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The Resiliency of Veteran Preschool Special Education Teachers

A Dissertation by
Monisola Komolafe

Brandman University
Irvine, California
School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

January 2019

Committee in charge:

Laurie Wellner, EdD, Committee Chair

Marylou Wilson, EdD

Robin Pierson, EdD

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY

Chapman University System

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

The dissertation of Monisola Komolafe is approved.


_____, Dissertation Chair
Laurie Wellner, EdD


_____, Committee Member
Marylou Wilson, EdD


_____, Committee Member
Robin Pierson, EdD


_____, Associate Dean
Patricia Clark-White, EdD

January 2019

The Resiliency of Veteran Preschool Special Education Teachers

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For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall
– *Psalm 18:29*

My gratitude first goes to my Lord Jesus for seeing me through this journey. It was challenging but He remained faithful.

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This journey would not have been possible without the support of my children Adetunke, Adedamola, and Opeyemi, and family who trusted and supported me. My uncle, Chief. Akin Akinola, provided the foundation on which I continue to build. I love you, Baba! To my friend, Adefunmilola, thank you for always reminding me a graduation party was in the making. To my church family, thank you for supporting me and excusing my absences from all special events. Thank you all so much for supporting me to achieve my dream.

Finally, I am indebted to all the veteran preschool special education teachers who took the time to participate in the study and all the resilient preschool special education teachers who stay true to their passion and continue to utilize all available resources to remain resilient and committed to the field of early childhood special education.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my resilient mother, Henrietta Komolafe, who sowed a seed of resilience and greatness in me. Here I am, paying my debt 36 years later.

To live in the heart of those we love is never to die (Campbell); you will forever be in my heart!

Rest on Mama!

ABSTRACT

The Resiliency of Veteran Preschool Special Education Teachers

by Monisola Komolafe

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the perceived factors that led to the resiliency and retention of veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools in California.

Methodology: This study utilized a phenomenological design to gain insight into the perceived factors influencing veteran preschool special education teachers' resiliency and career decision to continue teaching in the field of special education for at least 10 years. Using snowball sampling, 12 preschool teachers employed in public schools in Solano County with at least 10 years of experience were selected to participate in the study. Qualitative data were obtained from participants using semi-structured interviews.

Findings: Participants identified four major factors as integral to their resiliency in the field: personal strategies, positive emotions, peer support, and mentoring. Furthermore, the teachers reported job satisfaction, administrative support, motivation, and prior experience and formal preparation had a significant influence on their career decision to remain in the field.

Conclusions: Based on the findings of this study, four main conclusions were drawn. First, the impacts of teaching challenges can be minimized by utilizing appropriate strategies. Second, positive relationships between teachers and their peers, mentors, and administrators are needed for teachers to develop resilience. Third, intrinsic motivation to teach helps them continue teaching despite crises. Finally, prior experience and formal preparation are significant for teacher retention.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The field of special education witnessed significant legal battles, policy reforms, and initiatives in providing quality public education to all students with disabilities (Kauffman, Hirsch, Badar, Wiley, & Barber, 2014; Reichow, Barton, Boyd, & Odom, 2016). The outcomes of various initiatives are yet to be realized due to chronic shortages of certified special education teachers across the nation (Billingsley & McLeskey, 2004; McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004). The short supply of special educators is deemed long-standing, continual, and chronic (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & May, 2011). The inability to hire and retain qualified teachers is widely documented in the literature (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley & McLeskey, 2004; Nichols, Bicard, Bicard, & Casey 2008; Sack, 1999; Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). Attrition is a major cause of teacher shortage (Ingersoll, 2001). Ingersoll (2001) reported an inadequate supply of qualified teachers exists because teachers exit the field at an unprecedented rate, leading to a greater demand for teachers than supply.

Numerous attempts to address the issue of special education teacher attrition focused on teachers who left, but all to no avail (Billingsley, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Day & Gu, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007). After many unsuccessful strategies and methodologies, a shift emerged in the literature to focus on special education teachers who remained in the profession instead of those who left, which formed the bulk of existing retention and attrition literature (Billingsley, 2005; Gu & Day, 2007). Although special education teachers continue to leave teaching, some continue teaching despite all the challenges associated with the profession (Billingsley, 2005; Gu & Day, 2007). In

understanding why they remain resolute despite the same adversities others succumbed to, the notion of resilience is significant (Bobek, 2002; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

Resilience was initially coined in the fields of psychiatry and psychology to describe experiences of children who displayed positive life outcomes despite all adverse conditions to which they were exposed (Rutter, 1990). Though at-risk children were predisposed to display negative life outcomes, they in-turn overcame and overturned those experiences (Rutter, 1990). Efforts of researchers to understand the phenomenon led to various insights and definitions of resilience (Bernard, 1991; Masten et al., 1990; Werner & Smith, 1992). Resiliency development is attributed to many factors, including personal, environmental, and protective factors and the interaction between factors (Bernard, 1991; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Masten et al., 1990).

Due to the multi-dimensional nature of resilience, researchers are yet to agree on the appropriate definition of teacher resilience (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). Therefore, many dimensions and definitions of the concept exist. Resiliency development among teachers is a factor of individual characteristics (Watt & Richardson, 2012). Research showed individual teacher motivation and commitment are integral to resiliency development; other researchers identified self-efficacy and confidence as important teacher attributes needed for resiliency development (Castro, Kelly & Shih, 2009). Still other researchers identified teacher individual coping skills as important to resiliency development (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Day and Gu (2009) stated teachers develop resiliency because of interactions between teacher variables and their external home and work environments. According to them, teachers' ability to manage the interaction between the variables is dependent on their professional life phases and identity (Day &

Gu, 2009). Bobek (2002) commented that during the process of resiliency development, teachers equally acquire needed teaching competency.

Some existing studies identified factors protecting teachers against adverse teaching conditions (Mackenzie, 2012). Mackenzie (2012) discovered teachers who perceived they fulfill a higher calling were resilient. Having strong relationships outside of work and taking pride in self-actualization were equally influential in resiliency development among teachers (Mackenzie, 2012). Experiencing daily doses of positive emotions was also a requirement for resiliency development among teachers (Morgan, Ludlow, Kitching, O'Leary, & Clarke, 2010).

Teacher resiliency development is a function of a variety of factors, including aging factors (Day & Gu, 2009). Similar resiliency development themes emerge among special education teachers (Hong, 2012). Cunningham's (2015) study to determine the resiliency of veteran special education teachers revealed protective factors influencing teacher decisions to remain in the field of special education. Protective factors included personal characteristics, the ethic of care, positive and supportive relationships with professional peers, and years of teaching experience (Cunningham, 2015).

Background

This section describes the background of the research. It examines the advent of special education and early childhood special education in public schools in the United States and the implications for retention of qualified early childhood special education teachers. The role of resiliency development on retention of teachers of students with disabilities is examined based on the conceptual frameworks of Frederickson's (2001)

Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions and Billingsley's (2005) Leadership Framework.

Advent of Special Education in Public Schools in the United States

Public education was made mandatory for all school-aged students across the country by the enactment of the 10th amendment to the United States Constitution in 1791 (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Prior to the Constitution of the United States, education was encouraged and financially supported by the federal government (Jenkins & Hill, 2011). Despite the enactment, disabled students were denied enrollment at public schools in America (Yell et al., 1998). The advances and activities of many advocacy groups, parents, and concerned citizens gave rise to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) in 1975 with many amendments since then. Of significance was Public Law 99-452 of 1986 mandating early intervention and educational services to children between the ages of three and five. The legislation specified the rights of students with disabilities to a quality public education in their natural environments and active parental involvement among other educational provisions (Lloyd & Lloyd, 2015). The need for appropriate techniques and services in meeting the needs of disabled students was also established (Keogh, 2007). It is pertinent to examine how the legislation affects the provision of services to infants, toddlers, and most especially preschoolers with special needs.

Early childhood special education in public schools in the United States. The fields of early childhood special education and special education share some similarities (McLean, 2016). The division of early childhood special education equally witnessed extensive advancement of advocacy and public involvement demanding the rights of

children with disabilities. The amendment of 1986, Public Law 99-457, stipulated provision of education services to all children with special needs aged three to five, as well as a comprehensive system of early intervention from birth to three. Public Law 94-142 (passed in 1975 and enacted in 1977) provided for free and appropriate public education for children 3 to 21 years (McLean, 2016), with special reference to the appropriateness and timeliness of provisions in determining the outcomes of young children with disabilities (Silverstein, 1988). Employing and keeping qualified early childhood teachers to carry out these objectives has been an arduous task (Billingsley, 2004, 2005; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999).

Early childhood special education personnel shortages. The major factor mitigating against quality service delivery to children with disabilities remains personnel shortages (Kasprzak et al., 2012). As the nation continues to witness a chronic dearth of qualified early childhood special education teachers, it is impossible to achieve the objective stipulated in Public law 99-457 and subsequent amendments (National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center [NECTAC], 2011). Tyler and Brunner (2014) reported close to one million U.S. school children with disabilities were either receiving services from unqualified personnel or not receiving services at all. The shortage of qualified special education teachers has significant effects on students with disabilities (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; McLeskey et al., 2004).

The implications of an inadequate supply of certified early childhood special education teachers included “inadequate education experiences for students, reduction in students’ achievement levels and insufficient competence of graduates in the workplace” (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996, p. 204). Billingsley (2005) opined the quality of

education received by students with special needs was significantly impacted by teacher attrition and shortages because replacements were usually less qualified. Furthermore, ongoing school efforts were also disrupted to attend to the crisis of teacher shortages (Billingsley, 2005). Additionally, the costs of replacing qualified teachers and supporting newly hired teachers are exorbitant (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Teachers who remain share in the burden of teacher attrition because they are compelled to provide additional support, training, and mentorship to the newly hired (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wychoff, 2012). The services and programs available to stayers are streamlined to accommodate increasing costs of new teacher recruitment. Also, the overall school climate is equally impacted by teacher turn-over (Hanselman, Grigg, Brunch, & Gamoran, 2011, as stated in Ronfeldt et al., 2012). Therefore, the effect of teacher attrition is global to the teaching community at large (Ronfeldt et al., 2012). As such, it is imperative to employ and retain licensed early childhood special education teachers in the classrooms to prevent identified and impending challenges.

Special Education Teacher Retention

Retaining qualified special education teachers continues to be an arduous task for leaders in the field of special education (Beltman et al., 2011; Billingsley, 2004, 2005). As such, it is critical to examine the characteristics of the teachers who remain in the field to proffer solutions to the retention problems (Billingsley, 2003).

Characteristics of stayers. Billingsley (2005) found special education teachers with tenure were more likely to stay in the field compared to their early career counterparts. Teacher career decisions to remain in the field were also found to be dependent on school climate and administrative support (Billingsley, 2004; Cross &

Billingsley, 1994; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Miller et al., 1999).

Other factors critical to special education teachers' career decisions to stay in the field were collegial support, professional development, and various roles performed by teachers (Gersten et al., 2001).

Factors influencing special education teacher attrition are well documented in the literature, but limited research exists on factors motivating them to remain (Cunningham, 2015; Henderson, 2014). Studies showed focusing on factors motivating special education teachers to stay in the field could provide long-lasting and fruitful solutions for retention (Hong, 2012).

Factors influencing stayers to stay. The work of Henderson (2014) on factors influencing experienced special education teachers to stay in the field revealed four important retention factors: the joy of teaching, making a difference in student lives, district-level administrative support, and support from other special education teachers. Other factors influencing special education teacher career decisions were stress, job satisfaction, and commitment (Billingsley, 2004, 2005). Special education teacher retention was also associated with a high sense of commitment and job satisfaction, and reduced stress (Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Gersten et al., 2001).

Consistent with existing research, administrative support is a dominant factor predicting retention among teachers working with challenging students (CCBD, 2007, as cited by Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013). Cancio et al. (2013) pointed out supportive principals and work environments were influential on career longevity among special education teachers. However, Cancio et al. (2013) believed teacher decisions to exit or remain in the field were a function of individual decisions and personal factors as

opposed to environmental factors. Based on the literature, it is pertinent to ask why some teachers did well under the same stressful conditions when others left the field.

Resilience

The idea of resilience originated from the fields of psychiatry and psychology to describe characteristics of children who overcame adverse life stressors that could have ended their lives (Werner, 1995). Pioneers in the field of human development focused on vulnerability of children to environmental conditions that predisposed them to unfavorable life results (Rutter, 1980, as cited by Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999). A shift emerged in child development literature that focused on attributes of children who overturned the exposed risk factors to display positive life outcomes (Werner & Smith, 1992). Although children are the subject of existing resilience studies, some similarities exist among emerging adult resiliency studies (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Studies showed adult resiliency development as an active, continuous process influenced by multiple social factors (Gu & Day, 2007, 2013). Teacher resilience can also be learned and not necessarily a personal attribute (Day & Gu, 2007).

Resilience is widely described and defined in the literature. One definition was a “set of qualities or protective factors that buffer the effects of adverse conditions which leads to positive life outcomes” (Bernard, 1991, p. 41). Rather than qualities or protective factors, Masten et al. (1990) defined resilience as the “process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 426). Rather than a psychological trait or fixed attribute, Rutter (1990) commented resiliency was developed from the interaction between competencies present in individuals and support they receive from their family and community at large. Rutter

(1990) concluded the interactions between these two produced cushioning against adverse environmental conditions.

Unlike child resiliency, teacher resiliency is considered a function of work and personal lives. One study showed “leadership trust, positive feedback from parents and students, and in-school support” are critical to teacher resiliency development (Day & Gu, 2013). Resilience development is also influenced by the strength of teachers’ moral convictions and ethical values (Brunetti, 2006). Rather than a single episodic event recovering from adversity, teacher resilience is continuous and required daily for teachers to sustain their commitment and effectiveness (Day & Gu, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Studies showed resiliency development among special education teachers is an essential component of successful teacher retention, so it is important to promote resiliency development among teachers of students with special needs (Bobek, 2002; Gu & Day, 2007). Two important conceptual frameworks were employed to guide the direction of this study, Frederickson’s (2004) Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions and Billingsley’s (2005) Leadership Framework.

Frederickson’s (2004) Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions stated positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment, pride, and love are capable of widening individual “thought-action repertoires. Thereby build the enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources” (p. 3). Individuals who experience positive emotions draw on resources (physical, intellectual, social, and psychological) for successful adaptation and survival

(Day & Gu, 2013). The theory was relevant to this study because positive emotions bred resilience (Day & Gu, 2013).

The Leadership Framework focused on factors that influence retention of special education teachers (Billingsley, 2005). Billingsley (2005) stated quality teacher retention requires finding and promoting the growth of high-quality special educators competent and eligible to provide quality instruction to students with special needs. Additionally, retention in special education requires developing a positive work environment that supports teachers to do their jobs effectively for a substantial length of time (Billingsley, 2005). According to Billingsley (2005), these factors include (1) employing highly qualified special educators, (2) supporting beginning teachers through responsive induction and mentoring program, and (3) providing meaningful professional development.

Role of Resilience on Teacher Retention

Existing studies alluded to the positive role of resiliency on teacher retention (Bobek, 2002; Hong, 2012). Resilient teachers were found to respond to stressful situations by employing appropriate techniques and therefore became competent and satisfied with their jobs (Gu & Day, 2007; Hong, 2012; Howard & Johnson, 2004). Findings from Hong (2012) about the differences in resilience between teachers who stayed versus teachers who exited revealed stayers demonstrated greater efficacy beliefs, asked for assistance when needed, and set appropriate boundaries in their relationships with students. As such, Hong (2012) depicted resilience as a process as opposed to protective factors.

Role of Resilience on Special Education Teacher Retention

Cunningham (2015) discovered six main themes as he explored factors influencing resilience development and retention of veteran special education teachers. His findings revealed personal characteristics, ethics of care toward students, and supportive peer relationship as integral to teacher resiliency development. Other factors included desire to remain committed, teacher tenure, and longevity (Cunningham, 2015).

Experienced special education teachers are usually considered more resilient than early career special education teachers (Billingsley, 2005). Day and Gu (2009) argued motivation, resilience, and commitment of experienced special education teachers could be impacted by continuous change in education laws, standards, policy reforms, and leadership structures, as well as the normal process of aging.

Gap in the Literature

Existing studies focused on factors influencing special education teachers' decisions to exit the field, but limited studies exist to describe factors that motivate other special education teachers to remain in the field (Cunningham, 2015; Henderson, 2014; Hong, 2012; Leahy, 2012). Similarly, studies on child resiliency can be traced a few decades back, but research on teacher and special education teacher resiliency is relatively new and emerging (Bobek, 2002; Sotomayor, 2012).

Billingsley (2003) recommend an in-depth study of stayers to provide a better understanding of resilience and retention. Similarly, existing research focused on special education teachers in general, whereas research on specific units within special education, such as early childhood special education, is scant (Singer, 1992).

Statement of the Research Problem

The field of special education continues to witness an inadequate supply of certified teachers for students with disabilities. Beginning special education teachers leave their jobs in large numbers by their fifth job anniversary (Ingersoll, 2001). Consequently, the high attrition rate among special education teachers is a major cause of the special education teacher shortage across the nation (McLeskey et al., 2004).

Although many teachers of students with special needs exited the field, others chose to remain (Billingsley, 2003; Greenfield, 2015; Nieto, 2015). The notion of resilience helped in understanding the decision of stayers to remain. Resilient teachers were found to remain competent and committed because of their ability to respond appropriately to classroom stressors and life in general (Gu & Day, 2007; Hong, 2012; Howard & Johnson, 2004). Findings from Hong (2012) on differences in resilience between teachers who exited and those who remained in the field revealed stayers demonstrates greater efficacy beliefs, asked for assistance when needed, and set appropriate boundaries with students.

Existing studies focused on factors influencing special education teachers to exit the field, but few studies describe experiences of special education teachers who continued in the field (Cunningham, 2015; Henderson, 2014; Hong, 2012; Leahy, 2012). A comprehensive study of stayers who remain in the field was recommended by Billingsley (2003) to understand resiliency and retention factors among teachers. Similarly, Cunningham (2015) recommended further exploration of special education teacher resilience that influences their career decisions to stay in the field of special education, paying close attention to their experiences.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the experiences and perceived factors that led to the resiliency and retention of veteran preschool special education teachers in the field of early childhood special education.

Research Questions

One central research question and two sub-questions guided this study:

Central Question

What experiences of veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education?

Sub-questions

1. What factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their resiliency in the field of early childhood special education?
2. What factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their retention in the field of early childhood special education?

Significance of the Problem

Teacher resiliency is considered essential for developing and sustaining a quality workforce in the field of education (Bobek, 2002). The field of special education especially witnessed significant teacher turnover recent decades due to the stressful nature of the profession (Billingsley, 2005; Hamama, Ronen, Shachar, & Rosenbaum, 2013; Kyriacou, 2001). Teacher stress is a major factor mitigating against special

education teacher retention (Bobek, 2002), and the cost of teacher attrition is enormous (Gibbs & Miller, 2014; Howard & Johnson, 2004).

Although many special education teachers exit the field, others stay (Day & Gu, 2009; Greenfield, 2015; Nieto, 2015). These stayers develop the resiliency needed to remain in the field because of the personal, familial, and contextual factors that protect them from the harsh effects of work stressors (Day & Gu, 2009). It is imperative to examine factors that promote resiliency of veteran special education teachers who stay to proffer a long-lasting solution to special education teacher attrition (Day & Gu, 2009; Muller, Gorrow, & Fiala, 2011). According to Gu (2014), resilience is the capacity to overcome and survive the challenges of teaching and to overcome and bounce back daily and continuously.

The benefits of this study are three-fold. First, the findings highlight the perspectives of veteran preschool special education teachers on factors that promote their resiliency in the field. The findings also offered new perspectives on existing literature mostly devoted to early career special education teachers (Day & Gu, 2009; Gu, 2014). Second, the findings provide school administrators, special education leaders, and policymakers with essential tools for promoting the retention of preschool special education teachers. Lastly, this study provides insights into promoting the resiliency and retention of teachers from the specific division of early special education.

Definitions

The following definitions were provided to offer a clear understanding of terms used in the study.

Disabilities. Physical or mental conditions affecting learning.

Early Childhood Special Education. The arm of special education focused on providing specialized instruction to children with disabilities between the ages of zero and five years.

Leavers. Teachers who leave the teaching profession early in their career to pursue other opportunities.

Preschool Special Education. The division of special education providing specialized instruction to students with disabilities between the ages of three and five. Specialized instruction can be provided at home or in a setting, but the focus of this study was the public school setting.

Special Education. The field of education providing services, instruction, and support to address the individualized needs of students with disabilities (Bateman & Linden, 2006).

Special Education Teachers. Teachers trained to provide customized instruction to students with disabilities as determined by their individualized education program (IEP). This category excluded other specialized service providers.

Stayers. Teachers who remain in the teaching profession.

Teacher Attrition. Teachers leaving the field of education, which may entail special education teachers leaving the profession or transferring to general education (Billingsley, 2005).

Teacher Resilience. Teacher motivation and commitment to remain in the teaching profession despite professional and personal challenges and trauma (Masten et al., 1990).

Teacher Retention. Keeping teachers in the field of education (Billingsley, 2005). For this study, retention pertained to special education teachers who either remained in the same teaching assignments for a considerable length of time or transferred to different assignments within the field of special education.

Veteran Teacher. Someone teaching in the field of education for an extended period (Day & Gu, 2009). The specificity of the length of experience was absent in the literature to qualify teachers as veterans or otherwise. Although some authors classified teachers with 24 or more years of experience as veterans (Day & Gu, 2009), others classified teachers with eight years of experience as veterans (Teitelbaum, 2008). For this study, veteran teachers were those with 10 or more years of experience.

Delimitations

This phenomenological study was delimited to preschool special education teachers working in public school districts within Solano County, California. The study was also delimited to veteran preschool special education teachers working with preschool special education students for 10 or more years.

Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. The current chapter examined the background of special education and early childhood special education, teacher retention, and resilience. It also introduced the purpose of the study and its research questions. Chapter II reviews the existing literature on special education teacher resilience and retention. The research design, methodology, and analysis are described in Chapter III. Chapter IV presents and analyzes the findings from the study, and finally, the study is summarized with conclusions and recommendations in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Numerous studies identified the reasons why teachers leave the field, but few focused on teachers who remained in the field (Day & Gu, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007). The need to focus on special education teachers who remained in the field became apparent in the 21st century (Beltman et al., 2011; Billingsley, 2005; Feng & Sass, 2009; Gu & Day, 2007). To understand why some special education teachers remain committed to teaching students with special needs, the notion of resilience is significant (Day & Gu, 2009, 2013). Day and Gu (2013) found resilience as an integral component of special education teacher retention. Many studies showed the need for resilience to successfully teach for an extended period (Bobek, 2002; Castro et al., 2010; Howard & Johnson, 2004; McKenzie, 2012).

The goal of this literature review was to examine the history of special education and early childhood special education in the United States, and the perceived factors that influence the retention of special education teachers. Research identified resilience as an integral factor in the retention of special education teachers (Day & Gu, 2013), so the review further examines the definitions of teacher resilience and its perceived influence on retention of special education teachers. The review also considers the perceived factors that influenced resiliency and retention of preschool special educators. Furthermore, this chapter describes the conceptual framework that guides the study.

In gathering relevant information for the review, the researcher searched related databases using the terms special education, special education teacher retention, special education teacher resiliency, and early childhood special education as variables. The researcher reviewed scholarly journal articles, textbooks, and dissertations.

Conceptual Framework

The objective of this study was to identify and describe the perceived factors that influenced veteran preschool special education teachers to continue teaching in the field. Two conceptual frameworks guided the study: Billingsley's (2005) Leadership Framework and Frederickson's (2004) Broaden and Build Theory of Emotions. The Leadership Framework focused on factors that influence retention of special education teachers (Billingsley, 2005) whereas the Broaden and Build Theory of Emotions provided understanding in how positive emotions become influential in overcoming the effects of negative events and developing resilience (Frederickson, 2004).

The Leadership Framework

Billingsley's (2005) Leadership Framework (Figure 1) depicts that quality teacher retention requires finding and promoting the growth of competent special educators who are provide high-quality instruction to students with special needs. Additionally, special education retention requires developing a positive work environment that supports teachers to do their jobs effectively for a substantial length of time (Billingsley, 2005).

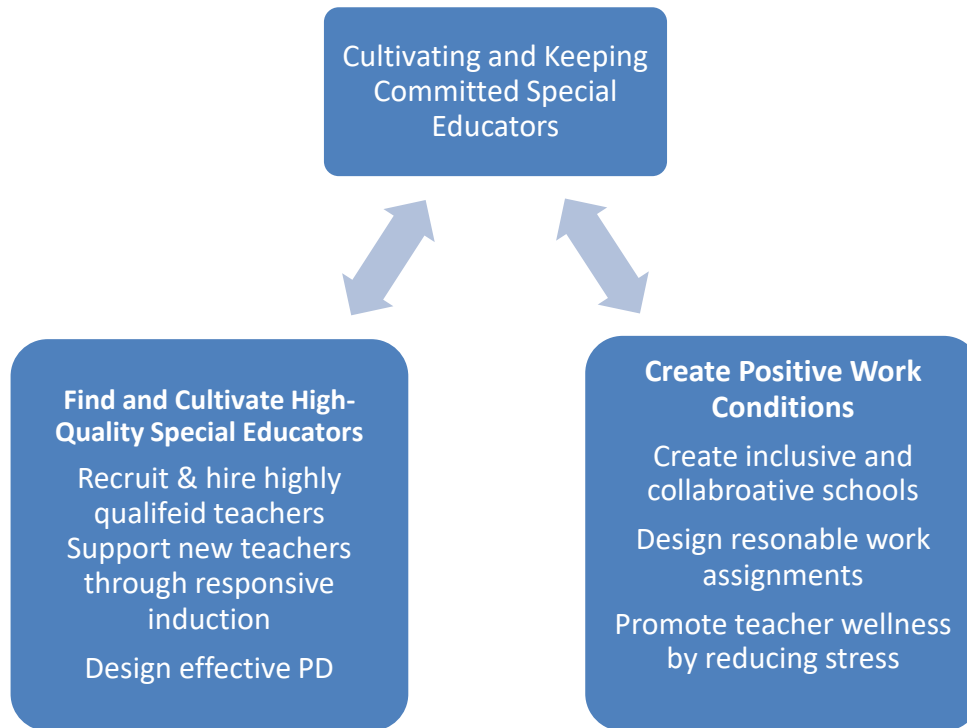


Figure 1. Billingsley leadership framework.

The framework indicates special education teacher retention efforts should focus on the two dimensions because retention is impossible to achieve without both (Boe, 2014; Carr, 2009). According to Billingsley (2005), employing high-quality teachers does not guarantee retention nor does positive work conditions, although both are strong predictors of teacher retention. Similarly, research showed recruiting quality special education teachers is insufficient, although important, to ensure teachers remain committed to the field for a substantial length of time (Belknap & Taymans, 2015; Boe et al., 2011). However, to hire and retain high quality educators, Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, and Darling-Hammond (2017) suggested district leaders must devote time and resources to the hiring process so the right candidates are selected for the right positions.

Similarly, Gu and Day (2007) coined the notion of quality retention which describing sustained teacher commitment to their teaching career. According to Gu and Day (2007), it is possible for a teacher to lose their passion and drive for teaching but continue to teach, leading to dwindled student achievement and unproductive retention. The Leadership Framework identified factors that ensure the identification and development of high-quality special education teachers who stay committed to the field for a considerable period (Billingsley, 2005). According to Billingsley (2005), these factors include: (1) employing highly qualified special educators, (2) supporting beginning teachers through responsive induction and mentoring programs, and (3) providing meaningful professional development.

The Broaden and Build Theory of Emotions

Frederickson (2001, 2004) described resilience as a psychological construct. Frederickson's (2004) theory of emotions provided understanding in how positive emotions become influential in overcoming the effects of negative events. Humans have the capacity to exhibit both negative and positive emotions that are complementary, adaptive, and psychological. Positive emotions include joy, interest, and love whereas negative emotions include fear, anger, anxiety, and sadness. An individual's available thoughts/actions selections are narrow and limited when experiencing negative emotions whereas a boundless range of selections are possible during positive emotional experiences (Frederickson, 2001, 2004).

The Broaden and Build Theory of Emotions further stated that as individuals continue to experience positive emotions, they build long-lasting physical, intellectual, and social resources. These resources are stored up as reserves from which individuals

can draw during moments of emotional threats to ensure growth and resilience (Frederickson, 2004). Studies showed individuals experiencing positive emotions demonstrated creativity, open-mindedness, flexibility, and integration (Isen, 2000; Isen & Daubman, 1984). Frederickson and Losada (2005) asserted “because the broaden and build effects of positive affect accumulate and compound over time, positivity can transform individuals for the better, making them healthier, more socially integrated, knowledgeable, effective and resilient” (p. 680).

Because of the array of possibilities in thoughts, actions, and behaviors available to individuals experiencing positive emotions, they are more flexible to adapt to changes in their environment, develop coping resources, and develop resiliency (Frederickson & Losada, 2005). Furthermore, positive emotions function to neutralize the effects of long-term negative emotions because of the broadened thought-action repertoires that fuel resiliency and improve emotional well-being (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). This is particularly true for teachers who engage daily in emotional issues (Nieto, 2015).

Fredrickson’s (2004) Broaden and Build Theory of Emotions was relevant to the current study because of the effect of job satisfaction on teacher retention. Studies showed special education teachers derive satisfaction from their profession when factors such as administrative and collegial support, reasonable work assignment, relevant professional development, and responsive induction programs are in adequate supply (Billingsley, 2005; Kraft et al., 2012; Podolsky et al., 2017). In the same way, studies reported special education teachers who experience job satisfaction are more likely to remain in the profession (Berry, 2012; Fish & Stephens, 2010; Leko & Smith, 2010).

History of Special Education

The 10th Amendment to the United States Constitution made it compulsory for all school-aged children across the United States to attend school (Yell et al., 1998). Despite the passage of this law, many students with disabilities were precluded from accessing free public education (Yell et al., 1998). According to Kauffman et al. (2014), many students with disabilities were excluded and denied public education in the first 75 years of the 20th century. The exclusion of students with disabilities was considered acceptable during this period of segregation and upheld in various courts across the nation (Yell et al., 1998). The Supreme Court of Wisconsin ruled students with disabilities should be precluded from attending public schools in the case of *Beattie v. Board of Education* (Winzer, 1993). Similarly, the Supreme Court of Illinois ruled compulsory free public education should not be extended to students with disabilities if they were considered disruptive and cognitively incapable to receive instructions (Yell et al., 1998).

The origin of the special education law is the result of progressive efforts of parents of children with disabilities, advocacy groups, and the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s (Kauffman et al., 2014). Through their efforts, it became a law in most states to provide public education to students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). In 1965, Public Law 89-10, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was enacted. According to Wright (1999), ESEA was the foundation of early special education law. It described a plan for dealing with educational inequalities, particularly among economically disadvantaged children. Several amendments were made to ESEA that provided grants for the education of children with disabilities (Wright, 1999). Due to the possible loopholes evident in the application of the Public Law 89-10 and its

amendments, ESEA of 1965 was not fully upheld in all states across the nation (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). This led to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975.

Of all the numerous civil rights decisions of the 1950s and 1960s, the field of special education was mostly impacted by the landmark civil rights decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954 (Koseki, 2017; Wright, 1999). The Supreme Court ruled it was unconstitutional to deny a citizen his or her rights because of a permanent characteristic such as race or disability (Koseki, 2017; Martin et al., 1996; Strassfeld, 2017). According to Strassfeld (2017), the notion of equal opportunity applied in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* was extended to students with disabilities. With this verdict and numerous other court cases, parents and advocacy groups filed lawsuits against school districts for discriminating against students with disabilities (Strassfeld, 2017). Notable among these lawsuits were: *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* in 1971 and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* in 1972 (Koseki, 2017). In both cases, it was ruled children with disabilities between the ages of 6 and 21 must be provided free public education alongside their typically developing peers (Koseki 2017; Strassfeld 2017; Yell et al., 1998). In the *Mills* case, the court ruled it unconstitutional to exclude, suspend, expel, reassign, or transfer any student with a disability without due process of law (Koseki, 2017; Strassfeld, 2017; Wright, 1999).

In November 1975, Public Law 94-142, also known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, was enacted to legalize the provision of free appropriate public education to all students with disabilities (Katsiyannis, Thomas, & Yell, 2012).

Other provisions included in the legislation were parental participation, non-discriminatory assessment, and procedural due process. Furthermore, every student with a disability became entitled to receive an individualized education program (IEP) in the least restrictive environment and the legislation stipulated the procedural safeguards to protect the rights of children with disabilities and their families (Lloyd & Lloyd, 2015).

Public Law 94-142 was amended many times and renamed since its original enactment (Wright, 1999). Before 1986, young children with disabilities were provided with some educational services at the prerogative of many states because there were no legal mandates to guide the process. With the passage of Public Law 99-457 (1986), added incentives and grants were allocated to states to provide a free appropriate public education for preschoolers with disabilities and early intervention programs for infants (birth to three years) with disabilities (Kauffman et al., 2014). According to Trohanis (2002), 598,922 preschoolers (3-5-year old) with disabilities were provided educational and related services by August 2001 compared to 261,000 served in 1986. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was renamed to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, and two other disabling conditions were added as qualifying categories: autism and traumatic brain injury (Trohanis, 2002).

IDEA was reauthorized in 2004 to align with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Council for Exceptional Children, 2006; Yell, Meadows, Drasgow, & Shriner, 2009). The goal of the alignment was to provide fair and equal access to quality education to students with a disability using research-based practices by highly qualified teachers. According to the Council for Exceptional Children (2006), a highly qualified special education teacher must obtain certification in all the core academic subjects they

teach in addition to their teaching certification and bachelor's degree. Leko and Brownell (2009) asserted special educators need to be competent in core content and instructional skills to deliver high-quality instruction to students with a disability.

Prior to the enactment of the NCLB, the field of special education witnessed inadequate educational opportunities for students with special education and continuous shortages of qualified special educators (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010). In addressing the inadequate quality personnel and educational opportunities for students with disabilities, the major objective of IDEA was to provide high-quality public education to students with disabilities (Brownell et al., 2010).

The need for qualified teachers in special education classrooms across the nation was further heightened by the NCLB requirement of highly qualified teachers (D'Aniello, 2008). With the enactment of NCLB, many teachers left the field because meeting the highly qualified requirement was considered arduous, expensive, and stressful in addition to other persistent attrition factors (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006). Additionally, because states were permitted to define the highly qualified process, many unqualified and ill-prepared teachers were classified as highly qualified, which jeopardized the quality of education received by students with special needs (Burke, 2015). Although many special education teachers exited the field, others remained even amid all these challenges (Day & Gu, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007). Thus, the need to focus on factors that enabled these special educators to remain in the field became significant (Billingsley, 2005; Feng & Sass, 2009; Gu & Day, 2013).

Early Childhood Special Education

The division of early childhood special education, originated from both special education and early childhood education divisions, equally witnessed extensive parental advocacy and public involvement demanding the rights of children with disabilities (McLean, 2016). After decades of advocacy and activities of the civil rights movement and legal reforms, the provisions of the Public Law 94-142 were legally extended to young children with disabilities with the passage of the amendment of 1986. Prior to 1986, the provision of educational and related services to children with disabilities was at the discretion of states because there were no legal mandates to guide the process (McLean, 2016).

Passage of the Education of the Handicapped Amendments of 1986 provided states with grants and incentives to extend public education to preschoolers (3 to 5 years) and infants and toddlers (birth to 3 years) with disabilities (McLean, 2016). With the alignment to NCLB and IDEA, it became necessary for all teachers, including preschool special education teachers, to attain the highly qualified teacher status (Council for Exceptional Children, 2006). Although preschool special educators taught multiple pre-academic subjects and other skills on IEPs, they were still required to fulfil the highly qualified teacher requirement. Although limited studies exist on preschool special education teacher attrition, studies showed the field of special education was significantly impacted by the legal mandates of NCLB.

Special Education Teacher Shortages

The field of special education continues to witness severe shortages of certified special education teachers across the nation (Berry, 2012; Leko & Smith, 2010; Tyler &

Brunner, 2014). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) described the shortages as “severe and persistent” (p. 13). According to Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), because of these persistent shortages, more than 30,000 uncertified special education teachers were teaching across the United States in the 1900s and over 47,000 special education teachers taught in classes they were not certified to teach during the 2000-01 school year. Special education teacher shortages reached its peak in the 2015-16 school year when 48 states reported critical special education teacher shortages (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016).

A steady 17% increase in demand of special education teachers was equally predicted through 2018 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). In California, 211 school districts reported critical rates of teacher shortages in 2016; 9 of 10 were in the field of special education (Podolsky & Sutcher, 2016). According to Arnup and Bowles (2016), shortages of special education teachers were reported in the United States and across other developed nations. To make up for the scarcity of these educators, school districts often hired uncertified teachers, assigned teachers to classrooms they were not certified to teach, and sometimes left positions vacant (Podolsky & Sutcher, 2016).

Reasons for special education teacher shortages across the nation were examined by numerous studies (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2005; Oliarez & Arnold, 2006; Podolsky & Sutcher, 2016). According to Oliarez and Arnold (2006), the shortage was due to school districts’ inability to recruit and retain certified special education teachers. Podolsky and Sutcher (2016) identified shrinking supply of new teachers, teachers retiring, and teacher attrition as the leading causes of shortages in California. Similarly, other researchers identified attrition as the leading cause of special educator shortages

(Boe et al., 2005; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Leko & Smith, 2010; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Although teacher attrition is high in the field of education, the rate is much higher among special education teachers than their general education teacher counterparts (Albrecht, Johns, Mounstevan, & Olorunda, 2009; Stephens & Fish, 2010).

Many special education teacher attrition studies pervaded the literature, but special education teachers continue to leave the field (Brownell & Sindelar, 2016; Ingersoll, 2011) and higher rates are predicted for the next decade (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). According to D’Aniello, (2008) the shortage was further aggravated by the alignment of NCLB, IDEA and other subsequent mandates that required high-quality education for students with disabilities alongside their counterparts in general education. Additionally, the special educator shortage was further aggravated by an inadequate supply of special education faculty at the university level (Smith, Young, Montrosse, Tyler, & Robb, 2011), which further impacted the supply of qualified special education teachers across the nation (Smith, Robb, West, & Tyler, 2010).

Special education teacher shortages may be detrimental to the achievement and future of students with disabilities (Bettini, Cheyney, Wang, & Leko, 2015). The quality of education received by students with special needs is significantly impacted by teacher attrition and shortages because, in the absence of qualified special education teachers, the replacements are usually less qualified (Burke, 2015; Kasprzak et al., 2012).

Special Education Teachers

To understand the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers, it is important to provide a clear understanding of the term *special education*. According to the U.S. Department of Education (as cited by Rock et al., 2016), special education

entails the provision of “specially designed instruction, related services, and supplementary aids and services to meet the unique needs of children and youth with disabilities to achieve educational benefit” (p. 98). Special education teachers are therefore educators who provide specialized, individualized instruction to students with disabilities as written in their IEP (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2010).

According to Rock et al. (2016), a special educator must be knowledgeable and skilled at assessing, planning, collaborating, and delivering effective interventions for the highly heterogeneous population of students with disabilities. Special education teachers therefore require expertise, training, and long-term commitments to perform their duties successfully over an extended period (Brownell et al., 2010; Mastropieri, Scruggs, & Mills, 2011). A student is considered eligible under IDEA (2004) to receive special education and related services when identified to have one or more of the following disabling conditions:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Deafness or Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Other Health Impairments
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Blindness or Visual Impairment
- Emotional Disturbance
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Traumatic Brain Injury

Therefore, a special education teacher requires extensive training to teach students with the wide range of disabling conditions (Brownell et al., 2010; Mastropieri et al., 2011). Additionally, Rock et al. (2016) stated, “special educators need to have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively teach core academic subjects to an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse student body” (p. 99). Special education teachers are required to be conversant with the historical and legal foundations of special

education and the characteristics of diverse learners, as well as planning and managing the teaching environment (Fall & Billingsley, 2011; Henley et al., 2010). They also must manage student behavior and interaction skills in the classroom effectively, maintain communication and collaborative relationships with other specialists, and maintain professionalism and ethical practices (Tsouloupas, Carson, Mathews, Grawitch, & Barber, 2010). Additionally, IDEA alignment with NCLB equally demanded special education teachers must be certified and attain highly qualified status. Special educators achieve highly qualified status when they become certified in all the core subjects they teach and complete teacher certification and a bachelor's degree (Council for Exceptional Children, 2006).

Special education teachers' roles include teaching in varied settings, collaborating with other professionals in varied capacities, and providing instructions to students with various disabling conditions across multiple grades (McCall, McHatton, & Shealey, 2014). McCall et al. (2014) reported special education teachers need to be determined, creative, flexible, energetic, and resilient to teach successfully. Due to the many roles and responsibilities expected of special education teachers, special education is considered a stressful and difficult job, filled with burnout and attrition (Downing, 2017; Hamama et al., 2013; Ingersoll, 2001; Nash, 2005).

Paquette and Reig (2016) identified major sources of stress for early childhood special educators: significant work overload, ineffective communication, lack of classroom management, and poor student discipline. Although the stressors were significant, teachers identified coping techniques that sustained their retention in the field. According to Paquette and Reig (2016), coping techniques included positive

relationships, physical activity, time management, and regular personal activities. However, considering the attrition rate among beginning special educators, coping techniques may not sustain some teachers to remain in the field for a considerable length of time (Henderson, 2014).

Special Education Teacher Retention

Every student with a disability is required under IDEA (2004) to receive a free appropriate public education provided by a qualified special educator. A highly qualified special education teacher is expected to have a bachelor's degree, certification in special education, and certification in all core subjects taught (Council for Exceptional Children, 2006). Unfortunately, the field of special education remains faced with two major challenges: recruiting and retaining qualified special education teachers (Beltman et al., 2011; Billingsley, 2004; 2005; Boe et al., 2013; Donne & Lin, 2013). The shortages are longstanding, critical, and persistent (Tyler & Brunner, 2014).

Some authors reported special educator shortages in up to 98% of school districts across the nation at various times (Henley et al., 2010; Kauffman & Ring, 2011). Due to these shortages, school districts across the country continue to experience difficulties retaining qualified special education teachers (Leko & Smith, 2010; Vittek, 2012). Attrition was a leading cause of special education teacher shortages across school districts (Ingersoll, 2011; Stephens, 2010; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). However, studies showed though many special education teachers transfer or leave the field altogether, many others continue teaching (Day & Gu, 2009; Downing, 2017; Gu & Day, 2007).

Efforts at addressing special education teacher attrition thus far have proven ineffective; thus, a shift emerged to focus on special education teachers who remained

committed to the field (Day & Gu, 2009; Henderson, 2014). In addressing the critical shortages of special educators, Feng and Sass (2009) observed factors that motivate stayers to remain in the field despite challenges of the profession. However, factors that influence preschool special educators to remain in the field are missing from the literature. No studies to date examined the perceived factors that influence the resiliency and retention of preschool special education teachers. However, studies of special education teachers in the literature offered some insight into the current study.

Special Education Teacher Retention Enhancing Factors

Some attempts were made by researchers in understanding the factors influencing special education teachers to remain in the field (Chambers, 2011; Fish & Stephens, 2010; Stephens & Fish, 2010). Because special education teacher retention is complex and multidimensional, it is impossible to attribute single factors to the retention of educators (Atkins, 2012). According to Billingsley (2005), teacher retention efforts are two folds: (1) hiring quality special educators, and (2) developing positive work environments. Research showed it was necessary to recruit quality special education teachers and provide positive working conditions that promote job satisfaction and career longevity (Carr, 2009; Sutchter et al., 2016).

Research identified many factors that predict special education teacher retention (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011; Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman, & Israel, 2009; Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Kauffman & Ring, 2011). Berry (2012) opined that although some of the factors are inevitable and unalterable, some can be influenced and controlled by school administrators. To ensure quality retention among special education teachers, Berry (2012) suggested school administrators focus on influencing the alterable

factors. Billingsley (2004) identified these alterable retention-enhancing factors in her landmark analysis of 20 studies on special education teacher retention. High salary and benefits reduced special education teacher attrition and promoted retention. Billingsley et al. (2009) also revealed special education teachers were more likely to remain in their teaching positions when exposed to adequate and relevant professional development. Furthermore, the findings revealed special education teachers found positive school climate and collegial and administrative support influenced their decisions to continue in the field of special education. Similarly, Tyler and Brunner (2014) identified six primary attrition-reducing factors among special educators: positive workplace conditions, administrative support, professional development, teacher mentorship and induction, teacher preparation, and workplace decision-making. Further studies on special education teacher retention identified teacher induction and mentoring programs (Billingsley et al., 2009) and relevant professional development (Berry et al., 2011) as influential in special educator decisions to remain in the field. Research also found intrinsically motivated teachers, those with high self-efficacy, and those skilled in instructional strategies were also more likely to remain committed to the field of education (Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Kauffman & Ring, 2011).

The Leadership Framework describes factors that influence special education teachers to continue teaching in the same field (Billingsley, 2005). The framework identified factors that ensure the identification and development of high-quality special education teachers who stay committed to the field for a considerable period. According to Billingsley (2005), these factors include: (1) employing highly qualified special

educators, (2) supporting beginning teachers through responsive induction and mentoring programs, and (3) providing meaningful professional development.

Highly qualified special education teachers. Since the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and its many revisions, the main objective of the law was to provide quality education to students with disabilities (Brownell et al., 2010). As studies identified the effect of teacher quality on student achievement, it became imperative to provide all students, typical or disabled, with high quality teachers in their classrooms (Brownell et al., 2010; Master, Loeb, & Wychoff, 2014). Special education entails the provision of specialized instruction, so the need for adequate training for special educators to carry out their responsibilities cannot be overemphasized (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2010).

Qualified special educators must hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education and teacher certification in the subject or population they teach as required by the state in which they teach (20 U.S.C. Section 1401 (10)). These requirements vary from state to state. In addition to these basic requirements, highly qualified special educators are defined according to the trends, education policies, and service delivery practices in effect at various times (Brownell et al., 2010).

With alignment of IDEA and NCLB, it was mandated all special educators attain the highly qualified status in addition to their bachelor's degree and special education teacher certification. To achieve the highly qualified status, special education teachers must attain proficiency in all the core content subjects they taught (Council for Exceptional Children, 2006). Consequently, it was imperative for special education teachers to develop the needed skills to deliver general education curriculum in addition

to the specialized skills needed for implementing instructions to students with disabilities (Brownell et al., 2010).

The retention of highly qualified special education teachers is critical because student achievement is positively correlated to teacher quality (Feng & Sass, 2009; Kutsyuruba, 2016). Feng and Sass (2009) stated teacher quality is the main determinant of student achievement gains. Similarly, Shaw and Newton (2014) stated the need for quality teachers is expedient because teachers have the greatest influence on student achievement. Henderson (2014) affirmed the first strategy in addressing special educator shortages is attracting and employing qualified special education teachers. Studies found the rate of attrition among qualified special education teachers was lower than among their unqualified counterparts (Berry et al., 2011; Ingersoll, 2011). Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, and Wyckoff (2011) echoed the need for highly qualified educators in the classrooms because a strong workforce is a product of highly qualified teachers.

Responsive induction and mentoring program. Responsive induction programs are an integral factor in special education teacher retention (Billingsley, 2004; Ingersoll & May 2011; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). An induction program is defined as a program a beginning teacher participates in to develop the necessary skills to become a competent teacher (Sweeney, 2013). According to Sweeney (2013), the induction process may include orientation, training, mentoring, and professional development. Jones, Youngs, and Frank (2013) opined beginning special education teachers acquire instructional and classroom management techniques and adapt to the new school environment during the induction process.

The induction process is essential for beginning teachers as research found higher attrition rates among teachers who did not participate in an induction program (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). Many early career special educators exited the field before their fifth teaching anniversary, with 14% leaving by the end of their first year of teaching and 46% leaving within five years of employment (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Ingersoll & Perda, 2010). Beginning special education teachers often start their teaching career with optimism and high hopes that may be depleted with demanding teaching responsibilities and insufficient support (Billingsley, 2004; Hughes, 2012).

Beginning special educators have the same responsibilities as experienced teachers, but require additional time to become skilled in subject content and pedagogy, define instructional practices, learn the school organizational and political climate, and identify their role within the school culture (Bettini, 2015; Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011). New teachers are required to provide instruction, manage classroom behavior and discipline, and work collaboratively with general education teachers, other specialists, and parents (Billingsley, 2004; Hughes, 2012). Additionally, they conduct IEP meetings and complete significant amounts of paperwork (Billingsley, 2004, 2010; Smith-Washington, 2017). These responsibilities may be daunting and overwhelming, and may lead to exhaustion if these teachers do not receive the necessary guidance and support (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & May 2011; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

A responsive induction program focused on issues of beginning special education teachers was found to be critical for their survival, commitment, and retention (Huling, Resta, & Yeargain, 2012). According to Goldrick (2016), effective induction programs entail supporting new teachers for a period of two years to develop the needed

competency for effective teaching. Additionally, Goldrick (2016) emphasized the support should include opportunities to collaborate with peers, relevant professional development, and regular feedback from administrators. Therefore, goals of the induction program should focus on minimizing stress beginning teachers experience by supporting them through the transition process of becoming effective, committed special educators; who remain in the field (Leko & Smith, 2010). Vittek (2012) emphasized the content of an induction program must be comprehensive, relevant, and tailored specifically to the needs of beginning special educators. Vittek (2012) further stated induction programs should start before new teachers start teaching and continue until they become experienced.

Mentoring is a key component of a responsive induction program (Donne & Lin, 2013). Mentoring entails assigning a beginning special educator to an experienced mentor or colleague for familiarization with the teaching profession, support, and guidance until the new teacher becomes competent (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). For mentoring to be effective, Sweeney (2013) proposed a period of at least two years. Research showed quality induction and mentoring programs had a positive correlation with teaching skills, student outcomes, and career longevity (Billingsley, Israel, & Smith, 2011; Henley et al., 2010). Studies showed beginning special education teachers who found the induction program beneficial developed the needed skills for successful, long-term, and committed teaching careers (Billingsley et al., 2011).

The need for quality mentorship was indicated in the research findings of Shinn (2015). Shinn's (2015) qualitative study of beginning special education teachers revealed mentorship was influential in their decision to continue teaching. Study participants

experienced job satisfaction because of the availability of relevant induction and mentoring programs at their workplaces (Shinn, 2015). Kagler (2011) further supported the positive relationship between responsive induction programs and special education teachers' decisions to remain in the field. Kagler's (2011) qualitative study examined factors influencing the recruitment and retention of special education teachers using 15 certified special education teachers of students with severe behavior disorders in metro Atlanta. Many study participants indicated their induction program was significant in their decision to continue teaching. Furthermore, the findings identified administrative and collegial support as equally influential in the recruitment and retention of special education teachers (Kagler, 2011).

In contrast to the existing research, Mignott's (2011) quantitative correlational study found no relationship between teacher retention and their mentoring experience. Nevertheless, study participants perceived their mentoring experience to be important and useful to their teaching. The findings from Mignott's (2011) study showed mentoring may be useful for beginning teachers, but not affect teacher retention.

Professional development. Sindelar, Brownell, and Billingsley (2010) defined professional development as "a multi-faceted approach for producing gains in educator knowledge and skills directly tied to improved practices and ultimately leading to student achievement and outcomes" (p. 55). Tyler and Brunner (2014) opined professional development may include training, education, seminars, workshops, and conferences to enrich and support the career growth of teachers. Through meaningful professional development, a teacher is placed in teaching and learning environments where opportunities abound for gaining new instructional strategies, updating knowledge and

skills, and achieving career growth (O’Gorman & Drudy, 2011). Professional development is essential for teachers of students with disabilities to keep abreast of new evidence-based practices, early diagnosis and educational techniques, and educational devices and equipment, which are “continually evolving, increasingly complex, and rigorous” (Benedict, Brownell, Park, Bettini, & Lauterbach, 2014, p. 147). According to Desimone (2009), effective professional development must share the following elements: (1) content-focused, (2) relevant to current issues, (3) collaborative among teams, (4) active participation and learning, and (5) sufficient time to be effective.

Professional development has a direct influence on special education teachers’ retention and quality (Berry et al., 2011; Cancio et al., 2013; Gersten et al., 2001). Research showed professional development provides opportunities for teachers to learn new teaching and management skills and thereby improve student overall development (Berry et al., 2011; Shymansky, Wang, Annetta, Yore, & Everett, 2012). However, for professional development to be effective, it must be practical, relevant, and meaningful to teachers’ work with their students (Berry et al. 2011; Cancio et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Hammerness & Matsko, 2013). In addition to the need for strong mentorship, the beginning teachers in Shinn’s (2015) qualitative study equally identified relevant professional development as influential to their commitment and retention.

Regardless of the years of experience, all special education teachers need adequate and continual professional development (Chambers, 2011). A direct relationship exists between teacher decisions to continue teaching and the quality of the professional opportunities they receive (Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crocket, 2014). Professional

development and training are of immense benefit to both beginning and experienced special educators; however, professional development is a significant channel for accessing new knowledge and resources (Billingsley et al., 2011).

Pressley's (2013) qualitative study of beginning teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders revealed teachers need regular professional development. Pressley (2013) conducted a phenomenological qualitative study to examine the skills, knowledge, training methods, and support beginning uncertified special education teachers consider beneficial to their effectively teach students with emotional and behavioral disorders at a private special education school. Using journal entries, questionnaires, and interviews, the researcher examined the lived-experiences of study participants. The findings revealed participants understood the basic needs of their students, but lacked the ability to address those needs. Although participants acknowledged receiving basic support from colleagues and engaged in non-teaching activities to ameliorate stress, they experienced tremendous stress because they lacked on-the-job training and support from a strong induction, professional development, and/or mentoring (Pressley, 2013). Even beginning teachers who entered the field with a strong background in special education still struggled and were more likely to exit the field without adequate support (Council for Exceptional Children, 2013). Teachers indicated their perceived need for more time and continual professional development to become effective in the teaching profession (Pressley, 2013).

The influence of relevant professional development on teacher quality and retention is invaluable (Berry et al., 2011; Cancio et al., 2013). Berry et al. (2011) identified specific areas of professional development in which study participants needed

support: working with paraprofessionals and parents, low-incidence disabilities, emotional and behavior disorders, classroom management, curriculum content, and inclusive practices. Without professional development to address these areas, more than one third of participants indicated their desire to leave their special education teaching positions (Berry et al., 2011).

Positive Work Conditions

Positive work conditions are the second dimension of Billingsley's (2005) Leadership Framework focused on retention of high-quality special education teachers. According to Tyler and Brunner (2014), workplace conditions encompass the context of special educators' environment, which may include caseload, paperwork, and legal requirements. Additionally, within special educators' work environment is accessibility to resources such as technology and materials vital to career survival and longevity (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Billingsley (2005) opined positive work conditions must be inclusive and collaborative, be incorporated into school programs, offer manageable workloads, and promote teacher wellness.

Many studies on special education teacher retention found positive work conditions as integral to special education teachers' commitment, career longevity, and retention (Billingsley, 2005; Boyd et al., 2011; Kaufman & Ring, 2011). A positive school environment motivates and encourages special educators to teach at their best and feel as active members of their teaching and learning community (Billingsley et al., 2011). Positive work conditions ensure effective teacher collaboration, student achievement, and teacher effectiveness (Billingsley et al., 2011). Furthermore, special education teachers are satisfied and committed to continue teaching under positive work

conditions; however, the responsibility of creating positive work conditions rests with the principal and district leaders (Billingsley, 2005; Leko & Smith, 2010). Special educators reported experiencing positive work conditions when they were active members of a school community and had the power to make decisions about their students and the school (Berry, 2012; Fall & Billingsley, 2011). Special educators who experienced reasonable workloads reported more positive work conditions (Vannest, Soares, Harrison, Brown & Parker, 2009). Additionally, adequate instructional materials and professional learning opportunities facilitated positive work conditions (Boyd et al., 2011).

Special education teachers who experience positive work conditions are likely to stay in the field and the opposite is true for teachers who perceive their work conditions as negative (Billingsley, 2005; Boyd et al., 2011; Kaufman & Ring, 2011). Positive work conditions are therefore integral to special education teacher satisfaction and retention (Boyd et al., 2011). Research showed the retention rate of special education teachers increased when teacher work environments improved (Billingsley, 2010; Fall & Billingsley, 2011).

A workplace may be positive or negative. A negative workplace environment is related to job dissatisfaction and high attrition among special education teachers (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Ingersoll & May 2012; Leko & Smith, 2010). Numerous unfavorable working conditions identified in the literature significantly impacted special educators, including insufficient school supplies, severe behaviors, absence of parental support, and unreasonable workload (Moore, 2012; Renzulli, Parrott, & Beattie, 2011). Billingsley (2004), in her Leadership Framework, identified three main strategies school leaders can adopt to achieve positive work conditions in schools: (1) promote an inclusive and

collaborative school culture, (2) assign manageable workload to teachers, and (3) support teachers to minimize stress.

Inclusive and collaborative schools. According to Billingsley (2005), principals play a significant role in establishing a collaborative and inclusive school climate where all staff work together to achieve the needs of all students. Research showed a supportive collegial school environment was built by (1) ensuring special educators actively participate and are fully immersed in school activities, (2) providing sufficient time for collaborating with special education teachers, and (3) displaying caring and genuine interest in special educators' work (Bettini et al., 2015). Similarly, Leko and Smith (2010) identified five ways of providing administrative support to foster retention among beginning special education teachers: (1) provide relevant professional development, (2) create a reasonable caseload assignment, (3) offer meaningful mentoring, (4) promote a positive school climate, and (5) offer responsive induction. Inclusive and collaborative schools equally entail supporting special education teacher with all the resources they need to perform their duties effectively with minimal stress.

Several factors were identified in the literature for special education teacher attrition, but inadequate administrative and collegial support was cited as a major reason why beginning teachers left the field (Billingsley, 2004; Cancio et al., 2013; Prather-Jones, 2011). Administrative support was strongly associated teacher decisions to stay or exit the teaching workforce (Sutcher et al., 2016). Studies showed special education teachers who received adequate principal support were more likely to remain in the field and many teachers left the field because of inadequate principal support (Billingsley, 2003; Henderson, 2014; Shinn, 2015). Teacher perceptions of administrator support

influenced their decision to remain or exit the field (Prather-Jones, 2011). This was especially true for beginning special education teachers. In a qualitative study of beginning special education teachers, Shinn (2015) found multiple supportive roles performed by their administrators equally influenced their decision to continue teaching.

Prather-Jones (2011) observed that in addition to administrator support, support from colleagues and school personnel were equally strategic to special education teacher survival, effectiveness, and retention. Research showed special education teachers regarded the immense support from their colleagues as influential to their career longevity and retention (Billingsley, 2004; Fall & Billingsley, 2011; Sass, Seal, & Martin, 2011). Consistent with the theme of collegial support, the findings from Henderson's (2014) mixed-methods study with experienced special education teachers revealed the significance of collegial support to the retention of the educators. Teachers derived elevated levels of job satisfaction and experienced less stress when they had meaningful administrative support, and level of satisfaction influenced their decision to remain or exit the profession (Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Vittek, 2012).

To define the specific administrative supports teachers considered beneficial to retention, Prather-Jones (2011) employed a qualitative study with long-term teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. The findings revealed teachers felt supported by their administrators, which influenced their decisions to remain in the field. The teachers indicated they received support from the principal in the form of student discipline. According to Prather-Jones (2011), teachers felt supported because administrators made them feel appreciated and respected, and verbally expressed appreciation for their contribution and work. Additionally, the study participants felt

supported because their administrators created work environments where collegial support was the norm (Prather-Jones, 2011).

Manageable workload. Special education teachers experienced a great deal of stress as they performed their roles and responsibilities, which were sometimes unclear or perceived as unmanageable (Bettini et al., 2017; Fall & Billingsley, 2011). In addition to instructional responsibilities, special education teachers are responsible for designing and implementing IEPs, behavior plans, progress reports, transition plans, and other documentation specified by the local school district (DeMik, 2008). Additionally, special educators must have a good understanding of special education laws and procedures, and be highly qualified in the core subjects they teach (Council for Exceptional Children, 2006; Zost, 2010). Special educators are also required to provide accommodations for special education students to access the general education curriculum and implement instruction across all subject areas (McCray, Butler, & Bettini, 2014).

Due to these and many other roles special education teachers perform, they often experienced overload and stress (Emery & Vandenburg, 2010; Fall & Billingsley, 2011; Fish & Stephens, 2010). Special education teachers frequently reported lack of adequate time and support in performing teaching responsibilities effectively (Fall & Billingsley, 2011; Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, & Otis-Wilborn, 2008). Rather than focusing mainly on providing instruction to students, special education teachers perform non-instructional responsibilities with minimal time for direct teaching and other instructional responsibilities (Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010). Regardless, studies found special educators derive joy and satisfaction from their job when they focus on their primary assignment of teaching (Fish & Stephens, 2010).

The consequences of challenging workloads can be devastating for employees (Bettini et al., 2017). According to Brunsting, Sreckovic, and Lane (2014), teachers with overwhelming workloads were predisposed to emotional exhaustion and career decisions to exit the job. According to Billingsley (2005), work assignments must be manageable and reasonable so teachers have sufficient time to address student needs to retain committed and effective special education teachers.

Although the issue of demanding workload is driven by the district and other external factors, special education teachers may remain in their positions when work assignments allow for adequate time to teach and still meet all paperwork requirements (Leko & Smith, 2010; Vannest & Parker, 2010). Similarly, studies showed special education teachers with small, manageable class sizes were more prepared to provide instruction and ensure a conducive classroom environment where all students learn (Fall & Billingsley, 2011). When student needs are met, teachers better serve their students, which leads to elevated levels of job satisfaction and retention (Fish & Stephens, 2010).

Research found career decisions of special education teachers related to their perceptions of workload manageability (Albrecht et al., 2009). Special educators who perceived their workloads to be manageable were more likely to remain in the field whereas those who perceived their workloads as overwhelming and unmanageable were more likely to exit the field (Albrecht et al., 2009). Additionally, Bettini et al. (2017) found a relationship between teacher perception of workload manageability and their intent to remain in the field. The study compared perceived workload manageability among special education teachers to that of their counterparts in general education. The findings revealed beginning special education teachers perceived their workloads to be

less manageable than their counterparts in general education, which might have influenced their decision to exit the field. Consistent with the existing literature, findings indicated teacher workload manageability predicted emotional exhaustion among beginning general and special educators, which further resulted in a prediction of teacher career decisions (Bettini et al., 2017). Similarly, the findings from a survey of 776 teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders demonstrated a positive relationship between special education teachers' perceptions of workload manageability and their career decision (Albrecht et al., 2009). The findings revealed teachers with sufficient time to complete paperwork were more likely to intend to stay in the field (Albrecht et al., 2009).

In contrast to the existing literature on the relationship between teacher workload manageability and career decision was a study of beginning general education teachers conducted by Pogodzinski, Youngs, and Frank (2013). They surveyed 184 early-career general education teachers and compared their career intentions and workload manageability at the beginning and end of the school year. The results revealed an insignificant relationship between workload manageability and teacher plans to continue teaching (Pogodzinski et al., 2013).

Teacher wellness. Dodge (2012) defined teacher wellbeing as their capacity to maintain a state of balance between challenges and resources. The emotional wellbeing of special education teachers is crucial to their effectiveness, commitment, and retention (Billingsley, 2005). According to Ansley, Houchins, and Varjas (2016), special educators require high levels of physical and mental energy over a prolonged time and experience

tremendous job-related stress, which often leads to exhaustion, feelings of failure, and possible decisions to exit the field (Ansley et al., 2016).

Research showed special education teachers experienced significant emotional stress, could which eventually result in burnout (Ansley et al., 2016; Billingsley, 2005). Special education teachers identified common stressors as excessive paperwork, high caseloads, role conflict, isolation, and problematic relationships with general education teachers (Ingersoll, 2011). Research found a major cause of teacher attrition is stress and because of these job-related stressors, many special education teachers left teaching (Ingersoll, 2011; Kyriacou, 2011).

The role of a school administrator in minimizing stress levels of special educators cannot be overstated (Williams & Dikes, 2015). Williams and Dikes (2015) used mixed-method research to investigate factors that influence burnout among special education teachers. They found special educators left the field at a higher rate than general educators because of emotional exhaustion that varied based on such factors as age, sex, workload, and marital status. Additionally, William and Dikes (2015) recommended administrative and collegial support for special education teachers as the long-lasting solution for ameliorating excruciating job-related stress teachers regularly experience.

Other Factors Influencing Special Education Teacher Retention

Research identified other factors influencing the retention of special education teachers in addition to those enumerated in the Leadership Framework that equally predicted special educator career decisions. These included motivational factors for entering the field, personal characteristics, and job satisfaction.

Teacher motivation. Many studies in the literature attested to how special education teacher characteristics, interests, passion, and motives influenced them to enter the field, but may not sustain them through career adversities (Henderson, 2014; Hogan, 2012). Fish and Stephens (2010) explored what motivated teachers to enter the field as this could have implications for recruitment and retention. Teachers intrinsically motivated to teach were more likely to remain in the field of education (Major, 2012). In a mixed-methods study of 35 experienced special education teachers, Henderson (2014) identified factors that influenced decisions to continue teaching. Consistent with the existing teacher retention literature, the most influential factors for remaining in the field were the joy of teaching and making a difference for students with disabilities (Henderson, 2014). Similarly, Hogan (2012) found veteran special education teachers revealed a passion in making a difference in the lives of students as the most influential retention factor; these teachers believed their principals were supportive, but the passion to make a difference superseded their need for administrative support.

Chambers (2011) coined the term *professional fitness* as a critical factor that influenced the career longevity of experienced special education teachers in low-income schools. In a qualitative study, participants considered themselves professionally fit for the teaching students with disabilities because of their intrinsic motivation and moral obligation to make a difference in the lives of others. According to Chambers (2011), professional fitness may predict special education teacher retention and longevity.

Teacher characteristics. In addition to meeting pre-determined employment criteria, it is essential to consider teacher characteristics to ensure the right teacher is hired for the right position (Billingsley 2005; Chambers, 2011). Day and Gu (2009)

posited quality retention efforts focused on retaining qualified special education teachers is the enduring solution to attrition and retention in special education. Billingsley (2005) identified caring attitudes and strong commitment as important characteristics special education teachers must have in addition to knowledge, training, and experience.

Although existing literature focused mostly on workplace variables as predictive of special education teacher retention, participants in the qualitative study of Chambers (2011) attributed retention in the field to their endearing personal characteristics.

Chambers (2011) described special educators as go-getters able to confront and overcome professional challenges because they were resourceful, creative, open to change, and flexible. Additionally, the teachers indicated they were life-long learners, confident, and efficacious. When asked to describe factors influenced their retention in the field, they focused on their personal characteristics (Chambers, 2011).

Job satisfaction. Studies found special education teacher decisions to remain in the field was positively related to job satisfaction (Belknap & Taymans, 2015). Teachers derived job satisfaction when all or some of the following factors were present in the work environment: reasonable workload, meaningful professional development, positive work conditions, and administrative and collegial support. Complementary to retention-enhancing factors, the notion of resilience was applied to understand factors that motivate special education teachers to continue teaching (Gu & Day, 2007). Research found teachers employed personal and school resources to derive needed satisfaction to continue teaching, and developed resiliency that was instrumental to their retention and longevity; the notion of teacher resilience became significant in understanding why some special education teachers continue teaching (Gu & Day, 2013).

Understanding Resiliency

The construct of resiliency originated from the fields of psychiatry and psychology to challenge the risk theory that predicted the negative life outcomes of children exposed to adversities (Gu & Day, 2007). Because of the initial risk factors, such children were predicted to have negative life outcomes. However, resiliency theory emerged to understand the reasons children overcame adverse conditions and lived normal lives (Luthar, 2003). It became apparent these individuals bounce back and become stronger in the process (Bobek, 2002; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Although the focus of preliminary studies of resiliency was on children, studies showed similar resiliency development for both adults and children (Henderson & Milsten, 2003; Richardson, Neiger, Jenson, & Kumpfer, 1990).

Many attempts were made to describe and define resilience, yet no consensus exists regarding an appropriate definition considering its multi-dimensional nature (Day & Gu, 2009; Eldridge, 2013; Leahy, 2012). Numerous seminal researchers focused on overall characteristics or strengths of individuals exposed to adversities rather than focusing on outcomes of the initial diseased model (Higgins, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992). Notable among such researchers was Rutter (1987). According to Rutter (1987), resilience is a factor of individual resources that enable people to cope with adverse conditions. Rutter (1987) identified positive emotions, coined by Frederickson (2001), as one of those personal attributes. According to Frederickson (2001), positive emotions such as joy, love, and pleasure are stored in human bodies and can be accessed to combat the effects of negative experiences when needed.

Rather than personal resources, many researchers focused on the role of individual environments in overturning adverse conditions for better outcomes (Higgins, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992). These researchers observed the human capacity to turn challenging situations into supportive and conducive environments (Higgins, 1994; Werner & Smith, 1992). Werner and Smith (1992) found the negative effects of life catastrophes were cushioned by individual, familial, and environmental resources. According to Bobek (2002), these environmental resources included problem-solving skills, positive family experiences, and collegial support. To become resilient, individuals must use their environmental resources to adjust to the negative conditions and develop resilience for future negative occurrences (Bobek, 2002). Similarly, teacher resilience development was described as a factor of personal values and beliefs, the nature of the work, and a collegial environment (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Richardson et al. (1990) described personal and environmental resources as protective factors. Resiliency development was possible only with the availability of certain adequate protective factors. According to Richardson et al. (1990), in addition to individual personal factors, some environmental protective factors may be available to anyone experiencing adversities, which protect the individual from experiencing the full effects of the negative experience. Richardson et al. (1990) asserted successful adaptation or resiliency development was possible if the needed protective factors were in place. However, in the absence of personal and environmental protective factors, individuals may suffer from life disruptions and may either negatively or positively adjust to the conditions. Richardson et al. (1990) purported adverse conditions did not necessarily

result in negative life outcomes and environmental protective factors were integral resiliency development.

In support of Richardson et al., Henderson and Milstein (2003) opined resilience resulted from the interplay between an individual's personal and environmental factors. With a focus specifically on teachers, all individuals had the capacity to overturn adversity with appropriate protective factors. Protective factors according to Henderson (2014) were (1) purpose and expectations, (2) nurture and support, (3) positive connections, (4) meaningful participation, (5) life guiding skills, and (6) clear and consistent boundaries. With reference to teachers, Beltman (2015) asserted various resources in the teaching environment apart from personal resources promoted resilience and retention. Studies showed teacher resilience was possible within a resiliency-fostering school environment where all teachers thrived and sustained their long-term commitment (Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Muller et al., 2011). Prevailing teaching conditions require teachers to be resilient to sustain their commitment and remain in the field (Belknap & Taymans, 2015; Bobek, 2002).

Eldridge (2013) conducted a qualitative study of experienced teachers and found the interplay between the teachers' personal and environmental factors were influential in resiliency development. Using a phenomenological research design, Eldridge (2013) investigated strategies and processes of teacher resilience among experienced general education teachers. The study aimed at discovering how teachers developed resilience and remained committed to the field. The findings revealed resilience was influenced by the interplay between personal and environmental factors during career challenges. In contrast to the existing literature, Eldridge (2013) did not label factors as protective.

Rather than a factor of personal and environmental resources, resilience was described as a multidimensional, multifaced, and complex process by Gu and Day (2007). They defined resilience as a construct built upon systems of interrelationships within which protective factors shield resilient individuals from feeling the full effects of adversity. Environmental factors for teachers included other various elements that supported resiliency development such as friends, family members, and religious groups (Gu & Day, 2007). Aligned with existing literature, Hong (2012) postulated, “it is more fruitful to focus on the process how the individual teachers’ internal psychological state interacts with the external environment and how they perceive and interpret environmental cues” (p. 419).

The multidimensional and multifaced nature of teacher resilience was further confirmed by Downing’s (2017) qualitative study among special education teachers. The study was conducted to determine the factors influencing the resilience and retention of special education teachers. Using a phenomenological approach, the study examined four major areas: teacher motivation for entering the field, non-workplace contexts, workplace contexts, and personal resilience attributes. The findings revealed the four elements were influential to the development of resilience among study participants. Recurrent themes in the findings included pride in student achievement and growth, personal connection with students, and relationships with colleagues. Study participants practiced self-care and balance by engaging in regular exercise and traveling. They also engaged in team sports and community service for social networking. Participants indicated they received emotional, instrumental, appraisal, and informational support from their administrators. The other themes include staying student-focused, focusing on student potential, and

having a moral obligation to fulfil a higher purpose. According to Downing 2017, it was evident resiliency development was influenced by personal and contextual factors, administrative support, and intrinsic motivation.

As a multidimensional construct and process, Patterson, Collins, and Abbott (2004) focused on the personal assets and specific strategies employed by educators in overcoming and overturning career challenges. Patterson et al. (2004) identified these strategies as problem-solving, seeking professional development, decision-making, relying on colleagues and friends, and remaining flexible to adjust to change. Teachers need a sense of agency to successfully devise and employ effective strategies in confronting their challenges (Castro et al., 2010). Sense of agency is the belief individuals can effectively influence their lives and environment (Impedovo, 2016; Samoukovic, 2015). According to Castro et al. (2010), teachers develop new insights as they employ specific strategies to help manage future adversities.

Beltman (2015) described teacher resilience as the “capacity of teachers to navigate challenges, the process of interaction between individual teacher and their personal and professional contexts and the outcome of the teacher experiencing professional commitment, growth, and well-being” (p. 21). With this perspective, resilient teachers bounced-back from adverse career challenges and demonstrated what Day and Gu (2007) described as quality retention. Gu and Day (2007) distinguished quality teacher retention from continuation in the field of teaching. According to Gu and Day (2007), teacher quality retention involves teacher sustenance of motivation, commitment, and effectiveness. Multiple factors influence quality retention and resilience.

Factors Influencing Special Education Teacher Resilience

Although the special education teacher attrition rate is on the rise, some special education teachers continue teaching despite the perceived challenges (Day & Gu, 2007; Gu & Day, 2007). To retain qualified special education teachers, Albrecht et al. (2009) emphasized the need to identify and promote resiliency factors common to special education teachers who stay. Although attrition studies pervaded the literature, limited information existed on factors that led to special education teacher resiliency and retention (Mackenzie, 2012). Resilience was conceptualized by numerous studies, but teacher perceptions of the phenomenon is scant in the literature (Beltman et al., 2011).

Because special education teacher resiliency development is a complex and multidimensional construct, it is unrealistic to attribute single factors to its development. Thus, the researcher reviewed existing literature to identify what influenced special education teachers' resiliency and retention in the field of special education. Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, and Weatherby-Fell (2016) divided the factors that promote teacher resiliency into four categories: personal, contextual, strategies, and outcomes.

Personal resources. Beltman (2015) stated teacher personal resources are the attributes, resources, and assets they bring into the art of teaching that positively influence their development of resiliency. Teacher sense of vocation or purpose is an important personal resource promoting teacher resiliency (Day, 2014). Sense of vocation is the perception one is fulfilling an important assignment or obligation (Hansen, 1995). This is particularly significant for teachers because it increases their persistence, tenacity, and courage to remain committed to the profession despite personal and professional challenges. The literature included teacher moral obligation to make a difference, love for

teaching, and commitment to students as reasons for staying in the field (Gu & Day, 2007).

Following up with a longitudinal mixed-methods study of 300 teachers in 100 schools across England that examined factors causing changes to teacher effectiveness, Gu and Day (2007) focused on three teachers who demonstrated “different degrees of resilience in response to the differing challenges” (p. 1306). Gu and Day (2007) observed the teachers’ personal and professional challenges at separate phases of their teaching careers. They received differing types of support that enabled them to bounce back and continued teaching. The teachers had a high sense of vocation (Gu & Day, 2007). Similarly, Santoro (2011) identified teacher zeal and sense of mission as influential in sustaining resilience in times of career difficulties. Findings from Gu and Day (2007) revealed the teachers’ initial call to teach was significant in sustaining their resilience when career challenges occurred at multiple stages of their career.

Contextual resources. Relationships within and outside the work environment were significant for teacher resilience (Mansfield et al., 2016). Building these strong relationships through various networks provided growth and support integral to teacher resilience (Day & Gu, 2013; Le Cornu, 2015). Teacher support was well documented in the literature as a resiliency-enhancing factor among special education teachers and teachers in general (Belknap, 2012; Belknap & Taymans, 2015; Bobek, 2002).

The findings from a mixed-methods study of special education teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders demonstrated the importance of administrative, collegial, and parental support to the resiliency and retention of the educators (Albrecht et al., 2009). Albrecht et al. (2009) examined risk factors particular

to teachers who exited the field and the resiliency-enhancing factors of those who remained and continued teaching. Of 653 special educators surveyed, 513 (78.6%) indicated their decisions to remain whereas 140 (21.4%) reported they would be leaving the field in two years. Although the focus of this study was on special education teachers who developed resiliency and resolved to continue teaching, it is significant to report how the absence of support negatively influenced some of special educators and their career decision to leave the field in two years. Special educators who signified their intent to leave in two years reported the absence of adequate support as a major factor. In contrast, stayers reported specific areas they found support instrumental to their resiliency and retention. These included supports from administrators, colleagues, and parents, as well as support for students. Additionally, teachers cited job satisfaction, interest in student welfare, and consistent teaching career as instrumental to their resiliency and retention (Albrecht et al., 2009).

Leahy (2012) conducted a multi-method study to understand factors that influenced resiliency development and sustenance of teachers throughout their teaching career. The study was conducted among teachers teaching for more than eight years at socially and economically disadvantaged schools. Participants were identified as successfully coping with stressors associated with teaching in such areas and were therefore considered resilient. The findings revealed the role of the school principal as most significant for teachers to develop and sustain resilience. Other factors identified as influential in resiliency development and sustenance were supports from colleagues, family, and friends (Leahy, 2012).

The positive influence of supportive work environments on special educator resiliency and retention was reported in other retention studies (Zost, 2010). Resiliency was enhanced when adequate support was provided, which may be in the form of mentoring and provision of meaningful professional development to all teachers (Belknap, 2012; Belknap & Taymans, 2015). Principal support was found especially pivotal in special education teacher resiliency development (Leahy, 2012). The need for adequate support cannot be overemphasized for resiliency development and retention of special education teachers. Administrative and collegial support was significant to resilience development of beginning special education teachers (Belknap & Taymans, 2015). Belknap and Taymans (2015) further asserted beginning special education teachers were most resilient when they felt supported and intrinsically motivated to teach students with disabilities.

Teacher strategies. Resilience was described as a process whereby educators employ specific strategies and strengths to overcome and overturn career challenges (Patterson et al., 2004). In the process of adapting to changes in their teaching environment, teachers develop resilience using their strengths and strategies (Castro et al., 2010). The understanding of individuals about their ability to influence their changing environment in challenging conditions was integral to their ability to develop the needed resiliency to overcome and bounce back from life disruptions (Beltman, 2015; Lasky, 2005). Teachers were therefore considered “active agents who adopt various strategies to find balance and achievement in the face of adversity, often caused by minimal resources and challenging work conditions” (Castro et al., 2010, p. 623).

A qualitative study of diverse teachers in high-needs areas revealed the different strategies employed by teachers as they passed through adversities and challenges (Castro et al., 2010). All participants were beginning teachers, five of whom were special education teachers. The study investigated the strategies employed by these teachers and the resources available to them. The findings revealed the beginning teachers, especially the special education teachers, utilized help-seeking strategies by finding informal mentors, intentionally looking for resources, and searching for appropriate help to resolve specific problems. According to Castro et al. (2010), beginning teachers employed problem-solving techniques as they went about providing solutions to their various classroom and school challenges. Additionally, the teachers utilized alternative means of managing difficult personnel and parent relationships (Castro et al., 2010).

Often, special education teachers have the responsibility of coordinating the educational programs of their students and therefore need to collaborate with other personnel from different divisions (Castro et al., 2010). Friction and conflicts are expected during these times. To collaborate successfully with others and manage difficult and challenging relationships, special education teachers in a study identified specific colleagues as allies and buffers to stand in their defense or act on their behalf to avoid difficult exchanges and direct attack. They also avoided encounters with difficult personnel and parents, and collected documentation for building up cases against the difficult others. More importantly, the beginning special education teachers and other teachers in the study engaged in rejuvenating and renewing activities to reduce stress and gain improved strength to continue teaching in their various positions. Per Castro et al. (2010), the activities included finding work-life balance; caring for one's personal,

physical, and emotional well-being outside the classroom; and obtaining satisfaction. The findings of the study were consistent with the notion of resilience as a product of interactions and relationships within social systems (Castro et al., 2010).

Situated, professional, and personal factors. Factors that influence teachers to continue teaching are complex and multidimensional (Day & Gu, 2007). According to Mackenzie (2012), professional phases and teacher identity were critical in determining if a teacher would develop the needed resiliency to continue teaching. Additionally, teacher identities and professional phases were further influenced by personal, situated, and professional factors (Mackenzie, 2012). According to Mackenzie (2012), personal factors included influences outside the school whereas situated influences were within the school environment. Professional influences included governmental guidelines and procedures. Although these factors influenced special education teachers' resiliency individually, Mackenzie (2012) concluded the interaction between the three factors (personal, situated, professional) over the different professional phases produced resiliency.

Using a qualitative design, Mackenzie (2012) interviewed 19 veteran special educators to determine the factors that enabled them to become resilient and continue teaching for more than 15 years. The study focused on professional, personal, and situated factors that influenced how the teachers remained teaching for a considerable length of time. The 19 participants had taught students with special needs in both primary and secondary schools and were at different professional phases of their teaching careers; participant teaching experiences ranged from 15 to 30 years (Mackenzie, 2012). The findings revealed special education teachers derived satisfaction from fulfilling their inner urge to make a difference in the lives of students with special needs and from being

appreciated by their administrators for their work. On the personal level, participants indicated the accommodations and convenience the teaching profession afforded them to care for family obligations and financial responsibilities was integral to their resiliency and career longevity. Finally, all the teachers demonstrated resilience throughout their careers and were strongly committed to serving children with disabilities. Mackenzie (2012) stressed the interaction of personal, situated, and professional factors in influencing the teachers' commitment, resilience, and career longevity.

Summary

The field of special education continues to witness increasing shortages of qualified teachers across the nation (Berry, 2012; Leko & Smith, 2010; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Although many studies sought to address the reasons why special education teachers leave the field at such an alarming rate, a permanent solution to the crisis is lacking (Brownell & Sindelar, 2016; Ingersoll, 2011). However, research showed that despite the high attrition rate and perceived career challenges among special education teachers, other committed special education teachers continue in the field (Day & Gu, 2007; Gu & Day, 2007).

To proffer a long-lasting solution to special education retention, a shift emerged in the literature to focus on teachers who remained in the field for a considerable length of time and the factors that influenced their retention (Day & Gu, 2013; Gu & Day, 2007). Using Billingsley's Leadership Framework (2005), this chapter reviewed hiring practices that identify suitable special education teacher candidates and factors that promote their retention. The need for positive work conditions for effective special

education teacher retention was widely documented in the literature (Billingsley, 2005; Boyd et al., 2011; Kauffman & Ring, 2011; Tyler & Brunner, 2014).

Based on the knowledge of child resilience from the fields of psychology and psychiatry, resilience was found in the literature to be integral to the retention of special education teachers for a considerable length of time (Day & Gu, 2007; Day & Gu, 2013). Because teacher resilience is defined as a multidimensional and multifaceted construct that lacks consensus on its appropriate definition (Day & Gu, 2009), this chapter reviewed its various definitions and meanings from the literature. Frederickson's (2004) Broaden and Build Theory of Emotions was found relevant to the study of special education teacher resilience and retention. According to Frederickson (2004), positive emotions (e.g., joy, happiness, love) are stored in the form of physical, social, and intellectual resources individuals draw from during career challenges to ameliorate the full effect of crises. Isen and Daubman (1984) opined individuals who experience positive emotions are creative, open-minded, and flexible, and have the capacity for resilience and growth. This chapter also reviewed factors that influenced resiliency development among special education teachers who chose to continue teaching. The role of special education teachers was also reviewed in this chapter with the long-standing history of special education teacher shortages before and after the enactment of the Public Law 94-142, which legalized the provision of a free and appropriate public education for all students with a disability.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology employed in conducting this study. This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to describe the lived experiences of veteran special education teachers in public schools and perceived factors that led to their resiliency and retention in the field. This chapter describes the research design in relation to the questions and purpose of the study. Next, the population and sample are defined and identified. Then, the chapter describes the data collection process, interview schedule, and data analysis procedures. Finally, this chapter discusses the limitations of the study and provides an overall summary of the chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the experiences and perceived factors that led to the resiliency and retention of veteran preschool special education teachers in the field of early childhood special education.

Research Questions

One central research question and two sub-questions guided this study:

Central Question

What experiences of veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education?

Sub-questions

1. What factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their resiliency in the field of early childhood special education?

2. What factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their retention in the field of early childhood special education?

Research Design

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to describe the lived experiences and perceived factors that led to the resiliency and retention of veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County, California. Although studies of special education teacher attrition pervade the literature, studies of special education teachers who continue teaching despite teaching challenges are scant. Based on Frederickson's (2004) Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions and Billingsley's (2005) Leadership Framework, this study aimed at describing factors that enabled veteran preschool special education teachers in Solano County to develop resiliency and continue teaching for a considerable length of time.

Research designs describe the plan and procedures for collecting and analyzing data (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) stated these plans and procedures involve many decisions on how to conduct the study. A qualitative research design was utilized in conducting this study. Qualitative inquiry focuses on capturing and describing human experiences as perceived by the people who experienced the phenomenon in their natural setting (McMillan & Schumacher 2010; Patton, 2015). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further stated qualitative inquiry describes how humans perceive their experiences and define their realities.

A qualitative approach was appropriate for the current study because it sought to describe the experiences of the veteran preschool special educators in Solano County and

their experiences in relation to resilience and retention in the field of early childhood special education. Obtaining accurate information about a phenomenon can only be accomplished by asking those who encountered it (Denscombe, 2007). This study explored life experiences where preschool special education teachers demonstrated resiliency and retention during their career. Considering the scant literature on teacher resilience, gaining deep insights into the phenomenon from the special educators is crucial (Eldridge, 2013).

Five major techniques exist for conducting qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2017), but the phenomenological approach was suitable for the current study. Phenomenology seeks to explore the meaning of lived experiences of people regarding a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Finding common and diverse meanings and perspectives of a phenomenon are the hallmark of a phenomenological study (Patton, 2015). Therefore, this study sought to identify both common and diverse factors that veteran special education preschool teachers perceive as contributory to their resilience, retention, and longevity.

Phenomenological data can be gathered through in-depth interviews, artifacts, observations, and audio-visuals (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The semi-structured, open-ended interview was most suitable and adopted for this study. Semi-structured interviews are a main technique for conducting phenomenological studies because they generate detailed, rich, and in-depth information from the respondents regarding a given phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews ensure participants answer the same predetermined questions in the same order to prevent inconsistencies and errors in data gathering (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The semi-

structured interviews are unique for their use of probes and clarifying questions to elaborate on insufficient responses and clarify ambiguous responses (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Using semi-structured interview questions, each participant could share their unique personal and professional experiences as preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County. To avoid undue disruptions that occur when research participants are interviewed outside their natural setting, each participant was interviewed at their preferred location, day, and time. All the interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face at the teachers' school sites.

Population

A population is the group or individuals from who the data are intended to represent (Patton, 2015). According to Creswell (2009), it is the group of individuals with similar characteristics and traits. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a given population must meet specific criteria to make a generalization of findings possible. Although generalization was not the focus of this qualitative study, sharing common criteria is essential in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). As shown in Figure 2, the population for this study was preschool special education teachers in public schools in California. As of 2016, there were 1,680 preschool special education teachers in public schools in California (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

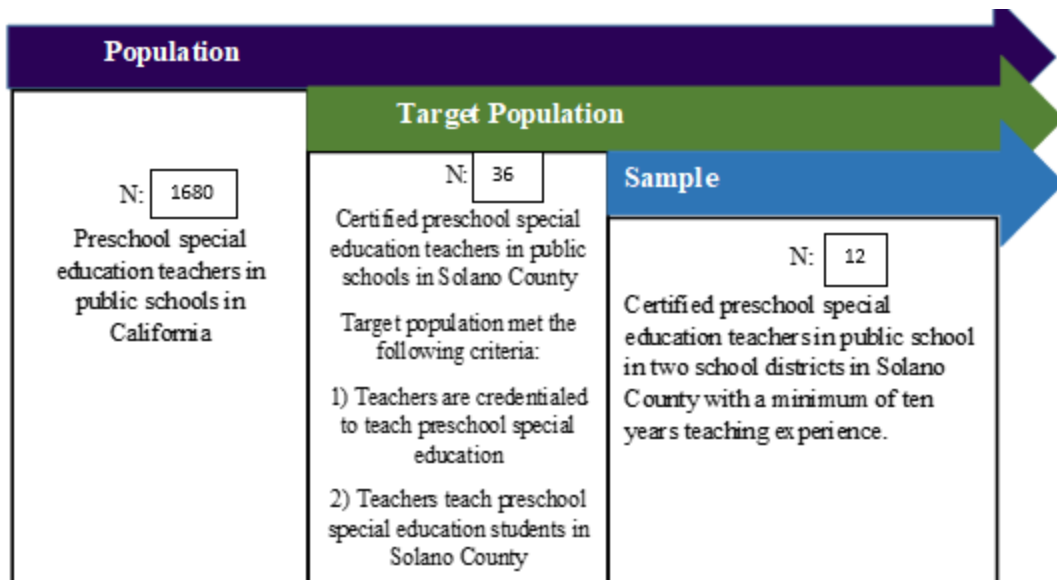


Figure 2. Narrowing from population to sample.

The target population of any study is achieved by reducing the population size using selected variables (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Based on the population of preschool special education in public schools in California, the estimated population of the study was 1,680 preschool special education teachers. However, given the time and financial constraints associated with executing a study of such magnitude, it was necessary to narrow the study population. Preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County were chosen for this study for easy accessibility and proximity to the research. Based on the population of preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County, the target population for this study was 36.

Sample

A sample is drawn out of a target population using appropriate sampling techniques and has all the attributes of the target population (Creswell, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sample for this study was veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County. To obtain accurate information that

addressed the study purpose and research questions, it was imperative to focus on teachers who demonstrated resiliency as measured by their years of experience in the field of early childhood special education. The sample was further narrowed by focusing on preschool special education teachers in Solano County with at least 10 years teaching experience.

The size of a qualitative sample is determined by the research purpose and not necessarily by the number of participants needed to obtain rich and detailed information (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher, therefore focused on 12 preschool special education teachers from two school districts in Solano County.

Sample Selection Process

To identify veteran preschool special education teachers teaching for at least 10 years, a snowball sampling technique was used. Snowball sampling entails contacting a few information-rich respondents and soliciting their recommendations for potential participants who also meet the study criteria (Patton, 2015). For this study, special education directors and coordinators in Solano County public schools were contacted using information available on the schools' websites. The directors identified a few preschool special education teachers who met the criteria. Using snowball sampling, additional study participants were contacted and interviewed. The veteran preschool special education teachers were contacted via emails informing them of the research purpose and soliciting their participation (Appendix A). Upon receipt of emails from the teachers signifying their intention to participate, the researcher provided the teachers with the informed consent form and participant bill of rights through emails (Appendix B).

The researcher then scheduled interviews with individual participants based on their choice of date, venue, and time.

Instrumentation

The researcher is known as the instrument when conducting a qualitative study (Patton, 2015). Because researchers are the instrument in qualitative studies, their unique personalities, characteristics, and interview techniques may influence data collection (Pezella, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). As a result, the study may contain biases introduced as the researcher interviews participants.

The researcher was the main instrument for data collection in this study. The researcher developed the interview questions, gathered and analyzed the data, and interpreted the findings. Additionally, the researcher was a veteran preschool special education teacher, which influenced her biases and assumptions about the topic. Moustakas (1994) stressed the importance for researchers to clarify their perceptions about the phenomenon in question before proceeding to understand other's perceptions. To gather quality qualitative data, it is pertinent to ask appropriate questions that would motivate participants to share their lived experiences and provide opportunities to clarify issues and ambiguities with the participants when the need arises (Barbour & Schostak, 2005; Patton, 2015).

According to Seidman (2013), interviewing is the most appropriate approach to the subjective understanding of a phenomenon. The interview approach was considered appropriate for this study because it offered the flexibility and time for the participants to share their opinions, ideas, and perceptions about the phenomenon. Additionally, the technique enabled the researcher to ask additional questions to clarify unclear responses

and deepen the knowledge of the topic. Furthermore, the interview technique enabled the teachers to share vivid accounts of their experiences and factors that led to their resiliency and career decision to continue teaching.

Examining existing and related interview questions is essential to developing good interview questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Using Billingsley's (2005) Leadership Framework and Fredrickson's (2004) Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions, the researcher developed relevant interview questions for the study. With the guidance of the dissertation chair and committee members, the researcher developed the interview protocol, which comprised of 14 questions using the research questions as a framework (Appendix C). The questions included demographic and open-ended items needed to address the study purpose. Demographic questions, such as year of certification and teaching experience, were asked to further determine if participants met the required criteria for participating in the study. The other interview items directly addressed the research questions. In addition, probing questions were used to clarify ambiguous responses and elaborate for deeper and more detailed information.

The quality of qualitative data is determined by examining the trustworthiness and credibility of the information gathered (Blomberg & Volpe, 2012). Per Blomberg and Volpe (2012), the credibility criterion checks if the data gathered accurately matches participant responses. To ensure the credibility of this study, the interview questions were reviewed by a panel of experts prior to data collection for alignment to the study purpose. The panel of experts included the dissertation chair and two committee members, who are knowledgeable in the fields of special education and research. Utilizing the panel of

experts increased the content validity of the study data. The experts' revisions were incorporated to the interview questions and resubmitted for approval.

Pilot Testing

To ensure interview questions, researcher, and procedures are free of bias, it is important to pilot test the interview questions using procedures like the actual interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher conducted a pilot interview with one veteran preschool special education teacher who was not part of the study; the pilot interview was witnessed by an observer. The observer had extensive knowledge in the fields of research and statistics. At the completion of the pilot interview, the participant and observer evaluated the interview process and questions using the interview critique (Appendix D) and interview observer questionnaire (Appendix E). The evaluation ensured the clarity and appropriateness of the questions for the study participants and necessary edits were made with approval of the dissertation chair.

The approved interview guide included 13 open-ended and demographic, semi-structured questions to motivate participants to share their stories and describe their experiences about perceived factors that led to their resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education. The demographic questions were posed to establish good rapport with participants and confirm participant eligibility for the study.

The interviews were conducted between September and October 2018. At the beginning of each interview, participants reviewed and signed the informed consent form to acknowledge their rights and consent to participate in the interview. Participants were presented with the interview protocol to intimate them with the interview questions in advance. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and digitally recorded. Additionally,

the researcher took field notes to document non-verbal communication and other interactions during the interviews. The audio recordings and field notes were transcribed. To further enhance the validity of the data, the transcripts were sent to the participants to verify their accuracy and completeness.

Researcher bias must be addressed and minimized (Creswell, 2009). Because the researcher was the instrument of the study, it was necessary to clarify assumptions and biases about the subject. Creswell (2009) further stated, “good qualitative research contains comments by the researcher about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, such as their gender, culture, history and socio-economic origin” (p. 192). As this researcher was a veteran preschool special education teacher, the researcher documented her experiences and opinions about special education teacher resilience and retention in advance before conducting the interviews.

Reliability

Reliability measures the ease with which a study can be replicated by other researchers and ensures consistent data collection processes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). To establish replicability of research, a large population size is required, which is not usually attainable in qualitative studies. However, research reliability in qualitative studies can be achieved by examining if the study findings are consistent with study data (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Although inconsistencies occur, it is imperative for qualitative researchers to document when they occur between findings and data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Intercoder agreement helps increase the reliability of a study (Creswell, 2009). Intercoder agreement measures “the extent to which two or more persons agree about

what they have seen, heard or rated” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 182). Interrater agreement is obtained when two or more raters achieve consistent ratings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To ensure the reliability of this study, a research expert was employed to code 20% of the study transcripts. A comparison was made between the expert’s and researcher’s codes to determine agreement between the two raters.

Additionally, study reliability can also be established if the researcher documents in detail the research process and various decisions made throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The researcher maintained a journal for documenting field notes and reflections during data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and noted when data sets were collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Furthermore, the researcher conducted all the interviews using the same protocol to ensure consistency.

Validity

Validity measures the credibility of a study from the perspectives of the researcher, participants, and readers (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Validity is an important feature of any research design (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). The goal of determining research validity is to ensure all components of the research design, questions, and methods are well aligned (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

To ensure the validity of this study, the researcher utilized an external audit approach. Dr. Sharon Herpin served as the external auditor for this study. Dr. Herpin is a Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership with extensive experience in research and evaluation. The auditor examined the relevance of the research design to the research purpose and study questions. The auditor also clarified all components of the research design were well-aligned.

Data Collection

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather in-depth and detailed information from veteran preschool special education teachers in Solano County about their lived experiences that led to their resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education. To achieve this objective, the researcher conducted face-to-face individual interviews using pre-determined, semi-structured questions. To elicit detailed and clear responses from participants, the researcher developed and posed probing questions as appropriate in the interview protocol. To ensure participant confidentiality, names were omitted and replaced with numbers. The audio recordings and field notes were also locked in a safe at the researcher's residence to ensure confidentiality and safekeeping of the data.

Human Subject Considerations

Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher obtained approval from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB). The study sample comprised of 12 veteran preschool special education teachers from two school districts in Solano County who taught preschool special education for a minimum of 10 years. Each participant was contacted through email informing them of the purpose of the study and soliciting their participation (Appendix A). In addition to the formal invitation letter, each participant was provided the *Research Participant's Bill of Rights* and informed consent form (Appendix B), and the interview protocol (Appendix C). The interviews occurred at the location, day, and time chosen by participants. To ensure participant privacy and confidentiality, names were replaced with identification numbers.

Interview Procedures

The researcher obtained participant permission to record their responses during the interview process. With the aid of a digital audio recorder, the researcher captured verbatim the responses, stories, and experiences shared by the respondents during the interviews. In addition to the audio recordings, the researcher documented non-verbal communication and other interactions during the interview process for an accurate gathering of responses and information from the educators.

The audio recordings and field notes were transcribed. Each participant was sent a copy of their interview transcript for review of accuracy and completeness. Using electronic software, NVivo, the transcripts were coded for common themes and patterns. The transcripts were then reviewed and analyzed by the researcher. Each participant received a copy of the dissertation at the completion of the study in appreciation of their participation and support in conducting the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an ongoing process that may begin during data gathering and continue throughout the entire process of a qualitative study (Spencer, O'Connor, Morrell, & Ormston, 2014). Data analysis involves, “coding, categorizing and interpreting research data to provide explanations of a single phenomenon of interest” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 367). Data preparation is an important phase of data analysis before data coding. It is important to organize the voluminous information obtained during data collection (Patton, 2015). The researcher utilized the various sections of the interview guide and research questions to divide the data into manageable units.

Data Coding

Per McMillan and Schumacher (2010), identifying the data segments is the beginning of the data coding process. A data segment is a piece of information relevant to participant experiences of the phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher read through the transcripts to identify the data segments by marking the cogent information of each transcript. The identified segments were later labelled as codes. A word, phrase, or sentence from the data transcript was used to label each data segment (code) to provide it meaning and identification.

Forming categories and themes. Themes are formed by grouping together similar codes using appropriate labels that give meaning to the classification (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2015). Depending on the relevance or importance of the codes, the researcher assigns tentative categories or themes to groups of similar codes for possible regrouping and reclassifying (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher reviewed the transcripts and codes several times to prevent code duplication, wrong coding, coding omissions, and other coding errors. For further analysis, the researcher reviewed the themes to identify relationships and connections.

Discovering patterns. Discovering relationships between categories in a qualitative data is the hallmark of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2009). The researcher reviewed the themes/categories and the entire transcript repeatedly to identify relationships and connections between the identified categories. The identified relationships were used to create data patterns that formed the basis for describing and interpreting the findings. Using NVivo, the patterns and frequencies of each code were determined.

Descriptions of Findings

The researcher utilized the narrative technique to describe the findings that emerged from the analysis. The narrative included a detailed description of the themes and patterns that emerged from the data analysis using participant quotations. Additionally, the researcher used visuals, such as tables and figures, to illustrate the description and discussions. The researcher made meaning of the phenomenon by comparing the findings with relevant findings from existing literature. The researcher's experience as a veteran preschool special education teacher helped in describing and interpreting the data.

Triangulation. To ensure the quality, credibility, and rigor of qualitative research, it is important to establish the consistency of the data by obtaining data from multiple sources in multiple ways (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Patton (2015) defined triangulation as “gathering and analyzing multiple perspectives, using diverse sources of data, and during analysis, using alternative frameworks” (p. 652). Patton (2015) stressed that although there are diverse types of triangulation, the objective remains “reducing systematic bias and distortion during data analysis, and thereby increasing credibility” (p. 674). The researcher used document review and member checks to establish the consistency of findings.

Document review entails reviewing pertinent public and private documents related to the phenomenon under consideration (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Per Patton (2015), these documents may include personal diaries, letters, photographs, artistic works, and official written materials. For the current study, the researcher reviewed

participant-related personal, school, and community documents to corroborate stories shared during interviews as indicated on the transcripts and findings.

Analytical triangulation is also achieved by “having those who were studied review the findings” to ensure the consistency of the findings and the participants’ responses about a given phenomenon (Patton, 2015, p. 668). To determine if the transcripts were a true representation of participant responses, opinions, and ideas, the researcher sent each participant a copy of their interview transcript. Each participant was provided the opportunity to review their interview transcripts for accuracy and completeness.

Limitations

Because the researcher was directly involved with gathering, recording, analyzing, and interpreting the data, it is impossible to exclude the researcher’s bias, opinions, interests, and perceptions from the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This is particularly important in this study because the researcher is a veteran preschool special education in Solano County. Although the participants were unknown to the researcher before the interview, they probably shared similar experiences. A limitation of the study was the possibility the researcher’s opinions were unknowingly interjected in the study. In expressing the researcher’s experiences and opinions about preschool teacher resilience and retention at the onset of the study, this limitation was minimized.

Like many qualitative studies, this study was limited by the small population and sample size, which limited generalizability. Although the population and sample were small, the intent of the study was not to generalize the findings but to understand the

phenomenon and describe it in detail. The researcher described each phase of the study in detail so it can be replicated by other researchers in similar contexts.

This study was also limited because it excluded preschool special education teachers with less than 10 years of teaching experience. The study aimed at identifying the lived experiences and perceived factors that led to the resiliency and retention of veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County teaching for 10 years and longer. Their perceptions may be different from those with less teaching experience or those in different regions of California or the country.

Summary

This chapter described the research methodology. A qualitative design using in-depth, open-ended interviews was utilized to gather data. The data were collected to provide insights and detailed information of the experiences and perceived factors that led to the resiliency and retention of veteran preschool special education teachers in Solano County in California. The population, target population, sample, and data collection techniques were explained in this chapter. Furthermore, it included the participant selection process and the development of interview questions. Finally, the chapter described the data analysis process and study limitations. Chapter IV presents the data, analysis, and findings from the study. The final chapter presents the conclusions, implications, and recommendation of the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This chapter summarizes the data gathered on the experiences that veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools considered influential to their resiliency and retention. The chapter begins with a review of the purpose statement, research questions, research design, and population and sample. It then presents the data and findings, and then concludes with a summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the experiences and perceived factors that led to the resiliency and retention of veteran preschool special education teachers in the field of early childhood special education.

Research Questions

This study was guided by a central question which was further divided into two sub-questions.

Central Question

What experiences of veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education?

Sub-questions

1. What factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their resiliency in the field of early childhood special education?

2. What factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their retention in the field of early childhood special education?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological design to describe the phenomenon of resiliency and retention among veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County. Phenomenological research seeks to explore the meaning of lived experiences about a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Finding common and diverse meanings and perspectives of a phenomenon are the hallmark of a phenomenological study (Patton, 2015). This study sought to identify both common and diverse factors that veteran special education preschool teachers perceived as influential to their career resilience and retention. Although the study of special education teacher attrition pervades the literature, a shift emerged to focus on those who stayed. The notion of resilience became significant in understanding why some teachers remained in the same field (Bobek, 2002; Howard & Johnson, 2004). The experiences of the stayers who remained in the field was gathered as data for the study.

Population and Target Population

The population for this study was preschool special education teachers in public schools in California. As of 2016, there were 1,680 preschool special education teachers in public schools in California (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). However, given the time and financial constraints a target population was selected. The target population was the 36 certified preschool special education teachers working in in public schools in Solano County, California, who met the study criteria.

Sample

The sample for this study comprised of 12 veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County with at least 10 years teaching experience. The sample was selected using snowball sampling techniques. Public schools in Solano County were chosen for this study for easy accessibility and proximity to the researcher. Then snowball sampling entailed soliciting new referrals from the interviewees who already participated in the study.

Presentation of Data

The study was conducted with 12 veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County. The participants were all females with teaching experience ranging between 10 and 29 years. The study participants had a varied and diverse backgrounds and teaching experiences. Six of the 12 teachers had experiences in general education classrooms as teacher assistants and classroom teachers, and five others worked in special education classrooms as para-educators, teachers, or volunteers. One participant had a disability and four had family members with disabilities.

The study utilized semi-structured interview questions to gather information from the participants. All 12 teachers were interviewed in their classrooms at their preferred day and time. Each interview lasted about one hour. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the study participants.

Table 1

Demographic Information

ID #	Gender	Years Experience	Prior Experiences
1	Female	14	Para-educator
2	Female	10	Teacher-Elementary/Middle School Special Education
3	Female	10	Teacher-Elementary/Middle/High School Special Education
4	Female	21	Para-educator & Teacher- Preschool/General Ed.
5	Female	29	Volunteer with Disabled Children
6	Female	20	Teacher-Preschool/General Ed.
7	Female	11	Teacher-Infant and Toddler
8	Female	27	Teacher Assistant
9	Female	18	Teacher-Infant and Toddler
10	Female	12	None
11	Female	22	Teacher-Preschool/General Ed.
12	Female	18	Teacher-Infant and Toddler

Development of Themes

With the approval of the study participants, all the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The researcher first reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and then sent each transcript to the participant to review. All participants agreed with the information on their transcripts. The researcher scanned the transcripts for possible themes and patterns based on related literature and data review. Across the two research sub-questions, 11 major themes were identified. These are presented in the following sections by research sub-question.

Findings for Research Sub-Question 1

The first sub-question was *What factors perceived by veteran, preschool, special education teachers in public schools led to their resiliency in the field of early childhood special education?* Five major themes were identified by participants as factors that led to their resiliency in the field. The frequency of references to the themes ranged between

121 and 18. Table 2 presents the factors that preschool special education teachers perceived to have led to their resiliency in the field of early childhood special education.

Table 2

Themes and Frequency of Themes for Research Sub-Question 1

Theme	Frequency
Research Sub-Question 1	
Personal Strategies	121
Rejuvenation and Renewal	55
Problem-Solving	53
Life-Long Learning	17
Help-Seeking	13
Personal Factors	51
Positive Emotions	76
Peer Support	72
Mentoring	18

Personal strategies. Personal strategies included specific attributes teachers utilized to solve problems, seek help, obtain training, and rejuvenate and renew their minds and bodies to minimize the full effects of the professional challenges (Castro et al., 2010). The use of personal strategies was identified by study participants as the most influential factor that led to their resiliency. The strategies employed by study participants were rejuvenation and renewal, problem-solving, life-long learning, and help-seeking.

All study participants employed one or more strategies to overcome career challenges. The use of personal strategies was referenced 121 times. Of the identified personal strategies, seeking rejuvenation and renewal had the highest frequency with 55 references, followed by problem-solving with 53 references. Life-long learning and help-seeking strategies received 17 and 13 references, respectively. This finding aligned with Castro et al. (2010), who indicated resilience occurred when individuals acted as active

agents and employed appropriate strategies to overcome challenges in their environment (Castro et al., 2010).

Seeking rejuvenation and renewal strategy. Seeking rejuvenation and renewal was identified by participants as the most influential strategy enabling them to develop and sustain resiliency during career crises. Eight of 12 participants identified rejuvenation and renewal to maintain emotional wellness. Because teaching is an emotionally, physically, and mentally tasking profession (Castro et al., 2010), it is necessary for teachers engage in regular activities to relieve tension and minimize stress (Kyriacou, 2001). Stress can be minimized either mentally or physically. The mental technique requires engaging in reflective practices to maintain a positive position in a bad situation (Kyriacou, 2001). Most participants employed mental strategies to address their challenges. T2 sought rejuvenation and renewal by maintaining a balance between life and work, and reflecting on issues to focus on what was important. T2 stated:

I really try to leave the emotional part of it in the classroom and don't take it home with me. A lot of times I'll do projects or work or art things to get ready but I don't take the emotional part of the day home with me. I would describe myself as a resilient teacher. I think I recover quickly from difficulties. I take them to heart but I am pretty good about kind of going home and rethinking it. Letting a lot of things go or coming up with different strategies on how I would deal with whatever difficulties there were.

T10 agreed with T2 that it was necessary to separate work from home by engaging in pleasant activities to take their minds off stressful work conditions. T10 and

T2 believed sharing good times and fun times with friends outside of school would promote renewal and well-being.

Focusing on the students was a strategy employed by many study participants to remain emotionally stable and positive during professional crises. T4, T5, and T6 relied on reflective practices to stay focused during challenging times. T6 commented:

I actually had to decide on what I could have control over and what I could manage and what I had no control over and what I couldn't manage. And I had to leave the emotions aside for those things and do what I could to affect change where I could affect change and live in those moments and live in the moments of what I was being successful in and that I was doing right by children in the environment and leave the other things aside and not allow myself to get consumed with that vacuum.

T5 shared, "I actually took stress relieving classes and kind of just focus on being with my kids and trying to shut out the negatives and the negativity and stress that admin is putting on."

Teacher emotional wellbeing is crucial to their effectiveness, commitment, resilience, and retention (Billingsley, 2005). Wellbeing is the capacity to maintain a state of balance between resources and challenges (Dodge, 2012). Participants reported protecting their emotional wellbeing by seeking rejuvenation and renewal. Teachers reduced the impact of stress when engaged in rejuvenation and renewal activities and developed new insights for future negative experiences (Castro et al., 2010).

Problem-solving. Employing problem-solving techniques was the second most influential strategy study participants utilized to develop resiliency. Problem-solving

strategies entailed specific techniques respondents utilized to resolve classroom or school issues. All 12 participants implemented one or more problem-solving strategies to resolve ongoing classroom and professional challenges. For example, T9 solved the problem of challenging parents in the classroom by engaging in open communication and regular celebrations involving students and families. T9 shared:

I work really hard on my relationships with my families. I communicate with them a lot, I call them. If the child rides the bus and I don't see the parent, I'll call them a couple of times a week and let them know how they are doing at school. I have a party in my classroom about once a month and I supply all the food and I have good food and desert for them. But the families end up absolutely loving to come to the party days and the dads will even ask their wives to let them know ahead of time so they can get the day off and come. I sometimes have grandmothers and grandpas and uncles and aunts and the whole family, siblings. It is really fun to do that and it helped to establish positive relationships with my families.

Due to the nature of teaching, teachers constantly problem-solve (Castro et al., 2010). Participants employed various strategies to address professional problems. Although some teachers reached out to others, some took initiative to solve problems themselves and others sought alternatives to scarce resources such as inadequate professional development and unresponsive induction and mentoring programs. Additionally, effective communication with students, parents, and families was found effective and influential to the resilience of the teachers, which aligned with Bobek (2002) who found open communication among resilient teachers.

Life-long learning. Commitment to life-long learning was identified by participants as influential to resiliency development and career longevity. Continuing education enabled them to stay abreast of current trends in the field of early childhood special education and acquire skills to teach effectively.

To ensure teachers remain competent and improve their teaching skills, regular professional development is provided. Although study participants participated in professional development provided at their schools, seven teachers considered it irrelevant to preschool special education and 12 concluded professional development was not influential to their retention (Table 3).

Table 3

Influence of Professional Development on Retention

Theme	n	%
Relevant Professional Development	5	41.7
Irrelevant Professional Development	7	52.3
Not Influential to Retention	12	100

To address their training and continuing education, participants adopted the life-long learning strategy for their training and learning opportunities. T7 described the various classes taken to remain current and knowledgeable in the field of early childhood special education, sharing:

I've had some pretty good training... I've also taken classes because I always feel like you can always learn. I took two classes this summer...in language and literacy. Even though we've been doing it for a long time, I love to see what's new and what's current and what's out there and what's

up and changing. As grownups, we too can learn and we're never done learning.

T4 and T10 agreed that to become resilient and successfully teach, preschool special education teachers must seek learning opportunities and be committed to learning throughout their teaching career. T4 stated, "I like learning... I was at a behavior training recently and all the behaviorist were asking 'what are you doing here?' It keeps you fresh. It invigorates you. It reinvigorates and motivates you." Likewise, T10 concurred, "being a teacher is being a lifelong learner." Commitment to lifelong learning was identified as a strategy that enabled the teachers to develop resiliency to continue teaching. Though participants considered the learning opportunities available to them as inadequate, their commitment to learning motivated them to seek quality and relevant professional learning opportunities beyond what was offered at their schools. This finding aligned with Billingsley et al. (2014) who found a direct relationship between career decision to continue teaching and the quality of the professional opportunities received.

Help-seeking. The strategy of help-seeking was identified as influential to the resilience of the veteran preschool special education teachers. In addressing the various challenges that confronted them, study participants reached out to other individuals within and outside their schools for help. Help-seeking strategy received 13 references from six participants. Employing the help-seeking strategy aided in ameliorating the classroom challenges. For help with students with severe behaviors in the classroom, T10 sought help from other professionals, describing, "If I don't know what to do with a student, if I am absolutely at a loss... I will try and go find help through other professionals." T9 identified these professionals as occupational therapists, speech

pathologists, and physical therapists within the school district. T10 suggested seeking help from the administrator before reaching out to other people.

Participants employed the help-seeking strategy to address their needs and overcome career challenges. For these participants, help-seeking involved requesting specialized services from non-teaching special education personnel and additional staffing from the administrators. Resilient teachers actively take care of themselves by utilizing appropriate strategies to address their areas of need (Le Cornu, 2015).

Peer support. Peer support describes different ways teachers support each another and build relationships within school environments (Le Cornu, 2015). Peer support was identified by participants as the second most influential factor that led to their resiliency and career longevity. Peer support was referenced 72 times by 10 study participants. T5 and T10 shared it would have been impossible to successfully teach for as long as they did without the support of their colleagues. T5 shared:

I don't know that I ever would have stayed as long as I have and in the positions that I've been in if I didn't have the team surrounding me that I do...Preschool has always been my family... I've had some other people that I've worked with. But I think you have to, there is so much that happens in preschool and you have to figure out how to work with the people that are in your closest environment and I think...in preschool the demands that are put on the teams, the preschool teams, are pretty diverse and intense and it's hard. It's hard work. And I think you have to support each other and love each other as co-workers in order to get through the day in and day out stuff that happens in a preschool classroom.

T10 concurred, saying:

Having a lot of support from other teachers. I actually had quite a few teachers that I was connected to that had been teaching for a while and I felt like I could talk to any of them...like random questions about paperwork and IEP's and this and that...Just having their support and talking to them and that they went through things and they came out the other side and that they were there to listen and understand.

T9 identified peer support as the primary support every teacher needs to become resilient and teach for a considerable period. T9 shared:

For resilience to happen with special ed teachers in today's culture I think there has to be peer support. You have to have support from your peers. I think that's the primary support that teachers need to have because you learn from peers, but you also know that they have an understanding of what you're experiencing. That's unique.

T8 shared that in the absence of formal mentors, experienced teachers rose to the occasion to support newer teachers and minimized the full effects of stress resulting from unresponsive mentoring. T8 stated:

I looked to the more tenured teachers to help me. Even though I didn't get a mentor I did look to my colleagues for the support. For how to write the IEP's, how to, what activities to do. But, to some extent that's how I got that support. And we, actually when I first came here the second year there was, I think, four of us and we teamed together and how we did our program was jointly and so ... we really supported each other. It wasn't I

have my room and I do my thing. We did it as a unit and so that was support. That was really good support.

The study participants identified the assistance from their colleagues as their primary source of support. It is significant to note the teachers reported receiving and providing collegial help as the teaching environment demanded. This aligned with a prior study that found support from colleagues beneficial because they shared similar experiences and challenges (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Additionally, research showed teacher morale increased when they experienced positive working relationships with their peers and informal relationships with their peers played a significant role in resiliency development (Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014).

Mentoring. Formal and informal mentors were influential to the resiliency and career longevity of participants. Mentors helped sustain resilience through forming satisfying and fulfilling positive relationships (Hong, 2012). Responsive induction and mentoring helped ensure new teachers experienced a smooth transition into the teaching profession and develop necessary teaching skills (Sweeney, 2013).

As part of the induction process, new teachers are assigned a mentor who ensures the teacher has the physical, material, and emotional resources to be successful in the profession. Only 2 of 12 study participants reported participating in a responsive induction and mentoring program offered by the district at the onset of their career, although noted it was not influential for their resiliency. Additionally, the remaining 10 participants shared the absence of responsive induction and mentoring did not influence their resilience or decision to continue teaching. Table 4 presents teacher participation in induction and mentoring and the influence on teacher resiliency.

Table 4

Teacher Experience with Induction and Mentoring

Theme	n	%
Participated in Induction and Mentoring	2	16.7
Did not Participate in Induction and Mentoring	10	83.3
Not Influential to Resiliency	12	100

T7 and T9 reported the mentoring part of induction was helpful and relevant to their needs. T7 shared:

I had a mentor. But I felt I knew just as much as her because I came from a general ed background so she helped me out with a lot of things like how to keep dates and all that stuff, but I came from [a school] that had a lot of great trainings. She was great though because she was at my site so she was kind of like my site liaison so she helped me like where do you order this, what you do with this and so she was a great support in that. She definitely helped me through sometimes. I think that it's really important to be supportive, especially as a new teacher.

Though 10 study participants did not participate in a mentoring program, they sought and found informal mentors among other teachers in the field of special education who were helpful and responsive to their needs and resilience. T9 indicated her need for a mentor, reporting:

I really could have used a mentor. I really could have because I didn't come with a lot of tools in my back pack, especially coming from an infant program where you're going to the home every week. It's so different than a classroom. And the organization is different, the

curriculum, the techniques, what you teach. And I walked into a classroom and if I hadn't job-shared with a teacher, I would have really been lost.

Teacher resilience is enhanced through formal induction and mentoring programs (Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014). However, in the current study, most teachers did not receive formal induction and mentoring. Rather, the teachers sought informal mentors among their tenured and experienced colleagues for addressing career challenges and developing resilience to continue teaching. This aligned with research that showed teachers who had quality relationships with their mentors experienced a high degree of job satisfaction and resilience (Castro et al., 2010).

Personal factors. Personal factors included the attributes and assets teachers brought into the profession that protect them from the devastating effects of work stressors (Beltman, 2015). The use of personal factors was identified as influential to the resiliency development of the study participants. The use of personal factors was reference 51 times and by all 12 study participants. The main sub-theme identified under this major theme was positive emotions.

Positive emotion was identified by participants as an influential factor that led to resiliency in the field. Participants experienced positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment, pride, passion, and love when working with preschoolers with special needs. As shown in Table 5, all study participants experienced frequent positive emotions teaching preschool special education.

Table 5

Teacher Experience with Positive Emotions

Theme	n	%
Experienced Frequent Positive Emotions	12	100

Ten of 12 respondents reported the positive emotions they experienced teaching preschoolers with disabilities was influential in their career decision to continue teaching. Research showed people who experienced positive emotions frequently became resilient because they developed long-lasting physical, intellectual, and social resources from which they draw upon during challenges and difficulties (Frederickson, 2004).

T3 shared she was able to teach preschool special education for a considerable length of time because of the joyful and happy moments she frequently experienced working with the students. T3 stated, “Anything that you find joy in, you tend to want to repeat, the joy I bring to the little ones...makes me want to continue to do what I do.” T5 shared similar sentiments; they both loved working with the students and looked forward to seeing them each day despite ant career challenges. T5 stated,

You have to love what you’re doing, If I ever get up in the morning and say, “I don’t want to go to work,” it is time to leave the classroom... If I ever feel like I have any level of dread for wanting to go to work, then I should not walk into a classroom again.

Though the study participants expressed that they experienced some career challenges, T1 and T12 concurred the satisfaction and joy surpassed the effects of the challenges. T12 stated:

I experience most of the time good and positive emotions. Although there are times when the going gets really rough and tough, but most of the time, it has been a joy teaching the preschoolers. There is always something to laugh about. Even if you are sad, they will make you laugh. I

look forward to coming to see them all the time. There has not been any time I did not want to come to work because of the children. The problem is always dealing with the adults.

Individuals experiencing frequent positive emotions have an array of possibilities available in their actions, thoughts, and behaviors that make them more flexible to adapting to changes in their environment, developing coping resources, and developing resilience (Frederickson & Losada, 2005). Teachers who engage in activities that lead to positive emotions can better endure negative emotions leading to resilience (Sharplin, O'Neil, & Chapman, 2011). Positive emotional states are integral to teacher resilience and commitments to continue teaching (Le Cornu, 2015).

Findings for Research Sub-Question 2

The second sub-question was *What factors perceived by veteran, preschool, special education teachers in public schools led to their retention in the field of early childhood special education?* Retention is achieved when a teacher continues teaching for a considerable length of time (Billingsley, 2005). In identification of perceived factors that led to retention of participants, seven themes were identified from the interviews; to be considered a common theme, it needed to be referenced by at least half of the participants. Frequency of reference to themes ranged from 83 to 21. Table 6 presents the perceived factors veteran preschool special education teachers considered influential to their retention.

Table 6

Themes and Frequency of Themes for Research Sub-Question 2

Theme	n	Frequency
Job Satisfaction	12	83

Administrative Support	12	73
Motivation	10	40
Teacher Experience	8	29
Teacher Preparation and Training	6	22

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was the most influential factor related to participant retention in the field of early childhood special education. The teachers defined job satisfaction based on their overall experiences, and all 12 participants identified job satisfaction as integral to their retention in the field of early childhood special education. Participants described their teaching experiences as joyful, enjoyable, satisfying, exciting, and rewarding. T5, T8, T9, and T10 reported tremendous satisfaction seeing their students' growth and progress. For example, T9 stated:

It's very satisfying to see the growth and progress in children, and because child development is so rapid in typical kids, it isn't that way in children with special needs and so a lot of times with kids that are typical developing you don't notice a lot of the little steps of development that they make because they do it so automatically. But with children who have disabilities or challenges, you work on those smaller steps of the skill development. And so every little area of progress or every little skill that they accomplish is so exciting because you know those little steps are going to lead to the larger ones.

T8 agreed with T9 that teaching students with special needs is rewarding and noted it was satisfying when students attained global developmental milestones. Similar to T9, T8 shared:

I'm still here after 37 years. I love the level because we're on sort of the edge of really reaching the kids. For example, the toddler program, they make progress but it's slow. Then they would come to my program and you'd see this amazing progress. That's what I really liked. I like working with the kids and teaching them the foundational skills necessary for their life... To be able to communicate, express yourself as well as socially interact and have relationships... That's why I really like preschool, because I can impact their education at an early age. I think that's what keeps me going is the progress that I see in the students and really being able to impact the children as well as the families.

T12 concurred that:

It has been exciting and fun teaching the little ones. I really enjoy teaching them new basic skills and watching as they attain individual milestones. They come to my class with barely any word and by the end of the first year, they are communicating with words, signs, and devices as needed. It is also exciting teaching them basic socialization and vocational skills... I am not sure I can do any other thing. It is rewarding and exciting.

All the participants reported experiencing satisfying and rewarding experiences teaching preschool special education. They continued to teach preschool special education for more than 10 years because they derived satisfaction seeing students achieve their developmental milestones and educational goals. This finding aligned with existing research. Gu and Day (2007) found teachers derived satisfaction by employing personal and school resources. Teachers who experienced pleasurable or positive

emotional states from teaching were more likely to have a high degree of job satisfaction leading to retention (Green & Munoz, 2016). Additionally, student progress was the main source of motivation for experienced teachers (Day & Gu, 2009).

Administrative support. Administrative support was identified by participants as the second most influential factor needed for retention. Thus, administrators play a significant role in teacher retention. Teachers experienced improved morale, satisfaction, and commitment when administrators formed strong and positive relationships with them in addition to meeting their needs (Day et al., 2011). Table 7 presents teachers perception of administrative support and its influence on retention.

Table 7

Administrative Support and Retention

Theme	n	%
Received Administrative Support	10	83.3
Did not Receive Administrative Support	2	16.7
Not Influential to Retention	10	83.3
Influential to Retention	2	16.7

Ten of 12 participants reported receiving administrative support during career challenges. However, only two teachers identified the support as influential to their retention. The teachers identified other sources of support (e.g., peer, family, friends) for overcoming challenges.

In addressing the role of administrators in promoting preschool special education teacher retention, participants focused mainly on their perception of administrative support and how they would like to be supported by administrators. T5, T8, T9, T10, and T12 identified wanting administrators to build strong positive relationships with them to promoting quality education. T8 commented:

Be visible, be available. Know what's going on and be supportive of us. One that's there to listen when you have a situation going on and that really shows that concern and then helps you to find the solution to the problem. As opposed to saying "no, no, it's not happening," or just not responding. I think number one is show your teachers you value them. Teachers do not feel valued by their admin. And there's been a breakdown in trust, so that's number two. There's no trust because your word is not your bond. I've heard a lot of "I'm going to do this and I'm going to do that" and then two months go by and emails and nothing has happened yet. Communication is number three... Isn't that key to everything, communication? I mean it could be actually number one, but because if you don't have good communication then you have breakdowns in all the other areas. There are simple things like trying to have a relationship with a teacher.

T12 shared similar sentiments that teacher appreciation and acknowledgement are key to retention. T12 added:

I think it is important that admins show appreciation for what teachers do. Everybody likes to be acknowledged and appreciated. No one likes to be ignored or not valued. They need to always be there for the teachers. Knowing that my admin gets my back feels really good. They also need to be responsive and available. Most admins don't return emails or calls, especially when teachers are experiencing difficulties. They need to have

good working relationships with their teachers. This goes a long way in motivating and encouraging teachers to go the long haul.

Although most of the teacher participants shared they received administrative support during professional crises, many still emphasized the need for strong and positive relationships between teachers and administrators as integral for retention. Research showed teachers experience growth and increased commitment when they have positive relationships with their administrators (Meister & Ahrens, 2011). Meister and Ahrens (2011) also specified teacher acknowledgement and recognition as needed for strong and positive relationships with the administrators.

Motivation. Motivation describes the inner drive that encourages teachers to pursue a career in education (Hong, 2012). Teachers usually find it intrinsically rewarding and satisfying (Hong, 2012). Motivation was referenced 40 times by 10 study participants as influential to their continued commitment and retention. T4 shared:

I wouldn't teach any other grade but preschool. It has always been my passion. I never thought of teaching any other grade. People used to ask me, "Why are you getting an early childhood sped credential that limits you to teach from birth to five?" Those of us who teach preschool special education don't understand why you will teach any other class because it is the easiest thing in the world. It comes natural to me and I just love it.

T8 identified her passion for making a difference for children with disabilities, noting it drove her to continue to teach even when things became difficult. T8 stated, "I think it's seeing the progress with the kids... I just always want to make it better for the kids, as best as I can. And right now, I'm doing things like that... That helps keeps me

going too.” Similarly, T4, T6, T7, T9, and T12 identified their love and passion for children motivated them to overcome teaching challenges and continue teaching for a long time. T12 shared:

I enjoy teaching preschool students with disabilities. My teaching career was initially borne out of necessity. I needed a job that gave me the freedom to have the same schedule as my young children, so teaching worked out perfectly well. Substitute teaching gave me the opportunity to try out many grades in general education and special education. I decided on pursuing a career in special education preschool after my encounter with the children. I am passionate about teaching the kids. I have many passions, but teaching preschool special education is the greatest of them all.

Most of the teachers identified their motivation for teaching preschool special education as integral to their decision to continue teaching. Participants stated it was the motivation to teach preschoolers with disabilities that informed their decision to continue teaching despite challenges. This aligned with research that showed intrinsically motivated teachers were more likely to remain in the field of education (Major, 2012).

Prior experience. Prior experience was identified by participants as influential to their continued retention in the field of early childhood special education. Prior experience was referenced 29 times by eight study participants as influential to their retention. When other factors such as administrative support, professional development, and induction and mentoring were inadequate, participants reported they were able to

overcome all these challenges partly by utilizing their prior knowledge and experiences working with children.

T3, T4, T6, and T7 described how they utilized their prior teaching and non-teaching experiences and proffered solutions to career challenges that could have frustrated them and possibly pushed them out of the teaching profession. T3 stated:

I was a seasoned teacher; that's all I've ever done. If that's what you're familiar with, you know how to modify and make things work. And a lot of that comes from not only your teaching; it also comes from how you experienced life in general. If you came from my kind of beginnings, you learned how to modify life to be successful. I'm just the type of person that I will go out and seek whatever I need because I want to be successful in anything that I do.

T4 similarly shared the influence of her prior experience as a para educator helped keep her in the education field. She stated:

I was a para-educator for eight years. The last two years as a para was at a high school. The teacher would have me do everything. All the assessments for present levels, so I kind of know how to do all this stuff before I became a teacher. That really helped me.

T6 identified prior preschool teaching and babysitting experiences led to her retention. T6 recounted, "The initial training that I had, that helped getting me started. I said I got my ECE certificate in preschool... Growing up, I always babysit preschoolers so yeah exactly so experience came from other ways, not from the district." T7 agreed

with teaching might be challenging for new or beginning preschool special education teachers, but prior experiences with the population helped. She commented:

I would feel really bad for somebody who came in here and they were fresh out of school because the thing that people expect you to know, like how do you write an IEP, how do you manage behavior in the classroom, where do you go for...the simplest things? Where do I go for Band-Aids? Where do I go for garbage bags? ...I'm a go-getter and I'm going to go find my answer. I've been doing this for a long time and I don't need somebody to hold my hand.

T8 highlighted that non-teaching experiences could be beneficial to teacher retention as well, describing the need for:

Having experience before they even get their first job, and that's what I've seen. That's what makes the teacher more resilient to be able to stay longer, having some type of prior training. Whether you're a para-educator or parent or sister or auntie.

The teachers believed their prior experiences in education, special education, or with children in general played a significant role in their effectiveness, commitment, and retention. This aligned with research that found teacher effectiveness was enhanced with experience (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2006). Additionally, participants exhibited a high degree of confidence in teaching preschool special education, which increased their effectiveness, motivation, and retention. This also aligned with research noting teacher self-efficacy increase motivation and satisfaction, leading to retention (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Teacher preparation and training. Initial teacher preparation and training was identified by study participants as influential to their retention. The need for adequate teacher preparation and training before fulltime teaching was referenced 22 times by six study participants. T2, T8 and T10 identified their teacher preparatory experiences as significant to their continued retention in the field. T2 commented:

I think that the training that I got to prepare me to become a teacher is different than what I see teachers getting prepared with now. I think sometimes teachers are just thrown into the classroom without any kind of training. I had a year of student teaching, a year and a half of student teaching where you are actually trained on writing goals and writing objectives and you had a teacher working with you in the classroom. And in a couple of different settings. And then when I got my special education credential afterwards, I worked under a special education teacher. And the same thing, it was like a semester of working in the classroom. I had a year and a half of support from a master teacher... I don't think teachers get that anymore.

T8 and T10 also spoke about their training experiences through alternative teacher credentialing programs. T8 stated:

Right from your freshman year you are put into a lab school. You start teaching in a lab school right from day one. I had four years of not only the theoretical knowledge, but the classroom experience before I ever even walked into a classroom. I was in a lab school for four years and working underneath master teachers for four years before I even put my baby toe

into even student teaching...I had all these months and months of student teaching underneath master teachers before I walked into my own classroom. I was very prepared. And I feel bad for some of the teachers that are getting what we use to call back then emergency credentials and, you may not have ever even seen an IEP. You've never even experienced a special education classroom. So here you are setting up your own classroom for the first time teaching special education, teaching for the first time, and have all these legal documents that you are also responsible for. And you are still going to school and taking classes and maybe you have family or significant others that you are trying to take care of. I have such great empathy for them.

T3 concurred:

Preschool teachers need to be more prepared of what their getting into because a lot of teachers are given these credentials and never been in the classroom. We get teachers who get these emergency credentials and they don't know what they're doing and so they set up to fail.

The teachers believed they were well-prepared for teaching preschool special education because of their sound training and preparation. Research found teachers who complete traditional teaching programs are better prepared and more likely to stay longer in the teaching profession than their counterparts who attend alternative teaching programs (Ingersoll, Merrill, May, 2014; Ware, LaTurner, Okulicz-Kozaryn, Garland, & Klopfenstein, 2011).

Summary

This chapter summarized the data and the findings gathered from the study. The purpose of the study was to describe the perceived factors that led to resiliency and retention of veteran preschool special education teachers in Solano County, California. Using the semi-structured interviews, 13 interview questions were administered to the 12 study participants to gain their perspectives about factors that enabled them to teach for 10 or more years in the field of early childhood special education.

The interview transcripts were analyzed, coded, and categorized into 11 major themes. The perceived factors that led to the resiliency of veteran preschool special education teachers were personal strategies (rejuvenation and renewal, problem-solving, help-seeking, and life-long learning); personal factors and positive emotions; peer support; and mentoring. The perceived factors that led to retention of the veteran preschool special education teachers were job satisfaction, administrative support, motivation, prior experience, and teaching preparation and training. The conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research are presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite a widespread shortage of qualified special education teachers across the country, some continue to teach regardless of the challenges associated with teaching. It is imperative to focus on factors that enable stayers to continue teaching to promote special education teacher retention. This study investigated factors veteran preschool special education teachers perceived as influential to resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education.

This chapter reviews the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the research methodology. The research findings as reported in Chapter IV are summarized in conjunction with the literature. Conclusions drawn from the major findings are then presented. Finally, the chapter concludes with implication for action and recommendations for future research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe the experiences and perceived factors that led to the resiliency and retention of veteran preschool special education teachers in the field of early childhood special education.

Research Questions

One central research question and two sub-questions guided this study:

Central Question

What experiences of veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education?

Sub-questions

1. What factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their resiliency in the field of early childhood special education?
2. What factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their retention in the field of early childhood special education?

Research Methodology

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological design to describe resiliency and retention among veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County, California. Phenomenology entails exploring the meaning of the lived experiences of people about a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Finding common and diverse meanings and perspectives of a phenomenon are the hallmark of a phenomenological study (Patton, 2015). This study sought to describe the lived experiences veteran preschool special education teachers to address the research questions. Additionally, the researcher aimed to identify both common and diverse factors participants perceived as influential to their career resilience and retention.

Population and Target Population

The population for this study, was preschool special education teachers in public schools in California. As of 2016, 1,680 preschool special education teachers taught in public schools in California (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). However, given the time and financial constraints associated such a large population, it was necessary to narrow the study to a more defined group. Therefore, the target population for this study

was certified preschool special education teachers who (1) were credential in early childhood special education, (2) had 10 years or more of teaching experience, and (3) taught preschool special education in a public school in Solano County.

Sample

The sample for this study comprised of 12 veteran preschool special education teachers who met the study criteria. Preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County were chosen for this study for easy accessibility and proximity to the researcher. The sample was selected using snowball sampling techniques, in which new referrals for study participants were solicited from interviewees who already participated in the study.

Major Findings

The major findings of this study are summarized and presented by research sub-question.

Major Findings for Research Sub-Question 1

The first research sub-question was: *What factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools led to their resiliency in the field of early childhood special education?* The major findings for this sub-question revealed four strategies veteran preschool special education teachers considered influential to their resiliency.

The most influential factor identified by study participants as integral to their resiliency was the use of personal strategies. Participants reported using rejuvenation and renewal, problem-solving, help-seeking, and life-long learning strategies to maintain and sustain their resilience. Rejuvenation and renewal had the highest frequency with 55

references. All 12 teachers believed participating in rejuvenation and renewal activities was integral to the development of resiliency because it was important to minimize the impact of stress they frequently experienced in their profession. The teachers consistently sought ways to rejuvenate and renew, such as finding balance between work and home lives, practicing reflection to mentally eliminate negative issues outside their control, and focusing on the students. Research highlighted the importance of teachers setting emotional boundaries and caring for their personal, physical, and emotional well-being outside the classroom to obtain satisfaction and develop the needed resiliency to continue teaching (Castro et al., 2010; Hong, 2012; Kyriacou, 2014).

The use of problem-solving strategies was also identified by participants as influential to their resiliency. Because the profession demands teachers to constantly proffer solutions to problems, each participant employed one or more techniques to address a challenge in or outside the classroom. Participants researched alternatives, consulted with other teachers and administrators, attempted to figure things out through trial and error. Other research also found problem-solving became opportunities for teachers to hone their skills, develop new strategies, and identify resources inside and outside school (Castro et al., 2010; Sharplin et al., 2011).

Participants identified their life-long commitment to learning and help-seeking strategies as integral to their resiliency. The study participants believed they could still learn despite being experienced and confident about their teaching. Research showed direct relationships between teacher decisions to continue teaching and the quality of the professional learning opportunities they received (Billingsley et al., 2016). Although study participants found professional development opportunities offer by the district

irrelevant to their retention, they sought assistance from others when needed and demonstrated tenacity to advocate for needed resources.

The second most influential factor for resiliency perceived by participants was peer support. These teachers believed the strong relationships they had with colleagues in preschool special education supported their growth and resilience. Their peers' non-judgmental support kept them encouraged and motivated to continue teaching. This finding was supported by research that showed positive relationships between teachers are needed for efficacy, which in turn influences commitment, resilience, and retention (Fall & Billingsley, 2011; Hong, 2012; Prather-Jones, 2011; Sass et al., 2011).

Mentoring was also identified by the study participants as influential to their resiliency. Participants believed they benefitted tremendously from the relationships they had with their mentors, which helped meet their needs and develop satisfaction that promoted resiliency. Research showed teachers with quality relationships with their mentors experienced a high degree of job satisfaction and resilience (Castro et al., 2010).

Another factor participants identified as influential to resiliency was positive emotions. Participants were convinced the frequent emotions they experienced teaching preschool special education led to their satisfaction and resilience. Other studies also found teachers who experience frequent positive emotional states demonstrate a high degree of flexibility, coping techniques, and emotional control needed for increased commitment and resilience (Le Cornu, 2013; Sharplin et al., 2011).

Findings for Research Sub-Question 2

The second research sub-question was: *What factors perceived by veteran, preschool, special education teachers in public schools led to their retention in the field*

of early childhood special education? The major findings for this sub-question revealed five factors that veteran preschool special education teachers considered influential to their retention. The most influential factor identified by participants was job satisfaction. All participants acknowledged they experienced a high degree of satisfaction teaching preschool special education, which influenced their retention. Other research also showed a high degree of satisfaction among teachers who experienced pleasurable or positive emotional states from teaching (Green & Munoz, 2016). Consistent with the existing literature (Day & Gu, 2009), the participants stressed they were motivated to continue teaching because of student progress.

The second most influential factor identified by participants as integral to retention was administrative support. However, participants reported inadequate administrative support did not impact their retention. They emphasized that they sought support from other sources. Consistent with existing literature (Meister & Ahrens, 2011), the participants believed they would experience improved growth and commitment when they feel acknowledged and valued by the administrators.

Although not as influential as job satisfaction and support, teachers also described intrinsic motivation and pre-service preparation and experience as influential to retention. Participants noted their inner drive to teach was influential to their continued commitment to the field. This confirmed prior research that found teachers intrinsically motivated to teach were more likely to remain in the field of education (Major, 2012). Participants identified their pre-service preparation and prior experience as instrumental to retention. The study participants believed their traditional pre-service teacher training and backgrounds prepared them for the teaching profession. This aligned with prior research that found teachers who receive traditional pre-service training are more likely

to remain satisfied and committed to teaching (Jorissen, 2002). According to Jorissen (2002), traditionally prepared teachers receive a combination of educational training and a rigorous supervised field experience that boost their confidence and knowledge, enabling them to teach for a considerable time. Similarly, prior experiences (non-teaching and teaching) before working in preschool special education were found beneficial to commitment to field. Consistent with existing literature (Boyd et al., 2006), teacher effectiveness, commitment, and retention are enhanced with experience.

Unexpected Findings

One unexpected emerged from the data gathered from the study. Existing literature identified administrative support, workload manageability, responsive induction and mentoring, and professional development as influential to the retention of special education teachers (Billingsley, 2005). However, in this study veteran preschool special education teachers found administrative support, workload manageability, induction and mentoring, and professional development less influential on their decision to continue teaching preschoolers with disabilities. Rather, they identified strategies they employed to stay positive during challenges. The teachers also identified their pre-service preparation and experience as integral to their resiliency and retention, which was not found in prior literature.

Conclusions

Based on the experiences shared by the study participants as evident in the findings derived from the interviews, and supported by the literature review, the researcher developed the following conclusions.

Conclusion 1 – Teachers who employ strategies such as rejuvenation and renewal ameliorate the impact of career challenges and are more likely to develop resiliency and continue in the field of early childhood special education.

Research showed teachers who participate in rejuvenation and renewal events can separate work from personal life; develop personal, emotional, and physical wellness; and continue to find satisfaction in teaching (Castro et al., 2010). Castro et al. (2010) stated during the process of renewal, teachers regained their strength and commitment to teaching. Research also showed educators who employ specific strengths and strategies overcame career challenges (Patterson et al., 2004).

Conclusion 2 – Positive relationships between teachers and peers, administrators, and mentors are integral to developing satisfaction and resiliency needed to continue teaching.

Participants indicated the relationships between their colleagues, mentors, and administrators provided solutions to career challenges. Sometimes solutions were not available, but the feeling of being understood, acknowledged, and valued increased their commitment, resilience, and career longevity. Research showed resilience occurred when teachers formed strong and positive relationships with their colleagues, mentors, and administrators resulting in teacher growth, empowerment, and resiliency (Day & Gu, 2014; Gu, 2014). In addition to positive relationships, participants reported frequently experiencing positive emotional states while teaching preschool students with disabilities. Positive emotional states were considered integral to teacher resilience and commitment to continue teaching (Le Cornu, 2013).

Conclusion 3 – Teacher motivation to teach preschool special education students is integral to their capability to withstand, overcome, and bounce back from career challenges.

A major finding from the study was participants enjoyed teaching and were passionate about seeing student progress; most of them could not think of pursuing another career but preschool special education. Studies showed teacher motives to teach led them to enter the field, sustained them through career challenges, and enabled them to continue teaching (Henderson, 2014; Hogan, 2012).

Conclusion 4 – Teachers who had traditional pre-service preparation and prior experiences are better able to deal with challenges in preschool special education classrooms and continue teaching.

Participants emphasized their competency and proficiency in teaching was enhanced with their prior experiences and pre-service preparation. Additionally, research showed teachers confident about their ability to meet student learning needs experienced increased motivation and satisfaction, leading to retention (Cochran-Smith, 2006).

Conclusion 5 – Factors that lead to resiliency and retention of preschool special education teachers are multi-dimensional and complex based.

It was evident from the study findings gathered that it is impossible to attribute single personal or environmental factors to teacher retention and resiliency, but rather it takes a combination of personal, contextual, and environmental factors. Gu and Day (2007) argued resilience is a construct built upon systems of interrelationships within which protective factors shield resilient individuals from feeling the full effects of the adversities experienced.

Implications for Action

This study investigated factors that influenced the resiliency and retention of veteran preschool special education teachers with the objective of promoting retention among this population. The lived experiences of the preschool special education teachers gathered from this study and the review of the literature resulted in major findings and conclusions. Based on these findings and conclusions, the following implications for action are recommended.

Implication for Action 1

Engaging in rejuvenating and renewing activities was found to help teachers minimize the impact of stress and gain strength and resilience to continue teaching. To support preschool special education teachers in their wellness efforts, district leaders and site administrators must ensure school sites have a gymnasium for teachers with basic functional equipment. This must be a private room where all teachers can de-stress on their breaks or after school to promote optimal health and well-being. Rejuvenating and renewing activities should also be incorporated into professional development and other school events. District and school administrators must also employ the services of experts in the field of emotional wellness and self-care to keep abreast of new developments and trends to share with teachers. This is necessary to support teachers in their wellness efforts.

Implications for Action 2

Strong and positive relationships between preschool special education teachers, teachers, mentors, and administrators were needed for resiliency and retention. To promote positive relationships between preschool special education teachers and their

colleagues, opportunities must be provided by school and district administrators whereby teachers come together for regular collaboration, deliberation, and debriefings.

Implication for Action 3

New special education teachers must be assigned to experienced special education teachers as mentors for needed support and a smooth transition into the field. Positive and strong relationships with mentors was instrumental to the retention of study participants. School and district administrators must also provide opportunities for new teachers to meet with their mentors during school.

Implication for Action 4

The experience of frequent positive emotions was found integral to the development of resiliency among study participants. To ensure preschool special education teachers experience positive emotions both in their classrooms and across the school sites, school administrators and district special education leaders must explore creative ways of incorporating joyful events that produce positive emotions into school and district-wide programs. This would also help in creating a positive school culture where all teachers thrive and quality retention is attained.

Implication for Action 5

Intrinsic motivation for teaching preschool special education was found influential to teacher retention. Special education leaders and site administrators must consider the factors that motivated preschool special education teachers to enter the field of early childhood special education during recruitment and assignment to positions. Studies showed intrinsic factors motivated preschool special education teachers to enter teaching and helped sustain them during professional crises.

Implication for Action 6

The findings of this study revealed teachers who attended traditional pre-service teacher preparation programs were better prepared to teach and more likely to stay in the teaching profession than their alternatively trained counterparts. Therefore, to promote the retention of preschool special education teachers, it is important to first consider teachers who received traditional pre-service training during recruitment. Teachers who attended traditional teaching programs received many opportunities during the program practice to develop and hone their teaching skills under the supervision of master teachers before working independently in the classrooms.

Implication for Action 7

Prior experience in education, special education, or working with children in general was influential to the retention of the preschool special education teachers. Teaching effectiveness is enhanced with teaching experience. For teachers to acquire increased teaching skills and experience, it is suggested new teachers schedule regular visits to experienced teachers' classrooms to observe the practices of successful teachers.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings, conclusions, and limitations of this study, the following are recommendations for future studies:

- Replicate this study with early career preschool special education teachers to compare the factors influencing their resiliency and retention
- Replicate this study with mid-career preschool special education teachers
- Replicate this study with veteran preschool special education teachers in charter schools in Solano County

- Replicate this study with veteran preschool special education teachers in southern California or other regions in California
- Replicate this study with retired veteran preschool special education teachers
- Conduct a qualitative study investigating administrator perceptions of factors that influence preschool special education teacher resilience and retention
- Conduct a qualitative study examining the perception of special education administrators about emotional wellness and its influence on teacher retention
- Conduct a correlational study to determine the relationship between preschool special education teachers' resiliency and quality retention
- Conduct a qualitative study to explore recent graduates' perceptions about their teachers' resiliency throughout their educational career

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Throughout my career as a preschool special education teacher, I witnessed on many occasions good teachers exit the field and many classrooms left in the hands of unqualified teachers. I was burdened by this problem for some time and often wondered how to proffer a long-term solution to the crisis. My decision to conduct a study investigating factors that could support teachers to become resilient and continue teaching for a long time was informed by my initial burden.

The literature review directed my attention to special education teachers who remained committed to the field after many years of teaching students with disabilities. The literature further revealed some factors that sustain veteran special education teachers to continue teaching in the field. The notion of resilience became relevant in understanding the reasons why stayers remain committed and motivated to teach.

As a veteran preschool special education teacher, I experienced tremendous stress and challenges I did not think much about until I started conducting this study. During the study, I had many opportunities to reflect on factors that enabled my resiliency and commitment to remain in the field despite challenges. As a researcher, I was charged with the responsibility to identify my biases and prevent them from interfering with any component of the study.

I was fortunate to have a group of study participants who were experienced and knowledgeable working with preschoolers with disabilities, and eager and willing to participate in the study even in the beginning of the school year when they were busy planning and strategizing about how to have a good year. These teachers shared valuable and rich insights about the topic and were eager to know the outcome of the study.

Based on the findings from the study, it was evident the responsibility of promoting the retention of preschool special education teacher lies with school and district leaders. A supportive and positive school environment where teachers are adequately supported by their colleagues, mentors, and administrator is needed for teachers to experience job satisfaction and develop the resiliency needed to continue teaching. Adequate attention should also be paid to the criteria used for selecting teacher candidates. Intrinsically motivated teachers with prior experience working with children should be considered for long-term teaching positions.

This study would not have been possible without the support of the resilient veteran preschool special education teachers in Solano County. They demonstrated their true resilience by offering to participate in the study even when their schedule did not permit. I am indebted to you all. To all the other resilient preschool special education

teachers out there, I commend your efforts in making a difference in the lives of young children with disabilities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – RESEARCH INVITATION LETTER

September 2018

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Monisola Komolafe, a doctoral candidate at Brandman University.

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County, which led to their resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education.

You were chosen to participate in this study because you currently teach preschool special education in a public-school district in Solano County. Furthermore, you are a suitable candidate for this study because you have been teaching preschool special education for at least ten years.

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will partake in a face-to-face interview that takes between 45 minutes to one hour. The interview will be digitally audio-recorded at your preferable location, time and day. During the interview, the researcher will ask you questions about your experiences as a preschool special education teacher and the factors which promoted your resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education.

Any information obtained from you during the interview will remain confidential. To this end, the researcher keeps all information pertaining to this study in a locked file until the end of the study when it is destroyed.

Please be informed that your participation is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

For all questions and concerns about the study, you may contact the researcher, Ms. Komolafe, by phone at 707-428-1004 or email at mfashoku@mail.brandman.edu. For further concerns about the study, you may write the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, or call (949) 341-7641.

Sincerely,

Monisola Komolafe

Researcher

APPENDIX B – INFORMED CONSENT AND BILL OF RIGHTS

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: The Resiliency of Veteran Preschool Special Education Teachers in public schools in Solano County, California.

Brandman University

16355 Laguna Canyon Road

Irvine, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Monisola Komolafe, Doctoral Candidate

TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Research Participant’s Informed Consent Form

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to describe the factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers teaching in public schools in Solano County, which led to their resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education.

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will partake in a face-to-face interview that lasts between 45minutes to one hour. The interview is audio-recorded takes place at your preferable location, time and day. During the interview, the researcher will ask you questions about your experiences as a preschool special education teacher and the factors o my lived experience which promoted your resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education.

I understand that:

- a. There are no known major risks or discomforts associated with this research. The session will be held at a location of my choosing to minimize inconvenience. Some interview questions may cause me to reflect on barriers and support systems that are unique to my lived experiences and sharing my experience in an interview setting may cause minor discomfort.
- b. There are no major benefits to me for participation, but a potential may be that I will have to share my experiences. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of the factors that may promote the resiliency and retention of preschool special education teachers.
- c. Money will not be provided for my time and involvement.
- d. Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Monisola Komolafe, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Ms. Komolafe may be contacted by phone at 707-428-1004 or email at mfashoku@mail.brandman.edu.
- e. I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the researcher may stop the study at any time.

- f. I understand the study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project.
- g. I understand that the audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interview. Once the interview is transcribed, the audio, interview transcripts and demographic information will be kept for a minimum of five years by the researcher in a secure location.
- h. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed, and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the office of the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedures set forth.

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party	Date

Signature of Principal Investigator	Date

Brandman University IRB August 2016

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction: My name is Monisola Komolafe. Thank you for offering to participate in the study. As previously stated, the purpose of this study is to describe the factors perceived by veteran preschool special education teachers in public schools in Solano County, which led to their resiliency and retention in the field of early childhood special education. The interview questions are written to generate relevant information addressing the purpose of the study. Your honesty and openness will be highly appreciated during this interview process.

Prior to this interview, you signed the informed consent form that outlined the interview process and the condition of complete confidentiality for this study. With your permission, this interview will be recorded and transcribed, and you will be provided with a copy of the complete transcripts to check for accuracy in content and meaning prior to me analyzing the data. Once the analysis has been completed, the data will be destroyed by shredding any documentation from these interviews, including the transcripts, and erasing the audio files. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions:

1. Will you please tell me a little about yourself-personal and professional?
2. How long have you been teaching preschool special education?
3. How long have you been credentialed as early childhood special education teacher?
4. What is your overall experience of being a preschool special education teacher?
5. My research is investigating preschool special education teacher resilience and retention.
Based on the definition of teacher resilience on the card in front of you,
Will you describe yourself as a resilient teacher or not? And why so?
6. What form of emotions do you experience frequently teaching preschool special education students?
 - a. Do you experience frequent positive emotions such as joy, passion, and satisfaction teaching preschool special education?
Probe: Please give examples of such emotions
 - b. How does this influence your career decision to continue teaching?
7. Have you ever experienced an overwhelming career challenge? Describe the experience? What did you do to recover?
 - a. Did you employ any strategy to stay positive during those challenging times?
Probe: What are those things that helped you to recover and continue teaching?
 - b. Did you receive professional help or support from your administrators or colleagues during the challenges?
Probe: What form of support did you receive?
 - c. How did this influence your decision to continue teaching?
8. How will you describe your work assignment?

- a. How does this influence your decision to continue teaching?
- 9. How relevant is the professional development you receive at work to your role as a preschool special education teacher?
 - b. How does this influence your decision to continue teaching?
- 10. Did you participate in any induction and mentoring program at the beginning of your career as a preschool special education teacher?
 - a. How did this influence your career decision to continue teaching?
- 11. What makes you continue to teach preschool special education?
- 12. What do you think preschool special education teachers need to do to develop resilience to continue teaching?
- 13. Is there anything your school administrators could be doing to motivate more preschool teachers to continue teaching rather than leaving the field?

APPENDIX D – INTERVIEW CRITIQUE BY PARTICIPANT

As a doctoral student and researcher at Brandman University your assistance is so appreciated in designing this interview instrument. Your participation is crucial to the development of a valid and reliable instrument. Below are some questions that I appreciate your answering after completing the interview. Your answers will assist me in refining both the directions and the interview items. You have been provided with a paper copy of the interview, to remind you of the questions asked in case it is needed.

1. How many minutes did it take you to complete the interview, from the moment the interviewee spoke until closing? _____

2. Did the questions ask upfront for you to read the consent information and sign the agreement before the interview began concern you at all? _____
If so, would you briefly state your concern _____

3. Was the Introduction sufficiently clear (and not too long) to inform you what the research was about? _____ If not, what would you recommend that would make it better?

4. Were the directions clear, and you understood what to do?
_____ if not, would you briefly state the problem

5. Were the interview questions clear, appropriate, and easy to understand? _____ If not, briefly describe the problem

6. As you progressed through the interview, were their questions that arose as to why the question asked was necessary or further explanation was needed regarding the question?

_____ If so, would you briefly state so and the interview questions of concern (please highlight the questions on the interview paper given or state the # here)

Additional Comments:

Thanks so much for your help!

APPENDIX E – INTERVIEW OBSERVER FEEDBACK REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the researcher, you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview. You should also discuss the following reflection questions with your ‘observer’ after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your perspective as the interviewer. However, you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation.

1. How long did the interview take? _____ did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?
4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case? 5. Were there parts of the interview that seemed to be awkward and why do you think that was the case?
6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would it be and how would you change it?
7. Were the interview questions appropriate or should there be adjustments?
8. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process? Additional

Comments:

APPENDIX F – SYNTHESIS MATRIX

	Recruiting Highly Qualified Teachers	Induction and Mentoring	Work Conditions	Teacher Wellness	Job Satisfaction	Intrinsic Motivation	Personal Resources	Context Resources	Teacher Strategies
Albrecht, S. F., Johns, B. H., Mounstevan, J., & Olorunda, O. (2009).			x						
Ansley, B. M., Houchins, D., & Varjas, K. (2016).				x					
Belknap, B. M. (2012).									
Belknap, B., & Taymans, J. (2015).					x				
Beltman, S. (2015)							x	x	
Benedict, A. E., Brownell, M. T., Park, Y., Bettini, E. A., & Lauterbach, A. A. (2014)									
Berry, A. B. (2012).			x						
Berry, A. B., Petrin, R. A., Gravelle, M. L., & Farmer, T. W. (2011).	x								
Bettini, E. (2015).			x						
Bettini, E. A., Cheyney, K., Wang, J., & Leko, C. (2015).			x						
Bettini, E., Jones, N., Brownell, M., Conroy, M., Park, Y., Leite, W., ... & Benedict, A. (2017).			x						
Billingsley, B. S. (2003).			x						
Billingsley, B. S. (2004).		x	x						
Billingsley, B. S. (2005).	x	x	x	x		x			
Billingsley, B. S. (2010).			x						
Billingsley, B., Israel, M., & Smith, S. (2011).		x							
Billingsley, B., McLeskey, J., & Crockett, J. B. (2014).									
Bobek, B. L. (2002).									
Boyd, D., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., Ronfeldt, M., & Wyckoff, J. (2011).			x						
Brownell, M. T., Sindelar, P. T., Kiely, M. T., & Danielson, L. C. (2010).	x								
Brunsting, N. C., Sreckovic, M. A., & Lane, K. L. (2014).			x						

Cancio, E. J., Albrecht, S. F., & Johns, B. H. (2013).			x						
Castro, A. J., Kelly, J., & Shih, M. (2010)								x	
Chambers, E. (2011).									
Collins, T. (1999).									
Darling-Hammond, L., & Richardson, N. (2009).									
Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2009).									x
Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2013).									
Day, J. M. (2014).							x		
DeMik, S. A. (2008).			x						
Desimone, L. M. (2009).									
Dodge, M. (2012)				x					
Donne, V., & Lin, F. Y. (2013).		x							
Emery, D. W., & Vandenberg, B. (2010).			x						
Fall, A. M., & Billingsley, B. S. (2011).			x						
Feng, L., & Sass, T. R. (2009).	x								
Fish, W. W., & Stephens, T. L. (2010).			x			x			
Gersten, R., Keating, T., Yovanoff, P., & Harniss, M. K. (2001).									
Griffin, C. C., Kilgore, K. L., Winn, J. A., & Otis-Wilborn, A. (2008)			x						
Gu, Q., & Day, C. (2007).					x		x		
Gu, Q., & Day, C. (2013).					x				
Hansen, D. T. (1995).								x	
Hogan, A. E. (2012).							x		
Holzberg, D. G., Clark, K. A., & Morningstar, M. E. (2018).									
Hughes, G. D. (2012).		x							
Huling, L., Resta, V., & Yeargain, P. (2012).		x							
Ingersoll, R. M. (2001).		x							
Ingersoll, R. (2011).	x			x					
Ingersoll, R., & May, H. (2011).		x							
Ingersoll, R. M., & May, H. (2012).			x						
Ingersoll, R., & Merrill, L. (2010).		x							
Ingersoll, R. M., & Perda, D. (2010).		x							
Ingersoll, R. M., & Strong, M. (2011).		x							
Jones, N. D., Youngs, P., & Frank, K. A. (2013).		x							
Kagler, F. T. (2011).		x							
Kaufman, R. C., & Ring, M. (2011).			x						

Kyriacou, C. (2011).				x					
Kutsyuruba, B. (2016).	x								
Lasky, S. (2005).								x	
Leahy, T. (2012).									
Le Cornu, R. (2015).									
Leko, M. M., & Smith, S. W. (2010).		x	x						
Mackenzie, S. (2012).									
Major, A. E. (2012).						x			
Master, B., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2014).	x								
Matsko, K. K., & Hammerness, K. (2014).									
McCray, E. D., Butler, T. W., & Bettini, E. (2014).			x						
Mignott, N. N. (2011).		x							
Moore, C. M. (2012).			x						
O’Gorman, E., & Drudy, S. (2011).									
Patterson, J. H., Collins, L., & Abbott, G. (2004).								x	
Pressley, D. M. (2013).									
Renzulli, L. A., Parrott, H. M., & Beattie, I. R. (2011).			x						
Santoro, D. A. (2011).								x	
Sass, D. A., Seal, A. K., & Martin, N. K. (2011).			x						
Sawyer, K. (2015).									
Shymansky, J. A., Wang, T. L., Annetta, L. A., Yore, L. D., & Everett, S. A. (2012).									
Sindelar, P. T., Brownell, M. T., & Billingsley, B. (2010).									
Shinn, S. (2015).		x							
Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016).			x						
Tyler, T. A., & Brunner, C. C. (2014).		x	x						
Vannest, K. J., & Parker, R. I. (2010).			x						
Vannest, K. J., Soares, D. A., Harrison, J. R., Brown, L., & Parker, R. I. (2009).			x						
Vittekk, J. (2012).		x	x						
Williams, J., & Dikes, C. (2015).				x					
Youngs, P., Jones, N., & Low, M. (2011).		x							
Zost, G. (2010).									