators scored borderline between low and moderate ranges with an average score of 15.50. The (Dp) subscale cut-off points are: High 14>, moderate 9-13, low 0-8. Group 1, regular educators, scored in the low range with an average score of 4.80. Group 2, the special educators, scored very low with an average score of 1.55. The (PA) subscale is measured opposite the (EE) & (Dp) scales. Lower scores on the (PA) scale correspond with higher levels of burnout. The (PA) subscale cut-off points are: High 0-30, moderate 31-36, low 37>. Group 1, regular educators, scored in the high range with an average score of 38.80, therefore, they scored low levels of burnout. Group 2, the special educators, scored in the high range with an average score of 39.70, therefore, also scoring low levels of burnout.

SUMMARY

The study performed failed to reject the null hypothesis on all three levels of the dependent variable, burnout. An interesting finding occurred on the (Dp) subscale of the data. Group 1, regular educators, had significantly higher levels of burnout than the group 2, special educators. This finding was in direct contrast to the hypothesized outcome. However, even though differences between groups on the (EE) subscale were not significant, group 2, special educators, did have higher levels of burnout than group 1, regular educators. The (PA) subscale had no significant differences between the two groups. All three subscales for both groups showed only low levels of burnout among the teachers. The (EE) subscale score of 15.50 for group 2, special educators, was the only score borderline low/moderate level of burnout.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers who work in special education schools have a higher incidence of burnout than teachers who work in regular education schools. The need for investigation into this area has been supported through a great deal of research already done on the high rates of burnout among special education teachers. Teachers in special education have been shown to experience great levels of burnout due to the students having so many social, emotional, physical, and cognitive problems. All of these problems need to be addressed by the special educator. In addition, a number of studies have shown high levels of burnout among special educators due to, behavior problems, aggression of students, lack of preparation time, poor administrative help, large classrooms, and developing IEP's. The high attrition rate of the special education field also supports the high incidence of burnout among the profession. Additional research in this area hopefully will initiate special schools to detect burnout and implement coping techniques in order to combat it's negative effects not only on the teachers, but their students as well.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory Educator's survey was administered to two groups of educators. Group 1, were 20 regular educators in a small school district in southern, New Jersey who taught levels k-12. Group 2, were 20 special educators from 2 small private special education schools in south, New Jersey. The survey has three subscales; (EE), (Dp), & (PA) which gives three individual scores to measure the overall dependent variable of burnout for each participant. The three scores of the three subscales were calculated by three two-tailed t-tests between-subjects. It was hypothesized that teachers who work with mentally and physically handicapped children will have a higher incidence of burnout than teachers who work with normal children.

CONCLUSIONS

The study performed failed to reject the null hypothesis on all three levels of the dependent variable, burnout.

1.The (Dp) subscale displayed significantly higher levels of burnout for group 1, regular educators.

However, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected since the findings are in direct contrast to the hypothesis, that group 2, special educators would have higher burnout levels.

2.The (EE) subscale displayed no significant differences between the levels of burnout for the two groups.

- Although, group 2, special educators, did have a higher mean score for (EE) than group 1, regular educators.
- 3.The (PA) subscale displayed no significant differences between the levels of burnout between the two groups.
- 4.All scores fell in the low range of burnout. The (EE) average for group 2, special educators, was the only score which was borderline low/moderate.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study do not uphold the previous research done on the presence of high levels of burnout among special educators. All three subscales showed only low levels of burnout among both groups. The regular educators scored even higher than the special educator's on the (Dp) subscale. A number of demographic variables may have played a role in the results of the study. The location of all four schools were in one fairly small county of South Jersey. This area may not have been representative of the overall population. There was an overwhelming number of female teachers 18 as opposed to male 2 in the special education school. The ratio of males in the regular education schools was much more representative 8. According to Banks & Necco, the age of a teacher has been shown to play a major role in levels of burnout. Older teachers have scored the lowest on burnout scales due to possibly their ability to be more mature in psychosocial

situations (1990). Another study which focused on attrition and special educators found that teachers under thirty were twice as likely to leave the special education profession as those teachers over thirty (Singer, 1992). The two studies just discussed support the low burnout scores of the special education teachers. Only 4 teachers out of 20 were under the age of 30 in group 2, special educators. The number of teachers over 40 were 12 out of 20. Perhaps group 1, regular educators, had significantly higher burnout scores on the (Dp) scale due to 8 teachers under the age of 30. The amount of years of teaching experience has also been shown to play a role in burnout. According to Singer, 12% of special education teachers are most likely to leave the profession after their first year of teaching, yet the rate drops to 5% if the teachers make it to 8 years of teaching. Fifteen teachers out of 20 have been teaching for over 8 years which again supports the low burnout scores.

The face validity of the Maslach Burnout Inventory may have played a role in the low levels of burnout among the special educators. Examples of statements on the MBI can be seen in table 3.1. A term referred to as, "social desirability response set" may have biased teacher's responses. A response set is when people respond to something according to how the status quo would feel a successful person should answer. Many of the statements on the MBI may be looked at negatively to those filling out the survey. As a result, teachers may not have answered

truthfully. The survey was handed out for teachers to fill out on their own time. Since the study was not done in a controlled setting, bias may have occurred.

The average mean score for burnout levels (EE) for group 2, special educators, was borderline low/moderate. The variance among the group of 20 teachers was very large. Scores ranged from 0-43. Three special educators scored in the high range on the (EE) subscale and 6 scored in the moderate range of burnout on the (EE) subscale. Although no significance was found, hopefully more conclusive research will be done to help teachers who fall in the moderate and high ranges of burnout.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the study did not show significant differences in burnout levels between special educators and regular educators, previous studies support the high incidence of burnout which exist in the special education field. In order to contribute to the compilation of studies which show the dangerous levels of burnout that exists and initiate special education schools to take action to detect burnout and implement coping techniques, a number of modifications could improve this study to yield significant results.

One modification needed to be made is a larger sample size. A sample of only 20 regular educators and 20 special educators was used. The participants taught in schools

located in one county of South Jersey. Twenty teachers from five different counties in both five different public and private special schools could be used to get a more representative sample. The male/female ratio would also be more representative with a larger sample. The age range of teachers would consist of teachers of all ages as opposed to the overwhelming number of teachers in the present study over thirty. The age of a teacher and his/her years of teaching experience plays a major role in burnout levels as mentioned earlier.

The second modification needed to be made is the environment of the testing situation and the test itself. Teachers filled out the survey on their own time. A more controlled environment may yield more significant results if the researcher is there while participants fill out the survey in a controlled setting in which individuals can focus on the survey. The Maslach Burnout Inventory was also too face valid. Therefore, many of the educators may not have answered the survey truthfully. A different, less obvious measure of burnout would work better in future research in order to avoid, "social desirability response set."

Measures of burnout can also be used in the future by not only researchers of education and psychology, but administrators of schools as well. Principals, social workers, and school psychologists, can all play an active role in detecting burnout among staff members and setting up

counseling sessions and coping techniques for teachers. If these detection measures are used regularly, schools can begin to combat the effects of burnout before they begin through preventative methods.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

High School Level

Regular Educator's handout

TO ALL TEACHERS:

My name is Andrea Liddle and I am a graduate student at Rowan College. I am presently working on my thesis for the master's program in School Psychology. Some of you may remember me. I attended your Junior and Senior High and graduated in 1990. I would like you to participate in my study. The survey and demographic sheet in your packet should take 5-10 minutes to complete. The purpose of this study is to discover how regular educators and special educators view their careers and the individuals with whom they work. Additional information and directions are present on the survey. Participation is voluntary and you will remain anonymous. All data collected from these surveys and the organization in which they were collected, will be held strictly confidential. If you decide to fill out the survey, please return it to Dennis Weaver by February 5, 1997. Thank you for your time. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Andrea Liddle

Appendix B

Elementary Regular Educator's Handout

TO ALL TEACHERS:

My name is Andrea Liddle and I am a graduate student at Rowan College. I am presently working on my thesis for the master's program in School Psychology. Some of you may remember me. I attended your Elementary school from k-6th grade. I would like you to participate in my study. The survey and demographic sheet in your packet should take 5-10 minutes to complete. The purpose of this study is to discover how regular educators and special educators view their careers and the individuals with whom they work. Additional information and directions are present on the survey. Participation is voluntary and you will remain anonymous. All data collected from these surveys and the organization in which they were collected, will be held strictly confidential. If you decide to fill out the survey, please return it to Jane Liddle by February 5, 1997. Thank you for your time. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Andrea Liddle

Appendix C

Special Educator's Handout K-12

TO ALL TEACHERS:

My name is Andrea Liddle and I am a graduate student at Rowan College. I am presently working on my thesis for the master's program in School Psychology. I would like you to participate in my study. The survey and demographic sheet in your packet should take 5-10 minutes to complete. The purpose of this study is to discover how regular educators and special educators view their careers and the individuals with whom they work. Additional information and directions are present on the survey. Participation is voluntary and you will remain anonymous. All data collected from these surveys and the organization in which they were collected, will be held strictly confidential. If you decide to fill out the survey, please place it in the self-addressed stamped envelope and mail it to me by February 28th. Thank you for your time. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Andrea Liddle