ABSTRACT

BATTLE, ELIZABETH MARGARET. Keeping the Exceptional Teacher: the Effects of Principal Support on Lateral Entry Special Programs’ Teacher Retention. (Under the direction of Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli.)

A qualitative study using narrative analysis on special program teacher turnover with a focus on the needs of the lateral entry teacher. Both traditional and lateral entry teachers from four pathways: exiters, switch schools, stay at the same school, and switch into regular education, were interviewed for a total of eight interview participants. Their responses were transcribed and coded in Atlas Ti. The researcher used narrative analysis to look for common themes or “stories” among the participants. The common themes included a description of the job itself and stressors, a description of preparation for the job and personal attributes needed for the job, and support desired from the principal.
Keeping the Exceptional Teacher: the Effects of Principal Support on Lateral Entry Special Programs’ Teacher Retention

by
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DEDICATION

To the teachers in my family who have inspired me, particularly my mother, Joan Battle. As an administrator, my goal is simply to hire and retain good teachers, and to let them do their work.
BIOGRAPHY

I grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina, the child of a teacher and a buyer for IBM. I attended Wake County Public schools until I was 16. I then went to Saint Mary’s Junior College and graduated in 1988. I went to Wake Forest University and Meredith College. I graduated from Meredith in 1992 with a B.S. degree in business management and a B.A. degree in English literature. I worked for a few years in sales. A friend in Rotary asked me to tutor at the women’s prison. In doing so, I found my calling. I went back to school and received a M.Ed. in marketing education in 1996. I taught for four years in the Wake County Public School System. I realized that I wanted to learn more and have an impact on more students and so went back to school for a degree in administration. I received that degree, an M.S.A. in 2001. I have worked as an assistant principal for seven years. I married in 2004.
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Thanks to….

My spouse, who grew tired of paying tuition and so pushed me to finish.

My parents, for all of their love and support.

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My colleague, Greg Butler, for doing the master schedule last summer so I could write.

My boss, Cathy Moore for allowing me some time off to write.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has taken to provide it, is a right that must be made available to all on equal terms – Chief Justice Earl Warren, Brown vs. The Board of Education (1954), p.493

Educational opportunity for students is not equitable. Jonathan Kozol, in his text, Savage Equalities, outlines the disparity of educational opportunity available to students from poor, urban, environments versus those of students in wealthier, suburban, or rural environments. Teachers in urban, poor schools, teach in conditions “that are medieval: over 30 students in a class including 8 students with handicapping conditions, insufficient outdated textbooks, no dictionaries, no paper, no access to a copier that works, no computers connected to the internet” (Haberman, 1987, p. 11) Students should be served equitably on an appropriate level according to their needs. Furthermore, because the single greatest factor in student success is the quality of the teacher, it becomes important to focus on hiring and maintaining a quality staff (Marzano, 2004).

Definitions of a “highly qualified” teacher abound. No Child Left Behind now mandates a “highly qualified teacher” in each classroom. According to the law, each state is left to define the expectations of a highly qualified teacher. The state then reports their requirements for approval by the federal government. In North Carolina, a highly qualified teacher is one who has received state licensure. There are several venues to receive state
licensure. All venues involve certification via a teacher education program, passing the Praxis exams, both in pedagogy and content, which are nationally normed teacher exams, or passing new HOUSSE requirements, High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation, which are state developed requirements for the development of portfolios for teachers who have been teaching in a content area and have been previously certified, but who would no longer meet the new certification requirements. Others would argue that highly qualified teachers are not simply qualified because of set credentials, but rather are those who understand and implement the INTASC standards, Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, and who can “connect” to the student.

Statement of the Problem

Recruiting and retaining the high quality teacher is a daunting task for the educational leader. Wake County Public Schools, a current leader in US education and the 21st largest district, has placed the recruitment and retention of quality teachers as one of its three strategic goals. Teacher turnover in the United States has reached epidemic proportions. We are now entering a period of both state and national crisis with regard to teacher supply. The United States Department of Education predicts that schools will need to hire more than 2 million teachers in the next decade (Bradley, 1999). Unfortunately, schools of teacher training are not keeping up with demand. Not only that, over 30% of new teachers quit with their first five years in the profession (Bradley, 1999). Other studies support high teacher turnover within the first few years. Reasons cited for the large number of teachers leaving the profession and the small number entering include low pay, little guidance or help with mentoring, ill-prepared teachers (those on emergency permits), the challenge of teaching
diverse student populations, increasing demands with regard to accountability, and poor administrative support (Archer, 1999, Bradley, 1999, Sack, 1999; 2000). Haberman (1987) asserts that, “Unlike professional practitioners in other fields they do not determine the goals of their services, the content they teach, the number of clients they will serve, the materials or equipment they will use, the conditions under which they work, or how they will be evaluated. …they have no control over their time schedules. Michael Apple (1988) has argued that these working conditions occur because of an inherent misogyny and a desire of the white male-dominated power structure to maintain the status quo. Given the high turnover and the increasing need for teachers, retaining quality teachers, and determining the appropriate working conditions needed to keep quality teachers, has become a primary goal for school leaders. Teachers are asked to become highly qualified professionals, but are then, in many ways, de-professionalized by the system.

An investigation of teacher shortages reveals that most teacher shortages occur within the field of special education (USDOE website). The field of special education has grown tremendously since the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1975. At that time, there were one million students identified and receiving special education services. Today, more than six million students are identified as having disabilities, a thirty percent increase in the last ten years (Sack, 1999). Haberman (1995) notes that “by the year 2012, twenty-five percent, or one out of four of our children will be labeled as handicapped in some way” (p. 8). According to the USDOE, 4.5 million children will receive special education services.
Special programs teachers burnout and leave the classroom for a number of reasons. Cross and Billingsley (2005) have done extensive studies on why special programs teachers leave and have written a text titled *Cultivating and Keeping Committed Special Education Teachers*. This text notes that excessive paperwork, difficult certification requirements, a feeling of isolation from regular education teachers, the slow progress of special education students, and disciplinary problems are all cited as reasons why special educators leave the classroom or switch into regular education. In 1999, of 330,000 special education teachers, over 30,000 are not certified (Sack, 1999). Also, at any given time over 6,000 positions remain unfilled. Each year, about seven percent of special educators switch into regular education, but only one percent of regular educators switch into special education (Sack, 1999). The shortage will grow greater each year because nearly 28,000 new special educators must be hired annually, but schools only graduate about 18,000, many of whom already have jobs (Sack, 1999). Toni Patterson, the former Assistant Superintendent for Wake County Human Resources, described the need for special program educators as “the perfect storm.” She spoke at a division of principals and assistant principals and said that normally, twenty-five percent of vacancies are in Special Programs, and they are usually the longest running vacancies. According to Ms. Patterson, in 2005, of the 1,000 special programs teachers in Wake County, 130 have at least 25 or more years of experience and so are on the verge of retirement; 90 are provisionally certified (certified but have not completed an initially licensed teacher program), 60 are lateral entry (on an emergency license and working toward certification), and there is a fourteen and a half percent turnover rate. In order to hire and retain special programs teachers, Wake County is looking at the possibility of placing special
program teachers on the same pay level as guidance counselors. The cost to the system would be $1.4 million. Wake County is also looking at developing a Special Programs position of “Coordinating teacher” at high schools who would be responsible for compliance, ensuring that students’ entry into the high school would be seamless with regard to their IEP (Individual Education Program) compliance, paperwork issues, and serving as LEA (Local Educational Agency) or the representative of the local education agency during a meeting for a special programs student. Determining methods to hire and retain special programs teachers has become an important goal for any school-based administrator, as well as system level administration.

A study by Cross and Billingsley (1996) examined why special educators leave, citing in particular what stresses special educators are under. With regard to intent to stay, the greatest factor cited was job satisfaction; the great influence on job satisfaction was principal support. Teachers who have supportive principals find their work more rewarding (Rosenholtz, 1989), experience greater job satisfaction (Chapmal & Hutcheson, 1982), and experience less job stress and burnout (Zabel & Zabel, 1982). Teachers who receive high levels of professional and emotional support from their principals were more satisfied with their work than those who receive lower levels of support (Billingsly & Cross, 1992). Dworkin (2000) proposes, “Principals, more than other school personnel, can do much to break the functional linkage between school-related stress and teacher burnout” (p. 36).

It is important to note that the fields of special programs, math, and science have the largest number of teachers entering through alternative certification programs. A report by Beatriz Chewell and Ana Villegas regarding an alternative licensure program called
Pathways, titled “Ending Teacher Shortages in High Need Areas”, states that the United States will need 2 million teachers in the next 8 years, and that shortages are greatest in the fields of special education, bilingual education, math and science. In reviewing the Pathways program, the authors noted that the program exceeded its recruitment goal and that these teachers received positive ratings from their supervisors, and that most were still teaching after three years. Programs like this alternative certification program have been developed to increase the pool of teachers. Traditional certification programs are undergraduate programs that serve students who enter college knowing they want to be a teacher or who decided to become a teacher while in college. Students complete coursework related to the content they will teach as well as the pedagogical skills needed to teach it. They complete internships whereby they visit local classrooms to observe. Lastly, they complete a student teaching experience for a semester under the guidance of an experienced teacher before receiving certification. They often must pass a professional licensure test as well.

Because of the teacher shortages in special education, many of the positions are filled by teachers who have not completed the traditional method of certification, but rather are seeking alternative forms of certification. In a study by the United States Department of Education in 2004, these alternative licensure, or lateral entry, programs were examined to determine their successfulness and for commonalities. One specific program in the study stood out, the Northeastern California Partnership for Special Education. This program sought to develop special programs teachers for rural Northern California. These programs noted that because these teachers began teaching immediately, as they completed coursework, that they “needed everything at once.” The support provided for these lateral
entry or alternative certification candidates was structured at three levels; the program provided supervisors, site-based mentors, and peer cohorts. This study acknowledged that the support needs of a lateral entry, or alternative certification candidate, vary from those of teachers graduating under the traditional certification model.

Alternative routes to education began taking shape in the late 1980’s, as researchers predicted a shortage of teachers. According to The National Center for Educational Information’s report on “Profile of Alternate Route Teachers”, more than 35,000 teachers entered the profession through alternative routes in 2005. Seventy percent of these teachers were over 30, and these teachers have a higher representation of male and minority teachers than the overall teaching population. Most states report that nearly two thirds of these teachers are in the classroom after five years. Currently 47 states and the District of Columbia offer alternative route licensure programs. There are over 500 such programs within these states, developed by colleges and universities, by school districts, by state departments, by consortiums, and by community colleges. Ninety-Eight percent of these programs require a bachelor’s degree and the majority set minimum undergraduate GPA requirements as well as a passing score on a basic state skills test. Well over 90% of the participants are employed as a teacher while completing the program. Program components for an alternative licensure program may include mentoring, summer coursework, seminars, peer reviews, and coursework for local colleges and universities that may be provided on-line or on-site. Participants are granted licenses upon successful completion of program requirements as well as passing other assessments including development of a portfolio and passing state and national tests.
States who have hired the most teachers on emergency permits included California, New York, and Florida.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act when passed was a reform that was much needed. Children who were “retarded” were not sent to school at all in the early part of this century. When the law was passed in 1975, “an estimated one million handicapped kids were not getting any education at all” (Worth, 1999). The current law itself (Section 601.C) notes that students, prior to the passage of the bill in 1975, have been denied equal educational opportunity in the past because of the practice of exclusion, because of inadequate resources, and because of undiagnosed disabilities.

Currently, special education services in the United States serves twelve percent of all school children at a cost of over sixty billion dollars (Finn, 2002). There are still a disproportionate number of African American and minority students identified in special education; however, at least we are attempting to meet their learning needs (Worth, 1999). According to the Children’s Defense Fund, middle-class children starting in first grade have been exposed to 1,000-1,7000 hours of one-on-one reading, while their low-income counterparts have been exposed to only 25 hours (Worth, 1999). Minority students then would be better served by a greater focus on the prevention of learning disabilities through high quality early reading instruction (Finn, 2002). This choice is not available to many principals; however, special education identification is. Although special education might not be the “ideal” reform, at least it is a “real” reform, one that can be used to garner additional aid for these children.
The IDEA has been re-authorized for 2006. The law clearly states the expectations for service of the disabled student. Section 601 states the need and outlines how we can effectively teach students with disabilities. Section 601 part 5 notes that we must have high expectations for student achievement, strengthen the role of the family, coordinate with other providers, support high quality professional development, and provide students with related services, aids, and supports as needed. These expectations must be met to fall within federal law. The law itself notes that more students are being labeled as disabled for a variety of reasons, including medical improvements that allow more students with disabilities to survive birth into adolescence as well as better diagnosis of students with disabilities.

Parents are becoming much more educated about their rights, and more and more students are being identified as disabled (Grove & Fisher, 1998). Therefore, we must have competent effective teachers available to fulfill this federal and ethical obligation to our students. Licensed special educators, then, are at a premium. Lateral entry special program teachers fill an important role as we do not have enough certified candidates but must have a teacher in every classroom. As principals we must support their unique needs and recognize what types of support they need. In the studies examined, I have not seen a differentiation between the types of principal support a licensed special programs’ educator needs versus a lateral entry special programs teacher. However, if we are to keep these special educators in the classroom we must note the differences and be prepared to meet the needs of lateral entry special education teachers. The increase in students identified as special programs, combined with the alarming rate that special programs teachers leave the classroom or switch into
regular education, presents the principal with the daunting task of maintaining a quality special programs department.

This inquiry will be guided by the following findings regarding the problem. Previous research has already shown that principal support has an effect on teacher turnover. These previous studies (Cross & Billingley (2005), Zabel & Zabel (2001), Dworkin (1985) have all reached the conclusion that principal support is a factor in reducing teacher stress and burnout, and consequently, teacher turnover. In another finding, data from federal information registries shows that special programs students are being identified at an increasingly higher rate. In the year 2000, 1 in 8 students in the public school population, 5.4 million students, were in special programs, up from 4.8 million 5 years earlier (Washington Based Council for Educational Development and Research, 2001). More special education students necessitate more special education teachers to serve them. We also know that schools of education are not producing enough special programs’ teachers to keep up with the demand for them. According to the Dictionary of Occupational Titles 2001, Special Education Teachers employment is, “Expected to increase much faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2006, spurred by the continued growth in the number of special education students needing services. The high burnout rate will lead to many additional job openings as special education teachers switch into general education or change careers altogether. Rapid employment growth and job turnover, coupled with a declining number of graduates from special education teaching programs, should result in a favorable market.”
More special education students, combined with a shortage of special education teachers, along with high turnover within special education, and the fact that special education students are also higher need students due to their minority and at-risk status, presents a moral dilemma for educators striving to provide all students with an equal educational opportunity.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to define conditions under which alternative licensed special educators leave the profession, as well as to define what these educators deem as the “principal support” needed to stay. Administrators, with this information, will be able to hire more successfully and retain licensed teachers in an area of high need and an area which currently has inequity of student opportunity.

**Definition of Terms**

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* was signed into law on November 29, 1975. President Ford signed public law 94-142 while at the same time he recognized the challenges of implementation that it presented. He stated, “Unfortunately, the bill contains more than the federal government can deliver, and its good intentions could be thwarted by the many unwise provisions it contains” (Sack, 1996, p. 5). Today, federal funding of the laws stands at eight percent, far below the promised forty percent by the federal government (Chinni, 1996). The bill mandates that each student identified as disabled receive an individual education program, or IEP, that is determined by the parent, a school administrator, and the students’ teachers and case manager, and the student if he or she is over age 14. The current special education legislation identifies eleven areas of special needs
students, including learning disabled, behaviorally and emotionally disabled, multi-handicapped emotionally and mentally disabled, etc.

By far the largest area is *Learning Disabled*, or LD. Over half of the students in special education fall under this classification. The law defines LD as “a disorder in which one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations.” The legislation further states that those students who show a “severe discrepancy” between their achievements in one or more subject areas and their intelligence, usually measured by an IQ test, are classified as LD. These students receive extra support in a variety of ways, from increased test time, to audiotapes, to extra help within the classroom.

Other areas of identification include BED or behaviorally and emotionally disabled, OHI or other health impaired which includes diagnoses such as ADHD as well as hearing impaired, and other medical handicaps. Categories also include AU or autistic, MU or multiple handicaps, EMD which is educably mentally handicapped or students with IQ’s of less than 60, VI or vision impaired or legally blind students, and MR or mental retardation. Many of these disabilities require specialized training and knowledge on the part of the teacher in order to understand how best to develop and implement an individual education program for the student. Categories of special education teachers’ licenses vary based on the needs of the students. There is certification for each of the areas listed above, as well as CCR,
which stand for Cross-Categorical Resource, a licensure that allow a teacher to work with all identified students.

Because of the increased resources allotted to special programs students, there has become a division between general and special educators (Sack, 2000). The division, along with excessive paperwork to document the modifications, the fear of litigation, and the amount of effort required to produce results with special education students encourages many special educators to leave the field. Over the last 5 years, North Carolina has averaged a teacher turnover rate or 12.94% and over 20% in special education (NCDPI website). These numbers are not disaggregated for the difference in turnover rate of an emergency licensed, or alternative licensed, special educator, versus a traditionally licensed special educator.

**Significance of the Study**

Recent research has outlined the increase in special programs students, the over-identification of minority students within special programs, the higher turnover rate for teachers of minority students and special programs teachers, as well as the definition of principal support of special programs teachers. No current study has looked specifically at the types of principal support that an emergency, lateral-entry, alternative licensed teacher (all interchangeable terms in NC), needs versus a traditionally licensed special programs teacher. Given the current shortage of special programs teachers, administrators are often forced to hire alternative or emergency licensed teachers and need to know the types of support that these teachers need to be given, understanding that they have not completed a traditional certification program. By understanding their needs, the principal can develop programs that best meet them, and in turn reduce turnover in an area of high teacher turnover.
Research Questions:

The following research questions will be examined in the study:

1. Why do alternative licensed or lateral entry special education teachers leave the classroom?

2. What types of support does the lateral entry special education teacher seek from his or her principal?

3. How does the lateral-entry special education teacher differ from his/her traditionally certified peer in terms of working conditions and principal support?

Chapter Summary

There is a shortage of special education teachers. This shortage has occurred because we have had a large increase in the number of students identified as special programs students. The increase in the number of students identified has led to a need for more special educators. Special educators leave the classroom at a faster rate than their regular education counterparts. The large number of teachers leaving the profession and the small number entering can be attributed to a number of factors, including low pay, little guidance or help with mentoring, ill-prepared teachers (those on emergency permits), the challenge of working with diverse student populations, increasing demands with regard to accountability, and poor administrative support (Archer, 1999; Bradley, 1999; Sack, 1999, 2000). Cross and Billingley have completed numerous studies regarding special program teacher turnover and the importance of principal support, publishing the text *Cultivating and Keeping Committed Special Education Teachers*. Their research has not noted the differences in support needed for lateral entry or alternative licensed special education teachers versus traditionally licensed
special education teachers. This study will investigate those differences by interviewing special program teachers who fall into both categories.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature/ Conceptual Framework

Introduction

Because this is essentially an issue of equity, and of providing highly qualified teachers for all students, including special education students, the review of the literature includes a review of the history of equity and ability grouping in U.S. schools, noting the fact that special education services is a “track” for students, the history of special education legislation, a review of why teachers leave, a review of the effect of principal support on teacher retention, and a review of licensure routes for teachers.

The History of Equity and Ability Grouping

Thomas Jefferson laid the foundation for the ideology of Americans with his eloquent Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights. He stated, “All men are created equal.” He went on to guarantee equality of opportunity in the United States by guaranteeing certain rights, including free speech, the right to a fair trial, the right to due process, the right to bear arms, and many others that we, as citizens, take for granted.

Jefferson, however, did not guarantee the right to a free and appropriate education. Recognizing the need for states to assume the responsibility of educating their citizens, the task of guaranteeing a free and appropriate education was left up to each individual state. Without digressing into a long explanation of economic theory, we can note that each state faces varying challenges with regard to both the structure of and funding for education.

Although our country was founded on the above theory of equity, ability grouping has been widely practiced in schools since the turn of the century. Many cultural and social
reforms precipitated the change from the one-room schoolhouse where all students were taught at their individual levels, at the same time, to the factory model school system, which we have today, largely unchanged from the earliest part of the century. At the turn of the century, ninety-five percent of students aged 5-13 were enrolled in school for at least a few months of the year; however, only five percent of students went on to high school and fewer to college (Ravitch, 2000, p. 20). At this point in time there was no educational “system.” There were thousands of district schools, hundreds of colleges, and many teacher-training schools. The typical style of pedagogy was rote repetition and recitation of a curriculum that emphasized reading, writing, mathematics, speaking, spelling, penmanship, and patriotism (Ravitch, 2000, p. 21). National educational leaders recognized the need to establish a system that would ensure that all students received an appropriate education. The Council of Ten, a group formed by the National Education Association, published its recommendations for a standardized curriculum, broken down into tracks, or ability groups, for those wishing to advance to college and those wishing to enter the workforce.

Ability grouping begins for the student at day one of elementary school. Ability grouping is the “formation of small, homogeneous groups within elementary school classrooms, usually for reading instruction” (Loveless, 1988, p. 5). The debate on ability grouping first began at the turn of the century and has raged since, concentrating on the desire for efficiency versus the desire for efficacy and equity. Problems with the current special education legislation and the mandate to identify students with special needs include the over-identification of minority students, double standards for student discipline, and interference with state and local educational reforms (Finn, 2001)
Options for the principal faced with students who will not score well on end-of-grade tests include special programs identification, which has exempted students from tests. One principal stated, “I think there is a lot of game playing the minute you introduce that kind of framework [accountability] … no one plays games better than school districts and administrators. The whole family was classified…. Why? Because there was a chance that the kids might fail and they were a low socio-economic family…. That’s how you maintain number one. You have to do something game playing. You have to” (Allington, 1996)(p.225).

As Nieto (2000) points out, these tests have “a detrimental impact on students of color because gross inequities in instructional quality, resources and other support services are ignored. Moreover, standardized test scores correlate very highly with family income” (p. 93). Because of high stakes tests and accountability, many administrators feel the need to classify children as special programs in order to give students the extra time and resources they need to do well on the test, or to exempt students from the test altogether, thus increasing the school’s overall score.

The history of testing in the United States is a dubious one at best. Goddard, hired in 1910 to test immigrants on Ellis Island, tested the immigrants in English and was surprised to find an alarming number of “feeble minded” immigrants (Gregory, 1996, p. 23). The army, in World War I, seeking to be able to “select and sort” recruits in the most efficient manner, elicited the work of Pyle and Yerkes to test recruits for intelligence levels. Brigham, in his book, A Study of American Intelligence (1923), undertook a massive analysis of scores for Nordic, Mediterranean, Alpine and African-American ethnic groups from the tests results of
the army in WWI. Brigham concluded that these groups were “intellectually inferior” (Gregory, 1996, p. 25). However, years later, Brigham recanted this view stating that “cultural language differences” were the most likely to cause of “ethnic and racial disparities on the army tests” (Gregory, 1996, p. 25).

Nieto also identified curriculum as an issue, which is controlled by the majority to the detriment of the minority in the current educational system. The progressive education movement recognized the need to teach the many children of immigrants coming to this country and to devise a “practical curriculum for those who would soon be in the workforce, especially students who were poor, foreign-born, or nonwhite” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 31). Darwinists and psychologists argued that radical differences prevented many students from learning the academic and liberal arts curriculum; and, therefore, to be fair, a curriculum designed to help students enter the workforce must be created. There were idealists who fought against this proposed differentiation among students. Charles Eliot, president of Harvard University, stated “we Americans habitually underestimate the capacity of pupils at almost every stage of education… public schools should promote students not by battalions, but in the most irregular and individual way possible” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 31). When specifically asked about differentiating the college-bound and workforce-bound students Eliot responded, “the classification of pupils, according to their so-called probable destinations, should be postponed to the latest possible time in life” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 46). The public, he stated, would object to having their children “sorted before their teens into clerks, watchmakers, lithographers, telegraph operators, teamsters, farm laborers and so forth and treated differently in school according to their prophecies of their appropriate life
careers. Who are to make these prophecies? … The individual child in a democratic society has the right to do his own prophesying about his career, guided by his own ambitions and his own capacities” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 47). Despite Eliot’s eloquent and sensible outcry at the proposed differentiation of curriculum, the schools proceeded with ability grouping, abandoning a liberal education for all.

North Carolina has followed in the tradition of tracking. Currently, in North Carolina, students must choose between four pathways in high school, the College/University, the Career, the College Tech Prep, and the Occupational pathway. The occupational pathway is designed for only special programs students and incorporates a vocational development through supervised work hours. These students are segregated from their peers during the school day by taking courses such as Occupational English, Occupational Life Science, Occupational Math and Occupational Social Studies. They work on and off campus at jobs to introduce them to basic vocational skills. The Career Pathway is designed for regular education and special education students who will enter the workforce immediately upon high school graduation. The base line requirements of four English classes, three social studies classes specifically world history, civics, and US History, three science classes specifically an earth, biological, and physical science, and the completion of Algebra 1, are combined with career and technical education courses designed to prepare the student for immediate employment. The same base line requirements exist for the College/ Tech Prep pathway. This pathway, however, requires that students complete two levels of math beyond Algebra 1. The College/ University has the same base line requirements for Career and Career Tech prep with regard to English, science, and social studies. However, no career and
technical education courses are required, as students will not be entering the workplace immediately, nor working on a vocation, but rather will be entering college and consequently, one assumes, a profession. Also, students must complete two levels of a foreign language, and they must complete three levels of math beyond algebra 1 including geometry, algebra 2, and a math such as statistics or pre-calculus. These pathways are clearly designed to sort students and limit socio-economic potential of groups of students. A recent NCDPI (2007), North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, study noted that of one hundred students entering 9th grade, sixty eight will graduate in four years. Of one hundred students with disabilities, fifty will graduate in four years. These numbers are alarming and do a discredit to a nation striving for economic leadership and civic development.

In 1901, sociologist Edward Ross explained that public schooling was “an engine of social control.” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 80) Ross believed the lower classes to be intellectual equals of the upper class, yet they would not assume the intellectual power and knowledge the upper class had because of the “economic system of police” known as the educational system. (Ravitch, 2000, p. 80). The ultimate goal of this powerful, centralized, state-controlled educational system was to perfect an education “in the interests of society” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 80). Thorndike and the theories of social efficacy were too strong for the liberal-minded academic education advocates and, in 1908, even Charles Eliot defected. In a speech to the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, he stated: (Ravitch, 2000, p.87)

How shall the decision be made that certain children will go into industrial schools, others into ordinary high schools, and others into mechanic arts high schools? It must
be a choice, a selection. Here we come upon a new function for the teachers in the elementary schools…. The teachers ought to sort the pupils by their evident or probable destinies.

Teachers at the elementary level group their students. Allingtion and Franzen in 1997 asked 49 elementary school principals about their views regarding special programs. The intervention response for students entering school without “a lack of relevant school experiences” and consequently doing poorly included referral to special programs, preschool programs, remediation, “miracle worker” teachers, delaying entry, and transitional class settings.

In examining the present day effect of that decision to differentiate, we can note that studies have repeatedly shown that poor, non-English speaking, and minority students are disproportionately assigned to special programs and wealthier students to Advanced Placement classes designed by College Board to help students prepare for college (Oakes, 1985). A National Educational Longitudinal Study released in 1992 states that students from poor families are much more likely to be assigned to special programs than wealthier students with identical achievement scores. In short, asking elementary teachers to group students according to ability is grossly unfair. The system remains in place, however, because of the supposed social efficacy of the system.

Freire (1970) asserts that the current “banking system” of education, in which the poor are given the deposits deemed sufficient for their needs and the wealthy are given the opportunity for critical thinking and revelation, reinforces man’s “fatalistic perception of his
situation” (Cahn, 469). The fatalists see a world of students too ignorant and unintelligent to be taught, who instead must be trained and ruled.

IDEA sought to expand the resources of students with special needs in order to allow them access to upper level tracks. To some degree this has been successful. Unfortunately, teachers and administrators have also used the legislation to protect themselves from societal conditions through which lower socio-economic students enter school unprepared and behind, consequently affecting school EOG and EOC scores. The goal of IDEA was to allow students who had been previously denied an education, an appropriate education fulfilling each student’s latent potential. The keys to these systems lie within two broad areas: skilled, insightful teachers who gladly move a student from one “track” to another, as well as an ever-expanding curriculum that both challenges and rewards the student. As the instructional leader of a school, the principal is charged with hiring and guiding the teacher, as well as providing the necessary resources for growth.

**Special Programs Legislation and Development**

A misperception is that education is a birthright in our country. To the contrary, education does not fall under federal jurisdiction, but rather under state authority. The tenth amendment assigns the right for education to the state government. States, then, must develop laws that guarantee the rights of all students. States, until the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was passed, differed in their approach to the education of students with special needs. Compulsory education was in place in all states by 1918; however, students with disabilities were exempt from these mandates (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Courts ruled over and over against children with disabilities (*Beattie Vs. Board of Education*,}
1919, *Department of Public Welfare Vs. Haas*, 1958). Even in North Carolina, the state made a law in 1969, which called it, “a crime for parents who persist in forcing the attendance of a child with disabilities after the exclusion from public school,” (Katsiyannis, A., Yell, M.L., Bradley, R., 2001). *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 began the movement toward equality of education. Central to *Brown* was the guarantee of the fourteenth amendment, which guarantees equal protection for all under the law.

In 1910, the White House held the Conference on Children, which had as its central goal to define and establish remedial programs for children with disabilities or needs (Yell, 2001). In 1933, the first parent advocacy group began in order to work and support change. Cases against states in the early 1970’s brought about legislation in 1973. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, requires agencies that are recipients of financial aid to provide assurances of compliance, to take corrective steps when violations are found, and to make individualized modifications and accommodations to provide services that are comparable to those offered persons without disabilities (Yell, 2001).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was signed into law in 1975 as the Education for all Handicapped Children Act. At the time, there was a definite need for special education services. Over one million students who were disabled were not receiving services of any type. Obviously, inclusion of special education students within regular education, as well as the allocation for resources necessary to properly identify and modify instruction for special education students has become a “hot topic.”

IDEA is a broad legislation. In reading through the legislation, one can become daunted by both the need and the vast expanse that it addresses in terms of education,
employment, and services such as assistive technology and other related services including transportation, vocational rehabilitation, etc. It is a carefully written law that begins by noting some of the problems inherent to special programs. In subsection 601.C, the law notes that “Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.” This same subsection acknowledges that students prior to the passage of the bill in 1975, have been denied equal educational opportunity in the past because of exclusion, inadequate resources, and undiagnosed disabilities. In this same subsection, 601.c.4, the law notes that implementation of the act has been hindered by low expectations and insufficient focus on methods of teaching.

Section 601.D of the law clearly state the laws purposes. These include to ensure that students with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education, to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities, as well as their parents, are protected, to assist states, local education agencies, and federal agencies with “implementation of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency, system”, and to ensure that educators and parents have the necessary tools to improve educational results for students with disabilities, including research, preparing personnel, technology development, etc. As read above, one can note that the law seeks the best interests of the citizen and is extremely comprehensive.
Many view the IDEA as a complete failure, yet for different reasons (Cuban, 1996). Conservatives feel that the act wastes too much money on one student. Radicals believe the bill is a failure because it does not do enough. “Radicals see those with disabilities as part of a large underclass that a service-driven economy has marginalized and continued by welfare programs” (Cuban, 1996). Moderates recognize that the bill has its successes and its failures.

The education of disabled students has progressed tremendously from the beginning of the century, at which time they were completely excluded from the education system. The National Council on Disability constitutes are by design enthusiastic supporters of the law (Cuban, 1996). One researcher (Cuban, 1996) asks to look at the “fidelity standard.” Has special education done what it was intended to do? Probably not. However, if one asked the hypothetical question in 1955 to top school officials, “do you believe that by the year 2000, over 15,000 school districts and 11% of children enrolled in schools would have an individualized education program?” their response probably would have been skeptical.

**Why Teachers Leave the Classroom**

Because research notes that the single greatest influence on student performance is the quality of the teacher, it is incumbent upon the school leader to recruit and retain high quality teachers. Numerous studies have examined why teachers leave the classroom. These studies are done on a macro, as well as a micro scale. School leaders and researchers each year examine the turnover of teachers within a school, within a license area, within a district, within a state, and nationally. These reports state that teachers leave their positions for a variety of reasons, including retirement and moving into administrative or central office positions. A 2001 Department of Instruction report in Virginia states that 44% of teachers
who left teaching had retired. Other reasons cited include spouse/partner relocation, personal health or the health of a family member, continuing education, and a lateral move within Virginia. Other reports include reports by Edweek, the National Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, The National Education Association, and the National Association for Secondary School Principals. Each group realizes the profound effect and importance of hiring and retaining qualified teachers.

Teacher burnout is also often cited as a reason that teachers leave the classroom. Farber and Asher (1991) define burnout as “the reaction to prolonged high stress--- [it] commonly results either in withdrawing and caring less, or in working harder, of mechanically to the point of exhaustion” (p. 17). Teachers who have completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory have identified four school cultural variables leading to burnout: drive toward measurable goal-achievement behavior imposed by administrators, inadequate trust in a teacher’s professional adequacy, circumscribing school culture, and a disagreeable physical environment (Friedman, 1991, p. 325). Special educators in particular cite the fact that the intrinsic reward of seeing a special programs’ students become successful does not happen as often or as quickly as it does with regular education students. “Special education students’ progress is often more difficult to gauge, making the teacher feel very ineffective (Sack, 1999, p. 1). Special education teachers also feel isolated from regular education teachers (Sack, 1999, p. 1). The principal has some control over the variables cited above for teacher burnout especially with regard to trust, physical environment, and school culture.

In May of 1995, the National Dissemination Forum on Issues relating to Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention, and Attrition was held in Washington D.C.
Presenters included many of the researchers already before noted in this paper, Bonnie Billingsley, Mary Brownell, Patricia Cegelka, Russell Gersten, Thomas Keating, and David Miller. These researchers presented findings focused solely on special education teachers and the factors cited for satisfaction and for leaving the field. Brownell, Smith, and Miller (1995) noted in the working paper “Attrition of Special Educators, Why they Leave and Where they Go” that disgruntled teachers made up the largest category of leavers, with 49 out of 96 respondents stating they were disgruntled. Disgruntled teachers reported feeling overwhelmed, unprepared, unsupported, and disempowered. The researchers were careful to state that the interaction of more than one of these factors increased the likelihood that a teacher would be disgruntled.

In a similar paper presented by Patricia Cegelka and Donald Doorlang (1995), “Implications for Pre-Service Preparation of Special Programs Teachers,” teachers who were fully-credentialed rated their professional skills more highly than teachers on a provisional license. However, all special programs teachers in the study rated the quality of their pre-service preparation as low relative to providing the skills needed to work in special programs. Lastly, the researchers noted that nearly one in five of respondents who had left the teaching profession reported dissatisfaction with building level authority.

Russell Gersten, Thomas Keating, and Paul Youvanoff (1995) presented a paper at the conference titled, “Understanding the Relationship between Job Design Problems, Support and Attrition/Retention of Special Educators. Within the results of their study, principal support is defined by special educators as having the following characteristics: the principal assists in problem solving, the teachers felt backed up by the principal with regard
to disciplinary issues, the teacher feels understood by the principal, and the teacher feels included in the overall school. According to the study, teachers who report high levels of principal support display a stronger commitment to the field of education, have a greater sense of professional development, have stronger feelings of trust and autonomy, and believe that the philosophies of the school converge with their own personal educational philosophies. The researchers noted that factors that influenced intent to leave included, years of experience, role conflict, weakened autonomy, and satisfaction with the current teaching assignment.

In examining job design itself, for the special programs teacher, Gerstman, Gilman, Morvant, and Billingsley (1995) asked several questions in a report presented in Washington. First, is the job feasible? In other words, is the special programs teacher able to wear the multitude of hats asked of him or her. The special programs teacher is often the direct service provider, as well as coordinator of indirect services such as transportation and assistive technology. The special programs teacher is the case manager who must oversee the individual educational plan of the student, at the same time meeting school, district and federal compliance requirements. Teachers in the study noted role conflict, or conflict caused by diverse responsibilities, presented a challenge. Teachers also spoke about role overload with regard to the size of their caseload, the complexity of student needs, the paperwork requirements, as well as the actions needed to keep regular educators informed and utilizing best practices with their special programs students. The teachers noted that school culture with regard to prioritizing and creating time to meet the above requirements was an indicator of intent to stay. Thirty-two percent of those teachers in the study noted that they were
dissatisfied with the level of support and encouragement within their school culture for special programs. The report noted a means to improve culture and prevent role conflict. First, the flow of information is critical and providing a means to improve and keep communication flowing between regular educators and special educators, between administration and special educators is critical. Next, to prevent role conflict and subsequent poor morale, the authors suggested that administrators provide relevant staff development as well as the time to do it. Lastly, the authors noted the importance of shared decision-making. Special programs teachers who did not receive that support reported feeling like their autonomy was weakened and that their professional opinions were devalued.

In a similar study, co-authored by Billingsley and Gersten, (1995)“Working Conditions: Admin support”, the researchers analyzed data from six urban school districts. The researchers noted the difference in building and central office support. Specific problems that were noted by special educators included a perceived lack of respect or concern for special programs teachers or students, a lack of communication between administration and special programs teachers, a lack of accessibility to administration, disagreements on student placement, administrators lack knowledge regarding special programs laws and requirements, administrators are more concerned with legal compliance than with effective programming, and a lack of input into decisions. Twenty-five percent of teachers in this study who left their position listed lack administrative support as the main reason.

The National Dissemination Forum on Issues Relating to Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention, and Attrition has been published as an ERIC report, ED 389 147, and contains 265 pages of study results from various researchers. It is interesting to note that
this research does not examine the particular needs of the alternative licensed teacher and what support the principal can provide to respond to those needs. Likewise, the most recent publication by Cross and Billingley (2005), *Cultivating and Keeping Committed Special Education Teachers*, does not distinguish between the needs of the traditional versus alternatively licensed special educator.

**The Shortage of Special Programs’ Teachers and Alternative Routes to Licensure**

As part of a the 2004 No Child Left Behind, a report titled, *Alternative Routes To Teacher Certification* was produced, with Rod Paige, then Secretary of Education, endorsing its findings. The report noted that teacher shortages are “especially acute in urban areas, special education, and in certain content areas such as mathematics and science” ([http://www.ed.gov/admins/tchrqual/recruit/altroutes/index.html p.2](http://www.ed.gov/admins/tchrqual/recruit/altroutes/index.html p.2)).

One reason for the shortage of special programs teachers and the need for alternative licensure routes is the fact that special programs students are being identified at an increasingly higher rate. In 2000, one in eight students in the public school population, or over five million, were in special programs, up from four million five years earlier (Washington Based Council for Educational Development and Research, 2001). Schools of education, however, are not producing enough special programs’ teachers to keep up with the demand for them. The Department of Education states that about twenty-eight thousand new special education teachers are needed annually, yet schools of education are only graduating eighteen thousand new teachers a year.
According to the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles 2001*, “Special Education Teachers outlook for Employment” is “expected to increase much faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2006, spurred by the continued growth in the number of special education students needing services” (p.238). The dictionary also notes the high “burnout” rate of special educators. The combined growth of special programs’ students, along with the dearth of available special programs’ teachers validates the need for this study.

The report, *Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification* (2004) describes in detail six different programs, including one for special educators in California. In 2004, 43 states plus the District of Columbia reported having some type of alternative licensure route for teachers. Only 8 states said they had such routes in 1983, when the National Center for Education Information began collecting such data (p. 4). The report also noted that an estimated 20 percent of new teachers enter through such a route. The term alternative licensure has been used loosely and can include unstructured help for people on an emergency permit as well as well-designed programs. The National Center for Alternative Certification has developed a typology that includes 10 types. A consensus has developed slowly on required features of such programs. These features include the following: The program has been designed specifically for talented individuals who have a bachelor’s degree and are interested in pursuing teaching. The candidates pass a rigorous screening test designed by the program. The program has fieldwork to allow the teacher direct interaction with students. The program includes relevant course work. The program has an active mentor requirement. The candidates must meet high performance requirements in order to graduate.
In North Carolina, people who have a bachelor’s degree, but have not received teacher certification, have a number of alternative licensure routes available to them if they want to become a teacher. Many of these routes are explained in detail on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction website, an indication of their importance in order to meet demand for teachers. NCTEACH, a program through UNC-CH, works with professionals through course work and mentoring to help them gain certification in high need areas such as math, science, and special programs. Other universities likewise provide on-line courses and mentoring to interested applicants. The RALC, or Regional Alternative Licensure Center, will review a transcript and let an interested person know the coursework that would be required, based on transcript review, to gain certification in a specific area. In North Carolina, to meet No Child Left Behind mandates, every teacher must pass the PRAXIS test for teaching before entering a classroom, even under an emergency license. However, once that requirement has been met, an applicant may have the transcript reviewed, enroll in the appropriate courses, make progress toward certification, and apply for an emergency or provisional license until the requirements have been met. These applicants are then called lateral entry teachers. Because these applicants have neither completed the course work, nor participated in a traditional student teaching experience, their needs differ from their traditionally certified counterpart.

**Principal Support**

House (1981) provided a framework through which we can define support. He identified four types of *principal support* which teachers seek: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support. Through emotional
support, principals show teachers that they are valued members of the community and trusted professionals in their field. Through instrumental support, principals provide teachers with necessary materials to be successful in the classroom and in their managerial support. Through informational support, principals provide teachers with the information they need to improve their classroom teaching practices and classroom management. Finally, through appraisal support, the principal gives current and constructive feedback to teachers regarding their teaching strategies. Cross and Billingsly (1988) noted that, “teachers who experience higher levels of principal support are more likely to experience greater job satisfaction and school commitment and less likely to experience personal health problems than those receiving lower levels of support.” General education teachers in this study reported that “emotional support is the most important type of support that administrators can provide.” Lastly, they noted that “Most principals do offer support… but it may not be the kind of support that teachers believe is important.” Consequently, principals should assess their behavior to see if they are providing the right type of support.

A study by Goor, Schwenn, and Bowyer in 1997 examined the specific components of a program that works to directly prepare principal for leadership in special education. These components comprised an examination of essential beliefs and that the effective principal did believe that all children can learn, that all children should be accepted within the school community, and that as the school leader, the principal is responsible for the education of all children within the building. Other components included knowledge and the ability to give instructional feedback that is timely, sustained and positive. Timeliness also proved a factor in looking at support for disciplinary issues, cited as one of the main concerns
by special educators. Special educators ask that principals be involved in IEP meetings and understand the paperwork and compliance requirements. Working effectively with parents is also necessary in order to lead an effective special programs department. The parents of students with disabilities have different needs and concerns. The ability to select and hire effective teachers, and to match those teachers with paraprofessionals is also a component. Lastly, the researchers noted the need for collaborative planning and decision-making. The ability to listen, to problem solve, to develop trust as well as appropriate staff development were all listed as part of developing a collaborative culture and a component of successful special programs.

In an interesting study, Foley and Lewis (1999) looked at principal’s self-perceived competence in serving as a leader. Their confidence predictors included the number of hours of professional development received, the number of academic degrees awarded, and the number of years teaching. In short, a principal reported being more confident in working with the special programs at his or her school if he or she had received appropriate staff development, had taken courses for degree work, and had a high number of years teaching. This same report noted again the importance of the principal as the leader in collaborative efforts between special programs and regular education teachers, and in terms of helping IEP teams and its stakeholder develop effective IEP’s. The information gleaned from reports which note what special programs teachers deem principal support, as well as the information from principals as to how they view support, can be combined to form a base of questioning for research as we seek to understand the needs of the lateral entry special programs teachers and how principals can meet them.
Conclusion

Current literature defines burnout, and specifically teacher burnout, as well as what educators define as principal support. Given the increase in the number of students identified as special programs students and the consequent need for special educators, many local education agencies are hiring special program teachers from non-traditional licensure programs. Although there have been a number of studies, many by Cross and Billingsley, to look at special program teacher turnover, reasons for and effects of, there has not been a study to look specifically at the effect of administrator support on lateral entry or non-traditional special program teacher turnover.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The researcher used narrative inquiry to investigate the differing needs of special education traditionally certified teachers versus lateral entry teachers. A list of potential interviewees was developed based on information from a human resources database maintained in a large, urban district. The researcher then chose one lateral entry teacher and one traditionally licensed teacher to represent each pathway identified by the Cross and Billingsley study. These pathways included exiters, transfers, and remain in the same school with the same assignment. Another category added was not in the Billingsley study, those teachers who switch from special programs into regular and based on location (only one teacher per school), and years of experience. The researcher asked teachers with less than 10 years experience hoping that their memories of their first few years were fresh. The researcher interviewed each teacher, reviewed the data, and scheduled a second, follow-up interview. The researcher used semi-structured interview guides for all of the interviews. The researcher also completed a final e-mail survey with each candidate with capstone questions based on the analysis of their transcripts.

Pilot Study

A small pilot study was completed during the fall of 2001 that comprised interviews with three teachers from one high school. One teacher had been special programs and had switched into regular education. One teacher had been traditionally licensed and had twenty years of experience in special education. The third teacher was working on her license
through the lateral entry process. Although the pilot study did not focus on lateral entry candidates, the findings of the pilot study reinforced the need for a more complete study. Teachers were excited to give feedback about their experiences and to feel that someone was listening to their needs. The responses of the interviewees were consistent with initial research findings regarding the importance and effect of principal support on special education teacher retention/attrition as noted in the literature review. The interviewees who had left teaching altogether cited many different reasons; however, principal support was the major factor cited by two of the participants. Other reasons cited included low teachers pay, little feedback from students, the cumbersome ILT process, excessive paperwork, fear of litigation, and long hours.

The teacher interviewed who had longevity noted that in her first few years of teaching, her principal sat in on every IEP meeting that she held and helped her better plan students IEP’s. She noted that his support helped her gain the experience necessary to be successful in the field. The teacher who had switched into regular education noted that principal support was a factor in two ways: time constraints and disciplinary issues. He stated, “If the administration thought you were doing a good job, they’d back you. If not, they’d leave you out to dry.” He also noted that he had to use his planning period to work with students in this case load. He believed the principal could have supported him more by scheduling students in his caseload to his curriculum assistance class. In that way, he would have contact with those students every day and not have to use his planning period to track them down.
The third teacher interviewed, who had left the profession, was lateral-entry. She noted that she left as a direct result of a lack of principal support. She stated, “I knew I was going to leave teaching because it just wasn’t right for me. I wanted to stay through the year for the kids. But after that e-mail, it was so mean, so accusatory. I just decided I couldn’t stay and work underneath her.” She also stated,

I think (Asst. principal) is overboard. I think she has a good heart.
I think she has good intentions, but I think she just doesn’t know where you draw the line. The Gestapo method went out a long time ago and threatening people went out a long time ago. If you threaten me the only thing you are going to do is piss me off. You are not going to get anything out of me if you are bullying me and pushing me up against the wall. I am going to do enough to get by. But, I am not going to do the little bit extra I would have done for you if you had treated me nicely.

This lateral entry teacher left the field in part as a direct result of their supervising administrator, legitimizing the necessity of a study on the effect of principal support with regard to lateral entry special programs’ teacher retention.

**Selection of Interview Participants**

Cross and Billingsley completed a study with the Research Triangle Institute in 1996 of teacher retention in Memphis schools. They developed a schematic representation of Special Education Teacher Retention, Transfer, and Attrition in Memphis County Schools. The schema notes that there are basically 3 pathways:

1) Attrition (exit the profession),
2) Transfer (to a different school, to a different assignment, to a different school and different assignment, and a few others), or

3) The teacher remains in the same school with the same assignment.

Other researchers have noted a fourth pathway for the special educator, to switch into regular education. For this study, that was the fourth type of pathway.

4) Switch into regular education

Using the database of a large, urban, district, The researcher gathered names of special educators on traditional as well as emergency license, as well as educators dually licensed in special programs and regular education and currently working in regular education. The researcher contacted teachers who had less than 10 years experience, and were certified or alternatively certified. The researcher sent an e-mail to them with a description of the research and the consent form to determine their interests. The researcher then used the “snowball” method to ask participants for teachers who have exited the field in order to find participants for that pathway. The researcher interviewed lateral entry special educators who fit into each one of the pathways as well as traditionally certified teachers who fit into each pathway, for a total of eight participants and 16 interviews.

**Consent Form**

A consent form was given to each participant, which stated the fact that their responses will be kept anonymous in any public document and that the information they provide me will be confidential. The researcher requested the use of audiotapes and assured confidentiality with regard to those tapes. These tapes allowed the researcher during the interview to maintain attention without fear of losing information in the note-taking process,
to focus in the flow of the interview and to ask relevant follow-up questions, because the
documentation was done electronically. The researcher did take shorthand notes as well,
which helped in particular with one interview that was unable to be transcribed due to poor
tape quality. Also, the researcher reviewed the transcript of the first tapes in order to ensure
that the second interview, or follow up interview, addressed all relevant openings for
questions, or un-addressed questions from the first interview. The researcher also reviewed
the transcript to begin looking for similarities and differences among the participants’
responses, as well as to improve in the ability as an interviewer to obtain lengthy, descriptive
responses.

**Procedure**

Each interviewee was interviewed at a location he or she picked and at the time of
day requested by the interviewee. Participants were encouraged to ask questions about the
process and the potential use of the results in order to alleviate any fears of retribution by
superiors for any negative comments and in order to understand the motivations behind the
study. The initial interviews used the interview instrument in the appendix. The time length
was not predetermined; however, most did not exceed an hour and a half (Marshall &
Rossman, 1999). The researcher used the data from the initial interviews to develop a second
interview instrument that questioned more specifically based on codes that emerged from the
first set of interviews. Although each interviewee had specific follow-up questions, there
were several broad categories that were addressed with all participants.
Interview Guide

Patton identifies three types of potential interviews, the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview. These approaches, he notes, are not mutually exclusive (Patton, 2002). Question types include: experience and behavior questions, opinion and value questions, feelings questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions, and background and demographic questions (Patton, 2002).

The interview guide used was a combination of the informal interview with the general interview guide approach. The interviewer spent time creating a comfort level among the interviewees by having an informal approach and sharing information about each other as we talk. However, an interview guide was used to ensure comparability among interviews and responses. The guide is the result of feedback from members of the NCSU spring 2002 Qualitative Analysis 2 course, as well as from information in the literature review, especially the research presented at the National Dissemination Forum on Issues relating to Special Education Teacher Satisfaction, Retention, and Attrition that was held in Washington D.C. in May of 1995.

The interview itself was semi-structured and audio-taped. The researcher met and spoke with participants at a variety of locations, based on their preference, including schools, the mall, coffee shops, etc. The queries were purposefully broad, with prompts designed to elicit clarification, and follow up questions based on the interviewee’s responses. The interviews were structured to allow the respondents the opportunity to discuss the nature of learning disabilities, as well as the school culture, their needs, and the support that has been
provided to them. Immediately after the interview, the researcher took time in the same setting to write down immediate thoughts and feedback in a journal.

**Research Techniques:**

**Method 1: In-depth Interviews.**

The researcher interviewed one lateral entry teacher and one traditionally certified teacher for each pathway identified by the Cross and Billingsley Memphis study. These pathways included exiters, transfers, those who switch schools, and those who remain in the same school with the same assignment. The researcher interviewed each teacher, reviewed the data, and scheduled a second, follow-up interview. The researcher used semi-structured interview guides for all of the interviews. However, the researcher also based the subsequent interview on the preceding one using not only the planned questions but also questions that arose from the “storying” and “restorying” process. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) The telling and re-telling process reveals a “reflexive relationship” between living a life story, then telling a life story, and re-telling a life story, and consequently re-living that life story in a constructivist manner. Narrative inquiry recognizes this storying and restorying occurs throughout the research process; therefore, interview guides were fluid and changed for each participant as his or her story developed. As stated, there were certain core questions, but, based on each person’s story, other questions were developed for each subsequent interview in addition to the core questions.

In order to develop the first interview guides for the study, the researcher worked with a group of graduate students in a Qualitative Analysis class and reviewed data gathered in the pilot study. The responses, as well as a review of the literature regarding teacher
burn-out and specifically special program teacher turnover, gave the researcher a general idea of topics to include in the in-depth interview guides.

The first interview inquired about the participants’ experiences in education prior to teaching, specifically with regard to their preparation and licensure, as well as their experiences during their first years of teaching. The researcher inquired about their desire to teach, defining moments in their teaching careers, and their perception of the role of the principal and types of principal support. This first interview was a professional life history interview; seeking to discover a pattern for teachers entering the field via traditional college programs as well as later in life using alternative methods of certification. Life stories often reveal more than just events but values and beliefs as well; therefore, the first interview provided insights not only into what happened in the participants’ lives, but also who they were as individuals prior to teaching (Atkinson, 1998). These interviews lasted from one and a half to two hours each.

Interviewing in the context of narrative inquiry differs from interviewing in other methods of qualitative research. The question is not necessarily intended to be a stimulus but “part of a circular process through which its meaning and that of its answer are created in discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other” (Mishler, 1986, pp. 53-54). Thus, it is important that the interviewer creates a level of comfort and fosters trust in the relationship and not dominate the interview. The dominant voice in the narrative interview should be the participant; furthermore, the responses, ideally, are in story form. It is important for the interviewer to recognize when stories are being told and to encourage those stories primarily by being quiet
and not redirecting the participant. (Mishler, 1986). The interviewer must allow the participant to tell a story even when it is seemingly irrelevant (Mishler, 1986). In narrative inquiry, the interview is a place where knowledge is not discovered but rather it is developed (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Therefore, during the interview process, it is impossible for the participant to say that something is irrelevant. After reviewing the transcripts from the interviews, most of the participants were very reflective, thoughtful, and descriptive in their responses. Two of the participants were not as forthright and did not choose to tell their story at length, but rather they simply answered the question posed with minimal responses.

While once the first interview was completed, the researcher had a general idea of the second interview guide for the study. The researcher read the transcripts of the first interviews, made margin notes, highlighted particular passages, and then developed codes for categories. These categories served as the basis for open-ended questions for the second interview guide. In that way, the interview guides proved to be fluid documents because the researcher relied on the previous interview to inform the questions for the subsequent interview. This fluidity is a key piece of the restorying process that occurs throughout the research study as the researcher and participant are reflecting on what stories have been told during interviews and restorying those stories to get to a deeper meaning (Atkinson, 1998). After reviewing the questions that were connected with the previous interview, the researcher began to develop the semi-structured questions for interview guide two. The focus of the second interviews with the lateral entry participants was the participants' experiences during the lateral entry program, regarding both the program itself but more importantly on their interactions with their school-based administrators and how those interactions supported their
lateral entry process or served to dissuade it. The interviewer asked interviewees about their experiences through their lateral entry licensure program, as well as about various aspects of their work at school, with their students, and interactions with colleagues and administration. The goal of the second interview for traditionally licensed applicants was to ask more questions regarding the teacher’s preparation, surprises in the classroom, and interactions with administrators. While, as discussed, the goal of narrative interview is to present open-ended questions that allow for the participants to share stories, the researcher asked additional questions based on the first interview and after reviewing the data that needed follow up based on the first responses.

In summary, the researcher interviewed special educators who have been traditionally certified as well as certified via an alternative licensure program. Categories for the lateral entry participants include; one participant identified as a lateral entry special programs teacher who has left the profession, one participant identified as a lateral entry special programs teacher remaining in the profession as a special programs teacher, one participant identified as a lateral entry special programs teacher switching into regular education, and one participant identified as a lateral entry special programs teacher staying in the profession as a special programs teacher, but leaving his or her current assignment. Traditionally licensed special educators were also interviewed using the categories listed above, leaving the profession, staying in the same position, switching into regular education, and switching assignment. The researcher interviewed each of the participants three times, including two face to face and one e-mail interview. The face-to-face interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.
Method 2: Email Survey Questionnaire.

While interviews can be the sole form of data for a narrative inquiry, it is helpful to triangulate the data sources in order to access different perspectives of the participants (Hatch, 2002). Therefore, after the second interview, the researcher asked the participants to review the findings based on their responses only, and then to complete a structured, formal interview via email. This, however, was not be a standardized interview in which all participants have the same questions (Hatch, 2002). The interview questions differed slightly for each participant based on his or her individual story. The researcher sent an email to ask questions based on the previous face-to-face interviews, and to ask questions from the previous interview that the interviewer did not have time to ask or that the interviewer missed the opportunity to ask during the interview, and discovered later while reviewing the transcripts. For all of the participants, the email interviews asked questions about the participants’ life stories, particularly questions about how they viewed the world based on their respective race, class, gender and their interactions with their disabled students.

The researcher choose to use the email format for one interview because often people who are reluctant to answer questions face-to-face find comfort in being able to respond in an alternate form. I also have a personal belief that the written word is a powerful one as it lives beyond your breath, and therefore those thoughts need more care when expressed. It is my hope the participants will take that care as they respond to written questions.


Upon completion of each interview, the researcher wrote down immediate impressions and thoughts regarding the content and tone of the interview. The researcher noted areas for
follow-up questions as well as begin to develop categories of responses and codes to use with the data management system, ATLAS/ti.

Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) define analysis as three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction occurs throughout the life of a research study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this study, data reduction began when I chose the topic of teacher retention. As a school-based administrator, it is my moral and professional responsibility to hire and retain quality teachers. This imperative is not as easily achieved as one would believe. Therefore, I chose this topic in order to inform myself about the best hiring and daily practices that retain quality teachers. I soon found that much research had already been completed in the area of teacher burnout, retention, and principal support. I narrowed my focus to the retention of special program teachers because this is currently the highest area of need in my school. Again, I found that Cross and Billingley had done extensive study of hiring and retaining special program teachers and the role of the principal. I did note that there has been little if any research on the specific needs of lateral entry special program teachers and principal support versus traditionally licensed special programs teachers. All of these decisions reduced my focus.

As I complete the interviews, I used ATLAS/ti. It is a software program used to organize and analyze data efficiently. Data displays condense and organize data in order to highlight the connections in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). ATLAS/ti was both and organizational tool that I used to arrange quotes by category, as well as a visual tool that
allowed me to arrange categories and quotes visually and to make connections. Conclusion
drawing/verification is a process that runs concurrently with data reduction and display
throughout the research process.

Within the context of Miles and Huberman’s system for data analysis, I relied on
Hatch’s (2002) assertion that data analysis involves asking questions of the data. Therefore,
throughout the analysis process, I asked myself: What is the story? What are the differing
needs of lateral entry and traditionally certified special programs teachers? I used inductive
data analysis (Hatch, 2002) to discover patterns of meaning in the data so that I could make
general statements about the impact of principal support on lateral entry special program
teachers and teacher retention. Using inductive analysis to find patterns allowed me to
address the question: what is the story? (Hatch, 2002; Mishler, 1986).

I based my narrative analysis on the work of Riessman (1993), Lieblich, Tuval-
Mashiach, and Zilber (1998), and Hatch (2002). An independent transcriber transcribed my
interviews. The transcriber emailed me the transcriptions digitally, which allowed me to
import them into the ATLAS/ti program where I could code the transcripts. I also printed a
copy of each transcript and developed a notebook for interviews 1 and then interviews 2.
Within the notebook I read and highlighted significant passages and began the coding
process. This effort made coding much easier in the digital format as I already had an idea of
how to delineate codes by subgroups.

After reading the transcripts as stated above and reviewing the researcher journal to
gain a sense of the stories that were being told, I coded the transcripts. To begin the coding
process, I used research questions and my interview questions to form a start list of codes
(Miles & Huberman, 1994). The start list is a set of descriptive codes that provides a means of organizing the data into types of information, including data about personal teaching careers, the teacher’s typical day, teacher needs, and resources and types of principal support. I quickly decided to develop a code, such as discipline, and then subheadings such as discipline: fairness, discipline: regular ed teachers, discipline: admin, etc, as many codes were broad and encompassed a large number of quotations.

Throughout my analysis, I sought to find connections among the stories and common themes emerging (Hatch, 2002) In forming the stories for the findings section, I intend to keep the participants’ experience in the forefront and unique. Narrative inquiry is a powerful tool as each of us has a story and wants to tell it in a safe context. I am reminded of a religion professor years ago who, regarding the synoptic gospels stated, every story is told by a particular person, at a particular time, for a particular purpose, and to a particular people. Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to de-construct each aspect of the interviewee’s story in order to determine the individual as well as global implications.

As mentioned, qualitative research, and in particular, narrative research are often criticized for lacking validity. Merriam (2002) suggests eight strategies for promoting validity and reliability in narrative research: triangulation, member checks, peer review/examination, researcher’s position or reflexivity, adequate engagement in data collection, maximum variation, audit trail, and rich, thick description.

**Limitations of the Methodology**

Narrative inquiry is risky because of its ambiguous nature. Traditional methods of research begin with a hypothesis or a problem and seek closure with an answer. Narrative
inquiry begins with an essential research question or two and allows those questions to guide the study. (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Unlike traditional methodologies, narrative inquiry is more about the search than the answer (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Conle (2000) asserts, “Narrative inquiry differs from more traditional uses of narrative in education, that is, from didactic and strategic uses of narrative. The major difference is related to its open-ended, experiential and quest-like qualities” (p. 50). Therefore, because it is “quest-like” and “experiential” the ambiguity should be embraced rather than feared because it is the ambiguity that is explored as a part of narrative inquiry.

The participants will be telling their story from their perspective and from their memory. We all see the world from our inner eye, our souls, our experiences. That eye is different from the eyes that view us daily as we move and act, more knowledgeable and less able to remove individual perspective. Because of the individual perspective gained, it is not possible to replicate the findings in a narrative inquiry with another study because the findings are situated within a specific context related only to one particular study.

**Qualitative Research: Validity and Reliability**

So why narrative? According to Liblach, Tuval-Masciach, and Zilber, “narrative research refers to any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials.” The narrative materials may include a life story, or field notes of observations, or a review of personal letters. We are story-tellers. We develop and tell our stories to construct our identities and personalities. These stories present our inner reality to the outside world. The data that is obtained from these stories is rich, thick, and deep and is data that cannot be obtained by questionnaires or experiments.
The evaluation for research has been the standards of validity and reliability. These standards contradict the narrative approach, which asserts that narrative, or the story, can be understood in many different ways, by readers of different backgrounds and with differing priorities. Therefore, what standard is used to evaluate narrative research? Liblach, Tuval-Masciach, and Zilber have developed a set of four criteria. The first, width, refers to the quality of the interview as well as the analysis. In other words, does the interviewer support the analysis with ample and appropriate quotes? The second measure, coherence, refers to how well the research fits together and with existing theories. Insightfulness, the next measure, refers to whether the analysis of the story or stories has led to new insight or understanding. The last standard for narrative, according to these authors, is parsimony, or the literary merits of the presentation of the story.

A researcher who is uncomfortable with ambiguity will not be drawn to narrative. As Clandinin and Connolley state, “Certainty is not the goal.”(9)

**Limitations of the Study**

During the study the researcher interviewed eight participants who each represented one of the pathways available to lateral entry special programs teachers and traditionally licensed special programs teachers. These pathways include exiters, transfer to regular education, stay at the same school in same position, and transfer to a different school. The goal of the interviews was to answer the main research questions, why special programs’ teachers leave, and what a principal can do to support special programs teachers in order to prevent them from leaving with specific emphasis on lateral entry special programs teachers.
Limitations of this study are based on the structure and nature of the study. The study itself is qualitative, using narrative research techniques, and findings are based on interviewee responses.

The researcher recognizes that the variables examined regarding why teachers leave are numerous. Teachers leave their positions for a variety of reasons, including retirement and moving into administrative or central office positions. Therefore, the effect of principal support with regard to teacher turnover can be erroneously marginalized. However, I believe it is significant in that the number of teachers reporting lateral moves, or entering another profession, is large.

In a pilot study conducted in the fall of 2001, one of the three teachers interviewed stated point blank that principal support, or lack thereof, was a dominant factor in their decision to leave the profession. The teacher interviewed in the pilot study who had switched from special education into regular education noted that he did not receive support with regard to disciplinary issues, or time constraints with regard to case management, and those factors led to the switch into regular education.

The teachers interviewed in this study represent a sample of teachers from large, urban high schools. The accuracy of the data collected is dependent upon the veracity of interviewee responses. Teachers sometimes exaggerate the demands placed on them. Teachers also might feel uncomfortable speaking with me, as I am a current administrator and could conceivably in the future be their administrator. Also, teachers might not have thought through many of the questions posed to them and consequently may not be able to give carefully thought-out responses. Clandinin and Connelly discuss the importance of the
researcher who must, “make a series of judgments about how to balance the smoothing contained in the plot with what is obscured in the smoothing.” (181) The smoothing is the participants re-storying to construct a new story. Clandinin and Connelly challenge the researcher to develop a “wakefulness”, to proceed with a “constant, alert awareness of risks, of narcissism, of solipsism, of simplistic plots, scenarios, and unidimensional characters.” (182). By being wakeful, and understanding the backgrounds of interviewee and interviewer, and the story being told, the narrative researcher can be an effective interpreter.

Another limitation is researcher bias. The inequities of education are apparent to me and as an administrator I seek to lessen them. According to Maxwell (1996), no interviewer is completely free of bias. Acknowledging this fact and asking an auditor to review transcripts and data collection can ameliorate researcher bias, however, it cannot totally remove it. The bias that I know I bring with regard to teacher turnover is that the successful teacher is one with many talents. He or she is intelligent, reflective, hard working, persistent, organized, flexible, creative, and kind. The combination of all of these qualities in one person is rare. Higlet describes in the Art of Teaching that teaching is both an art and a science. As an administrator I can often teach teachers the science. I can never teach the art, as that is the creative, kind, wise aspect that teachers possess. As I interviewed special programs teachers, I had to be conscious to remain a listener, with no prejudice or bias. I recognize that I may be inclined to disregard the story of a former special program teacher who claims lack of support as the reason for exit, but whom I find through their story, to have not developed an understanding or appreciation of the art of teaching. I must take care not to discount any
story because although I may be able to see the “administrator’s side”, that perspective is not important nor meaningful to the teacher.

Patton notes that although observation data is more meaningful than self-reported data, we cannot observe everything. Interviewing, then, allows us to gain an understanding of another person’s perspective (Patton, 2002). I used Cross and Billingsley’s schema to determine the different types of teachers, exiters, transfer to another school and retention within special education at the same school. I added another category, teachers who leave special education and enter regular education. I will interview teachers who fit each type.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) note that the strengths of the interview process include the ability to gather large amounts of data quickly. Also, immediate follow-up and clarification are possible. Limitations to the interview process include cooperation or lack thereof. However, every one of the teachers contacted agreed to participate. In fact, several of the teachers thanked me at length for providing the opportunity to share their experiences.

Julie stated,

I appreciate this opportunity [laughs] to talk to somebody. Because you know, in special ed we can complain all we want to. But the people at central office (inaudible) well, you have to. You have to do it. But it's nice to hear from somebody wants to listen. You know, why did you leave special ed? I want to tell some – I wanted to call the news and say, 'This is why.' And I just wanted – because it was…you know, I'm very…I mean, you can tell I'm very…passionate about it. And I like it. But it's…[sighs].

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“Interviewees may be unwilling or uncomfortable sharing the experiences the interviewer hopes to explore, or they may be unaware….. The interviewer may not ask questions that evoke long narrative” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 109). Marshall and Rossman (1999) also note that good interviewers have good listening skills, are skillful at personal interaction, question framing, and probing for elaboration.

**Ethical Issues Regarding Research Techniques Used: Insider Research**

This study, in essence, is comprised of insider research. Glesne (1999) notes the attractiveness of insider research in that access to data is easy, the results can be used for personal or professional purposes, and the amount of time needed to complete the research can be reduced. Problems with insider research include the potential for moral or ethical dilemmas; the role of the researcher has already been established as something different; and the potential to uncover “dangerous knowledge” (Glesne, 1999).

I asked Wake County to supply me with names of special programs teachers currently employed. These teachers have worked in various high schools in Wake County. Through graduate school, workshops, conferences, etc., I have become acquainted with administrators at almost every high school in Wake County. By interviewing teachers from these high schools, I may have gained information about the leadership style and skills of many of my peers, “dangerous knowledge”. “Moral dilemmas” include maintaining confidentiality among my peers, as well as amid the chance that a teacher might report problems, which would then force action on my part, for example, physical mistreatment of students or a crime committed by staff members. Fortunately, this did not occur.
The teachers interviewed who have left the teaching profession were candid because there can be no professional repercussions. The teachers who have switched from special programs to regular education likewise can be candid because of the assurance of confidentiality. I also recognize that because of my established role as principal, many teachers might feel uncomfortable revealing any negative insights. I recognize that these teachers are aware of the collegial relations that administrators maintain within Wake County and consequently might be hesitant to reveal any negative information.

I might have discovered from participants negative information about my peers, administrators at other local high schools. However, the consent form that participants signed promises confidentiality, and I will adhere to that promise. I began each interview acknowledging these factors and stating the importance and the goals of the research. Although there was the potential for the revelation of information, which would have compelled me to act, I did not gain any such information during the research.

Insider research has some positive benefits too. I am familiar with Wake County policies and practices and therefore was able more easily to understand the frustrations of special programs’ teachers and the language they used that is particular to Wake County. My interpretations of the data can then be more valid. Also, because I am an insider, establishing a rapport with these teachers was accomplished more easily, as I understand the ins and outs and needs of our county.

Subjectivity Statement

Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle states that we can never know a thing for sure because just the act of examining something changes it. If that’s the case, how can we know
for sure a student’s potential? The way we look at a student, our opinions of that student, necessarily change that student. We must accept our responsibility, then, in our gaze and examine students with kindness, love, hope, and care. Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle holds great potential and meaning for educators. We know then, that how we view a student impacts that student. As an administrator, I strive for every child in my building to be viewed by every adult as an able, full of future and potential, learning person.

I am the great-granddaughter, granddaughter, and daughter of educators. While I was in college I was somewhat interested in becoming an educator. My mother, a teacher of 30 years, encouraged me away from the profession because of the stress inherent within it. With a modicum of interest, I earned a degree in business management and a separate degree in English literature. I started working after college for Jefferson-Pilot, a financial firm. I joined a Rotary group in order to increase my sales leads. A member of this group asked me to tutor at a women’s prison. I did. That experience opened my eyes to the arbitrary nature of education and educational opportunities and instilled a passion and belief that we, as a nation, are allowing people to fail because of how we view that person and his or her potential.

We have multiple intelligences as human beings. Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences outlines a few of these (Gregory, 1996). However, in education, we really measure a student’s achievement level primarily through only one intelligence, language, both oral and written. Students who have difficulty with language are necessarily going to be unsuccessful in school. Students who are unsuccessful in school have a few vocational opportunities available to them. People who have few vocational opportunities available to them still have to survive, even if they have to beg, borrow, steal, assault, or kill. The women
that I worked with at central prison were not inherently evil women. I felt no ill will, nor did I ever fear for my safety. They were simply the result of an educational and cultural economic system focused on one type of intelligence and a societal and economic system that rewards that intelligence.

I decided to return to school in order to become a teacher. I received a master’s degree in education and taught business and marketing at the high school level. I was thrilled to help the 100 plus students that I taught every year. However, I wanted to have more of an impact. I again went back to school, that time for a master’s degree in educational administration. I have worked as an assistant principal the last seven years.

I am biased in many ways. I do not believe that hard work only determines success. I believe that many factors, many out of out our personal control, determine our success and station in life. I believe that the single greatest factor in educational achievement is not academic intellect, but rather “system” intellect. As a student, can I figure out the teacher’s system and play the game well? Many students inherently understand this “hidden curriculum”. Other students, many learning disabled, do not understand this “hidden curriculum” and consequently struggle to achieve. I believe that students of color and students from lower socio-economic strata are disproportionately labeled as special needs students because they do not understand the “hidden” curriculum and do not have anyone available to explain it to them. Lisa Delpit (1988) describes this curriculum in her article “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children.” I believe that to allow a child to make a poor choice is unethical and immoral. I believe that it is the responsibility of the educator to manipulate student options so that a student makes the
best choice for him or herself. I believe one must have a passion for teaching, for learning, and for children to be successful as an educator.

As an administrator, I am often called upon to determine teachers’ teaching assignment. Over the years I have come to the following conclusions. One must be very skilled to teach lower level students and be successful. This teacher must know the curriculum inside and out and because of that knowledge he or she will be able to focus more directly on pedagogy and developing relationships with students. The beginning teacher generally does not have the necessary knowledge of the curriculum, nor the bag of tricks, to allow for success with lower-level or at-risk students. I have also found that in order to teach academically gifted or honors courses, the teacher must have knowledge of the curriculum that is one or two levels above what they are currently teaching. For example, if I am teaching honors geometry, my knowledge should extend through pre-calculus in order to answer the inevitable brilliant question that a student will ask and encourage that student’s inquiry. This teacher too must have an excellent command of pedagogy in order to engage and stimulate the student who is constantly seeking answers and moving quickly. Again, the beginning teacher generally does not have the curriculum knowledge, or the pedagogical skills, to work with academically gifted students. Where then, does one place the beginning teacher with regard to teaching assignment? The beginning special programs’ teacher, especially the lateral entry one, is learning his or her craft on the job, making mistakes and learning along the way. How do those mistakes impact the students? The bias I bring will be the knowledge that the beginning special programs teacher, especially the lateral entry teacher who has not had a student-teaching experience monitored by a master teacher who
gives daily feedback, will by default be a barrier to student success. I must limit my bias and remind myself that the lateral entry teacher is learning on the job and, if she or he stays on the job, they will most likely have a very different perspective and different story in just a few years. In short, I must remind myself not to judge their story.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I reviewed the methodology, narrative inquiry. I described how I chose the participants, based on Cross and Billingley’s previous research, and using participants from a large, urban school district. I explained the rationale for using narrative inquiry. I also explained the methods of data collection, including face-to-face interviews, e-mail surveys, and a researcher journal. I also discussed the method of analysis I used, deconstructing the stories by coding them and reviewing the codes for patterns using ATLAS/ti. I reviewed validity and reliability concerns regarding narrative research. Lastly, I shared the limitations of the study, including the ambiguity of narrative research and the inability to make generalizations using narrative research, as well as researcher subjectivity and biases.
Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

As noted in the statement of the problem, more and more students are identified as special programs students since the introduction of the Individuals with Disabilities Act. Because of the increase in the number of students served, we have a corresponding increase in the number of teachers who will work with these students. Schools of education are not keeping up with the demand for licensed special programs teachers. Almost every state has alternative routes to licensure, also called lateral entry. Many special programs teachers entering the field enter through this route. Teacher turnover in special programs is higher than for other certification areas. Therefore, a principal charged with recruiting and retaining a quality teaching staff may be forced to hire a lateral entry special programs teacher. Previous studies have shown that principal support is a key factor in teacher retention. The purpose of this study is to determine the needs of the lateral entry special programs teacher and how those needs differ from the traditionally certified special programs teacher. The study is a qualitative study using narrative analysis. As we tell our stories, we often re-story, or re-tell, according to our needs and viewpoints. By carefully deconstructing the stories of the participants, the researcher is able to identify the common themes that emerge. The stories that emerged in this study have included stories about the demands of the job itself, about preparation for the job via traditional or alternative routes, and themes regarding support, or lack of, provided by the school and principal.
The Participants

In narrative inquiry, the researcher is eliciting a story and so must develop a comfort level with the storyteller within the interview process. This comfort level may be achieved in many ways. Clandinin and Connelly state that, “The way an interviewer acts, questions, and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the way the participants respond and give accounts of their experience” (p.110). In the same manner, the conditions of the interview, such as the time of day or the place, as well as the formality of the interviews, also shape the participant’s comfort and willingness to share his or her story. In selecting candidates to interview, I first asked for a report from a large urban district regarding teachers at the high school level who are certified in special programs. I then looked for teachers who held provisional certificates as well as dual-certified certified teachers in special programs and another area. I selected teachers to contact based on years of experience. My belief was that teachers with less than ten years experience would remember clearly their first few years and be able to tell their story in more detail. Finally, I looked for schools near my work place or near my home place for ease of access. I sent selected teachers an e-mail with the informed consent form and a summary of the research proposal. Every teacher contacted responded that he or she would like to participate. I then needed to narrow the study to eight teachers, four lateral-entry teachers, one in each pathway, and four traditionally certified teachers, one in each pathway. After speaking with teachers by phone, I narrowed the sample to teachers who fit in each of the pathways, had less than 10 years of experience, and worked at a school within a 20 mile radius. My remaining need was to identify teachers who had left the profession. As I interviewed each teacher and explained
the research, I asked if he or she had friends who had left the profession and who might be willing to participate. Through that process I was able to contact two teachers who exited the profession and agreed to help in the study. In that way, I determined all of the participants.

See the chart below. A brief description of each participant follows the chart.

**Table 1: Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants:</th>
<th>Lateral Entry</th>
<th>Traditionally Certified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exiter</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Jennifer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Regular Ed</td>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Jerry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Schools</td>
<td>Joss</td>
<td>Jean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same School</td>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A profile of each participant follows, along with supporting quotes from the interviews.

**Jane: Lateral Entry Exiter.** “And that, like, the kids aren’t kids. Yeah, or like, somehow they’re – spec ed is a different form of the human species.”

Jane is currently an occupational therapist in Durham. She decided to go back to school for a graduate degree after her teaching experience. She is a white female, in her late 20’s, with reddish blonde hair and striking eyes. She is extremely energetic and enthusiastic when you speak with her. We met for both interviews at a Starbucks. She was prompt and easy to recognize as well as easy to establish conversation with. We set up outside in the patio area and spoke at length about her experiences. She grew up in Wisconsin. She went to school in Atlanta. She had been a sociology major in college and was deciding her next step
when she applied for Teach for America. She had been working at a pre-school with autistic children and enjoyed it. She believed that Teach for America would help her discover if she did truly want to teach and make the investment to go back to graduate school for certification. She had to explain the Teach for America program to me, as I was not familiar with it. The program is a two-year program. There is a small stipend, $5,000, as well as several weeks of intensive teacher training based in Texas provided the summer before candidates start teaching. Candidates are then sent to areas with teacher shortages to interview. The school systems in those areas hire the teachers. Teach for America provides continuing education through list serves and electronic community forums.

She acknowledged that she was naïve, young when she undertook her job at a rural middle school in eastern North Carolina. She spoke of a number of issues that drove her to leave the profession. With regard to preparation through Teach for America, she stated that her preparation was good given the time involved, one summer. She stated she felt confident writing a lesson plan; however, other aspects of teaching, such as classroom management and working with paraprofessionals was extremely difficult for her. She sought support from her mentor and her principal and believed that she received none. In fact, she told stories in which the principal undercut her authority and her mentor expressed her unwillingness to help her. When asked about her principal, Jane stated, “I definitely left because of her.” She did find support from her special programs department chair who helped her to navigate the paperwork and provided advice when needed. She stated, “If not for her, I would not have come back for the second year.” The department chair helped her to brainstorm lesson plans and work through IEP’s. The department chair, though, left after her first year and she had no
help at that point. Jane told several stories regarding her view of how the students were treated. She expressed her frustration that her students were often singled out unfairly, that they had the worst classrooms, and that they did not have grade level appropriate books.

Jane has not ruled out returning to the classroom. She noted that she enjoyed teaching for the “ah-hah” moments and being a part of the school community. Yet she was frustrated by the lack of support from other teachers and from the principal and by how she felt the special programs students she worked with were treated.

**Julie: Lateral Entry Special Programs Switched into Regular Education**  “It was the paperwork. The last year – that last year I had special ed, oh, my gosh. Crazy caseload.”

I thoroughly enjoyed meeting Julie and listening to her story. She is petite and has short, curly, black hair. She has a genuine smile and a passion for education that can be seen as she sometimes stammers for the precise words to describe her beliefs clearly. Julie and I took similar routes to employment in education, the self-financed route through a degree program via odd jobs. That route also means we arrived as educators a few years later than most. She received her education degree in English education. Before being hired as an English teacher full-time, she made the decision to switch into special programs. Her cooperating teacher had told her that she would have a better chance being hired as a special programs teacher than as an English teacher, as there was a shortage of special educators. She began interviewing and was hired by a school to teach special education the first fall after graduation.

Julie decided to pursue her certification in special education after being hired by obtaining a Master’s in Special Education degree from a local university. In speaking with
Julie, her love for helping students is evident. However, also evident is her struggle for equitable treatment for all of her students as well as her personal struggle to define equitable. At the heart of this struggle is the process called the MDR hearing, or manifestation determination hearing. Students who have been identified as special programs, and who are suspended for more than 10 days, must have their suspension reviewed in an MDR hearing. The goal of the hearing is to determine whether, because of the student’s disability, he or she was able to control the behavior that resulted in the suspension, as well to determine whether the school had the appropriate modifications in place and an appropriate behavior plan if it is required. Julie stated that she left special programs because of this process. In her description she expresses frustration over both the process itself, as well as the ideology behind the process. The students in whom the panel finds manifestation return to school. The students in whom the panel finds no manifestation are to stay at home, but receive homebound services anyway, generally from the special programs teacher. Julie felt that she was able to control her day in terms of teaching, planning, and IEP meetings, but that she had no control over student behavior and consequences, and how those consequences affected her. She also struggled with the idea of fairness with regard to that process. She stated, “So I kept feeling empathy for these kids who, you know, I know they were troubled and they had…they needed help. I didn't think I was the one who could help them. Meeting after meeting. I had kids who actually were in school, but who behaved. I couldn't help them during lunch or after school or… You know, who needed help, you know, with work or whatever. I felt like I was spending all the time on the kids with the trouble.” After 10 years of teaching special programs, Julie decided to use her regular education degree and switch into teaching English.
She has taught English two years. She has interesting insights into how regular educators view special educators given her dual-certification.

**Joss: Lateral Entry Change Schools.** “And you know, I knew everyone on a first-name basis there. But, I knew here would be a different story, and there'd be a lot more people, and a lot more things.”

Joss is in her late twenties. She’s Asian and of medium height with dark hair pulled back in a pony-tail. She has a great smile and laughs a lot as she talks. She is quick in her speech patterns, as well as her ability to understand a question and respond appropriately. She was one of the first respondents and the first teacher that I interviewed for the project. We met at her school and spoke in a conference room across the hall from her classroom. As I entered her classroom, everyone in it was working on a task. Two students were at their desks with a TA helping them. Another TA was at the computer at the side of the room, and Joss was at her desk on the computer. She recognized who I was and moved to give a few directions to the TA and then we went across the hall.

Joss has a degree in psychology, and had an interest in pursuing graduate degrees in psychology. However, during her senior year, she began working with a children’s theater group and enjoyed it. She decided she did not want to spend more time in school at that point and sought information about working with students as a teacher. She states, “I checked the box on the Teach for America form that said, ‘Would you be willing to teach special education?’ And I checked yes. And ……I got accepted in Teach for America. And then through that, I got placed in North Carolina. And I was qualified to teach special ed.” She continued her certification by asking the RALC, or regional area licensure center, to review
her transcript and determine the courses needed for certification. She took 5 courses on-line to become certified.

She describes herself as a problem-solver and as a reflective practitioner who has learned through trial and error and by asking questions. She also sets boundaries with regard to her work life. She stated, “It's more stressful during those six hours when you're in school. But, like, it's one of those things that you can leave at the door.” She switched schools not because she was unhappy with her previous school, but rather to move to a larger metropolis in order to have more opportunities, make more money, and have a shorter commute.

In speaking about the support she received as a lateral entry teacher, Joss was understanding and appreciative. At times her principal did not know how to support her, and she would simply ask him for what she needed. She also felt that working within a small system allowed her to meet and get to know the personnel at central office who could help her. She is also careful to note the economies of scale inherent with a larger system when she stated, “There's just – I mean, on the flip side, it being so much bigger, there's so many more resources.”

Joss has worked as a cross-categorical teacher, as a teacher for Mentally Disabled students, as a self-contained biology teacher and as an Autistic teacher. She has worked at a small school within a small system and now at a much larger school within a large school system. She has many stories and insights to share about her experiences and she speaks about each experience as she enjoyed it and has enjoyed learning from it.
Janet: Lateral Entry Same School  “And any time that it was, you know, so much that we just could not handle it, you know, administration would always come down. And you know, try to help us out.”

Janet has taught three years at the same school, but has switched positions within the school. She is in her late twenties and is African-American. She is petit, of medium height, wears her hair long, and she wears glasses. When she speaks with you, she looks you in the eye and is direct in her response, laughing at times. Janet decided to begin work as a special programs teacher after working with a program that worked with adults with autism. She said she looked around and realized that there was very little upward mobility. As a research assistant, there was not much room for growth in her salary, and the positions at the higher levels had little to no turnover. Janet had a degree in psychology and began interviewing for positions in special programs while also enrolling in a university master’s degree program.

Her first position in teaching was as a teacher for students with autism who are self-contained. She held that position for a year and then moved into a cross-categorical position, or one that allowed her to work with students with differing disabilities such as Learning Disabled or Other Health Impaired. When asked to describe her first year, she answered, “It was like trying to find your way in the dark. Just feeling around. Seeing if you could grab onto something so that you wouldn’t fall down and hurt yourself.” Working in a residential setting and a school were very different, a difference she was not prepared for. When asked about her coursework at the time, she stated it was not helpful either. When asked about administrative support, she expressed the belief that they were trying, by being available when she called, and by contacting central office for help. However, she believed she needed
someone to show her what to do, not tell her what to do. She moved from the AU classroom after her first year because she felt she could not help those students and she now enjoys working with students via team-taught classes and curriculum assistance classes.

**Jennifer: Traditionally Certified Exiter:** “…there was no way I could do my job. The priorities were messed up. Nobody cared about my kids”

I met Jennifer at a local coffee shop to speak to her about her experiences in education. She left teaching for many years to work as a consultant or advocate for students with special needs, as well as a tutor. She has recently returned to teaching, working at a local private school. She is originally from New York, and received her undergraduate and graduate degrees there. She was recruited by a school system in the southern area to come and live and work in the South. She taught three years at the same school before deciding to leave and pursue other avenues. She has worked in jobs since that require use of her special programs background, even if they are not direct teaching positions within a school.

Jennifer is short and petite, in her mid thirties. She has blond hair. She is very articulate about the profession of teaching and is able to give relevant examples and use appropriate terminology to describe her beliefs. She has recently begun teaching again, at a small private school, and is able to describe best practices at her current school that were not in place in the first school she taught at. Jennifer acknowledges that several factors led to her decision to leave. First and foremost was a lack of support from her principal. She stated, “Just taking an interest would've been nice. Just to start with that. And to care about the kids.” Other factors related to principal support involved unequal caseload distribution,
inappropriate student and teacher scheduling, and regular education teachers not working to
develop and implement IEP’s via meetings or other required steps.

Jennifer also is careful to state that she was young, had a limited support network
because she had moved to the South, and so felt overwhelmed. She goes on to say, “And you
know, we can talk about that if you want. It’s…it’s amazing to – to teach in your 30s instead
of teaching in your 20s. Just the confidence level you have. And the background that you
can bring.” She believes, even looking back, that she couldn’t do the job she was asked to do
during her first few years of teaching, and so she had to leave that position.

Jean: Traditionally Certified Change School: “And I may have to give him the
answers, and tell him how to spell everything. But if he'll write it down, I mean, I'm
making progress. And I make progress with some of the really tough kids.”

I met Jean at her current school and we spoke in a conference room. She is in her mid
20’s. She has long brown hair and is tall and thin. She is married to a teacher who works at
her same school. She became interested in teaching in college, specifically with hearing-
impaired students, and so has a degree and certification that allows her to work with the
hearing impaired. She is able to sign. Her current school has a program for the hearing
impaired, which attracted her to move from a middle school position to a high school
position. The teachers that work in the positions with hearing impaired students will be
retiring soon. Hence, Jean took a special programs position working with OCS (Occupational
Course of Study) students to be at the school and available when the hearing impaired
positions open up. At the time she transferred, she was not qualified to teach in the OCS
program. However, she completed HOUSSE certification in order to become qualified. She
is also a soccer coach at her school. She taught two years at the middle school and one year at the high school. The OCS program that she joined is a large program, with four other teachers and 60 students.

When asked what she enjoyed most about her job, Jean replied, “Being able to connect with just the different kids. Just looking to help them.”

**Jasmine: Traditionally Certified Same School:** “I mean, I think years ago...you know. But now that we're not teaching...you know, I mean, for the most part we're not teaching classes.”

Jasmine has been teaching 10 years. She is the department chair at her school. She is tall and thin with long brown hair and a wide smile. She is extremely forthright and practical in her responses regarding special education. She acknowledges that recent changes in special education laws have changed the job itself and she directs some criticism at colleagues who are unwilling to embrace the new job and the needs and duties of the job.

Jasmine decided to become a teacher in college. She began as an industrial psychology major and realized she would need an advanced degree to “do anything with it.” A professor suggested she explore special education. She began working in a small rural county outside of Asheboro. She lived at home at the time, which she states helped her to stay in teaching.

“I was so desperate. I'm telling you, I cried every day. I would go home, and I was living with my parents at the time. And I would go home, and my dad was like, 'It'll be okay.' You know, every morning my dad would take me out to breakfast. Every morning.”
Jasmine moved to an urban area and began working at a high school. She moved after one year to a new high school that was opening in the same district in order to become the department chair. The most recent move she has made, over a year ago, was made to limit the commute she has each day. She moved to an established school within the same district to become department chair.

As Jasmine tells her story, it is apparent that when she sees a problem, she does not spend time or energy debating the development of the problem, she simply works to solve it. This attitude is evident as she speaks about scheduling issues for her students, parents who are demanding, ineffective regular and special programs teachers, and paperwork issues. One statement that exemplifies this attitude is her explanation of teachers attention to IEP responsibilities.

I think there's some people who just have this thing inside of them that just says, that's what – it's part of my job. I'm supposed to do that. Because that's how I am. You know? I just have this – you know, I'm like, it's just part of the job. You do what you're supposed to do. That's part of it. But I think there's some people that…it's – it's like, well, that's just one more thing I have to do. And I'm not going to – going to bother with it.

She understands people and their different motivations and works well with them.

Jerry: Traditionally certified Special Educator who transfers into Regular Education.

“I gained credibility when I moved from special education into regular education.”
Jerry was the last interviewee that I met. She teaches at a large urban, magnet school. She is currently teaching World History and Advanced Placement World History. She agreed to come by my school for the interviews. She came by in the afternoon and as we met and began to walk to my office, the fire alarm sounded. She immediately recognized that I needed to take action and she excused herself outside graciously. After checking the fire alarm and re-setting the building, I went and found her outside and we went to my office to talk.

Jerry is petite, with black hair and glasses. She is in her late forties or early fifties. She began teaching at the community college level in social studies and then received a Master’s degree in special education. She has taught special programs for twenty-six years and switched into regular education two years ago. She remained at the same school after the switch. When asked why she switched, she immediately said, “I was burnt out. Not with the students but with the paperwork, the conferences, and the exceedingly demanding parents. It was impacting my health.” When asked if her colleagues regarded her differently after making the switch, she stated that she had gained a new credibility because she now had a content area. When asked during her career as a special educator about administrative support, Jerry is very frank. She worked at various schools to meet the needs of her family, where her daughter would attend school and her commute. She has worked for supportive principals and ones who would not “back her up when it came to parents.” However, she did not make career decisions based on the level of administrative support, but rather to meet the needs of her family. Her questions and responses indicated that she is still reflective about her practice and excited to teach.
Summary of Categories of Findings

As each participant talked about the job itself, it became clear there were many different aspects and that the different participants found frustration with different aspects of the job. Categories that were created during coding based on participant stories included paperwork, parents, scheduling, IEP meetings, MDR meetings, interaction with regular education teachers, interaction with paraprofessionals, discipline issues, a perceived difference in resource allocation, caseload distribution, and interactions with central office staff and school administrators. The job is a complex one that at times seems to not involve teaching in the traditional sense.

Each participant was asked the question, “why teach?” Each answered using the words “help”, “growth”, and “enjoy working with kids.” Julie glowed as she spoke of a success story as a tenth grade special programs teacher teaching a resource English class of all identified students.

“I remember my most rewarding time as a special ed teacher was when I had eight of my 24 resource kids pass the writing test. It was way below the state average.

[laughs] Thirty-three percent. But you know, most of these kids start off the year without ever having written an essay. You know, five-paragraph essay. So. That was a big moment. You know, I was very proud of them.”

Janet told a similar success story regarding one of her former students who had been suspended and was attending an alternative school.

And he called my cell phone at…let's see…five o'clock. And he was like, 'Ms. ……,

I did it.' And my mood switched like nobody's business. Because actually, the thing
was, he found out that he passed the class, and then graduation was at seven o'clock.
So it was, like, no time to play around. So it's like, wow, I was so happy. So I
quickly jumped up and got some clothes on, and went to the graduation at that
alternative school. But it was just a good, good feeling.

When asked, “why teach?”, each teacher told a success story and of a desire to help students succeed.

In reviewing the transcripts from the interviews of each of the participants, and
developing the codes and networks using AtlasTi, the researcher was able to discern three
broad categories of findings that can be described within the interviews. The participants
spent quite a bit of time providing a detailed description of the job duties and perceived
expectations for a special programs teacher. Each also described the preparation received and
personal qualities that enabled the participant to work as a special programs teacher. Lastly,
and the focus of this study, the participants spent time describing the types of support they
felt the school system that employed them provided, from administrative support to other
types of resources, as well as whether the type of support provided encouraged them to
continue as a special educator.

**Category 1: The Job Itself**

As teachers began to discuss their job, duties and responsibilities, there appeared to
be conflict between the expressed desire to help students and the demands of their jobs that
did not directly involve student instruction. Areas of job duties that were described included,
scheduling of students, caseload monitoring, paperwork demands, discipline issues,
managing interactions with regular education teachers, working with paraprofessionals,
setting up and facilitating meetings, interactions with administrators and central office staff, and interactions with parents.

Each teacher described her caseload and how the caseload was assigned and managed. The caseload is the number of students that the teacher is responsible for by managing the IEP and communicating IEP goals and plans to the student’s parents and teachers. The caseload is different depending on teacher assignment. For instance, Occupational Course of Study teachers generally work only with students in that program, as that program has specific requirements for graduation that OCS teachers are more familiar with. In the same vein, students who are multi-handicapped self-contained, or AU self-contained have a unique course of study familiar only to the teacher. These caseloads then are limited to 10 or fewer students. The responses from AU and OCS teachers regarding caseload distribution indicated they believed it to be fair overall. Joss stated,

And for every meeting that they kind of have that a parent doesn't show, or you know, it can be a quick 20-minute, 35-minute, 25-minute meeting, I have a three-hour meeting that, you know, that they probably – we've had several of those this year. [laughs] (inaudible) I think they're kind of happy that as long as I keep the kids in there, and out of trouble – even within the department, you know, it's like as long as I keep them busy, occupied, happy and people content, that they're okay with the fact that I'm not taking over more of the…the other kids. Because in the long run it would probably take more time for them to train me on how to do those than them just taking that folder.
Jennifer, who worked as a special programs teacher at the elementary level, expressed frustration at her large numbers when discussing caseload distribution. As a beginning teacher she felt there should be a limit to the number of students assigned to a caseload. She stated that when she asked for the number, she was not given a specific answer. She continued to receive more and more students as students were identified in elementary school. However, the self-contained teachers did not receive new students.

Self-contained teachers were sitting kind of pretty. Because they had their – you know, 10, 12 children, and they were fine. And we were going nuts. Because nobody—we had no help. We had no assistant. We had nothing.

The next year, she and a colleague worked to split the caseloads more evenly, by dividing the number of identified students by the number of teachers. When asked how that worked, she responded;

I think the year, as far as I was concerned, went a whole lot better. I think the kids learned more. I felt less burdened by all the paperwork. Self-contained teachers didn't like it, as you can imagine, because it made it more difficult for them.

When asked about preparation regarding caseload management, most of the participants responded that they felt ill-prepared. Comments included “using every form in the file cabinet” and “learning through trial and error”. Teachers also stated they saw one IEP form from one state during their preparation or certification process and were expected to understand the forms and policies and procedures for their specific job in a different state. The lone teacher who expressed a feeling of preparation through her certification program
was Jasmine, the department chair at a large urban high school. She stated that she felt very prepared because her cooperating teacher required her to facilitate IEP meetings.

   The teacher that I did my student teaching with was great. In that she made me do things that I don't know that others necessarily make them do. For instance, I had to do an annual review. I had to do a re-evaluation. And I had to do an initial.

The lateral entry teacher who exited, Jane, when discussing preparation to facilitate IEP meetings and caseloads stated,

   It could be bad that you don't really know what you're doing. Hopefully, people (inaudible) IEP five years ago. That was bad. I had no idea. I had really no idea. Another teacher did. It was – I went to them. I have an IEP meeting the end of the week. And I…had gotten all the paperwork. And I'm looking at it. Okay, now I have to write…this new IEP and I…don't even know… I'll check all the same boxes. I guess I can do that.

Julie, the lateral entry teacher who switched into regular education, spent some time talking about her second year. For, it was in her second year that she realized what she did not know, the responsibility that she had assumed, and became worried. She stated,

   It was the second year that was much tougher. I don't know if anybody's ever said that before. But the second year, you know what you don't know. Like, the first year I had no idea what I was doing. It was okay because nobody really – I didn't worry about what I didn't know. The second year I had a better idea of what I was supposed to be doing. [laughs] It was just…overwhelming.
Julie, before switching into regular education, described her situation as similar to slowly dying.

But it really got worse as the years went on. And my friend, she described it perfectly. She said, like, it's a frog. You know? And you put him in water. And you turn up the heat. He'll stay in there until he dies. Because you can turn it up gradually….But you know, if you put him in boiling water – you know. But it wasn't –at first it was just lukewarm water.

Inherently linked to the caseload itself is the paperwork and time involved in meetings to manage the caseload. Each teacher, lateral entry and traditionally certified, expressed frustration at the amount of time required to properly write IEP’s as well as the pressure felt from administrators and parents regarding IEP goals and accommodations. Jean, traditionally certified, summed up the statements about the first meeting and her feeling regarding lack of preparation, “And…there was like – it's like, okay, here's your IEP. Go have a meeting. And I'm like, wait a minute. I don't know what I'm doing.”

Jasmine, the department chair, was matter of fact in her response about IEP’s and working with them;

I'm like – as a special ed teacher you have IEP meetings. That is what you do. You have to write IEPs. So if you're – if you hate that, then you need to look at something else. Because that piece is not going to change. You're going to have lots of those meetings.
Much of the frustration that arose from IEP meetings was not simply the meetings themselves, or the time involved in the meeting, but rather that the meetings were more of a priority to parents and administration than the students’ progress seemed to be. Jennifer, the traditionally certified teacher who left the profession stated, “The priorities were messed up. Nobody cared about my kids. They cared about my paperwork.” These sentiments were echoed by Julie, who exited into regular education. In speaking about her former principal she stated, “And she was – you know, I think as far as her compassion – that's the thing. She had a lot of compassion and… But you know, if your paperwork's not right, then you're just screwed. You know?” Julie described a teacher whom she believed was an effective talented teacher.

We had a teacher in our department. And the administrators were always on her case for everything. And you know, I put my paperwork first. That was my job. And I hated that that's the way it was. My paperwork came before my students. And I hated that. This teacher put her students first. And she – her paperwork was wrong. Or – you know, it was never right. And it was always an issue. And you know, she did a great job with the kids. But she was recognized for the – oh, her paperwork is wrong. Bad teacher. You know?

The pressure Julie felt to maintain her paperwork as well as the desire she felt to appropriately serve her students is evident in a comment about her school’s emphasis on paperwork and maintaining your caseload.

But you know, that folder, that caseload is yours. You know, I'm like, you know, that's it. That kid messes up, that's – you know, it's yours. You own it. If the folder's
messed up, it's your fault. Or… You know what I mean? It was – that's the way I felt. And that's the way the administrators looked at you. If your folder was messed up. [sighs] Bad teacher. You know, everything else you do is nothing, you know. But it's those folders that… And our last administrator…she did not like special ed. That was probably another reason. I did not – we did not feel valued. The whole morale was bad.

Special programs teachers manage their caseloads in a number of ways. These teachers must arrange for annual IEP meetings in order to review the program in place and determine if the student is making adequate progress. Regular educators, parents, teachers, and the student if appropriate must attend the meeting. The meetings may include other professionals depending upon the disability or the needs of the student. For instance, a visually impaired student may have a braillist at the meeting. Multi-handicapped students may have occupational therapists. Central office staff may attend as well to both monitor the district’s interest and help the teacher with decision-making regarding district resources. If the student requires special transportation, a member of that department may attend. In other words, these meetings can be quite small and informal, or large and formal dependent on the student’s needs. The special programs teacher must arrange the time and place of the meeting and contact all interested parties. One common lamentation from all of the special educators is the frustration felt in the attendance of regular educators at these meetings. These teachers seemed to work around their regular educator colleagues’ unwillingness to attend.

Jennifer, who left her position, was candid regarding her survival tips while working with regular educators.
…in particular, the first year. You know, you're told – there were certain guidelines that at an IEP meeting, X, Y and Z must attend. All right. So you know, you would try your best to follow that. And then inevitably, you'd end up with a conflict, and Y couldn't come. Or something. You learned that just out of pure survival, you could move on. And find Y later. And have Y sign the paperwork, and date it back. There was a ton of that that had to happen. Which wasn't right.

Julie, the lateral entry teacher who switched into regular education, echoes this belief when she states, “But you know, the special ed teacher is desperate for a regular ed signature.” Jean, traditionally certified who has switched schools, said with humor, “They dodge us. Because they don't want to go to IEP meetings. They see us coming, and No! They see the email, and don't open it.” Jane, the lateral entry teacher who exited, recognized the problem and again uses humor when she speaks about it.

Or the IEP meetings, if you had to have someone in there. It was like, 'We don't have time for that.' 'I don't even know that kid.' I'm like, 'Well…yes. But you do teach them one period of the day. And I really need you to be there.'

Jasmine, who is the department chair, is practical in her understanding of this symbiosis with regular education teachers. She notes,

What I find is at every school there's a select group that will come to every IEP meeting. And there's a select group that never comes. And I find – you know, I've found that same – it's the same teachers that will come to meetings. And the same teachers that don't come to meetings.
The frustration felt by special education regarding regular educators attending IEP meetings is compounded by the general feeling of disregard that many of the teachers express when working with their regular education counterparts. Even Jasmine, the department chair who is matter of fact in her assessment of the relationship between special ed teachers and regular ed teachers, and who is pragmatic about her job duties as a special programs teachers, stated:

I think that as a regular ed teacher [clears throat], when you get that list of special ed kids, you're like, 'Oh, great. I got this group of kids. I got to do all this special stuff, you know, to help them.' I think a lot of regular ed teachers don't think that special ed teachers really do anything.

Jennifer, the teacher traditionally certified who exited the profession for a few years, told a story about her first few of years teaching and her interaction with the regular education teachers she worked with. During both interviews, she re-iterated this story, leading the interviewer to acknowledge its significance.

I can remember walking to a – knocking on the door of a third grade teacher's trailer, at the end of the day. And opening it. And she goes, 'Oh, not you again. What do you want now?’ I was like, 'Well, thanks.' Okay. And that is how (inaudible) feeling. Sure. The majority of them do a good job of trying to be compliant. But they – I felt like I was bothering them. Like, okay, I'm going to need you to be at this meeting. I'm going to need you to sign these forms. And I need you to do all this stuff. I tried to do so much of that for them. You know. I'll prepare all this. All you have to do is show up.
An interesting perspective regarding the relationship between regular educators and special educators was provided by the two participants who had switched into regular education. Both acknowledged that once they switched into regular education, they were viewed differently by the regular education peers. Jerry stated that she had more “credibility” among regular educators as a content area teacher. Julie, the lateral entry teacher who switched into regular education, stated:

They're not very kind. They're very un – they're not understanding. I hear comments a lot. Now, I… And it's…sometimes I have to hold my tongue. Or sometimes I won't. About [sighs]…about what they do. You know? And it's – you know, I've done both. I will never go back to special. I mean…not because of the kids. But I would never teach it. They don't think they work hard. They don't understand…they just don't understand…what a pain in the butt the whole thing is.

Each of the eight participants acknowledged a separation between their regular education counterparts and special education teachers. Each acknowledged that there are some regular educators who seem to truly appreciate the efforts of the special programs teacher and not view him or her as a “bother.” Jane, the lateral entry exiter, had an interesting idea as she spoke about this divide. She stated,

But having, like, a special ed teacher and a regular ed teacher working together to reach, you know, children with all sorts of needs and learning styles, and everything else. And I mean…I don't know. I sometimes think that maybe education is a good way to go. So I don't know if just having teachers talk more, or, you know, having
there be some, like, observation. Like, having regular teachers observe in special, you know, special ed classes to see that they're really not that different.

The interaction with regular educators often comes through IEP meetings. As part of the job itself, special education teachers must plan and implement meetings throughout the year. All of our participants noted this reality of their job and most lamented that it took away from their ability to teach. Each meeting must have the following school personnel present, a regular education teacher, the case manager, and an LEA or representative of the Local Education Agency, who is generally a school administrator. Each school struggles to develop a system to effectively communicate meeting dates, times, and places to all involved to ensure that the guidelines are met. Jasmine’s school runs all meetings through her, the department chair, to the administrative team. When asked about how the meetings are handled at her school Jasmine responds realistically;

…some people feel like that their meetings are always being canceled. But nobody else is getting their meetings canceled. And it's like, how is it that one person gets priority over someone else. You know, so like, if five people submit for the same day…and there's only four administrators, somebody's going to not get their meeting scheduled.

Within these meetings, special education case managers must work with parents, regular education teachers, and often the student to develop a plan for success, when all might have differing viewpoints. Joss, the lateral entry teacher who has switched schools, talks about setting up the meetings and expresses some of her frustration with both the parents and teachers:
I've seen it work absolutely horribly. I mean, it's been to the point in (name of) County where we had to – the parents had to push. And really have had to force modifications. And regular ed teacher, she's coming out and saying, 'I'm not doing it. I'm not working with these kids. I'm not doing the modifications. They're going to do it like everyone else does.' And our biggest frustration is there hadn't been a lot of – you know, pressure. But nothing ever seemed to get done to really push the issue to where I change what happened. I mean, even with IEP meetings. And I do that here.

Or just here, you know, teachers not coming to IEP meetings.

Julie, who switched into regular education, expressed that she felt like she was being “meetinged to death.” When asked to describe her typical day as a regular education teacher, she indicates her dissatisfaction with meetings by saying, “Teaching, teaching, teaching. Grading, grading, grading. Lot – lot for me – you know, few meetings I have now. I don't have as many meetings.”

Part of the meeting process that each educator spoke about was working with difficult parents. Parents of course want what is in their student’s best interest and can become frustrated with the public school system. The face of that system is often seen as the case manager. Jerry, the experienced teacher who switched into regular education, did not speak much on the role of the principal in her career decisions except in this case. She wanted her principals to back her as she was the professionally trained special educator and her opinion should carry weight. Jasmine, as department chair, has chosen to assume the high profile cases. She described these parents when we met,
They just – they cause a lot of controversy. They're at the school a lot. They're always complaining. There's... Trying to calm people – parents down when they get upset. I had a parent – we actually just met yesterday to... A few weeks ago she was coming up to kick some ass. And... she had bail money to bail herself out, she wasn't afraid.

Special educators, as case managers, must deal with parent frustration regarding regular education teachers, their colleagues, regarding their actions in the classroom and whether their colleagues are appropriately implementing the modifications outlined in the IEP. Joss talked about working in a rural area where parents did not feel empowered to speak to “the teacher.”

And it's funny because it's usually the parents who come and complain to us first. They rarely go to the regular ed teacher first. You know, we're their case manager. We're their team leader, whatever. Special ed, they know us, they've worked with us before. So-and-so – Mr. So-and-so is not doing his modifications. He's failing, he's failing, he's failing. What can we do? And we have to kind of empower the parents to confront the teacher.

Responding to parent demands is not the only frustrating part of the special educators job. Special educators also spoke about the difficulty in times of generating parent participation. Jean, the traditionally certified teacher who has switched schools, stated that, “I...do about 10 IEPs a year. And maybe one or two parents will show up for an IEP meeting.” Jennifer also spoke about having to “get the signature” and what she felt like she needed to do to accomplish that. She had to go to find these parents.
Because they wouldn't…come in. They wouldn't return calls, or whatever it was. Or…you know. They would return a call. But they just – it wasn't convenient for them to come when I needed them. So I'd be like, okay, I'll just come to you.

As special programs teachers discussed a major aspect of their job, discipline, it fell into different categories when the researcher completed coding including, inconsistency of discipline with administrators and regular education teachers, the equity issues regarding discipline with a special programs student, and classroom management issues for the special programs teacher with a higher number of student discipline issues. Jennifer spoke of a young man that she was assigned to escort from the bus in the morning to breakfast to help him with behavior issues. She stated, “But you know, he was just very difficult to deal with. I didn't know how to deal with him.” Jane, the lateral entry exit, had multiple stories about a class that she had taken on, knowing that there were discipline issues as there were many students repeating eighth grade, but believing that her principal would support her.

I knew – I knew – I was warned, especially the eighth grade language arts class is especially difficult. It was – it was six or seven boys who had all failed eighth grade several times. And they had been told that if they passed this one semester of language arts, that after Christmas they would be moved up to the high school.

She went on to describe, and she described this scene in both interviews, a situation in which a student threatened her and the principal did not support her.

And then I had – the first year – what happened is that one of my sixth grade
math students who – he was – during class, he would put his hands in, like, a gun shape. And make noises, and point at me like he was shooting me. And he'd mumble, like, you know, 'You're dead, you're dead.' It was a little distracting, to teach when someone is [laughs] – you know, imaginarily killing you. And so I didn't go to the principal right away. I called the parents of the child. And I said, you know, 'I'm having some behavior issues with your son. What do you want to do?' And she pretty much said, 'I don't know what to do with him.' … And so I said, 'Well, I don't know what to do.' So I went to the principal, hoping she could help me out. ….

Well, about 30 minutes later the mother and the principal came down to my classroom. They walked in, and the principal said, 'Would it be okay if I talked to your kids for a minute?' Sure. No problem. And she proceeded to go on this rant about how I was a white teacher from the North. And she knew that I didn't understand any of them. And they just had to put up with me. And that, you know, she was sorry that they were stuck with me. But they should do their best. And – you know. This horribly – pretty much like telling them that I was, you know, the worst thing that ever happened to them. And they were so sorry. And, like, I couldn't believe that she was saying it. And she – and then she kind of laughed. And I was, like, 'What?' And my assistant was, like – the assistant was, like, 'Did she just say what I think she said?' And I was like, 'I think so.' And the kids were, like – it was as quiet as I'd ever heard them. Like, they didn't say anything. And I was just like, 'All right. Well, I guess we're going to get on with the lesson.' What else can you do?
And so that was, like, the first sort of, like, wow. She really doesn't like me. And I
don't know why it is.

Other special programs teachers spoke about their concern about the perceived
consistency of discipline when working with special programs kids. They noted that special
programs students would often commit more egregious offenses and receive a lighter
punishment than their regular education peers. They also question the fairness of a special
programs student receiving homebound services because of committing a serious violation
and no longer being allowed to attend school, while a regular education student would simply
no longer be in school and would not receive the homebound service. In other words, are
they rewarding poor behavior? Jean, the traditionally certified teacher who switched
schools, commented about the consistency of discipline with administrators when she said,

And…he was a regular kid, and he was gone. No – (inaudible) nothing. (inaudible)
expelled. First time he'd ever done anything. Not even late to class. And you're like,
okay, wait a minute. What's going on here? Our kids get in fights. I mean, we got
kids that have 15 referrals. And you'll get one-day in-school suspension. It's like,
okay, this kid in regular ed didn't do something half as bad. And…gets expelled.

Frustrates me.

Julie, who switched into regular education, summed up the whole process and her frustration
with it by saying,

I think special ed is great to help kids who have learning problems, who need, you
know, adaptations and modifications, whatever. But it's the discipline. I just… And
I felt like…the kids…in these situations were getting special treatment. I just thought
it was really unfair that these kids who continually got suspended, troubled kids – and (inaudible) by saying the ones who kept getting in trouble, you know. [sighs] I just felt like I was helping them when I was helping the ones who were in school, wanted to be there learning. You know what I mean? It's just very frustrating…… But you still suspend them. They get services. That just does not seem fair. To… I mean, that's not life. You know? That's not life. That's not…fair to the – you know, the ones who aren't suspended. It's actually not fair to the kid who gets suspended. For him to get – or her to get special treatment.

Teachers most often speak of administrative support in terms of discipline as well as in terms of helping with IEP meetings and difficult parents. Other types of principal interaction noted by the participants included gathering resources, developing a schedule to help teachers and students be successful, and setting school wide priorities that address the needs of special programs students. As the participants were asked to speak about interactions with administration as part of the job itself, the findings were not surprising. The two participants who left the teaching profession both stated that they did so directly because of the actions of their principal. The other participants would note positive and negative concerns about their perception of administrative support. These will be addressed by the researcher under the heading of support provided by the school.

**Category 2: Teacher Preparation for the Job Itself**

Each of the participants discussed the preparation and skills brought to the job of special educator. The lateral entry teacher preparation was different for the different teachers, depending on their entry into special programs. Two of the lateral entry teachers went
through the Teach for America Program. One of the lateral entry teachers was a newly
certified English teacher and was unable to find a position in English and so took a job as a
special programs teacher, having the teacher preparation but without any special programs
background. She chose to complete certification via a Master’s degree program at a local
university. The other lateral entry candidate had worked in an adult rehabilitation home and
was enrolled in a Master’s degree program in special education and brought those
experiences with her to her new job.

The traditionally certified teachers also had varied backgrounds in terms of
preparation. One had become certified in New York and was recruited to North Carolina as a
first year teacher. One was certified from a North Carolina college in the field of hearing
impaired and worked in a different area of disability and had to achieve certification via the
HOUSSSE process. One was certified at a North Carolina university and then returned home
to a smaller town to begin her first position. The last participant had been certified in a
different state, Ohio, and moved to North Carolina twenty years ago. It is interesting to note
that of the eight participants, six had undergraduate degrees in psychology. Of the lateral
entry participants, three out of four were psychology majors who faced the decision
regarding what to do with that degree and decided to pursue special education. When each
participant was asked directly if she felt prepared the first year as a special education teacher,
without exception, each one replied no.

As the researcher reviewed the respondents’ transcripts, and developed codes, three
major codes emerged regarding teacher preparation: teacher preparation with curriculum,
teacher preparation within an internship, and teacher preparation at the college, university, or
lateral entry program level with regard to coursework. Jane, the lateral entry teacher who switched into regular education, summed up her beliefs regarding her preparation within the curriculum using humor. In her first year as a special programs teacher, she was assigned to teach a resource class, which means only special programs students would be in the class, physical science class.

It surprised me that nobody was really concerned that I didn't know, you know, it was like, okay, here's your desk. You can use those books for science. And you know, I – they just – you know, and it wasn't like they were just, you know, mean and terrible. [laughs] You know, they had to get their own stuff ready. And I won't say they weren't helpful. They were helpful. They were very nice people. But I was, like, surprised. I mean, I've never taught science. Isn't anybody worried that I don't know what I'm doing?

Jennifer, the traditionally certified exiter, several times during our interview noted a lack of emphasis during her teacher preparation on curriculum. “But…I knew nothing about reading methods. And programs. Curriculum. Nothing. Nothing. And that was really, really hard.” Jasmine, the traditionally certified teacher at the same school, has a realistic approach to curriculum preparation given the new constraints of No Child Left Behind. Teachers who are licensed as special programs teachers may no longer teach content specific courses. In other words, Jasmine could not teach the science course Julie spoke of above given today’s laws. Only a certified science teacher could teach that course. Jasmine could serve as a teacher within the class to help provide the modifications to the special programs students, but not as the teacher of record according to No Child Left Behind. Jasmine said, “We're certified in
special ed, reading, writing and math. I mean, so…when it comes to – I can't teach an English class. I can be put in an English class to support the teacher. Now, as special ed teacher, I can go in there, and I can step up to the plate."

Jasmine was also particularly complimentary of her internship experience, whereas she was the only traditionally certified teacher to note that it was a beneficial experience. She now uses that experience when she has student teachers to help them become more prepared. My…student teacher – or the teacher that I did my student teaching with was great. In that she made me do things that I don't know that others necessarily make them do. For instance. I had to do an annual review. I had to do a re-evaluation. And I had to do an initial. She made me do all the paperwork. She made me do everything that needed to be done for that. She made me go to every meeting that she had to go to. Jasmine believed that her educational background prepared her for many of the aspects of being a special needs teacher because of her internship. However, she acknowledged that she had a very difficult first year and was glad she lived at home and had the support of her parents throughout that first year. She said, “The part that I was not prepared for was going to a place and having to fit in.”

Jean, who is traditionally certified and recently switched schools, also felt like she had a good educational experience but acknowledged that she felt unprepared for the job. I was shown an IEP in one class, one day… There was no instruction with it. It was like, here. Here's an IEP. Fill it out….then I never saw another – and I got here. I see an IEP. And it was nothing like that IEP. And…there was like – it's like, okay,
here's your IEP. Go have a meeting. And I'm like, wait a minute. *I don't know what I'm doing.*

Jennifer, also traditionally certified, enjoyed her internship experience but again felt that it did not prepare her for her job as a special educator. She had a fifteen-week student teaching experience that she described as very good, longer than the usual experience, at a diagnostic clinic that helped her later as she tested students for initial placement. When asked to describe the internship in more detail, she acknowledged that she did not teach the entire time.

I did more watching. Picked up things slower, I guess because I had more time. And I don't think I ever...there was never a time where she (cooperating teacher) wasn't there for any... You know, other than if she went to the teacher's lounge for part of the class. And you know, went to do or run an errand. She was never gone. So I never had sole responsibility.

She stated, when asked to sum up her educational preparation for teaching, “I didn't get – not enough of the practical.”

The lateral entry participants were even more critical of their preparation, but at the same time acknowledged how difficult it would be to develop a program to adequately prepare them to teach children with disabilities. Julie, the lateral entry teacher who has since switched into regular education, when speaking about her first experience, noted she was not ready, but that she was glad to have a job.

They hired me the day before school started. I mean, I didn't have any work days. It was, here's your schedule. And I was just so happy to have a job. That I could –
[laughs] I would have taken anything. And…I think a lot of — well…I don't know. I was like that. I can't say all young teachers are like that.

She noted that she felt like she didn’t know anything and she was surprised that neither her colleagues nor administration seemed concerned that she didn’t know anything.

And fortunately, I only had five students. There's no End of Course Exam at the time in physical science. And they could barely read. And they were so sweet. They didn't know I didn't know anything. And world history was a lot easier for me.

Because it goes chronologically. [laughs]

Joss talks about the Teach for America program with fondness and explains the intensity of the 5 week class during the summer. However, she too said that she spent most of her time feeling unprepared and learning what she needed to learn through trial and error on the job.

We taught in the morning. For three hours. And we team-taught with three or four other teachers. And in the afternoon we took classes on lesson planning, on long-term planning, on curriculum, on reading. Everything. I mean, covering AP. And that's hard because you have people from all different parts of the country. And trainers here from all different parts of the country.

Teach for America gave her the “big picture” but not the everyday steps a teacher must take to be successful in the classroom.

I think – well, in the sense of having an idea of what I wanted my classroom to look like. And how I wanted it to run? Having no clue how to get there, how to make it happen. But having an idea of kind of the really big picture. Of, you know, I want students to sit in their desks. You know, I want students to be organized, and I want
to have a routine, and I want to do this and that. And you know, and having that big vision for it. But really, like I said, having no idea how to make that happen initially. During the interview, Joss acknowledged that she learned those things through trial and error and by asking her colleagues for help. She also noted that the main gap that she felt during her preparation was in understanding learning disabilities themselves.

Just really unprepared for understanding the disabilities of what I was working with. You know, and whatever – what it means to be LD or EMD, whatever on the afternoons and everything. But I don't think unless you've actually seen it and worked with it, you can ever be prepared for it. And you know, even if you've seen it and worked with it, every kid is so different.

Janet, the lateral entry teacher who has switched positions within the same school, gained certification through master’s degree work at a local university. She believed that the master’s program made some assumptions about what she had learned as an undergraduate. Her undergraduate degree was in psychology, not in education, so she did not know how to write a lesson plan, or have previous information about classroom management. Her graduate courses did not cover these topics but rather ranged from “working with general education teachers”, to “the IEP process”, and “tests and measurements”. When asked if the program was helpful, she stated it was once she had moved within her school from an AU classroom to a resource, or PALS, type of class.

She said, “I was really unprepared for understanding the disabilities of what I was working with.” Jane, who was lateral entry and has exited the field, stated point blank that she was not prepared. She would have liked to have had an internship with a cooperating teacher who
could give her daily feedback. She lacked a strong relationship with her mentor and received little feedback. She needed a better understanding of how to work with paraprofessionals and create a cooperative atmosphere. However, given her feelings regarding inadequate preparation, she stated

I think that's true for any job, though. Now that I'm older, I think that you can really get a certain – can get sort of the knowledge you need. But when it comes to really doing the job, you have to learn that on the job.

The belief that much of what is learned is learned on-the-job, was echoed by Julie and Joss, lateral entry teachers, as well as by Jennifer, Jean, and Jasmine, traditionally certified teachers. In other words, six of the eight participants believed that on the job learning is a must for success in special programs.

**Category 3: Support systems the teacher brought to the school and support systems within the school**

Each of the applicants discussed the types of support networks they developed to help them in the workplace. This support was either provided by the school in terms of resources, adequate scheduling, support personnel such as mentors or central office staff, or other types of stated resources. Each applicant also brought their own set of resources with them. These resources can include stated beliefs and personality traits, as well as family and friends who helped them. Julie stated that her level of maturity helped her succeed. “But I mean, realistically, I was older, also. I was 27. And I was ready for a real job.” Jasmine, who was traditionally certified, said she cried for the first few weeks. Her father was supportive in that he took her to work each day and helped her make bulletin boards for her classroom. She
also, throughout the interviews, maintained the importance of keeping a positive attitude and
doing her best work. She stated that special educators can fall into a trap of negativity,
especially when discussing their working relationship with their regular education
counterparts.

   But then when I proved to them that I was only asking them to do this because I was
   trying to make a difference with the kids, they really started to come around and like
   me. And then you know, there was never an issue of, you know, well, she doesn't do
   anything. But again…I had to do something to show them I am trying to make a
   difference.

She understands when regular educators discount the work of special educators because she
knows that many special educators do not put forth the positive effort needed to develop
those relationships and gain esteem.

   I can be put in an English class to support the teacher. Now, as special ed teacher, I
   can go in there, and I can step up to the plate. And I can say, 'I don't know this, but
   I'm going to learn it. I'm going to read the novels. I'm going to help teach the class.
   I'm going to do everything I can.' You know. Maybe – they're going to be – you're
   going to work as hard as that regular ed teacher. Okay? Not all special ed teachers
   want to put forth that much effort.

Joss, the lateral entry teacher who has switched schools, on several occasions stated how
important it was that she ask for help and listen to advice given. She recognized where her
program weaknesses were, in understanding disabilities themselves, and sought out veteran
teachers for help. She believes one of the best parts of her program was the network she has established with other teachers.

And I think the biggest help for me has been, you know, willing to listen to advice. Whether I take it or not, you know, to weed out what I want. But you know, going to people and asking. And talking to veteran teachers. And talking to people who've mentored, you know.

Jennifer, who was traditionally certified and exited, several times in her interview noted her age as a factor. The job she exited was her first job. She came from New York. She did not know many people nor have a system of support in place at school or away from school to help her with the first year transition. Most of the teachers she worked with were much older and she did not develop a social relationship with them. She is now back in teaching and says that it is much different to teach in your 30’s than in your 20’s. In her first job, You know, if you feel like you’re not doing your job well, no matter what you do, I think it’s time to move on. You know. So I guess there was a lot of self-doubt. What am I doing wrong? Why – you know, what could I be doing differently or better?

Julie noted her maturity, entering the workforce late, as a reason she was able to be successful as a first year teacher. Joss spoke of her willingness to ask for advice and listen, as a lateral entry first year teacher who struggled and said she learned each day from trial and error. Janet asked for help but did not find it helpful. She learned midway through the year that she might switch positions and that eased her first year. She believes she would have left teaching if she had not switched positions. Jennifer, who left her position, felt that her youth and lack of ability to compare her situation to others, in other words her lack of experience,
hindered her success during her first few years. Jasmine believes her work ethic and positive attitude have kept her from being seen by others as not working hard or putting forth the effort.

Support that the school is able to provide varies from school to school. The respondents discussed various topics they believed indicated support that were specific to their needs at the schools at which they have worked. These topics include: support from the principal and assistant principal, support from regular educators they work with, support with regard to discipline of special programs students, support with regard to difficult or demanding parents, support from mentors and department chairs, support with scheduling, support with regard to resources such as textbooks and classrooms, support from colleagues, and support in terms of an orientation and effective communication.

Jane, the lateral entry teacher who left the profession, made a statement that really struck the interviewer, an administrator who desires to support all teachers. Jane said her assistant principal,

actually did periodically – would stick her head in, and say, 'How are things going? Are you okay?' And...you know, I don't think she would have wanted, really, to have gotten into it.

When asked what she meant by, “she wouldn’t have really wanted to get into it”, Jane said she really didn’t want to hear her answer. She just wanted to hear that everything was fine. The respondents mainly noted that the administrators seemed to want to follow the law in place of taking action in the best interest of the students. Three of the respondents, the two who left the profession, and one of the two who switched into regular education, stated that a
lack of principal support was why they made the decision to change. This principal support is viewed through the lenses of scheduling, resource allocation, interactions during IEP meetings and with parents, interactions with other staff members, interactions through the discipline process and other needs as they arise. Julie stated that overall she had good relationships with administrators.

But…I’ve had some that were perfectionists who didn’t listen. And of course, you know, when you got the law behind you – you know, you – they – all they want you to do is follow the law.

Each participant had someone with whom they worked, a mentor, a department chair, a colleague, on whom they relied and of whom they spoke highly. Jane, the lateral entry exiter, said she would not have returned for the second year if not for her department chair.

She was very good. So I got a lot of support from her. But she was also – also incredibly overwhelmed. And so she would give me – not overwhelmed, overworked. She was not overwhelmed. She was overworked.

Julie, the lateral entry teacher who transferred into regular education, talked about the file cabinet in the office and the willingness of others to help her. She also talks about the relationship she had with them.

The department chair. The other resource teachers. There was a lot of fun and…gave me a lot of advice. And they let me vent. And…you know. They – they really helped. So I think that was really important.

Jennifer, the traditionally certified teacher who exited, talked about a colleague who helped her. They worked together to get a very difficult job done and both left at the same time
because of their dissatisfaction. At one point she says, “But probably the hardest part was just lack of support after school. I had (name of colleague). And thank God I did.”

The participants each noted the help they received from colleagues as well as department chairs. However, within their statements, they cautioned that because the job is so time demanding, that they did not ask for help for fear of placing demands on their counterparts. For example, Jean said that she received some help, as she switched schools and curriculum, but felt that overall,

So, so busy. I mean, I just felt like I was bothering her. I went to kind of like the lead HI teacher. And she was my LEA. And she helped me through the meeting. But it wasn't like I have time to sit down the day before and work with you.

The participants looked to the department chairs and administrators for support with scheduling, with paperwork, and with difficult parents. Jerry, the traditionally certified special programs teacher who switched into regular education after more than 20 years, said that the support, or lack thereof, she received from the principal, was not an overall factor in her vocation, as she was a wife and parent and so made decisions with their needs as the dominant factor. However, when asked about leaving special programs for regular education, she stated that the paperwork became overwhelming and that parents became difficult in terms of their demands and her administrators did not back her recommendations. “I am the one with the degree, aren’t I?”

All of the participants were asked about the support they received from their mentor teachers. Jennifer and Jane, both teachers who exited the profession, believed that they did
not receive adequate support from their mentor. Jennifer, who worked with LD students, was assigned a mentor who was certified AG. So she didn't have the same perspective.

And she tried. You know, she would meet with me regularly. And share what she could. But we were on different ends of the spectrum.

Jane, when asked about her mentor, said that she played no factor in helping her.

I did have a mentor. And she was a little – I guess I'd say she was racist. That she told me that she didn't know what to tell a white teacher to do. Because she didn't even know how to help me. Occasionally she'd have, like, some paperwork that she had to fill out to say that she was mentoring me. And she'd be, like, 'Jane' sign this.' And I was, like, 'Absolutely.' So I was just so uncomfortable around her. So I, like, didn't even know – like, she would say these things. I was like, I don't even know what…

Julie, who switched into regular education, had a mentor who was a certified English teacher. She said she felt comfortable going to her if she had a bad day. However, for advice on her special needs students she asked her colleagues in special education for help.

Both of the teachers who exited the profession were passionate when they stated they did not believe their administrators cared about their students. Jennifer told the story twice of working with the safety patrol in her school. She assigned a few poor, minority, and special programs students to the safety patrol. Her principal told her,

'You will not put those children on safety patrol.' And I said,
'Then you will get somebody else to do safety patrol. Because these children, they'd love to be on safety patrol.' But he – I think that was his feeling. Just that comment there just said a lot to me.

When asked what role the principal played at her school, Jennifer stated,

To me, his role – and I think he felt his role – was more advisory as far as procedures went with the school. He didn't seem to be helpful in any way with instruction. It was…more logistical things. Like space. Procedures. Things like that. I never got any help with curriculum the whole time unless it was from a colleague.

When asked what the principal could have done differently to keep her from leaving, Jennifer stated,

Just taking an interest would’ve been nice. Just to start with that. And to care about the kids. I mean, I can tell you in a nutshell why I think I left. I mean, and he – he has a lot to do with it. Just I had no support. Zero.

Jane, who also exited, expressed frustration at the way in which she felt special programs students were treated at her school.

And that, like, the kids aren't kids. Yeah, or like, somehow they're – spec ed is a different form of the human species. And that principals somehow just don't even know what to do with them.

As the second interview concluded, Jane said,

And I think that – you know, quite a few of my kids – my classroom was sort of a safe haven… I don't think my kids felt like they were integrated into the school as a
whole either. And so I think you feel that your kids are isolated. And like they're not a part of the school….You know, they're – and they know they're getting the bad classrooms. And my kids knew, like, why do the other kids have big classrooms, and we're stuck in this, you know, closet with no windows. I couldn't say, like, 'Well. Because we fit.' [laughs] Because it fits.

Julie, who transferred into regular education, expressed a similar frustration at the treatment of special programs students in her school,

And I know – you know, you asked me why I left. And what my frustrations were. I don't – you know, these kids are people. And they deserve an education. I'm not saying they don't. It's just that [laughs] my role in it was just very – because I do take my job very seriously.

When asked how her former principal viewed special education, Julie stated,

Yeah. She blamed teachers for folders. And things that were really not under – in our control. You talk about being in jail and stuff. If we – you know, she really thought that a lot of the special ed kids were making the school look bad because of the trouble and stuff….. And she was – you know, I think as far as her compassion – that's the thing. She had a lot of compassion and… But you know, if your paperwork's not right, then you're just screwed. You know?

Joss, who is lateral entry certified and recently switched schools, discussed her former principal.

I mean, I knew I could go into my principal's office, close the door, and say, 'Look, I need this help,' or, 'I need that help.' Or – you know. And I just – with everyone there, I… The second principal I had, you know, was very supportive and very there.
And you know, just – they'd pop in and out of my classroom and just, you know, talk to everyone and talk… And they were really good about talking and interacting with our kids specifically. And really, you know, making them feel like part of the school.

Janet, who is lateral entry but has switched jobs within the school, noted that her administration had been very helpful as she was learning within an AU setting.

And so we've – we, you know, dealt with it for a couple weeks. And I expressed to administration that, you know, something needed to be done. Because this wasn't the right fit for – for those kids. And you know, they worked – they worked with us, and helped us to, you know, find a better – a better environment for those students. A more suitable environment for those students. And too, any time there was – like I said, sometimes our students would get a little violent. And any time that it was, you know, so much that we just could not handle it, you know, administration would always come down. And you know, try to help us out.

Jean, who was traditionally certified and recently switched schools, believed that her administrators were helpful as needed. She knew to ask questions. She understood the feedback received from observations and used some pieces of it, but not others. She mainly felt that administrators were useful for the “big stuff.” When asked for an example, she noted a difficult parent conference.

And so they're kind of in there for – to keep everybody calm. Parent says, 'My kid's not getting this. I'm threatening to sue.' Well, they're there, you know. [laughs] They're here for the big stuff. So this is a regular, simple, easy IEP where the parents
are very – okay, yeah, that's fine. They're not – we don't even bother. Because they are busy too.

She also sought advice from her administrator when students confided in her during the day and she did not know how to use that information. In the example below, she asks an assistant principal for help.

I'll go ahead and say, like, you know, these two kids are planning on having a sexual activity when they come back from spring break. What do I do? I mean, I plan on calling the parents and everything (inaudible). She'll sit down and talk with me about it. She's really good about that.

Jasmine, who is traditionally certified and in her second year at a new school, speaks positively about working with administrators to problem solve and meet the needs of students. She told a story of a regular educator and special educator not working well together. She could see both sides and the administration managed a solution through which the special educator pulled students out rather than working with them in the same class.

Jasmine said,

But I was like, I was glad that she went to an administrator, or someone who could make a difference, than to just go and vent to somebody…

When asked specifically about resources and principal support, the same participants expressed frustration, Jane and Jennifer, who exited the profession, and Julie and Jerry, who moved into regular education. Jennifer succinctly stated;

“I – my children were not– I didn't see them making the progress. I didn't have the materials. I didn't have the situation. I didn't have the support that I needed to do well.”
Julie did not seem as frustrated by her lack of materials when she noted that she did not have a chalkboard or pencil sharpener in her room. Eventually, she received them.

So I had to wait several other months before I got what I wanted. So anyway – you know, stuff like that. But that's typical in a school. And you know, teachers have got – like, this semester – this is, like – the semester that they moved my room. I'm in a home ec room. So I have, like, three kitchens and a washer-dryer.

So at first I thought, I'm in a kitchen. They wouldn't put so-and-so in a kitchen. I kind of took it personally. But I'll tell you what. I love it. I love having a fridge…

Jean, who was traditionally certified, is equally unflappable when discussing her lack of resources.

Do you have books?

Nope. No books (inaudible). [laughs] …really, really old. We just get skipped over when… I mean, there's no real – I mean, OCS is pretty new. …There are no…OCS…books on the adapted…adopted…list. Whatever. For the – for the county. There are none….So it's like I'm having to find all this information…online, in books, libraries, wherever. See, I would just like…a book…[laughs] (inaudible) curriculum. Or something.

Jane, the lateral entry teacher who left the profession had several comments to make about the resources her students were allocated.

Classrooms: One thing that really pissed me off – excuse that language – was that special ed never gets good classrooms. Like, we were always given the trailers. Or, like – you know, my eighth graders that I was teaching, there's no classroom for us.
So we were put in a computer room that had no desks. And I was supposed to put my kids in chairs, like in a circle, and teach them. And then we're already talking about the kids who, like, you know, aren't passing, have behaviors. Like, they don't have the basics. So why are we giving them an even worse learning environment? And then expecting them to do the same as everyone else.

Textbooks, supply: Well, you know that I had a couple of kids who had in their IEPs that they were supposed to get a textbook at home, and in the classroom. And there weren't even enough for the classroom. So, I did a lot of copying of textbooks, which maybe is illegal? But I would – those kids, I would send them home with a textbook. And then I would copy the textbook for them to have…

Textbooks, appropriateness: And I also found that, you know, because the kids are behind, that the textbooks weren't necessarily appropriate. You know, if you have – if you're teaching sixth grade math, and your kids are at third grade level, where are you supposed to get a third grade textbook. And I think it's different if you're at an elementary school. Because you can go to the third grade teacher. Maybe say, 'Hey. Can I borrow a third grade book?' But I only had sixth, seventh and eighth grade stuff. So I made a lot of my own…

Jasmine, who is traditionally certified at the same school, stated that because most special programs teachers at the high school level work as a curriculum assistance teacher or as a PALS teacher combined with a regular education teacher, that special educators no longer need certain materials.
But now that we're not teaching...you know, I mean, for the most part we're not teaching classes. There's not a whole lot of things that you need. I think it goes back to more what resources could I have that I could give to a regular ed teacher to help them. You know, like – well, I've got the U.S. history and world history broken down into these little short little mini-things.

Another area that the participants discussed as an indicator of school level support was the scheduling process. The teachers indicated they needed a variety of considerations to help them be successful at their jobs and often those considerations were not in place.

Students who are identified as special programs at the elementary or middle school level receive services during the day and are pulled out of their other classes to do so. Jennifer, the exiter who taught elementary, and Jasmine, the traditionally certified teacher who began in middle school, both told stories of having disparate level students who needed instruction in different areas sent to them at once. Jennifer said,

And I found out that you can't – you can't be effective in some of those situations, when you've got 15 children and they're from well, four different grade levels and three different disabling condition areas, and... How can anybody live with that?

And feel like you're doing a good job.

Jennifer also spoke about a cap on class size and case load as being necessary for success.

Jasmine worked at a middle school and had the same issues that Jennifer did. When she talked about how she solved them, it turned out she asked the husband of a colleague to sit with her and work out a new schedule, finding an outside resource on her own.
But because I was the only middle school teacher, kids would come to my classroom at any point during the day, based on their schedule. So, like, the kids would have a schedule. And they would come to me, you know, if let's say they were a kid who was supposed to get help with writing. They would come whenever they were in language. If they had reading, they would come to me when they had reading on their schedule. And I had sixth, seventh and eighth grade. So at any point I could have a sixth grader doing reading, a sixth grader doing writing, a sixth grader doing math. The same for seventh, the same for eighth.

Jasmine re-worked the schedule by grade level and disability so that she could provide more direct instruction to the students.

Jasmine also works closely with the schedule at her current school, a high school, and as we spoke she acknowledged that many factors are important when considering the schedules of special programs teachers. If a special programs teacher is certified in reading or writing, she will utilize that knowledge by placing them in an English class as a PALS teacher. She also knows that it is important to provide common planning for this PALS team. Lastly, she spoke about needing to limit the number of subjects a special programs teacher will PALS in. She gave the example that she worked one year in three different levels of English and had to read texts for all three classes in order to provide help to those teachers.

Now...if I'm only doing ninth grade, shame on me that I can't read all the novels like they're doing. But you know, we had one who – we had one teacher this year that she was doing ICR earth science, U.S. history, and civics and economics. Well, she had three different subjects. Three different teachers she was working with. It
would be hard to be knowledgeable in all three areas if it wasn't something you had been doing, or knew enough about.

Jasmine also emphasized letting PALs teachers know early who they will be working with and in what subject so that they can prepare over the summer. Joss talks about developing a good team as well.

I think that's kind of…more just making sure that… And I think it's more of a personnel issue (inaudible) whoever is deciding who's working with whom.

Making sure that those relationships are working properly. But really taking that into account. And – like, I really think the numbers is probably the biggest thing.

Jean, who is traditionally certified and at a new school, talked about the schedule in terms of having multiple preparations in the same class.

Well, in my one class I have all prep, 1, 2, 3 and 4… (inaudible) class. It's a nightmare. (inaudible) just kind of like, I teach science 1 and 2 together. Then I got to go through and pick the big ones out.

Not surprisingly, the teachers who did not have a planning period are also the teachers who have exited. Jane worked with a self-contained class and ate lunch with her class and had no planning period. Jennifer stated, “I had no planning periods. Second year I didn't have lunch.” Joss, who works with self-contained, also said she did not receive a planning period for two years. She has one now because a PE teacher takes her students for calisthenics each day. Teachers also expressed a desire to have common planning periods with their regular education PALs teacher, with other self-contained teachers to be able to brainstorm and plan, and with as OCS teachers.
Another area of support provided by the school is support with IEP paperwork and difficult or demanding parents regarding IEP’s. Jennifer, who exited her first job, talked about the fact her principal believed paperwork was more important than the students or teaching.

You're out of compliance, which is – you know, the worst thing in the world. The worst thing in the world's not not teaching. The worst thing in the world's being out of compliance. I mean, I can even remember there was this one file that I didn't get on fast enough. Didn't – didn't do things in a timely manner. And I remember my principal saying, 'You could be denied tenure for this.' And you know, well, thanks for all your help up until now. And you know, that's how it felt like. Well, that was kind of the beginning of the end for me. It was just such a low blow.

Julie, who is now a regular education teacher, also expressed frustration over the paperwork and her belief that her administrators were not supportive.

But you know, that folder, that caseload is yours. You know, I'm like, you know, that's it. That kid messes up, that's – you know, it's yours. You own it. If the folder's messed up, it's your fault. Or… You know what I mean? It was – that's the way I felt. And that's the way the administrators looked at you. If your folder was messed up. [sighs] Bad teacher. You know, everything else you do is nothing, you know.

Janet, who was a lateral entry teacher and has been at the same school a few years, when asked about the most frustrating part of her job said,
The most frustrating thing about my job would have to be… Well, it used to be the paperwork. But I feel like I'm getting a better handle on it. So that's not as bad as it used to be.

When the interviewer followed up to ask how she had gotten a handle on it, she said that she was able to ask questions and get help and information from her colleagues and department chair. Joss, who was a lateral entry teacher and has switched schools recently, also talked about paperwork as difficult for her as a new teacher. However, she stated that it had become easier because of help from her mentor.

It was a learning process. Definitely a learning curve. But like I said, my mentor was absolutely wonderful. And you know, the first couple of meetings, she made sure she was there with me. And she made sure we filled out everything together. And, you know, and she didn't just say, ‘Oh, okay, (inaudible).’ You know. It was like, let's go over it. Let's see what you need to do.

With regard to paperwork, many of the participants not only expressed frustration at learning how to do the paperwork, but also at being able to complete it given the requirements of having a regular education teacher present at the meetings. Jean, who was traditionally certified and switched schools, recently joked that teachers would not open their e-mails from her for fear it was an invitation to conference. Jennifer, who was traditionally certified and exited, expressed frustration at trying to complete the process and do it well given that she felt overloaded and regular education teachers were not supportive.

I couldn't have an IEP without a teacher. I mean, that was the other thing. You know, you're not supposed to have an IEP without an LEA and so on. And – or
without a regular ed. And we followed that very hard at the beginning. But the part that got so difficult was just manipulating the paperwork. You know. Changing dates on things so that they would all match. And I'll be honest with you. That stuff happened. And I had no choice but to do some of that stuff at times. Just because I knew…you know. So I didn't do 10 days notice. I only gave eight. And (inaudible) with the spec, two days, what difference does it make. Because you know, they'd put the fear of God into us about this special stuff. I mean, I never did anything that I feel hurt a kid, or was unethical to a kid in any way. But there would be things like the IEP was due on the 15th.

We met on the 16th. I said, 'Do you mind putting the 15th on your date?' And they – no problem. They would do it. So that stuff happened. The only support I remember receiving from the principal was – we were allowed to cancel class. We started classes, I think, one or two weeks into school. And we canceled one or two weeks before school was out. To do paperwork at the end. And at the beginning, to do scheduling. And that, you know, was something announced and said. It wasn't like, okay, I've decided I'm not going to see kids for two weeks. So. That – there was that much.

Julie also talked about the difficulty of securing a regular education teacher signature. She said, “But you know, the special ed teacher is desperate for a regular ed signature.”

Julie, when asked directly why she left special education, talked about the increase in paperwork, especially the paperwork process to review a suspension for a student with disabilities titled the Manifestation Determination Review. It is conducted after a students
has been suspended for 10 days to determine if the behavior the student was suspended for is linked to the student’s disability, and to see if an appropriate IEP is in place. Julie felt she spent more time on those reviews than she did helping her students.

I felt like I was spending all the time on the kids with the trouble. And I think what would've helped – is we had a person – I don't know, an assistant or an administrator or somebody – who just did MDRs. And telling that's what it was. I could handle the IEPs. Because they came up on a regular – you know, you schedule them, you plan for them. And you – you know, you have conferences. That's part of your job. But the MDRs just…throw you off. Like you have everything scheduled and you know what you're going to be doing. And then all of a sudden, oh, we got to do an MDR.

Jasmine noted that the meetings at her school had not been handled appropriately and so the administration had taken more oversight of the process.

Well, he came back to school on a full day. No one made administrators aware of any of those decisions that were put in place. Oh, (inaudible) can't put a kid on modified day without the senior administrator from downtown. Well, they had no senior administrator at the meeting. And when the kid got into a fight at the buses, well, they went – they recommended long term, because it was a pretty big – big deal. But they were late in really searching through the IEP, discovered that he was supposed to be on modified day. So then they had to overturn it because they're like, if he had been on a modified day, he wouldn't have been at school at that time… And then so there were several situations. And then we had a teacher to have a meeting
with the regular ed teacher, no LEA. And everybody just signed that the meeting happened. And…again, we got backlash from that. And… A decision was made…And the parent wasn't at the meeting….

Meetings are now scheduled so that an administrator is present at every meeting.

When the participants are asked how does administration know the paperwork is complete or incomplete, most of them responded that central office staff will come and do an audit. When asked about central office staff and the help they provided, the participants’ responses varied tremendously. Jennifer, Jasmine, Janet, and Joss all acknowledged that if they call with a question one day, and get an answer, that if they call the next day with the same question, they might get a different answer. Joss, who had switched schools and so had recently completed an audit of her caseload, best sums up the responses regarding inconsistencies by saying,

Different interpretations, a lot. I think people coming in from different places. And how do you know that one way – and I think it's really hard to get everyone on the same page. And – you know. And a lot of the questions are ambiguous. And with IDEA changing, and the constant updates, and the…things in there, you're getting different things. And… I think a lot probably has to do with people coming in from different places. And everyone trains you a little differently.

Jennifer expressed frustration at these inconsistencies because she believed she was being held accountable.
You know, we were told to – to bring all our questions to our program specialist. Which we did. You know. And I think she did the best that she could with the information that she had, to tell us what to do. But it varied. I think that whoever was above her had ambiguous information. So things changed constantly. You never quite knew exactly what you were supposed to be doing with certain things. And you just hoped you were doing it right. Because you knew you’d end up in trouble later if you did it incorrectly.

Jasmine said that she would just take the name of the person giving her the response and the date and note it and move on.

Well, when I find out about a change, I start doing it. But I don't get upset if I do something wrong, if I didn't know about it. You know, I'm like, okay, well. I'm not going to go back and fix all of the – the ones that I did wrong. But I will start doing the others like they're supposed to be done. But. That – you know, that's a common problem.

Janet talked about central office help a little differently in that she asked for help as a lateral entry AU teacher.

Well, they came and observed. And…they…gave me tips on things that I could do. But…I would have rather them, like, stay longer and show me how to do it. Like put it into practice, and show me exactly what it is I'm supposed to be doing. Instead of – and how I'm supposed to be doing it. Instead of just leaving, and then writing an email and sending me a list of, try these things.
Julie talked about central office in terms of students who had been long-term suspended and were now provided services at home. She was required to provide those services.

And central office said it's your own caseload. It's your responsibility to find them a home hospital teacher. And…so I was doing three kids. And you know, they do compensate you for that. But it was something I would've rather not have had to be responsible for. That's what really bugged me.

All of the participants discussed difficult or demanding parents as an area where they needed support. Jerry stated flat out that she switched from special programs to regular education because of the strain of demanding parents. “Basically, I had burnt out. Not from the students. The paperwork had become unbearable, the conferences, and exceedingly demanding parents.” She expressed that parents were asking for more and more accommodations, as well as more communication. Her school is on a traditional schedule, with 7 classes. She then had to gather information about student progress from a number of different teachers for each one of her students. She stated that she “tended to be proactive rather than reactive, and so I have a lot of meetings up front to prevent a problem later.” However, she also said that parents would increasingly demand unnecessary modifications and that her administration would back the parents rather than following her recommendations. Julie, who also switched into regular education, felt that parents saw her as a lifeline for their child and she was unable to meet their demands.

And the parents. The parents of one of the kids who got – one in particular. This is the reason why I left special ed. Was…she kept calling. What are we going to do about this person? It's too late to go to – (the alternative school) was full. She
couldn't get him in any program. I mean, he was unsupervised except for the two hours a day I'd be there. And she was frustrated. And every day, what are we going to do, what are we going to do. And I…driving me crazy.

When asked about orientation or beginning teacher support programs, each of the participants was asked about the first few days of school and the orientation provided. The teachers who had left the profession, Jane and Jennifer received no orientation. Jennifer stated, “It was all done piecemeal, and by whoever thought to do it. (A colleague) showed me a lot.”

Jasmine and Joss both talked about their school’s orientation, which occurred before the school year started. Both spoke of the orientation as very helpful.

And it was so nice because we developed these relationships with all the new people because they didn't know anybody. And we had lunch. And…we did activities. And they showed us around the school. And they…you know, helped us with just, you know, how to use the copier. And where your mail box is. And we got our keys. And here's where your classroom's going to be. And all those things that you're kind of anxious about. You know, so – at least when the first day of school came, the 30 of us, at least, you know, we kind of all (inaudible) together. Because we had had that two days. So we felt…you know, that bond. And which I thought was just really nice.

Julie was surprised that no one was available to show her the classroom, or books, or other information that might be helpful.
It surprised me that nobody was really concerned that I didn't know, you know, it was like, okay, here's your desk. You can use those books for science. And you know, I – they just – you know, and it wasn't like they were just, you know, mean and terrible. [laughs] You know, they had to get their own stuff ready.

Teachers also discussed how administrators worked with special programs students and how they interpreted administrators’ actions. Jane and Jennifer, who exited, felt that administration held them responsible for student behavior but did not give them suggestions for effective classroom management techniques. Jane discussed an incident where she took a day off and her kids misbehaved with the substitute.

And apparently, you know, the sub just couldn't get a handle on them. And they were running up and down the classroom screaming. At one point I heard that one kid had mooned another classroom, which I think is just hysterical. But [laughter] obviously not okay behavior at school. Yeah, they were acting atrociously. And I got a call from my principal saying, like, 'It's unacceptable behavior. I'm going to be holding you responsible.' And she pretty much was like, 'You cannot go on vacation again if your children are going to act this way.'

Jane, in discussing her theory of classroom management said, “I definitely think that consistency is key. But I think that a lot of administrators are very overburdened. And it's very hard for them to keep consistent.” Jennifer believed the students “were allowed to get away with more if they were special ed. Particularly, you know, if they had a behavioral classification.” Julie, who switched into regular education, also echoed that sentiment, “I really wish the discipline at our school were a little bit more…strict.” Jean, who was
traditionally certified and switched schools stated, “And then, there's also not a lot of consistency in disciplining special ed kids and regular ed kids.”

**Summary of Key Findings**

Lateral entry and traditionally certified teachers from the four identified pathways, switch schools, stay at same school, exit, and switch into regular education, were interviewed twice in person and audio-taped. The audio-tapes were transcribed. The participants were also sent an e-mail questionnaire with the three research questions to answer in their own words as a final follow up. The interviews were coded and reviewed in Atlas Ti. Three major themes were identified and described in the findings. The first theme, the duties of the job itself, recounts the participants comments regarding caseload monitoring, paperwork demands, discipline issues, working with regular education teachers, working with paraprofessionals, setting up and facilitating meetings, interactions with administrators and central office staff, and interactions with parents. The participants noted that much of their time is spent on non-teaching duties. The second major theme provided information about teacher preparation, as well as the attributes the teachers noted they brought to the profession. The last theme, support provided by the school and notably the principal, included support with discipline, with difficult or demanding parents, from mentors and department chairs, support with scheduling, support with resources such as appropriate classrooms and texts, and support in terms of an orientation and effective established lines of communication. The findings for each area are discussed in the participants’ own voices, at times lending a shocking candor to the findings.
Chapter 5

Discussion of the Findings

Well, they came and observed. And…they…gave me tips on things that I could do. But…I would have rather them, like, stay longer and show me how to do it. Like put it into practice, and show me exactly what it is I'm supposed to be doing – and how I'm supposed to be doing it. Instead of just leaving, and then writing an email and sending me a list of, try these things. Because…it just – I don't know. Just didn't work out the way that I would've hoped. - Janet, lateral entry special programs teacher

The research was guided by the following research questions.

1. Why do alternative licensed or lateral entry special education teachers leave the classroom?

2. What types of support does the lateral entry special education teacher seek from his or her principal?

3. How does the lateral-entry special education teacher differ from his/her traditionally certified peer in terms of working conditions and principal support?

Bonnie Billingsley, in 2005, published *Cultivating and Keeping Committed Special Education Teachers What Principals and District Leaders Can Do*, a very comprehensive review of why special educators leave the classroom, reviews methods for recruiting and hiring qualified special educators, developing induction programs to support new special educators, designing professional development, creating inclusive and collaborative schools, designing reasonable work assignments, and promoting wellness. Billingsley did not
distinguish in her text between the needs of the lateral entry special programs teacher versus
the needs of a teacher certified through a lateral entry program. That difference was the focus
of this study.

The findings of this study are very consistent with previous research regarding why
special educators leave the classroom and what their expectations are for principal support.
Jane, alternative licensed exiter, left the classroom because she felt her principal did not like
her and was almost out to get her. She had an assigned mentor that she believed was “racist”
and who did not meet with her or help her. She believed that her students were not seen as
part of the overall school environment and made to feel included. She had a department chair
who tried to help, but who left after Jane’s first year and so was not there to help her in her
second year. Jane felt that she was not effective in her position and left the profession after
fulfilling her commitment to Teach For America. Jennifer, who left and has since returned,
left her first position because she believed her principal did not care about her students. She
believed her caseload was unmanageable. She did not have an effective mentor as her mentor
was not certified in the same area. She believed her regular education peers did not
understand her role well or appreciate her efforts. Again, she believed she was not effective
and could not be effective given her workload and the lack of principal support. Julie, who
was alternatively licensed and switched into regular education, left because of the demands
of the paperwork, specifically the MDR, and the feeling that her administrators cared more
about her paperwork than how she taught her students. By moving into regular education, she
believed she could focus more on teaching rather than on the extraneous duties that fall under
the purveyance of the special educator, MDR’s, IEP’s, and paperwork. Jerry, who was
traditionally licensed and switched into regular education, left because of the demands of the paperwork. She felt she physically could not do the job any longer. As she said, “it was impacting my health.” She also believed that parents have become more and more demanding and that school administrators cater to those demands against her professional judgment. By switching into regular education, she no longer had the stress of paperwork and principals who did not support her in IEP meetings. All of the sentiments expressed by the participants above, including creating an inclusive environment for special education students, developing an appropriate induction program that includes an effective mentor, and designing reasonable work assignments are addressed in Billingsley’s text, as well as in other research.

Russell Gersten, Thomas Keating, and Paul Youvanoff (1995) presented a paper titled, “Understanding the Relationship between Job Design Problems, Support and Attrition/Retention of Special Educators”, which also echoes the sentiments of the participants above. Within the results of their study, principal support is defined by special educators as having the following characteristics: the principal assists in problem solving, the teachers felt backed up by the principal with regard to disciplinary issues, the teacher feels understood by the principal, and the teacher feels included in the overall school. Teachers in the study noted that role conflict, or conflict caused by diverse responsibilities, presented a challenge. Teachers also spoke about role overload with regard to the size of their caseload, the complexity of student needs, and the paperwork requirements, as well as the actions needed to keep regular educators informed and utilizing best practices with their special programs students. Lastly, the authors noted the importance of shared decision-making.
Special programs teachers who did not receive that support reported feeling like their autonomy was weakened and that their professional opinions were devalued. A similar study, co-authored by Billingsley and Gersten, (1995)“Working Conditions: Admin support”, echoes the findings of this study. In it the researchers analyzed data from six urban school districts. The researchers noted the difference in building and central office support. Specific problems that were noted by special educators included a perceived lack of respect or concern for special programs teachers or students, a lack of communication between administration and special programs teachers, a lack of accessibility to administration, disagreements on student placement, administrators’ lack of knowledge regarding special programs laws and requirements, administrators who are more concerned with legal compliance than with effective programming, and a lack of input into decisions. Twenty-five percent of teachers in this study who left their position listed lack of administrative support as a reason for leaving.

Jane, Jennifer, Julie, and Jerry, all of whom left the profession or moved into regular education, spoke of their principals in terms of not feeling understood, not feeling included, and of their students not being valued. Jane felt undermined when her principal went into the class and described her to her students as a white teacher from the north who could not relate well to black students. When her principal told her she could not take a day off after her students behaved badly for the substitute, she felt undermined in terms of disciplinary support. Jennifer spoke of her students being excluded from the Safety Patrol by the principal because the principal felt her students were not suitable for Safety Patrol. Her principal asked her to be on the student support team and do the work for students who are being referred to
special education in her elementary school, including the initial meetings and evaluations. Her principal assigned her a large caseload that grew throughout the year as more and more students were identified. Her principal would not allow her to meet with students on a schedule conducive to her needs, but rather to schedule students to meet the needs of the regular education teachers. Consequently, she would have different grade level students, with different disabilities, in her class at the same time. She spoke with frustration as she told a story where her paperwork was not in order and her principal threatened her with a letter in her file. She felt unsuccessful and overwhelmed and so made the decision to leave. Julie left because of the paperwork. However, she too believed her principal did not understand her students and would rather not have special programs students. Jerry also left because of the paperwork. As to the principal support, Jerry had been a special programs department chair and had a pragmatic understanding of the role of the principal. However, she noted that parents want more and more in their IEP’s and that principals seemed to give in to those demands despite her recommendations.

Those teachers in the study who are still working in special programs spoke about receiving the type of support that Gersten, Keating, and Youvanoff noted in their study: the principal assists in problem solving, the teachers felt backed up by the principal with regard to disciplinary issues, the teacher feels understood by the principal, and the teacher feels included in the overall school. Joss discussed her principal fondly, and even told a story of how her came and changed her tire when she had a flat on the way to school. He also came to her wedding. She noted that he knew her students by name and spoke with them easily. She said that he did not necessarily know how to volunteer help, but that she felt comfortable
going into his office and asking for what she needed. Jean likewise talked about her administrator and how she felt comfortable asking her for help with disciplinary issues and how she appreciated the feedback she received from observations. Janet also noted that she could call her principal and they would come. She had two students placed in her self-contained AU class that were very low functioning, in diapers, and did not fit with her program. The principal worked with her to have central office assign these students to another program in the county. The principal also worked with her when she wanted to change her teaching assignment from AU to CCR. Jasmine, a department chair, spoke of principal support in terms of helping with the scheduling process, problem solving issues between special and regular educators, and by developing a thorough orientation. These teachers all felt the type of support noted by previous researchers and consequently are still working in special programs.

Another study, with teachers who have completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory, identified four school cultural variables leading to burnout: drive toward measurable goal-achievement behavior imposed by administrators, inadequate trust in a teacher’s professional adequacy, circumscribing school culture, and a disagreeable physical environment (Friedman, 1991). All of these factors were cited by the participants who left special education. Julie notes that her administrators felt that special education students could make the school look bad, and so their IEP’s had to be correct to ensure that suspensions were upheld. She said that her administrators would view a teacher poorly if the IEP’s were not up to date. She told a story of calling a registrar in another state every day, over and over, in order to get historical information on a student to make sure the school was in compliance
with the IEP. Jane spoke of her administrator usurping her power in the classroom by going into it and telling the students she was not a good teacher but that the students had to live with it. Jane also spoke of the small classrooms her students were given as well as the lack of resources and the message she internalized that her students were inferior. Jerry also spoke of the lack of trust when she said that administrators would give into parent requests that were unnecessary and despite her recommendation. Each of these teachers left special education for the reasons cited by Friedman.

**Implications for Further Research**

Each of the special programs teachers interviewed noted the schism between regular educators and special educators. Statements from these teachers included such alarming statements as special programs teachers would kill for a regular ed signature, that regular educators don’t open their e-mail for fear of invitations to conferences, that they avoid speaking to them in the hallway for fear of special educators requesting information or their presence at a conference, that they don’t come to conferences when invited, that they don’t implement modifications appropriately, and finally that there is a feeling that special educators are bothering regular educators by simply doing their jobs. Most of the special educators interviewed felt that regular educators did not understand nor appreciate their efforts. Billingsley also noted that special educators feel isolated from regular educators and devoted a chapter in her text, *Cultivating and Keeping Committed Special Education Teachers What Principals and District Leaders Can Do*, to “Creating Inclusive and Collaborative Schools”. In it, she discusses how principals can create a welcome and emotionally supportive environment and one that fosters collaborative relationships. Given
the results of the participants regarding the feeling that at times they were doing their jobs despite the passive aggressive methods of their regular education counterparts, it would be interesting to develop a study of regular educators views of special educators to determine, if indeed, they do harbor negative views of special educators and why, as well as regular educators’ views of the demands made by special education laws.

**Implications for Practice (Building, district, state, and federal)**

Janet, whose quote started this chapter, began teaching as a lateral entry teacher in a self-contained AU classroom. She had a degree in psychology and had worked for a group home for AU patients. She believed she received help from her administrators. She spoke of central office support as well. However, she described her experience as feeling around in the dark, afraid you are going to fall, and she said that she wanted to be shown how to improve, not be told, not sent e-mails with instructions. She wanted to be shown. Julie, who was lateral entry, laughed as she described her first year, and said, “didn’t anyone care that I didn’t know what I was doing?” She also talked about year two, which was more difficult than year one, because she understood the responsibility she had undertaken, but did not understand how to do her job well. Again, she wanted to be shown but acknowledged that no one around her had the time to do that. Jasmine, who was traditionally certified, spoke fondly of her cooperating teacher and her student teaching experience. Her cooperating teacher made her complete each type of meeting that she would have as a special programs teacher, a re-evaluation meeting, an IEP meeting, and a manifestation determination review. She believed that that experience gave her confidence and prepared her well. Billingsley devotes a chapter in her book, *Cultivating and Keeping Committed Special Education Teachers What*
Principals and District Leaders Can Do, to supporting new teachers through an induction program. She notes the key components of an effective induction program. She explains why teachers struggle by explaining that new teachers have undertaken a life change, which creates stress. There is a steep learning curve, which also creates stress. New teachers may have an unrealistic view of the job and become frustrated when the day-to-day job does not match their ideals. New teachers believe they should be prepared and are humbled by what they do not know. Billingsley goes on to denote the key components of an induction program, a comprehensive school orientation, effective mentoring, a school support team that consists of veteran teachers from whom the new teacher can seek technical and emotional support, and targeted staff development opportunities.

At each level, building, district, state, and federal policymakers should review the resources allotted to such a program. Currently, at the state level, new teachers are allotted a mentor for the first two years of teaching. That mentor is paid a stipend. However, for lateral entry teachers, they receive a mentor the first year and then the year that they become fully certified. Therefore, there can be a gap in the mentor process. There is no federal legislation or funding regarding the mentoring process. At the district level, the district supports new teacher programs by providing a stipend for new teacher coordinators who have monthly induction meetings on appropriate topics. At the building level, an administrator would want to review the new teacher program in place, speak with new teachers to determine gaps, and provide resources to fill those gaps. Using state allotment, or ADM, to provide an experienced mentor special programs teacher with an extra planning period or two to help new special educators prepare for IEP and other meetings would help the new teacher.
Matching mentor teachers and new teachers in terms of personality and scheduling to ensure they have a common plan would also help the new teacher feel that he or she has someone to go to, and that person has the time to help. In short, that the new teacher is not bothering them.

At the building level, administrators who take an interest in the students identified as special education and get to know them indicate to the special education teachers working with them that they care and that they value them. Working to include them in the overall school environment and asking about the resources they have again indicates that you value the students. Jane and Jennifer who exited special education both spoke strongly about their principals and the fact that their principals did not care about their kids, and even saw their students as an obstacle to higher test scores and a safer school. Julie and Jerry, who transferred into regular education, both spoke of how administrators placed a priority on paperwork rather than teaching and learning. The building level administrator, to keep the special education teacher, needs to prioritize the students and their success.

At the district level and building level, administrators should work to develop a program to induct new special programs teachers into paperwork and meetings by both an introduction to the paperwork, as well as a mentor, or apprenticeship process, where the mentor shows the new teacher how to complete it and sits with the new teacher through her first meetings. As Jasmine said, she did not want to be told what to do, she wanted to be shown what to do. Jasmine, whose cooperating teacher did this process, spoke very highly of it and her confidence as a new special programs teacher. For example, an introduction to IEP’s workshop can be developed. Then, after the teacher has completed the workshop,
reviewed all the IEP’s in his or her caseload, and has set an IEP meeting, a mentor teacher can work with the new teacher to prepare for the meeting and then sit with him or her in the meeting to insure all goes smoothly. This process can be repeated for each type of meeting, re-val’s, initial placements, etc., until the new teacher has gained a comfort level for each type of meeting and paperwork that is required. Smaller schools may not have the resources in terms of a trained mentor special educator and so may work with the district to gain this resource. Developing a program in which the district or school actively engages the new teacher in conversations about working with regular education colleagues, developing systems and understanding paperwork, working with students and their specific disabilities, classroom management and discipline issues, and working with difficult or demanding parents will indicate to the new teacher that the school administration cares and is providing a resource to help.

The lateral entry teacher “needs everything at once” according to a study by the Northeastern California Partnership for Special Education. According to our participants, all expressed a feeling of being overwhelmed as a first year special programs teacher. Even Jasmine, who is a confident special programs department chair at a large urban high school, who was traditionally certified, and who noted that her cooperating teacher made her do every type of meeting which made her feel prepared, stated that she cried every day after work and that if she had not lived at home and had the support of her dad, she is not sure she would have made it. She said she was not prepared to go somewhere and have to fit in. Jane and Jennifer, who exited, were from the North and had little support system. They did not have appropriate mentors and felt no support from their principal. Julie, who switched into
regular education, felt that as new teacher, everyone was busy, and she had people to ask, but that she was imposing when doing so. Joss and Jean also expressed confusion as new teachers, and were surprised at how ill-prepared they were. However, they both felt comfortable asking questions of their administrators. Janet, too, felt she was stumbling in the dark, but could ask her administrators for support. All of the teachers interviewed noted that most of their learning took place on the job, and believed it would be difficult for any type of program to adequately prepare them for teaching special programs. However, each participant had different types of on the job training and help available. For the lateral entry teacher, who needs everything at once, the on the job training must be comprehensive regarding paperwork, lesson planning, classroom management and other areas. For the traditionally certified teacher, a step by step on the job induction program would work effectively, as the teacher already has a base of knowledge. Most importantly, the building level administrator, when hiring, must be cognizant of the difference in their needs, as well as the school resources available to provide on the job training, and determine if the school can meet the applicant’s needs before hiring.

**Conclusions**

As an administrator, I understand the importance of hiring and keeping excellent classroom teachers. Currently, due to the increase in students identified as special programs, there is a greater need for special programs teachers. Schools of education are not keeping up with this need. An estimate from a 2004 report titled, *Alternative Routes to Special Education*, is that up to twenty percent of special educators are alternatively certified. Students who are identified as special education students have a greater likelihood of failure,
and of poor performance on end of course tests. The federal government through No Child Left Behind mandates that these students achieve progress each year and track that progress. Given this need, given the state and federal mandates for progress, given the role of the teacher in student achievement, a school-based administrator must hire and retain qualified, effective special educators.

The goal of this study was to determine, in the words of the special educator, his or her experience in special education and how the administrator can help the special educator with specific emphasis on the experiences of the lateral entry special educator juxtaposed to that of the traditionally certified special educator. The findings are consistent with previous research in regard to the job stressors for special educators and their definition of principal support. The principal, when hiring a lateral entry teacher, must understand that he or she will need everything at once and be prepared to have a strong, certified, special education mentor in place as well as a program and resources to meet those needs.


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