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Special Education Teacher Resilience: A Phenomenological Study of Factors Associated
with Retention and Resilience of Highly Resilient Special Educators

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in
Educational Leadership

by
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Chair

University of California, San Diego

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2017

Dedication

In memoriam of my Grandma Sylvia for her unwavering support and for providing the resources to allow me to freely pursue higher education. In memoriam of my 'Nani,' Ann Landberg, who, alongside my father and mother, pushed me to pursue this doctorate, believed in me wholeheartedly, and encouraged me in everything I have done.

I dedicate this dissertation to my students who I have had the honor to teach. It is your hearts and our time together in class that pushed me to learn more about the field of special education; and gave me the desire to teach other teachers how to see you for who you are, love you for who you are, and teach them that though you may learn differently, you can become anything you want to be. The sky is the limit. Your story is yet unwritten.

Epigraph

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I
know that full well.”

– Psalm 139:14 (New International Version)

~

“You have sacrificed a lot to be here. I’m here to tell you how grateful I am and remind
you that you are rainbows in clouds.”

– Maya Angelou

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Special Education Teacher Resilience: A Phenomenological Study of Factors Associated
with Retention and Resilience of Highly Resilient Special Educators

by

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Professor Jacqueline Thousand, Chair

Special education teachers are in high demand and greatly needed to meet the needs of the growing population of students qualified for special education services under the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004. The increasing attrition rates of special education teachers are a social justice issue that needs attention. The demands and pressures that special education teachers face need to be closely examined and addressed to ensure equal access to education for the population of students receiving

special education services. The literature review analyzes and discusses the need to identify the severity and impact of special education teacher attrition rates and the use of a resilience construct to help increase the retention of teachers. This phenomenological research study examines the research and findings of implemented and needed interventions to help mitigate the issue. This study examines a conceptual framework of special education teacher resiliency by look at four major areas: (1) why special education teachers enter the field, (2) non-workplace contexts, (3) workplace contexts (e.g. collegial support, administrative support, other supports), and (4) personal resiliency attributes. This study posits these four elements influence teacher resiliency and satisfaction/intention to stay or leave the field of special education. A resilience scale to pre-screen participants and a semi-structured interview was employed to gather data. Participants guided the findings of this study and inform educational leaders and policy makers on special education teacher resiliency factors that promote retention. These findings included being able to experience and learn of student growth and accomplishments, having a personal connection to special education and individuals with disabilities, a sense of fulfillment, and relationships with parents, colleagues, and students; balance and boundaries participants sought personal self-care through individual exercise and travel, and social networking through team exercise and sports, community service and involvement, and connecting with family and friends; administrative support through emotional, instrumental, appraisal, and informational supports; staying student centered and focused upon student potential, the verbal and physical actions of administrators, and collegial relationships; and having a sense of purpose.

Keywords: Special education, resiliency, attrition, retention, administrative support, satisfaction

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Any novice teacher faces a host of challenges associated with starting a new career (Griffin et al., 2009). Novice special education teachers face the dual difficulty of being new to teaching and meeting the many additional assessment, collaboration, paperwork, and legal demands of a special education teacher (Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013).

Gu and Day (2007, 2013) and other researchers (e.g., Bobek, 2002; Brunetti, 2006; Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Currey & O'Brien, 2012; Doney, 2012; Le Cornu, 2009) have found resilience to be a necessary attribute for teachers to sustain their capacity to teach. Teacher resilience has been described and defined by many. However, this researcher is interested in Gu & Day's simple definition of resilience as "the capacity to continue to 'bounce back,' to recover strengths or spirits quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity" (2009, p. 1302).

Resilience can be influenced by numerous variables and can fluctuate depending upon a teacher's personal and professional relations, own biography, educational values, and the specific socio-cultural and policy contexts of the workplace (Gu & Day, 2013). Castro and colleagues (2010) are joined by Doney (2012) and Mansfield, Beltman, Price and McConney (2012) in recognizing that self-protecting factors of resilience can be built across a teacher's career.

Patterson, Collins, & Abbott (2004) identified nine factors associated with the most resilient urban educators they studied. Namely, resilient educators (1) had strong personal values, (2) availed themselves of professional development opportunities, (3) provided mentorship to others, (4) solved rather than avoided problems, (5) focused on

student learning, (6) were persistent with promoting student success, (7) had colleague support, (8) were flexible in their teaching style, and (9) knew when to get involved and when to stay out.

As Tait (2008) has noted, people with high levels of resilience are able to manage feelings, stress, and challenges in the workplace with optimism and success. Special educators are in particular need of resiliency because of the intense, complex, and often stressful and unpredictable nature of their work (Fish & Stephens, 2010).

How can teacher preparation programs, workplace conditions, relationships, and personal development interventions promote teacher resilience, increase retention and avoid attrition of special educators? Some efforts to foster teacher resiliency have been made that hold promise. For example, Curry and O'Brien (2012) propose promoting a wellness paradigm - personal understanding of oneself, one's well-being, and how to cope with daily stressors – as a way to provide teachers the self-control, internal stability, and self-support needed to cope with the daily stressors, which, in turn, may reduce teacher attrition. Doney (2012), using principles of Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), note that teacher strength in the face of adversity (i.e., resilience) can be bolstered by having the need for human connectedness met by deliberate structuring of personal and professional connections and supports for new teachers.

Another approach for building teacher resilience is the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) for Teachers professional development program (Jennings, Frank, Snowbert, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2011; 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The CARE for Teacher's program teaches and coaches teachers to use skills to reduce emotional and social stress and build resilience in managing their daily

challenges. Using direct instruction, guided practice, group discussion, and reflective writing, the program teaches educators (a) emotional skills of “how to practice self-induction of positive emotions to promote resilience and self-regulation” (Jennings et al., 2013, p. 378); (b) mindfulness practices of enhanced attention and nonjudgmental awareness of moment-to-moment experiences, and (c) compassion-building mindful listening (i.e., simply listening without judging, reacting, or providing advice). The 2011 and 2013 studies of the CARE program conducted in urban and suburban settings found that participants found CARE improved self-awareness, well-being, and the ability to handle the daily stressors, particularly with teachers in urban schools of high poverty and with students with more intensive academic and behavior difficulties. With results such as these, teacher preparation and local, state and national leadership can be encouraged to be deliberate about resilience building so teachers stay in their profession and have not only the academic, but the social/emotional competence and resiliency to meet the needs of students with excellence.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher attrition in the public school system is a continuing concern in the United States (Connelly & Graham, 2009; Curry & O’Brien, 2012). The attrition rate among general educators is estimated to be about 7.6% annually (Connelly & Graham, 2009); it is even higher among special educators, estimated to be about 13.5% annually, which is about 22,000 special educators (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Fish & Stephens, 2010). Further, teachers who leave the profession tend to do so within the first three to five years of starting the profession (Bobek, 2002; Le Cornu, 2009; Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011; Yost, 2006). The exodus of new teachers from the profession is a tremendous loss of

resources to the profession. It is also a tremendous loss for the individual who has expended so much time and effort in coursework and clinical practice experiences in hopes of a career in service to children, families, and the community as a special educator (Stephens & Fish, 2010).

When special education teachers leave the profession, it poses additional problems, given the steadily increasing number of students requiring special education services. In 2003 there were approximately 6,046,051 students ages 6 through 21 receiving special education services, which is a 30% increase since 1993 (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Although each year an estimated 22,000 new special educators graduate from our nation's teacher preparation programs, these numbers are insufficient to fill the job openings generated by a growing student population, the retirement of an aging teaching force, and the openings left by those leaving the profession (Connelly & Graham, 2009; Fish & Stephens, 2010).

As stated previously, teachers who have resilience attributes, habits, and supports are better able to manage feelings, stress, and challenges in the workplace with optimism and success and are less likely to leave the field. As also noted, because of the intense, complex, and often stressful and unpredictable nature of the employment responsibilities and conditions of special education, special education teachers are in particular need of supports, strategies, attributes, and dispositions that are characterized by a resiliency construct.

Although teacher attrition and retention factors related to student and teacher resilience have been examined from a variety of perspectives over the past couple of decades, there is still a need for a focused examination of the supports, strategies,

attributes, and dispositions that are needed for and used by special educators who successfully negotiate the stressors of the job and stay in the field beyond five years (the threshold year when most teachers who leave teaching, do so); (Bobek, 2002; Le Cornu, 2009; Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011; Yost, 2006).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The literature regarding the relatively high attrition of special educators as compared to general educators prompted this researcher to examine what factors special educators, who have chosen to stay in the field beyond five years, attribute to their retention in the field. The factors this researcher explored were motivational factors to enter the field, workplace, non-workplace, and personal resiliency attributes that have influenced their retention in the field of special education. The researcher's review of the literature on teacher satisfaction, motivation to enter teaching, support factors internal and external to the workplace, as well as resiliency attributes and coping behaviors reinforced the researcher's desire to inquire how to better activate resiliency among special educators to increase retention. A review of the research in these areas, which is presented in Chapter 2 and articulated as a research conceptual framework in Chapter 3, suggests four sets of factors as being related to or contributing to teacher satisfaction and retention.

Factor 1. Expressed reasons (motivation) for entering the field of special education (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Stephens & Fish, 2010)

Factor 2. Non-workplace influences and experiences (e.g. family, mindfulness practices) (Lee et al., 2011; Tait, 2008; Yost, 2006)

Factor 3. Workplace influences and experiences (e.g. collegiality, administrative support, student learning) (Griffin et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2013; Leko & Smith, 2010; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994)

Factor 4. Personal resiliency attributes and behaviors (Bobek, 2002; Gu & Day, 2007; Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004)

Given these factors, the purpose of this study was to identify the motivational, resiliency, and workplace and non-workplace behaviors and experiences which highly resilient special educators associate with their retention as special educators. To achieve this end, this researcher more deeply examined four factors that emerged from the research literature, by exploring the perceptions and experiences of special educators who scored as highly resilient (scoring 136 to 175) on the Wagnild (2009b) *The Resilience Scale* and who have chosen to stay in the field beyond their fifth year, the threshold year when most teachers who leave special education do so.

The following four research questions specifically explored the lived experience of this study's research participants.

Question 1. What do special educators who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as their *motivation(s) for entering and staying in the field* of special education?

Question 2. What do special educators who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as *non-workplace practices, experiences, and influences* (e.g. family, mindfulness practices) that may affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

Question 3. What do special educators who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as *workplace influences and experiences* (e.g. collegial support, administrative support, other supports, student learning) that may affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

Question 4. What do special educators who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as *personal resiliency attributes and behaviors* and *influences on their resilience* that may affect their satisfaction and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

This researcher also created space for any other factors that may emerge throughout the study by exploring a fifth question:

Question 5: What do special education teachers who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as factors that may affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

Context of the Study

This study was conducted with self-identified highly resilient southern California special educators who have remained in the field of special education beyond a threshold of five years. These participants were identified through an informant process. The criterion for being an informant was that the informant must have had direct contact and experience with the potential participant as a university professor, district supervisor or mentor, or professional colleague. The researcher sought 50 and was able to engage 28 initial study participants to self-assess their degree of resiliency. Of the 28, eleven

assessed as highly resilient and agreed to participate in the follow-up interview portion of the study.

Overview of Research Methodology

This study was a phenomenological study of the experiences of special educators who have remained in the field of special education for more than five years and who self-identified as highly resilient on the Wagnild (2009b) *Resilience Scale*. This study used a phenomenological qualitative research design, which was especially suited to the nature of this study. Namely, this design is best employed when a researcher is seeking to better understand a phenomenon about which little is known (Creswell, 2012). It can also be used to gain new perspective on what is already known about an area of research, or to gain more in-depth information. For example, teacher attrition and retention, teacher resilience, and factors influencing teacher satisfaction and well-being have been studied. However, these areas of study have not been connected together and examined through the lens of the experiences of self-identified highly resilient special educators who have chosen to stay in the field beyond the threshold of five years when those who choose to leave do so. Using a phenomenological approach allowed this researcher to study the lived experiences of the phenomenon, the decision of self-identified resilient incumbent special educators to remain in the profession, and focused upon discovering and describing the commonalities of the participants. The ultimate goal was to understand the factors of the participants' lived experiences as represented in their responses to the researcher's semi-structured interview questions into a menu of supports and strategies for local, state, and national educational leaders to enhance special educators' resiliency, satisfaction, and intention to remain in the field of special education.

Significance of Study

Many studies have noted high special education teacher attrition and identified reasons for teachers leaving the profession. Yet there is little comprehensive, prescriptive information on how to foster special education teachers' resilience or retention in the field. This study aimed to partially fill this research and practice gap by obtaining from highly resilient teachers who have chosen to remain in the field, their concrete descriptions and examples of motivations to be a special educator, factors internal and external to the workplace, and personal resiliency attributes and behaviors associated with their retention, as well as create space for any other themes that may emerge. The information gained from this study can be shared with the professional education community to promote further attention and research in this critical area of need and to create understanding of the lived experiences of special educators, to increase the support and the retention of special educators.

Background and Role of the Researcher

Being a self-identified highly resilient special educator who has remained in the field of special education beyond a threshold of five years presents its own benefits and challenges. As a special educator having served in the field for 10 years, the researcher understands the complexities of the job a special educator faces and the phenomenon being studied. This proximity and positionality was carefully considered when interviewing the participants and analyzing the data, so as to not influence the interviews and data analysis. Given this self-awareness of positionality and reflexivity, the researcher was as deliberate as possible to ensure that she did not lead or influence her participants' responses in any way toward her own experiences.

The researcher was interested in the topic of teacher resiliency as a result of her own experience with and perspective on the field of special education. Throughout her tenure as a special educator she has seen the high attrition rates of special educators. She witnessed first-hand and learned through the research the reasons special educators leave the field. She was keenly aware of the reasons she entered the field, the non-workplace and workplace contexts, and personal resiliency attributes that influenced her own resiliency, satisfaction, intent, and ultimate behavior of staying in the field. Therefore, she was interested in studying the resiliency of other special educators, their reasons for entering the field, their non-workplace and workplace contexts, and their personal resiliency attributes that influenced their satisfaction, intent, and ultimate behavior of staying in the field in order to provide educational leaders strategies to retain highly qualified special educators.

Definition of Key Terms

The following list of key terms were provided to assist in orienting the reader to terms that appear in the literature review and throughout this study.

Administrative Support

Administrative support can be defined as the perception that the lead school personnel (e.g., principals, leader teachers and coaches, department chair) are effective in providing educators what they need to effectively do the job. Four types of support have been identified: (1) *instrumental* – helping teachers with their work, (2) *appraisal* – offering coaching and feedback or clarifying job responsibilities, (3) *informational* – providing professional development and current updates on best practice, and (4) *emotional* – showing teachers they are esteemed and worthy of concern by showing

appreciation, taking an interest in their work, and asking for and considering teachers ideas (Boyd et al., 2011; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; Tickle, Chang, & Kim, 2011).

Highly Qualified Teacher

McLeskey & Billingsley (2008) describe a highly qualified teacher as an educator who has the necessary certifications to teach and are knowledgeable in the necessary content areas.

Resilience

Authors and researchers have offered various definitions of resiliency. Gu and Day (2009) provide a broad definition of resilience as “the capacity to continue to ‘bounce back,’ to recover strengths or spirits quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity” (p. 1302). For the purposes of this study, this will be the overarching definition of resiliency. Resilient individuals are better able to manage feelings, stress, failure, and challenges in the workplace with optimism and success (Tait, 2008). Workplace experiences associated with resilience include observation of student progress and growth, positive learning environments, supportive peer relationships and staff collegiality (Gu & Day, 2007; Jennings, 2010; Taylor, 2013).

Special Education

The U.S. Department of Education defines special education as, “specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.39(b)(3); IDEA, 2004).

Special Educator

Special educators are teachers who are credentialed or licensed to manage the Individual Education Program (IEP) plans and instructional programs for students who are eligible for specially designed instruction due to their qualification for special education services in one or more qualifying disability categories under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which guarantees students with disabilities a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment.

Teacher Attrition

Boe, Cook, Sunderland (2008) define teacher attrition simply as a teacher “leaving teaching employment” (p. 12).

Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation and teacher preparation programs prepare individuals to serve as educational personnel in the field of education through a course of study and clinical experiences designed to enable them to promote student educational success (Sindelar, Bishop, Brownell, Rosenberg & Connelly, 2005).

Teacher Retention

Billingsley (2004) provides a two-category definition of teacher retention. “Category one pertains to teachers who remain in the same teaching assignment and school from year to year; category two refers to transfers to another special education teaching assignment” (p. 40).

Teacher Turnover

Boe and colleagues (2008) define teacher turnover as “major changes in a teacher’s assignment from one school year to the next” (p. 8).

Teaching Efficacy

Teaching efficacy has been described and defined as the level of confidence a teacher has in his or her ability to bolster student learning (Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011), and findings show low levels of teaching efficacy to be a significant factor in teacher burnout and attrition. Bandura (1997) notes that mastery and vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states contribute to teaching efficacy, and that efficacy develops through both pre-service experiences and a teacher's early years of teaching.

Wellness

Curry and O'Brien (2012) define wellness as a person's understanding of him or herself, and what that person needs to experience well-being, to cope with daily stressors and function at maximum capacity.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one discussed the initial outline of the literature retention and attrition of special educators. It also provided grounds for investigating the lived experiences of self-identified highly resilient special educators who remained in the field beyond a threshold of five years.

Chapter two provides a detailed review of the current literature on special educator attrition and retention and a historical background of the theoretical framework of resiliency theory.

Chapter three describes the approach used to investigate this population's lived experiences.

Chapter four presents the results of the study; namely, eleven interviewees'

identified reasons for entering the field and the non-workplace and workplace contexts and personal resiliency attributes and behaviors, as well as a fifth identified factor associated with their resilience, satisfaction, intention, and ultimate behavior of remaining in the field of special education beyond five years.

Chapter five reviews the studies statement of the problem, theoretical framework, methodology, and limitations, and discusses the implications of finding and future considerations for research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Special education teachers are in high demand and greatly needed to meet the needs of the growing population of students qualified for special education services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 which guarantees students with disabilities a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The high attrition rate of special education teachers in the teaching force is a phenomenon in need of attention, as are the demands and pressures that special education teacher's experience that may be associated with this attrition. Special education needs to retain teachers to reduce the impending financial impact and to reduce the inadequate educational experiences for students with learning differences (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b).

Topics Addressed in the Literature Review

This literature review examines factors that influence teachers' decision to leave the field of special education. It draws upon bodies of literature that examine attrition rates of educators, with a focus upon attrition of special education teachers. Also examined is the resilience construct. Resilience has been associated with the survival and success of a number of populations of humans in difficult situations such as youth who are at risk for school failure (Krovetz, 1999), educators (Taylor, 2013), marriage and family therapists (Clark, 2009), and nurses (Stagman-Tyrer, 2014). Factors that impact teacher retention also are examined and include the nature of the work of a special educator, the state of teacher retention and attrition, workplace factors that influence teacher behavior, and non-workplace factors that influence teacher behavior. Through this literature review, the researcher identified a gap in literature concerning strategies

that special education teachers can use to remain in the job and the nature of administrative support that may motivate special educators to remain in the field of special education.

The Special Education Context

Special Education in U.S. Schools. Special education is the constellation of supports and services provided to students who are found eligible for these educational supports after being assessed as having one of 13 federally defined disabilities that impact the learner's ability to access and progress in the general education curriculum. According to Section 300.39 of the U.S. Department of Education's regulations governing the administration of IDEA, special education is defined as specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.39(b)(3); IDEA, 2004). The U.S. Department of Education annually reported state eligibility data indicates that approximately 8.8% of school-aged children in the United States have an identified disability (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2007; 2013).

The number of students who receive special education services continues to increase annually (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2013), with just under 10% of the student population eligible for special education nationally. More males than females are found eligible for services. The U.S. Department of Education (1998) postulated three possible reasons for the disproportionate number of eligible males: (1) physiological and maturational differences, (2) education bias (i.e., more female teachers than male teachers make referrals and there are more female than male teachers in the

teacher population), and (3) assessment bias, whereby tests used to determine eligibility have a tendency to identify more boys than girls.

Figure 1 shows the U.S. Department of Education's reported disability distribution of students ages six through 21 receiving special education and related services under IDEA for the 2008-2009 academic school year (Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2013). As Figure 1 illustrates, special educators who serve this broad and diverse population of students need to be equipped with a broad range of skills. The demands of a job that serves such a diverse population of students can impact a special educator's feelings of self-efficacy and, in turn, the intention to and actual act of continuing as a special educator.

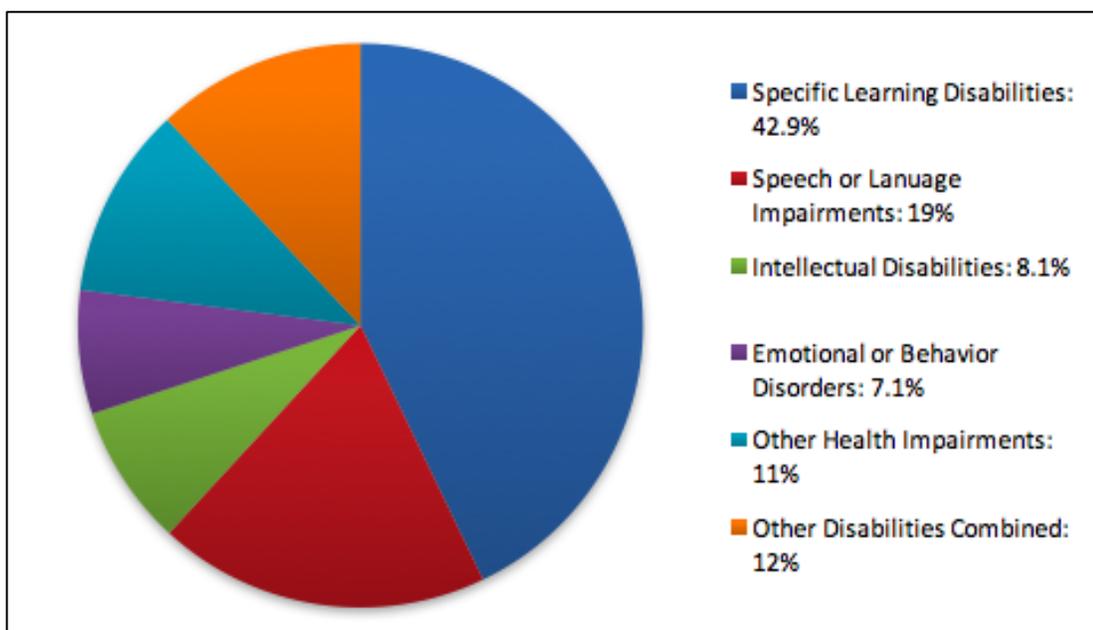


Figure 1. Disability distribution of student's ages 6 through 21 receiving special education services under IDEA for the 2008-2009 academic school year. (Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2011 as cited in Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Shogren, 2013)

The Role and Retention of Special Educators in U.S. Schools. Special educators are critical to supporting students eligible for special education to advance academically, behaviorally, and socially (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). Yet school districts find it challenging to find highly qualified special education teachers needed to meet the increasing number of students eligible for special education services (Fish & Stephens, 2010). To illustrate, over a 13-year period (i.e., from 1990 to 2003), the number of students aged 6 through 21 receiving special education services increased by 30% (Connelly & Graham, 2009). They also found that a lower percentage (84.8%) of special educators remained in the teaching profession as compared with their general education counterparts (92.4%). Further, while 8.8% of special education teachers transfer to general education positions, only 1% of general education teachers transferred to special education positions. Six years later (in the 1999-2000 academic year) U.S. Department of Education data revealed that 97% of all of the nation's school districts had at least one special education vacancy, representing nearly 79,000 special education job openings in one year (Connelly & Graham, 2009).

Who becomes a special educator? Being a special education teacher is a demanding, complex, and ambiguous profession. Despite the ambiguity and demands, educators are drawn to and remain in the field for a variety of reasons. Identified retention factors include empathy towards students and a desire to serve those in need, having a family member or friend with special needs, job vacancy and availability in the field, and having themselves received special education services (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Stephens & Fish, 2010). Despite a desire to enter the field of special education, once employed special educators face a myriad of challenges that may conflict with their

desire to focus on teaching children; namely, the demands of extensive paperwork, frequent and intense meetings, limited planning time, and a wide range of student and family needs (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Leko & Smith, 2010).

Research has identified a discrepancy between teachers' intent to leave the profession and teachers actually leaving. Gersten and colleagues (2001), in a longitudinal study of teachers who had expressed an intent to leave and those that actually left, found that of 33 teachers who had expressed the intent of leave, only 69% actually left (approximately 23 teachers).

Why might this discrepancy between intention and action exist? First, special educators remain in the field for a variety of reasons. They may be satisfied with their job and feel their role of serving those in need makes a positive difference. They may have supportive district and school site administrators, and supportive colleagues, and enjoy the meaningful dialogue with other educators. Furthermore, they are encouraged and inspired by academic progress achieved by students, provided professional development opportunities, are engaged and active in implementing the public policy and legislative laws of special education, and because they simply love the profession (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Gersten et al., 2001; Stephens & Fish, 2010).

Job Demand Stressors Unique to Special Educators

Paperwork. Research estimates that special educators spend an average of about five hours per week on paperwork and forms (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b; Carlson et al., 2002 as cited in Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). One teacher in Stephens and Fish's (2010) study stated that the amount of paperwork that had to be processed and generated was unbelievable. The encumbrance of paperwork left little time to create effective

lesson plans for multiple subjects and grade levels.

Role ambiguity – A problem and solutions. With the shift from educating students with disabilities in separate classrooms to collaboratively teaching all students in general education environments through co-teaching approaches (Villa & Thousand, 2016), there is inevitable confusion as to the role of special and general educators in the planning for and the instruction and assessment of students with disabilities. Neither party has well-defined or well-understood roles and responsibilities as part of their history. Both parties may be uncertain or confused as to who is responsible for what parts of a special education students' education, resulting in ambiguity that can be both confusing and frustrating (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b). This frustration can be exacerbated when general educators do not see themselves as responsible for or appreciative of the needs of students with disabilities (Stephens & Fish, 2010).

One way to reduce role ambiguity and dissonance among general and special educator roles is for administrators and school systems to create opportunities for general and special educators to collaborate to establish shared goals and values for all of the students they serve (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b; Jones et al., 2013). Role dissonance among special educators is predictable due to the array of instructional and non-instructional responsibilities demanded of them because of IDEA regulations, and student and family needs (Gersten et al., 2001). The good news is that general education teachers, who have different skill sets (e.g., deep understanding of curriculum content), can help novice special educators thrive through partner and mentor relationships, thus reducing attrition (Griffin et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2013).

Institutional factors. Institutional factors that contribute to a novice special

education teachers' view of and ability to function and succeed in their initial school assignment are the school's climate, in particular the culture regarding relationships with and support from other school administrators and mentors; opportunities for professional development and collaboration; integration of special education classrooms in the general education campus rather than away from the mainstream of the school learning community; and assistance in the management of workload and paperwork (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b; Griffin et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2013; Leko & Smith, 2010).

The State of Teacher Retention and Attrition

Teacher Retention and Attrition in the U.S. In the United States, the attrition rate of both general and special education teachers in the public school system has been a long-term problem. Boyd and colleagues (2011) found 16% of overall teacher attrition to be due to retirement, while 84% was due to teachers permanently leaving the field or switching schools. Examining data from the national 1994-1995 Teacher Follow-Up Survey, Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008) found 27% of teachers leaving the field due to retirement, 31% leaving due to personal/family reasons, 5% leaving due to poor health, and 3% leaving due to school staffing actions.

Retention and Attrition of Special Educators. In the 1990s U.S. special education teacher turnover was high, with 22% to 23% of public school special educators and gifted education teachers leaving teaching, switching teaching area focus (e.g., moving to general education), or changing schools (Boe et al., 2008). In 2008, Boe and colleagues had found the attrition rate to have improved for special educators, with only 6.3% of special educators leaving annually, which was close to the 6.6% attrition rate for general educators.

With the recession and economic downturn of recent years, this progress reversed, so that by 2010, special educators again were leaving the teaching profession at a significantly higher annual rate of 13.5%, equating to 22,000 special educators leaving per year (Fish & Stephens, 2010). Simultaneously, fewer new special educators were graduating from teacher preparation programs to replace those leaving the job. The infusion of new talent still left a gap of need created by special education teacher attrition and the steadily increasing number of students receiving special education services (Connelly & Graham, 2009; Fish & Stephens, 2010). Ironically, Fish and Stephens (2010) found that 18% of elementary teachers and 10% of the secondary teachers surveyed believed school districts did not work hard enough to recruit needed special education teachers.

Special educators who leave the profession do so early, within the first three to five years of teaching (Bobek, 2002; Le Cornu, 2009; Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011; Yost, 2006) and they leave the field for a variety of reasons. Everyday they face many challenges such as being overwhelmed by the work load causing feelings of alienation, not feeling heard and supported by administrators, increased legal requirements, excessive time needing to be spent on required administrative and paperwork tasks (i.e. IEP's, assessments, and eligibility determination), and lack of opportunities for preparation from pre-service and in-service programs (Connelly & Graham, 2009; Nance & Calabrese, 2009).

When highly qualified special education teachers leave their job they often are replaced with unqualified teachers who do not remain in the position long enough to become highly qualified. This leaves students receiving less than optimal special

education services, potentially widening their achievement gaps (Connelly & Graham, 2009). In an analysis of U.S. Department of Education special education teacher data, McLeskey and Billingsley (2008) found that from 1993 to 2003, the percentage of uncertified personnel serving school-aged students (i.e., 6 through 21 years of age) eligible for special education rose from 9.06% to 12.38%, a 36% increase. In raw numbers, this 12.38% represents more than 49,000 personnel not properly certified to teach in their assignment teaching roughly 830,000 students with learning differences; Connelly & Graham (2009) report similar data.

Despite an ongoing special education teacher shortage (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Connelly & Graham, 2009), there are highly qualified special educators eager to stay in the field. In fact, special educators who experience support from their colleagues have been found to experience an enhanced commitment to their teaching assignment (Jones et al., 2013). Resilience of special educators is an important area to explore to determine and then to help foster their want and desire to continue teaching.

Educational policy. Districts continue to find it challenging to find highly qualified special education teachers to meet the increasing number of students referred to special education (Fish & Stephens, 2010). Reporting on U.S. Department of Education special education data, Connelly and Graham (2009) note that the number of school-aged students (aged 6 through 21) served under the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) has steadily increased, with 6,046,051 being served in 2003, a number representing a 30% increase over a 10-year period.

Increased imposed legal requirements and paperwork negatively impact teacher's desire to continue in the job. Increased support to accomplish these tasks is one way to

positively influence special educators to remain in the job (Nance & Calabrese, 2009). Legislative changes such as IDEA and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), recently reauthorized (in December 2015) and dubbed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) have inadvertently contributed to special education teacher shortages (Nichols, Bicard, Bicard, & Casey, 2008) by (a) opening new avenues for determining whether a student is eligible for services in the learning disabilities category through the data-based Response to Intervention (RTI) approach to eligibility determination, and (b) committing to service delivery through age 21 to support student progress toward achieving post-secondary goals.

Highly qualified status. Until the recent reauthorization of ESEA, from 2001 until 2015 the act specifically mandated new guidelines for teachers, defining what a highly qualified teacher was (Nichols et al., 2008; Sindelar, Bishop, Brownell, Rosenberg, & Connelly, 2005). A highly qualified teacher was one who has the necessary certifications to teach and has been assessed to be knowledgeable in requisite content areas (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). Sindelar and colleagues (2005) note that defining *highly qualified* for special educators is itself a problem, noting that even special education professionals cannot come to agreement as to what constitutes a highly qualified teacher or how to measure it.

Regardless of the debate among special education professionals as to the definition of highly qualified there remains a critical need to retain effective special educators (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008; Nance & Calabrese, 2009; Nichols et al., 2008). Possible approaches for increasing retention of highly qualified special educators include changes in teacher preparation pre-service programs, enhanced staff

development, and increased colleague support (Jones et al., 2013; McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008;). Connelly and Graham (2009) concur that, in addition to adequate training and certification, special educators thrive when they experience self-efficacy, effective communication, and supportive collaboration from administrators and colleagues. Jones and colleagues (2013) found not only formal, but informal relationships important to novice teacher success.

Professional Preparation Factors Influencing Retention and Attrition

Pre-service teacher preparation programs prepare teachers to promote student success (Sindelar et al., 2005). What does the research say about the effectiveness of pre-service program in transitioning novice teachers from students to teachers? Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, and Weber (1997) found that fully qualified and credentialed teachers were more likely to stay in teaching compared to teachers who begin teaching as partially certified (e.g., as interns or emergency credentialed personnel). Defining and measuring what is a fully prepared or qualified teacher is problematic for special educators due to variances in job assignments, class make-up, school climate (Sindelar et al., 2005), and other variables such as a district's commitment to and support of inclusive education and school-wide support systems for all students.

There is documented reduced teacher attrition for teachers who have completed comprehensive coursework and student teaching (Connelly & Graham, 2009) as compared with alternative licensure pre-service preparation programs (Connelly & Graham, 2009; Sindelar et al., 2005). Clinical practice experience does matter. Connelly and Graham (2009) found that novice special education teachers with fewer than 10 weeks of student teaching were at risk of leaving the profession early compared to those

who had 10 or more weeks of clinical practice. They argue that shorter alternative credential routes may not offer enough to establish the skills, self-efficacy and resilience needed for novice special educators to be successful in the job and commit to staying in the job.

Teaching efficacy and retention. Pre-service programs can be a significant factor in the development of strong, self-efficacious teachers (Lee et al., 2011; Tait, 2008; Yost, 2006). Lee and colleagues (2011) describe and define *teaching efficacy* as the level of confidence a teacher has in his or her ability to bolster student learning. In their research with 92 special education intern teachers, they found low levels of teaching efficacy to be a significant factor in teacher burnout and attrition. Bandura (1997) identified four dimensions that contribute to teaching efficacy – (1) mastery experience, (2) vicarious experiences, (3) social persuasion, and (4) physiological and emotional states, and notes that these dimensions develop through both pre-service experiences and a teacher's early years of teaching. Yost (2006), in a study of 17 teachers from a small liberal arts college, found reflection and inquiry to be effective tools to help teachers cope with everyday challenges. They also found that teaching and expecting candidates to use a thinking model throughout their pre-service program helped novice teachers develop self-efficacy and resiliency.

Yost (2006) argues that teaching efficacy or self-efficacy - the power to produce desired effects for oneself - is important, but not enough to improve teacher retention. Skill building and mastery of pedagogical and classroom management skills through authentic teaching experiences in pre-service programs is essential. Otherwise stated, authentic, quality teacher experiences bolster self-efficacy and confidence, which, in turn,

decreases the likelihood of a teacher leaving the profession in his or her first years.

Workplace Factors Influencing Teacher Behavior

Lee and colleagues (2011) found three employment dimensions to pose potential challenge or supports for new teachers. The three dimensions are: (1) school climate, (2) relationships and social networks support (e.g. administration support, mentoring, professional development, collaboration) at any level, and (3) student instructional and work responsibility issues (e.g. paperwork, role ambiguity) (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b; Griffin et al., 2009; Leko & Smith, 2010). Districts that retain highly qualified and effective teachers have been found to create working conditions where teachers feel that they have influence, administrative support, staff relations, good student behavior and engagement, facilities, and safety (Boyd et al., 2011).

Collegial support. Novice teachers benefit from veteran collegial support to help build their self-efficacy and enhance job satisfaction (Jones et al., 2013). Peer mentoring is one approach that helps develop self-efficacious and resilient teachers, which can positively influence retention. Collaboration and communication among general and special educators can be promoted with something as basic as close classroom proximity, which allows novice teachers to have more frequent opportunities to collaborate, communicate, and build collegial relationships (Griffin et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2013; Leko & Smith, 2010). Colleague support and mentoring can come from general education teachers or other special education teachers (Griffin et al., 2009). Leko & Smith (2010) note that special educators' potential feelings of isolation can be reduced when relationships with other special education teachers, whether at their own or other school sites, are fostered.

Griffin and colleagues (2009) found that special educators often feel most supported by special education colleagues versus general education colleagues. Similarly, Leko and Smith (2013) note that novice special educators benefit from specialized support and mentoring related to their specialized and multi-dimensional job role. These findings acknowledged, general education colleagues offer important support roles (Jones et al., 2013). The bottom line is that special educators and general educators need to work together in an inclusive educational model (students with special needs included in the general population of the school) to problem solve and resolve role ambiguities (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b).

Administrative support and professional development. What might explain this loss of special education personnel in the field? Billingsley (2004b) suggests that special education teachers leave the field, in part, due to perceived lack of administrative support. Administrative support has long been identified as an important teacher support variable, particularly important during a teacher's first year(s) of teaching (Boyd et al., 2011; Gersten et al., 2001). While there are a variety of factors that influence a teachers' decision to stay or leave the job, Tickle, Chang, and Kim (2011) determined that supportive administration mediates all other effects of teaching. Novice teachers specifically have identified scarcity of administrative support as a major cause for leaving the teaching profession entirely (Tickle et al., 2011).

Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) examined and discovered the types of administrative support that teachers are seeking and appreciate. Specifically, they examined the effects of principal support on general and special educators' stress, job satisfaction, school commitment, health, and intent to stay in teaching. They found that

administrators offer different types of support (e.g., *instrumental* - helping teachers with their work, *appraisal* - offering coaching and feedback or clarifying job responsibilities, *informational* – providing professional development and current updates on best practice). Yet, the type of support offered is not always the type educators most want. Specifically, *emotional* support - showing teachers they are esteemed and worthy of concern through "open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, and considering teachers' ideas" (Littrell et al., 1994, p. 297) - emerged as the most important support for administrators to provide.

What is an example of an action that administrators can take to structure one or more of these four types of supports? *Informational* support is provided when administration provides staff development that builds teacher competence and resilience (Fish & Stephens, 2010). Administrators structure both *instrumental* and an *emotional* support when they reorganize the life of teachers through a flexible and responsive master schedule that allows teachers to meet, plan, teach, and debrief as teams and get their need for collegial affiliation and support met. (See the previous discussions on Collegial Support and the Relational Cultural Theory discussion below for more on the importance of collegial affiliation.)

During a teacher's first year(s) of teaching, administrative (e.g., principal, teacher leader) support is particularly important in helping the novice to become more effective and resilient (Boyd et al., 2011; Tickle et al., 2011). Leko and Smith (2010) urge administrators to think carefully about school climate in terms of collaboration and collegiality. A school climate that fosters collegiality and communication reduces teacher stress and allows novice special educators to focus on instruction (Griffin et al., 2009;

Leko & Smith, 2010). Administrators can foster and support collaboration and collegiality through inclusive educational models where general and special educators collaborate to educate all students in the general education environment through structures such as co-teaching (Griffin et al., 2009; Leko & Smith, 2010). When teachers feel isolated and alone they feel more stress because they do not feel they have the necessary support to learn the complexities of the job, in turn reducing their capacity to build self-efficacy.

Resiliency Theory and Teacher Retention

Historical Context. Research on teacher resilience began in the 1970s and 1980s in the fields of positive psychology and psychiatry (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Gu & Day, 2007; Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012) following an interest in and initial examination of resiliency in youth at risk (e.g., Benard, 1993). Teacher resiliency concerns how educators respond to and overcome the challenges and changes in their work environments (Castro, et al., 2010; Gu & Day, 2007; Mansfield et al., 2012).

Gu and Day define resilience as “the capacity to continue to ‘bounce back,’ to recover strengths or spirits quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity” (2007, p. 1302). Other definitions of resiliency exist, but for the purposes of this research study, this is the definition that will be used to examine special education teacher resiliency. Resilience is a quality that allows teachers to stay committed to their field despite changes and challenges (Brunetti, 2006). Bobek (2002) found resilient teachers to (a) have significant relationships, (b) be given and responsible for professional responsibilities, (c) exhibit problem solving and goal setting skills, (d) demonstrate confidence and self-efficacy, (e) humor, and (f) a sense of accomplishment. A resilience

construct can be useful in identifying teacher skills and character traits that can be developed to reduce teacher burnout and turnover. These skills and character traits may or may not be the same as those required of other professions (Castro et al., 2010; Mansfield et al., 2012).

Resilience Theory Applied in Educators. Tait (2008) identified teacher resilience, promoted through self-efficacy, as a key contributor to long-term teacher retention. Gu and Day (2013) found resilience to be a necessary condition for teachers to sustain their capacity to teach at their best and an attribute that can fluctuate depending upon interactions with others in an individual's personal and professional life. Further, teachers' perceptions of their resiliency level can be influenced by their own biographies, educational values, the socio-cultural and policy context of their teaching situation, and the conditions of their personal and professional lives (Gu & Day, 2013).

Resilient individuals are better able to manage feelings, stress, failure, and challenges in the workplace with optimism and success (Tait, 2008). Special educators especially need resilience, as special educators usually have a greater amount of stress, complexity, and unpredictability in their work life than do general educators. For example, special educators can be inundated with paperwork and complex relationships with families, students, related services personnel (e.g., psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists), and administrators across several grade levels and subject areas (Fish & Stephens, 2010). Special educators with few opportunities to collaborate or co-teach with educators in the general education environment may feel isolated and alone in the back corner of the school.

Many ask, "Is resilience static or fluid?" This has not been definitively

determined, but Doney (2012) found self-protecting factors in teachers' lives helped to foster and build resilience throughout their careers. These findings support the position of Castro and colleagues (2010) and Mansfield and colleagues (2012) that teacher resilience can build over time and is not an innate quality.

If resiliency is a human attribute that can be influenced by a teacher's actions and the experiences and people surrounding that teacher, what can be done to enhance special educator resiliency? This is one of the questions explored by this researcher in this study.

When novice special education teachers are hired, they face the dual difficulty of being new to the profession and meeting the demands of a special education teacher (Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). To bolster teacher resilience to handle the demands of the profession Patterson, Collins, & Abbott (2004) found nine resilience attributes or strategies used by the 16 participants in their study. They found resilient teachers to have (1) clear personal values and (2) professional development opportunities. They also found that resilient teachers (3) mentored others, (4) were problem solvers instead of victims, (5) focused upon student learning, (6) were persistent with fostering student success, (7) had colleague support, (8) were flexible in their teaching style, and (9) knew when to get involved and when to stay out of a situation. This small scale study points to behaviors that may help special educators to manage and enjoy the stress of their job and be more inclined to remain in and enjoy their profession. This current research study seeks to further determine the attributes and actions of a larger pool of special educators who self-assess as being highly resilient and who have chosen to stay in the field beyond the five-year point when most teachers who leave the profession choose to leave.

Resilience Theory and Job Satisfaction. Teachers face adversity and challenges

every day. To maintain their status as a teacher, and be able to teach effectively and at their highest level of excellence teachers need high levels of resiliency. With all of the compounding factors teachers face, Gu and Day (2013) offer a broader definition of resilience in comparison to those discussed above. Gu and Day assert, that a resilience construct in teachers is the capacity to manage the unavoidable complexities inevitable in teaching and that it is driven by teachers' educational purposes and moral values. Gu and Day also provide a broad definition of resilience (as discussed above) as "the capacity to continue to 'bounce back,' to recover strengths or spirits quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity" (2009, p. 1302). For the purposes of this study, this will be the overarching definition of resiliency. Dimensions of resiliency have also been identified and include but are not limited to student progress and growth, positive learning environments, supportive peer relationships/in school support; staff collegiality, commitment, and many more (Gu & Day, 2007; Jennings, 2010; Taylor, 2013).

Related Theoretical Frameworks, Approaches, and Programs for Building Resiliency. Historically, special education teachers and general education teachers have experienced role ambiguity (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b; Griffin et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2013; Stephens & Fish, 2010), meaning that there is lack of clarity as to how they are to interact with one another and the students that they both serve. Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) is a theoretical framework that acknowledges the importance of human connectedness and relationship in the workplace and the cultural differences and ambiguity that exist between general and special education teachers (Doney, 2012). Unless deliberately structured by the school system, novice special education teachers often fail to have the personal and professional human connections they need, resulting in

stress and frustration (Jones et al., 2013). This is where resilience building interfaces with RCT. If one accepts the proposition that resilience is a trait and set of behaviors that can be built up throughout one's life (Castro et al., 2010; Doney, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2012), then deliberate structuring of human support systems within and outside of the school by a teacher and by the school system, are strategies that can increase teacher resiliency and retention.

Wellness and resiliency. Researchers are beginning to examine and offer theoretically based insights into how to build programs and establish paradigms in schools, including the structuring of human support systems, to facilitate teacher resiliency. For example, a focus upon self-care and wellness behaviors can positively affect a person's ability to be resilient and effectively manage stress. Curry and O'Brien (2012), recognizing that teachers' inability to manage daily job stressors can impair their ability to effectively meet the constantly changing needs of their students, recommend that to reduce teacher attrition, schools make a wellness paradigm shift. They define *wellness* as a person's understanding of him or herself and what is needed to experience well-being and cope with daily stressors to function at maximum capacity. In their case study, they found that when teachers formulate and act upon a wellness plan, they can experience greater self-control, internal stability, and self-support. They suggest that school site administrators and districts adopt wellness practices (e.g., teaching about and encouraging mindfulness thinking and practices among students and staff) to reduce teacher attrition rates. Two questions that this promising practice raises are (1) "What wellness practices do resilient teachers practice?" and (2) "What wellness supports do schools in which resilient teachers work deliberately or incidentally provide?"

CARE professional development. Another example of a program for reducing teacher attrition while building teacher resilience is the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) professional development program (Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia & Greenberg, 2013). The CARE program is a 30-hour program of emotional skill instruction, mindfulness practice, and compassion-building activities aimed to provide teachers with the skills to reduce emotional and social stress in teaching while building resilience to manage those challenges. A U.S. Department of Education-funded randomized control study of 53 urban and suburban participants of the CARE program over a two-year period found 87% of participating teachers strongly agreed that teacher in-service training should include CARE or something similar (Jennings et al., 2013). More specifically, of the participants, 96% found CARE training to improve self-awareness; 92% found it to improve well-being; and 77% found it to facilitate resilience and the ability to handle the daily stressors of their job with greater ease. With results such as these, school districts and state departments of education are encouraged to consider implementing the CARE or similar professional development programs to promote resilience building among teachers, which, in turn, may keep them in the profession to meet the needs of students with excellence.

Conclusion

Teacher attrition is a continuously growing concern in the United States that needs attention (Curry & O'Brien, 2012). The demand and expectation of special education teachers specifically is high and costly. Paperwork, unsupportive personnel, service hours, and legal ramifications inundate special education teachers and result in high attrition rates and unqualified teachers in the classroom (Connelly & Graham, 2009;

Nance & Calabrese, 2009). Research shows that special education teachers leave the profession within the first three to five years (Bobek, 2002; Le Cornu, 2009; Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011; Yost, 2006). When special educators feel support from their colleagues, it contributes greatly to their staying committed to the teaching assignment (Jones et al., 2013). Teachers need to feel efficacious and appreciated for their work in restoring families' beliefs in the education system and to help families cope with the challenges that come with having a child with special needs.

Furthermore, to maintain their status as a teacher, be able to teach effectively and at their highest level of excellence, they need high levels of resiliency. Research needs to examine the factors that self-identified highly resilient special educators use to remain in the field beyond the threshold of three to five years.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study was a phenomenological study of the experiences of special educators who have remained in the field of special education beyond the threshold of five years and who self-identified as highly resilient. The study is a phenomenological study wherein the researcher explored the identified phenomenon of self-identified highly resilient special educators who have remained in the field of special education beyond the threshold of five years. The researcher collected data from eleven participants who have experienced the phenomenon of remaining in the field beyond the threshold of five years and developed “a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). However, this study was informed by multiple theoretical and research-grounded perspectives, which the researcher conceptualizes as working together to influence special educators’ behavior to stay in or leave the profession.

A Conceptual Framework Informing This Research

The Chapter 2 literature review outlines that at least four factors relate to and contribute to a special educator’s resilience, satisfaction, and intention and action to stay (or leave) teaching as a special educator:

- 1.) Expressed reasons (motivation) for entering the field of special education (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Stephens & Fish, 2010),
- 2.) Non-workplace practices, experiences, and influences (e.g. family, mindfulness practices) (Lee et al., 2011; Tait, 2008; Yost, 2006),
- 3.) Workplace influences and experiences (e.g. collegial support, administrative support, other supports, student learning) (Griffin et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2013; Leko &

Smith, 2010; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994), and

4.) Personal resiliency attributes and behaviors (Bobek, 2002; Gu & Day, 2007; Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004).

Figure 2 presents a conceptual framework that connects the four factors and suggests paths through which these factors may work to influence teacher resilience, satisfaction with, and intention to remain teaching as a special educator, and the ultimate behavior of remaining as a special educator beyond the threshold of five years. Note that the conceptual framework predicts all four factors as having some impact on special education teacher retention by influencing or being associated with either teacher resilience or teacher satisfaction and/or intention to stay in the field.

The researcher was not hypothesizing that any of the four factors have any particular relative weight with regard to influencing teacher resilience, satisfaction, intention, or the act of staying in the field. Nor was the researcher assessing through this research whether these potential paths of influence, in fact, work through the resiliency construct to influence a teacher's intention, satisfaction, or ultimate behavior of continuing in the field. Instead, the conceptual framework was intended to provide the reader with a schematic of the factors that the literature associates with teacher resiliency and retention and drove the researcher to craft the four categories of interview questions that comprise the semi-structured interview used with the participants of this study. These questions were designed to elicit from the special educators, who self-identified as highly resilient and who have remained in the field beyond five years, information regarding (a) motivation for entering and staying in the field, (b) non-workplace supports and actions, (c) workplace supports and actions, and (d) personal resiliency-related attributes and

behaviors. The responses to these questions were analyzed to determine potential supports and strategies that might inform educators, administrators, and the field of education on how to foster resilience and satisfaction in order to increase retention of special educators.

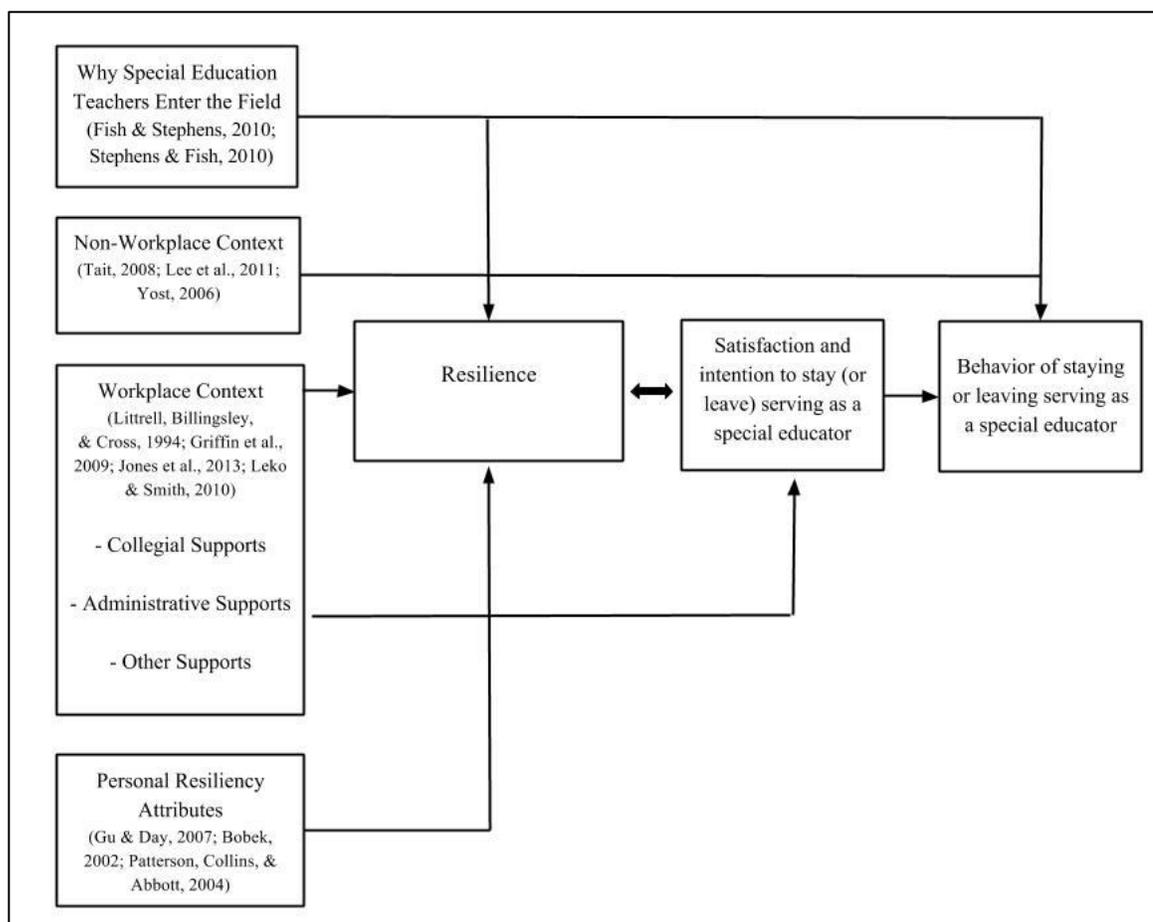


Figure 2. Conceptual framework for factors associated with special educator teacher resiliency and retention in the field of special education.

Research Questions

Given the conceptual framework presented and described above, this researcher more deeply examined the four factors that emerged from the research literature, by exploring the perceptions and experiences of special educators who scored as highly

resilient on Wagnild (2009b) *The Resilience Scale* and who have stayed in the field five or more years.

The following research questions guided the exploration of the lived experience of this study's research participants.

Question 1. What do special educators who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as their *motivation(s) for entering and staying in the field* of special education?

Question 2. What do special educators who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as *non-workplace practices, experiences, and influences* (e.g. family, mindfulness practices) that may affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

Question 3. What do special educators who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as *workplace influences and experiences* (e.g. collegial support, administrative support, other supports, student learning) that may affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

Question 4. What do special educators who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as *personal resiliency attributes and behaviors and influences on their resilience* that may affect their satisfaction and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

Question 5. What do special education teachers who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as factors

that may affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

Research Design

This study explored the experiences of special educators who have remained in the field beyond a fifth year, the threshold year when educators who leave the profession do so (Bobek, 2002; Le Cornu, 2009; Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011; Yost, 2006). A phenomenological qualitative research study “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” and “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). A phenomenological qualitative research design was especially suited to this study, as the design best supported research seeking to more deeply understand a concept or phenomenon about which little is known, to gain new perspectives on what is already known about an area of research, or to gain more in-depth information (Creswell, 2012; 2013). The first four research questions of this study encompass what the literature states as factors that influence teacher resilience. Phenomenological methods allow the data to emerge, so this researcher had a fifth question to allow any emerging themes to come out of the research that have not yet been considered in the proposing of the first four questions.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, teacher attrition, retention, and resilience as well as factors influencing teacher satisfaction and well-being, have separately been the topics of investigation and research. They have not, however, been examined through a unifying theoretical framework such as that proposed and described by this researcher and presented in Figure 2 above. Using a phenomenological approach allowed this researcher

to study the lived experiences of a phenomenon, the decision and ultimate behavior of self-identified resilient incumbent special educators to remain in the profession, and focused upon discovering and describing the commonalities of the participants.

The ultimate goal of this study was to identify and describe, the essence of the phenomenon by translating this study's participants' lived experiences as special educators (represented in their responses to the researcher's semi-structured interview questions) into recommendations for school and district personnel and special educators to consider and implement to enhance special educators' resiliency, satisfaction, intention to remain in the field as special educators, and their ultimate decision and behavior to stay or leave. To this end, the researcher decided to tap into the lived experiences of self-identified highly resilient special educators who have chosen to stay in the field beyond the threshold fifth year when those who choose to leave the field do so. The researcher, in deciding upon the target population for this study, considered including and comparing the responses of special educators who self-assessed as less highly resilient than the selected target population. But because the overarching purpose of the study was to explore attributes, behaviors, and influences on resilient teachers, the researcher decided to focus only upon the most resilient population identified through *The Resilience Scale* used in the study to screen potential participants (i.e., Wagnild, 2009b).

Phase 1 – Screening for and Selecting Interviewees Using *The Resilience Scale*

Validity and Reliability of The Resilience Scale. *The Resilience Scale*, shown in Appendix A, was developed by Dr. Gail Wagnild and Heather Young and is among the earliest published resilience assessment instruments (Wagnild, 2009a; 2009b). At least 96 studies have been published in national and international journals using *The Resilience*

Scale (Wagnild, 2009b). Additionally, at least 42 completed dissertations have used the scale (Wagnild, 2009b). From the list of completed dissertations provided in *The Resilience Scale User's Guide* only five were topics related to the field of education (e.g. college student resiliency, principal leadership resiliency, resilience in adult women students in higher education, pre-service teacher resiliency) (Wagnild, 2009b). None of the dissertations addressed special education teacher resiliency. Lastly, in email correspondence between the researcher and *The Resilience Scale* creator Dr. Gail Wagnild, she informed this researcher that “the resilience scale has been used in hundreds of studies...and more than 130 countries” (G. Wagnild, personal communication, April 20, 2016).

The creators of this scale sought to examine individual levels of resilience and what they considered to be positive personality characteristics that allowed people to adapt to difficult situations. They conducted an initial qualitative study of 24 women who had adapted successfully after major life events. From the participants' narratives they established five interrelated components representing resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993). It should be noted that all items in the scale were worded positively and reflect verbatim statements of participants of the original study. The five interrelated components are: (1) equanimity, (2) perseverance, (3) self-reliance, (4) meaningfulness, and (5) existential aloneness. Prior to this study, other studies established the reliability and validity of the scale (Wagnild, 2009a; Wagnild and Young, 1993).

This researcher located *The Resilience Scale* by doing a web search for “resiliency scales.” She came across the scale, took the online test herself, and purchased *The Resilience Scale* (Wagnild, 2009b) and the permission for its use. Purchasing this use as a

student researcher granted her permissions to use the scale for this research study. (Find the purchase and permission conditions at www.resiliencescale.com/shop/resilience-scale-license-pack-for-studentsresidents-of-a-developing-country/). The researcher also contacted the creator of the scale, Dr. Gail M. Wagnild, in 2016 to obtain further permission to use the scale as part of this research study and a letter was provided by Dr. Wagnild, for IRB, confirming her permissions to use *The Resilience Scale* for this study (See Appendix B).

Initial Participant Recruitment Procedure. Through informants, this researcher sought approximately 50 initial study participants to self-assess their degree of resiliency as defined and measured by 25 items included in *The Resilience Scale* (Wagnild, 2009b) shown in Appendix A. The criterion for being an informant was that the informant must have had direct contact and experience with the potential participant as a university professor, district supervisor or mentor, or professional colleague. The researcher in this study had a relatively large network of local school district special education coordinators and university special education teacher preparation program faculty members from two universities in San Diego County. To obtain participants for this part of the study, the researcher first reached out to university professor contacts - two informants at a southern California State University and two at a private southern California university. The two informants at the California State University provided a list of 68 e-mail contacts of university special education teacher preparation graduates who had finished and had been working as a special educator beyond the threshold of five years. An additional university contact was out on medical leave and did not reply. The two, district special education coordinators contacted also did not reply. One of the university professors at the private

university connected her with the coordinator of outreach and clinical placement in the School of Education. The coordinator arranged for the researcher to have a table at its chapter of the annual statewide *Better Together Conference* held in the summer of 2016 during which this phase of the research was conducted. The researcher was informed that she would have access to 200 or so teachers working in the county.

In preparation for the conference, the researcher contacted a graphic designer who created attractive signage (presented in Appendix C) to solicit participants. At the conference, the researcher obtained three additional names, one of which was new to the field of special education and therefore ineligible to participate. The other two were special education teacher coaches in a southwestern San Diego school district that had been in the field beyond the threshold of five years. One of them offered to talk to the district's special education director to see if this researcher could come to a special education Professional Learning Community (PLC) event at the start of the fall school year to explain the study and seek participants. The researcher was invited to the PLC, briefly presented the study, displayed the signage presented in Appendix C, and passed out a sign-up list. A total of 22 names and contact emails were obtained from this PLC event.

Through the process described above, the researcher procured a total of 95 special educators who met the criterion for participation in *The Resilience Scale* self-assessment phase of this study (Wagnild, 2009b). To keep track of communication with and receipt of forms from each contact, the researcher created a data collection checklist shown in Appendix D. Upon receipt of a name and contact email, the researcher sent an email explaining the study via the introductory letter, shown in Appendix E, which was

included as an email attachment.

Because potential participants resided and worked all over San Diego County, the researcher was not able to meet with contacts to obtain signatures. So, the researcher purchased a monthly subscription to digisigner.com to enable participants to sign permission documents electronically. When the researcher received a statement by email from a contact agreeing to take *The Resilience Scale* assessment, a follow-up email was sent out with the Informed Consent for Completing *The Resilience Scale* Assessment shown in Appendix F.

Upon receipt of a participant's electronic signature, a link to *The Resilience Scale* typed in Google Form, exactly as the scale appears on the hard copy version, and with six additional questions relating to participant's demographics were (e.g. gender, number of years teaching, special education credentials held, age range and grade levels currently taught, primary diagnoses of students taught within the last five years, and percentage of time providing pull-out, consultative, and co-teaching services) was sent to the participant through Google Drive. If a participant's scale responses were not returned within one week, the researcher sent a follow-up email with the Google Form link again attached with an inquiry about continued interest in completing the scale. If, after the follow-up email, the researcher did not receive a response within two weeks, no further communication or solicitation was attempted and the person was considered a nonparticipant.

Criteria and Procedure for Recruiting and Selecting Interviewees. This phenomenological study sought 10 – 20 special educators (e.g. special day class teachers, resource teachers, co-teachers). The criterion for participation was they had to have been

in the field beyond the threshold of five years and self-identify as highly resilient.

The researcher had hoped for 25 to 50 special educators to complete *The Resilience Scale*. Of the 95 special educators contacted, 28 completed *The Resilience Scale*. Once the minimum number of respondents (i.e., 25) completed *The Resilience Scale*, scores were viewed on Google Sheets by clicking a button on *The Resilience Scale* Google Form, which populated all responses on a Google Sheet where total resiliency scores could be calculated. As shown in Appendix A, the scale included 25 items, each with a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 represented “strongly disagree” and 7 represented “strongly agree.” A maximum score on the scale is 175 points (i.e., the product of the 25 items and the 7-point maximum). Based upon the scale’s guidelines, a respondent whose total score is 136 or greater was considered to be highly resilient. Respondents in this study who had a total score of 136 or greater were considered highly resilient and a candidate for the interview stage of the study.

Of the 28 respondents, 22 had total scores of 136 or greater on the *The Resilience Scale*. The six who did not score as highly resilient were emailed and thanked for their participation and informed that this researcher was able to glean the information the researcher needed from them without taking their valuable time.

The researcher clustered the 22 eligible respondents into three categories based upon the number of years respondents had been teaching. Category A included six respondents who had been in the field between five and eight years. This was the category of most interest to the researcher, as it included those respondents who had most recently exceeded the five-year threshold. This was the group of respondents, who the researcher first invited to be interviewed. Category B included the seven respondents who

had been in the field between nine and eleven years. Category C included four respondents who had been special educators twelve or more years.

The researcher had hoped to interview 10 to 20 participants who had the highest total resiliency scores and who met the above initial (i.e., total score of 136 to 175) or back up (i.e., scores of 131 to 135) screening criteria. Category A respondents (i.e., those who had a resiliency score of 136 or higher and had been in the field between five and eight years) were the first to be asked if they would be willing to meet with the researcher in person for a semi-structured interview of approximately two hours. Of these six Category A special educators, all eleven initially agreed to participate; five of the eleven actually showed up for the face-to-face interview. Next, Category B respondents (i.e., those who had a resiliency score of 136 or higher and been in the field between nine and eleven years) were asked to participate in the interview phase of this study. Of the seven Category B respondents, three agreed to be and were interviewed. Category C respondents (i.e., those who had a resiliency score of 136 or higher and been in the field twelve or more years) were the last to be asked to participate in the interview. Of the four Category C respondents, three agreed to and did participate. In total, the researcher obtained permission to and actually interviewed 11 of the 22 eligible special educators. These 11 were from school districts across northern, northwestern, and southwestern San Diego County.

Incentives and recognition for participation. As incentives and recognition for meeting with the researcher and participating in the interview and the follow up member check, each interviewee had a choice of receiving a \$10 Amazon or Starbucks gift card, a letter of appreciation, and a copy of the research study upon completion. Potential

interviewees were told this as part of the invitation to participate and it was reiterated in the Interview Informed Consent and Agreement Contract shown in Appendix G.

Phase 2 – Interview Preparation

Interview Setup. For the 11 respondents who agreed to be and were interviewed, upon receipt of their agreement, using digisigner.com, the researcher emailed them the interview consent form (see Appendix G) to digitally sign. Once an interviewee confirmed participation through the signing of the informed consent and agreement contract shown in Appendix G, a semi-structured interview of approximately two hours was set up. The researcher emailed the participant, thanking him or her for continuing to participate in the study and asking for the best date(s), time(s), and location(s) to meet for the interview. Through email, interviews were set up for an agreed-upon date, time, and location. A semi-structured interview lasting approximately two hours was conducted and audio recorded at a location (e.g., home, school classroom) and time (e.g., immediately after school, on a weekend morning) that guaranteed privacy and was identified as most convenient by each participant. The researcher assured verbally and through the Interview Informed Consent and Agreement Contract (Appendix G) that participants' identity would be kept confidential and that participation in the study was voluntary. Participants who agreed to be interviewed could choose to decline being interviewed or participating in the follow-up member check at any time without any negative consequences.

Interview Questions. A semi-structured set of interview questions was the main source of data collection for this study. Interviews were salient in this phenomenological qualitative research because it created space for participants to voice their lived

experiences. In qualitative research, such as this study, open-ended questions allowed participants to “best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). Research also shows that “providing teachers a genuine voice transforms the entire school culture and has a significant impact on areas such as teacher retention and increasing student motivation and achievement” (Quaglia & Lande, 2017, p. 24).

In this study, the semi-structured interview (presented in Appendix H) was comprised of 19 multi-dimensional questions and a closure question asking for any additional comments not elicited in the 19 questions. The interview questions were derived from the literature review and align with the four factors, as well as with teacher satisfaction and intention variables, included in the conceptual framework presented in Figure 2. Appendix H displays the 19 interview questions and a glossary of terms used in the interview, which the participants received ahead of time. Appendix I presented the same questions, the 20th closing question, additional prompts to remind the researcher to give the interviewee time to read key terms, and probe for additional responses, and examples; suggested probe questions were listed at the bottom of this interview document. Most importantly, the researcher version, presented in Appendix I, showed the number of the research question(s) (i.e., coded Q1 for Question #1 and so forth) or element(s) of the Figure 2 conceptual framework (e.g., satisfaction, intention) which each interview question or sub-question explored. In developing the interview questions, the researcher was deliberate in aligning the questions with research findings (e.g., motivation to enter the field, support variables and stressors internal and external to the workplace, personal resiliency attributes and influences, factors affecting

satisfaction/intention to stay in the field) reviewed in the Chapter 2 literature review.

Participants were provided (e-mailed) a copy of the interview questions ahead of time, so they could read and think about the questions and their potential responses prior to the face-to-face interview. In order to provide flexibility in how the participants might respond, the researcher considered breaking up the interview guide into two or three sessions, depending upon how the interviewees responded. Additional sessions were not needed. However, some clarification was needed from two participants. This was to better understand their responses, as during the coding process, these two participants' each had a response that was unclear. This researcher wanted to ensure that their lived experiences and true voice was heard, so the researcher reached out by email for clarification and further detail. Based upon the type of question (e.g., Could you please clarify and explain (response inserted) a little further?), the researcher was able to gain clarification by emailing the participants for the follow-up information.

Phase 3 – Interviews in Action

The interview, being a salient part of a phenomenological study, required the researcher to provide enough structure to guide, but not restrict the participant's responses, while maintaining flexibility in customizing the interview based on interviewee responses. For example, if an interviewee seemed to not understand a question (e.g., "Um, throughout my life or just within my..."; "helping teachers to accomplish their paperwork?"), the researcher added an example to provide clarity (e.g., "Just within your teacher preparation program."; "So, it'd be support that you would be given."). If an interviewee seemed to strongly identify with an interview question by elaborating and providing a long detailed answer (e.g. about how they got into special

education), a new question was created to draw out further responses and clarification that were not anticipated (e.g. “So, besides your family, because...special education wasn’t your original trajectory. What about the resource 50/50 made you...influenced or was the key reason(s) that you decided to then go full-time into Special Education?”).

Interview Preview Protocol. Before beginning the audio recording, in order to provide interviewees an understanding of the purpose of the study and the interview process, the researcher began the interview with a brief description of the purpose of the study and a preview of the process. The researcher also spent a few moments getting acquainted with the participant by thanking them for their time and willingness to be a participant in the study. After these few brief moments the researcher began the interview by pressing record on her iPad and then stating the participant’s name, the date, and then the interview would begin by asking, “What percentage of the time would you say you consult and/or co-teach with others?”

Interview Timeframe and Timeline. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. Six interviews took place on the weekends and five took place during the weekdays. The day of the week depended on the availability of both the researcher and the participant. Each interview was also audio recorded for transcription. At the interview, the participants were provided a copy of the interview questions to look at, as well as the definitions of key words and phrases that were referenced throughout the interview; though the interviews were audio recorded using a recorder app on the researcher’s iPad, the researcher also took rather detailed notes, in the event something with the recording failed, and to provide comparison with the transcription. Fortunately, all of the recordings were successful and were able to be transcribed.

The first interview took place in September of 2016 and the last interview took place in December of 2016.

Interview Locations. Interviews took place either in participants' classrooms or a secluded area of a local coffee shop. A challenge for the researcher was the amount of driving time (e.g., 90 to 120 minutes round trip) it took to go to and from the interview settings. A strength of this study was the diversity of the school districts in which participants were employed. Eight of the eleven participants lived and worked in different districts approximately 45 to 60 minutes north of the researcher's home and place of employment. Three worked in the same southwestern San Diego school district nearer to the home and workplace of the researcher.

Incentives and Preview of Interview Questions. As part of the study, participants were offered the incentives of (a) a \$10 Amazon or Starbucks gift card, (b) a letter of appreciation, and (c) a copy of the research study. Prior to the interviews, only one participant mentioned the gift card incentive, and it was provided at the time of the interview. Once this study was completed and submitted to the library, all three incentives had been delivered to all eleven participants.

Prior to the interview, each participant was provided a copy of the interview questions to review in preparation for the face-to-face interview. Two participants commented that they had thoroughly reviewed the questions ahead of time; others stated they had "glanced over" the questions. The researcher hypothesizes that, as previous studies have suggested, these participants, like most special educators, are inundated with the roles and responsibilities they have as special educators as well as the activities of their personal lives, leaving them little time to carefully study the interview questions

ahead of time.

Researcher Observations of Participants. All participants seemed eager to share their stories and lived experiences as special educators. This researcher noted how eager the participants were to be heard and have someone take a genuine interest in the essences of their lived experience as a self-identified highly resilient special educator who had remained in the field beyond the threshold of five years. Each person interviewed was gracious, generous with their time, and willing to help further, as needed. Several offered additional support, and conversations continued outside of the actual interview recording. They were complimentary about the researcher's study commenting on their interest in the topic of this study and the ultimate results. Several also commented on the researcher's obvious passion for special education.

From the first point of contact, participants seemed comfortable with their involvement in the study. The participants and researcher made immediate connections. This may be due to the researchers' positionality, the topic of the research, and the fact that the informants who recommended them were known to and trusted by the participant. Several participants made positive comments about their respective informant before, during, and/or after their interview.

Phase 4 – Data Analysis

Transcribing and Member Checking. To ensure validity, reliability and accuracy, the interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim by Rev.com, and reviewed by the researcher and compared to her interview notes to ensure accuracy. To transcribe the interview recordings they were first uploaded to Google Drive, then downloaded to the computer to be able to be uploaded to Rev.com for transcription. Once

the transcriptions were complete and sent back by Rev.com to the researcher, the researcher emailed the participants a copy of the transcription and they were asked to member check (See Appendix J) the transcription and description of their lived experience.

If an interviewee wished to alter any of the transcribed content, the participant was asked to edit the transcription using the track change feature of the Review function of Microsoft Word and/or Apple Pages. Participants were provided detailed instructions on how to do this process (See Appendix J) and provided a timeline for returning the transcript with or without edits in email correspondence. If a participant desired further assistance in executing this member check, they were invited to call or meet with the researcher to provide assistance in getting the member check process started and completed. No participants reached out for guidance or help on the member checking process. Upon receipt of approval from the participant of the transcription, this researcher coded the transcription.

Coding Methodology. To elicit the experiences and meanings of the participants' voice, the researcher employed the Descriptive Coding and In Vivo coding approaches. According to Saldana (2016), "Descriptive Coding summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often a noun – the basic topic of passage of qualitative data" (p. 102). In Vivo coding also has been described as, "literal coding," "verbatim coding," "inductive coding," "indigenous coding," "natural coding," and "emic coding" in selected methods of literature" (p. 105). Additionally, "the root meaning of In Vivo is 'in that which is alive,' and as a code refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record..." (Strauss, 1987, p. 33, as cited in Saldana, 2016, p. 105).

These coding methods were appropriate for this phenomenological study because it allowed the researcher to “prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (Saldana, 2016, p. 106). The researcher read through the transcriptions and used a procedure called “epoche (or bracketing), in which investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). The researcher did this by being aware of her positionality as a self-identified highly resilient special educator who has remained in the field beyond the threshold of five years by intentionally focusing on the coding methodologies, Descriptive and In Vivo, to not have her experiences influence the experiences, meaning, and essence of the participant’s transcription.

Interview Response Analysis and Interpretation. Upon completion of the member checking, the researcher coded the transcription by hand. The researcher went through each transcription and first highlighted and numbered where every interview question and follow-up question was asked. Upon completing this, the researcher color coded each interview question and went through the researcher’s copy of the interview questions (Appendix I) to color code and align the interview questions with the research question(s). Next, this researcher went through each transcription and coded with pencil the key words and phrases that corresponded to the interview questions being asked using the epoche procedure. Namely, the researcher bracketed key words or phrases in the participant’s transcription and coded their responses either verbatim, using In Vivo coding, or by summarizing their response in the short word or phrase using Descriptive coding, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon.

As show in the Appendix I matrix of questions, interview questions had already

been associated with each of the first four research questions and the conceptual framework (shown in Figure 2). For each interview question, participant responses were collapsed and analyzed for thematic categories, first by individual interview question and then by research question. Each participant statement was treated with equal weight.

Several interview questions – Questions 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, and 15 - began with a sub-item that asks the interviewee to first rate on a 5-point Likert scale the degree to which the content of the question was important to the interviewee. For example, for Question 11 that examined administrative support, the first sub-question asks “On a 5-point scale, where 1 = “I could care less,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important,” (see table 4.1) please rate how important *administrative support* at work is to you? For each of these ratings the researcher computed the means.

To compare the importance of four types of administrative support (i.e., appraisal, emotional, informational, instrumental) examined in Questions 7 through 10, the researcher summed and averaged participants’ Likert ranking of each type of support. Then the four support means were compared to determine a ranking from most too least important for the four types of support.

Coding Process. Using the epoche procedure, the researcher drew out of the personal experiences of the participants an understanding of their responses. Upon completion of the coding of each individual interview, the researcher used flip chart paper and placed each interview question on a separate page of a flip chart. She then created a T-Chart - one side for the code and the other side for the interviewee’s number that addressed that code. This was done for all 19 interview questions and sub-questions. This process allowed the researcher to see commonalities and themes across each

interview question.

Once all interview questions and sub-questions were coded onto the flip chart paper, they were each put into a spreadsheet in order for the information to house safely and securely. For the last step of this process, the researcher created flip charts for each research question and filled in the thematic codes that had been collapsed from the interview questions for each research question. This process allowed the researcher to see commonalities, themes, and develop significant statements and group them into meaning units (Creswell, 2013) that supported each research question.

In answering the four research questions examined by this study, the researcher reflected upon the themes that emerged for each question to interpret the meaning of themes in terms of questions such as the following:

1. Are there particular motivations for going into special education that characterize resilient special educators who continue in the profession beyond five years? What are they? What external and internal to schools can be done to reinforce this motivation to be maintained in times of difficulty?
2. Which supports, relationships, and activities internal and external to school do participants value and perceive as beneficial to their work and retention as special educators? What external and internal to schools can be done to structure these supports, relationships, and activities?
3. What are the most salient challenges faced by special educators? What resiliency factors and supports, relationships, and activities internal and external to school do participants identify as supporting them to meet and

overcome these challenges? What external and internal to schools can be done to teach and provide experiences that build these resiliency factors?

4. What supports could school leadership provide new special educators to increase satisfaction, resiliency, and the intent and ultimate behavior to stay teaching in special education?

What other factors might special educators use that this current study has not yet considered? Interpretations of themes in relation to the four research questions and additional questions such as these are reported and discussed in Chapter 4.

Ethical and Confidentiality Considerations

As a special educator who has as a professional responsibility to observe the confidentiality of student and family records, I was very aware that working with human subjects required me to abide by the ethical standards of the California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California San Diego (UCSD) Institutional Review boards. This study was submitted to the CSUSM Institutional Review Board. Only after IRB approval were the potential participants contacted, letters of introduction and resiliency surveys sent, and interviews conducted.

To maintain district and teacher confidentiality, the researcher kept all school districts, schools, and teacher participants' names confidential. In all written presentation of methodology and results, participants were given numbers so that any identifiers (i.e., participant name, exact name of university affiliation) were eliminated and replaced with a generic term (e.g., teacher, university).

Participants were introduced to the study before the resiliency assessment and interviews were scheduled and conducted. An informed consent form that outlined the

research activities and potential risks to participants (see Appendices F and G) were provided for each participant to sign. Participants were told in writing and in person that they may choose to decline participation at any time without any negative repercussion from the researcher and the participants' school and school district.

Measures Taken to Maintain Confidentiality and Anonymity. For security purposes and to ensure anonymity, all hard copy data collected and analyzed during the research process was stored in a locked cabinet in the home office of the researcher, accessible only to the researcher. Electronic results were stored on the researcher's private home computer and a hard drive back-up, which were password protected and only accessible to the researcher. The data will be destroyed no later than three years after the end of the project. At the conclusion of such timeframe the researcher will shred all hard copy materials and expunge raw data stored on the researcher's personal home computer and hard drive back up.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Research Questions

The following four research questions specifically explored the lived experience of this study's research participants.

Question 1. What do special educators who self identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as their *motivation(s) for entering and staying in the field* of special education?

Question 2. What do special educators who self identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as *non-workplace practices, experiences, and influences* (e.g. family, mindfulness practices) that may affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

Question 3. What do special educators who self identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as *workplace influences and experiences* (e.g. collegial support, administrative support, other supports, student learning) that may affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

Question 4. What do special educators who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as *personal resiliency attributes and behaviors and influences on their resilience* that may affect their satisfaction and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

This researcher also created space for any other factors that may emerge throughout the study by exploring a fifth question:

Question 5: What do special education teachers who self-identify as being highly resilient and who remain as a special educator for five or more years identify as factors that may affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator?

Table 1. Participant Demographics obtained from the Resilience Scale

Demographic Questions

Participant Number	Gender	Number of years of Teaching Special Education	SPED Credentials Held	Resilience Scale Score
1	Female	6	Educational Specialist Mild/Moderate	152
2	Male	12	Educational Specialist Mild/Moderate	156
3	Male	9	Educational Specialist Mild/Moderate & Moderate/Severe	148
4	Female	6	Educational Specialist Mild/Moderate & Moderate/Severe	146
5	Female	11	Educational Specialist Mild/Moderate	163
6	Female	12	Educational Specialist Mild/Moderate	153
7	Female	10	Educational Specialist Mild/Moderate	146
8	Female	6	Educational Specialist Mild/Moderate & Moderate/Severe	144
9	Female	6	Educational Specialist Mild/Moderate & Moderate/Severe	168
10	Male	7	Educational Specialist Mild/Moderate & Moderate/Severe	155
11	Male	12	Educational Specialist Mild/Moderate	138

Motivational Factors for Entering the Field Attributed to Resilience and Retention

Being a special education teacher is a demanding, complex, and ambiguous profession. Despite the ambiguity and demands, educators are drawn to and remain in the field for a variety of reasons. Identified retention factors include empathy towards students and a desire to serve those in need, having a family member or friend with special needs, job vacancies and availability in the field, and having received special education services (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Stephens & Fish, 2010). Furthermore, special educators remain in the field for a variety of reasons. They may be satisfied with their job and feel their role of serving those in need makes a positive difference. Additionally, they may have supportive district and school site administrators as well as colleague support, and enjoy the meaningful dialogue with other educators. Furthermore, they are encouraged and inspired by academic progress achieved by students, provided professional development opportunities, are engaged and active in implementing the public policy and legislative laws of special education, and because they simply love the profession (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Gersten et al., 2001; Stephens & Fish, 2010).

Research Question 1 (RQ1) explored interviewees' *motivation(s) for entering and staying in the field of special education*. Four main themes emerged from an analysis of participants' responses to interview questions as to their motivation(s) for entering and staying in the field of special education. The first theme that emerged regarding participants' motivation for entering and/or staying in the field of special education was their *observation of and influence upon students' day-to-day growth and accomplishments* outside of the special education setting.

The second theme involved participants' *personal connections to a special education experience*. Some participants had a child with a disability in the family and were influenced to enter and/or remain motivated and satisfied in their role as a special educator because of their child. Other participants had familiarity, exposure, and positive experiences with individuals with disabilities early on in their lives due to family members who worked in the field, and who provided exposure and experience with individuals with disabilities, which motivated them to enter and stay in the field of special education beyond the threshold of five years. A third personal connection involved participants who had an immediate or extended family member with a disability with whom they had experience. The fourth personal connection involved encouragement to enter the field of special education by someone highly respected. These encouraging influential people were not necessarily directly involved in education or special education and they were experienced at various times and places by the participants. What they shared was a strong belief that the participants could bring a positive perspective to and have a positive impact on the field of special education.

The third theme that emerged as being associated with motivation to enter and/or remain in the field of special education involved having a *sense of fulfillment* - wanting to make a difference and correct difficulties that can arise in special education. These participants fulfilled a need for a sense of purpose by working in special education. They expressed that a career in special education allowed them to be part of the solution of creating learning environments in schools that allowed students who learned differently to make the greatest growth and feel the most successful.

The fourth and final theme identified as associated with motivation for entering and/or staying in the field involved participants' *relationships with others* – students, students' parents, and colleagues. These relationships motivated participants to bounce back in the face of adversity and maintain their satisfaction in the field because they felt they were making a difference through the connections with those around them.

What follows is a detailed analysis of each of the four themes regarding motivation to enter and stay in special education and participants' illustrative quotes.

Research Question 1, Theme 1: Student Growth and Accomplishment. All eleven or 100 percent of participants reported that observing, learning about, and somehow being involved in fostering students' growth and accomplishments was a motivator for entering and/or remaining in the field of special education. It was the theme that resonated with every participant. Participants talked about both academic and personal obstacles that students with disabilities overcame to meet the cognitive, academic, emotional, and physical demands placed upon them in the classroom. And they noted being motivated by continuing to see students achieve beyond the time participants were responsible for providing the students special education services.

Experiencing student growth and accomplishment during the K-12 years. For four (36.4 percent) of the participants, being able to see that they were making a difference, despite how challenging their job as a special educator could be, positively influenced their day-to-day resilience and satisfaction in the field. This satisfaction is illustrated in the following Participant 1 (P1) statement.

Being able to see my students, who maybe started out in an SDC class [Special Day Class, a segregated special classroom for students who receiving special education services for more than 50 percent of the school

day] that I taught, and now are fully mainstreamed with some push-in support, and seeing how well they're doing socially with their peers, and for them, academically. They might not be at grade level, but the progress that they have made...[A]nd then having them come up and still say, '[Teacher's name], [is] how you know, they remember.

Participant 8 (P8) described not only how the “in the moment” student growth was important to her, but also described seeing continued growth beyond the time she was responsible for providing the students special education services.

Those students, I, I really had my standards, or my bar up here, and I would take the gen. ed. curriculum, and I'd bring it into my classroom, and I'd, you know, give a little modification, depending on the students' needs. And a lot of my student's got pushed out, eventually... They were with me for a year and a half, and then they were out... And I'd always check on them in the general education. They're doing great, you know, they're doing awesome... because I made sure that they understood the rigor. They had that high expectation standard for themselves, so they were prepared for it and their behaviors were acceptable in the gen. ed. setting.

P8's belief in her students and her setting of high standards for them to achieve both motivated her student's and influenced their growth by showing student's that, despite their challenges with learning, they are capable of achieving the work and meeting the demands and expectations.

Participant 9 (P9) described an incident where a student had been sent to her to take a test in the school's learning center, where she delivered special education services. The student could not find the notes needed to take the test. P9 took the time to organize the student's backpack and was able to retrieve the missing notes so the student was able to successfully take the test. For P9, this experience and her involvement in organizing the student for success was gratifying and a “...victory. Knowing he took his test, he didn't fail his test, he had his notes, he's capable of doing it. That's a victory. Yay.”

Participant 6 (P6) described being motivated by seeing the years of hard work, discipline, services, and meetings paying off with the culmination of students graduating.

P6 described the experience and the feelings as follows:

Graduation day. It's...an awesome moment at the school, because the kids walk down, and all the teachers do a tunnel and we do high fives, and then instead of having someone talk, the kids have a statement that the...counselors read as they walk down. And then they get their diploma, and they go sit down. And then afterwards, there's this big celebration, so just...seeing that and seeing the kids that are so proud of graduating, especially the one that's the, the first people in their family that graduated from high school. So it's, it's pretty cool. I like that.

Learning of student post-secondary growth and accomplishments. For three (27.3 percent) of the participants, learning of student growth and accomplishment *beyond* the K-12 special education setting also seemed to be a motivator to continue in the field. When it is time for students to graduate and move on, as a special education team, the hope is that students have been equipped with the tools and strategies they need to succeed in life. Participants reported how hearing about the post-secondary accomplishments of their students was motivating and satisfying for them as special educators. Participant 4 (P4) put it this way.

Seeing my students graduate, seeing them go on and do amazing things with their lives is super encouraging. Those are kind of my favorite moments. Every once in a while, I have a former student on Facebook who will post something about teachers who have impacted them in their lives and it's just such an honor when you get like a little card from a student.

Sometimes feedback regarding post-secondary success came directly from the students themselves. Participant 6 (P6) reported the following.

I got him all the way through high school. He graduated. He got a scholarship...And he is at SDSU getting his engineering degree...and he

got in touch with me and he just wanted to tell me that it was because of me, and he wanted to thank me. So it's, it's great times like that.

Participant 11 (P11) also received positive student feedback, but in a different and direct way. She noted that "I've got quite a few kids that will come back to volunteer in the room, and just to see that success that they're accomplishing... It's been great."

Sometimes this type of positive feedback regarding the difference the special educator is making comes from students' parents. These moments are meaningful because parents are the ones with whom special educators spend, over the years, hours in meetings working together to help their students grow and accomplish excellence. Getting positive feedback from a parent can be very motivating and satisfying, as P11 noted how gratifying it was "having parents come back, and thank me, seeing them on the street."

In summary, based upon participant responses, it appears strong motivators for special educators to stay in the field are (a) believing and learning that they have influenced students' growth and accomplishments and (b) witnessing first hand student growth and accomplishments.

Research Question 1, Theme 2: Having a Personal Connection to Special Education and Individuals with Disabilities. Participants' *personal connections* to special education involved having a child or an immediate or extended family member with a disability, having exposure and positive experiences with individuals with disabilities, and being encouraged or inspired by someone to enter the field of special education. These positive and negative exposures and influences seemed to have motivated participants to enter and/or stay in the field of special education primarily

because they wanted to be in a position to positively influence the situations of others who have disabilities.

Family member as the personal connection. Five or 45.5 percent of the eleven participants were motivated to enter and remain in special education, at least in part, because they had a family member (e.g. sibling, uncle, child) with a disability. Participants 1, 7, and 8 had a child with a disability. Participant 2 had familiarity with, exposure to, and a positive experience with individuals with disabilities. Participants 4 and 7 had an immediate (i.e., sibling) or extended (i.e., uncle) family member (with a disability).

Having a child with a disability. Three or 27.3 of the participants had a child with a disability. Participant 1 (P1) had a son with special needs and volunteered in his classroom. P1 stated the following:

My youngest out of three children, um, has, um, a disability, and he's been on an IEP since he was three. So, I was always the mom that went...so I'm a later-in-life special education teacher. Once when he was in 3rd or 4th grade and they don't want you in the classroom all the time anymore, I was kind of at a loss.

The experience that P1 had with her son and her son's teacher motivated her to enter the field of special education so that she could continue to support students like her son, once the opportunity was lost as a parent volunteer. P1 was also encouraged by the teacher of her son to obtain a special education teaching credential. This will be discussed later as part of another theme.

Participant 7 (P7) went into the field of special education as a result of her son, who had a disability and an Individual Education Program (IEP), having a negative

public education experience. This personal connection motivated her to learn how to serve both students with and without disabilities as a special educator. P7 stated:

[M]y son had an IEP, which I didn't even realize he had an IEP in public education. I pulled him out of public education in the third grade, and it was a really miserable experience, and um, so, at any rate, I served students both with special needs and typical needs together.

Given the high demand for special educators, P7 saw more opportunity to teach and serve by entering the field of special education rather than general education. She explained that being a special educator met her need to "go outside the box," noting "I am not an inside of the box teacher or person."

Participant 8 (P8) too had a child with a disability, giving birth to a son who was identified as having a learning disability after she entered the field of special education. Becoming a parent of a child with a disability inspired her to remain in the field. P8 explained her inspiration as follows.

Being a parent of a student with special needs helps me understand that perspective too. So...I think I was meant to be what I am...because I didn't know he was going to have a learning disability until way after I became a special educator...that inspires me to stay there.

Having an immediate or extended family member (other than a child) with a disability as a connection. Two or 18.2 percent of participants had exposure to special education because of their involvement with an immediate or extended family member (other than their own child) with a disability. Participant 7 (P7) had an uncle with autism with whom she was raised in the same household. Participant 4 (P4) had a brother with autism, whose negative schooling experiences motivated her to enter the field of special education so that she could provide the extra support students (with and without disabilities) who learn in different ways need. P4 experienced, first hand, her brother

going unidentified as in need of special education support, resulting in him being pulled out of public school to be home schooled.

[My brother] had a really rough time in school. My parents ended up pulling him out of school in seventh grade because he was failing every class and then scoring the highest scores in the district on the standardized assessments...So, kind of the experience of my family and then just being out in the gen. ed. setting and seeing that so many students learn in different ways...and need extra support.

Exposure to and familiarity and experience with individuals with disabilities.

Participant 2 (P2) grew up with exposure and positive experiences to individuals with disabilities. P2 had an aunt who was the director of a camp for children with autism. P2 grew up volunteering at this camp. Although he became a special educator later in life, his familiarity, exposure, and positive experiences early on in life helped to motivate him to enter and remain in special education. P2 explains:

I grew up doing it. My aunt runs a school for autism...And so, um, I kind of was...even as a little kid, I was vacuuming, like at 10, and I kind of worked through it. And then, um, it was my summer job in high school. And then my summer in college, I didn't really think I wanted to do it as a career, so I got away from it for a lot of years. And then when I decided to become a history teacher, I thought, 'Nah, I'd rather be a special ed. teacher.' So I got both credentials. I love it. It's the best job I ever had...I like helping people, and it's rewarding for like the kids.

Participant 6 (P6) changed her mind about her teaching path and was motivated to enter special education through a work experience of serving as a long-term substitute in a special education classroom, where she could individualize instruction for students and see the difference it made.

P6: I did not want to be a special educator. I absolutely did not. I wanted to go into general education...but then I started doing a long-term sub, which I was already part of 'cause I was the aide for that class, came back to the district, started doing the long-term for that program, and fell in love with it, and went back to finish my special ed. [teaching credential].

Researcher: “So what are some of the key reasons that made you fall in love with it?”

P6: It was individualizing the student’s needs and being able to work in a small group and seeing the differences instead of a whole class.

Participant 8 (P8) was motivated to enter special education after being reminded of her childhood experiences of students with disabilities not being able to go to the same school as the one she attended and remembering her early desire to be of help to these students. She told the following story.

Occasionally there were some students that would come into some of our courses that were taking their SPED credentials, and my heart always told me that, that might be where I want to go, you know? Because when I was young, when I was um, a young child...I actually went to a school right down the street...The students with special needs would go to a separate school. They weren’t full included at all on our site...I always wanted to go help those students. Like as a child I always wanted to go there...And you know, I always had a heart for, um, students with special needs...So I’ve, I have my Multiple Subject [credential]. And then a couple years later, I went back to [University Name] and started getting my special ed. credential, and met [name of professor] and her passion and, she really influenced a lot. She influenced me a lot about what, what special ed. really means.

Being encouraged or inspired by someone to enter the field. Six or 55 percent of the eleven participants stated they entered the field of special education because they were encouraged or inspired by a person they knew and respected. Encouraging people included a special educator, professors, teacher candidates in a special education preparation program, a relative, and a school site administrator.

Participant 1 (P1) was motivated to enter and remain in the field of special education due to her admiration for her child’s *special education teacher* and the rapport and value this teacher had with parents. P1 was encouraged to obtain her special education

credential by her son's special education teacher and was further motivated to enter the field in order to emulate the positive home-school relations this special educator modeled.

My son's special ed. teacher encouraged me to go to school to get a teaching credential in special ed...I really wanted to be like my son's teacher, where she had such a wonderful rapport with the parents and worked as a partner, in what she was doing in the classroom, to what we could do at home. I wanted to provide that same type of support to other parents.

Participant 5 (P5) was encouraged by her university's special education overview class *professor* to enter the field of special education. She describes how the professor facilitated P5 to have direct special education experiences, which provided her exposure and an understanding of the world of special education to which she had not yet been exposed.

She [the professor] really saw special ed. teaching in me. And I sort of resented her, because she wasn't listening to what I was saying - that I wanted to be an 8th grade teacher. And so she added the requirement or extra credit, or something like that, where we had to go observe. And I went and observed an RSP [Resource Specialist Program], kind of more on the moderate end of RSP class, um, that [name of professor] was actually teaching. And [I] totally fell in love and was like, oh, who, like I was envisioning something totally different for special ed...I had no idea, um, what special ed. really was. So I'm really thankful for it, but kind of a strange way to get into it.

Participant 10 (P10) was inspired to enter special education because of the encouragement of a *cousin* and because of his own faith and aspiration to be like the greatest teacher, *Jesus*. When P10 was in junior high school, P10's cousin told him that he thought he would make a good teacher. P10:

Key reason...my cousin, he inspired me. He was the one that told me, 'I think you'd be a good teacher.' And I said, 'okay, sounds good to me.'

Um, two, uh, Jesus is a big influence in my life...and he's the greatest teacher, and so I try to be an example of Him and so that was another one.

The *principal* of a school at which P11 frequently substituted in a special education classroom inspired him to entire the field. P11 had been employed in retail. After being robbed while working, he decided it was time to do something else; and he obtained a license to substitute teach. It ended up that he repeatedly substituted in one school's "special ed. class and...kept getting called back." The principal took note, complimenting P11 by commenting that, "this is unusual, because most substitutes don't come back more than once."

Research Question 1, Theme 3: Sense of Fulfillment. Having a sense of fulfillment was the third theme that emerged for motivating people to enter and remain in the field of special education. Of the eleven participants, seven or 63.6 percent spoke of wanting to be part of a solution and something positive that was larger than themselves. They described teaching in special education as a unique opportunity to positively influence a unique group of students and change the way students with special needs are viewed, educated, and otherwise treated. For example, Participant 8 (P8) came to be a special educator in order to provide access, equity, and advocacy for her students, all actions with clear social justice purpose.

When asked what most influenced his intention to stay in the field of special education, Participant 2 (P2) stated, "I have to have a purpose...for the community. That's important to me." Absent significant responsibilities outside of work (e.g. school-aged children), P2 could fulfill his sense of fulfillment by devoting himself to his role as a special educator.

Some participants had other careers prior to entering the field of special education - careers they failed to find fulfilling. They discovered and found special education as the vehicle for receiving a sense of fulfillment in their career. Participant 3 (P3) described his journey.

I studied business. I thought about law school. Wasn't very, um, fulfilling, so I did some work and went back, 'cause I knew I wanted to teach. I just didn't really know quite what. So I took a few years...and then went back to the [university]...and, uh, I finished up my [undergraduate degree]...Then you interview for the teacher college thing, and I...graduated from [university name] with a joint Single Subject with special education [credential].

P3 further shared that, despite how difficult the role of a special educator can be physically, mentally, and emotionally, the job met his need for fulfillment in his career.

Participant 9 (P9) also had a previous career and came to special education later in life. Through previous volunteer and professional experiences, P9 worked with university undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities. A sense of fulfillment drove her motivation to transition to being a special educator, and she felt "privileged to be able to do it." As the following quote illustrates, she wanted to spend the last part of her life being purposeful and leaving a legacy by serving students with disabilities.

Some of them had autism and they, I helped 'em get through their dissertations. And, you know, they came up through the ranks. And, you know, and just the process of supporting students, even the high-level students like them, was really gratifying. And I wanted to, I felt it was purposeful and, um, being a special ed. teacher, I kinda felt was a good way for the last part of my life to be the last part of my life...I don't have any kids and it's a legacy issue, I guess, too, you know.

When specifically asked by this researcher, "so what most influences this intention to stay?" P9 identified "being and having a purposeful life [and] being part of the solution,

not part of the problem” as key motivators for being and remaining in the field of special education.

P10 expressed his sense of fulfillment by taking a position as a teacher of students with pervasive and significant support needs who others might not want to teach or find too difficult. He describes his motivation and decision as follows.

One of my initial desires coming in here, I wanted to be in a place that no one else wanted to be in...Typically three years was the dropout rate. And uh, I said, ‘Perfect, this is my class.’ (P10 laughs) No one wants to be here, I’ll be in here.

Research Question 1, Theme 4: Relationships with Parents, Colleagues, and Students. Participants reported various relationships with others as motivators for entering and staying in the field of special education. Participants identified three categories of people - students’ parents, colleagues, and students, themselves - who influenced their satisfaction and resilience as a special educator. Although relationship is a common thread through the previous three thematic categories, it was mentioned enough by participants to merit being its own thematic category.

Relationships with students’ parents. Three or 27.3 percent of the eleven participants reported that their relationships with students’ parents influenced their desire to stay in the field of special education. Although not all relationships with the parents were noted to be positive and some interactions were unexpected, building and maintaining parental relations was considered a significant and important part of the job of these special educators as well as relevant to their motivation to go into and stay in the field.

Participant 10 (P10), who teaches a unique population of students identified as medically fragile, found such parental expressions of appreciation as “You’re one of the only people that actually takes initiative and gets to know my child” to be satisfying and motivating. Participant 1 (P1) reported that not only did she have “no regrets” entering the field of special education, but that she “loved working with parents,” a part of the job that she fully anticipated. In contrast, Participant 9 (P9) was initially surprised at the “amount of support that parents needed,” but came to recognize and appreciate the challenges parents may experience and express. Consider P9’s observations.

They [parents] really are struggling...A lot of them are really grieving... I feel like I spend more time than I expected. I’m not complaining. It’s actually a part of the job I’m kind of surprisingly loving, is providing that kind of support to parents. [They’re expressing] broken heartedness and frustration, and like, anger and resentment and...not at me...I’m old enough to know it’s not at me. It doesn’t bother me...and I think that one of the problems with younger people is that they think it’s directed at them, when it really isn’t. It’s just frustrations at life and disappointments and unmet expectations.

Relationship with colleagues. As noted in the Chapter 2 review of the literature (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b), the roles and responsibilities of special and general educators in planning for and delivering instruction to students with disabilities often are ambiguous, resulting in both parties being uncertain or confused as to who is responsible for what parts of a special education students’ education. As Stephens & Fish (2010) point out, confusion and frustration can be exacerbated when general educators do not see themselves as responsible for or appreciative of the needs of students with disabilities.

Five or 45.5 percent of the eleven participants discussed this role dissonance and its impact on their work and motivation. The overarching theme across these participants was just how much special educators need to learn and practice listening, negotiation, and

what several termed “public relations” skill with general education counterparts in order to advocate on behalf of the students they serve. Participant 1 (P1), noting the importance of building and having positive interpersonal relationships with colleagues, stated the following about the public relations role special educators must play.

I believe that special education teachers also have to be PR teachers...and what I mean by that is, they have to not only work with the parents, they have to work with general ed. teachers. And it's how you handle and approach them – how you also get the most support as well. So, I think you're always in a sense in a PR position, a public relation position. Where, as general ed. teachers, they have one focus. It's a little harder for them to see both.

In learning how to define and differentiate her role with general educators, P1 described the power of active listening and finding “win-win” solutions.

[There is] a lot of collaboration with the teachers, a lot of listening to them, letting them know that I hear their concerns, and really trying to make a solution happen that benefits all parties. And if it doesn't, at least letting them know that I tried my best to take their input and make it happen. Again, I think it's the whole public relations part.

For P1, the collegial relationship with fellow special educators is not only important, but also inspiring. P1 reported that she was inspired by “my colleagues, definitely. And, and I still consider...my special education team, they definitely inspire me.”

Similar to P1, Participant 5 (P5) saw public relations as central to her relationship with general educators. She was, however, surprised by the unexpected challenge of handling colleague's expressed negative perceptions about the students.

Dealing with things that you don't foresee. Like you expect that general ed. teachers would be ready to take your kids and love them. And then when you overhear them saying horrible things about your kids, or just kids in general, that was unexpected. Like the negativity in the staff rooms. Whew, I thought they were joking the first couple times I like heard that kind of stuff. And then I just stopped eating in there. Other people's perceptions of my kids and of my job, like it's either, ‘Oh, you're

so patient, I could never do that.’ Or it’s a little bit of like disgust. Like my first year teaching, I had a first grade teacher tell me, ‘Well, at least you’ve got your foot in the door. Then you can get a real job next year.’ And I was teaching SDC [Special Day Class], so... that pervasive like negative attitude was very much unexpected. I didn’t realize how much like PR I’d be doing for my kids and myself and the whole system, in trying to educate on like a secondary level, of my peers.

Despite these unexpected challenges with general education colleagues and with the support of her spouse’s listening ear, P5 was able to reframe her thinking and use these challenges to motivate herself to focus on the students, doing her job, and making things enjoyable. Listen to P5 processing her experiences and find her resilience.

How can I reframe what I’m seeing, so that I don’t feel so disempowered? Or how can I avoid it? Or how can I change it? And I think that’s part of the motivation, is to take myself out of it, and realize that like even if it’s happening to me, it’s not probably personal... So, um, so I do... wash between like too much challenge and like motivated just enough to make change, because I can’t stand how unfair the challenges are... I really just have to focus on the kids and doing right by them, and making things funny.

Reframing her thinking allowed P5 to be resilient, stay satisfied, and stay in the field.

As with P5, Participant 8 (P8) was surprised by unexpected negative perceptions about students with disabilities expressed by colleagues. And like P5, P8 was able to overcome this challenge, in her case, by being persistent in requesting to be part of general education functions and transitioning her students into general education classrooms where they could show their capacity to learn and flourish due, at least in part, to her preparation. She shared the following about the first two years of her current job.

I got a lot of, um, resistance from gen. ed., which I didn’t think I’d get... I’d show up to the PLCs [Professional Learning Communities] and they’d ask me why I was there. ‘Why are you here? You know, why do you want to look at what we’re doing? There’s no way your, your children

who are reading so low could do this.’ And I would just let it go, not personal at all, and I would just say...can I just look at what you’re doing? You know, they were nice, you know, but...they just didn’t understand why I was there, and why I wanted to be a part of the groups...So after, you know, a year, they started to understand, because I started pushing kids out [into general education classrooms]. And they started realizing, ‘Wow they really know the program. They know what’s expected. They, they know how to navigate what’s going on in my classroom. It’s because I’ve been doing it in mine. And I’ve been fading off my supports, and once I’ve faded off enough, bam! They’re gone [mainstreamed into general education]. So, um, that was an unexpected challenge for me, because I thought everyone thought like me.

Participant 2 (P2) was surprised not only by the disposition of some general educators, but also by understanding how to differentiate instruction.

[I did not expect to be] working with gen. ed. teachers that maybe don’t...really want to teach, or don’t really understand, um, how to, um...differentiate or daily assess...and explaining those things. I wasn’t quite ready to explain those things to veteran gen. ed. teachers.

In the face of this adversity, he persists in the job by “always think[ing] of myself as a special educator first...and so I just keep, uh, kids’ needs first.”

Echoing P2, Participant 4 (P4) expressed surprise, but, in her case, in discovering that “not everybody in education is there for the students,” that not every teacher is effective, and that there are teachers biding their time until impending retirement.

[Y]ou’re put in a co-teaching situation with the teachers who are the least successful as far as, um, what their administration believes is success. And so they’ll put you with them to try to encourage, you know, better outcomes, for students. And I remember just being a beginning teacher and thinking ‘Why are you in education?’ Like there would be teachers that would tell you straight up, ‘I hate my job. I hate kids. I don’t wanna be here, but I have three years ‘til I retire. So what else am I gonna do?’...I remember just thinking like this is so damaging for teenagers...[I]t builds a wall between you and the students. And you can’t learn...So, um, that, I think, was the most surprising thing to me.

Despite these challenges and unexpected interactions, P4 remained in the field, crediting her persistence to her dedication to “making a difference” and knowing “that there’s kids whose lives are changed and it’s not just in vain if you have had a bad day.” She also credited her persistence to the encouragement of her family and teacher colleagues. For her, the opportunity to have a listening ear and to dialogue was important, stating, “being able to tell them ‘I had the worst day today, you know. Everything went wrong and nobody learned anything’ (P4 laughing). And just they’re encouraging. And I’ve had colleagues who’d just remind you, ‘You have tomorrow.’”

P4 also derived continued inspiration to remain a special educator from veteran teachers at her school site who continue to be excited about their work and who served as role models.

Other teachers, people I’ve worked with...who’ve spent 30 years doing this and still are excited to go to work every day and being able...to teach at a school where some of the teachers that made an impact in my life are there and...it’s a really neat feeling to be able to see the people that were your mentors and, um, that inspired you to become a teacher, that they’re still out there doing it and they’re still a support system for you and an encouragement to you.

In conclusion, despite various unexpected and surprising experiences with teacher colleagues, these special educators saw beyond the moment and drew upon their values, commitment, persistence, and support of other educators to remain satisfied in the role of special educator.

Relationship with students. Five or 45.5 percent of the participants specifically identified their relationship with students - connecting with students to support them and meet their emotional need - as a primary motivator to be and remain a special educator. Participant 2 (P2) reported that the part of his job as a special educator that turned out to

be what he initially had hoped for was his “relationships with students,” musing that he “...kind of had this dream that we’d have these great relationships...and we do, and it’s a lot of fun.” He reported being uplifted by “getting emails from students, um, seeing joy in someone’s face who’s been in education for 10, 12 years” and observing a positive shift in students’ attitudes toward education, noting “then they hated it, and now...they’re liking it.”

Like P2, Participant 4 (P4) identified “working with the kids, the relationships you build with students,” as the part of the job that turned out to be what she initially desired and actually has found gratifying. She offers the following examples of favorite moments and the encouragement it offers her.

[E]ven the ones that you don’t think you’ve made a really strong connection with, just out of the blue, they’ll tell you something that really impacted them; or they’ll bring you a little something and say, ‘Yeah, I just wanted to thank you. Um, this was a really good thing that happened.’ And that is the best feeling in the world...Favorite moments are just when you make a good connection with students...and seeing my students graduate. Seeing them go on and do amazing things with their lives is super encouraging. Those are kind of my favorite moments.

Participant 5 (P5) also reported that, “the connection with kids...was a huge part of what drew me in.” Advocating for her students’ interests sees her through adversity and enables her to be resilient. As she states, “because I can’t stand how unfair the challenges are...I really just have to focus on the kids and doing right by them.” Focusing on student relations motivates and satisfies her enough to remain in the field.

Participant 6 (P6) experienced the greatest job satisfaction when meeting the emotional needs of students. When asked, “Could you describe your moments of greatest satisfaction as a special educator?” P6 acknowledged how important students’ social and

emotional well-being is to their ability to engage with the curriculum and to her satisfaction as a special educator.

Greatest satisfaction when it comes to [being a] special educator, is when I meet a behavior need of a student, when I get them to come back from wherever, um, sadly to say, emotional state that they may be in and when we get them back. When I get them back, I think that's my greatest satisfaction. More than meeting a goal, more than meeting a benchmark, it's meeting the emotional need of my students. That's my greatest satisfaction.

Finally, recall Participant 9 (P9) who facilitated a student's success on a test by helping him get organized and find and use his notes for the test. Reflecting on that experience, she commented on the satisfaction derived from the "small moments" of student connection throughout the day.

So, I mean, that's a small thing. But life is small things. That's all it is... So that's a joyful small thing... I have those all day long, and that's why I do this. That's why I'm happy, joyful... Giving them that sense of relief in a journey that's often so hard... This kid's gonna have a good weekend now. He's gonna come back, he's gonna feel successful.

In summary, although these five participants experienced the connection with students differently, all five cited the opportunity to have relationships with students eligible for special education as a significant motivator to enter and remain in the field.

Non-Workplace Factors Attributed to Resilience and Retention

Researchers have examined and offered theoretically based insights into how to build programs and establish paradigms and human support systems to facilitate teacher resiliency. Curry and O'Brien (2012), recognizing that teachers' inability to manage daily job stressors can impair their ability to effectively meet the changing needs of their students, recommend that schools make a wellness paradigm shift. They define *wellness* as the understanding of oneself and what is needed to experience well-being, cope with

daily stressors, and function at maximum capacity. In their case study, they found that when teachers formulated and acted upon a wellness plan, they experienced greater self-control, internal stability, and self-support. Focusing upon self-care and wellness behaviors can positively affect a person's ability to manage stress and be resilient.

Research Question #2 and Interview Questions 5 and 12 examined participants' *non-workplace practices, experiences, and influences (e.g. family, mindfulness practices) outside of the workplace* that may affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator. The overarching theme had to do with achieving balance and maintaining boundaries between work and the rest of life. Participants acknowledged how hard it was, at times, to disconnect from work and noted the importance of having time to disconnect from the stressors of being a special educator. As Participant 1 (P1) stated, “[Y]ou could answer work emails all night long. And you, you have to limit yourself. Y-you just have to make boundaries to give yourself time to rejuvenate.” Participant 7 (P7) described her strategies to remind herself to maintain boundaries between work and the rest of life as follows

...little stickers that will say ‘balance, peace’ you know, just little things to help me remind myself not to do this [referring to feelings of burn out from the previous week’s work]...My desk is a mess right now at work, and I left everything there because I knew I just needed to shut down. If I think about work, work will come into my, my brain...my thoughts this weekend.

Participants achieved the capacity “to ‘bounce back,’ to recover strengths or spirits quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity” (Gu and Day, 2009, p. 1302) – to be resilient – by structuring *personal self-care* activities and through *social networking*.

Research Question 2, Theme 1: Personal Self-Care. Of the eleven participants, nine or 81.8 percent identified personal self-care activities of exercise, travel as important to maintaining balance and resiliency.

Individual exercise. In the context of this study, individual exercise refers to time spent alone physically exerting oneself. Six or 54.5 percent of the participants discussed their need to go to the gym. Participant 4 (P4) explained about building exercise into life. “I exercise. That’s huge for me and I have to have a personal trainer to exercise to make myself...follow through with it...So I make appointments for the things that are important to me. I make appointments to take care of my health...” Participants 2 and 3 (P2 and P3) mentioned their time at the gym as their way to refresh and rejuvenate. Participant 5 (P5) described the connection of setting and achieving workout goals with resilience when stating “...for resilience, honestly, I think working out, like making new goals with my workouts, so then achieving them.”

Participant 10 (P10) noted exercise as essential to his teaching job, “for the physicality of the job itself, lifting students, things of that nature.” This response also illustrates how important his job as a special educator is to him. Being physically fit is not a published special education job requirement, but something he saw as important to be effective. Participant 11 (P11) also reported the importance of exercise. “I exercise a lot, and I try to stay in good shape because, if you don’t, then again, it can wear on you...I’m a gym rat so, at four o’clock in the morning, I’m there for two hours or so...The exercise is important.”

For these five participants, individual exercise was a key non-workplace activity that helped them be resilient.

Travel. Five or 45.5 percent of participants identified travel as a self-care activity positively associated with resilience. When asked interview question 5c, *outside of work what other activities or experiences have you participated in that help you to be resilient and successful at your job*, they discussed their love for travel and the time and space travel provides to disconnect from everyday work life. Participant 5 (P5) appreciates having summers off from teaching to experience new things with family and friends.

Oh, yeah, I travel a lot. As much time off as teachers get...Experience new places...so we try to spend as much time during the summer traveling as possible. And my husband...gets a week of vacation so usually he and I will do something for one week...and then I'll travel with friends who are teachers or my mom.

P6 shared how her travel to another country where there are fewer educational opportunities for students with disabilities influences her resilience.

P6: I do go a lot though to Tijuana...and seeing that environment also makes me resilient to my job...because I love what I do, and seeing how things are different in different countries, makes me be more successful here.

Researcher: How so?

P6: Education system in Mexico was not what we would like it to be and I have family over there and I have tenants over there and it's – when I talk to them about education, they're not near, near what we have here in the United States with special ed., so that also makes me reflect a lot.

Researcher: Would you say it makes you appreciate what you have here?

P6: Appreciate. I get the energy to come back and continue with my kiddos here and give them the opportunity that I know they have here.

Research Question 2, Theme 2: Social Networking. Participants also identified social networking – engaging in team exercise, community activities, and spending time with family and friends – as facilitative of resilience.

Team exercise and sports. Of the participants, four or 36.4 percent reported they enjoyed team sports, either as players or coaches, as an external source of rejuvenation. Participant 2 (P2) enjoyed playing rugby and noted that he seeks this personal activity outside of work to bolster his resilience. Participant 4 (P4) described enjoying scuba diving with a club in Los Angeles and playing coed softball with her husband on various teams. Participant 6 (P6) coaches soccer and describes the energy it brings, stating “...I honestly believe that going back to those kids [speaking of the 4-year olds she coaches]...gives me energy, even though they take it away...they give it back...”

P11 coaches basketball and reflected on the relationship between being a coach and being an effective teacher, saying, “I looked back to my experience in grade school and high school, and the best coaches are the best teachers. And the kids wanted to be there. And they wanted to learn basketball. So it was a different way to teach, but I got to see them outside of the school setting.” P11 also seemed to not only enjoy watching the teammates, but also appreciate how to use participation in sports as an academic motivator.

It’s for second graders, and...it’s very cool. It’s like ‘Bad News Bears’... They don’t know where the ball is going and 20 of them dive for one ball. They, they turn it into rugby. They don’t really have the art of dribbling down, and they’ll pass to the wrong team. But they want to be there and, coincidentally, they’re the best students too....I tell my kids, ‘You better get good grades...All the teacher has to do is call the coach and you’re going to be benched that day.’ So it helped me...I wasn’t any good, but it kept me out of trouble.

For these four participants to have the opportunity to touch students’ lives in a different way through exercise and team sports seemed to facilitate their resilience.

Community service and involvement. Five or 45.5 percent of participants identified engaging in community service and business activities as fulfilling. Participant 5 (P5) described her diverse “volunteerism.”

I volunteer a lot, which sounds like... ‘Your job’s already semi-volunteerism.’ But, um, I do like animal shelter work and fundraising... I have a disability group that I volunteer with, that I help support parents of children with the disability and how to kind of like navigate the system nationwide.

Like P5, Participant 6 (P6) has “activities all over the community.” She describes how running a family business energizes her to come back to her job as a special educator.

[W]e also have a the business that my grandma created. We still run it. But all that, believe it or not, being in a different type of environment, running a different business, not being in the education system, gives you the energy to come back.

Participant 9 (P9) described how her volunteering for school district committees not only fulfills her need to give back to her district in a different way than her work as a special educator, and allows her to focus her attention on solving issues that might affect her students, but also allows her to take her mind off the specifics of her day-to-day role as a special educator.

Participant 10 (P10) and Participant 4 (P4) discussed how teaching classes at church helped them with their job as special educators. P10 described how teaching at church provided him with feedback he did not get from his students in his role as a special educator. Having the opportunity to teach classes at church filled his educator need for reciprocity in conversation and dialogue.

In the [special education] class there’s not a lot of give and take. And so that’s tough for an educator... Luckily I teach a lot of theology and

apologetic[s] classes at my church. So that – that inspires – that, I guess, fulfills the craving of interaction in a typical standpoint for special education. Um, so I don't feel that lack of. I'm not getting the give and take that I really need in the [special education] class that is typically, uh, I guess, craved by educators. I still get that give and take...but it's in a unique way. But, I also get the, like I said, the typical give and take also from just teaching classes like that [referring to his theology and apologetics classes at church].

P4 also reported how her teaching at church was invigorating and caused her to appreciate how her high school-aged students had once been children who love learning, shifting her perspective on her students in a positive way.

Ironically, I ended up teaching at church, too, so it's on the weekends. It's teaching. But, it's elementary schoolers; and it's just a completely different experience to be with first graders versus high schoolers. And it's refreshing...Teaching my first graders reminds me like these kids start off excited to learn...And they want to learn and, deep down, even by the time they're seniors in high school, if they've had a horrible experience for 10 years, there's still a part of them that wants to learn and wants to do well. And so that kind of shifts my perspective once a week...and reminds me of those things.

Connecting with family and friends. Seven or 63.6 percent of the eleven participants reported engaging with social networks outside of work (e.g., family and friends) to be rejuvenating. Participant 4 (P4) described how her family and friend support network offered encouragement and support.

Just my regular support system, just my friends and family. Um, I have really good friends. And most of my friends I've known since I was a little girl. So, um, maintaining those connections is really important. And they've always...they're the type of friends that would probably encourage me no matter what my job was, you know. You know, my best friend works in a dental office, and so we have opposite stress times. Like today...I'm relaxing and spending the day shopping doing fun things and she is dying at work today. And so, I know we try to touch base regularly and just encourage each other. And, um...yeah, just good support system from friends, and...friends and family that are supportive of your goals and encourage you.

Participant 8 (P8) found doing things with her children and parents relaxing and helpful in getting her “through everything.”

You know, going to my son’s football game...was very relaxing for me. Uh, I love hanging out with my dad. I-I-I make time every weekend...I love doing things with him because him and I are so similar. He was an educator, you know...Just making time to hang out with my children and my father and my mom...I really try to take those little moments and relax with them, you know, so that helps me get through everything.

Participant 5 (P5) reached out to her parents and her domestic partner.

...both of my parents, in different ways. Um, my mom sees it, because her neighbor has foster kids right now, and so she sees how the foster system is failing those kids. Um, and she gets so mad that she’ll start crying and she’ll call me and like I can semi-explain things to her. But most of the time, I’m explaining that this is how it is and it totally sucks, and I’m glad you’re mad with me...My dad just is kind of a goofball and he’s...he’s a good listener. Um, [partner’s name], for sure...I want to tell you how much this sucks, but then I also want to like help you see the challenge, like...or let’s brainstorm solutions.

P5 also shared how difficult it was for her to connect with administrators and colleagues because her work is confidential. She could and did connect with her special educator partner outside of work.

It’s really isolating...because then who do I go to for coaching, you know? Who do I go to for support? There’s nobody. Um, my partner teacher though, she’s good. Um, and outside of work, like we’ll connect over that...I mean every challenge you take on, that you like conquer makes you more resilient.

P6 relied upon family members who also were special educators as sounding boards outside of work.

My family works in the district, a lot of them. Two are in special education, so they are the ones who I usually reflect back and we talk about students and we talk about strategies, even though we don’t want to. It comes up, it comes up. We talk about it...but both of my sisters are the ones I go back to.

In contrast, P6 also found it useful and inspiring to dialogue with a friend with opposing views on education. Listen to our exchange.

P6: A friend of mine who dislikes education and believe it or not, I talk to her about it and she gives me her side of the story and her experiences with education and she, she does guide me sometimes because of her different perspective...But she makes me reflect back on a non-education form...

Researcher: “And that helps you rejuvenate and...”

P6: “It does...it kind of grounds...”

Researcher: “Would you say it grounds you? Or what would you say that that alternative perspective of someone who’s not in education and who dislikes education, how does that not bring you down?”

P6: “Because it inspires me to convince her...to see it my way and sometimes she doesn’t and it’s okay. And sometimes she does agree...It’s the will to win.”

Like P6, Participant 7 (P7) also relied on friends in education to share experiences and emotions, particularly humor.

I have a lot of friends...that are in education...I totally have a few really close friends that are in special education that we, um, we will call and we will talk to, and sometimes it’s crying, sometimes it’s laughing. I think humor is the most important thing, and I was thinking about this when I read your questions. I, we don’t laugh at students, but we laugh at our job, and you have to keep that humor...in there, and sometimes it’s, it’s a, um, warped sense of humor...

As with P6 and P7, P8 relies upon her special education friends to help her “keep going” and “get through it all.”

We always, um, call each other and give each other support. There are times we just want to let it all out, and the other person will hear you out, and then we reflect and we talk about why we do this and try to bring it back into what the purpose is and that helps us get through it all...There are times I’ll call my friend that’s at my old site, and I’ll just ‘ah na na na na na na na na na.’ And at the end we’ll just always talk about bringing it back to the children, the purpose, the reasons, and it helps us to keep

going (P8 laughter). You need those people in your circle, you know, and special educators just need to hang out with each other. Some of my gen ed. teachers are very supportive too, so I talk to them as well, you know. Especially the ones that have been in special – and then they go back to gen – so they know a lot.

Likewise, Participant 9 (P9) turns to teacher friends to “commiserate.”

There are teachers and sometimes I’ll commiserate with them...I have a couple of friends in the district that we’ll go out for coffee, like every couple weeks. We’ll sit and we’ll chew the fat, you know. But I don’t, like, once I leave, I leave. Like, I’m pretty compartmentalized.

In contrast, P10 did not seek support outside of work other than from his spouse who had been in his class and who understood his work challenges.

(P10 sighed) Outside of work, I definitely have my wife, because she has been in the class, and she understands the challenges that are presented in the class, and so, um, she helps. Because, if there’s any venting, it’s not a venting about students. If anything it’s more because of staff...I guess any venting would have to be because of (P10 sighed) I guess inspiration of ideas of how to make typical curriculum appeal to somebody who’s cognitively six months. So that’s the hard part. Because she helps me a lot in that. But there’s not many other people outside of work that I could talk to about this, because they don’t, just don’t understand. They’re not in special education. And other people that are in education just don’t understand my line of work...So I’m kind of a lone wolf in it, um, outside of work, except for my wife.

Summary for Research Question 2. In summary, for Research Question 2, participants identified *non-workplace practices, experiences, and influences* that positively affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator as ones that allowed them to maintain balance and boundaries between work and the rest of their lives. These included personal self-care activities of exercise and travel and social networking via team sports and community activities as well as time and conversations with family and friends.

Workplace Factors Attributed to Resilience and Retention

Administrative support has long been identified as an important teacher support variable, particularly important during a teacher's first year(s) of teaching (Boyd et al., 2011; Gersten et al., 2001). While there were a variety of factors that influence a teachers' decision to stay or leave the job, Tickle, Chang, and Kim (2011) determined that administrative supports mediates all other effects of teaching, with novice teachers identified scarcity of administrative support as a major cause for leaving the teaching profession. Billingsley (2004b) also suggests that special education teachers leave the field, in part, due to perceived lack of administrative support.

Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) examined the effects of principal support on general and special educators' stress, job satisfaction, school commitment, health, and intent to stay in teaching. They found that administrators offer four types of support: *instrumental* - helping teachers with their work, *appraisal* - offering coaching and feedback or clarifying job responsibilities, *informational* – providing professional development and current updates on best practice, and *emotional* - showing teachers they are esteemed and worthy of concern through "open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, and considering teachers' ideas" (Littrell et al., 1994, p. 297). Littrell and colleagues found emotional support to be the most important to educators' well-being.

Research Question 3 explored interviewees' *workplace influences and experiences (e.g. collegial support, administrative support, other supports, student learning)* that affected their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator. Five themes emerged from an analysis of participants' responses to the

related interview questions. The first theme was that relationships with students, administrators, and teacher colleagues motivate and foster resilience. The remaining four themes have to do with the influence of the four types of administrative support described by Littrell and colleagues (1994).

Research Question 3, Theme 1: Workplace Relationships and Resilience.

Participants identified three categories of people who mattered and influenced their resilience, teaching efficacy, and wellness – their students, their site administrators, and teacher colleagues.

Students. Two out of eleven participants (18.2 percent) mentioned relationships with their students as significant workplace relationships that helped or motivated them to be more resilient or more effective. Participant 8 (P8) described her strong sense of responsibility for student learning, using it as fuel to feel effective in her role as a special educator.

My relationship with my, um, my students...putting my students first, wanting them to be successful is is everything to me. So, if I don't provide them with the best instruction, I really think I've failed them, and I take that personal. So, um, to me it's very important for me to give them access. What I need to do is my responsibility. So if they're not reading grade level, it's my responsibility to make sure they have access to that grade level, somehow. Whether it's closed reading, whether it's teaching them how to annotate, whether it's teaching them how to use context clues, whatever it takes. That's my job, so because I take ownership of that, I think that helps me through those other things. Being effective, being resilient, because I feel it's my responsibility to make sure they have access, and someday they will be able to be in the least restrictive environment. I don't want it to be my instruction holding them...back.

Participant 11 (P11) also found his sense of responsibility and caring for students something that made the hard work “worth it.” He sees his students as more than just “names on a report.”

Most of the teachers I've run into in my career, it's inherent. You have that feeling for the students. You have it, they're not names on a report. They're not check marks that you click, and then, file it, and then, move on. They're different. They're individual people who you have to address, and have to see their wellness because, I agree with what you said. Some of them, this is the safest they're going to be all day, and some of them, if I buy them a little tiny football, that might be the best thing they get. You have to see the emotional...It's trying, and it's hard, but it's worth it, so the majority of the teachers I have are that way. They're resilient. 'I'm not getting through to this kid. What can I do?' and if, well, that's the best part of teaching. How can I fashion this key to let them open the doors, instead of their not getting it.

Site administrators. Five (45.5 percent) interviewees noted their *relationship* with site administrators as positively influencing their effectiveness.

Participant 2 (P2) described her dialogue with one of the assistant principals as giving direction to her and her colleagues as a consequence of their relationship and dialogue, stating, "we kind of just kind of talk to each other at times, off the record...And she gives me the kind of administration big picture, and I, I give her the smaller picture from our department. So that kind of helps."

Researcher: "And how does this impact your resiliency and your teaching efficacy?"

P2: "Uh, yeah, that you're heard. And I think, um, the assistant principal feels like she's heard, and I try to make those changes within the department, from her desires, you know. I can tell what's really important, what's really bothering her, and then I communicate to the other team, um, through me instead of her – so that it's not coming from the administrator."

For Participant 5 (P5), having opportunities to be valued as an expert and used as a resource by site administrators helped her to be resilient.

Two principals I can think of that really have noticed big changes in their teachers since I've been working with them. And they're really appreciative of it. Um, and they even had me like train at their staff meetings, and that's been really fun. Like they're like, 'Oh, you know, like

what do you think?’ And, um, so those relationships because I feel like I’m actually being used to my full potential, um, those are nice. That helps me be more resilient, because I actually feel valued.

For Participant 6 (P6), her administrator’s “leading by example” by backing the special education team’s inclusion initiative at her school was an energizer.

...that was something my administrator came up with. So he supports that. So that’s how I get that emotional [support] from him. He supports all these programs that we create...If it wasn’t for him, I don’t think teachers would be open to it because when we first came out with the idea, I had teachers here telling me that it’s not gonna work, that it’s impossible, we cannot include SDC students in our general ed, they don’t meet the cut and they’re gonna be really behind, and how am I gonna deal with their behaviors. So they were very concerned. So when we started telling them more of a co-teaching style, more of us going in there, they started to be more like opened to it.

For Participant 8 (P8), having an administrator who has and shares her appreciation of high teacher performance expectations is something she “thrives on.”

My administrator has, um, supported that. So that together is what helps me to be the way that I am with my teaching practices...Because she feels the same way, and I thrive on high expectations...I want a professional leader that has high expectations. And I’m not there to make friends. I’m there to help my students learn. That’s my mindset. So that helps me be successful with what I do because, like I said, it’s my responsibility, it’s my job to make sure that my students are successful and reach their potential.

Finally, Participant 10 (P10) appreciated an understanding listening ear, sharing that he sought out his principal frequently because “he can understand where I’m coming from. He doesn’t have any answers. But he can at least understand.” P10 also extended the importance of relationship to associated office staff, to “special relationships with each and every [person]...the nurse...the office staff...the principal.”

Teacher colleagues: Special educators, general educators, and support staff. All eleven (100%) participants identified relationships with non-administrative colleagues –

special educators, general educators, support staff (e.g. school psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, adaptive physical education teachers), and instructional assistants or paraeducators - as important in supporting them in some way in their role as a special educator. Further, participants (nine or 81.8 percent) rated their relationship with other special educators and support personnel as “extremely important,” the highest rating on the 5-point Likert scale. Only two (18.2 percent) rated their relationships as a three or “somewhat important.”

Special educators. Novice teachers benefit in many ways from veteran collegial support (Jones et al., 2013). Griffin and colleagues (2009) found that special educators often feel most supported by other veteran special education colleagues. Similarly, Leko and Smith (2013) note that novice special educators benefit from specialized mentoring related to their multi-dimensional, specialized job role.

In this study, five interviewees (45.5 percent) identified other special educators as providing them support that fostered their effectiveness and resilience. Participant 1 (P1) noted the receiving support from the entire special education team.

The strong special ed team! It’s not just the special ed. teachers. It could be your OT [Occupational Therapist]. It could be your speech and language... We have a very good relationships with our school psychologist. Because we understand that additional piece.

Participant 5 (P5) appreciated the validation provided by her special education teacher partner and coach and having “somebody to say like, ‘He-he, yeah, that person is crazy.’ or like ‘Wow, that person has made so much growth,’ you know, just being validated with what, um, what I’ve experienced and kind of like bouncing it off of her, has definitely helped me.”

Leko & Smith (2010) note that special educators' potential feelings of isolation can be reduced through collaboration with other special education teachers, whether at their own or other school sites. Participant 6 (P6) spoke about how collaborating with her special education colleagues to start a new program was critical to her success throughout her day,

Right now I've been connecting with two of my SDC [Special Day Class] teachers. We are creating that inclusion program. I have students of theirs that I work with, and they have students of mine that they work with...We do talk a lot about our students, where they're at. Are they able to be in that group? Are they meeting the needs? Or do we rotate them?...So it's more of a...collaboration, but with each other's students...We do email a lot, our lesson plans...We have another RSP teacher that helps me, that co-teaches the writing workshop.

Participant 7 (P7) described the co-teaching among general and special educators that had been initiated at her school. When asked about particular people, she identified her close and fun relationship with another special educator who, like her, no longer has a segregated special education classroom, but shares the new role of the "push-in" collaborating teacher serving students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

I work with the other mild-moderate teacher. And her and I, she jokes. She has a two-year-old. And I guess there's a movie called Frozen. And, in Frozen, it says, 'We finish each other's sandwiches.' And so she's always joking and telling people, 'Oh, [P7] and I finish each other's sandwiches,' instead of sentences...The way the school is set up is there's not mild-moderate classes...She has the 10th and 11th graders...I have all the 9th graders. And so we're...it's all pushed in.

Participant 9 (P9) shared similar experiences to P7, working closely with special education colleagues on sight, and seeking them out throughout the day to support her in her role as a special educator. When asked if there were particular people she connected with or sought out, she reported, "I have SPED teachers on either side of me. And, like,

we constantly help each other out.” She further described their cooperation and pragmatic support of one another

We try to work together...that way and, um, if I need to go to the bathroom, you know, like, I ask that guy next door to come over and watch my kids, you know. So that’s the kinda stuff we do during the day and also we get, we call each other...I mean, we call the moderate/severe teacher...She’s new this year. And I actually worked ESY [Extended School Year] with her this summer. So we became friends...I’ll say, ‘Listen, two of my aides didn’t show up, do you have anybody just for, like, half an hour, can you send someone?’ So we try to share our support.

In summary, as previous research has suggested special educators are a source of support that can foster resilience among one another. This begs the question, what are ways that schools more deliberately create and support opportunities for special educators to collaborate and mentor one another?

General educators. With the shift from educating students with disabilities in separate classrooms to collaboratively teaching all students in general education environments through co-teaching approaches (Villa & Thousand, 2016), there can be confusion as to the roles of both special and general educators in planning for, instructing, and assessing students with disabilities. Neither party may have, as part of their history, well-defined or well-understood roles and responsibilities as collaborating instructional partners, resulting in ambiguity that can be both confusing and frustrating (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b).

One way to reduce role ambiguity and dissonance among general and special educators is for school systems to create opportunities for general and special educators to collaborate (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b; Jones et al., 2013). Participant 2 (P2) described how he took the initiative to connect with his general education co-teaching partners, to

“seek out my two co-teachers. And I’ll eat lunch with them. Or I’ll show up at their prep or...cover a class for them. Or we’ll talk to each other or text each other...Even with, some of their life problems, I help them out.” Participant 4 (P4) identified the power of the encouragement, collaborative problem solving and friendship that general education teacher partners can provide.

I’ve had so many co-teachers where I was in their classroom and just loved it...and I looked forward to it and made positive connections where, um, it was just so good. You could just ask them for encouragement. You could encourage them. You could bounce ideas off of each other and work together to support students and it was just like the best possible situation...having friendships like that is super important in your job. And I think that’s part of why having a new job is extremely challenging...To be in a new place where you don’t know anyone quite yet and you don’t have those connections, my stress level is hugely different from where it was.

Support staff. School support staff includes a wide range of roles - classroom aides or paraeducators, specialist such as Speech and Language Pathologists (SLPs), Occupational Therapists (OTs), Adapted Physical Education (APE) teachers, and school psychologists, and English language development (ELD) teachers. Three participants (27.3 percent) identified support staff as key contributors to their success and resilience. For instance, Participant 3 (P3) described the joy his relationship with his instructional assistant brings and the steps he took to get his partner acknowledged for the many things he contributes.

It’s nice to have that guy there [speaking of his instructional aide]. Because he and I see things similarly...If you’re cranky in the morning, just smile. And we, we both, we’re always, come in, smile, say hello to everybody...My instructional aide...and I was instrumental in this, won county Employee of the Year...I mean he did all these things...for years. He’s been there a long time. I wrote him the recommendation letter. And you can only do three paragraphs...I had to sum up three paragraphs of all

the stuff this guy did...So it's kinda like we, we, we helped each other. So that was kinda cool and he was very, like, thankful.

Participant 8 (P8) described the power of the rich sharing of resources and ideas that occurs among herself, other special educators, the school psychologist, and speech pathologist support personnel.

I do like to meet with my *school psychologist* a lot because some students on my caseload have um, emotional issues. And she is the go-to person. And I will spend time with her...she'll give me strategies, she'll walk me through it, so I do connect with her a lot. And we talk about what we can do to help support, you know, of course students and staff. And I'll meet with my PLC [Professional Learning Community] teams. I'll have my SDC [Special Day Class *special education*] teacher coming down. [The] *speech pathologist* will be there, and myself. And at that time, we share best practices, we share material. At least that's great. You know, at our site, they love sharing. And I love sharing too. So we collaborate. The speech pathologist collaborates. And what's cool about it is if we're learning about theme, she pulls theme into her groups...and she'll try to use the same articles. So it's kind of like cross-content.

The dynamic between support staff and special educators can set the tone for the entire learning environment. Support staff members need to feel they are valued and contributing members of the classroom structure, and the teacher's approach to this is critical. Participant 10 (P10) described how, upon being hired in his current position, he communicated his valuing of support staff while maintaining his role as the lead professional.

First thing I did is sat everyone down, because...we merged the two classes together, because the teacher retired. I told them all, I said, 'You have the experience. I have, in a sense, that education that they're looking for...the collegiate level or whatever...But this is *our* classroom. So I need to take your experience and integrate it with my collegiate knowledge, and merge it together to make what we're going to make.' And I think that diffused a lot of situations. I made sure to establish that I'm the Gordon Ramsay, but...you guys are also the professional chefs in here and I'm going to glean knowledge off of you, and experience off of you, and

you're going to do so with me. And we're going to make this our classroom, not my classroom.

In summary, important to participants who noted support staff relations, was setting an *our* versus *my* structure and reciprocal and equitable relationships. Professional preparation program and school administrators can learn from these participants' dispositions and practices and encourage and create forums for novice teachers to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of veteran teachers and support personnel through any collaborative opportunity while asserting leadership in a respectful and professional manner.

Research Question 3, Theme 2: Administrative Support. As a reminder, Research Question 3 explored *workplace influences and experiences (e.g. collegial support, administrative support, other supports, student learning)* that affected interviewees' resilience. The four types of administrative support described by Littrell and colleagues (1994) emerged as highly important workplace influences for the participants in this study. As noted in Chapter 3, the researcher averaged and compared participants' Likert rankings of each type of support and determined the ranking from most to least important to be (1) emotional, (2) instrumental, (3) appraisal, and (4) informational. Findings regarding these four types of supports are discussed in this order here. Participants ranked the importance of having received the four types of workplace support on a 5 – point Likert scale as outlined below in Table 2.

Table 2. Likert Scale Descriptions

Likert Scale Score	Ordered Response Meaning
5	“Extremely Important”
4	“Very Important”
3	“Somewhat Important”
2	“Minimally Important”
1	“I Could Care Less”

Emotional support. Emotional support has been defined as “showing teachers they are esteemed and worthy of concern through ‘open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, and considering teachers' ideas’ [e.g. showing appreciation, asking for and considering idea(s)]” (Littrell et al., 1994, p. 297). As in Littrell and colleague’s study, participants in this study ranked emotional support as the *most important* of the four types of support for them to receive at work, with the Likert scale mean being 4.5. Participants received emotional support from three main groups of people. Six (54.5 percent) reported receiving emotional support from *special education co-teachers*; six (54.5 percent) reported receiving emotional support from *site level administrators*; and three (27.3 percent) reported receiving emotional support from their special education *classroom paraeducators*. Note that several participants reported receiving emotional support from more than one of these three groups. Also note that these three groups are the same as those identified in the previous section as important workplace relationships.

Emotional support varied among participants of this study. However, data analysis revealed participants identified emotional support as bolstering participants' feelings of self-worth in four ways, through positive praise and encouragement, listening and dialoguing, and teaching as a team sport.

Positive praise, appreciation, and encouragement. Five participants (45.5 percent) found emotional support to be positive praise and encouragement. Participant 3 (P3) experienced that at work “everybody... instructional aides... administrators, teachers...” provide emotional support that is “happy and upbeat.” He also tries to provide emotional support, commenting, “I always try to bring it to my staff, [saying] ‘Hey, good morning everybody; how you doing? So nice to have you here.’... If everyone’s happy and working, it provides a good team.”

Participant 4 (P4) described the emotional support she got from colleagues and administrators, which encouraged her to bounce back from a rough experience or day.

Being able to talk to your colleagues when you’ve had a rough day and them encouraging you and reminding you that you’re here for the kids and that everyone has a rough day sometimes... and that, um, the stuff that you’re working on with your students is sinking in even if you... don’t see it on a daily basis. That’s super encouraging for me. Or if you have a rough parent phone call, being able to go to your admin. and having them support you versus just automatically say like, ‘What did you do that made that parent upset?’

P4 described the being and small actions of a principal that clearly showed appreciation and valuing of teachers’ work.

My last principal was beyond amazing as far as supporting teachers and making sure that... I mean you just felt appreciated all the time. She was constantly doing things like staff appreciation lunches and, um, popping into people’s classrooms in like an encouraging way, not necessarily to evaluate you or to watch your teaching, but just to come in and say hi and ask how things are going and if you need anything.

When asked what emotional support P4 found to be most valuable to her well-being, she identified “encouragement from colleagues especially wise seasoned teachers” because of the ability to mentor.

[They] have been doing the job a long time and are full of wisdom and they just kinda give you those little nuggets of wisdom that...encourage you and, um, helped mentor you through when you're having a rough time.

Participant 5 (P5), who rated getting emotional support as “extremely important,” had a great deal to say. First, she was candid about her personal need to be appreciated and the negative impact when appreciation was not forthcoming.

I need it personally, like I need to know that I'm valuable...Presently, I'm not feeling very appreciated, very belittled, and so I have to like keep reframing who I'm there for, like I'm not there for approval, I'm there for my kids and my teachers and...But that's like an extra filter on my life, where if... I wasn't fighting against that lack of appreciation; I think I'd be having a much better time.

P5 did get validation from her peers in a variety of ways.

Either seeking my ideas, which is like validating that I have good ideas, occasionally, or um, you know, just complimenting, or like wow, I noticed that your class is really doing better...things like that where it's like oh, your hard work is paying off.

And P5 did recognize that everyone needed emotional support to “know they are OK.”

Really, truly, in this job, I rarely get that because everybody comes to you when they're in crisis. So, um, I'm usually the one giving them emotional support...Something that really resonated with me when I first started this job, was ‘Holy crap, everybody just wants to know they're OK.’

Given that P5 needs but rarely receive the emotional support she wanted and provided to others, the researcher probed further, asking, “If you're rarely getting it right now and it's a five for you, how do you kind of bounce back everyday and be resilient enough to want

to stay?” To this, P5 responded by describing what makes the job fulfilling and her strategy of avoiding those who don’t show appreciation.

That’s the thing. I want to stay in the profession because I love the kids. I love the research part, I love making a difference, being part of a community...I have so many cool things to look forward to and so many teachers that I’ve like already set up co-teaching with me...And that’s kind of what keeps me going...And, to be honest, like avoiding the people that should appreciate me and don’t.

Two participants, Participant 6 (P6) and Participant 7 (P7), were most interested in giving rather than receiving emotional support. P6 stated, “I’m more concerned of their emotional support, of my co-workers, then I am of mine. So I want to make sure they know that I’m here for them.” When asked who has provided her with emotional support she identified her students.

I think students are very honest and they show, they support you and they show their concerns with you and most of my students have that where they come in, um, on lunchtime, on recess time just to be here. So, by them doing that, that shows me some support...I need to see them happy. I need to see them come in when it’s not their time because they want to be here. So...my students are the ones who give me more of my emotional support.

Like P6, Participant 7 (P7) discussed she did not need praise and recognition, but appreciated it when she received it, particularly from her administrator.

My principal is, is right there. There’s not a week that goes by...she doesn’t do it publicly with me because she doesn’t need to with me. I don’t need the public stroke so, for me, it’s more quietly. Like if I go up and hand her an amendment, she just will go, ‘I just want you to know I sleep at night now.’ She’ll make those comments, you know? But it’s, it’s quiet...it’s quiet things for her...but I think I’m giving emotional support to my other teachers, both gen. ed. and...because we’re, we work so close as a team at, at the school.

Listening and dialoguing. Three (27.3 percent) of the participants identified being listened to and heard by colleagues at work provided them with the emotional

support they needed or desired. When asked by the researcher, “And what has this emotional support looked like for you?” Participant 2 (P2) appreciated listening and dialoging as follows.

If you have a problem, they listen. They try to help you with it...they ask...If I have a problem with something, they’ll...instead of just blowing me off, they’ll put me in charge of a team to come up with an answer. Um, so they’re kind of solution based instead of problem-based, which is...a lot of times, which is kind of nice.

P2 also reported “just normal conversations and laughter” as a most valuable and helpful type of emotional support, noting that he and his colleagues, “all eat lunch here together, and...we just talk like adults...The biggest thing is that 30-minutes of just...talking and laughing.”

Participant 9 (P9) also discussed the importance of the emotional support she received from informal conversations outside of school with her special education mentors. She reported, “I go out, usually on Friday, to do dinner, with the vice principal of SPED [Special Education]... We’re both from back east. So we go out, we commiserate...pretty much every week.” She adds.

There’s another girl who’s the department chair...and she was my BTSA [Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment] support provider. And we became friends and she’s also from [the east coast]...And we go out for coffee every three weeks or so. And it’s nice to get together with...more experienced people. So I get an inside track on how, like, the politics in the district, I learned about how things work, and what’s coming up and what to look out for.

P9 also described being in a joyful giving role with her department chair mentor, noting, “I kinda provide her more support than she provides me emotionally. But that’s okay. You know, ‘cause I’m able to do that, you know.”

Researcher: “It sounds like you enjoy it.”

P9: “I do.”

Researcher: “And that’s part of what makes you resilient?”

P9: “Yea...I don’t have children, so like the thing that people that have children, they give all that to their kids. I have it to give. And it’s joyful to give it. So, to be able to give it. You know? That’s joyful.”

Participant 11 (P11) noted that in addition to strong team collaboration, he appreciated the non-verbal and verbal dialogue with teaching partners.

More dialoguing, and knowing what kids work well with each other, and what kid’s about to have some problems and...just across the room, looking at each other, we can all see what’s going good. I can hear her lesson. She can hear mine and, if something’s not going right, or something’s going off the rail, just to be able to talk. And the couple of minutes that we assess everyday. This kid had a hard time today. Maybe this girl doesn’t need to be sitting near this boy. So it’s kind of just figuring out the, keeping the temperature of the room kind of calm, and...having things in place if something does happen, or a kid runs out of the room. ‘Will you be following her, or will you be calling the office?’ that kind of thing because...you have to plan ahead before it happens.

When asked what emotional support he found most helpful to his well-being, P11 expanded on the value of dialogue with colleagues.

Again, just having people to bounce things off of, and not negative, but, ‘Oh my goodness, I had a hard time today, and ‘This student managed to push all my buttons 10-minutes into the day,’ and just people to talk to. People that know this is a hard class.

For these three participants open dialogue and active listening generated feelings of self-worth. Dialogue also opened up the opportunity for participants to work as a team with their special and general education colleagues.

Teamwork: Teaching as a team sport. Two (18.2 percent) participants named teamwork as the vehicle providing them with emotional support. Participant 10 (P10) identified teamwork as an extremely important emotional support for special educators

and expounded further community he and his classroom staff have and the emotional support they provided one another on school-related and personal matters.

The [special education] staff...at my school it's, it's like a community. In the sense you can describe it like a family...and so people sympathize and can empathize with...struggles we go through, with certain students, or, um, certain situations, because they're in a sense experiencing it.

P10 also acknowledged that the dynamics of any team or family can be tricky.

We're all, in a sense, the same struggle and pull in trying to help these guys [students with severe disabilities] out, and so there's, there's nobody in a sense criticizing what we're doing...But just like a typical family or community, there is, there's tensions at times...It's emotionally, it's great because you cry together, you can be frustrated together, you can rejoice together. And, um, everyone is there for each other, on the site, same mindset...Emotional support's big.

Participant 11 (P11) described his emotional journey as a special educator and how teamwork and collaboration were important emotional supports.

Special ed. can be an emotional roller coaster. There's days when I leave walking on air because I know I've made a difference. And there's days when I leave physically and mentally hurt, so you have, it has to keep a happy balance there.

He expounded further and discussed how important general and special education teammates are in supporting him emotionally to cope with a roller coaster job.

I'm fortunate, I've got a terrific aid, the best aid I've ever worked with... Both my fellow sixth grade and fifth grade [general education] teams, that helps a lot because we can share. We have pretty good antenna...And it's nice to work with someone I consider a teacher, not an instructional assistant. We can play off each other. If somebody is working well with a student, then we will switch. And then, my general ed. teachers have always been very supportive...What interests me this year is they're having more problems with behavior in their class than I am. And now, they're coming to me, 'What can we do with this kid, and this kid?'

When further probed what emotional support from teammates looked and sounded like, P11 reported that emotional support from teammates came in many forms and resulted

from knowing teammates and being dedicated to the end goal, of successful and happy students.

If a kid's into sports, I can go play catch with him. If a girl's upset, she can go walk with my aid. It's just knowing your kids' temperatures and how to address it before it gets overblown, and also, knowing which of my peers is going through a hard time. Maybe, a death in the family, a really hard kid, something said, something very hurtful. So it's knowing who you work with, and bucking each other up as a team because, as a team, it's everybody. And if you don't take care of the person that's going through a hard time, you're not going to succeed. And a happy staff means happy kids, I've always believed.

Instrumental support. Instrumental support has been defined as helping teachers with their work (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994). It should be noted that one participant reported giving rather than receiving instrumental support, so did not rate this form of administrative support in term of importance to her. Given the importance ratings of the remaining ten participants, the mean rating of 3.85 placed instrument support as the *second* most important type of administrative support. Eight (72.7 percent) of participants reported receiving instrumental support from *site and district level administrators*; six (54.5 percent) reported receiving instrumental support from *other special educators, including their paraeducator assistants and classroom aides*.

Data analysis revealed participants received and sought instrumental support in four domains: (1) human support (e.g. from general education teachers, other special education staff, and professional development, (2) paperwork (including, but not limited to IEP paperwork, lesson planning, teaching and learning resources), (3) legalities, and (4) time.

Instrumental human support. Eight (72.7 percent) of participants identified one or more types of personnel support they sought or received. Participant 2 (P2) evaluated

instrumental support to be “huge.” His position was unique in that he co-taught with general educators, from who he learned “so much” even from the mistakes.

And so, part of that [human instrumental] support is...whatever lesson plan we come up with, and I have a different lens of, as a special educator, to really differentiate. And a lot of times they [his general education co-teachers] know what it means, but they don't quite understand how to implement – so that's...that's...I love that.

In this instrumental support network, they “split grading...assign tasks based off our skill levels...” and “...because I don't mind conflict, I, I do a lot of the grading and parent contact and other teacher contacts.” P2 also describes how special educators can easily provides one another instrumental support because of their close proximity in the same office area.

I have our office, like we all sit in this one room that we're in right now. There's seven of us [special educators], and I have it designed like that on purpose, so...we can kind of support each other, instead of we're in our own room, and we're alone. So this way, we kind of just help each other out the whole time.

When asked to further detail what this looked and sounded like, he described the collaboration as follows.

Literally, I'll be typing something, and I'm like, 'How do you do this in SEIS [Special Education Information System] again?' And someone will holler... I'll do the same thing, where they'll be like, um, you know, 'How're we writing goals again?' We're just kind of going back and forth and asking for help from each other.

Participant 3 (P3) rated instrumental support as “somewhat important,” stating, “I don't ask for it. I don't need it. I don't look for it. But if I do get it, I'm stoked.”

Participant 5 (P5) also rated instrumental support as “somewhat important” and noted that she often she *gave* human instrumental support by helping others with special education paperwork. P5 mused that she sought out less human instrumental support because she'd

“been doing this work for a while” and was “fairly good at the paperwork.” But she noted that, “every once in a while, I’ll clarify if something’s really strange and call and get the answer. She appreciated getting a response “right away...because it just closes the feedback loop” and allowed her to quickly proceed with her work and “just run with it.”

Participant 6 (P6) sought and received human instrumental support from her sisters, who also were special educators. P6 sought her sisters out for “...questions that I have...doubts in.” For district support, she goes to her coordinator, “because we have a coordinator that comes once every two weeks; and I do have my list of questions for her!”

Participant 8 (P8), who rated instrumental support as very important, saw professional development as her preferred avenue for helping teachers accomplish their work (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994). She stated, “professional development in the current best practices is the best you could do for your children.” She gave an example, describing a professional development she attended where she received not only training, but also a free resource.

It has all of these assessments to touch phonemic awareness, to test phonemic awareness. Different types of assessments so you can target what’s going on with their gaps or whatever. And it’s all free. And then...they gave us little strategies on how to teach phonemic awareness...and I learned a lot about equity in education and how important it [is]...to be a positive support.

When asked what instrumental support she sought out, P8 identified curriculum and instructional strategies.

Curriculum...As far as the paperwork goes, I’m pretty, uh, savvy on that kind of stuff, technology and stuff. But I just want strategies. Because not every student is...not all students are the same. What works for one is not going to work for the other. There’s always some amazing strategy going

on somewhere, and I want access to it...I want the best curriculum, the best, um teaching strategies, in my classroom.

P8 also found her principal to be an important human instrumental resource particularly with regard to "...classroom management. And she's also taught...make the objective clear." She also noted that her credential preparation program personnel had taught her about the paperwork involved in being a special educator, so that, in turn, she provided human instrumental support by teaching about paperwork to "teachers at my site that had been there for 10 years."

Participant 9 (P9) reported wanting instrumental support in terms of clear technical support from district personnel regarding paperwork and other district policies. And she also found satisfaction in providing instrumental support of any sort to her colleagues.

What I need to know is I'm doing the thing the district wants me to do to be compliant with district policies. I need to know that I'm not stepping outside of what the district expectations are...I need to be able to call my program specialist and say, 'What's the district, what does the district want us to do when I face this situation?' I need to have, like, technical support on what's good, what's not good, what's compliant, what's not compliant. But I do think I do get more satisfaction from being able to help other people. I think that's the reason why I'm a special ed. teacher. And the extensive staff I work with and related service providers.

P9 offered an example of human instrumental support her district program specialist provided to get another part-time person hired to support her students.

It's in their IEP that they get adult support...I've got to push a staff member into there. I've been complaining about this...I went to my program specialist [with a schedule she'd created and showed to the researcher earlier in the interview] and then she went to HR [Human Resources] and they did an assessment based on the data I provided them, because I'm pretty organized. And, and, and there I was able to justify getting another person, another part-time person in the afternoon for coverage.

Participant 10 (P10) judged that he could “care less” about getting instrumental support for himself and noted that he was sought out to provide instrumental support with IEPs, commenting “...most people seek me out for it (P10 laughs), because a lot of my teachers are, were the veterans” who he could catch up on the “new stuff.” He did identify his principal as the one person who he sought for human instrumental support, stating, “if I can’t answer it, I’ll go, I call him the big boss man, the principal.” He did admit that, being at a segregated site with an adult transition program for 18 to 22 year old students with IEPs, he would need to seek instrumental support to function at other grade levels, stating “if I had to go to a different school...I’d be very lost, because...stuff changes so fast.”

Participant 11 (P11), who is a special educator who is transitioning from educating and supporting students in segregated classrooms to supporting student in inclusive general education classrooms rated instrumental support as extremely important to him, “especially now, since we’re going to do the push-out and going to general ed.” He acknowledged that, “I’ve got to have the ability to make sure that my kids can enter the [general education] rigor that the other kids are doing.” He reported receiving instrumental from district personnel, stating, “I appreciate the seminars, and things they’ve sent me to.” He acknowledged and appreciated that “there’s a lot of training, and [that] our district, has been terrific with helping me.” He has sought out instrumental support to catch up in his learning about new innovations (e.g., technology).

So I've asked to learn how to do all the other stuff, and it's been hard. But you've always got to go forward. You can't stay in one place. You've always got to learn with everybody else...I'm still learning all the

technological stuff... We're going to go that way because the days of pencil and paper are pretty soon going to end.

P11 also appreciated the instrumental support provided in the weekly meetings with the principal and the special education team, which includes special educators, the speech pathologist, and the psychologist, commenting these human interactions “help a lot because we can find out who's got an IEP coming up this week, how are you doing with this student, how are you doing by having this general ed. teacher buy into the process.” When the researcher asked what instrumental support looked and sounded like in these meetings, P11 appreciated the pragmatic activities of calendaring IEP meetings, problem solving for individual students, and having opportunities to ask for help without any sense of shame or judgment from colleagues.

We'll do the calendar for the IEPs because, again, it's a lot of people involved, and we have to make sure that we get everybody there on time, and that the reports are written on a timely basis. And then, we'll talk about the kids... And then, as a team, we can get a whole lot of people involved because we can identify the problem... If this child's having trouble at recess then, instead of sending him or her to the office, which isn't an option anymore, you have to address the problem. Is he being picked on? If he does not have social skills, how can we address that?... Then also, being able to ask for help. I've never felt bad about that. I don't think it means that I'm not a good teacher. It simply means I don't know how to do this. Any other job, if you didn't know how to use a particular tool, you'd ask for help.

In summary, for the participants in this study, instrumental human support varied in importance from one participant to the next, seemed to be most important for less incumbent educators, and took the form of assistance with paperwork, collaborative planning and teaching, advocacy for additional support (e.g., additional support personnel), and professional development to develop curriculum and instructional skills.

Instrumental support with legalities, time, and paperwork. Six (54.5 percent) of the participants discussed instrumental support for dealing with the legal dimensions of special education including paperwork and for finding time to collaborate.

Time is a very valuable commodity for special educators. For Participant 2 (P2) having time to plan and collaborate was his most important instrumental support. P2 learned about and used a variety strategy to maximize his and his colleagues' time.

Time...I got something from [my professors in my credential program]... There's 50 different ways of getting time for me and my co-teacher that's outside of just having a principal paying for it or something like that. And so there are so many different ways...[my] co-teacher and I [have] to figure out when is that time and stick to it each week. So I, I meet with each of them on a certain time, every week, no matter what...that's when we do our kind of...we plan out that week or lesson block or something...not having to cram it in before or after school.

Participant 6 (P6) discussed the deadlines for the legal paperwork required of special educators and also focused on time being an instrumental need and support. She reported:

We have time limits to meet. We have the law in the back of our shoulders so we have to accomplish them. And I'm part of the IEP chair, so I do have to help my co-workers with paperwork just as they have to help me with...so that's why it's super important, mostly because of timelines and laws and legal documentations that we have to work with.

She noted she seeks out instrumental support from her special education coach with "a question regarding an IEP situation, it's mostly IEPs that I have questions with."

Participant 1 (P1) described with appreciation the instrumental support provided by the schools' administration to hold sacred one entire day per week for special educators to collaborate with one another and their support personnel and complete paperwork and other special educator's tasks.

Every Wednesday...is our workday. That is where we work on IEPs, and we do assessments...and that is just purely a teacher, special education teacher workday...That has been built with the site administration. Because they understand every teacher has paperwork, but ours also has a deadline capacity that needs to be done, so it's that support from the administration that builds that into...our week.

Researcher: Is that in the morning, or just in the afternoon?

P1: Every Wednesday. Including our aids. So unless there's a special circumstance...the expectation is the...special education teachers and the classroom aids are doing assessment, writing IEPs. They're given that time...The rest of the week is either pullout or push-in support.

Participant 4 (P4) identified support with paperwork and special education legalities as important instrumental support because, "having colleagues that are willing to review your IEPs and, um, give input on if they think that a student needs more support or less support, kind of giv[es] you the...encouragement to be brave in an IEP meeting and suggest things to parents." She also appreciatively described the instrumental support her instructional aid provided with paperwork.

We had a paraprofessional who was a small business owner and worked as a paraprofessional because...she wanted to be where her daughter was. She wrapped up all the...paperwork; and that is just priceless. You know, to be able to just hand off my paperwork after I'm done with the meeting and she's gonna copy and send copies home and make everything a nice little package; and then make sure it's scanned so that I can just pop it online...it took so much stress off to not have to follow-up with all that little extra stuff, you know...That is a priceless gift that they give.

For P4, the most important instrumental support were her paraprofessionals who helped collect data, support her in other administrative tasks, and, most importantly, be a safety net for her students.

Paraprofessionals are in the classrooms out in the gen. ed. environment with some of my caseload students because I'm teaching...they're able to observe them on a daily basis and collect data and provide interventions...so a lot of assistance with data collection...transition

assessments...career interest inventories...and then kind of the finishing side of things, getting paperwork scanned and emailed and copied and collated. Some of the administrative stuff.

Having the paraprofessionals in my classroom and having them in the gen. ed. classroom with my caseload students was the most important instrumental support for me...knowing that my kids have a safety net of five or six different people looking out for them to make sure they're not gonna fall through the cracks. Knowing that was just valuable.

In addition to her paraprofessionals, P4 reported that she received instrumental support from "...a lot of colleagues...as well as my special ed. department on site." She noted that she has daily collaboration with them and that she also accessed her SPED TOSA [Special Education Teacher on Special Assignment] to support her with the legalities of the job. P4 stated she sought and used "lots and lots of administration support," noting that, "it's not a job you can do on your own."

When asked what instrumental support was most valuable to his work. P11 identified help with developing quality IEPs.

In my case, it is those IEPs. Here's how you can write better ones. Here's how you can, there was some training for goals the other day, and that helped a lot. Here's, you can, here's how you can write better goals, so making the IEP work for me, not just a big, old, long report. Making it something I can flip to, and look, and I go, 'These are the goals this student needs to be working for.'...Paperwork's my area of concern, so anytime they can simplify it, and make it easier for me to write, that's better.

In summary, participants identified instrumental supports as the second most important administrative and collegial support enabling them to do their jobs and remain resilient as special educators. The type of instrumental support sought and provided ranged from human support from other school and district personnel to help with

paperwork, problem solving for students, and collaboration and professional development to improve curricular, instructional, and technological skills.

Appraisal support. Appraisal support has been defined as offering coaching and feedback or clarifying job responsibilities (Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross, 1994). Given the importance ratings of the eleven participants, the mean rating of 3.3 placed instrument support as the *third* most important type of administrative support. Eight (72.7 percent) of the participants reported they received and/or sought out appraisal support from site and/or district level administrators and their colleagues. Participants discussed the nature of appraisal feedback that validated their work and also described appraisal feedback that was not helpful to their professional development.

Validation of work as appraisal support. The eight participants who discussed appraisal support described the type of appraisal support they sought or receive, the appraisal support they most appreciated, and whose appraisal was the most valuable to them. Most participants mentioned desiring validation of their work through the appraisal feedback they received.

Participant 1 (P1) sought out “informal feedback from...collaborative peers...” and she noted it as beneficial because, “if you have a certain situation you might feel like you’re deadlocked on it, somebody else might have a fresh perspective that you hadn’t thought about. So that type of feedback is important.” When asked whose appraisal she considered most valuable, P1 identified her special education peers and that often it was “informal, like passing each other in the hallways, or going to a room and discussing a problem” rather than a formal meeting format, “because we already have a set schedule of a whole group meeting.” P1 also appreciated her administrator’s appraisal support,

recalling, “I had this principal that was...a hard-ass at first...just really focused on my teaching. Because of that, it made me a better teacher...Him just...keeping me, um, um, on point and...trying to improve myself really kind of helped me set a standard for myself.”

Participant 2 (P2) had the highest appreciation of appraisal support, stating he rated it a “five, and if I could go higher than the other ones [speaking of the other types of support], I would.” He stated he appreciated “in the moment” real time feedback from colleagues stating that “having the opportunity to go ‘How’d that go?’ and she’ll tell me, like, ‘Oh, this is this,’ and she’ll...like give me pointers.” He notes that the feedback is reciprocal, saying “I do the exact same thing for her, so it’s nice having that like...like, immediate feedback.” He reported that what he liked best about this reciprocal appraisal support was that “we’ll just sit down and just kind of talk things out. And that really is...the thing that, that helps me the best...is just talking with my peers and...watching them and them watching me.” Feedback can be difficult to receive, but P2 found it so important that he had “no problem with feedback at all.”

I take it to heart even if there’s pieces I don’t, uh, agree with. I try to look through their eyes, and um, make some changes...and even if the change doesn’t go well, at least I’m trying to improve it.

Participant 5 (P5) rated appraisal support as “extremely important,” but she prefers not to seek it, stating, “I always want to be doing my best...I don’t want to be like having to seek feedback, like ‘Am I doing okay?’ Because that just puts you in a weird position.” However, she appreciated feedback “when it’s coaching, where it’s like a compliment built in with a ‘Hey, I noticed’... That’s super important because...if I’m

missing the boat and there is something I'm not doing to better serve my students and my teachers...I need to know about it.”

Participant 8 (P8) rated appraisal support as “extremely important,” was open and willing to receive appraisal support, and believed, “that we need constructive criticism to grow.”

I-I always seek out my admin's approval...I'm not afraid for her to tell me, 'I don't like that.' She's very professional. And on a professional level. I'll take her ideas and, you know, things she'd like me to work on, and I, I do.

I like when the principal comes in and evaluates my lessons. Am I nervous? Of course I am. But then I get, I want to go in and talk to her about them. What can I do better? How did I do this? You know? What do you think I could do? How can I grow? Because we're lifelong learners, and that's something I learned at [pre-service program university]. I think it was in every course.

P8 also shared that she believed she received appraisal support when engaging in brainstorming sessions with her principal, they engaged in professional “push back” with one another through questioning and answering. Finally P8 articulated that appraisal support from her site-level administrator was extremely important “because she [her administrator's] always looks at the bigger picture, P8 elaborated.

My ideas are just what's best for me and my life and my kids. Her [administrator's] ideas are what's best for everyone. So she helps bring it to the perspective of the whole picture and when I have her in my IEPs, when I put an accommodation on...She always asks me, 'what's that going to look like in the gen. ed. setting? You need to think.' And I'll think about it. And then I'll go, oh, maybe we should do something a little bit different, because it might not be something a gen. ed. teacher could...do by herself.

Participant 10 (P10) rated appraisal support as “extremely important.” He described appraisal feedback from his principal early on in his career that helped him to stay motivated despite the many challenges his student’s experience.

The best feedback I got from the principal was, ‘This is the first time I’ve seen anyone in this class treat these students like teenagers or like adults. You’re not treating them like babies and talking in baby voices, and things like that.’ You talk to them, as they were people, like you are talking to me... ‘If that’s all you did for this year...you have met, gone above and beyond most of the people that have taught this class.’

P10 also gets encouragement from peer appraisal, “from my peers, looking in the class, and just saying, ‘I don’t know how you do it, then, how you’re interacting with them. How can we interact more?’”

Participant 11 (P11) talked about how appraisal feedback had changed over his time as an educator from blaming to proactive support, so his desire for appraisal shifted positively. P11 explained. “I always want to know how I’m doing, and I always need feedback because it helps you grow as a teacher, as a person.” P11 continued, describing how “back in the dark ages it was the reverse.”

I-I wouldn’t get attention, or I wouldn’t show up on anybody’s radar screen unless a kid had been hurt in the class or something had happened, or a parent complained. It was kind of the opposite way of...giving me the support. I was guilty until proved innocent. I’ve had some instances where it made it really, really hard to keep going with the job.

P11 also accounted how he has sought out general educators’ appraisal, asking questions such as, “Is this too above their [his students’] heads?”

Participant 4 (P4) ranked appraisal support as “minimally important,” noting, “it just depends on who it’s coming from...because teaching is so subjective.” She did report to having sought out feedback and observations from colleagues, noting that she

“...would value that feedback I think a lot more than...an administrator...you know, they’re in your classroom more often...and they’re with kids all day.” For, P4 student appraisal was the most authentic and, therefore, the most valuable.

I like to give surveys and I like to give evaluative feedback to my students, asking them to evaluate me...I think overall their opinion is the most important because they’re the ones that are either learning or not learning and they’re the ones in your classroom all day. And I would be most likely to change my practices based on their feedback...versus feedback from someone who’s in my classroom once every other year.

Participant 6 (P6) also ranked appraisal support as “minimally important,” explaining why.

Every day I work with one purpose, for my students, making sure I provide them with the proper help they need, the support they need...the lessons that they need. So if somebody comes in here and gives me some coaching or some feedback, I’m always welcomed to it, but when it comes to my site, they don’t know about special education. The coach...our site administrator...does not know about special education. So sometimes I am the one who’s clarifying some of the stuff. And then they get it, why I’m doing certain things. So I can care less about their coaching and feedback...and then I have to clarify my job responsibilities to them because I’m the one who always are out there doing the behaviors and doing other stuff that is not part of my responsibilities, but I take it in.

She did slowly admit that she did need and accepted appraisal support stating, “when it comes to...new curriculum...or the assessments that we have to do...they help me and they guide me and they coach me with that. So that’s been valuable ‘cause they know a lot more ‘cause they’ve been in the trainings.”

In summary, participants had a wide range of views and reactions to appraisal support from administrators and other colleagues, based upon their very personalized experiences. In general, all valued the concept of appraisal support, but some participants

either questioned the potential appraiser's understanding or valuing of the role of a special educator and the instructional demands of the students they served.

Unhelpful appraisal support: Vague or negative feedback. As Littrell and colleagues point out, effective and meaningful appraisal support is that which offers coaching and feedback or clarifying job responsibilities (1994). As already noted, *positive* appraisal support was expressed by 72.7 percent of participants to positively influence their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue in the field. Three (27.3 percent) of the participants described appraisal feedback, which did not clarify job responsibilities, as unhelpful. For Participant 2 (P2), when "...administrators come in and just say, 'It's great. You're, you're a great teacher.' that helps me...not (P2 chuckles)." P2 clarified, "I want to hear *what's* good or...*what* could be better." Participant 4 (P4) echoed this sentiment.

I had times where admin. comes in and observe me and it's just all good things. 'You're doing a good job, Keep it up.' So it's not really even feedback. It's kinda just like, 'Yup. You're meeting... your minimum. You're doing great.' I mean it feels good to get a pat on the back and be, you know, know that you're secure in your job...But it's not like it improved your teaching practices at all.

Participant 5 (P5) found the least valuable type of appraisal to be the following.

Feedback from someone who has no idea what my job actually is. And so they're way in left field...Or the feedback of like, well, that's not your job because you can't save the world. Yea, that's not my favorite either. That's probably not appraisal support, that's probably a putdown in disguise.

Informational support. Informational support has been defined as providing professional development and current updates on best practice (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994). Given the importance ratings of the eleven participants, the mean rating of

4.4 placed informational support as the *fourth* most important type of administrative support. Participants reported that they received informational support either from the district primarily through professional development opportunities or that they sought out informational support themselves.

Professional development as informational support. Nine (81.8 percent) of the participants reported professional development as the source of their informational support. Participant 1 (P1) rated informational support as “very important” but indicated that informational support was generally not being offered within her school district. She shared that they have been sent assessment kits with no training, “so we train ourselves.” She expressed that “informational support is extremely important. If there’s procedures, if there’s training so I can better do my job as opposed to doing the sink or swim on the job” she is all for it. P1 also shared that professional development has been the most valuable and helpful informational support to getting her job done and that it helped her to stay current with new trends.

Participant 2 (P2) also rated informational support as “very important,” commenting, “there’s always new things happening and new things occurring” and noting, “we’re teachers giving information out, so...a teacher should always be learning too.” He received informational support primarily through trainings at the district level.

Participant 3 (P3) found informational support “somewhat important.” His site and district leaders were casual in sharing professional development opportunities (e.g., Oh, you interested in going to this training program? Oh, do you wanna, would you like to go to this or that?), but good about communicating opportunities.

Like P3, Participant 4 (P4) found informational support “somewhat important.”

When asked to explain her rating further, she shared that professional development can be variably relevant and useful stating the following.

Depending on the type of professional development, I’ve been to a few that were really, really good and applied to special education really well... And then, ironically, some of the special education professional developments that I’ve been to have been about like differentiating instruction, but the way it’s taught is just a lecture for eight hours with a PowerPoint.

In contrast to poor professional development experiences, P4 reported opportunities to be included in discipline-specific trainings for general education math teachers and reported the “math professional developments...were beyond amazing.” Being included was especially important for P4, noting that,

I love that they included the co-teachers and resource specialists that were pushing in the math classrooms as part of the math department and the district that I was in sent us to all the math trainings. It was fantastic...you’re part of the math department...it’s great to be a part of, you know, not just the special ed. team, but part of the math department team.

As research has shown, special education can be a very isolating field and as P4 shared, being included with other departments outside of special education was important informational support in allowing her to be resilient and satisfied in her role as a special educator.

Participant 5 (P5) highly valued informational support, arguing, “Why have all this research, if we’re not putting it to use?” She expressed her bias toward professional learning.

Personally, I just love learning. So I like learning the new strategies...I like ‘never thought about that,’ or, um, ‘Oh, I really want to share this with

so and so'...It's a way to stay engaged...and inspired, because then you have new things to try.

For P5, the most valuable informational support was from "different district leaders..." in the form of "...professional development" She explained.

My assistant sup. [superintendent] has given me a lot of informational support since I've been here, because we're really literacy focused. And she's had a lot of really good, um, PDs [professional developments] and sort of inquiry based group work, where you discuss it and...make it your own.

She elaborated upon the value of "needs-based PDs, where you can kind of take what you need and sort of customize it to yourself."

Participant 6 (P6) considered informational support "very important" for keeping current, stating "we have to have professional development in order to be updated on our current curriculum, on our current standards, um, and best practices...the new technology." P6 reported that her district provided these trainings, as did her school, during PLC [professional learning community] time.

Our districts have training on Wednesday's that provide us with the current updates and what to do, and then I'm the IEP chair, so I have I have special meetings on my own that they train us on the upcoming laws or whatever they need us to do and I have to relay that information to my class, to my co-workers.

While P6 valued these professional development opportunities, she found most valuable to her role as a special educator three years of district-sponsored summer training on new curriculum, Common Core, and the technology that helped her change her program. P6 noted this training was "district provided and paid. So it's a bonus. You go, you learn and then you get paid."

Participant 8 (P8) also considered informational support very important, as it kept her fresh.

It's just so important to me because you can't get too comfortable with how you teach. Because, then you, you're going to get bored out. Burnt out, for one. You always want to change some things in your life. Even the way you present stuff, to just make it more fresh, you know?

P8 discussed receiving professional development from her district and especially appreciated “informational support on how to support students with learning disabilities...[and] how to teach Common Core curriculum. Amazing. Five plus, plus, plus [on the 5-point Likert scale rating of importance; see table 4.2 above].” Participant 8 (P8) also appreciated her administrator leading by example, appreciating “an administrator that has high expectations for their staff, and is, is also working just as hard as the staff...that's what I love about my principal.” P8 appreciated her principal providing opportunities for her and the rest of the staff to learn and practice teaching strategies that help students learn Common Core skills (e.g. critical thinking), which, in turn, provides her confidence and a sense of security in her role as a special educator.

Participant 10 (P10) also rated informational support as very important even though he stated he did not “receive too much because no one knows about my program.” He noted, “one workshop I went to...[given by Regional Center]...was the game changer in my program. And, I, I seek more like that. It's hard to find.” For P10, knowing how little support and training there was for teachers of his unique group of students with pervasive support needs, he provided the other teachers of students similar to his with informational support when they come to him and ask questions such as “how do I interact with these guys? I don't want them just sitting there on the TV and watching TV

the entire time. I want them to interact.” Despite P10 “doing more of it [providing informational support] than receiving,” the informational support that he has received has been applicable and “has been phenomenal.”

Participant 11 (P11) found informational support to be somewhat important, “because it seems its more the overview of being a teacher.” For him, for professional development to be valuable informational support, the training/meeting needs to “run well” so, “I can...leave the meeting saying I learned something from this, that’s good.” P11 reflected that professional developmental is only as valuable as the extent to which he “take[s] the information and use[s] it.” He acknowledges, “a lot of that depends on me.” He sees his access to and use of informational support as his responsibility. He reported received valuable informational support from his on-site administrators through their instruction on “new procedures, and new tools, and equipment that we use in the class...the writing and the reading assessments...the school district and state testing.”

Self-sought informational support. Five (45.5 percent) of participants shared that the informational support they used and found valuable was self-sought. Participant 2 (P2) described how he gets much of his informational support “on my own.” He employs several strategies, including (1) “request[ing] to just observe a teacher,” (2) “going to school for my masters,” (3) “just research[ing]...on my own – if a law comes out...I’ll check it out,” and (4) going to “people in my department [who] would help.” Participant 5 (P5) sought out information “through articles or Ed Week, or... the Ted Talks for Education.” Participant 9 (P9) preferred informational support tools such as Google Drive that provided “easy access to information that’s organized in a way that I can access quickly.”

Participant 4 (P4), self-sought informational support on current updates and best practice. She conducted her own research in a variety of ways.

A lot of looking at, um, my old credential program and what books they're reading and looking kind of at, um, my colleagues who are going through BTSA [the mandatory two-year Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program for new California teachers]...Just being...proactive about looking at current research I'm trying to incorporate that into my teaching.

Ironically, even though she sought informational support from her colleagues going through the BTSA program, she reported that the least valuable informational support she had received was her own two general and special education BTSA experiences.

Participant 7 (P7), who considered informational support to be extremely important to her work as a special educator, explained how she has chosen to seek it out and then offer it to others at her campus. She shared, "...we get very little informational support; our emails pretty much go unanswered...So I kinda jokingly call us the redheaded stepchild...You got to [have] humor." P7 noted that her provision of informational support has positively impacted her special education teaching partner, who was alone herself at the site the previous year. P7 stated that her principal has noticed how her team teacher's "...whole facial expression or...countenance is so much better now." P7 noted that, "she [her team teacher] said her ship was sinking last year...So we joke and we say our ship." Having P7 as a comrade with informational support seems to have positively influenced P7's co-teacher's resilience.

Summary for Research Question 3. Of potential *workplace influences and experiences (e.g. collegial support, administrative support, other supports, student learning)* that could affected participants' resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to

continue as a special educator, (1) relationships, (2) emotional support, (3) instrumental support, (4) appraisal support, and (5) informational support were identified as the most salient by the participants in this study.

Personal Resiliency Attributes and Behaviors Attributed to Resilience and Retention

Gu and Day (2013) found resilience to be a necessary condition for teachers to sustain their capacity to teach at their best and an attribute that can fluctuate depending upon interactions with others in an individual's personal and professional life. Teachers' perceptions of their resiliency level can be influenced by their own biographies, educational values, the socio-cultural and policy context of their teaching situation, and the conditions of their personal and professional lives (Gu & Day, 2013).

Resilient individuals are better able to manage feelings, stress, failure, and challenges in the workplace with optimism and success (Tait, 2008). Special educators especially need resilience, as special educators usually have a greater amount of stress, complexity, and unpredictability in their work life than do general educators. For example, special educators can be inundated with paperwork and complex relationships with families, students, related services personnel (e.g., psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists), and administrators across several grade levels and subject areas (Fish & Stephens, 2010). Special educators with few opportunities to collaborate or co-teach with educators in the general education environment may feel isolated and alone in a back corner of the school.

Research Question 4 explored what interviewees identified as their own *personal resiliency attributes and behaviors* and other *influences on their resilience* that they

believed affected their satisfaction and/or intention to continue as a special educator. Four themes emerged. A few participants discussed resiliency as a *personal attribute*. A great majority discussed staying student centered and focused on student potential as a *personal behavior* that influenced their resilience. Administrative support and collegial relationships were the two other *influences* discussed by most participants.

Research Question 4, Theme 1: Resilience as a Personal Attribute. Gu and Day define resiliency as “the capacity to continue to ‘bounce back,’ to recover strengths or spirits quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity” (2009, p. 1302). The answer to the question, “Is resiliency innate?” has not been definitively determined. Castro, Kelly and Shin (2010) and Mansfield, Beltman, Price, and McConney, (2012) suggest that teacher resilience may not be innate, but is something that can be built over time. And Doney (2012) suggests particular self-protecting factors that help to foster resilience. In this study, only three (27.3 percent) of the participants discussed resilience as a personal attribute.

P9 clearly saw resiliency as a personal attribute: “But for me [P9], I don’t really have an issue with resiliency. I think its just part of my nature.” Participant 1 (P1) also described resilience as “a personal attribute,” stating “you can have as much support as possible, but if you don’t take advantage of it...and your own mental health – you could be a person that [has] a lot of challenges throughout life...Just learning to help our own selves as well...it’s a personal inner strength.”

Participant 11 (P11) spoke of resilience as a personal attribute, stating, “you have to be resilient in teaching. If you’re not, then you won’t last very long,” However, P11

saw it as more of an attribute acquired over a teacher's career, as a teacher builds confidence by not taking mistakes personally and taking corrective actions.

The efficacy. If you do it long enough, you start to build the confidence. I know there's still days when I've taught stuff, and it's bombed... [Y]ou get the confidence, and not take it personally. That's life. In the business world,...if it doesn't work, you don't quit full chop. You find out why it didn't work...Realize and accept you made a mistake, and change it, and make it better.

Research Question 4, Theme 2: Staying Student Centered and Focused Upon

Student Potential. Eight (72.7 percent) of the participants described their focus upon students and student potential as influencing their satisfaction. Participant 1 (P1) stated that she comes back to teaching special education each day because of the “student potential” she observes being uncovered through her work with students. She elaborated, stating, “it’s amazing to see...untapped potential...uncovering that. There’s no cap on learning...It’s all...the success stories.” Similarly, for Participant 4 (P4) “what makes it worth it” was “seeing my students learn, seeing them gain confidence in learning, seeing them gain valuable skills that they need to function in the world.” Participant 5 (P5) exclaimed, “The kids are fabulous!” Participant 7 (P7) just simply stated “students;” Participant 8 (P8) added, “students’ smile[s].” For Participant 9 (P9), what mattered was that she “can help kids. It’s that simple.” Finally, Participant 8 (P8) stated it this way:

...because of my students, because of their growth. I, I see growth everyday with my students because I notice the little things. One student forming a ‘b’ correctly; or [a student] noticing a ‘b’ from a ‘d.’...or one student instead of saying ‘free,’ saying ‘three.’ To me, that’s amazing...So yea, that, that brings me back every day.

To focus upon the students and making a difference in their lives was particularly important when participants were faced with job challenges. When a challenge conflicts

with his desire to be a special educator Participant 2 (P2) tried to "...always think of myself as a special educator first...so I just keep...kids' needs first...That kind of does everything." Participant 5 (P5) embraced challenges, thriving on challenges that kept her "motivated enough to make change" a "focus on the kids and doing right by them." When Participant 8 (P8) found herself thinking, "Wow, this job's too much," she would do the following.

Read those letters [from past students and parents], and they help me keep going because my purpose is for the children. I want them to have a right to that gen. ed. curriculum or whatever. I want them to have the right to learn, so reading those reflections of everything...just helps me get through those times.

Research Question 4, Theme 3: Administrative Actions as Allies, Protectors, and Advocates. While there are a variety of factors that influenced a teachers' decision to stay or leave the job, Tickle, Chang, and Kim (2011) found supportive administrative support to mediate all other factors affecting teaching, with lack of administrative support being a major reason educators left the profession entirely. In response to interview questions that asked about other *influences* on participants' resilience (i.e., interview questions 11, 13), all but one interviewee identified administrative actions as influencing their resiliency.

The administrative influences described here supplement the discussion of instrumental administrative supports presented with Research Question 3 and explore the administrator's role as an ally, protector, and advocate.

Participant 11 (P11) clearly articulated the importance of having an administrator as an *ally*.

When I've had it [administrative backing], life's good. And, when I haven't had

it, it's a very hard job. A couple of times I was thinking of pulling the pin because it's hard enough when you don't have the support. When you do have it...it makes all the difference in the world.

Participant 10 (P10) appreciated the administrator who serves as an *ally* by clarifying boundaries and then trusting educators to do their work.

Administrators can tighten the leash, or they can release the leash. And um, my administrator essentially has unhooked me from the leash, and has told me to roam free. So that has helped me a ton...and if I ever do need to be reined in, he lets me know.

Participant 1 (P1) articulated the importance of administrators being *protectors* and *facilitators* of the work and causes (e.g., advocacy for students, inclusive education) of special educators.

They're gonna be the ones that either protect you, encourage other staff members to see your viewpoint, or to try a new program, and to help pave the way...Without the administration leading the way [in starting a new program], to the overall faculty, we could not get to that level [inclusion model].

Participant 3 (P3) also saw administrators as facilitating special educator ability to do their job.

You gotta have, like, admin. running the show. At least have them at a good foundation so you could do some stuff...If that's not there, and I, that's just basic things...kids should be in the right places..." [If] she [the principal] was doing her job, I was able to do my job.

Participant 4 (P4) emphasized the importance of administrative back up in order

to take risks and *advocate* for students' best interests.

It's really important...to know that if you try something new and it doesn't work, that you're not gonna lose your job. It's important to know that you have the space to fail and to try and find your way as an educator...It's important to know that you have the backing of your administration if there's something that arises as a challenge with a parent or with a student that...they're gonna be willing to back you up in your decisions. Especially as a special educator, if you make a decision and, and advocate for a child for an IEP for something that the child really needs...if the parent is gonna get push back, but the admin is gonna support you in that decision, it makes it a lot easier to feel confident advocating for the child.

Participant 5 (P5) described the effect of her principal's behavior as a protector and facilitator who empowered her in difficult parts of her job. "You need admin to have your back. Otherwise you feel really disempowered to make the changes you need to, or to, um, address the big problems that are holding you back from being your best teacher." Recalling a situation with a parent, she described the following:

My principal got red in the face and was like, 'you're not talking to my teacher like that'...[It] was really amazing to have somebody stand up because normally I'm not somebody that's standing up for others, and I was like, 'Whoa, this feels super nice'... She [the principal] didn't even question me...and she really was just like, 'I'm so sorry you had to go through that,' and it just felt really good to not have to worry about like justifying myself or being afraid of a parent.

Participant 6 (P6) emphasized how anything she did required administrator involvement and shared how her administrator's support of a particularly difficult change

in a student's program facilitated her to feel important by making a difference in a student's life. She recalled, "[I] presented the project to my administrator at that time...He supported us...And we did it. So that made a huge difference. It made me feel important. It made me feel I made a difference."

Research Question 4, Theme 4: Collegial Relationships. Relationships between special educators and other school personnel (e.g. general educators, related services personnel such as speech pathologists and psychologist, and others specialists such as English development teachers or reading specialist) can be difficult to navigate. Yet, educators, particularly novice educators, benefit from collegial support (Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). Peer mentoring and other collegial relationships can help to develop teacher self-efficacy and resilience, which can positively influence retention (Griffin et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2013; Leko & Smith, 2010). Colleague support and mentoring can come from general education teachers or specialists (Griffin et al., 2009). Leko & Smith (2010) note that special educators' potential feelings of isolation can be reduced when relationships with other special education teachers are fostered.

Participants in this study identified how relationships with other school site personnel affected their satisfaction and resilience. They found collegial relationships to be fostered by physical proximity, a focus on building interpersonal and family-like relations, along with professional relationship opportunities to build personal relationships and trust, and trying to understand one others' perspective on education as influencing their personal resiliency, satisfaction, and intention to remain in special education.

Participant 1 (P1) discussed the importance of her building professional bonds

with her special and general education colleagues first by developing interpersonal relationships.

A personal relationship...leads into a professional relationship. Because if you don't connect on a certain level, it's much harder to connect in a co-teaching area within the general education classroom...Everybody makes an effort to be social and friendly inside and outside of the work environment and that this social component builds a higher level of trust with one another.

Participant 2 (P2) described how special education colleague *support one another* by covering one another classes when they have IEP meetings and use down time to connect personally and professionally.

Its almost like a working lunch everyday where everyone sits down, and we're laughing and stuff...We're always talking about students, kids, things that are coming up. And...that contact time, everyday, those 30-minutes, helps a lot.

He was candid in sharing that he had to learn that he could not always be as forthcoming with the constructive feedback as he would like to give, which created more neutral relationships with some colleagues. However, in spite of the differences he might have had with colleagues, it was collegial support that influenced him to stay teaching at his school after he experienced some non-workplace issues. He explained, "I enjoyed it so much, being with the kids and having this job and...my work friends, that it, it made me stay in southern California..."

Participant 4 (P4) described how *having fun* with collegial relations and friendships reduces stress and

Having friendships at work is...so important. And having a good relationship with

your colleagues helps you. You can, at break, spend 10 minutes joking around and just being silly and having fun...It takes your stress level down...There's an immediate stress release when someone makes a joke and you're all cracking up. So, having friendships like that is super important in your job.

She acknowledged that finding and developing these types of relationships can be difficult, "but once you find who you work well with, it just makes all the difference."

Participant 5 (P5) valued her relationship with and time to be with her *special education colleagues* as "everything." It provided opportunities for expressing "mutual respect" which promoted feelings of being valued and supported. Listen to her explanation.

If you feel like you're not valued or supported...it affects everything, your wellness and your like desire to go to work...But on the flipside, like it's fun to look forward to like, 'Oh, my gosh, you're here.' Or you know, when someone is like excited to see you or, um, they really want to tell you something, like you feel valued and that's motivating to be part of.

Participant 6 (P6) appreciated the new collaborative role of special educators as partners rather than separate from the work of general education, reflecting, "Before...it was special ed. on one side, general ed. on the other side." Asked how she bounced back from challenges that arose between herself and her general education colleagues, she said she goes "...back to the ones that are amazing and are creative and you grab some more energy and then try it again with the other ones." She compared her role as a special educator to being a roller coaster – unpredictable and a thrill!

Participant 7 (P7) and one other special educator work in *close proximity* with one

another, in the same room. P7 confessed that, at first, it was very difficult to be working in such close proximity, but they enjoyed playful humor in their room.

I had a mouse in my desk, and that brought us close together. I can't believe how much Mickey [the name they gave to the mouse] brought us close together...It was just a joke, but it, it really bonded all of us together.

Proximity at lunchtime also allowed her and her special education colleagues to dialogue about students for the benefit of students.

You know, who needs what help and who hasn't done what assignments and who needs to do that during math lab and hasn't done that during math, and who hasn't whatever. I mean, we're just right there 'cause we're sitting right there having lunch everyday.

Participant 11 (P11) also noted how physical proximity to his general education colleague who was his "next door neighbor" allowed their relationship to grow because they could find a moment "just to have a sounding board...so we're working as a team." Aside from proximity, P11 attributed their success to having open and honest conversations about how to make it work for individual students. He also communicated his valuing of his general educator partners' work with the inclusion of his special education students, saying, "your [the general educators' job] job can't be harder." Additionally Participant 8 (P8) discussed the importance of sharing expertise among general educators, specialists (e.g., special educators, speech pathologists), and paraprofessional support personnel.

Everyone's important. Your paraprofessionals all the way to your school site...It's a team, and the team needs to all be on board, and you're not meant to do it

alone. That's the thing, we try to do it all by ourselves and we're not supposed to. Your site can help you, your speech pathologist, your paraprofessionals, the gen. ed. teachers...It's the only way it will work because some of the needs of the students...I don't have expertise in...it's very important to share your ideas and expertise.

Participant 9 (P9) emphasized how working to build a “close-knit special ed. department...” provides a family atmosphere that “makes me happy...” because “...I like building that community. That gives me, that gives me a lot of joy. And it makes me wanna come back every day...I look forward to coming to work.” Similar sentiments about being a family member who gives and takes were expressed when talking about her general education partners. “They wanna teach the kids. They care. They care a lot. And they wanna do a good job...Together, we can. So to help... I also interface with the parents for them, so they don't have to...I kinda buffer.”

Participant 10 (P10) reinforced the power of “positive attitude and energy... the encouragement that other people have, or encouraging others,” noting that “it helps with the resiliency.”

Other Factor(s) Associated with Resilience and Retention

As mentioned at the end of chapter 2, research needed to examine the factors that self-identified highly resilient special educators used to remain in the field beyond the threshold of three to five years. This study has done that by creating space for participants to identify the reasons they entered the field of special education, their non-workplace and workplace contexts, and their personal resiliency attributes that affected their satisfaction, intention, and ultimate behavior of staying in the field beyond the threshold of five years. However, in looking to study the phenomenon of special education teachers

who have remained in the field of special education beyond the threshold of five years, the researcher created space for a fifth research question for any themes that emerged that did not fall under the aforementioned four areas.

Research Question 5 explored what interviewees identified as other *factors that may affect their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator.*

Research Question 5, Theme 1: Sense of Purpose. Six (54.5 percent) of participants identified that they were most influenced to remain in the field because they felt a *sense of purpose* as a special educator.

Participant 9 (P9) shared that what most influenced her resilience, satisfaction, and intention to remain in the field was “having a purposeful life. Being part of the solution, not part of the problem.” For Participant 7 (P7), a sense of purpose came from her “need to be a part of something” and that “something” was her role as a special educator. Participant 1 (P1) liked “the behind-the-scenes, dealing with the meetings and policy making, and dealing with parents” in order to “pave the way...showing a path to those who might not see it readily...parents,...teachers,...students.” Participant 5 (P5) wanted to share “some gifts that I can give and help...with my perspective and my lack of fear.” Participant 2 (P2) stated he continued his work because “I have to have a purpose...for the community. That’s important to me. Might as well get paid at it.”

Participant 10 (P10) found purpose by “be[ing] in a place where no one else wants to be.” He connected his purpose to his faith.

I see who they [the students] are...They are knitted to who God wants them to be, and they will glorify Him through their lives...And it’s my job as a Christian...to follow

Christ, and to glorify him...And if I can glorify him through these individuals...I'm going to do that. And that keeps me coming back. I will keep doing it until they literally kick me out of the class.

Summary of Results for the Five Research Questions

Motivations for entering the field. *Research Question 1* explored what special educators who self-identified as highly resilient and who remain in the field for at least five years identified as their *motivations for entering and staying in the field* of special education. The research literature suggests empathy towards students with disabilities, the desire to serve those in need, having a family member or friend with special needs, job availability in the field, and having been a recipient of special education services as being positively associated with entering and staying in special education (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Stephens & Fish, 2010). In this study, participants identified the following as priority motivators for entering or staying in the field: (a) *having a personal connection with special education and individuals with disabilities*, (b) *enjoying relationships with parents, colleagues, and students*, (c) *experiencing student growth and accomplishments*, and (d) *experiencing a sense of fulfillment*.

Non-workplace contexts. *Research Question 2* explored *non-workplace practices, experiences, and influences* (e.g. family, mindfulness practices) that may affect special educators' resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator. The literature suggests that resilience may be a trait or, at least, a set of behaviors that can be nurtured (Castro et al., 2010; Doney, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2012) by non-workplace factors. Participants in this study indicated that finding *balance and boundaries between work and home* was important to their well-being and resilience.

Participants sought personal self-care through *individual exercise, travel, social networking through team exercise and sports, community involvement and service, and connecting with family and friends* and noted these as influential to their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to stay in the field.

Workplace contexts. *Research Question 3* delved into *workplace influences and experiences* (e.g. collegial support, administrative support, other supports, student learning) that may affect special educator resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator. Lee and colleagues (2011) found three employment dimensions to pose potential challenge or supports for new teachers: (1) school climate, (2) relationships and social networks support (e.g. administration support, mentoring, professional development, collaboration) at any level, and (3) student instructional and work responsibility issues (e.g. paperwork, role ambiguity). Boyd and colleagues (2011) found working conditions that fostered teacher retention to include teachers feeling that they had influence, administrative support, positive staff relations, good student behavior and engagement, adequate facilities, and safety.

In this study, participants identified workplace relationships *with students, site administrators, and teacher colleagues* (e.g. *other special educators, general educators, and support staff*) as influential to their resilience. Furthermore, this study explored four types of administrative support (e.g. emotional, instrumental, appraisal, and informational) and the impact of each on participant's resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator. Consistent with the findings of Littrell and colleagues (1994), *emotional* support - showing teachers they are esteemed and worthy of concern through "open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in

teachers' work, and considering teachers' ideas" (Littrell et al., 1994, p. 297) - emerged as the most appreciated type of administrative support. The other types of administrative support also were appreciated by participants, the second most important being instrumental support and the third and fourth most important being appraisal, and informational support, in that order.

Personal resilience attributes and behaviors. *Research Question 4* examined *personal resiliency attributes and behaviors* and other influences on their resilience affecting special educators' satisfaction and/or intention to continue in the field. The literature on resiliency has not settled the question as to whether resiliency is an innate or an acquired attribute. Doney, however, (2012) found self-protecting factors in teachers' lives that helped to foster resilience, which support the position of Castro and colleagues (2010) and Mansfield and colleagues (2012) that teacher resilience can be nurtured over time. The responses of some of the participants in this study suggested that they, at the very least, viewed resilience as a personal attribute. Participants also identified *staying student centered and focused upon student potential* as personal behaviors that helped them to be resilient. Additionally, they identified *the actions of administrators as allies, protectors, and advocates, and collegial relationships* as other influences on their resilience.

Other factor(s) associated with resilience and retention. Gu and Day (2013) note that teachers' perceptions of their resiliency level can be influenced by their own biographies, educational values, the socio-cultural and policy context of their teaching situation, as well as the conditions of their personal and professional lives. *Research Question 5* investigated other factors beyond the motivational, personal, workplace and

non-workplace factors explored by Research Questions 1 through 4. Having a *sense of purpose* larger than oneself emerged as important to these special educators' perseverance and resiliency. Participants mentioned the importance of leaving a legacy and being a part of a social justice solution.

Conclusion

Figure 2 offers a conceptual framework that predicts four factors explored by Research Questions 1 through 4 as having some impact on special education teacher retention by influencing or being associated with either teacher resilience or teacher satisfaction and/or intention to stay in the field. As emphasized in Chapter 3, the conceptual framework was intended to provide the reader with a schematic of the factors that the research literature has associated with teacher resiliency and retention. The framework also drove the researcher's crafting of interview questions to elicit information to answer the first four research questions regarding (1) motivation for entering and staying in the field, (2) non-workplace supports and actions, (3) workplace supports and actions, and (4) personal resiliency-related attributes and behaviors. The researcher's analysis of the responses to these questions presented in this chapter seem to confirm and extend the findings of previous research that associate motivational, non-workplace, workplace and personally-related attributes and behaviors to teacher resiliency and retention. Findings also suggest that having a *sense of purpose* larger than oneself is a potential influence upon the resilience and retention of highly resilient special educators. In Chapter 5, the researcher attempts to interpret participant responses and the themes that emerged for each research question in terms of the potential supports, strategies, and actions educators, administrators, and those affiliated with special

educators might take to foster special educator satisfaction, resilience, and retention. Chapter 5 also reviews the studies statement of the problem, theoretical framework, methodology, and limitations and discusses the implications of findings and future considerations for research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Chapter five reviews the studies statement of the problem, theoretical framework, methodology, and limitations and discusses the implications of findings and future considerations for research.

Overview of the Statement of the Problem

Teacher attrition in the public school system is a continuing concern in the United States (Connelly & Graham, 2009; Curry & O'Brien, 2012). The attrition rate among general educators is estimated to be about 7.6% annually (Connelly & Graham, 2009). It is even higher among special educators, estimated to be about 13.5% annually, which is about 22,000 special educators (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Fish & Stephens, 2010). Further, teachers who leave the profession tend to do so within the first three to five years of starting the profession (Bobek, 2002; Le Cornu, 2009; Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011; Yost, 2006). The exodus of new teachers from the profession is a tremendous loss of resources to the profession. It is also a tremendous loss for the individual who has expended so much time and effort in coursework and clinical practice experiences in hopes of a career in service to children, families, and the community as a special educator (Stephens & Fish, 2010).

When special education teachers leave the profession, it poses additional problems, given the steadily increasing number of students requiring special education services. In 2003 there were approximately 6,046,051 students ages 6 through 21 receiving special education services, which is a 30% increase since 1993 (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Although each year an estimated 22,000 new special educators graduate from our nation's teacher preparation programs, these numbers are

insufficient to fill the job openings generated by a growing student population, the retirement of an aging teaching force, and the openings left by those leaving the profession (Connelly & Graham, 2009; Fish & Stephens, 2010).

Teachers who have resilience attributes, habits, and supports are more likely to manage feelings, stress, and challenges in the workplace with optimism and success and are less likely to leave the field (Tait, 2008; Jennings, Frank, Snowbert, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg (2009); Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia & Greenberg, 2011). Because of the intense, complex, and often stressful and unpredictable nature of the employment responsibilities and conditions of special education, special education teachers are in particular need of supports, strategies, attributes, and dispositions that are characterized by a resiliency construct (Fish & Stephens, 2010).

Although teacher attrition and retention factors have been examined from a variety of perspectives over the past couple of decades, there is still a need for a focused examination of the supports, strategies, attributes, and dispositions that are needed for and used by special educators who successfully negotiate the stressors of the job and stay in the field beyond five years, the threshold year when most teachers who leave teaching, do so (Bobek, 2002; Le Cornu, 2009; Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011; Yost, 2006).

Chapter 2 highlighted the factors that influence teachers' decision to leave the field of special education. It drew upon bodies of literature that examined attrition of educators, with a focus upon attrition of special education teachers. Also examined was the resilience construct. Resilience has been associated with the survival and success of a number of populations of humans in difficult situations such as youth who are at risk for school failure (Krovetz, 1999), educators (Taylor, 2013), marriage and family therapists

(Clark, 2009), and nurses (Stagman-Tyrer, 2014). Factors that impact teacher retention also were examined and included the nature of the work of a special educator, the state of teacher retention and attrition, workplace factors that can influence teacher behavior, and non-workplace factors that can influence teacher behavior. Through the literature review, the researcher identified a gap in the literature concerning strategies that special educators employ and the nature of administrative, workplace, and non-workplace supports that may motivate special educators to remain in the field of special education.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study was a phenomenological study, which examined the experiences of eleven special educators who self-identified as highly resilient and who had experienced the phenomenon of remaining in the field beyond the threshold of five years. This study was informed by multiple theoretical and research-grounded perspectives, which the researcher used to conceptualize a theoretical framework presented in Figure 2. The framework suggests paths through which four factors – (a) motivation for entering and staying in the field, (b) non-workplace supports and actions, (c) workplace supports and actions, and (d) personal resiliency related attributes and behaviors - may work to influence teacher resilience, satisfaction with and intention to remain teaching as a special educator, and the ultimate behavior of remaining as a special educator beyond five years. The researcher did not hypothesize that any of the four factors had any particular relative weight with regard to influencing teacher resilience, satisfaction, intention, or the act of staying in the field. Nor was the researcher assessing through this research whether these potential paths of influence, in fact, work through the resiliency construct to influence a teacher's intention, satisfaction, or ultimate behavior of

continuing in the field. Instead, the conceptual framework was intended to provide the reader with a schematic of the factors that the literature associates with teacher resiliency and retention and drove the researcher to craft the interview questions that comprise the semi-structured interview used with the participants of this study to elicit information regarding the four factors. The responses to these questions were analyzed to determine potential supports and strategies that might inform educators, administrators, and the field of education on how to foster resilience and satisfaction in order to increase retention of special educators. A fifth research question also was crafted to create space for any theme(s) that emerged that did not align with the other four questions.

Summary of Findings by Research Question

Motivations for entering the field. The first research question examined what special educators who self-identified as being highly resilient and who remained teaching as a special educator for five or more years identified as their *motivation(s) for entering and staying in the field* of special education. Participants identified as priority motivators: (a) *having a personal connection with special education and individuals with disabilities*, (b) *enjoying relationships with parents, colleagues, and students*, (c) *experiencing student growth and accomplishments*, and (d) *experiencing a sense of fulfillment*.

Non-workplace contexts. The second research question examined what these same special educators identified as *non-workplace practices, experiences, and influences* (e.g. family, mindfulness practices) that affected their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator. Participants identified finding *balance and boundaries between work and home* as important to well-being and resilience and achieved personal self-care by engaging in *individual exercise and travel, social*

networking through team exercise and sports, community service and involvement, and connecting with family and friends.

Workplace contexts. The third research question examined what these same special educators identified as *workplace influences and experiences* that affected their resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to continue as a special educator. Participants identified workplace *relationships* with *students, site administrators, and teacher colleagues (e.g. other special educators, general educators, and support staff)* as impacting their resilience. This question also examined the relationship of four types of *administrative support (e.g. emotional, instrumental, appraisal, and informational)* with participants' resilience, satisfaction, and/or intention to stay in the field. Consistent with the findings of Littrell and colleagues (1994), *emotional support* was ranked the most important type of support for participants to receive from administrators. Second most important was *instrumental support*; third, *appraisal support*; and fourth, *informational support*.

Personal resiliency attributes and behaviors. The fourth research question explored what the special educators who participated in this study thought about *personal resiliency attributes and behaviors and influences on their resilience* other than the workplace and non-workplace influences already explored. The question of whether resiliency is an innate trait or an acquired attribute that can be nurtured has not yet been answered by the research literature. Some of the teacher participants in this study seemed to view resilience as a *personal attribute or trait*. Participants also identified *staying student centered and focused upon student potential* as personal resiliency attributes and behaviors that promoted resilience. Emerging again as external influences to resilience

were human workplace influences; namely the *verbal and physical actions of administrators and collegial relationships*.

Other factor(s) associated with resilience and retention. The fifth research question sought to determine factors beyond the motivational, personal, workplace and non-workplace factors explored by the first four research questions that influenced these participants resilience. Participants identified the importance of having a *sense of purpose* larger than themselves, of leaving a legacy and being a part of a social justice solution.

Limitations of Study

As with any research investigation, this study had several limitations, which are described in the following four sections.

Participant Bias. One limitation of the study is that it is at risk for participant and volunteer bias. It is at risk for *participant* bias in that it involved only individuals who had chosen to stay in the field of special education for five or more years and who also had self-rated as highly resilient. The study also is at risk for *volunteer* bias in that participants not only volunteered to respond to the initial resiliency scale but also were willing to further engage in the extensive personal interview, with a follow-up member check of their responses. These behaviors and attributes taken together suggest that these participants may not be representative of the general population of special educators in that the behaviors suggest enhanced commitment to the field of special education and advancing knowledge in the field through taking the time and expending the effort to engage in research activities involved in this study.

Unvalidated Researcher-Developed Interview Questions and Protocol.

Another limitation of this study was that the interview questions and the interview

protocol were researcher-developed. Although the questions directly reflected the literature on teacher retention, resiliency, and satisfaction, they did not undergo any formal evaluation, other than the face validity determination provided by the researcher's dissertation committee. They were field tested with one colleague to determine how long the interview likely would take and to determine if the questions were clear and meaningful to the pilot interviewee. The field test suggested that a two-hour timeframe was a reasonable one for conducting the interview and that the questions had adequate meaning and clarity.

Limited Generalizability of Results. Phenomenology is unique and specific to the experience being studied which, in this case, was the experience of special educators who have chosen to remain in the field of special education beyond the threshold of five years and who self-assessed as highly resilient. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the general teacher population. Further, since participants in this study self-identify as highly resilient, the findings may not be generalizable to teachers who do not self-identify as highly resilient, as measured by the resiliency assessment employed in this study. Nevertheless, this study could be replicated with other populations of educators (e.g., pre-service teachers, incumbent teachers who do not self-identify as highly resilient, general educators, other related service personnel such as speech and language pathologists and psychologists, paraeducators). The procedures for conducting this study are described in adequate detail, so that the study can be replicated by anyone who wishes to do so with the same or any other educator population. Due to the study being qualitative in nature and involving so few (i.e., eleven) participants, findings may not be generalizable to special educators across the state in which it was conducted or

across the United States.

Positionality and Reflexivity. Positionality is a term that refers to the position researchers have or take within their research. Bourke (2014) describes positionality as the “space in which objectivism and subjectivism meet” (p. 3). Reflexivity “refers to the researcher being aware of and openly discussing his or her role in the study in a way that honor and respects the site and participants” (Creswell, 2012, p. 474).

Both positionality and reflexivity play an active role in any research study. In the case of this researcher, this researcher has been employed as a special educator for ten years, serving in the same nonpublic special education school setting for nine of those years of service, and then moving into a district level position in a K-8 school district in San Diego County. As an educator who has remained in the field of special education beyond the threshold of five years during which most teachers who choose to leave the field do so, the researcher has had the lived experience of the phenomenon being researched. Therefore, the researcher was keenly aware of her own reasons for going into and remaining in the field of special education, non-workplace contexts that have influenced and supported her to remain as a special educator, workplace contexts (e.g., collegial relations, administrative actions) that have positively and negatively influenced her satisfaction as a special educator and desire to remain in the field, and her own personal resiliency attributes that have influenced her satisfaction and intention to stay in the field, and her ultimate behavior of staying in the field beyond the threshold of five years. Given this self-awareness of positionality and reflexivity, the researcher was as deliberate as possible to ensure that she did not lead or influence her participants’ responses in anyway, based on her own experiences. One way that the researcher did this

was to member check transcriptions of teachers' responses to ensure that the responses correctly documented the expressed experiences of the participants.

Implications for Practice

Being a special educator can be a very demanding and complex job. However, the findings of this study suggest strategies special educators can employ and supports special educators can seek and activate to remain resilient, satisfied, and motivated to stay in the field. The participants in this study seem to have been able to navigate the field of special education by: (1) staying focused on the reasons they entered the field of special education, (2) employing non-workplace contexts to rejuvenate and bounce back to face another workday, (3) having workplace supports to navigate through daily work, (4) activating personal resiliency attributes or behaviors, and (5) having a sense of purpose and calling beyond themselves and the complexities of the profession.

Based upon the findings of this study, the researcher sees several potential implications for special educators themselves, general and special education colleagues, educational leaders and administrators, and teacher educators in preparing, hiring, and supporting special education teachers to remain and be successful in the field. The implications described and practices suggested in the sections that follow are based upon the research literature, the researcher's resiliency conceptual framework (see Figure 2), and the findings reported in Chapter 4. The implications and suggestions are organized by research question. When more than one research question is associated with an implication, all related questions are referenced.

Implications for Recruiting and Motivating People to Be a Special Educator.

In response to questions associated with the first research question regarding motivations

for entering and staying in the field, participants identified as priority motivators: (a) *having a personal connection with special education and individuals with disabilities* and (b) *enjoying relationships with parents, colleagues, and students*. Participants identified early exposure in their lives as key motivators for them entering the field of special education. The examples participants provided regarding the importance of early positive exposure to individuals with disabilities and their families seems to strongly suggest a need to explore ways in which to structure such opportunities through community (e.g., inclusive organized sports, accessible and inclusive arts, recreation, and sports experiences) and school experiences which highlight the strengths and abilities of individuals with disabilities rather than falling into an ableistic and benevolent mindset. Smith, Laura, Foley, Pamela, and Chaney describe ableism and its potential chilling effects.

Ableism is a form of discrimination or prejudice against individuals with physical, mental, or developmental disabilities that are characterized by the belief that these individuals need to be fixed or cannot function as full members of society...As a result of these assumptions, individuals with disabilities are commonly viewed as being abnormal rather than as members of a distinct minority community (2008, p. 304).

Hehir (2005) effectively argues that ableism is deeply imbedded in school tradition, resulting in attitudes that it is better for a child to “walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check” (p. 3). An ableistic bias is manifest in schools through special education’s historically segregated service delivery model.

They key, then, is to create inclusive community and school experiences that focus upon reciprocal, positive interactions as with cooperative games and cooperative

learning and partner learning structures. Such experiences should be designed and carried out in inclusive learning, community, recreational environments with peers as *natural supports*, where natural supports is simply defined as any “assistance, relationships, or interactions that allow a person to secure, maintain, and advance” (p. 275) in school, play, work, or any other endeavor. The researcher experienced, firsthand, as a high school peer tutor, students with more pervasive support needs and the gifts and strengths of her classmates, which motivated her to enter the field of special education.

Creating opportunities for students to be peer buddies, instructors, and advocates for classmates with IEPs can create culturally proficient peer allies and culturally proficient future special educators. This exposure early on will allow them to see their peers on IEPs not through a lens of ableism and benevolence, but a lens of competence and friendship. Special and general education teachers and their educational leaders and administrators who create as many inclusion opportunities as possible for students with IEPs allows for a shared understanding that students are students no matter how they learn. Students’ learning through early exposure how special educators are allies and advocates for anyone who learns differently rather than benevolent helpers can create early momentum for young people to consider entering the field of special education.

Implications for Pre-service Teacher Preparation. For Research Question 4, interviewees identified *staying student centered and focused upon student potential* as a personal disposition and behavior that associated with resiliency. This finding supports the benefit of exposing and countering ableism as part of pre-service professional preparation not only for special educators, but all educators (Lindsey, Thousand, Jew, & Piowlsky, 2018; Villa & Thousand, 2016). Pre-service programs can educate candidates

of the historical implications of segregation and social stratification. Programs can deliberately prepare special educators to view themselves as advocates of inclusive education and multi-tiered systems of educational and behavior support for all students rather than “heroes” rescuing students who happen to have an IEP. And programs can articulate and assess candidates’ professional dispositions regarding views of students as “able” versus “incapable.”

Results of this study also suggest that course instructors and clinical practice mentor teachers can play a part in facilitating special education teacher candidates’ current and future resiliency. For instance, for Research Question 2, participants identified that finding balance and boundaries between work and home was core to their well-being. Teacher preparation faculty and clinical practice mentors can model and deliberately instruct about wellness and the importance of personal self-care, asking candidates to include as part of their professional growth plans the ways in which they will seek personal self-care as suggested by the participants in this study (e.g., exercise, travel, social networking, sports, community service, connecting with family and friends).

In this study, participants identified workplace relationships with *students, site administrators, and teacher colleagues (e.g. other special educators, general educators, and support staff)* as influential to their resilience. At the pre-service level, university faculty can facilitate candidates’ future success and resiliency not only by giving the tools to differentiate instruction, but the collaborative teaming and creative problem solving skills they will need to effectively collaborate with teacher colleagues, supervising administrators, community agency personnel with who they coordinate services, and the

parents of the students they serve. Professors and clinical practice mentor teachers can model for novice teachers active listening and questioning skills in ways that build their interpersonal and professional expertise, without fear of reprisal. It goes without saying that when screening for clinical practice mentors, preparation programs should look for not only highly qualified and experienced teachers in the field, but mentors who can describe, model, and nurture dispositions identified for Research Question 1 and 4 (e.g., viewing student's as able, noticing and appreciating student growth and accomplishment, experiencing their sense of fulfillment, identified in response to Research Questions 1 and 4).

Implications for Promoting and Maintaining Personal Well-being. As mentioned in the previous section, for Research Question 2, participants identified finding balance and boundaries between work and the rest of their lives core to their well-being and resilience as special educators. Strategies for maintaining balance included engaging in (a) personal self-care activities of exercise and travel, (b) social networking activities via team sports and community activities, and (c) conversational time with family and friends. Given these findings, this researcher first suggests that special educators (and all educators) be deliberate about exploring, identifying, and then regularly engaging in activities that, for them, are personally enjoyable and rejuvenating.

Administrative actions for promoting well-being. Administrators also can work with special educators to identify ways to carve out time for them to not only complete the planning, instructional and paperwork tasks that accompany the job, but also build in social networking opportunities (e.g. weekly “lunch and learn” gatherings; fun social activities such as faculty talent or “non-talent” shows, incorporate mindfulness practices

into the daily and weekly routine of the school for teachers, establish a “work week challenge,” morning partner or team walk and talk challenge). For school districts, these findings suggest the potential value of partnering with local businesses (e.g. gyms, recreation centers, spas) to acquire teacher discounts for leisure activities, structuring fun and engaging school experiences where and by providing timely and applicable informational and instrumental support to maximize teacher’s time at work will allow special educators to create balance and boundaries between home and school.

As noted in the previous section regarding pre-service education, participants found *staying student centered and focused upon student potential* associated with well-being and resilience. How might administrators help educators stay student centered and focused upon student potential? Administrators might do as suggested for pre-service preparation programs. Administrators might advocate for inclusive education and work to install a school-wide multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) for all students that focuses upon student progress data and delivering targeted interventions with any child without a need for labeling (Villa & Thousand, 2016).

Practicing mindfulness in school. In order to increase student and teacher productivity and social-emotional health, school districts and schools around the nation are engaging in teaching and practicing mindfulness with students and educators (Thousand & McAvoy, 2017). Like Curry and O’Brien (2012), this researcher suggests that schools and districts adopt wellness practices (e.g., teaching about and encouraging mindfulness thinking and practices among students and staff) to increase teacher well-being and reduce attrition. Educational leaders can promote student and educator mindfulness by encouraging daily practice of focused breathing, relaxing meditations,

mindful listening, and mindful eating. They can be mindful role models by greeting colleagues with awareness, greeting each student entering the school or classroom, attending to teachers' emotional and physical presence, and pause to observe what's going on in classrooms and around the school. Additionally, at staff meetings, educational leaders can structure time for educators to reflect on their week, focusing on positives, and special moments to remember (Thousand & McAvoy, 2017).

Implications for Promoting Personal and Professional Workplace

Relationships and Collaboration. With the shift from educating students with disabilities in separate classrooms to collaboratively teaching all students in general education environments through co-teaching approaches (Villa & Thousand, 2016), there is inevitable confusion as to the role of special and general educators in the planning for, instructing, and assessing students with disabilities. Neither party has well-defined or well-understood roles and responsibilities as part of their history. Literature shows that one way to reduce role ambiguity and dissonance among general and special educator roles is to create opportunities for general and special educators to collaborate to establish shared goals and values for all of the students they serve (Billingsley, 2004a, 2004b; Jones et al., 2013). In response to Research Question 3, special educators in this study found less role dissonance with their general education counterparts when they were able to establish *personal* relationships with their partners. Participants also overwhelmingly identified working *professional* relationships among *all* educators, specialists, and administrators as central to their satisfaction and success as special educators. A few participants also identified how having physical proximity to one another facilitated relationships.

Based upon these findings and the supporting literature, this researcher suggests educational leaders and administrators be deliberate about providing shared time and opportunities for general educators and special educators as well as specialists and support staff (e.g., paraeducators) to meet to build trusting personal and professional relationships so they may define their various roles and responsibilities (e.g. curriculum, social-emotional and behavior supports for particular students) and discover one another's strengths and areas of expertise. Such forums allow novice educators to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of veteran educators, collaboratively plan for high quality educational experiences for all students, and develop resilience through collegial support. Educational leaders also can arrange for shared cross-disciplinary instructional preparation times and office space among special and general educators and other support personnel, so they may readily collaborate to co-create lesson plans and engage in the natural professional development that occurs when colleagues share their expertise in planning and debriefing.

Of course, with time, space, and opportunity for educators to collaborate, comes the need for accountability. An important administrative action is to establish systems for holding special educators and their collaborators accountable for actually using the time they have been given to collaborate rather than do what they otherwise would have done had they not had the shared time and space.

Finally, given the shift to inclusively teaching all students in general education through co-teaching approaches, the researcher also suggests that schools and districts provide professional development in co-teaching approaches and processes as well as redefine job descriptions and stated job expectations so that the roles of all teachers,

specialists, and paraeducators include co-teaching as the default special education service delivery model. Co-teaching allows for the expertise and strengths of at least two educators to benefit students with and without IEPs. However, co-teaching requires skills and dispositions acquired through pre-service and/or in-service professional development, as well as ongoing monitoring and coaching to ensure quality and fidelity.

Implications for Inter-and Intra-Professional Collaboration and Learning.

Teaching is a team sport that requires the expertise and support of all stakeholders in any student's educational journey. In response to interview questions associated with both Research Questions 3 and 4, participants in this study identified cross-disciplinary collaboration - collaboration with the speech and language pathologist, the school psychologist, and paraprofessionals – and intra-disciplinary collaboration – collaboration with other special educators with similar roles – as influencing their effectiveness and resiliency. In addition to the suggestions already provided in the previous section for promoting workplace relations, this researcher recommends school districts and building administrators consider creative ways of using Professional Learning Community (PLC) and professional development time for across-discipline or within-discipline conversations about topics as far ranging as problem solving for a particular student's support needs to implementing a new literacy intervention program with integrity across district sites.

Paraeducators cannot be over-looked as members of the instructional team. They have diverse responsibilities for supporting the day-to-day instruction in classrooms as well as the various clerical and data management tasks of a special educator or other related services personnel such as speech and language pathologists. Participants of this

study discussed how important and appreciated paraeducator support is. One implication of these findings is the need for educational leaders and administrators in collaboration with specialists to provide time for paraprofessionals and professionals to meet to plan together. Currently, in most school districts paraprofessionals are not compensated for planning time, so this would need to become a part of a conversation about role redefinitions and job descriptions.

Implications for Administrative Supports and Actions. Special education teachers leave the field, in part, due to perceived lack of administrative support (Billingsley, 2004b). Administrative support has long been identified as an important teacher support variable, particularly important during a teacher's first year(s) of teaching (Boyd et al., 2011; Gersten et al., 2001).

Emotional support. This study reinforced Littrell and colleagues' (1994) finding that *emotional support* is the most important form of support administrators (and other colleagues) provide educators. *Emotional support* has been described as showing teachers they are esteemed and worthy of concern through "open communication, showing appreciation, taking an interest in teachers' work, and considering teachers' ideas" (Littrell et al., 1994, p. 297). In this study, participants experienced emotional support when given positive praise and encouragement and when listened to in dialogues and collaborative team endeavors. Based upon these findings, this researcher suggests educational leaders and administrators make a concerted and deliberate effort to show special educators they are appreciated with words of praise and encouragement. This could be achieved by (a) regularly conversing with and actively listening to their special educators; and (b) providing them with genuine positive praise and encouragement, either

publically or privately, as appropriate to the situation. Since collegial dialogue and collaborative teaming seemed to provide structures for emotional support, administrators also can be deliberate about structuring regular opportunities for special educators and colleagues to support one another in learning and problem solving (e.g., through PLC meetings, shared professional development experiences).

Instrumental support. *Instrumental* support involves helping teachers with their work (Littrell et al., 1994). Participants rated instrumental support as the second most important type of administrative support. Data analysis revealed participants appreciated instrumental support in four domains: (1) human support from colleagues; (2) support with paperwork, including IEP paperwork and lesson planning; (3) support with the legal dimensions of special education; and (4) support in finding time for collaboration and professional development to improve curricular, instructional, and technological skills. These findings suggest obvious concrete actions that school administrators can take to provide special educators with the instrumental support that is important to them. Human support from colleagues can be structured as already described in the previous section, through shared planning time and spaces and the structuring of special education service delivery through collaborative structures such as co-teaching. Clearly, administrators can and should ask special educators what they most need in order to most effectively do their work. Findings suggest that priority administrative instrumental support involves arranging regular (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly) time blocks for special educators to engage in non-instruction duties (e.g., IEP writing, calendaring of IEP meetings), so they may focus their remaining time on instructional-related responsibilities.

Research Question 4 explored personal resiliency attributes and behaviors and other *influences* on special educators' resilience. Interestingly, for this question, the majority of participants identified the instrumental support they received from administrators as allies, protectors, and advocates. One participant considered her administrator as an ally when clarifying boundaries and then trusting educators to do their work. Others spoke of the importance of administrative back up in order to take risks and advocate for students' best interests. Given these findings, this researcher suggests that school districts and university preparation program personnel consider how best to answer the following questions. In what ways might these instrumental administrative roles of ally, protector, and advocate be communicated to and nurtured and developed in administrators? How might they be communicated and assessed through the hiring process and in job descriptions? How might administrators communicate to their faculty that they understand these roles as important job functions through their words and actions?

Appraisal support. As Littrell and colleagues (1994) point out, effective and meaningful appraisal support is that which offers coaching and feedback and that which clarifies job responsibilities (1994). Participants rated appraisal support as the *third* most important type of administrative support, appreciating appraisal feedback that validated their work and that was specific about what was good and what could be improved. Vague and generalized feedback (e.g., That's great!) was found unhelpful. Some participants suggested the appraisal feedback was considered questionable, if they assessed the appraiser's understanding or valuing of the role of a special educator and the instructional demands of the students they served. Given these results, administrators are

advised to establish their credibility with special educators by clearly communicating their understanding and valuing of the job of a special educator and by providing feedback that is specific, constructive (i.e., what was done well and what could be done differently), and relevant to the job demands of a special educator.

Participants also shared that they valued proactive appraisal that provided “up front” information and expectations related to curriculum, behavior, school and classroom procedures, IEPs, and all other responsibilities asked rather than reactive “after the fact” appraisal. Given these comments, administrators and educational leaders are advised to front load information and expectations (e.g., new curriculum and assessment expectations as with the recent Common Core curriculum and Smarter Balanced assessment system roll out) to better equip special educators to handle the complex and challenging nature of their job rather than spending time, after the fact, reading about and trying to independently figure out curricular and assessment changes and expectations.

Finally, participants discussed how appraisal support in the form of administrators setting high expectations helped to push them beyond the status quo. Administrators and educational leaders can work with special educators and all staff to set and clarify expectations by engaging in such activities as starting the school year with a school-wide examination of the school’s vision and mission, teacher and student norms and values, and cross-disciplinary shared goal(s). Benchmarks aligned with the shared goal(s) could be established and professional development time allotted for faculty to work on this goal and track their progress toward goal attainment (Lindsey, Thousand, Jew, & Piowlsky, 2018). It is recommended that administrators and educational leaders also set high expectations by taking advantage of the internal strengths of their staff members rather

than relying upon district or outside personnel to provide professional development. Expecting and supporting faculty to share their expertise and lead and facilitate professional developments could engage them at a higher level as the equal stakeholders and leaders they are on campus.

Informational support. Informational support has been defined as providing professional development and current updates on best practice (Littrell et al., 1994). Participants rated informational support as the *fourth* most important of the four types of administrative support. The vast majority (81.9 percent) of participants reported professional development as the primary source of their informational support. Some participants found the available professional development to be variably relevant and useful. Those who found professional development useful commented it being relevant to their job and useful in keeping them up to date with current best practices including technology. Participants appreciated professional development that offered examples and modeling of the practice in action rather than simply being given new curriculum or assessments and having to spend time figuring out how to use them in their context. Based upon participants' responses, this researcher recommends that when educational leaders and administrators are considering how to expend district resources on professional development, they assess the pertinence of the information to the expected roles of special educators and ensure that participants are provided with examples, models, and guided practice using the practice in their own work and job context, as a special educator or other educator within the school system.

Participants also discussed how valued and satisfied they felt when they were included along with their general education counterparts in content-specific (e.g. math,

science, reading) training. Being included better equipped them to teach and understand the rigor and expectations of general education curriculum, which in turn enabled them to better prepare students with IEPs for the general education classroom. School administrators could arrange such cross-disciplinary professional development on district-wide professional development days, or through periodic site-based PLC meetings or other school-wide non-student work times. Administrators also are advised to consider summer training experiences. Educators can be so overwhelmed with the daily demands of their jobs during the school year that focusing upon new material can be challenging. By providing such summer learning opportunities, administrators can signal to educators that their practice, professionalism, and growth are high priorities.

Currently, in California, special education candidates are required to reflect upon their perceived strengths, gaps, and interests and develop an Individual Transition Development Plan (ITDP) that they can share with new employers to guide their professional development experiences in the first years of their employment as a novice special educator. This researcher recommends that administrators responsible for the mentoring and supervision of new special educators spend time reviewing and refining this document in order to identify professional growth goals and learning opportunities most relevant to each special educator's job assignment and perceived strengths and needs.

A few participants shared that the informational support they used and found valuable was self-sought. As educational leaders and administrators it is important to build and provide structures for special educators to be life-long learners and create opportunities for educators to be self-directed in seeking new knowledge as part of

building their disposition as a lifelong learner and responsible professional.

Administrators can encourage and reinforce special educators to be self-seeking life-long learners by providing time and resources for special educators to personalize their professional growth plan, observe one another and their general educators, and engage in constructive dialogue about best practices.

Implications for Policy, Higher Education, and Social Justice

There is an insufficient number of special educators to serve the increasing number of students qualifying for special education under one of the 13 federally qualifying disabilities. The current Secretary of Education for the United States under President Donald Trump, Betsy DeVos, lobbies for school voucher programs wherein public funds are diverted to assist families to send their children to private schools. These school voucher programs could deplete the funding of the public school system, increase segregation, and have few, if any, benefits to students (Weller, 2017). How would this negatively impact students eligible for special education? If a family whose child receives special education uses a school voucher they must give up their federal protections given under IDEA (Goldstein, 2017; Weller, 2017). Goldstein observed the following:

Depending on the voucher program, the rights being waived can include the right to a free education; the right to the same level of special-education services that a child would be eligible for in a public school; the right to a state-certified or college-educated teacher; and the right to a hearing to dispute disciplinary action against a child. (Goldstein, 2017, para. 9).

This study has implications for national policy because it highlights the need for continued and increased federal funding and regulations to best meet the needs of students with special needs under IDEA and the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA). The

ESSA “reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation’s national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, para. 1). It is the recommendation of this researcher that this study be used to inform policymakers and higher education personnel to educate and guide special educators, educational leaders/administrators, and parents on the importance of increased rather than decreased federal funding for special education in a time when more students are qualifying and more personnel and support is needed to meet the increasing demands and workload of special educators serving students with disabilities. Without federal funding the field of special education will likely continue to have high attrition rates and the resilience of special educators will likely be negatively impacted. Funding is needed to provide structured opportunities and school experiences that create inclusive community and school experiences that focus upon reciprocal positive interactions through cooperative learning structures that motivate people to be and remain special educators. Workplace supports from educational leaders and administrators who provide emotional, instrumental, appraisal, and informational support that are highly influence special educators’ resilience and satisfaction are critical during this time when more paperwork and legal demands leave educators with less time to plan for and support students. Instrumental support needs to be increased and funded, not cut, to provide teachers the time they need to serve students with special needs with high fidelity. Informational support through the funding of applicable and relevant profession development during the summer and school year is important to ensure best educational practices are used in the classroom. Lastly, the funding and implementation of wellness paradigms and programs in schools is important

to provide teachers the balance and boundaries they need both in and out of the workplace to bolster the resilience, satisfaction, intention, and ultimate behavior of remaining in the field of special education.

The results of this study provide higher education personnel with information about how to deliberately prepare special educators to view themselves as advocates of inclusive education and multi-tiered systems of educational and behavior support for all students and inform novice teachers of the potential effect of school vouchers program and diversion of federal special education funds in a time where funding is needed more than ever to meet the increasing number of students receiving special education services.

Future Considerations for Research

As long as attrition of special educators remains high and the number of students qualifying for special education continues to increase, there is a need to further research the phenomenon of special educators who are resilient and choose to continue in the field. Previous studies have identified factors associated with teacher attrition and retention, and studies have specifically examined the attrition of special educators and reasons they exit the field within three to five years (Bobek, 2002; Le Cornu, 2009; Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011; Yost, 2006). This study specifically examined factors that may contribute to special educators' work satisfaction, resiliency, and desire and ability to remain in the field. The findings and implications discussed in this and the previous chapter add to the body of literature and knowledge regarding special education teacher retention and resiliency by providing a conceptual framework (shown in Figure 2) for thinking about factors that have been identified as related to teacher resiliency and success and suggesting strategies for teacher educators, administrators and other

educational leaders, and educators, themselves, to promote resiliency and retention.

As previously noted in the limitations section of this chapter, results of this study cannot be generalized to general education teachers or other specialists (e.g., English language development teachers, psychologists, speech and language pathologists) populations or educators who do not self-identify as highly resilient. However, because the procedures for conducting this study are described in adequate detail, the study can be replicated by anyone who wishes to do so with the same or any other educator population (e.g., pre-service teachers, incumbent teachers who do not self-identify as highly resilient, general educators, other related service personnel such as speech and language pathologists and psychologists, paraeducators). Future research could include replication of this study with the same or a similar population of special educators at a grander scale (i.e., with a greater number of participants) in this and other states across the nation. Other populations of education professionals, paraprofessionals, education-associated specialists (e.g., psychologists, speech and language pathologists), and other human service personnel (e.g., nurses, social workers) could also be examined using the resiliency construct and conceptual framework used in this study.

The study's methodology could also be adjusted so as to examine the perceptions and experiences of individuals who do not self-identify as highly resilient to determine additional barriers to and facilitators of professional satisfaction and intent and choice to continue in education or other human service fields (e.g., nursing, social work).

The “What Other Factor” and Conclusion

Don't aim at success. The more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of

one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. (Frankl, 1959, p. XIV)

The researcher chose to save a discussion of implication of the findings of Research Question 5 for this final conclusion of this chapter and this dissertation. For Research Question 5, participants were asked to identify what motivational, personal, workplace and non-workplace factors not already examined influenced their resilience. Several participants identified *having a sense of purpose* as key to their resiliency. Becoming and remaining a special educator seems to be, at least in part, about having and holding onto a sense of purpose larger than oneself.

Sense of purpose, perhaps has best been described by an Auschwitz concentration camp survivor, Viktor Frankl (J Sokol, 2011). Frankl, in his book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959), chronicles his experience as a World War II concentration camp inmate and his psychotherapeutic method of identifying a *purpose in life to feel positively about* as a survival tactic. He concludes that neither happiness nor success can be pursued; instead, they ensue as unintended side effects of a "personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself" (Frankl, 1959, p. XIV). If Frankl is correct, then all who dedicate themselves to the education of children would do well to take pause and self assess if their work really is a personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself. The answer to this self-assessment may be a bottom line for explaining teacher resilience.

If sense of purpose and having a cause greater than oneself matters at all in education, then this researcher has an additional set of recommendations for anyone who has the chance to interact with a special educator:

Remember to pause to notice and comment upon the impact special educators are making on students, teachers, the school campus, the school district, and the field in any way you can think of - through poster walks celebrating colleagues' passion, purpose, and gifts and other public or private acknowledgement.

Pause and comment upon the gifts a special educator offers by staying in a field that is ever changing and ever challenging, tell a special educator how grateful you are.

Pause and give the emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental support a special educator may need and may not know to seek to navigate the roles and complex demands of the job.

Finally, pause to wonder at and celebrate the unintended side effect of personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself – happiness and success.

APPENDIX A: THE RESILIENCE SCALE

Name:

Date:

Please read each statement and **highlight**, **bold**, or underline the number to the right of each statement that best indicates your feeling about the statement. Please respond to **all** statements. Please also answer the demographic questions at the bottom! Thank you.

Circle the number in the appropriate column

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. When I make plans, I follow through with them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I usually manage one way or another.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I am able to depend on myself more than anyone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Keeping interested in things is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I can be on my own if I have to.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I feel proud that I have accomplished things in life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I usually take things in stride.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I am friends with myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I feel that I can handle many things at one time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I am determined.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I seldom wonder what the point of it is.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I take things one day at a time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I can get through difficult times because I've experienced difficulty before.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. I have self-discipline.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I keep interested in things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. I can usually find something to laugh about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. My belief in myself gets me through hard times.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. In an emergency, I'm someone people can generally rely on.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I can usually look at a situation in a number of ways.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Sometimes I make myself do things whether I want to or not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. My life has meaning.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I do not dwell on things that I can't do anything about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. When I'm in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. I have enough energy to do what I have to do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. It's OK if there are people who don't like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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1. Gender? Male Female
2. Number of years of special education teaching experience?
3. Special education credential(s) held?

4. Age range _____ and grade levels _____ of students you currently teach?
5. Primary diagnosis(es) of the students served in the past 5 years?
6. Percentage of time providing pullout, consultative, and co-teaching services?

APPENDIX B: THE RESILIENCE SCALE PERMISSIONS LETTER



Are You a Special Ed Teacher?

**Help Improve the Future of Special Educators by
Participating in a Doctoral Research Project!**

- The study is on the resilience of special educators who have been in the field beyond the threshold of 5 years
- The survey should take no more than 10 minutes
- Based on your score on The Resilience Scale you may be asked to be interviewed

Brienne Downing, M.A. Special Education
Doctoral Candidate, UCSD/CSUSM



APPENDIX D: DATA COLLECTION CHECKLIST

Participant Name: _____

Participant Pseudonym: _____

Checklist:

_____ Participant info. Given by informant: _____ - Date: _____

_____ BD Emailed Participant - Date: _____ ; Response: ____ Y/ ____ N

_____ BD Emails Appendix B & C - Date: _____

_____ Consent form signed and returned to BD - Date: _____

_____ BD Emailed Resilience Scale - Date: _____; Electronic ____; USPS ____

_____ Follow-up email sent *after* 1 week - ____ Y ____ N; Date Sent: _____

_____ Resilience Scale Score: _____; Highly Resilient: ____ Y; ____ N

_____ YES = Asked to be interviewed - Date asked: _____

_____ NO = Thank you! I was able to gain the information I was seeking without taking your valuable time.

_____ Interview Response - ____ Y; ____ N; Date Responded: _____

_____ Interviewees told: 1. Incentives (gift card, letter of appreciation, copy of study)
2. Given Appendix D
3. Told one - three semi-structured interviews lasting no more than 2 hours each.

_____ Interview Scheduled - ____ Y; Date Responded:

- Questions sent - ____ Y; Date Sent: _____ - Email or USPS (Circle One)

1. 1st interview - Date: _____ Time: _____
Location: _____

2. 2nd interview - Date: _____ Time: _____
Location: _____

3. 4rd interview - Date: _____ Time: _____
Location: _____

_____ File Checklist - Date: _____ Researcher Initials: _____

APPENDIX E: INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Dear _____,

My name is Brienne Downing and I am a doctoral candidate in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of California, San Diego and California State University, San Marcos. The purpose of this resilience scale¹ is to better understand special education teachers' self-assessed levels of resilience. You have been selected by to participate in this study because you have been a special educator beyond the threshold of three to five years that research shows special educators leave. Your contact information was obtained from an informant that had you as a student in your teacher preparation program or who you have worked with in the field. This survey should only take about 10 minutes of your time. Please give your honest answers in response to the questions asked. You have the option of responding to the survey electronically as well; a copy of the scale or the link to the electronic version will be provided to you upon confirmation of your interest in participation.

This survey is for a research study to provide useful information for educational leaders on how to retain special educators through the use of resilience strategies. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. You have the option to opt out of the study at any point in time. Your completed survey signals your consent to participate in this study and be potentially contacted again for an open-ended interview based on your resilience scale score. The information collected from your participation will be invaluable in gaining a better understanding of special educator's resilience factors that retain them in the field.

If you have questions about the study, you can contact Brienne Downing at 619-873-7860 or brienne.downing@gmail.com. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Marcos, at 760-750-4029 or irb@csusm.edu.

If you are interested in participating in this study please provide consent to the informant you contacted and cc'ing the researcher, Brienne Downing (brienne.downing@gmail.com) by sending the following email and including your email address and contact information for the researcher:

"I, _____, give my consent to have my email and/or phone number shared with the researcher of this study, Brienne Downing, to contact me for my participation in the research study on special educator teacher resilience."

Sincerely,
Brienne Downing

¹ Wagnild, 2009b; Fish and Stephens, 2010; Stephens and Fish, 2010; Tait, 2008; Lee et al., 2011; Yost, 2006; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; Griffin et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2013; Leko & Smith, 2010; Gu and Day, 2007; Bobek, 2002; Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004

APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT FOR COMPLETING THE RESILIENCE SCALE ASSESSMENT

Special Education Teacher Resiliency: A Phenomenological Study of the Factors that Highly Resilient Special Educators Use to Remain in the Field



California State University
SAN MARCOS

School of Education California State University San Marcos 333 S. Twin Oaks Valley Road San Marcos, CA 92096-0001 Tel: 760.750.4300 Fax: 760.750.3352 www.csusm.edu/education

Informed Consent for Completing *The Resiliency Scale* Assessment

Special Education Teacher Resiliency: A Phenomenological Study of the Factors that Highly Resilient Special Educators Use to Remain in the Field

WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Principal Investigator:	Brienne Downing
UCSD/CSUSM Department:	Educational Studies: Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership
Phone:	619 873-7860
Email:	Brienne.Downing@gmail.com
Co-Investigator/Faculty Sponsor:	Dr. Jacqueline Thousand, PhD.
CSUSM Department:	School of Education
Phone:	760 750-4022
Email:	jthousan@csusm.edu

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH?

This survey is being used with special educators as part of a research study that hopes to provide useful information for educational leaders and special educators to reduce the attrition rates of special educators. Your completion of this Resilience Scale will help the researcher to better understand special educators' self-assessed levels of resiliency and factors that influence their resiliency and decision to stay in or leave the field. Approximately 25 to 50 special educators

who have been working in the field of special education for five or more years will be included in this phase of the study.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS RESEARCH, AND DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

It will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete The Resilience Scale survey. Following your completion and return of the survey, you may be contacted by the researcher to engage in a face-to-face interview about your experiences as a special educator. If asked you do not have to participate in this second phase of the research study. Participating in phase I of the study is completely voluntary.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THIS RESEARCH?

You will be asked to give your honest answers in response to the questions asked on The Resiliency Scale survey. Survey responses will remain confidential. Three years after the completion of the study, the survey responses will be destroyed.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH?

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. The researcher understands that the research participants all live very busy lives and may feel burdened by having to respond to this scale. Please note that participation to responding to the 25 questions in The Resilience Scale is completely voluntary. Participants have the option of opting out of the study at any point in time. The resilience scale will be used to identify potential participants to be interviewed and will remain confidential.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATION?

Specific benefits beyond the opportunity for participants to reflect upon their lived experiences as special educators are minimal. However, by participating, the information collected will help inform the researcher and, hopefully, the field about resilience of special educators who remain the field beyond the threshold of three to five years. Additionally, participants who choose only to participate in this first phase of the study will be thanked for their time and their resilience score will be sent to them for their reference.

ARE THERE ANY ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION?

An alternative is to not participate.

WILL MY INFORMATION BE PRIVATE?

Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by law. All hard copy data and analyses collected and analyzed during the research process will be stored in a locked cabinet in the home office of the researcher, Brienne Downing, accessible only to the researcher. Electronic results will be stored on the researcher's private home computer and a hard drive back up, which are password protected and to which only the researcher will have access. The data will be destroyed no later than three years after the end of the project. At the conclusion of such timeframe the researcher will shred all hard copy materials and expunge raw data stored on the researcher's personal home computer and hard drive back up.

The results of your participation in this study may be used for publication or for scientific purposes, but the results will not include any information that could identify you.

WILL I BE TOLD ABOUT THE STUDY RESULTS?

If you participate, I will provide you with a copy of the study once completed.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs involved in completing The Resiliency Scale.

WILL I BE PAID FOR MY PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH?

You will not be paid to complete The Resiliency Scale.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about the research now or later, you may contact Brienne Downing, (619) 873-7860. If at any time during the research you still have questions or concerns, you also may contact the California State University San Marcos IRB at 760-750-4029 or irb@csusm.edu.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE:

The California State University, San Marcos Institutional Review Board has approved this consent document, as signified by the Board's stamp. The consent form must be reviewed annually and expires on the date indicated on the stamp. Completion and return of your responses to The Resiliency Scale signals your consent to participate in this phase of the study and your understanding of the information provided above.

California State University, San Marcos
Consent to Act as a Research Participant

Special Educator's Self-Assessed Level(s) of Resilience and the Factors that influence their resilience to stay in or leave the field of Special Education

Brienne Downing, under the supervision of Dr. Jacqueline Thousand, Professor in the Department of Education at CSUSM, is conducting this research for her doctoral dissertation in the UCSD-CSUSM Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been a special educator beyond the threshold of five years. There will be approximately 50 participants in this study. The purpose of the study is to understand the resilience factors self-assessed highly resilient special educators use to remain in the field. The goal is to inform future research and catalyze change in policy, procedure, and working conditions of special educators.

If you agree to be in this study, the following activities will take place:

The researcher will ask you to take a resilience survey. Based on your self-assessed resilience level the researcher will ask to make an audio recording of an interview with you around your lived experiences as a special educator. The interview will last between 1 to 2 hours. The interview will be transcribed and analyzed. If necessary, the researcher may request a follow-up interview to clarify or expand their knowledge on the subject and to check for accuracy of transcription and understanding of your interview responses. You can decline to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. Simply tell the researcher that you do not wish to continue. If at any point in the interview you feel uncomfortable the interview session will terminate.

Your identity will be held confidential. Your name will not appear in the analysis of the survey. Participants and survey notes will be coded numerically to ensure anonymity. Research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. The CSUSM Institutional Review Board may review records.

Because this is a research study, there may also be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable. There is however a small risk of a potential breach of confidentiality.

There will not be any direct benefit to you from participating in this study and you will receive no compensation. However, as incentives and recognition for meeting with the researcher and participating in the interview and the follow up member check, each interviewee will have a choice of receiving a \$10 Amazon or Starbucks gift certificate, a letter of appreciation, and a copy of the research study upon completion.

Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. There will be no cost to you for participating.

The researcher named above has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research- related problems you may reach Dr. Jacqueline Thousand at 760 750-4022. You may call the CSUSM Institutional Review Board at 760 750-4029 or email at problems.

You have received a copy of this consent document.

You agree to participate.

Participant's signature

Date

The California State University

Bakersfield | Channel Islands | Chico | Dominguez Hills | East Bay | Fresno | Fullerton | Humboldt | Long Beach | Los Angeles | Maritime Academy Monterey Bay | Northridge | Pomona | Sacramento | San Bernardino | San Diego | San Francisco | San Jose | San Luis Obispo | San Marcos | Sonoma | Stanislaus

**APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT AND AGREEMENT
CONTRACT**

Special Education Teacher Resiliency: A Phenomenological Study of the Factors that
Highly Resilient Special Educators Use to Remain in the Field



California State University
SAN MARCOS

School of Education California State University San Marcos 333 S. Twin Oaks Valley Road San Marcos, CA
92096-0001 Tel: 760.750.4300 Fax: 760.750.3352 www.csusm.edu/education

Interview Informed Consent and Agreement Contract

Special Education Teacher Resiliency: A Phenomenological Study
of the Factors that Highly Resilient Special Educators Use to
Remain in the Field

WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Principal Investigator:	Brienne Downing
UCSD/CSUSM Department:	Educational Studies: Joint Program in Educational Leadership
Phone:	619 873-7860
Email:	Brienne.Downing@gmail.com
Co-Investigator/Faculty Sponsor: CSUSM Department:	Dr. Jacqueline Thousand, PhD. School of Education
Phone:	760 750-4022
Email:	jthousan@csusm.edu

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH:

This study involves research. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews is to better understand special educator's resilience factors that influences their decision to stay in or leave the field. The interview(s) are for a research study that hopes to provide useful information for educational leaders and special educators to reduce the attrition rates of special educators.

Approximately 10 - 20 participants will be included in this study.

This document has been approved by
the Institutional Review Board at
California State University San Marcos
Expiration Date: May 19, 2017

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS RESEARCH?

Your participation in one to three semi-structured interviews will last no more than 2 hours for the initial interview, clarifying interviews, review and verification of your transcribed interview through processes known as member checking and theoretical sampling.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THIS RESEARCH?

You will be asked to give your honest answers in response to the questions asked in the interview(s). Interview responses will remain confidential. Three years after the completion of the study the surveys will be destroyed.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH?

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. The researcher understands that the research participants all live very busy lives and may feel burdened by having to be interviewed. Please note that participation to be interviewed is completely voluntary. Participants have the option of opting out of the study at any point in time. The interviews will be coded for data collection and analysis and all parts will remain confidential.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATION?

Specific benefits beyond the opportunity for participants to reflect on best practices that can enhance the lived experiences of special educators are minimal. However by participating, the information collected will be invaluable in gaining a better understanding of the resilience factors that influence special educators to remain in the field beyond the threshold of three to five years. Those who choose to participate in phase two of the study will be informed of their resilience score once all interviews have been concluded, so as to not influence their responses in any way.

ARE THERE ANY ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION?

An alternative is to not participate.

WILL MY INFORMATION BE PRIVATE?

Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by law. All hard copy data and analyses collected and analyzed during the research process will be stored in a locked cabinet in the home office of the researcher, Brienne Downing, accessible only to the

researcher. Electronic results will be stored on the researcher's private home computer and a hard drive back up, which are password protected and to which only the researcher will have access. The data will be destroyed no later than three years after the end of the project. At the conclusion of such timeframe the researcher will shred all hard copy materials and expunge raw data stored on the researcher's personal home computer and hard drive back up.

The results of your participation in this study may be used for publication or for scientific purposes, but the results will not include any information that could identify you.

DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

You do not have to participate in this research study. If you choose not to participate there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Additionally, you may choose to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WILL I BE TOLD ABOUT THE STUDY RESULTS?

If you participate I will provide you a copy of the study once completed.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs to participate in this study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR MY PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH?

You will not be paid to participate in this study. However, an incentives and recognition for meeting with the researcher and participating in the interview and the follow up member check, each interviewee will have a choice of receiving a \$10 Amazon or Starbucks gift certificate, a letter of appreciation, and a copy of the research study upon completion.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about the research now or later, you may contact Brienne Downing, (619) 873-7860. If at any time during the research you still have questions or concerns, you also may contact the California State University San Marcos IRB at 760-750-4029 or irb@csusm.edu

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE:

The California State University, San Marcos Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form, as signified by the Board's stamp. The consent form must be reviewed annually and expires on the date indicated on the stamp. Return of your completed survey signals your consent to participate in this study.

California State University, San Marcos

Consent to Act as a Research Participant

Special Educator's Self-Assessed Level(s) of Resilience and the Factors that influence their resilience to stay in or leave the field of Special Education

Brienne Downing, under the supervision of Dr. Jacqueline Thousand, Professor in the Department of Education at CSUSM, is conducting this research for her doctoral dissertation in the UCSD-CSUSM Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been a special educator beyond the threshold of five years. There will be approximately 50 participants in this study. The purpose of the study is to understand the resilience factors self-assessed highly resilient special educators use to remain in the field. The goal is to inform future research and catalyze change in policy, procedure, and working conditions of special educators.

If you agree to be in this study, the following activities will take place: The researcher will ask you to take a resilience survey. Based on your self-assessed resilience level the researcher will ask to make an audio recording of one to three interviews with you around your lived experiences as a special educator. Your signature of this document constitutes permission for this audio recording. No one other than the researcher will have access to the recording(s) and they will be erased after the completion of the study. The interview will last no more than 2 hours. The interview will be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. If necessary, the researcher may request follow-up interviews to clarify or expand their knowledge on the subject and to check for accuracy of transcription and understanding of your interview responses and to co-construct meaning. You can decline to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. Simply tell the researcher that you do not wish to continue. If at any point in the interview you feel uncomfortable the interview session will terminate.

Your identity will be held confidential. Your name will not appear in the transcript of the interview nor will it appear in the analysis. Participants and interview notes will be coded numerically to ensure anonymity. Research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. The CSUSM Institutional Review Board may review records.

Because this is a research study, there may also be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable. There is however a small risk of a potential breach of confidentiality.

There will not be any direct benefit to you from participating in this study and you will receive no compensation. However, as incentives and recognition for meeting with the researcher and participating in the interview and the follow up member check, each interviewee will have a choice of receiving a \$10 Amazon or Starbucks gift certificate, a letter of appreciation, and a copy of the research study upon completion.

Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. There will be no cost to you for participating.

The researcher named above has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research- related problems you may reach Dr. Jacqueline Thousand at 760 750-4022. You may call the CSUSM Institutional Review Board at 760 750-4029 or email at irb@csusm.edu to inquire about your rights as a research subject or to report research-related problems.

You have received a copy of this consent document. You agree to participate.

Participant's signature

Date

The California State University

Bakersfield | Channel Islands | Chico | Dominguez Hills | East Bay | Fresno | Fullerton | Humboldt | Long
Beach | Los Angeles | Maritime Academy Monterey Bay | Northridge | Pomona | Sacramento | San Bernardino |
San Diego | San Francisco | San Jose | San Luis Obispo | San Marcos | Sonoma | Stanislaus

**APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWEE PREVIEW
AND USE**

1. Please describe who or what sparked your interest in becoming a special educator?
What are some of the key reasons you decided to go into the field?
2. To what extent did the job as a special educator turn out to be what you expected it to be?
 - 2a. What parts of the job turned out to be what you initially desired or thought?
 - 2b. What has been surprising or unexpected about the job?
 - 2c. What, if anything, has been disappointing or an unexpected challenge of the job?
 - 2d. When a challenge conflicts with your initial desire to be a special educator, how do you handle these moments?
3. Today, who or what inspires you as a special educator?
4. Please review the provided definition of *resilience* and take a moment to recall your special education teacher preparation program experience.
 - 4a. What in your teacher preparation program (e.g., courses, assignments, student teaching experiences, coaching, relationships) helped build your *resilience* as a special educator?
5. Being a special educator can be a very challenging job.
 - 5a. What are some things that you *do outside of work* to refresh and rejuvenate so you are ready to face another day at work?
 - 5b. *Outside of work*, are there *particular people* you connect with or seek out who help you *rejuvenate* or *reflect* on your role as a special educator? Could you describe who they are, how they help you, and what you do together?
 - 5c. *Outside of work*, what other activities or experiences have you participated in that help you to be resilient and successful at your job?
6. Could you describe your moments of greatest satisfaction as a special educator?
7. Please review the provided definition of *instrumental support*. Also, please take a moment to think about a typical week at work.
 - 7a. On a 5-point scale, where 1 = “I could care less,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important,” please rate how important *instrumental support* at work is to you. Score: ____ Could you explain your rating a little further?

- 7b.** What types of *instrumental support*, such as assistance with paperwork, do you seek and who provides or has provided you with instrumental support?
- 7c.** Who provides or has provided you with instrumental support? Could you please describe and provide an example of what that support looks and sounds like?
- 7d.** What *instrumental support* have you found to be most valuable and helpful to you getting your job done?
- 7e.** What *instrumental support*, if any, has been the least valuable?
8. Please review the definition of *informational support* and take a moment to think about a typical week or month at work.
- 8a.** On a 5-point scale, where “I could care less,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important,” please rate how important *informational support* at work is to you. Score: ____ Could you explain your rating a little further?
- 8b.** Who provides or has provided you with *informational support*? Please describe and provide an example of what that support looks and sounds like?
- 8c.** What *informational support* have you found to be most valuable and helpful to you keeping current?
- 8d.** What *informational support* has been the least valuable?
9. Please review the definition of *appraisal support* and take a moment to think about a typical week or month at work.
- 9a.** On a 5-point scale, where 1 = “I could care less,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important,” please rate how important *appraisal support* at work is to you. Score: ____ Could you explain your rating a little further?
- 9b.** What types of *appraisal support* (e.g., peer coaching) have you sought out?
- 9c.** Who has provided you with *appraisal support* that you considered valuable and useful? Could you describe what that appraisal support looked and sounded like?
- 9d.** What *appraisal support* has been the least valuable?
10. Please review the definition of *emotional support* and take a moment to think about a typical week at work.
- 10a.** On a 5-point scale, where 1 = “I could care less,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important,” please rate how important is *emotion support* at work is to you. Score: ____ Could you explain your rating a little further?

10b. At work, who provides or has provided you with *emotional support*? Please describe and provide an example of what that support looks and sounds like?

10c. What *emotional support* have you found to be most valuable and helpful to your well-being?

10d. What *emotional support* has been the least valuable?

11. Please review the provided definitions of *resilience* and *teaching efficacy*.

Administrative support has been found to influence teacher resilience and teaching efficacy.

11a. On a 5-point scale, where 1 = “I could care less,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important,” please rate how important *administrative support* at work is to you. Score: ____ Could you explain your rating a little further?

11b. Could you provide an example of when your school or other administrator provided you with support that you particularly appreciated or was particularly helpful? How would you say it affected your *resilience* and *teaching efficacy*?

11c. Please review the definitions of *appraisal, emotional, informational, and instrumental* support and think about the administrators you have had. Please rank in order the importance of receiving each type of support *from your administrator*?

1. Most important to receive from my administrator: _____ Why?

2. Second most important to receive from my administrator: _____ Why?

3. Third most important to receive from my administrator: _____ Why?

4. Least important to receive from my administrator: _____ Why?

12. Again please review the definitions of *resilience* and *teaching efficacy*. What professional or personal activities or experiences *outside of work* do you participate in or seek to bolster your *resilience* or *teaching efficacy*?

13. Collegial relations take many forms in schools – co-teaching, peer coaching programs, job-alike meetings among educators who share the same position.

13a. At work, are there particular people you connect with or seek out who help you get through the day or support you in some way in your role as a special educator? Could you describe who they are, how they help you, and/or what you do together?

13b. Please review the provided definitions of *resilience, teaching efficacy, and wellness*. Do any significant relationships at your workplace help or allow you to be

more *resilient* or *effective*? Could you describe the relationship(s) and how they help your *resilience*, *teaching efficacy*, or *wellness*?

14. *Special* educators and *other support personnel* (e.g., speech pathologists, psychologists, English language development teachers, paraprofessionals) have different roles in supporting student success, and have opportunities to partner and collaborate in various ways.

14a. Given your specific role as a special educator at your school, how would you rate the importance of your *relationships with other special educators and other support personnel*?

1 = “Not important,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important.”
Score: ____

14b. Could you explain your rating a little further? For example, how often and in what ways do you work with other special educators and support personnel?

14c. Would you say the overall relations among special educators and other support personnel at your school are *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral*? What would you say most influences these relations?

14d. In what ways, if any, do your personal or professional relationships with other special educators and support personnel affect your *resilience*, *teaching efficacy*, or *wellness*?

15. *General* and *special* educators also have different roles in supporting student success, and also have opportunities to partner and collaborate in various ways.

15a. Given your specific role as a special educator at your school, how would you rate the importance of your *relationships with general educators*?

1 = “Not important,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important.”
Score: ____

15b. Could you explain your rating a little further? For example, how often and in what ways do you work with general educators?

15c. Would you say the overall relations between general education and special education personnel at your school are *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral*? What would you say most influences these relations?

15d. In what ways, if any, do your personal or professional relationships with general educators affect your *resilience*, *teaching efficacy*, or *wellness*?

16. Could you please review the provided definitions of *resilience* and *wellness*? Some schools have instituted programs such as teaching about mindfulness to promote teacher wellness.

16a. Have you experienced any such program? If so, could you describe it? To what extent and in what ways did it affect your *resilience* or *wellness*?

17. How would you finish this sentence starter? “The part of my role as a special educator that is the most challenging or unsatisfying is...

18. How would you finish this sentence starter? “I come back to teaching in special education each day because...

19. I know it is hard to predict how many more years you intend to continue working as a special educator. But if you made a prediction in years, what would it be? What most influences this intention to stay or leave?

Definition of Terms Used in the Interview

Appraisal support - providing coaching and feedback or clarifying job responsibilities.

Emotional support - showing teachers they are esteemed and worthy of concern (e.g., showing appreciation, asking for and considering idea)

Informational support - providing professional development and current updates on best practice

Instrumental support - helping teachers to accomplish their work (e.g., paperwork)

Resilience - the capacity to continue to ‘bounce back,’ to recover strengths or spirits quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity. Resilient people manage feelings, stress, failure, and challenges in the workplace with optimism and success.

Teaching efficacy - the level of confidence and skill a teacher has in his or her ability to bolster student learning

Wellness - a person's self-understanding of what s/he needs for well-being and to cope with daily stressors

**APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH RESEARCH QUESTION AND
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ELEMENTS ADDRESSED BY EACH
QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTION NOTED**

1. Please describe who or what sparked your interest in becoming a special educator?
What are some of the key reasons you decided to go into the field? (Q1, Entering the field)
2. To what extent did the job as a special educator turn out to be what you expected it to be?
 - 2a.** What parts of the job turned out to be what you initially desired or thought? (Q1, Entering the field)
 - 2b.** What has been surprising or unexpected about the job? (Q1, Satisfaction)
 - 2c.** What, if anything, has been disappointing or an unexpected challenge of the job? (Q1, Satisfaction)
 - 2d.** When a challenge conflicts with your initial desire to be a special educator, how do you handle these moments? (Q1, Q4, Satisfaction)
3. Today, who or what inspires you as a special educator?
(Q1, and possibly Q2, Q3, & Satisfaction, depending upon the response)
4. Please review the definition of *resilience* and take a moment to recall your special education teacher preparation program experience. [Provide a moment for the interviewee to review the definition and recall his/her preparation program.] (Q2, Entering the field)
 - 4a.** What in your teacher preparation program (e.g., courses, assignments, student teaching experiences, coaching, relationships) helped build your *resilience* as a special educator? (Q2, Entering the field)
5. Being a special educator can be a very challenging job.
 - 5a.** What are some things that you *do outside of work* to refresh and rejuvenate so you are ready to face another day at work? (Q2 & Q4, Non-workplace Context)
 - 5b.** *Outside of work*, are there *particular people* you connect with or seek out who help you *rejuvenate* or *reflect* on your role as a special educator? Could you describe who they are, how they help you, and what you do together? (Q2 & Q4, Non-workplace Context)
 - 5c.** *Outside of work*, what other activities or experiences have you participated in that help you to be resilient and successful at your job?
6. Could you describe your moments of greatest satisfaction as a special educator? (Q1, Q3, Satisfaction) [Probe for a 2nd or 3rd if needed.]

7. Please review the definition of *instrumental support*. Also please take a moment to think about a typical week at work. [Provide a moment for the interviewee to review the definitions and think about his/her workplace.]
- 7a.** On a 5-point scale, where 1 = “I could care less,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important,” please rate how important *instrumental support* at work is to you. Score: ____ Could you explain your rating a little further? (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 7b.** What types of *instrumental support*, such as assistance with paperwork, do you seek and who provides or has provided you with instrumental support? (Q3, Q4, Workplace Context)
- 7c.** Who provides or has provided you with instrumental support? Could you please describe and provide an example of what that support looks and sounds like? [Probe for a 2nd and 3rd example.] (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 7d.** What *instrumental support* have you found to be most valuable and helpful to you getting your job done? (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 7e.** What *instrumental support*, if any, has been the least valuable? (Q3, Workplace Context)
8. Please review the definition of *informational support* and take a moment to think about a typical week or month at work. [Provide a moment for the interviewee to review the definition and think about his/her workplace.]
- 8a.** On a 5-point scale, where “I could care less,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important,” please rate how important *informational support* at work is to you. Score: ____ Could you explain your rating a little further? (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 8b.** Who provides or has provided you with *informational support*? Please describe and provide an example of what that support looks and sounds like? [Probe for a 2nd and 3rd example.] (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 8c.** What *informational support* have you found to be most valuable and helpful to you keeping current? (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 8d.** What *informational support* has been the least valuable? (Q3, Workplace Context)
9. Please review the definition of *appraisal support*. [Provide a moment for the interviewee to review the definition.]
- 9a.** On a 5-point scale, where 1 = “I could care less,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important,” please rate how important *appraisal support* at work is to you. Score: ____ Could you explain your rating a little further? (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 9b.** What types of *appraisal support* (e.g., peer coaching) have you sought out? (Q3, Q4, Workplace Context)

- 9c.** Who has provided you with *appraisal support* that you considered valuable and useful? Could you describe what that appraisal support looked and sounded like? [Probe for a 2nd and 3rd example.] (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 9d.** What *appraisal support* has been the least valuable? (Q3, Workplace Context)
10. Please review the definition of *emotional support* and take a moment to think about a typical week at work. [Provide a moment for the interviewee to review the definition and think about his/her workplace.]
- 10a.** On a 5-point scale, where 1 = “I could care less,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important,” please rate how important is *emotion support* at work is to you. Score: ____ Could you explain your rating a little further? (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 10b.** At work, who provides or has provided you with *emotional support*? Please describe and provide an example of what that support looks and sounds like? [Probe for a 2nd and 3rd example.] (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 10c.** What *emotional support* have you found to be most valuable and helpful to your well-being? (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 10d.** What *emotional support* has been the least valuable? (Q, Workplace Context)
11. Please review the definitions of *resilience* and *teaching efficacy*.
- Administrative support has been found to influence teacher resilience and teaching efficacy.
- 11a.** On a 5-point scale, where 1 = “I could care less,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important,” please rate how important is *administrative support* at work is to you. Score: ____ Could you explain your rating a little further? (Q3, Workplace Context, Personal Resiliency Attributes)
- 11b.** Could you provide an example of when your school or other administrator provided you with support that you particularly appreciated or was particularly helpful? How would you say it affected your *resilience* and *teaching efficacy*? (Q3, Q4, Workplace Context, Personal Resiliency Attributes) [Probe for a 2nd and 3rd example.]
- 11c.** Please review the definitions of *appraisal, emotional, informational, and instrumental* support and think about the administrators who have had. Please rank order the importance of receiving each type of support *from your administrator*? (Q3, Q4, Satisfaction, Workplace Context, Personal Resiliency Attributes)
1. Most important to receive from my administrator: _____ Why?
 2. Second most important to receive from my administrator: _____ Why?
 3. Third most important to receive from my administrator: _____ Why?
 4. Least important to receive from my administrator: _____ Why?

12. Again please review the definitions of *resilience* and *teaching efficacy*.
- 12a.** What professional activities or experiences *outside of work* do you participate in or seek to bolster your *resilience* or *teaching efficacy*? (Q2, Q4, Non-Workplace Context, Personal Resiliency Attributes)
- 12b.** What personal activities or experiences *outside of work* do you participate in or seek to bolster your *resilience* or *teaching efficacy*? (Q2, Q4, Non-Workplace Context, Personal Resiliency Attributes)
13. Collegial relations take many forms in schools – co-teaching, peer coaching programs, job-alike meetings among educators who share the same position.
- 13a.** At work, are there particular people you connect with or seek out who help you get through the day or support you in some way in your role as a special educator? Could you describe who they are, how they help you, and/or what you do together? (Q2 & Q4, Workplace Context)
- 13b.** Please review the definitions of *resilience*, *teaching efficacy*, and *wellness*. Do any significant relationships at your workplace help or allow you to be more *resilient* or *effective*? Could you describe the relationship(s) and how they help your *resilience*, *teaching efficacy*, or *wellness*? (Q4, Workplace Context, Personal Resiliency Attributes)
14. *Special* educators and *other support personnel* (e.g., speech pathologists, psychologists, English language development teachers, paraprofessionals) have different roles in supporting student success, and have opportunities to partner and collaborate in various ways. At the beginning of the interview, you estimated that you consulted and co-taught with others ___% of the time.
- 14a.** Given your specific role as a special educator at your school, how would you rate the importance of your *relationships with other special educators and other support personnel*?
1 = “Not important,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important.”
Score:___ (Q3, Satisfaction)
- 14b.** Could you explain your rating a little further? For example, how often and in what ways do you work with other special educators and support personnel? (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 14c.** Would you say the overall relations among special educators and other support personnel at your school are *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral*? What would you say most influences these relations? (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 14d.** In what ways, if any, do your personal or professional relationships with other special educators and support personnel affect your *resilience*, *teaching efficacy*, or *wellness*? [Please feel free to review the definitions.] (Q3, Q4, Workplace Context, Personal Resiliency Attributes)
15. *General* and *special* educators also have different roles in supporting student success, and also have opportunities to partner and collaborate in various ways.

- 15a.** Given your specific role as a special educator at your school, how would you rate the importance of your *relationships with general educators*? (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 1 = “Not important,” 3 = “Somewhat important,” and 5 = “Extremely important.”
Score: _____
- 15b.** Could you explain your rating a little further? For example, how often and in what ways do you work with general educators? (Q3, Workplace Context)
- 15c.** Would you say the overall relations between general education and special education personnel at your school are *positive, negative, or neutral*? What would you say most influences these relations? (Q3, Workplace Context, Personal Resiliency Attributes)
- 15d.** In what ways, if any, do your personal or professional relationships with general educators affect your *resilience, teaching efficacy, or wellness*? [Please feel free to review the definitions.] (Q3, Q4, Workplace Context, Personal Resiliency Attributes)
16. Could you please review the definitions of *resilience* and *wellness*? Some schools have instituted programs such as teaching about mindfulness to promote teacher wellness. Have you experienced any such program? If so, could you describe it? To what extent and in what ways did it effect your *resilience* or *wellness*? (Q3, Q4, Workplace Context)
17. We are almost to the end of the interview. Again, thank you so much for your time and thoughtful and detailed responses. Before we end, I am curious as to how you finish this sentence starter: “The part of my role as a special educator that is the most challenging or unsatisfying is...(Q1, Q3, Satisfaction) [Probe for a 2nd and 3rd with “Is there anything else?”]
18. Now, let’s reverse the sentence starter. How would you finish this starter? “I come back to teaching in special education each day because... (Q1, Q3, Satisfaction) [Probe for a 2nd and 3rd with “Is there anything else?”]
19. I know it is hard to predict how many more years you intend to continue working as a special educator. But if you made a prediction in years, what would it be? _____
What most influences this intention to stay or leave? (Q1, Q3, Satisfaction, Intention)
20. Is there anything else you would like to add or comment on that I have not already asked? (Closure)

Possible Probes to Prompt Elaboration of Responses:

You mentioned _____. Could you give me more information or details about it?

Could you give me an/another example of _____?

Could you give me an/another example of when that has happened?

Would you share why? Why not?

What about _____ [refer to a part of the question not yet addressed]?

How does that effect you? Or Has that had any effect on you?

APPENDIX J: MEMBER CHECK EXPLANATION AND DIRECTIONS

Dear _____,

Thank you for your continued participation in this research study. Your time and participation is invaluable to the field of special education, education policy, and to educational leaders in understanding the resilience factors that create resilience in special educators to remain in the field.

Your interview has been transcribed by the researcher and asks that you now member-check the transcription. This is voluntary, but a very important part of the process. Member checking is the process of you, the member/participant, checking the transcribed interview data for accuracy. If there is any of the transcribed data you wish to edit please follow the below directions to edit the transcription using the track changes feature of the Review function of Microsoft Word or Apple's Pages. If you desire further assistance in the member check process please call the researcher, Brienne Downing at 619-873-7860 or email her at brienne.downing@gmail.com.

Track Changes Directions for Microsoft Word

1. Download the transcription of your interview that was emailed by the researcher.
2. Open the downloaded document in Microsoft Word.
3. To insert comments highlight the word(s)/phrase(s) you want to comment on.
4. Click the tab labeled "insert" and then select "comment." A red comment box will appear with the word(s)/phrase(s) you selected highlighted in red. Continue this steps for any additional comments.
5. For further tools for commenting please select the tab labeled "view." Scroll down and select "toolbars," and a side bar with options will extend to the right; select "reviewing."

A tool bar should appear at the top of your page showing a comment tab and track changes tab. You can then click directly on the “new comment” tab with ease to make comments on the transcription.

Track Changes in Apple’s Pages

1. Download the transcription of your interview that was emailed by the researcher.
 2. Open the downloaded document in Apple’s Pages.
 3. To insert comments highlight the word(s)/phrase(s) you want to comment on.
 4. Click the tab labeled “insert” and then select “comment.” A yellow comment box/bubble will appear with the word(s)/phrase(s) you selected highlighted in red. Continue this steps for any additional comments. When you are done just click anywhere on your document and the box/bubble will close, but a yellow box will appear on the left side of the page where you put your comment.
 5. For further tools for commenting please select the tab labeled “edit.” Scroll down and select “track changes.” A tool bar should appear at the top of your page showing a plus sign for adding comments; the default color is yellow, but you can change the color by clicking on the ‘sun’ icon on the track changes toolbar and scrolling down and choosing “author color;” various colors will appear for you to choose from for your commenting.
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