

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF RURAL CENTRAL OFFICE
ADMINISTRATORS' EXPERIENCES IN SUPPORTING MARGINAL SPECIAL
EDUCATION TEACHERS

by

Lawrence William Randolph

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the life experiences of 11 central office administrators from rural school divisions in Virginia, and investigate their shared experiences when assisting and supporting marginal special education teachers. The four theories guiding this study were Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Collins, Brown and Newman's cognitive apprenticeship theory, Evans' path-goal leadership theory, and Burns' transformational leadership theory. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory discusses the environment of a child impacts their growth and development. Collins, Brown, and Newman's cognitive apprenticeships theory in context of this study describes how master teachers or administrators must train marginal teachers. Evans' path-goal leadership theory pertains to this study by encouraging administrators to provide supports to teachers to meet necessary goals. Burns' transformational leadership theory supports the idea that administrators must provide motivation to their teaching staff in order to raise them to acceptable levels. This study used the following research questions: R1: How do central office administrators in rural school districts in Virginia describe their experiences when working with marginal special education teachers? R2: How do central office administrators describe their experiences working with marginal special education teachers that they had to terminate from their position? R3: How, if at all, do central office administrators describe supports they provided to marginal special education teachers that enabled the teachers to meet district standards? R4: How, if at all, do central office administrators respond to the barriers they experienced when working with marginal special education teachers? R5: How do participant responses compare or contrast? Data collection methods consisted of interviews conducted on 11 central office administrators and field notes. Data analysis strategies consisted of

horizontalization, reduction and elimination of invariants, clustering, thematizing, and final identification.

Keywords: marginal, incompetent, teacher evaluation, central office administrators and marginal teachers, central office administrators and incompetent teachers, laws and teacher employment

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first to my heavenly father. Without him, this definitely would not have been possible.

To my grandmother, Pearl L.W. Randolph who although did not get to see the end of my journey has always taught me to shoot beyond the stars (Grandma, I finally made it!).

To a wonderful group of professors, Dr. Milaci, Dr. Ackerman, Dr. Zabloski, and Dr. Tolbert-Simmons whose encouragement from the beginning of this journey inspired me to reach this goal in my life.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|------|---|
| AYP | Adequately Yearly Progress |
| CEC | Council for Exceptional Children |
| ESEA | Elementary and Secondary Education Act |
| IDEA | Individuals with Disabilities Act |
| IEP | Individualized Education Plan |
| NCLB | No Child Left Behind |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| PISA | Program for International Student Assessment |
| RTTT | Race to the Top |
| SOL | Standards of Learning |
| USDE | United States Department of Education |

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The role of a K-12 classroom teacher is constantly changing. The importance of having a dedicated individual with the mindset of not only educating students, but also of taking on multiple roles within the school building is necessary in the current field. Teachers should make adjustments within their classroom to achieve the goals of providing critical support, guidance, and direction in the education of a child (Liu, 2013). Students, even special education students, are no longer simply expected to regurgitate information they have learned, but are expected to achieve the top levels of Bloom's Taxonomy by thinking more critically, becoming more engaged in project based learning, synthesizing and evaluating information. Constant increased demands on the student have also increased demands on the classroom teacher. Therefore, there is an increased need for a quality educator who is able to facilitate learning within the classroom setting. Most of these increasing demands stem from released assessments comparing the educational trends of United States citizens with that of students from other countries.

The Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment that compares scores from 15-year-old students from various countries in the areas of reading, mathematics, and science. The 2010 Program of International Student Assessment ranked students from 34 developed countries who were all members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (West, 2012). West (2012) noted the release of the 2010 study that showed 15-year-olds in the United States landed 14th in reading, 17th in science, and less than 25th in mathematics. Essentially tied to the future of the country and its financial growth are the poor educational conditions within the United States. West (2012) summarizes in his

research the impact of raised United States student performance in comparison to other countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development by stating:

Consider the results of a simulation in which it is assumed that the math achievement of U.S. students improves by 0.25 standard deviation gradually over 20 years. This increase would raise U.S. performance to roughly that of some mid-level Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, such as New Zealand and the Netherlands, but not to that of the highest-performing OECD countries. Assuming that the past relationship between test scores and economic growth holds true in the future, the net present value of the resulting increment to GDP over an 80-year horizon would amount to almost \$44 trillion. A parallel simulation of the consequences of bringing U.S. students up to the level of the top-performing countries suggests that doing so would yield benefits with a net present value approaching \$112 trillion (p. 41).

With economic stability serving as a factor or influence, and the need for increased quality education, legislative policies were implemented that sought to enforce high quality education in the classroom. The United States Government continues to pour more financial resources into school systems through initiatives stemming from The Elementary and Secondary Education Act to the newly developed Race to the Top initiative which has received more than \$4 billion in allocations (Gorlewski & Porfilio, 2013). Lavigne's (2013) research on educational funding showed an influx of allotted monies for creating and restructuring teacher evaluations across the nation in an effort to attract and retain good teachers in the classroom. Lavigne (2013) shows through research within two years the District of Columbia Public School system had fired over 400 teachers due to low performance scores on their adopted \$7 million teacher evaluation system known as IMPACT. In 2010, the Virginia Department of Education

overhauled the entire teacher evaluation program and increased the performance standards and evaluation criteria for teachers, principals and superintendents (VDOE, 2012). Current educational guidelines in Virginia based 40% of the new teacher evaluation program on overall student academic progress (VDOE, 2012).

Both quality teachers and quality school systems really do matter. A dismal school system could reflect a weak community, families in disarray, a limited supply of jobs, and an increase in drug use and violence (Gibbons, 2003). For some students, having a quality educator in the classroom is the difference between a promising future and a potentially devastating future (Nixon, Packard & Douvanis, 2010). However, not all teachers are as effective in the classroom as they should, and meeting the ever-changing needs within this country's school systems is an increasingly tough job. In an effort to combat ineffective teachers, administrators conduct weekly classroom walk-throughs and yearly teacher evaluations. There still exists marginal teachers and marginal teaching in the school system that impact student learning, even with all of these supports in place, the financial resources, and the school-implemented strategies.

Being a marginal teacher and marginal teaching both have many definitions. Various definitions and descriptions regarding the marginal teacher come up through a review of the literature. For instance, Kaye (2004) states, "In professional discourse, teachers' minimum application of the explicit knowledge, skills, and attributes considered by educators to constitute acceptable practice commonly is called marginal teaching" (p. 234). Kaye (2004) also notes that society can view marginal teaching as a level of professional teaching not recognized as incompetent teaching, and a marginal teacher's behavior prompts administrators to believe that the teacher is in need of significant improvement. Marginal teachers may have trouble with things such as poor classroom management skills, ineffective teaching practices, and poor

organizational skills (Gerlach & Giles, 1999). Sweeney and Manatt (1984) obtained data from more than 750 principals in 1984, and these principals came up with a “blurred but distinguishable portrait” (p. 13) of marginal teachers. Their research suggests that a marginal teacher is one who appears to have a good grasp of the content area, but lacks in other ways such as classroom management, failing to check for understanding effectively, failing to use modeling appropriately, or failing to attend to student motivation (Sweeney & Manatt, 1984).

Although there is not a clear, solid definition on a marginal teacher, it is still the duty of school principals, and most importantly central office administrators, to identify and support marginal teachers. Sweeney and Manatt (1984) note that there exists specifically designed intensive assistance to help marginal teachers once again meet district standards. Teacher evaluations, weekly and yearly observations, and assistance from central office members are examples of strategies used to help classroom teachers and ensure they are performing sufficiently at their jobs. However, unless an immediate effective method is adopted by schools to assist marginal teachers, some three hundred thousand marginal teachers will continue to affect over five million American schools each year (Gerlach & Giles, 1999; Henderson-Sparks, J.C., Ehroggt, R.H., & Sparks, R.K., Jr., 1995).

Background

The United States saw a surge in demands on education during the first half of the 20th century. Such demands for schooling in the United States were credited to the technological changes that increased the wages available to workers who could follow written instructions, decipher blueprints, and perform basic calculations (West, 2012). Leaping forward, the implementation of educational competition between the United States and other countries was prevalent through administered tests such as PISA, which ranks student performance in areas

such as math and science against all participating countries. Thus, the increasing demands on student learning began to bring about the change in teacher evaluation processes, and the need for policy review of ineffective teachers. Today's educational platform puts the previous No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 to the bottom of educational policy, and President Obama's current initiative, Race to the Top (RTTT) as the front-runner for schools seeking to opt out of NCLB policies. Hershberg and Robertson-Kraft's (2010) research noted the biggest difference between the NCLB policies and the RTTT policies on student process on closing achievement gaps is RTTT places a great deal of importance on improving the quality of a teacher. In fact, President Obama's \$4.35 billion dollar plan requires states seeking funds to use data to reward teachers who are performing effectively at their job, support those who are struggling and replace teachers who were not meeting sufficient progress in improving student achievement (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010; White House, 2009).

Many states have begun to adopt RTTT policies within their school systems in effort to compete for purposeful and much needed funding. NCLB granted 27 states in 2012 federal waivers to take on the challenge of raising educational standards, improving accountability for teachers, and most importantly, improving teacher effectiveness (Giddens, Duneier, Appelbaum & Carr, 2014). The RTTT initiative, as outlined in the document's guidelines, supports pay for performance and the dismissal of ineffective educators (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010). The purpose of this initiative is to provide teachers who are performing above standards to receive higher pay and more opportunities for advancement. In an effort to ensure that states were appropriately seeking out above par teachers, a look at teacher evaluations was critical for such development and application. Research shows most teacher evaluations geared around a single measure of performance do not provide enough adequate information about the quality of

instruction provided by the teacher (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010). Researchers such as Hershberg and Robertson-Kraft (2010) found that new evaluation systems should adopt a balanced approach, using multiple sources of data to gauge teacher effectiveness and recognize outstanding performance in order to be effective agents of positively identifying good teachers.

However, because not all teachers within RTTT states are as effective as government officials would hope, RTTT initiatives provide advice to administrators when dealing with marginal and/or ineffective teachers. Administrators should provide supports to educators who do not meet standards of performance that were agreed upon, and a fair process must be established to get rid of the teachers who are failing to make the adequate progress towards meeting these standards (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010). States such as Delaware have already begun initiating policy changes by removing educators from their positions if they show a pattern of ineffectiveness in their performance over a period of two or three years (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010)

So, the question becomes, why are these marginal, ineffective or incompetent teachers not terminated and more effective teachers hired? Tucker (2001) notes, conservative estimates yield that a minimum of five-percent of teachers are incompetent; however, the termination rate- which includes resignations, dismissals of tenured teachers, and non-renewals of probationary teachers- is a maximum of one-percent. Nixon et al. (2010) defined in their research principal perception to be that teacher unions and lack of time were the greatest impacts on addressing ineffective teachers. Other identified barriers consisted of lack of support from the superintendent, limited support from the school board, insufficient financial support throughout the process, school laws protecting the teachers, and simple evaluator personality characteristics (Nixon et al., 2010). Bridges (1992) identified four choices that principals choose from when

dealing with ineffective teachers: deal with the incompetent teacher, save the teacher, force them to resign, reassignment them or transfer them to another school, or make a recommendation to terminate them (Nixon et al., 2010). One issue found in research was that although principals may make the decision for non-renewal of a teacher's contract, the superintendent, the school board, the court or other independent hearing officers might overturn the decision (Nixon et al., 2010). School superintendents are the only central office administrators who are able to recommend to the school board the termination of a teacher contract.

This study sought to focus on the lack of research on marginal teachers beyond the principal perspectives and more on the central office administrator perspectives who ultimately make the decision to terminate marginal and/or ineffective teachers. As research and RTTT policies call for increased support given to marginal teachers, still many principals report issues and barriers that exist when working with Central Office staff and marginal teachers (Causey, 2010). As noted, not only do marginal teachers affect students, but ineffective teachers impact society as well. As McMurrer (2007) found, schools had begun to narrow down course offerings for students in order to place emphasis on subjects tested. This decreased the amount of time in subjects that exposed students to science, social studies, music, art, and physical education (Giddens et al., 2014). With lack of exposure to these particular subjects, parents, administrators, and stakeholders can argue that students are not receiving a well-rounded education, which can have negative impacts upon a child when he or she enters college or the work force.

School systems can address the issues of students not receiving a well-rounded education and being impacted by both marginal and incompetent teachers. This research study sought to extend the knowledge related to supporting marginal teachers within the school system in an

effort to decrease the number of marginalized teachers within schools influencing millions of students each year. The key beneficiaries of this study will be central office administrators as they view the perspectives of central office administrators who have already dealt with numerous marginal teachers over the course of their careers. In addition, central office administrators will be able to utilize this research when assisting building-level administrators and their plight to improve marginal teachers.

Situation to Self

Research shows that roughly a maximum of 15% of the over 2 million teachers in public classrooms are performing at incompetent levels (Tucker, 2001). Thus, one can estimate that many children encounter a marginal teacher throughout their education. Sadly, many of the students labeled with a learning disability will also encounter marginal teachers who do not promote the process of learning growth but hinder the process. Sweeney and Manatt (1984) noted that marginal teachers lack skills in modeling, motivation, and explanation, which are essential when dealing with students with disabilities. Personally, I hold positions as a middle school department chairperson for special education, child study co-chairman, special education teacher, and grant director within the county, all which focuses on fostering the educational growth of the student. Furthermore, I serve as the Director of Special Programs designee to regional meetings with Virginia's Department of Education.

The reader will note that this study will use a snowball sampling procedure that is a direct reflection of the interaction had with numerous special education directors within the region at these meetings. Meetings like this occur each semester to allow central office administrators to meet and discuss current trends within their county and within the state. With my experience, I realize the need for quality educators in the classroom to not only educate but also, promote

educational growth in identified special education students. In addition, I realize the necessity of support for marginal teachers in the classroom in an effort to increase their performance and get them back within the minimum standards set by the school division. Thus, I recognize the need to support and decrease the number of marginal special education teachers as a must when promoting significant growth in special education students.

In order to understand my motivation for conducting the research, the philosophical assumption that I will bring to the research is an epistemological assumption. Epistemology is a theory of knowledge, which researches the relationship between the participant and myself (Lee, 2012). In addition, this research will adopt a constructivism approach or paradigm that will guide this study. Within constructivist teaching, researchers recognize that both the teacher and student are very valuable, contributing members in the learning environment, and both of these contributing members bring their prior knowledge and experiences with them into the classroom (Morphew, 2012). In regards to this research, the marginal teacher would require meaningful experiences within the school building, positive interactions between students, parents, and administrators, and active prior knowledge of the subject they are teaching in order to contribute to a constructive learning environment (Morphew, 2012).

Problem Statement

Research (Sweeney & Manatt, 1984) has already focused on the overall marginal teacher and the intensive supports that have gone into helping them. Further research from Kaye (2004) focused on defining a marginal teacher and expanding the literature available regarding marginal teaching. Doctoral dissertation research has even focused on the marginal elementary teacher and the issues and barriers that elementary principals encountered when working with them (Causey, 2010). As stated before, research from Nixon et al. (2010) supports the idea that

although principals may make the decision for non-renewal of a teacher's contract, the decision may be overturned by several people to include the superintendent (also known as central office staff), members of the school board, and court or other independent hearing officers (Nixon et al., 2010). However, the ultimate support to the principal and the one who makes the ultimate decision to terminate these teachers comes from the superintendent, the school board, and other officials.

There is a lack of research on what central office administrators do to support marginalized teachers to ensure they have met district standards. Even further, there is a lack of research focused on the supports for the marginal special education teacher and how central office administrators can assist them. Thus, the problem is a lack of research that focuses on central officer administrators and their shared perspectives regarding the issues and barriers they have faced and the supports they provided when dealing with marginal special education teachers. The problem is that too many marginal teachers impact classrooms around the nation daily, and the process for removing these marginal teachers is tedious and long drawn. In essence, many administrators simply put up with the teachers' lack of professionalism or empathy for the job as opposed to starting the process of terminating them.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of central office administrators in rural school districts in Virginia when supporting marginal special education teachers. More specifically, this research sought to examine the perspectives of 11 previous Region A central office administrators regarding the issues that they experienced when working with marginal teachers, the amount of work it took to support marginal teachers while under improvement, the potential ramifications of not fully

supporting marginal special education teachers, and whether or not it was financially driven. This research focused on rural school divisions in Virginia, using the perspectives and experiences of 11 central office administrators. The research defined marginal special education teachers as those who were not labeled as incompetent teachers, but whom central office administrators had identified as marginal teachers. Additionally, for the purposes of this study, this research identified a central office administrator to be a school administrator who has direct supervision over all personnel in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 within a particular school system. These categories of administrators are different from building-level administrators, because they have interaction and direct supervision of all teachers from grades Pre-K through 12 where a building-level administrator would only have direct supervision over staff in their school building.

Significance of the Study

Educators can learn a significant amount about supports, issues, and barriers that central office administrators face when working with marginal teachers. Existing research regarding RTTT suggest supporting ineffective teachers and then recommending dismissal of ineffective teachers who still do not perform well with the supports (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010). However, this research does not provide guidance on how to support the marginal teachers. Other research has been geared around reasons why teachers become labeled as marginal teachers (Gerlach & Giles, 1999), and even existing research point out the effects of ineffective teachers and school systems (Gibbon, 2003). There also exists research regarding issues that principals face when dealing with marginal teachers (Bridges, 1992; Causey, 2010; Nixon et al., 2010). However, there remains a missing piece in the research regarding the perspectives and supports provided from those who make the final decision on terminating marginal or

incompetent teachers: central office administrators. In addition, a gap exists in literature pertaining to marginal special education teachers and supports provided to them from central office administrators.

This study sought to provide beneficial information to those particularly in rural school divisions. With such small school populations, one marginal teacher has the potential of affecting a greater population of students in comparison to urban school divisions. In addition, due to the location of rural school divisions, many central office administrators can utilize this research as a means of understanding or receiving suggestions when dealing with their own marginal special education teachers within their school divisions.

Research Questions

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of central office administrators when supporting marginal special education teachers. In order for a teacher to move from marginal status to an effective educator, the administrative staff must identify and recognize the teacher is marginal and respond to their individual needs (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Range, Hewitt & Young, 2014). One of the main groups of individuals overseeing marginal teachers are central office administrators. Perspectives and lived experiences of central office administrators, when supporting marginal special education teachers, have not been documented in literature. The following five developed research questions framed the overall premise of this investigation, guided this study, and were based off a review of the literature.

RQ1: How do central office administrators in rural school districts in Virginia describe their experiences when working with marginal special education teachers?

Previous research has provided principal perceptions when identifying and working with

marginal teachers, and research has described the barriers principals have experienced when supporting these teachers (Kaye, 2004; Maulding & Joachim, 2000). However, research does not include the perception of central office administrators when working with and supporting marginal teachers. Therefore, this question was established to document the lived experiences of participating central office administrators when working with marginal special education teachers.

RQ2: How do central office administrators describe their experiences working with marginal special education teachers that they had to terminate from their position?

Research has estimated approximately 5% to 15% of teachers in classrooms educating students are incompetent (Range, Duncan, Scherz & Haines, 2012; Yariv, 2004). Range et al. (2012) stated that identifying incompetent or ineffective teachers is one of the most critical roles of school leaders. Therefore, this question was established to document central office administrative experiences when working with marginal special education teachers whom they had to terminate from their position.

RQ3: How, if at all, do central office administrators describe supports they provided to marginal special education teachers that enabled the teachers to meet district standards?

Research has supplied administrators with evidence that supports and strategies must be implemented to help struggling teachers who are marginal or incompetent at the building level (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010; Sweeney & Manatt, 1984; White House, 2009). Therefore, this question was derived to document supports that central office administrators provided to marginal special education teachers that assisted them in meeting district standards.

RQ4: How, if at all, do central office administrators respond to the barriers they experienced when working with marginal special education teachers?

Range et al. (2012) found that effective administrators in a school building seeking to improve student achievement were actively helping to improve teachers and their practice. Therefore, this question was derived to document the lived experiences of central office administrators in regards to the barriers they experienced when working with marginal special education teachers.

RQ5: How do participant responses compare or contrast?

Very little is known in research regarding the identification process of incompetent teachers, what procedures are used by administrators to remediate them, what procedures are used to dismiss them, or how school leaders views compare or contrast based on their position (Range et al., 2012; Yariv, 2004). Therefore, this question was established to document the lived experiences of central office administrators and how their responses compared and contrasted. Not only did this question compare and contrast any responses about incompetent teachers, but it was also used to compare and contrast responses regarding marginal teachers.

Research Plan

This qualitative research study employed a transcendental phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994). This particular qualitative method focuses on how individuals, in this case central office administrators, make sense of their experience when supporting marginal teachers, and transforms this experience into consciousness (Hart & Swars, 2009). The ultimate resolution of phenomenological method is to “reduce individual experiences” with an occurrence to a depiction “of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Upon receiving permission and approval from the internal review board, this research sought to find and interview 11 central office administrators from rural areas in Virginia. Interview questions regarding the central office administrators’ experiences working with marginal special education teachers were semi-

structured which allowed for new ideas to be brought forth during the interview based on the responses from the respondents. The researcher recorded interviews through digital files, and transcribed some by hand and others with a professional transcription company. After the transcription, the researcher used Atlas.ti to match up participant responses with the appropriate research question in order to analyze trends in the research.

Delimitations and Limitations

Limitations within this study consist of opening the study up to only 11 central office administrators. When conducting research within rural school divisions, the study sought to identify and interview only central office administrators who have background experience in special education and how they were supporting marginal special education teachers within their divisions. Also, this study sought to employ a transcendental phenomenological method opposed to other qualitative methods simply because this study will seek to identify shared experiences among various central office administrators experiencing the same thing, supporting marginal special education teachers. In addition, Creswell (2007) notes the goal of phenomenology is to record the participant experiences and how it was experienced.

Further limitations of this study consist of the researcher's employment in the county where some of the potential participants live or lived. In addition, another limitation of the study is the number of available participants with experience in special education. In many instances, central office administrators in rural school divisions have limited backgrounds in the area of special education. Therefore, this research will have its focal point in rural areas in Virginia. This lack of experience that some central office administrators have in special education may be an underlying issue in supporting marginal special education teachers and helping them to meet district standards. Due to the large distance between rural school division central offices within

the state, and in many instances, those central offices have a limited number of central office administrators working with instruction; this research will focus on rural central office administrators. Thus, the ability to collaborate with other central office administrators throughout the state is time consuming and poses as a burden for some. Therefore, this research sought to close some of those barriers for central office administrators by providing them with research-based information they can use when supporting their marginal special education teachers.

Definitions

1. *Incompetent or Ineffective Teacher*- Teachers who are inefficient, lack necessary skills, inadequate knowledge of content, unwillingness to teach the curriculum, failure to work efficiently and effectively with colleagues and family members, poor classroom management and discrepancies in their attitude (Essex, 2012).
2. *Marginal Teacher*- Teachers who do sufficient work to keep their jobs, but are a detriment to student learning (Zepeda, 2013).

Summary

As the United States continues to seek the top educational spot in the world, there is a continued existence of increased legislation urging a move towards excellent schools. Historical research has continued to show the negatives and the positives of both the NCLB supported by President Bush and the current RTTT initiative supported by President Obama. However, even with NCLB policies and RTTT initiatives, schools still face a continued increasing problem of marginal teachers. Research geared around the principal perception when working with marginalized teachers is prevalent, but research has failed to gauge the interaction or responsibilities that central office administrators have taken to bring these marginalized teachers

back to sufficient performing teachers. This particular study sought to expand upon the already existing information on marginalized teachers by telling the untold story from the standpoint of central office administrators.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two explores the theoretical framework and the existing literature concerning marginal special education teachers and central office administrators. Within the theoretical framework, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is explained which provides a detailed analysis of the impact that school has on the development of a child. In addition to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, this research uses three other theories to establish the theoretical framework regarding marginalized teaching to include the following: the cognitive apprenticeship theory, the path-goal leadership theory, and the transformational leadership theory. A review of related literature focusing on the importance of quality teachers, school system policies and accountability, highly qualified general and special education teachers, special educators' roles, marginal teachers' impact on student learning, incompetent teachers' impact on student learning, the teacher evaluation process, and school laws governing the termination of teachers follow the theoretical framework. Finally, chapter two provides a summary of what research currently knows, what research does not know or covers, and how this proposed study can specifically address gaps in the existing literature. The research questions that will guide this study are as follows:

R1: How do central office administrators in rural school districts in Virginia describe their experiences when working with marginal special education teachers?

R2: How do central office administrators describe their experiences working with marginal special education teachers that they had to terminate from their position?

R3: How, if at all, do central office administrators describe supports they provided to marginal special education teachers that enabled the teachers to meet district standards?

R4: How, if at all, do central office administrators respond to the barriers they experienced when working with marginal special education teachers?

R5: How do participant responses compare or contrast?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study includes four main theories, all which have been prevalent through research dealing with the impact on a child's education. All children have multiple influential people or things in their lives which will affect who they are and who they will become. In addition, society argues that all people learn from one another whether it is through one's own observation or from another person modeling a behavior. Thus, this theoretical framework has its foundation in literature regarding Bronfenbrenner ecological system theory (Johnson, 2008) and Collins, Brown and Newman's cognitive apprenticeship theory (Bouta & Paraskeva, 2013). Both theories explain the importance of decreasing non-influential people or things, marginal teachers, within school systems across the country. In addition, they support the need for proper modeling from central office administrators when it comes to supporting marginal special education teachers. In addition to those two theories, this dissertation will employ the values of leadership theories to include both the path-goal theory and transformational theory to explain the behaviors and attitudes of administrators and their direct impact on marginalized teachers. Research suggests one of the most important factors for increasing student success is increasing teacher effectiveness (Owings, Kaplan, Nunnery, Marzano, Myran & Blackburn, 2006; Range et al., 2012; Rutledge, Harris, & Ingle, 2010; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Stronge, 2002; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Through the incorporation of leadership theories, this dissertation sought to show how administrative interaction with marginalized teachers could assist in increasing teacher effectiveness, which

could obtain/produce higher student achievement levels. All theories served as the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner believed various aspects of the environment affected a child's overall development, and that a relationship existed between the environment and the child, known as a bi-directional relationship (Lin & Bates, 2010). Bronfenbrenner developed this theory with the hope of both defining and understanding human development through a system of relationships that would establish a person's environment (Johnson, 2008). Bronfenbrenner's definition of the theory states:

The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progress, mutual accommodation throughout the life course between an active, growing human being and that changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives. [This] process is affected by the relations between these settings and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 188)

Bronfenbrenner proposed that here are four systems that have the most impact on a child's growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Johnson, 2008; Lin & Bates, 2010). Those systems include the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. Researchers also suggest a fifth agent of impact on a child: the chronosystem, which deals with the family dynamic or the family's history (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Johnson, 2008; Swick & Williams, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner (1995) described the microsystem as the pattern of activities that a child has, the roles that a child takes on, and the interpersonal relationships that exist within a particular setting. The microsystem, out of all of Bronfenbrenner's systems, would have the

most direct impact on a child's development and would deal with the school, the family, and the neighborhood (Lin & Bates, 2010; Swick & Williams, 2006). These are things in which the child would interact with on a daily basis and serves as the first point of learning for the child. Johnson made a specific analysis applying the microsystem to organizational development. Johnson noted that in organizational development, Bronfenbrenner's (2008) theory could apply to an individual school and could include the students at the school, the parents whose children go to the school, family members of the students, administrators who lead the school, teachers, and the surrounding community, which could include stake holders. Regarding this particular research, the marginal teacher in the classroom would have a direct impact on the student's education and growth, and would therefore be a significant member of the microsystem.

Second, the mesosystem deals with the connection that the agents of the microsystem have with each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Lin & Bates, 2010). This could include the connection that a child's parents have with the child's teacher or administrator. Johnson (2008) provides the reader with an example of an individual school's mesosystem by describing the interactions between the students and parents, also known as the microsystem. Through the parental expectations regarding the academic and extra-curricular offering and success of those offerings to their children can create an environment that indirectly affects the atmosphere or climate of the school (Johnson, 2008). Tension and fear arises when there are unreasonable high expectations and low tolerance for failure (Johnson, 2008). These tensions usually form between the parent and child (Johnson, 2008). In application of the mesosystem to this research, a parent's expectations for the school system to provide a quality educator in the classroom can produce a negative dynamic when not met between the parent, school and potentially the child.

Third, the exosystem contains elements of a child's life in which he or she does not interact with directly. Lin and Bates (2010) provide the example of the parent's job as being an agent within the exosystem. Although the parent's job does not come into direct contact with the child, it still has a direct impact on the child's life. Johnson (2008) notes that the exosystem is the larger of the social systems, and it includes all things in which the child has no direct influence over. In application to this research, the marginal teacher would have a direct impact on the student's education and growth; however, the student would have no influence over the marginal teacher or their perception of education.

The macrosystem is the relationship between all of the previous systems including the laws, cultural values, and cultures that affect a child's growth (Lin & Bates, 2010). Johnson (2008) describes it as a blueprint towards a given society and its elements. The macrosystem pertains to this particular research as it reviews the state of education in the entire nation and not just the state of education in one setting.

Finally, the chronosystem is more time based (Johnson, 2008), and would review the school system's information to see what occurrences have happen from day to day and from year to year that would impact the child. For example, the negative or positive affects on a child could be based on changes in teaching staff, curricular choices, student body, and how many years in operation this school had been open (Johnson, 2008).

The following image is one regarding the impact that the school system has on the development of a child. The model is the actual ecosystem of the school setting and its direct and/or indirect impact that it would have on a student's education. As one can see, the administration and faculty/staff would have a close direct impact upon the individual school. Items closer to the individual school such as parents/families, community, students,

administration, and faculty/staff would all have a direct impact on the student as a whole while factors such as district policy, local economics, state regulations and federal mandates would have an indirect impact on the child within their development.

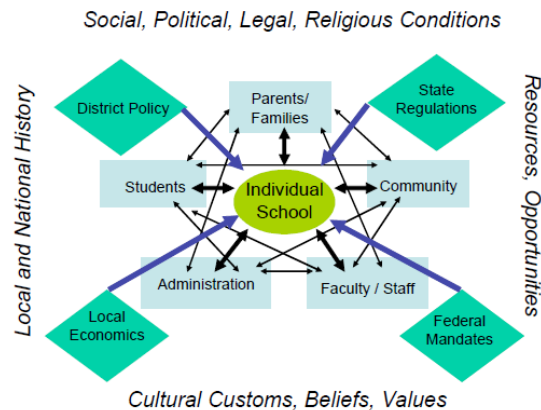


Figure 1: From “Ecological systems and complexity theory: Toward an alternative model of accountability in education,” by E. S. Johnson, 2008, *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, 5 (1), p. 4. Copyright 2008 by Copyright Holder. Reprinted with permission.

Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory

Research has already suggested the need to help struggling marginal and incompetent teachers (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010; Sweeney & Manatt, 1984; White House, 2009). Therefore, the apprenticeship theory has a direct correlation to marginal teachers, and is a method that supports the idea that when central office administrators provide supports to marginal teachers, these supports can get marginal teachers back on track towards meeting district standards. There is no doubt that an effective leader needs certain required skills. The federal government provides money to institutions of higher education each year in an effort to educate and turn out potentially effective educators to promote the growth and development of children within the United States school systems. The cognitive apprenticeship theory’s application is useful when seeking to bring about effective skills within marginal teachers.

Bouta and Paraskeva (2013) note the Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory has four components consisting of “the content of knowledge and learning strategies, the teaching methods, the sequencing of activities, and the sociology of learning” (p. 160). The cognitive apprenticeship theory seeks to make the learner and transform oneself into an expert thinker as they are gaining access to knowledge throughout their experience (Bouta & Paraskeva, 2013). The cognitive apprenticeship theory “makes the use of real world context or situated learning in which the skill is developed” (Bouta & Paraskeva, 2013, p. 162).

Most importantly, and with greatest application to this research, the cognitive apprenticeship theory focuses on developing cognitive and metacognitive skills (Bouta & Paraskeva, 2013). The entire premise of the cognitive apprenticeship theory is for one to learn from their trainer. When applying this concept to education, marginal and incompetent teachers can learn significant teaching methods from not only the research, but also those who have taught in classrooms and obtained supervisory positions in order to ensure effective teachers are in the classrooms within their districts. A key point made by Bouta and Paraskeva (2013) is that, “Not only does [cognitive apprenticeship theory] promote learner-centered, higher-order thinking skills but it offers the opportunity for peers to serve as cognitive resources for each other. The basic aim [of cognitive apprenticeship theory] is to help students develop the ability to generalize” (p. 162). Thus, this theory’s application can provide trained and supported marginal teachers the cognitive skills needed to become effective teachers and promote growth in students.

Path-Goal Leadership Theory

Identifying marginal teachers and providing this intervention is critically important for administrators (Range et al., 2014). One of the many important theories within leadership is the path-goal theory which “...posits that leaders can positively inspire the performance,

contentment, and motivation of their employees by clarifying the path on how to achieve performance goals, bestowing rewards for achieving those goals, and removing obstacles that are stopping employees from achieving these goals” (Vandergrift & Matusitz, 2011, p. 350;). In an ongoing effort to improve marginal teacher performance, the path-goal theory provides a positive way for administrators to set goals for their teachers, keep track of goal performance, and assist in ensuring that these goals are met by the marginal teacher. However, in order for the path-goal theory to be successful, both parties must have a positive attitude regarding acceptance and change. Established by Robert House in 1971, path-goal theory states that it is the behaviors and attitudes of the leader that can drive the motivation, satisfaction, and performance of his or her subordinates (Evans & House, 1996; Vandergrift & Matusitz, 2011). Thus, the leader or administrator in this case must be willing to help the marginal teacher meet district standards once again, and the administrator must be willing to take the time out to help educate and work with the marginal teacher.

Building-level principals are responsible for the direct supervision of marginal teachers within school systems nationwide. However, central office administrators are the ones with the final say in regards to the termination of marginal teachers. Thus, administrators can apply the path-goal theory to much of their experience when working with marginalized teachers by finding out or examining the at work obstacles that hinder these teachers from being successful and assist building-level principals in removing or decreasing those obstacles. Central office administrators can set goals for marginalized teachers that include rewards when the teachers meet the goals. However, instead of simply setting these goals and rewarding the teacher every time they meet the benchmark, the central office administrator must take the time to visit the marginal teacher’s classroom. When visiting, they must observe a lesson that is being taught,

meet with the marginal teacher after the lesson, review the positive and negatives of the lesson, and provide immediate feedback that would assist in their development towards meeting district standards. Most importantly, and the most significant out of all three intentions of the path-goal theory, is that central office administrators can clarify the path through explanation of how to achieve the performance goals for marginalized special education teachers in order for them to obtain meeting district standards achievement level.

Transformational Leadership Theory

In addition to the path-goal leadership theory, the transformational leadership theory is another theory that pertains to administrators overseeing marginal teaching. In 1978, James MacGregor Burns (1978) categorized leadership into two categories: transformational and transactional. The idea of transactional leadership is a simple study of how leaders and followers socially exchange with one another. For the purposes of this dissertation, the researcher has chosen transformational leadership theory as the focal point for inspiring marginal teachers. Research defines the components of the transformational leadership theory in the following ways: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Antonaki & House, 2014; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

As state in Bass & Riggio (2006), Burns stated that transformational leaders “help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers’ needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization” (p. 3). Alsmadi and Mahasneh (2011) stated “transformational leadership occurs when leaders set challenging expectations and inspire others to achieve a high level of performance and also set examples of what is expected in terms of ideal behaviors” (p.161). Many times marginal teachers do not share the same vision as the

school system in which they work, or they do not share the same view points as their principals or other administration within the school building. At times, marginalized teachers have witnessed failed attempts to implement policies and procedures and thus have a negative viewpoint when introducing new policies or procedures. Administrators who are working with marginal teachers must set clear expectations for these teachers, reasonable goals that can be achieved, and discuss with them the acceptable behavior that must occur within the workplace.

Research states that “transformational leadership suggests that leaders encourage people to reflect on their different perspectives, knowledge, and beliefs about their context, within an atmosphere of trust to foster changing ways of thinking and performing” (Alsmadi & Mahasneh, 2011, p.162). Yes, marginalized teachers may have different perspectives of how the school should run and administrators should open up the lines of communication with marginalized teachers to build a sense of trust within the school community so these teachers can feel that their opinion is valued. Within this intellectual and reflective process, critiquing knowledge and assumptions is a goal of all members and the members begin to construct new knowledge, skills, and understandings (Alsmadi & Mahasneh, 2011). Through motivation and inspirations, school or business leaders who operate on a transformational leadership level are able to unite individuals to achieve a common goal (Alsmadi & Mahasneh, 2011). By aligning the objectives and goals of all parties involved, marginal teachers may feel more inspired and more involved in the learning process of their students.

In addition to an internal feeling of wanting to be involved, marginal teachers seek motivation. To carry out the duties that are required of them within the school building, these teachers rely on motivation from their leaders and peers to be successful. “Transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they

thought possible” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 4). By motivating marginal teachers, the administration can decrease the attitudes of giving up that many marginal teachers have.

“Transformational leadership involves inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers’ leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring, and provision of both challenge and support” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 4). Marginal teachers have the characteristic of giving up and feeling uninvolved and unwanted within the school. Through the mentoring and coaching stage, marginal teachers receive supports from their leaders and advice on how to become effective teachers again.

Related Literature

The public school system is comprised of integrated individual positions that are constantly required to adapt and differentiate instruction based on student learning and shifts in education. Teachers who fail to adapt to the changing curriculum or differentiate according to student needs are outside of the norm of what defines a good teacher. Researchers and educators use several established terms to describe a teacher who is not performing according to district standards. Two terms in particular are incompetent and marginal. Research shows that five to fifteen percent of the 2.7 million teachers in public classrooms are performing at incompetent levels (Bridges, 1992; McGrath, 1995; Tucker, 1997; Tucker, 2001). A marginal teacher is a teacher who is mediocre and not quite good enough (Platt, Tripp, Ogden & Fraser, 2000). Zepeda (2013) defined marginal teachers as teachers who “manage to perform just well enough to keep their jobs, to the detriment of student learning” (p. 71). Balliet, writing in 1894, suggested that the only way to reform schools was to “ensure a competent superintendent and

allow him to reform the incompetent teachers who could be reformed and to bury the rest who were dead” (Nolan & Hoover, 2007, p. 3).

Policies & Accountability

Schooling is one institution that affects the lives of more people than any other institution in America (Brevett, 2014). Society sees education as one of the most effective positive trends that guide a politician’s career. Society is constantly looking towards politicians to make positive impacts on the field of education and to ensure that every child is receiving a good quality education. Thus, ongoing debates in the field of education continue to force the term “accountability” to the forefront of reform policies within our country. Starting in 1965, the establishment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act sought to provide greater opportunities in the field of education for students labeled as disadvantaged by increasing student performance (Terry, 2010). President Johnson signed The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) into law in 1965, and required federal funds of more than 1.3 billion dollars in order to complete five tasks. The ESEA was established to (a) improve programs for students in low-income areas, (b) provide additional financial supports to school libraries to include the purchase of textbooks and other school instructional material, (c) finance educational centers and services, (d) expand upon cooperative research, and (e) provide more supports to State Departments of Education (Wolfe, 1965). Wolfe’s (1965) research found that the government earmarked the largest amount of money, more than 1 billion dollars, to help strengthen public schools with the highest level of poverty, and states spent over 100 million dollars on school supplies. However, what the government soon found was that “ESEA failed to produce significant changes in student achievement, so as the national standards movement swept the country in the late 1980s

and 1990s, policymakers began to focus on students' opportunities to learn defined, rigorous academic content" (Terry, 2010, p. 84; Vinovskis, 2009).

Since 1965 when the ESEA was established, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 sought to update and revise many policies within the previously established act. NCLB policies "created a new focus on the relationship between teacher qualifications and student achievement" (Robinson, 2011, p. 43; Shen, Mansberger, & Yang, 2004). The NCLB Act of 2001 was one of the educational reform acts that followed A Nation at Risk data released in 1983. A Nation at Risk stated that schools in America were failing and in direct correlation, teachers are thus failing (Rosenberg, Sindelar & Hardman, 2004). During the first year of implementation, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development released the results of their international math and reading survey which showed the United States to be ranked 24th in Math out of 29 industrialized countries who were tested (Peterson, 2005). This sparked an immediate concern in President George W. Bush and the Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings.

Lagana-Riordan and Aguilar (2009) describe the three main functions of the NCLB policy to include the following: developing standards within the content, administer assessments to measure student knowledge and retention, and institute accountability mechanisms. Developed standards should determine what the students know and are able to retain. Results from administered assessments should measure the retention and knowledge of students to see if they are meeting the standards. Accountability mechanisms should measure whether or not all students are receiving an equal education to meet the proficiency standards.

To meet these requirements, states were required to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) measured through state assessments for students. Every student and school must meet specific

AYP standards as outlined by the department of education. Through these standards, education departments produce data to localities to allow parents, stakeholders, and school district leaders/personnel to “more objectively identify areas of strength, as well as areas in need of improvement” (Simpson, LaCava & Patricia, 2004, p. 69). Within the AYP criteria, states had to show progress in multiple subgroups “including low-income students, minority students, students with disabilities, and students for whom English is a second language” in order for performance to be compared to that of their peers (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009, p. 136). If a particular school division did not meet these requirements within a given amount of time, enforced punishments upon the school division to include monetary or organizational sanctions were carried then through (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009; Hursh, 2005). The federal government labeled schools that did not meet the AYP requirements for two consecutive years as needing improvement (Simpson et al., 2004). Ultimately, the goal of NCLB was to have every student, including those with special needs, be accountable to meet state standards by the end of the 2013-2014 school year (Simpson et al., 2004).

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reforms* was published as a report from President Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education (n.a., 1983). This particular document declared existing threats to the educational foundations of The United States of America (Scott, 2011). In addition, the release of the document brought to the forefront of American readers the urgency of a detrimental social issue that our school systems were failing to meet the educational needs nationally in order to compete in a global market (Scott, 2011). Since the release of *A Nation at Risk*, national leaders have continued to meet in order to establish policies that would improve the educational system in America. Because of established committees, continued meetings and a dedication to policy creation the H.R. 2460 (102nd):

America 2000 Excellence in Education Act was introduced to congress in 1991 (Govtrack, 2014). The urgency for H.R. 2460 (102nd): America 2000 Excellence in Education Act called for a new generation of schools which would reward schools when gains in student performance were shown, create academies that promote and improve upon leadership and teaching in schools nationwide, support states to attract qualified teachers, provide states and localities with flexibility in exchange for greater accountability, encourage testing and evaluation, and expand on federal support for reforms in teaching literacy (Govtrack, 2014).

Today, President Obama's plans to increase accountability in school systems led to the Race to the Top initiative. RTTT established a \$4.3 billion dollar grant competition in 2009 to help State Department of Education agencies who were making efforts to abide by forms from the United States Secretary of Education (Brevetti, 2014; Stern, 2013). This initiative by President Obama differs from President Bush's NCLB policy, because RTTT ties "nationalized high-stakes testing to teacher accountability and school finance, while promoting charter schools" (Tanner, 2013, p. 5). RTTT has four key areas of reform that include a) the creation of standards that are rigorous and student assessments that are better b) the implementation and accessibility of better data systems for schools, teachers, and parents to store and obtain information regarding student progress c) the implementation of support for teachers and school leaders to become more effective and d) increased interventions for schools that are still considered low performing schools (White House, 2014). With all of the policy reviews that have taken place in the United States, the continued goal is to attract and keep highly qualified teachers. During the time of this research study, congress passed the Every Student Succeed Act. According to the United States Department of Education (n.d.), the Every Student Succeed Act provides a higher quality of pre-school, upholds accountability expectations for low performing

schools, upholds accountability for schools with continuously low graduation rates, and informs schools and the community about schools through annual state-wide assessment progress reports.

Highly Qualified Teachers

Poftak (2003) notes that good teaching is one of the biggest factors in improving education. Good teaching yields improvements in test scores and enhances the students' overall education knowledge and growth. Alarming, statistics show that 26 percent of students in high-poverty schools have non-content certified teachers teaching the subject they are currently teaching (Poftak, 2003). Through efforts of NCLB, it was required that all classrooms have a certified teacher in the subject-area of expertise by 2006, and in doing so, the goal for NCLB legislation was to have all students taught by highly qualified teachers (Poftak, 2003; Robinson, 2011). Wayne and Youngs (2003) summarized qualified personnel by saying, "Both intuition and empirical research tell us that the achievement of school children depends substantially on the teachers they are assigned" (p. 89). School divisions across the world note this change in licensure requirements, and many took on the financial burden of recruiting and keeping highly qualified teachers. Poftak (2003) notes, The New Hampshire School Administrators Association estimated that increasing teacher and paraprofessional pay based on highly qualified status would cost them \$28.3 million that would be a financial burden to fall upon the taxpayers.

Before the NCLB, the concept of being highly qualified was mainly associated with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which mandated that all newly hired teachers in Title I schools be highly qualified (Strain, 2007). Title II of the NCLB Act calls for local educational agencies to demonstrate the number of highly qualified teachers teaching the core subjects in addition to increasing the number of high quality professional development opportunities offered to teachers

(Poftak, 2003; United States Department of Education, 2004). Further research regarding the NCLB policies, showed that “highly qualified” is also discussed in Title IX § 9101 (23) (A&B) of the program that outlines four specific guidelines for teachers in public elementary or secondary school to meet. No Child Left Behind codes teachers as highly qualified if they possess a degree in the subject in which they teach, or have passed tests in the subjects or met some other standards as prescribed by the state (Lewis, 2005).

Being highly qualified did not just affect teachers in the general education setting, but it also had an impact on teachers teaching students with disabilities. To receive classification as a highly qualified teacher, teachers must meet basic requirements set by the NCLB. However, more complex and rigorous requirements for special education teachers were established. These implications and a call for being highly qualified came through the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act congress passed eliminated the term highly qualified teachers, and allowed states more flexibility in regards to who teaches in the classroom (USDOE, n.d.).

Highly Qualified Special Education Teacher

In 2004, IDEA added a new definition to its list of terms, “highly qualified.” IDEA required special education to adopt the same meaning given to a highly qualified teacher under the Elementary and Second Education Act, and imposed specific requirements for special education teachers. Education agencies along with the government expect special education teachers to meet both the requirements of NCLB and the IDEA requirements (Council for Exceptional Children, 2004; Luft, 2008; Robinson, 2011). Both IDEA and NCLB require the special educator to have disability-specific training and degrees, making the requirements for a

highly qualified special education teacher more rigorous and complex (Luft, 2008; Robinson, 2011). One of the discrepancies between NCLB and IDEA policies is that NCLB puts focus towards all children meeting standards where IDEA focuses on students with disabilities meeting standards.

“The promise of the standards era is straightforward: All students can and will learn more than they are currently learning” (Rosenberg et al., 2004, p. 269). In making this promise to students with disabilities, this statement increased the responsibilities of special education teachers and centered the focus on special education qualifications within the states. “...And all students will succeed if schools expect the highest academic standards” (Rosenberg et al., 2004, p. 269). Rosenberg et al. (2004) further noted that public schools will be accountable for student failure if students do not succeed. Although public policy makes these promises to the student with disability and their parents, the ultimate question presented to many is *are special education teachers being adequately prepared to work in a standards-based system?*

Special education teachers are definitely not exempt in any way from the accountability mandates ordered by state governments. In essence, the role of the special education teacher and the demand for highly quality special education teachers continue to increase throughout the years. The role of the special education teacher is not simply one who instructs a course, but includes overseeing the student Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities. In addition, school systems and federal education agencies expect special education teachers to serve in support roles for general education teachers who are currently instructing students with disabilities in their classroom.

When NCLB introduced the requirement for being highly qualified through the NCLB act, several teaching shortages were already in place. Thus, it made it more difficult for

educational agencies to staff areas in which severe teacher shortages were taking place. For example, personnel who were not certified to teach or those who had not yet demonstrated acceptable levels of education to meet the highly qualified status staffed classrooms, including special education classrooms (Simpson et al., 2004). The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) reported a nationwide shortage of over 40,000 special education teachers who were qualified (Allbritten, Mainzer, & Ziegler, 2004). Simpson et al. (2004, p. 71) states, “As of the 2002-2003 school year, 6% of all teachers nationally were not certified. This number increased to 8% for special education teachers and for teachers who teach in high-poverty areas.”

Role of the Special Educator

With an increase of stricter requirements on teachers, multiple definitions of what the role of a special educator is has come. Luft (2008, p. 431) notes, IDEA regulations and its amendments designate specific personnel, known as special educators, to be primarily responsible for overseeing and implementing educational services to identified students. Services should be implemented and carried out through each identified student’s IEP (Luft, 2008). Instruction for the particular identified students must occur within their least restrictive environment, and identified students must have access to the general education classroom and curriculum (Luft, 2008). This particular law continues to evolve the actual definition of the special educator’s role within the school building, to include their instructional role when working with students with disabilities. Education agencies, local governments, and federal governments expect special education teachers to work closely with general education teachers when students with disabilities are in the inclusive or collaborative classroom settings. Luft (2008) notes three roles of the special education teacher to include “As consultant teachers who meet periodically with general education teachers to provide expertise in addressing specific

learning needs of special education students (p. 431)” and “as resource room or itinerant teachers who provide skill specific or content-specific instruction to special education students who are in full-time inclusion-placements (p. 432).” The special educators role is defined by several researchers as a collaborative, cooperative, or co-teacher who works with another general education teacher either full or part-time (Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003; Idol, Nevin, Paolucci-Whitcomb, 2000; Kampwirth, 2003; Luft (2008); Moores, 2001; Olson & Platt, 2004; Stinson & Kluwin, 2003; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003).

With the more rigorous requirements and the undefined nonspecific roles of special education teachers, more and more are finding themselves leaving the education profession for other opportunities, and many are finding themselves falling below district standards. Special educators are leaving the field at alarming rates. Billingsley (2004) and Courtade, Servillio, Ludlow & Anderson (2010) note that 13.2% of special educators will leave their positions per year, 7% will transfer into general education, 29% of special education teachers will leave education within the first three years of teaching, and 39% of special education teachers will leave within five years of teaching. Work place stress and inadequate compensation are two of the major reasons contributing to the attrition rates of teachers (Courtade et al., 2010). Through research, Courtade et al. (2010) cites Carlson and Skrtic research that shows the workload for special education teachers have increased thus increasing the likelihood of teachers leaving the classroom due to larger caseloads, more paperwork, and constant meetings. As mentioned, due to the increased workload of special education teachers and the varied expected duties they undertake, many are either leaving the field or falling below district standards.

Marginal Teachers

When describing what a good teacher is, Lawrence, Vachon, Leake and Leake (2001) list the following responses from students: patient, clear, likes students, fair, empathetic, sensitive, dedicated, resourceful, well organized, dedicated, flexible, respectful, good motivational skills, good communication, classroom manage is effective, is available to students, is task oriented, and is flexible. Principals use classroom walk-through data and observations, along with year-end evaluations to measure teachers' ability to meet district standards. However, principals use other indicators such as student scores on year end state assessments to evaluate the performance of a teacher and recognize problem areas. Lawrence et al. (2001) describe the following as indicators of problems: the number of student referrals for discipline, parental complaints, staff complaints, students receiving failing grades, and the attitude of a teacher (their uncooperativeness or resistance). Lawrence et al. (2001) identified a marginal teacher as someone who is "borderline between competent and incompetent" (p. 2). McEwan-Adkins (2005) defined a marginal teacher as one who lacks proficiency in one or several areas of instructional knowledge. Marginal teachers are those seen as doing just enough to get by for an evaluation and then slip back into poor teaching patterns or chronic negative attitude patterns (Lawrence et al., 2001). Kaye (2004) stated, "In professional discourse, teachers' minimum application of the explicit knowledge, skills, and attributes considered by educators to constitute acceptable practice commonly is called marginal teaching" (p. 234). Kaye (2004) conducted a research study titled "Turning the Tide on Marginal Teaching." Within this study the author defined marginal teaching as "the level of professional teaching that cannot be documented as 'incompetence' but, rather, borders on incompetence and prompts a supervisor to believe that the teaching needs to change and to improve" (p. 234). Some of the identified reasons as to why

teachers are ineffective are “inadequate training, personal problems that interfere with effective teaching performance, simply a negative attitude, or some combination of these” (Lawrence et al., 2001, p. 2). As mentioned before, marginal teachers may feel inadequately trained, and special education teachers more specifically may feel this inadequate training due to the numerous requirements and increased role strains that the teacher is experiencing.

Marginal teachers may also demonstrate other characteristics within the school building. Lawrence et al. (2001) notes the following characteristics of marginal teachers in regards to working with students:

...does not adequately supervise students, does not get students actively involved in classroom presentations, does not provide a safe learning environment, engages in a power struggle with students, has a disproportionate number of student discipline referrals, has an excessive number of students receiving failing marks, has poor classroom management skills (p. 2-3).

In terms of instructional strategies, Lawrence et al. (2001) felt that a marginal teacher

...presents boring lessons, displays a negative attitude toward teaching, does not follow the adopted curriculum, does not maintain appropriate scope and sequence, does not prepare adequately, does not use instructional time efficiently, has a limited range of instructional strategies, has inadequate or no lesson plans, uses an excessive number of worksheets (p. 2-3).

In addition, Lawrence et al. (2001) notes the following characteristics of marginal teachers in regards to working with administration, teachers, and parents:

...consumes too much administrative time, does not following school procedures and guidelines, does not communicate effectively with parents, has numerous complaints

from students, parents, and colleagues in the building, inadequately reinforces learning, is resistant to change, is uncooperative with other staff members, lacks communication skills, lack organizational skills, has a negative attitude and refuses to do what is expected (p. 2-3).

With the many identifying factors, marginal teachers can have a negative direct impact on not only the student but the other building teachers as well. Marginal teachers need direct supervision that is closely monitored (McEwan-Adkins, 2005). With the role of a special education teacher providing direct supports to general education teachers for students with disabilities, administration must monitor closely any labeled teacher who is marginal and this is a huge undertaking for administration. McEwan-Adkins (2005) notes that collaborative models or indirect models do not work for marginal teachers. The goal when working with a marginal teacher is for them to improve and once again meet district standards. McEwan-Adkins (2005) notes marginal teachers have the potential of becoming more effective.

With the need for highly qualified teachers in the field of special education both by NCLB and IDEA standards, marginal teachers can “be a drag on school improvement initiatives because their students do not achieve at the levels of which they are capable” (McEwan-Adkins, 2005, p. 142). McEwan-Adkins (2005) conducted interviews of principals who noted that marginal teachers need someone in the classroom with them multiple times throughout the week not just one or two days, and frequent documentation is key when working with marginal teachers.

Types of Marginal Teaching

Through research, marginal teaching is definitely not a new topic that has plagued classrooms around the country. However, several written research studies and dissertations

focus on understanding the marginal teacher and their characteristics. Through qualitative analyses of interview data, Kaye (2004) found three distinctions between marginality and characterized them by the following terms: Flotsam, Jetsam, and Club Med.

Flotsam Marginal Teaching

Merriam-Webster (2016) defines flotsam as floating pieces, parts, etc. from a wrecked ship. Kaye (2004) connects this definition of flotsam by placing it in the context of schooling by stating, “Flotsam marginal teaching is consciously unskilled teachers” (p. 247). Teachers who fall at the flotsam level would include new teachers, teachers working in new environments, teachers working at a new instructional level or those who struggle with the curriculum. Teachers labeled flotsam were described as those who are able to improve their teaching ability, self-motivated, or will seek out assistance needed to enforce the change (Kaye, 2004). Within the study, Kaye (2004) notes one teacher’s interview response, “I’m not doing the job” (p. 247). Teachers known as flotsam marginal teachers recognize the need to get help or collaborate with their peers. “Teachers reported Flotsam teaching to be natural, recurring cycle in schools. They perceived teachers in these situations as caring about their students. Individuals who took ownership for change and movement” are flotsam teachers (Kaye, 2004, p. 247).

As noted, new teachers would generally fall within this category, because in reality, seasoned teachers and stakeholders have very high expectations for new teachers, often expecting them to perform at levels equivalent to veteran teachers (Dyal & Sewell, 2002). However, new teachers begin their career with the feelings of idealism, enthusiasm, encouragement, and dedication, only to have a feeling of being alone or simply drifting in the water in relation to the term flotsam. Over 30 percent of new teachers leave the classroom by the end of their fifth year nationally (Bolich, 2001). Research has suggested that providing induction

training for new teachers is a means of decreasing flotsam teaching. A longitudinal quantitative study suggest that beginning teachers who participate in a rigorous inductive program improved their effectiveness in comparison to their coworkers who did not participate in the training opportunities (Fluckiger, McGlamery, & Edick, 2006). School divisions across the state have established programs that provide mentorship and induction ceremonies to new teachers to make them feel welcomed. Fairfax County Public School System in Virginia is one such system who established the “Great Beginning: The Next Generation” program which is geared around inducting and retaining quality teachers who will “ultimately contribute to increased student achievement” (FCPS, 2014, np). The school division describes this program in the following way:

Great Beginnings is a comprehensive new teacher induction program with a unified mission of supporting new teachers that has quality mentoring practices, professional teaching standards, classroom-based teacher learning, commitment and support, and ongoing program assessment (FCPS, 2014, np).

Many programs established around the country provide new teachers and teachers new to the school division with a mentor who is responsible for supporting the teacher with feedback, modeling effective strategies, and serving as a resource. Nielsen, Barry, and Addison (2006) noted in their research that the goal of the mentor was to observe new teachers, provide feedback, model strategies, co-plan lessons, and help teachers analyze data. While these are effective methods of helping new teachers and teachers new to the division, they still do not necessarily solve or stop the problem of flotsam teaching.

Jetsam Marginal Teaching

Another form of marginal teaching identified by Kaye (2004) is jetsam marginal teaching. *Merriam-Webster* (2016) defines unwanted material or goods thrown overboard from a ship and washed ashore as Jetsam, especially discarded material thrown overboard to lighten the vessel. “Teachers left behind in times of change constitute educational jetsam” (Kaye, 2004, p. 247). Teachers at this point may feel discouraged, unmotivated, and frustrated regarding the current amount of workload required to them without time to do, resources to assist in instructional learning, and support to implement the changes (Kaye, 2004). Upon reaching this point, teachers may go into survival mode and feel alone in the process. “Frequently teachers perceived that Jetsam marginal teaching eroded the energy and will of others. They reported this type of marginal teaching resulted in the loss of hope and energy” (Kaye, 2004, p. 247). Marginal teachers may sense a feeling of frustration that buries their sense of hope (Kaye, 2004) that shows within the school environment. “Teachers perceived that colleagues who exhibited this type of marginal teaching performance were aware of ineffective practices but did not have the resources to improve, if resources were measured as the teachers’ time, energy and ongoing trainings” (Kaye, 2004, p. 248). Teachers who reach this point are many times veteran teachers who complain about the teaching profession, but do not retire or change jobs.

Teachers who reach this particular level of marginality exhibit negative attitudes towards the school setting. Changes in a teacher’s attitude show a direct correlation to the employee acceptance of new procedures and policies that put into place (Zimmerman, 2006). Zimmerman (2006) also believed that habit is a barrier that has a correlation to teachers changing their practices. Greenberg and Baron (2000) stated that teachers who have been at schools that

implemented unsuccessful efforts at change could be wary or hesitant about accepting further attempts to change within the school system.

With jetsam marginal teachers, Kaye (2004) found in her research that teachers reflected on colleagues by stating they were simply going along with how things were moving opposed to retiring early or moving on to another job. Kaye (2004) also found that the participating teachers in her study requested more time to learn new curricula opposed to school expecting them to teach it immediately, and in essence, these teachers felt they were ill prepared to teach their students the new subject content. Doctoral dissertation research also showed that participants were willing to help one another, because they felt "...I could become marginal without even knowing" (Kaye, 2004, p. 249). "Participants perceived that, although they pitied these teachers, Jetsam Marginal Teachers, their colleagues, principals, and school jurisdictions shared responsibility to do something about the marginality" (Kaye, 2004, p. 249). Similar to research stated by others, Kaye (2004) noted teachers labeled as jetsam marginal teachers needed peer coaching as a practice that would aid in helping them.

Club Med Marginal Teaching

The third type of marginal teaching as identified through Kaye's (2004) research was club med marginal teaching. Through her research she suggested that teacher stories indicated that some teachers make careers out of being marginal by being classified as a marginal teacher long-term (Kaye, 2004). In addition, some teachers enjoyed being a marginal teacher according to some of their co-workers, and enjoyed the label that came with being marginal (Kaye, 2004). Kaye (2004) also found that teachers describe club med marginal teaching as a practice of having little connection with students, learning, or the teaching profession. Teachers within this category could be ones with work ethics that fall below the acceptable line and do not take

ownership for what they do (Kaye, 2004). Sometimes, teachers that fall in the club med track would consider themselves as meeting district standards and working to their full potential, whereas their peers would consider them not getting by at all or simply not caring about the job in its entirety.

Through further analysis of teacher interviews conducted, Kaye (2004) found significant statements within the qualitative study. Teachers believed administrative responses to club med Marginal teachers were ineffective, that club med teaching practices usually did not change, and that club med teaching practices became a habit with these particular teachers having no desire to become the best in their profession (Kaye, 2004). Also, teachers believed that club med teachers were more concerned with their personal interest than professional interest, and teachers reported that their associates who were club med teachers usually delegated their work to others or manipulated others into completing tasks for which they were responsible for doing (Kaye, 2004).

Kaye (2004) found in her research that teachers felt betrayed by the school division when administrators did not respond to club med teachers. Blacklock (2002) addressed the issue of school administrators working with club med teachers by summarizing the need for central office administrators to be actively involved in supporting principals in making decisions about whether or not to dismiss a teacher who falls into this category. Boshier, Kaminkski and Vacca (2004) discussed the need for documentation and personnel evaluations as building blocks of success when defending the dismissal of a teacher, while Phillips and Young (1997) stated that administrators and supervisors have ultimately avoided, rather than addressed, marginal teachers due to the paperwork involved in the process.

Society has somewhat established a definition of marginal teaching in many ways. In addition, Kaye's (2004) research has helped describe three forms of marginal teaching. So, why is it then so difficult to establish a teacher as marginal and, if they do not improve, to simply terminate them? The reasons are numerous and can include a significant amount of forms that go into evaluating and documenting attempts to work with marginal teachers, laws that are in place to protect teachers from termination, school unions that work to support teachers, and as mentioned sometimes lack of support that administrators receive from central office administrators. Tucker (1997) described principal responses to addressing teacher incompetence. In this research, Tucker found six potential factors in addition to formal teacher evaluations that play a part in their reluctance. Those six factors were personal discomfort, role conflict of assistance and summative judgment, lack of requisite skills for identification and assistance, inadequate time, lack of central office support, and lack of financial resources (Tucker, 1997). The ultimate challenge for club med marginal teachers falls under the research of Duke (2004) who determined that the first and necessary step to overcoming resistance within the school building is the ability to identify who is resisting the change and why they are resisting the change that is occurring.

School Law

Blacklock (2002) argues that administrators have legal and moral obligation to ensure that students receive an appropriate education by addressing incompetent teachers. Blacklock (2002) stated, "a principal must react if a teacher's practices harm to a child whether it is academically, emotionally, physically or socially which could include the practices of marginalized teachers" (p. 27). Administrators must also realize that education is a business whose main goal is to provide a good education to children, not provide employment for teachers

(Blacklock, 2002). However, when supporting marginal teachers to the fullest extent possible does not work, principals and central office administrators must recognize and know laws that protect and govern schoolteachers. Numerous law codes regarding schools and protecting teacher rights are in existence. The Virginia assembly recognizes the probation and/or dismissal of a teacher under HB 316: Teachers probation and dismissal (Virginia's Legislative Information System, n.d.). This particular bill "specifies that a teacher may be placed on probation for incompetency, immorality, noncompliance with school laws and regulations, disability as shown by competent medical evidence" or "other good and just cause" (Virginia's Legislative Information System, n.d., para 1). A key point of the Virginia Legislative Information System's publication (n.d., para 1) states the following:

...for the purposes of teacher employment, of one or more unsatisfactory performance evaluations with the condition of more than one unsatisfactory performance evaluation or one unsatisfactory performance evaluation coupled with a finding by the division superintendent that the teacher (i) exhibited a pattern of poor performance or (ii) failed to respond to efforts to improve his performance.

However, in order for a school division to terminate teacher, the teacher must be able to see all forms of evidence the school division is using to make this decision. Thus, the school division must have adequate evidence in the form of paper work to make this decision. Paper work can be defined as any piece of evidence in which the school board and/or superintendent uses as grounds to terminate a teacher. This includes, but is not limited to, teacher observations that described in detail points of improvement, improvement plans signed by the building-level principal and the teacher, follow up letters or observations in direct connection with the

improvement plans, and/or memorandums and letters to the teacher regarding their lack of performance.

In the book, *American Public School Law* by Alexander and Alexander (2001) the authors noted that cases involving incompetent teachers usually proceeds through testimonial hearing. Courts have continued to allow the testimony of supervisors as expert witnesses to the incompetence of a teacher. However, the burden of proof rests on the school division when they must prove a teacher is incompetent to fulfill their job duties, especially tenure is involved.

Summary

A search of Liberty University's online library supplied the researcher of this dissertation with numerous other dissertations that focused on marginalized teaching. In 1986, Boothroy (1986) completed a dissertation study on "The Identification of Marginal Probationary Teachers: A study of practices in the 50 largest school districts in the state of Iowa." In 2001, Jerrells (2001) completed dissertation research on "Principal's Perceptions Regarding the Identification and Management of Incompetent Teachers." In 2001, Kaye (2001) completed dissertation research on "Living between Doubt and Hope: Teacher's Perspectives on Marginal Teaching." In 2002, Richards (2002) completed a dissertation on "Positioning the Elementary Core French Teacher: An Investigation of Workplace Marginality." In 2008, Nicolas (2008) completed a dissertation entitled, "Middle and High School Principal Responses to Marginal Teachers in Kentucky Districts of Varying Size." In 2009, Myricks (2009) completed a dissertation on "Principals Perceptions: The use of Formative Evaluations to Assist Marginal Teachers."

More research that is current on marginal teaching is limited on supports provided to those teachers, and most importantly, research lacks a focus on marginal special education teachers. In addition, limited research exists in regards to central office administrators and their

experiences working with marginal special education teachers. As noted in McEwan-Adkins (2005) text, the authors collected perspectives of the principals and building-level administrators. This research will seek to provide more updated information regarding marginal teaching in regards to central office administrators and special education teachers. While much research discusses marginal teachers, incompetent teachers, teacher evaluation procedures regarding marginal teachers, and laws governing teachers, there still exists a significant gap in the literature regarding the perspectives of central office administrators when working with marginal teachers, specifically special education teachers. In addition, the literature fails to address the support that marginal special education teachers receive in an effort to transition from marginal status to a teacher with good standing within the school division. The proposal of this research sought to close the gap by describing the perspectives and experiences of central office administrators when working with marginal teachers. This research especially sought to close the gap by specifically targeting the experiences of central office administrators when working with marginal special education teachers.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the phenomenon regarding the shared experiences of 11 central office administrators while working with marginal special education teachers. Phenomenon comes from the Greek word *phainesthai* and constructs from the word *phaino* that means “to bring to light” and “to show itself in itself” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). This particular chapter will discuss the research design chosen for this particular study. It will discuss participant participation, site details as well as its site selection, and methods that occurred to obtain data and the data analysis process. Finally, this chapter discusses ethical implications and trustworthiness when completing this study

Design

This research study employed a qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design. “For Hegel, phenomenology referred to knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). This particular chosen research design focused on the common meaning of the participants’ lived experiences dealing with marginal special education teachers (Creswell, 2013). As Creswell (2013) describes, “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 75). The specific phenomenon this study sought to describe is the experiences of central office administrators when dealing with marginal teachers, operationally specified for the purpose of this study as marginal special education teachers.

For the purpose of this study, this research utilized a transcendental phenomenological method. Moustakas (1994) defined transcendental phenomenology as a method “in which

everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (p. 34). Transcendental phenomenology pulls from the work on *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology* and the data analysis procedures of Van Kaam (1966) and Colaizzi (1978) (as cited in Creswell, 2013). Husserl used the term epoché to describe the period in which investigators set aside their own experiences or differences as much as possible in order to examine a fresh perspective regarding the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Moustakas’ (1994) works set the foundational procedures for conducting a transcendental phenomenology study. Moustakas (1994), as cited in Creswell (2013, p. 80), notes that the procedures consist of first identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one’s experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon. During the process, Moustakas (1994) believed there were four integral steps to follow in order to gain awareness, understanding, and knowledge. He felt these four steps were a natural process when conducting transcendental phenomenological studies. The first procedure Moustakas (1994) describes was epoche. During this process, personal knowledge and judgments were set aside, the identified phenomena was freshly revisited. Second, a transcendental phenomenological reduction must occur in which the phenomenon is considered in and for itself (Moustakas, 1994). During this process, the phenomenon is described in a fresh and open way, and descriptions are established for the phenomena’s meanings. Third, the imaginative variation is employed which “aims to grasp the structural essence of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35). Finally, “structural essences of the imaginative variation are then integrated with the textural essences of the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction in order to arrive at a textural-structural synthesis of meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 36). Following the collection of data, the researcher will “analyze the data

by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Following the analyses of data, the researcher must develop a detailed description of the lived experiences of the participants, how the lived experiences influenced the conditions, and “a combination of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

Research Questions

For purposes of this qualitative research study, the following research questions will guide this study:

RQ1: How do central office administrators in rural school districts in Virginia describe their experiences when working with marginal special education teachers?

RQ2: How do central office administrators describe their experiences working with marginal special education teachers that they had to terminate from their position?

RQ3: How, if at all, do central office administrators describe supports they provided to marginal special education teachers that enabled the teachers to meet district standards?

RQ4: How, if at all, do central office administrators respond to the barriers they experienced when working with marginal special education teachers?

RQ5: How do participant responses compare or contrast?

Through the research questions and the research design, the researcher sought to understand the central office administrators’ perceptions regarding their experiences supporting marginal special education teachers. This research will not only seek to understand the supports central office administrators provide to marginal special education teachers, but the supports that central office administrators provide to building-level principals overseeing marginal special education teachers.

Setting

Due to a larger financial allocation of funds in urban school divisions, localities can allocate more money towards administrators who work specifically with instruction. Therefore, more administrators can have experience working with marginal special education teachers. Due to the increased numbers of central office personnel, vast and differentiating opinions and methods within the system allow marginalized teachers to gain a variety of methods to improve upon. However, in rural school divisions, fewer numbers of central office administrators exist. In most cases, there is a high probability that only one member of the central office deals with teacher improvement. This one person, in order to gain other ideas from experienced people, would have to travel hours away or call and schedule conferences with other leaders in neighboring districts who work directly with teacher improvement.

In an effort to give rural school division staff members a direct go to for methods when dealing with marginalized teachers, this research study will be limited to participants who live in 12 rural counties located in Region A within the state of Virginia. The researcher has predetermined the 12 rural counties within Virginia based on their geographic location within the region, as assigned by the Virginia Department of Education, that is being studied. The researcher will provide pseudonyms for the counties/school divisions within this dissertation. All 12 counties within Virginia are located in the southside of the state. All of the counties have seen a decrease in population based on manufacturing jobs moving out of the region and people moving to more populated areas for job opportunities. One of the 12 counties is currently below a population of 10,000 people, eight of the 12 counties are between 10,000 and 19,999 people living within the county, and the remaining counties have 30,000 to 39,999 people living in the area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). All counties are above the state average of 11.3% living below

poverty, and five of the 12 counties are above 20% poverty rates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). All of the median household incomes for each county are below the state average of \$63,907, and only two of the 12 counties have a median household income that is above \$50,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In addition to manufacturing jobs leaving the area, a prison system as well as a private college system has closed within the region within the last five years.

Participants

This research used a sample size of 11 central office administrators from within 12 identified rural counties in this state who have experienced working with marginal special education teachers. In the initial stages of the study, the researcher composed an email that went to all potential identified central office administrators within the region inviting their participation. Within the email, the researcher outlined that central office administrators who agree to the study must have current or past experience working with marginalized special education teachers. In addition, for the purposes of this research, central office administrators must have current or past experience working with special education teachers who did not meet district standards, also known as incompetent special education teachers. The researcher generated a list of central office administrators who meet the above requirements for this study as other participants recommended them.

This research study employed purposive sampling also known as judgment sampling. Bernard (2000), as cited in Patton (2002), describes purposive sampling or judgment sampling as a process where the researcher decides the purpose they want informants to serve, and they go out to find these informants to meet that purpose. By finding a well-suited central office administrator who met the above requirements and had both knowledge and historical background or experience working with marginal special education teachers, the researcher used

a snowball or chain sampling method to receive recommendations regarding other central office administrators. Patton (2002) describes the snowball or chain sampling as “an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases” (p. 237). Throughout this process, the researcher asked each interviewed central office administrator to recommend another participant who had worked in the region and whom he or she thought might agree to participate in the study. Since rural school division central offices are rather isolated, recommended names most often took precedence over those who are not. Patton (2002) states, by asking a number of people whom else to talk with; the snowball will get bigger and bigger as the researcher accumulates new information-rich cases. Although rural school districts are rather isolated, several scheduled yearly meetings between central office administrators in the participating region allow for necessary interaction needed to recommend a peer for this study.

Due to the limited number of central office administrators in rural parts of Virginia, a snowball sampling procedure enabled the researcher to identify other potential central office administrators who were willing to participate in this particular study. The researcher set the parameters of research by stating that the recommended administrators must be located within one of the 12 rural predetermined rural counties within the state. Thus, demographic information from the participants varied based on the recommendations provided by the previous participant. However, the researcher sought to have a fair representation of age, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds represented throughout the study, also known as maximum variation. Each participant utilized pseudonyms throughout the research in an effort not to disclose their identity.

Procedures

Moustakas (1994) notes the specific organization for methods and procedures when conducting human science research. Those procedures are as follows:

(1) Discovering a topic and question rooted in autobiographical meanings and values, as well as involving social meanings and significance; (2) Conducting a comprehensive review of the professional and research literature; (3) Constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate co-researchers; (4) Providing co-researchers with instructions on the nature and purpose of the investigation, and developing an agreement that includes obtaining informed consent, insuring confidentiality, and delineating the responsibilities of the primary researcher and research participant, consistent with ethical principles of research; (5) developing a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process; (6) Conducting and recording a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on a bracketed topic and question. A follow-up interview may also be needed; (7) Organizing and analyzing the data to facilitate development of individual textural and structural descriptions, a composite textural description, a composite structural description, and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences (p. 103-104).

The researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee at Liberty University in order to conduct the experiment. Following IRB approval, the researcher sent e-mails to school division superintendents or their designees within the region to gain permission to interview administrators within their divisions. After receiving minimal responses from school division superintendents, the researcher submitted a change in protocol to the IRB committee that would change the research to include only participants who had previous central office administration experience in the region in which this dissertation study was being

conducted. After receiving approval through IRB, the researcher sent an email to the first participant to gain their permission to participate. The email informed the participant of what the study was about, who the target population was, and also the consent to participate form was attached to the email. The e-mail invited the potential participant to take part in an interview regarding their experience working with marginalized special education teachers. The e-mail outlined three requirements to participate: (a) must have experience as a central office administrator in the region where this dissertation is being conducted, (b) must have current or past experience working with marginalized special education teachers, and (c) must have experience working with terminated marginalized special education teachers. The potential participant was notified that the interview would be recorded, and redirected to the statement in the consent that discussed the interview being recorded. In addition, the email and the consent form outlined to the participant that their voluntary participation in an online focus group of central office administrators sharing their experiences with each other regarding marginalized special education teachers was needed.

Upon receiving the consent of the first participant, the researcher scheduled an interview and conducted the research. After completing the interview, the researcher asked the participant if he/she knew of any other previous central office administrators that would be interested in being a part of this study that also met the criteria. Several names were provided to the researcher, and a list of those names was created. After the interviews, the researcher created memos in regards to the interview experience along with any other notes that assisted the researcher in bracketing his own biases out of the study. This process was repeated several times until all 11 participants were interviewed and/or information gathered on each one.

Upon completion of all of the interviews, the researcher transcribed two of the interviews by hand, listening to the audiotapes several times to ensure accuracy. In addition, two of the participants chose not to do an interview but to provide their answers via paper. That information was transcribed into a word document similar to the rest. In addition, the researcher utilized a professional transcription company to transcribe the remaining seven interviews. After receiving the transcribed interviews, the researcher listened to the audiotapes and the transcription for accuracy. Minor errors were found in the transcriptions, and the researcher corrected those errors. All of the participants were given the opportunity to review their transcribed transcript through the process of member checking. Each participant was allowed to review their responses for accuracy, and the participants who opted to review their transcript were able to approve their transcript.

The Researcher's Role

In 2007, I entered the field of public K-12 education as a private counselor working with students with mental and emotional issues. After a successful year, I obtained a full time teaching position in the school system working as a special education teacher. Since 2008, the researcher has served in various positions related to the field of special education. I have served as child study chairperson that entailed assisting classroom teachers with strategies to help struggling students, and assisting classroom teachers through the recommendation process of having students tested for learning and emotional disabilities. I have served as department chair and team leader of special education at the middle school level that entailed overseeing a team of four to five special education teachers, and serving as the go to person within the school setting in relation to special education questions. I have served as an intern to a director of special education during my administrative licensure process at Liberty University. The intern position

entailed writing IEPs, monitoring IEP implementation, conducting Section 504 eligibility meetings, attending regional special education meetings with school special education directors, and assisting the director in the state special education audit.

I have served in leadership capacities to include the Director of 21st Century Grant that oversees remedial and enrichment programs at the middle school level to include a staff of 18 or more teachers who actively participate in tutoring, enrichment, and parent programs. In addition, the Director of 21st Century Grant Director serves as the overseer of federal funds for the grant and submits documents to the state and other state and federal designated agencies regarding school performance. All of my experience obtained working in the field of education has been within the participating region for this dissertation. Through these many positions within the school system, the researcher has realized the importance for special education students to receive an adequate education within the school building. Thus, the idea of supporting teachers identified as marginalized special education teachers is necessary in order to provide students with the satisfactory and free appropriate public education they deserve. I have positive working relationships with central office administrators in one of the school divisions participating in this study. However, outside of my current home school setting, my relationship with other central office administrators is minimal.

Data Collection

Once the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University granted their permission, the researcher began locating central office administrators with previous experience working in the region to participate in the interview. The Virginia Department of Education website contained a list of all of the central office employees and their email addresses. If the contacted individuals responded to the email by agreeing to an interview, and met all the criteria, then the researcher

conducted an interview with them personally at an agreed upon location. Each participant signed a consent form agreeing upon their participation in this research, and participants had the option to withdraw should they choose not to sign the consent form. The consent form outlined confidentiality and informed them that pseudonyms throughout this study took the place of their actual name school. Participants received a copy of the signed consent form. The participants received copies of their transcribed interviews upon request. Participants were able to opt in or out of having a follow-up interview.

After the interview, participants could voluntary go to an online focus group to provide further information to additional questions. This secure site required a password for the group and a password for each individual participant that would access the site. This eliminated any outsiders from accessing the group. Online forums used the pseudonyms. Participants received directions for accessing the site and the forum in addition to directions for setting up their user name for the site. The online focus group centered on working with marginalized special education teachers.

During the interview, follow up or probing questions were asked based on the responses of the participants as needed. In addition, the interviewer wrote field notes both during and directly after the interview before the interviewer left the premises or finished the phone interview. After conducting the interview, the researcher made field notes regarding any observations or key phrases noted during the interview. A journal was kept by the researcher to note any biases or opinions to ensure their elimination from the study.

Following each interview, the researcher transferred the audio files from the audio device used to a computer with a secure password. The researcher deleted all audio files from the recording device. The researcher had a transcription company transcribe the interviews. Any

obtained digital files were located on the researcher's computer, in a file under a secure password. Following the transcription, the interviewer read back the interviews while listening to the cassette tapes and digital files at least three times to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed information. Participants who requested copies of their transcribed interviews received them through a password secured e-mail. In addition to the interview process, the researcher used an online discussion forum where questions for research participants to share their opinion on were available. This was strictly voluntarily for the participants. Questions came from experience working with working with marginalized special education teachers as well as incompetent special education teachers. The goal in using the online focus groups was to allow central office administrators within the region to share their concerns and successes when working with these teachers. In addition, it allowed the researcher the opportunity to find further similarities between the participating central office administrators.

This research employed multiple methods of data collection. These included interviews, online focus groups, and field notes throughout the process.

Interviews

Patton (2002) states, open-ended questions from interviews yield in-depth responses about a person's experience, personal perceptions, personal opinions, personal feelings, and personal knowledge. "Data consist of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable" (Patton, 2002, p. 4). Research supports interviews being the principal means of data collection in phenomenological qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Englander, 2012; Hatch, 2002).

An audio device was used to record all interviews. All participants' voice recordings were coded starting at 001 and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality of all

participants. As files were saved to the researcher's computer, pseudonyms were used to code the files. Each file was saved in a secure folder and transferred to a USB drive in which the researcher was the only one to have access to. The interview questions, which guided this research, were:

Demographics

1. What is your name?
2. What current and previous positions have you have held in the field of education?

Possible Probes:

- a. What is your current occupation in the field of education?
- b. How many years have you worked in the field of education?
- c. What other positions have your held in the field of education?
3. At what point in your career did you experience working with marginal special education teachers?
4. At what point in your career did you experience working with marginal special education teachers in which you had to recommend for termination or recommend to the superintendent for termination?

Defining Marginalized Teachers

1. How would you define a marginal teacher?

Possible Probes:

- a. What specific qualities, behaviors, and mannerisms do they exhibit?
2. How would you define a marginal special education teacher?

Possible Probes

- a. What specific qualities, behaviors, and mannerisms do they exhibit?

- b. How difficult is it to support marginalized teachers after they have taken on the qualities, behaviors, and mannerisms that you have described?
3. How does your school division define a marginal teacher and how does that definition differ from your own?

Defining Incompetent Teachers

4. How would you define an incompetent teacher?

Possible Probes:

- a. What specific qualities, behaviors, and mannerisms do they exhibit?
5. How would you define an incompetent special education teacher?

Possible Probes

- a. What specific qualities, behaviors, and mannerisms do they exhibit?
 - b. How difficulty is it to support incompetent teachers after they have taken on the qualities, behaviors, and mannerisms that you have described?
6. How does your school division define an incompetent teacher and how does that definition differ from your own?

Comparing and Contrasting

7. What differences have you experienced when working with marginal special education teachers and incompetent special education teachers?

Identifying Marginal Teachers

8. How do you or your school division identify and approach marginal teachers?

Probing Questions:

- a. What is the specific chain of command followed before you receive a teacher's name to start supporting?

Types of Supports

9. What types of supports do you or have you offered to marginalized special education teachers?

Possible Probes:

- a. Is there a system or policy in place within your school division to help with offering supports to marginalized special education teachers?
 - b. What type of specific supports have you offered to marginalized special education teachers that assisted them in become effective teachers and therefore meeting district standards again?
 - c. What barriers did you experience throughout the process of supporting a marginalized teacher and getting them to meet district standards
10. At what point would the school system determine that a teacher were no longer marginal and therefore meeting district standards?

Possible Probes:

- a. What is the average time it takes for a teacher to qualify as meeting district standards and not as a marginal teacher?
- b. How much support is provided to a marginal teacher before they are considered incompetent teachers?
- c. What barriers have marginalized teachers experienced causing them to become incompetent teachers in your opinion?
- d. How is the marginal teacher identification and support process different for incompetent teachers?

Closing

11. Do you wish to elaborate further on any questions?
12. Is there any other information you wish to share with me that we have not already discussed?
13. May I get in contact with you again should I need to conduct a follow up interview?

Field Notes

The researcher wrote memorandums that outlined the observations that occurred during the interview. The researcher made many of these field notes when the interview was being conducted and after the interview was finished. Notations for phone interviews included any noises in the background, where the interviewer chose to be when the interview was taken place, and what the interviewer was doing when the interview was being conducted. These memos assisted in outlining the behaviors of the participant during the interview, the setting of the interview, the actions of the participant, and any other observable human experience that occurred throughout the research. Patton (2002) notes that field notes is a form of observational data found in qualitative research. Field notes should include “rich, detailed descriptions, including the context within which the observations were made” (Patton, 2002, p. 4).

Online Discussion Group

This study sought to use an online discussion group to gauge future information from the participants. However, some of the administrators who participated in the study could not commit an extra amount of time to completing the online discussion forum, thus negating the results that the researcher could potentially obtain from using the forum.

Data Analysis

After collection of transcribed interviews, the researcher reviewed the recorded tapes to ensure full, correct transcription of data. Next, the researcher began to study the transcribed

interviews, field notes, and the online focus group responses through phenomenological analysis. The research took the following steps to ensure a complete data analysis of the material is conducted and represented within this research.

Preliminary Grouping

The first step in the data analysis process was to horizontalize the data. In this particular analysis phase, all of the statements or topics related to the question are assigned an equal value. By assigning the data equal value, the researcher put all of the statements from the interviews and online focus groups into Atlas.ti. After information was uploaded and codes created, the researcher placed the data into clusters and began the process of reduction/elimination.

Reduction and Elimination

After the horizontalization process of the data occur, the meaning or a grouping of meaning units are listed (Moustakas, 1994). All of the meaning units are then clustered into common themes. This way, overlapping and repetitive statements that are insignificant to the study will be removed (Moustakas, 1994). During this phase, information should be considered in two ways. The first way is examining the information to see if it is relevant or sufficient. The second way of examining the information is to horizon it if the information is relative to the research, and to eliminate it if it does not. During the second step, any information that is overlapping, repetitive, or vague is removed (Moustakas, 1994). Invariants are the kept information.

Clustering, Thematizing, and Final Identification

Invariants occur when the data that has been gathered is reviewed and several questions are asked. Is the data sufficient? Is the data necessary to understand? Can we derive a label from this data? Data that meets these requirements remain in the research study and become the

invariants. During this next particular step within the research, the data, also known as the invariant, constituent clusters into derived themes and meanings in order to establish the textural descriptions of the experiences. During this point, the main themes of the research are established. During step four, Moustakas (1994) noted that the invariants should be checked in three ways. “(1) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription? (2) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed? (3) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researcher’s experience and should be deleted” (p. 121). As noted, during this particular step, more of the researcher groups and further eliminates more of the invariants.

Textural and Structural Description

The validated invariants relevant to the research will construct an Individual Textural Description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Examples from the transcribed interviews and online focus groups assisted in creating this description. Individual Structural Descriptions show how the feelings and thoughts of each of the participants connected with the existing phenomena. Finally, a composite structural description puts meaning and understanding to how the participants as a group experienced what they experienced (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a social construction and constructivist criteria for judging the quality and credibility of qualitative inquiry. Patton (2002) states the researcher’s voice can convey a feeling of trustworthiness when conducting an interview. In addition, Patton states time is a huge factor in establishing trustworthiness within the research. Thus, time at the research site, time spent during the interview, time building relationships with these administrators will all be considered throughout this process (Patton, 2002). Another aspect of establishing trustworthiness lies within the researcher. Patton (2002) states that the trustworthiness of the

person collecting and analyzing the data and their level of competence plays a significant part. For the purpose of qualitative research, Patton (2002) states, “Competence is demonstrated by using the verification and validation procedures necessary to establish the quality of analysis and thereby building a ‘track record’ of quality work” (p. 570). Throughout this process, every possible carried out attempt will assist in assuring the maximum percentage of trustworthy and credible work, and that the researcher does not cross the line between objectivity and trustworthiness by bracketing oneself through memos and field notes. The following specific implemented methods ensure that trustworthiness and credibility of the study is preserved:

Triangulation

Patton (2002) noted that a study could be strengthened using triangulation. This particular research study uses methodological triangulation by using multiple methods to study the existing phenomenon. Triangulation within this study combines interviewing and noting administrative observations conducted on marginal teachers. “Triangulation within a qualitative inquiry strategy can be attained by combining both interviewing and observations” (Patton, 2002, p. 248). This particular study will use interviews to gather information regarding the lived experiences of central office administrators when working with marginalized special education teachers. However, after conducting the interviews, the interviewer made field notes of any immediate observations that stood out during the interview. In addition, the interviewer used triangulation of data sources by checking for consistency of what people say they have commonly experienced over time by comparing interviews and field observations (Patton, 2002).

Bracketing

Throughout the research procedures, the researcher used a reflective log or journal to bracket personal thoughts and feelings both before and after the interview process. Bracketing

allowed the researcher to put aside or separate any personal feelings or personal experiences from that of the participants. This eliminated any threats of bias from occurring within the research. By eliminating personal bias within the research study, the researcher was able to increase the validity of both the collection of data and the analysis process.

Member Checking/Peer Review

A further validation of data included member checking. This allowed participants to review their transcribed interviews, analyzed data, and the write up from their interview prior to the final submission to ensure the information presented is accurate and depicts their true meaning (Creswell, 2013). By using the member checking process, participants had the opportunity to provide additional thoughts as a follow-up to the audio interview. Participations also had the option to request a meeting with the researcher to clarify points within the transcribed interviews. The researcher also used the peer review process, which entailed getting peers in the field of academia to review the dissertation to ensure the review of literature and to verify that the research has covered every research question outlined in this dissertation.

Ethical Considerations

Protecting human subjects or participants within a student is very important. Thus, the researcher entrusted the integrity of this research study through the IRB at Liberty University. The goal of the IRB is to ensure that minimal risk to human subjects is likely and that the research is reasonable to conduct (Buelow, 2011). The committee must “see that subject risk is minimal and reasonable when compared to the anticipated benefits, that subject selection is equitable, that privacy and confidentiality of subjects are safeguarded, and that vulnerable populations are not exploited” (Buelow, 2011, p. 279). The researcher was responsible for carrying out an ethical study, and the IRB of Liberty University oversaw this process including

the ethical treatment of human participants. This research did not seek to bring any psychological harm to its participants nor any negative impacts financially or work related. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants while maintaining the integrity of the research, the researcher used pseudonyms for the participants and the school divisions in which the research took place.

Summary

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study took place in rural school divisions in Region A of Southside, Virginia. This researcher's study used five research questions to study 11 previous central office administrators lived experiences when working with marginal special education teachers. Within this study, documented interviews and field notes accurately depicted the experiences of all participants. To ensure a sense of maintained trustworthiness, bracketing, member checking and triangulation were present within this doctoral research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of 11 previous Region A central office administrators about their lived experiences when supporting and working with marginal special education teachers. The lived experiences of the central office administrators could have been a positive or a negative documented experience. In addition, the researcher wanted to document supports that central office administrators provided to marginal special education teachers that encouraged those teachers to meet acceptable district level standards. Finally, the researcher sought to investigate the lived barriers that these central office administrators experienced when working with these marginal special education teachers. The following research questions were explored:

R1: How do central office administrators in rural school districts in Virginia describe their experiences when working with marginal special education teachers?

R2: How do central office administrators describe their experiences working with marginal special education teachers that they had to terminate from their position?

R3: How, if at all, do central office administrators describe supports they provided to marginal special education teachers that enabled the teachers to meet district standards?

R4: How, if at all, do central office administrators respond to the barriers they experienced when working with marginal special education teachers?

R5: How do participant responses compare or contrast?

This study utilized 11 participants who met the following criteria: exhibited previous central office administrative experience, worked in Region A (pseudonym) schools at one time or another during their career, and worked with marginal special education teachers. Each

participant was given the option of an in-person interview or a phone interview. Due to time constraints of the 11 participants, only two of them chose to have in-person interviews, two of them opted out of an interview but chose to provide written responses to all of the interview questions, and seven of them opted to do phone interviews. Each participant was able to choose the time, date and place in which they wanted their interview to be conducted. Each participant recommended another participant who met the above criteria upon request. A total of seven women and four men were interviewed for this particular study, which included one African-American administrator and 10 Caucasian administrators. Each of the interviewed administrators had obtained central office level positions in education commensurate to Instructional Coach, Special Education Coordinator, Director of Secondary Education, Division Superintendent, or had already retired from the field of education. Each of the participants had previous building-level assistant principal and/or principal experience. Participants signed a consent form, and the researcher assigned a pseudonym for confidential reporting purposes.

Participants

Documenting the lived experiences of each participant is necessary when re-telling the stories described. This documentation allows not only the reader but also the researcher to become a part of these experiences. The documentation of each lived experience allowed the researcher to touch on each of the research questions within this dissertation. Data collection was aimed at ten participants; however, the researcher chose to include an 11th interview simply because two of the interviewees only provided their input to the research questions and declined to have a face to face or phone interview. Saturation was obtained in this research after the 11th interview was conducted. In order to achieve validity within this research, interviewing until saturation was achieved was a necessary component of this research project (Creswell, 2013). At

this time, the researcher felt that nothing new was being shared between participants that would contribute to the research.

Wilborne

Wilborne (pseudonym) is a female central office administrator. She reported having twenty-six years of experience at the time of this interview. Wilborne chose to have her interview held at a restaurant in a private backroom. She was very eager to tell her story to the researcher of the many experiences she had supporting marginal teachers. She had worked in Region A schools, especially in Carrol County (pseudonym). She later moved out of the region to obtain jobs in higher administration. While in Carrol County, she served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and central office director. According to Wilborne, she wants “students to be productive independent citizens” and her plan in the field of education “is to continue to support and encourage especially teachers to inspire others”. She began working with marginal special education teachers when she was an assistant principal. She described a marginal special education teacher as one who does not have goals for his or her children or expect them to be successful.

Gail

Gail (pseudonym) is a female previous central office administrator with thirty-five years of experience as an educator at the time of her interview. Gail chose to have her interview conducted at her home. During her interview, she took her time to develop an answer to each of the interview questions as opposed to just giving an answer immediately. She had worked in Region A schools, especially in Carrol and Morrison Counties (pseudonym). While in Carrol County, she served as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal before moving to Morrison County. While in Morrison County, Gail served as a division level instructional coach. Gail

experienced working with marginal special education teachers when she was a classroom teacher. Gail described a marginal special education teacher as one who “talked to the whole group versus if they had several different levels in their classroom”. In addition, she found that many marginal special education teachers did not really study their student IEPs, were not aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and failed to meet students at their level.

Samantha

Samantha (pseudonym) is a female previous central office administrator with thirty-five years of experience as an educator at the time of this interview. Samantha chose to have her interview conducted by phone. The interviewer noted that Samantha was at work when the interview was conducted, and could have been distracted with her job duties. The interviewer noted children crying in the background that required Samantha’s immediate attention. She had worked in Region A schools, especially Henry County (pseudonym). While in Henry County, she served as teacher and supervisor of special education teachers. When Samantha became a special education supervisor, she began working with marginal special education teachers at the division level. When ask to define what a marginal special education teacher was, Samantha discussed the importance of reviewing a teacher’s evaluation to see how they are rated in the areas of professionalism, professional knowledge, planning, instruction, and student progress. In her experience, teachers who were labeled as marginal teachers were those who had poor planning, their instructional delivery was lacking, they would fail to pull small groups of students and work with them differently, and would use a lot of worksheets as opposed to hands on activities.

Steve

Steve (pseudonym) is a male retired educator of thirty-five years. For this interview, Steve chose to have his interview conducted via phone. The researcher noted that Steve was answering questions to this interview while parked in a parking lot. Steve was driving down the road when the researcher called him to have the interview conducted. Steve pulled over on the side of the road so that he could focus on the interview and answer the questions in their entirety. Steve moved to Virginia from North Dakota. While in Virginia, Steve has experience working in Region A especially in Carrol and Morrison Counties (pseudonym). Steve served in the capacity of a teacher, elementary school principal, high school principal, middle school principal, central office director, assistant superintendent, acting superintendent, director of facilities, construction manager, and division superintendent. Steve mentioned that during his third year in education he experienced working with marginal special education teachers for the first time. Steve felt that marginal special education teachers were poor at fulfilling the expectations of a special education teacher in regards to paperwork. Steve described a marginal special education teacher as one who “does not meet the expectations of the school division and does not help the children.” To Steve, “marginal to me very simply means there is a margin of difference between what is expected and what is being produced or achieved.”

Richard

Richard (pseudonym) is a male retired educator of thirty-five years. Richard chose not to participate in an interview via phone or in person. However, Richard wanted his input to be recognized within this research study and therefore requested to complete the interview questions in writing. Richard was provided a hardcopy of the interview questions by the researcher. He completed each question in writing and returned it to the researcher. Richard has experience

working in Carrol County (pseudonym) within Region A. While employed by the school division, Richard served as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, principal, general supervisor, and assistant superintendent. Richard experienced working with marginal special education teachers while he was an assistant principal. Richard describes marginal special education teachers as those who lack classroom management skills, has poor student rapport, lacks an adequate curriculum, has poor classroom preparation skills, lacks accountability, and has poor social skills.

Marie

Marie (pseudonym) is a female retired educator. Similar to Richard, Marie chose not to participate in an in-person or phone interview. However, she wanted her voice and lived experiences to be represented in this research. Thus, she chose to have the interview questions sent to her. She completed each question in writing and mailed them back to the researcher. She had twenty-two years of experience working in public schools upon her retirement. Marie has experience working in Carrol County (pseudonym) within Region A. While employed by the school division, Marie served as a principal, school social worker, and a central office director. Marie experienced working with marginal special education teachers in 1996. She defined a marginal special education teacher as “one who tries, but who is not making progress. They also have poor classroom management.”

Anthony

Anthony (pseudonym) is a male who has twenty-two years of experience in the field of education. Anthony chose to have his interview conducted over the phone due to his schedule. At the time of this interview, Anthony had just returned home from taking his son to sports practice. He has served in positions such as teacher, special education coordinator at the division

level, and assistant principal. At the time of this interview, Anthony had left his position as a central office administrator to return to the building-level as an assistant principal. He has experience working in Henry County (pseudonym) within Region A. He noted that during all of his twenty-two years of experience he has worked with marginal special education teachers. Anthony took a different route when asked to describe a marginal teacher. Anthony had found during his experience that general education teachers who could not obtain positions in a general education classroom accepted jobs as special education teachers in order to get in the door. However, when a general education teacher position opened, they transferred out of special education in order to obtain those positions. He noted that when this happened there was a lack of investment in special education from these teachers.

Sue

Sue (pseudonym) is a female with twenty years of educational experience. The researcher had noted through investigation that Sue had worked in Region A schools particularly in Morrison County (pseudonym). She had moved to Virginia from North Carolina. Sue has over twenty years of experience as an educator. She has served as a teacher, elementary assistant principal, special education coordinator, instructional coach, director of student support services, and assistant superintendent. She had left the region to take on an assistant superintendent position in another county within the state. The researcher had emailed Sue about participating in the dissertation research, and received an email from her secretary to schedule a phone conference to discuss the dissertation. The researcher called Sue that same day and explained what the research entailed. Sue immediately agreed to do the interview over the phone and signed her consent form that same moment. Sue carved out time from her schedule to provide her input in regards to each interview question so that her lived experiences could be

documented. Sue mentioned during her first job as teacher she begin working with marginal special education teachers. She described a marginal special education teacher as one who lacked having a “full toolbox”. This meant that a special education teacher should be one who has a significant amount of instructional and behavioral strategies to implement into their classroom to assist every child.

David

David (pseudonym) is a male retired educator of thirty-two years. David chose to have his interview conducted over the phone. He has served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, director, assistant superintendent, and a division level superintendent all in Region A. In addition, David is the only participant interviewed to have school board member experience. David has experience working in both Carrol and Henry Counties (pseudonym). David noted he gained the most exposure working with marginal special education teachers when he entered the central office. David noted that during his time working in the school system, all of the first year teachers were labeled as marginal teachers. David described more specifically that marginal special education teachers under his leadership were those who did not have a general knowledge of the subject matter and did not have patience for students. David also noted that marginal special education teachers are those who required assistance supporting students, whether through instruction or developing their IEPs.

Olivia

Olivia (pseudonym) is a female participant who has over thirty-two years of experience working in various school divisions. Her most recent experience was in North Hampton and Baskerville County schools (pseudonym) within Region A. During her time working in the region, she served as guidance counselor, teacher, assistant principal, principal, director, and

superintendent. Olivia chose to have her interview conducted over the phone and was such a joy to interact with. During this interview, the researcher could tell that Olivia had significant experience working with marginal special education teachers and supporting them. Olivia believes that when she became a principal, she began working with marginal special education teachers. Olivia discussed marginal special education teachers as having poor planning and lacking in relationships between the home and the school community. In addition, marginal special education teachers, according to Olivia, would exhibit poor student gains when it comes to state testing.

Donn

Donn (pseudonym) is a female who has over 33 years of experience working in school divisions. Her most recent experience was in Carrol and Morrison Counties (pseudonym) within Region A. Donn was the only participant who offered up to the researcher that she left the field of education at one time to pursue employment in community health, but later returned to education. During her time working in the region, she served as assistant superintendent, superintendent of schools, and division level assistant superintendent of instruction. Donn chose to have her interview conducted by phone. Donn noted to the researcher that it was while she was a teacher she started working with marginal special education teachers. Donn noted that marginal special education teachers are not effective in delivering instruction to students, do not have a working or healthy relationship with their students, and are simply not getting the job done as evident by their performance reviews or standardized testing results.

To understand the participants better, the reader made use Table A found on page 95, and Table B found on page 96. Table A shows a list of all the participants, how many years of education experience participants have, and what their current job in the field of education is.

There was an average of thirty years of experience represented within this doctoral dissertation. This table should provide the reader with a visual method of explaining years of experience and level of achieved administrative leadership these individuals had. Table B is a demographics table of each participant and describes their attributes. The gathered information in this table was during in person interviews or over the phone conversations held before the scheduled interview took place. Actual questions concerning marginal teachers were explored during the scheduled interview.

Table A

Participant Experience in Education

| Pseudonym | Years of Experience | Current Job in Education |
|-----------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Wilborne | 26 | Central Office Director |
| Gail | 35 | Instructional Coach- Division Level |
| Samantha | 35 | Retired |
| Steve | 35 | Retired |
| Richard | 35 | Retired |
| Marie | 22 | Retired |
| Anthony | 22 | Assistant Principal |
| Sue | 20 | Assistant Superintendent |
| David | 32 | Retired |
| Olivia | 32 | Division Superintendent |
| Donn | 33 | Division Superintendent |

Table B

Participant Demographics

| Pseudonym | Gender | Race | Marital Status |
|-----------|--------|-------|----------------|
| Wilborne | Female | Black | Widowed |
| Gail | Female | White | Single |
| Samantha | Female | White | Married |
| Steve | Male | White | Married |
| Richard | Male | White | Married |
| Marie | Female | White | Married |
| Anthony | Male | White | Married |
| Sue | Female | White | Married |
| David | Male | White | Married |
| Olivia | Female | White | Married |
| Donn | Female | White | Married |

Results

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to document the lived experiences of the 11 research participants as described in this chapter. The research process started with a set of interview questions in which participants chose to complete over the phone or in-person. Phone interviews were opted as a choice for working central office administrators who were unable to find time for an in-person interview. Following the interview, the researcher bracketed out thoughts and feelings of each interview so that accurate data was reflected within this dissertation, and no personal impact on a participant lived experiences would be made. Each

of the interviews was transcribed. The researcher transcribed four of the interviews by hand, and the other seven interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist company in which a nondisclosure agreement was signed. Each participant was given the chance to review their transcribed interview for accuracy, and provide their approval before the information was used within this study.

The researcher utilized Atlas.ti to input all of the transcribed interviews. After the interviews were loaded into the system, the researcher began to reread and review the transcribed interviews looking for themes and commonalities amongst the participants. The researcher also created a Microsoft Excel document to assist in grouping some of the common responses of the participants. While immersed in the data, I found myself reading and rereading transcribed interviews and listening to the interviews numerous times in order to have a clear understanding of what each participant was trying to portray through their lived experience. I used both Atlas.ti and Microsoft Excel to assist in coding data and clustering statements into themes based on the similarities and differences of the participant responses. I found four themes that stood out regarding marginal special education teachers. They were:

1. Lack of knowledge
2. Lack of support
3. Lack a desire to change
4. Lack of administrative experience and help

Each theme is described and examples are given for each theme within the remaining portion of this chapter. Each particular theme touched on question five how does participant responses compare and contract when working with marginal teachers.

Lack of Knowledge

The first theme that emerged in this study was that marginal teachers have a lack of knowledge. This particular theme provided answers to research question one: How do central office administrators in rural school districts in Virginia describe their experiences when working with marginal special education teachers? While digging into the literature and reviewing the characteristics of marginal special education teachers, the main theme that was evident was central office administrators felt that marginal special education teachers lacked the necessary knowledge to conduct the classroom. The researcher found the most common responses of participants and utilized those as subthemes for this research. The subthemes that were founded by the researcher was that central office administrators noted that marginal special education teachers lacked knowledge in planning and instructional delivery, they lacked the knowledge to understand the students' IEPs, and they lacked the knowledge of understanding who the student is. Table C outlines the sub theme responses of each participant.

Table C

Participant Responses Lack of Knowledge: Subthemes by participant

| Pseudonym | Poor Planning and Instructional Delivery | Does not Understand Special Education Student IEP | Lack of Knowledge in regards to who the students are |
|-----------|--|---|--|
| Wilborne | X | X | X |
| Gail | X | X | X |
| Samantha | X | | X |
| Steve | | X | X |
| Richard | X | | X |
| Marie | X | | |
| Anthony | | X | X |
| Sue | X | | X |
| David | | X | X |
| Olivia | X | X | X |
| Donn | X | X | X |

Poor Planning and Instructional Delivery. Eight of the participants expressed that marginal special education teachers they have worked with lacked the knowledge of how to plan and deliver instruction. These teachers usually had very poor planning and their instructional delivery suffers because of it. Another subcategory could have been the inability to differentiate instruction for students with disabilities; however, the researcher felt that differentiation of instruction would fall under this subcategory with instructional delivery. Students who are

entering classrooms around the country are from various races, communities, and all of them exhibit different learning styles. Tomlinson (2001, p. viii) states, “acknowledging that students learn at different speeds and that they differ widely in their ability to think abstractly or understand complex ideas is like acknowledging that students at any given age aren’t all the same height: It is not a statement of worth, but of reality.” Gail seemed to be more vocal with this statement by stating; a marginal special education teacher “...did not differentiate with students and provide the best possible education for that student.” When asked to explain further, Gail went on to say

I guess that would probably be someone who talked to the whole group versus if they had several different levels in their classroom, and they didn’t really study the child’s IEP and know their strengths and weaknesses and meet them at their level and bring them up from where they were to where they needed to be and gave them the extra support. It is more about meeting the child where they are at.

One very important quote throughout this research came from Olivia who stated, “There should be a growing that takes place within that child, no matter how low that child is or no matter what their disabilities are,” and marginal teachers fail to grow the child. Only three of the participants did not discuss instructional delivery when they were describing what a marginal special education was. However, those three participants seemed to focus their attention on the marginal teacher not understanding the student, nor their Individualized Education Plans.

Does not Understand Special Education Student IEPs. Seven of the participants expressed that marginal special education teachers did not understand the students’ Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). These five participants had a focus on the student’s IEP and understanding that special education students have an individualized plan for a reason. This

particular subcategory could also go with instructional planning and differentiating instruction. However, there is so much more to a student's IEP than just their educational needs. For starters, the instructional planning for students is a problem when marginal special education teachers do not understand the IEP of a student. Wilborne felt that marginal special education teachers not only did not understand the IEP, but they did not follow the IEP as well.

Another viable part of understanding a child's IEP is to ensure that annual goals and objectives are met and to ensure that all laws are being followed. Stemming from the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, an IEP is a document that serves many purposes all designed to benefit and protect the special needs child and provide parents with procedural safeguards (Twachtman-Cullen & Twachtman-Bassett, 2011). To corroborate the research pulled from text, during this interview process, Donn addressed in her interview that marginal special education teachers are "people who do not have an adequate understanding of the laws that protect our students with disabilities." Only four of the participants within this study did not address the importance of understanding the student's IEP.

Lack of Knowledge in Regards to who the Students are. This particular subcategory was the most effective with ten responses saying that marginal special education teachers did not understand who their students were. This particular subcategory could include a teacher's lack of knowledge in regards to goals and expectations of their students. Wilborne, a district level central office administrator states,

For me, a marginal teacher would be a teacher who number 1 does not actually have goals and expectations of his or her children. Especially as a teacher of special education it starts with expectations- recognizing and understanding the needs of the children and how he or she will be able to accomplish those goals.

Similar to what Wilborne felt about understanding the needs of the children, Donn felt that marginal special education teachers failed to establish a “loving and supportive relationship with their students.”

In addition to understanding who the students are, several of the participants felt that marginal teachers lacked a connection between the home to understand where the students come from and who their parents are. Olivia states, marginal special education teachers have “poor relationships with home and with the community.”

As stated, Table C offers a comparison of participant responses in regards to the subcategories within the theme of lack of knowledge.

Lack of Support

The second theme that emerged in this study was the lack of supports to be provided to marginal teachers. This theme provided answers to RQ3: How, if at all, do central office administrators describe supports they provided to marginal special education teachers that enabled the teachers to meet district standards? While reviewing the research and listening to the interview recordings, the researcher found four particular subcategories to this theme. Those particular subcategories consisted of the need for professional development, the need for observations, peer mentoring, and having collegial conversations. Table D outlines the participant responses based on these subcategories. This particular theme provided necessary information needed to support marginal teachers. This particular theme was one that administrators and central office staff can utilize when working with marginal special education teachers that they are struggling to reach.

Table D

Participant Responses Lack of Supports: Subthemes by participant

| Pseudonym | Professional Development | Observations | Peer Mentoring | Collegial Conversations |
|-----------|--------------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Wilborne | x | x | X | x |
| Gail | x | x | x | x |
| Samantha | | | x | |
| Steve | x | | x | x |
| Richard | | x | x | |
| Marie | x | | x | |
| Anthony | x | x | x | |
| Sue | x | x | x | x |
| David | x | x | X | x |
| Olivia | x | x | x | x |
| Donn | | x | x | |

Professional Development. Eight of the participants felt that providing professional development to marginal special education teachers was a necessity in ensuring they improve. During the interviews, the eight participants who discussed professional development opportunities were very passionate about the effect that professional development could plan on a marginal special education teacher. Steve put this particular subcategory into perspective by stating

It is interesting; sometimes we send the best teachers to conferences and get them excited. They are already excited and they are already good, when we should be sending the marginal teachers to get them excited.

Central office administrators discussed their willingness to provide substitutes for these marginal special education teachers so that they could attend professional development opportunities and learn how to become effective teachers.

Observations. Eight of the participants felt that observations were an important tool in ensuring that marginal special education teachers became effective in the school. During their interviews, the eight participants professed confidence in their ability to observe teachers and provide that immediate feedback to them necessary to grow. Wilborne noted in conversation that she has trained administrators on how to do proper classroom observations to include what to write down and what to look for. Wilborne felt the most important thing to do was document everything you see. She provided the example of going into a teacher's classroom and watching the teacher instruct class. During this time she documented how many students were unfocused, the time they were unfocused, and the number of minutes it took the teacher to correct the action. She believed this documentation was necessary in starting the improvement conversation with her teachers. Steve, Olivia, and David felt through their experience that it is necessary for central office administrators to go into the classrooms themselves and observe what a marginal special education teacher is doing. Olivia noted in her experience as superintendent she did not want marginal special education teachers to think that the "Director of Instruction is someone who passes down orders and does not get in and roll their sleeves up." She felt that it was necessary to get into the classroom, get hands on with the teachers, and engage in activities with them. In addition, David felt that central office administrators seen as supportive to building-

level principals were those such as the Director of Special Education who would go and observe marginal special education teachers and provide them with supports. Through further investigation of transcribed interviews and interview notes, the researcher found that seven participants felt that peer observations were a necessity for marginal special education. Not just having the administrator observe the classroom, but also having peers observe their teaching and provide feedback. In addition it is important to have the marginal special education teacher go into other classes and see what good effective teachers were already doing.

Peer Mentoring. This by far was the biggest subcategory with all 11 respondents stating the importance of assigning peer mentors to marginal special education teachers, and allowing these marginal special education teachers to conduct peer observations throughout the school year. Wilborne was very vocal about the necessity of having peer mentoring within the school system. She stated,

Teachers often feel they are by themselves. They try to meet the standards that are set before them. However, they feel overwhelmed with everything they do. Especially special education teachers. They get bogged down in paperwork. They feel that lack of support.

Wilborne further voiced her concern in regards to peer mentoring by describing the necessity to have marginal special education teachers within a positive culture. Wilborne felt in her experience, that she has worked with marginal schools. In a marginal school, the overall expectation of the leadership was to expect nothing more than what the teachers were already doing, and therefore, the leader in the school was marginal. Others such as David and Anthony believed that if you took a marginal teacher and placed them into a school with high expectations

and high performance, not just from administrators but from teachers, then they would live up to those expectations and no longer be a marginal teacher themselves.

Collegial Conversations. Six of the participants felt that having collegial conversations with marginal special education teachers was a big support that could assist them in becoming a more effective teacher. Three of the participants went even further in their conversation by voicing some of the experiences they had with marginal special education teachers in the past that had glowing recommendations from previous administrators. These participants noted how difficult it was to tell a teacher they were marginal, especially when the teacher had copies of past administrative evaluations noting how distinguished they were. Wilborne, Steve, and Oliva discussed one of the barriers of working with marginal special education teachers was starting from scratch with evaluations of teachers labeled as proficient from previous administrators.

Plan of improvement was an invariant eliminated from the research. This was something the researcher struggled with getting rid of. Four of the participants, Steve, Marie, Olivia and Anthony all believed that a plan of improvement was a supportive tool to help marginal special education teachers. After listening to the participant interviews again, the researcher found that Steve, who was a retired assistant superintendent, utilized the plan of improvement as a communication tool to open up positive collegial conversations with his staff in an effort to help them improvement. Steve states,

....developing the improvement plan should be a mainstay for the teacher themselves. If you [the administrator] simply write the plan and say do it, then they haven't got any ownership.

Lack a Desire to Change

The third theme emerged in this study was the lack of a desire to change. This particular theme provided answers to RQ2: How do central office administrators describe their experiences working with marginal special education teachers that they had to terminate from their position? The third theme emerged in this study also provided answers to RQ3: How, if at all, do central office administrators respond to the barriers they experienced when working with marginal special education teachers? In addition, the researcher chose to go further with investigation by asking participants to describe what an incompetent teacher was in their professional opinion. This particular theme of unwillingness was one state by all of the participants that contributed to a marginal special education teacher labeled as incompetent. Through further investigation of participant responses, the researcher found that three subcategories could be utilized under this theme. They were marginal special education teacher's unwillingness to change their attitude and to accept help. Table E outlines the subcategories noticed under the theme of unwillingness of participants.

Table E

Participant Responses Lack of Desire to Change: Subthemes by participant

| Pseudonym | To Change their Attitude | To Accept Help |
|-----------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Wilborne | X | |
| Gail | | X |
| Samantha | X | |
| Steve | X | X |
| Richard | X | X |
| Marie | X | |
| Anthony | X | X |
| Sue | X | X |
| David | X | X |
| Olivia | X | X |
| Donn | X | X |

To Change their Attitude. A marginal special education teacher's unwillingness to change their attitude was one of the two subthemes taken from the research. Ten participants who felt this was a major barrier when working with marginal special education teachers addressed this particular subtheme. Several of the participants took the theme of changing attitudes into different perspectives. For example, Steve found that it did not just mean a change in attitude of the marginal teacher, but a change in attitude for all three people involved in the process. Steve stated in his interview, "It all has to do with the willingness of all three parties to work together. That being the marginal teacher, the immediate supervisor or principal, and the

central office support.” Steve further explained what he meant by the willingness to change their attitude when he was questioned about his experience working with marginal teachers that led them to become incompetent teachers. Steve stated, “You see absolutely no progress. Another is undermining the process.”

To Accept Help. A marginal special education teacher’s unwillingness to accept help was another one of the two subthemes taken from research. Eight participants who felt this was a major barrier when working with marginal special education teachers addressed this particular subtheme. More often than not, the participant responses addressed the need for marginal special education teachers to be willing to accept help given to them in order for the process of healing to begin. Steve felt that marginal special education teachers must be willing to accept the help and recognize their shortcomings in order for the process to move from marginal to competent to occur.

Lack of Administrative Experience and Help

The fourth theme emerged in this study was the lack of administrative experience and help. This particular theme provided answers to RQ1: How do central office administrators in rural school districts in Virginia describe their experiences when working with marginal special education teachers? This particular theme provided answers to RQ2: How do central office administrators describe their experiences working with marginal special education teachers that they had to terminate from their position? The fourth theme emerged in this study also provided answers to RQ4: How, if at all, do central office administrators respond to the barriers they experienced when working with marginal special education teachers? Through further investigation, the researcher found two subthemes that contributed to leadership becoming one of the prevalent themes in this research. Those two themes were administrative experience and lack

of time to support marginal special education teachers. Table F shows the subthemes under the category of leadership that impact marginal special education teachers.

Table F

Participant Responses Lack of Administrative Experience and Help: Subthemes

| Pseudonym | Administrative Experience | Lack of Time to Support |
|-----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Wilborne | X | X |
| Gail | X | |
| Samantha | X | |
| Steve | X | X |
| Richard | | X |
| Marie | X | X |
| Anthony | | X |
| Sue | X | X |
| David | | X |
| Olivia | | X |
| Donn | | X |

Administrative Experience. Six of the participants noted that administrative experience was necessary to support marginal special education teachers. Participants such as Wilborne found through her experience that marginal administrators were more likely to have unsupported marginal teachers in their school building. In addition, Wilborne, Samantha, and Anthony discussed the need for administrators to have experience in special education in order to assist and support marginal special education teachers. Wilborne discussed in her interview the need for proper administrative training in properly doing observations of marginal teachers. Some administrators lack the experience necessary in conducting a good observation and pinpointing

the areas in which marginal teachers need support. Anthony also discussed how administrators must have experience finding adequate teachers who are coming into the teaching profession to educate the children and not just to obtain coaching positions.

Lack of Time to Support. Nine of the participants noted that administrators lacked the necessary time to invest in supporting marginal special education teachers. Participants such as Olivia found that administrators had to find the time to support marginal special education teachers. A huge barrier for administrators was setting aside the time to support marginal teachers and following through on this time. This time does not limit itself to just doing observations, but also includes the following: having conversations with the marginal teacher after the observation, setting aside time to model effective instruction for the teacher, and setting aside time to listen to the marginal teacher. In addition, administrators must be willing to set aside the time to create goals for the marginal teacher, discuss these goals with the marginal teacher, and follow through by documenting success when goals are obtained. Olivia noted that marginal teachers required a huge amount of invested time in order to support them properly and get them back to meeting district standards.

Central Office Administrators Supports

After concluding the interviews, the researcher provided the participants with some background knowledge of how this particular study came about. Through explanation, the researcher discussed with each participant that research has failed to ask central office administrators their experience when working with marginal special education teachers. In addition, further research has discussed, from a principal perspective, which they feel unsupported when it comes to central office administrators help them support marginal special education teachers. The researcher questioned each participant by asking him or her if they have

felt that central office administrators provided them help while they were a building-level principal. Table G shows the responses of these participants.

Table G

Participant Responses: Central Office Administrators Helpful to Building-level Principals

| Pseudonym | Yes, Central Office Administrators Supported Me | Neutral | No, Central Office Administrators Did not Support Me |
|-----------|---|---------|--|
| Wilborne | | | X |
| Gail | | X | |
| Samantha | | X | |
| Steve | X | | |
| Richard | X | | |
| Marie | X | | |
| Anthony | X | | |
| Sue | X | | |
| David | X | | |
| Olivia | | X | |
| Donn | | | X |

Through questioning each participant who had central office administrative experience, six of the participants believed that central office administrators had supported them as building-level principals. Three of the participants felt in many cases they received support, and in some cases, he or she did not receive support. Finally, two of the participants agreed with previous research from building-level principals by stating that central office administrators are not doing enough to support building-level principals.

Donn provided her views from both a central office perspective and from being a principal by stating,

Honestly and truly, I would probably agree with the principals definite. I think it is much easier to deal with an incompetent teacher, because they make it easier for you. A marginal teacher is going to need more work, they are going to need more investment, and I would guess having been both in the central office for many years and on the other side, I would guess the principal's assessment is accurate. It does not make it right, but I could see how principals would feel that with a marginal teacher it would be their job to grow and improvement them and central office has less time and energy for that lengthy process even though they should be more helpful.

Sue felt that central office administrators had been helpful by "creating objective goals that could be measured" or by "helping principals do observations." Anthony specifically thought that central office administrators had done a good job working with building-level administrators by providing them with materials "especially with special education." Steve on the other hand felt that "it depends on the school division that [I] was working in. [I] worked at 12 different school divisions. In cases where it was a large school division, they had adequate resources and a lot of personnel, it was something easier." When speaking to the participants, the researcher noted a difference between those who had experience working in urban school divisions and those who only had experience working in rural school divisions. Those who only had experience working in rural school divisions noted a lack of resources to help building-level principals successfully support marginal teachers.

Summary

Donn's quote is the most substantial in this research when she states, "A marginal teacher can grow, and can improve, and can reach the standard even exceed the standard with support, help and resources." This chapter shared a summary of the lived experiences of each participant who had experience in rural school divisions in Region A. These participants all had central office experience before they retired or left the region. The overall process of conducting interviews showed four things in regards to marginal special education teachers. The participants overall felt that marginal teachers were those who lacked an understanding of something whether it be the child's IEP, how to plan instruction, how to deliver instruction, how to understand the student, how to understand the student's home. In addition, the participants felt overall that peer observations and peer mentoring was an effective method of combating marginal special education teaching. Having that marginal teacher feel like they are not alone in the process was key in getting them to meet district standards. However, the third thing was there needs to be a change in the attitude and willingness of the marginal teacher to change. This unwillingness to change and adjust is the biggest barrier that administrators are facing today. Finally, the participants felt that administrators played a critical and vital role to supporting marginal special education teachers. Participants noted that time of the administrator to invest in the process of marginal special education teachers, and the experience of administrators play a critical role in ensuring marginal special education teacher's move from marginal to competent.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

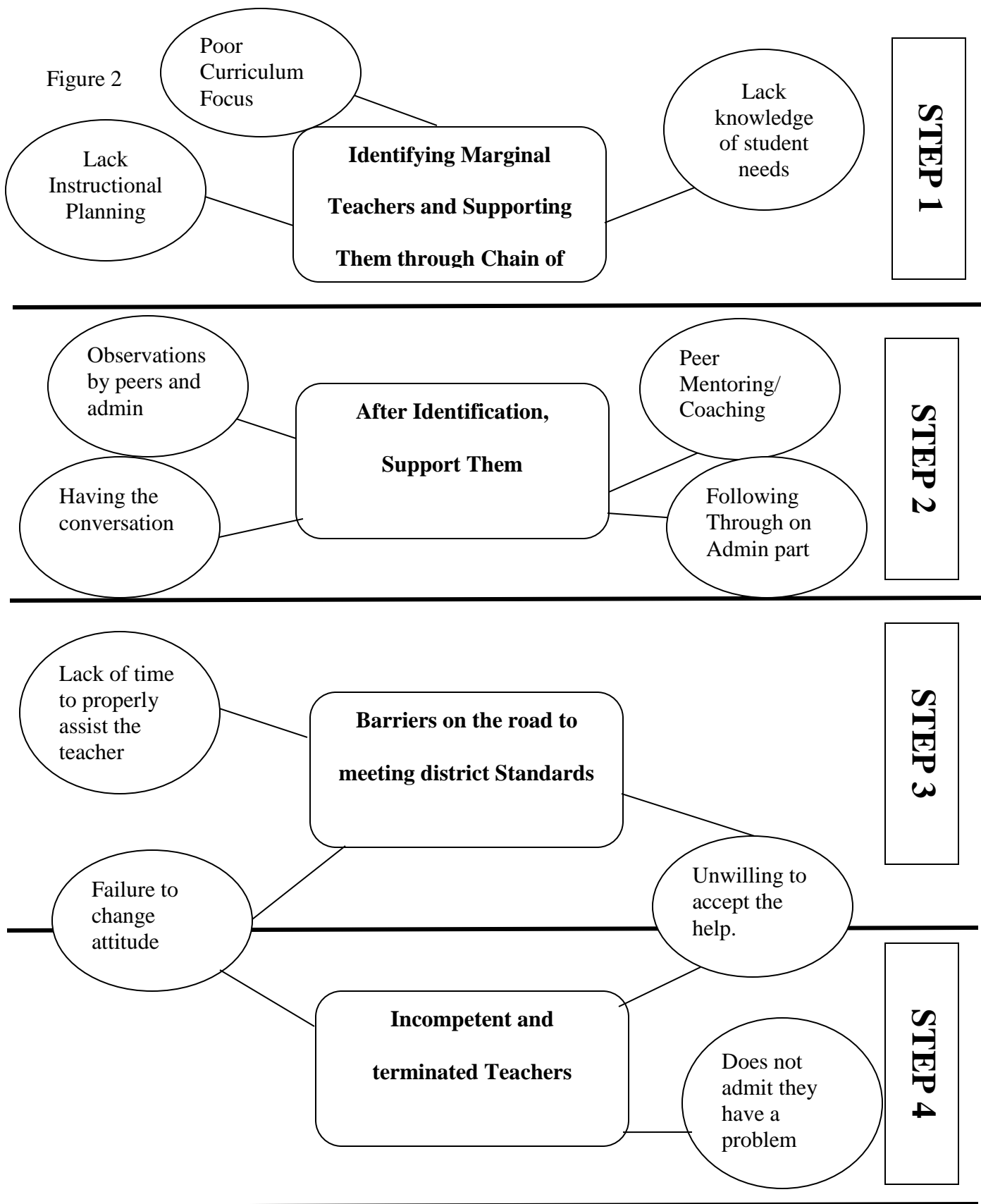
The purpose of this study was to document the lived experiences of central office administrators when working with marginal special education teachers. This study evaluated a sample of 11 previous central office administrators in Virginia with experience in Region A (pseudonym). The participants were all previous central office administrators within the region who had experience working with and supporting marginal special education teachers. Collectively, the participants had an average of over 29 years of experience working in the field of education. The purpose of this research was to reflect the voices and lived experiences of 11 central office administrators. In addition, the research sought to document ways the central office administrators supported and worked with marginal special education teachers throughout their career.

Summary of Findings

Five research questions guided this research. RQ1: How do central office administrators in rural school districts in Virginia describe their experiences when working with marginal special education teachers? RQ2: How do central office administrators describe their experiences working with marginal special education teachers that they had to terminate from their position? RQ3: How, if at all, do central office administrators describe supports they provided to marginal special education teachers that enabled the teachers to meet district standards? RQ4: How, if at all, do central office administrators respond to the barriers they experienced when working with marginal special education teachers? RQ5: How do participant responses compare or contrast?

Schools around the globe are increasingly experiencing a global issue of combating marginal teaching. Studies suggest, “Both intuition and empirical research tell us that the achievement of school children depends substantially on the teachers they are assigned” (Wayne & Young, 2003, p. 89). Each participant chosen for this particular study was chosen based on their experience working in the central office experience working in Region A schools in Virginia, and their experience working with marginal special education teachers. This study investigated the lived experiences of these participants when working with and supporting marginal special education teachers. Little research exist in regards to central office administrative perspectives when working with marginal special education teachers and supporting building-level administrators. A careful and considerable review of the literature concerning marginal teachers was considered before developing open-ended interview questions that provided opportunities for these participants to describe their lived experiences. In the process of learning more about their lived experiences, four themes continued to develop in this study: (a) Lack of knowledge, (b) lack of support, (c) lack a desire to change, and (d) lack of administrative experience and help. The following visual describes the themes as they emerged from the research.

Figure 2



These themes suggest the following: (1) marginal special education teachers are those who lack planning instructionally and in the delivery of instruction, they fail to know their children or their parents and fail to set goals and know gains of their students. (2) After marginal special education teachers are identified, they require observations conducted on them by their peers, administrators and central office personnel, they require constant feedback based on their performance so they know what to improve on, and they should have some type of say in regards to where they feel they are weakest at. Having the say in regards to what they are weakest at is a part of admitting that a problem exists. In addition, administrators must have a plan of action with these teachers and follow through on this plan not just expecting the teacher to change, but ensuring they change, through constant reviews and observations. (3) Principals and central office administrators do not see great success in marginal special education teachers when there is a lack of time and effort put into growing the person, if the person is unwilling to accept the change, or unwilling to admit they have a problem. (4) Administrators must make the necessary time adjustments to support marginal special education teachers. This includes identifying them, observing them, meeting with them to have conversations, observing them again, and providing supports. The main element is that administrators must follow through on their actions and not just leave marginal teachers to support themselves. Finally, administrators must have the necessary experience to support marginal teachers. If they are marginal administrators, they will not be effective in supporting marginal teachers. Within this research, it was with an astounding number of reviews that pairing a marginal teacher up with a strong peer teacher and allowing peer mentoring, peer coaching, and peer modeling is one of the most effective things to do when trying to bring a teacher from marginal to an acceptable level. Without these things, barriers will continue to exist and incompetent terminated teachers will continue to increase.

Discussion

Each theoretical and empirical finding within my study joined chapters two and four. The foundational framework for this research was grounded in four particular theories (1) Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory, (2) Collins, Brown, and Newman's cognitive apprenticeship theory, (3) path-goal leadership theory, and (4) transformational leadership theory. This particular section will recap highlights of each theory, and how it pertains to data found within this research study.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner believed various aspects of the environment affected a child's overall development, and that a relationship existed between the environment and the child, known as a bi-directional relationship (Lin & Bates, 2010). As noted in the research, several participants felt that marginal special education teachers lacked the essential knowledge of who the student was. One participant stated that marginal special education teachers lacked an understanding of who the whole child was, including who their family was. Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that it is through these established relationships with children that teachers are able to see the most gains in their education.

Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory

Research has already suggested the need to help struggling marginal and incompetent teachers (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010; Sweeney & Manatt, 1984; White House, 2009). Therefore, the apprenticeship theory has a direct correlation to marginal teachers, and is a method that supports the idea that when central office administrators provide supports to marginal teachers these supports can get marginal teachers back on track towards meeting district standards. Data collected through this study suggest that when central office

administrators are willing to get involved in the overall support process of marginal teachers, then effective transitions can take place between a teacher being marginal and competent. Olivia was a true example of how central office administrators can get involved in the process and effectively coach marginal teachers to success. She mentioned in her interview how the central office administrators would bring teachers to the central office and model for them effective strategies collaboratively. They would set up mini-classes on effective instruction that allowed teachers to hear from multiple people multiple ways of doing things correctly.

Path-Goal Leadership Theory

Identifying marginal teachers and providing this intervention is critically important for administrators (Range et al., 2014). One of the many important theories within leadership is the path-goal theory which "...posits that leaders can positively inspire the performance, contentment, and motivation of their employees by clarifying the path on how to achieve performance goals, bestowing rewards for achieving those goals, and removing obstacles that are stopping employees from achieving these goals" (Vandergrift & Matusitz, 2011, p. 350). These central office administrators discussed significantly the need for leaders to be positive models to marginal special education teachers by "modeling good instruction." In addition, central office administrators noted the need for leaders to allow teachers to recognize they have a problem and provide their input in regards to how to tackle the problem. Providing that teacher voice into the solution allows the participant to have some accountability towards his or her own success.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Burns stated that transformational leaders "help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers' needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization" (as cited

in Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 3). Alsmadi and Mahasneh (2011) stated “Transformational leadership occurs when leaders set challenging expectations and inspire others to achieve a high level of performance and also set examples of what is expected in terms of ideal behaviors” (p.161). Wilborne best covered this in her interview. She mentioned that marginal leaders will produce marginal teachers. Effective leaders must set high expectations for their staff in order for them to be high achievers. If ineffective leaders are trying to transform marginal teachers then the result will simply be a teacher who is barely conforming to the rules and regulations necessary to make it from day to day.

Additions

In addition to the current existing theoretical framework, the researcher noted how each of the participants in this study, in which all had central office administrative experience, found that assigning an effective mentor to a marginal teacher were an effective method of ensuring the success of a marginal teacher and leading them to meet district standards. Further information regarding a mentor can be found in the implications section of this chapter.

Implications

This particular research took place in rural counties in the state of Virginia. The implications of this study primarily focus on three groups of people (1) central office administrators who make the policy and decisions for the district, (2) the building-level principals who are in charge of supporting and ensuring improvement of marginal special education teachers, and (3) peer mentors.

Central Office Administrators

Central office administrators who are seeking to support ineffective teachers must first know what to look for in a marginal teacher. This would include a teacher is not proficient in

instruction, their delivery is lacking, they fail to set goals for their students, they are incapable of showing and providing student growth, and they fail to understand the home life of students. More precisely, marginal special education teachers are unable to understand and explain a child's IEP, unable to carry the IEP out, and fails to understand the laws and regulations that govern students with disabilities. After identifying these marginal teachers, it is very critical that marginal teachers receive immediate help and a documentation process of supporting the teacher is in place. From the central office perspective, central office administrators can get into the classrooms of marginal teachers and observe them, serve as a second set of eyes by helping building-level principals observe the teachers, provide them immediate feedback, and model for them effective instruction. Directors of instruction and directors of special education should use their expertise to provide additional professional development opportunities, help teachers unpack the Standards of Learning or Common Core standards, provide mentorship and guidance to teachers, and assist building-level principals in creating a plan of improvement for these teachers. In regards to professional development, central office administrators should be willing to provide the necessary coverage for ineffective teachers to go to conferences in order to become effective teachers. Central office administrators can assist building-level principals by providing more money for principals to put towards classroom instructional strategies. In conclusion, central office administrators must support their principals and ensure that the principals feel supported.

Building-level Principals

Building-level principals are another group of people that could benefit from this study. Building-level principals should immediately start the process of supporting marginal special education teachers after identifying a teacher as marginal. Building-level principals should get in

touch with central office administrators to get the necessary support and backing to help to assist these marginal teachers. Building-level principals serve as the immediate supervisor of marginal teachers, because they are in the same building as these teachers and can support them more effectively. Building-level principals can model for teachers' effective instruction, find effective teachers to serve as peer mentors, provide time for marginal teachers to go and observe effective teachers to get strategies they can implement in the classroom, and establish cooperative teaching and cooperative planning times between marginal special education teachers and effective teachers. In addition, there exists a necessity for teachers to have time to meet together. This includes department chairs meeting with team members to unpack the standards and understand what instruction must take place in the classroom in order to meet the needs of all students. Finally, building-level principals must start the process of improvement plans for teachers immediately upon identifying a marginal special education teacher. Administrators, especially building-level principals, cannot be afraid of the necessary paperwork needed to document the supports provided to teachers. Administrators must in turn follow through on any recommendations provided to marginal teachers and ensure they are carrying these procedures through. Finally, administrators must be willing to have the collegial conversation with marginal special education teachers that allows them to provide their input in regards to admitting what they are doing wrong and how they can improve it.

Peer Mentors

The central office administrators and building-level principals entrust peer mentors to ensure that a marginal teacher receives all the necessary "tools," as one of the participants put it, to be successful. It is necessary for a mentor to find themselves in the classroom of their peer observing their teaching abilities, documenting deficiencies, and having those general

conversations with marginal teachers on how to become effective. Carefully selected peer mentors can serve as a model of effective instruction for the marginal special education. When modeling effective instruction it is necessary for the marginal special education teacher to come away with some helpful tips and instructional strategies to implement in their classroom. Peer mentors effectively serve as a go to peer so that marginal special education teachers do not have to go through the process alone. Peer mentors must be willing to make the time necessary to devote to their co-workers success. Peer mentors must have a positive mindset in knowing their assignment is for the marginal teacher's benefit, and they are to assist the marginal teacher in improving the education provided to the children assigned to that marginal teacher's classroom.

Limitations

Special education has been a big part of my life for the past nine years. Within this time, I have worked with students with mental and physical disabilities. In addition, I have served in special education leadership capacities within the region in which this dissertation was conducted. These recognized facts caused bracketing out my own experiences supporting marginal special education teachers a challenge within this study. Through journaling, I was able to work very hard in achieving true bracketing of thoughts from this transcendental-phenomenological study.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of racial diversity achieved in my study. All but one participant was Caucasian. In addition, this research occurred in one region of Virginia schools in which all school divisions are small in nature. I believe this to be a limitation because a comparison between a smaller and a larger school division could have been effective in this study.

Another limitation in my study was getting participants. Although the researcher used a snowball sample in this study, many of the recommended central office administrators who had left the region or retired did not experience working with special education teachers, had health issues preventing them from committing time to the study, or were currently central office administrators in the region, which disqualified them from the study.

Another limitation was time that these working professionals had. The researcher found two things to be limitations. The first limitation was many administrators did not participate in a face-to-face interview and that two of the participants wanted to share lived experiences through paper oppose to an interview over the phone or in person. Finally, another limitation was the researcher wanted to use online discussion forums for participants to share lived experiences, but due to time constraints, this was not possible to get all of the participants to participate.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to document the lived experiences of central office administrators when working with and supporting marginal special education teachers. Based on established collected data throughout this research, many qualitative studies can stem from this research. In my research, one of the most valuable effective supports that central office administrators utilized was peer observations when working with marginal special education teachers. Having that said, this study could be broadened to research the effectiveness of peer observations when supporting marginal special education teacher.

In addition, the participants in my study were mainly Caucasian (with the exception of one participant). In future studies, more diversity among participants should be included. My study also examined the lived experiences of people who had previous central office administration within the studied region. There could be a study conducted on current central

office administrators who are actively supporting marginal teachers and the supports they are providing to them.

Another recommendation future recommendation for researchers would be studying a region in which more central office administrators would be present. For example, in a small rural region there are very few central office administrators to choose from and even smaller population of those central office administrators who have experience working with and supporting marginal special education teachers. As noted in my study, one of the participants made mention that there is usually one person assigned to working with marginal teachers in a rural school division.

Another topic that came through within this dissertation was the use of peer teachers to assist marginal teachers effectively. Future quantitative research studies could include a comparative study between marginal teachers supported by peers and marginal teachers not supported by peers.

Summary

Supporting and working with marginal special education teachers is definitely a necessity when providing adequate support to students with disabilities. Providing supports to marginal teachers will allow positive instruction administered to students within classrooms across the country. The 11 participants in this study articulated clearly the supports they have provided to marginal special education teachers. This was important since this research sought to provide central office administrators across the country with adequate methods they could implement within their divisions when supporting marginal special education teachers.

My experience interviewing the central office administrators and the new friends that I met encouraged me even more to move forward in this field of education. All of the participants

within this study were retired or at the end of their careers, and their knowledge and experience encouraged me to want to push forward with my plans to move into administration and support struggling teachers. All participants were very confident and clear in ensuring an accurate depiction of their lived experiences was put on paper. I am even more convinced that supporting teachers is a trickledown effect. When central office administrators effectively support their building-level principals, the principals are more apt to support their teachers who in turn can be more effective in teaching their students.

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APPENDICIES**Appendix A: IRB Approval****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 27, 2015

Lawrence William Randolph
IRB Approval 2250.072715: A Phenomenological Investigation of Rural Central Office
Administrators' Experiences in Supporting Marginal Special Education Teachers

Dear Lawrence,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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Appendix B: Consent Form

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
7/27/15 to 7/26/16
Protocol # 2250.072715

CONSENT FORM

A Phenomenological Investigation of Rural Central Office Administrators' Experiences in Supporting Marginal Special Education Teachers

Lawrence W. Randolph, Ed.S.
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of central office administrators and their experiences working with marginal special education teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because of your working knowledge of special education teachers and your former position as a central office administrator. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Lawrence W. Randolph, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to document the lived experiences of central office administrators when working with marginalized special education teachers.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Participants will be asked to take part in an interview between the researcher and the participant. This interview will be recorded using an audio digital device. The interview should take no longer than an hour and a half to complete.
- Participants will also be asked to participate in an online discussion forum. Discussion forums will be used after all interviews are conducted, and will be available for your review and response for a period of one week. You will not be required to log on at any certain time and participate. In addition, it is completely up to the participant how long during the week you wish to participate on the discussion forum.
- Participants will be asked to review their transcribed interview to ensure their intent was covered. Review of the transcribed interview will depend upon the length of the interview. Participants will be provided the transcribed interview and asked to provide their opinions and/or accept the transcribed interview within 15 days.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks associated with this study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits to participation are directly related to society and not to the participant directly. This study seeks to provide rural school divisions across the country with a go-to directive for dealing with marginal special education teachers.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for this particular study. All participants are volunteers.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
7/27/15 to 7/26/16
Protocol # 2250.072715

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. During the interview, all digital files will be downloaded to the researcher's computer and locked in a secure folder. All digital files will be deleted from the researcher's computer three years after the doctoral defense. Participants will be given pseudonyms throughout the research and used in both the doctoral dissertation documents and in the online discussion forum. The researcher will be the only one with access to the digital files and the online discussion forum information. In the online discussion forum, administrators are encouraged to use their pseudonyms. However, the researcher cannot assure that other participants will maintain the subject's confidentiality and privacy. Participants will be given pseudonyms at the start of the process so they are not identifiable by other people. In addition, the participant's school division will also receive a pseudonym. Participants are required to use their pseudonyms for both themselves and the school division throughout the research process.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study

Participants may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the researcher at 434-391-4028 or lrandolph2@liberty.edu. All collected data linking to the participant will be properly destroyed, and information within the dissertation provided by the participant will be deleted.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Lawrence W. Randolph. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 434-391-4028 or lrandolph2@liberty.edu. You may also contact the student's doctoral chair, Dr. Ackerman at mackerman@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview process of this doctoral research

Yes or No

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
7/27/15 to 7/26/16
Protocol # 2250.072715

I agree to participate in an online secure discussion forum regarding marginal special education teachers

___ Yes or ___ No

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Re: Permission to Use Copyright Material From Your Publication

Eileen Johnson [REDACTED]



To: [Randolph, Lawrence](#)

Saturday, July 02, 2016 10:00 AM

- You replied on 7/2/2016 3:31 PM.

Lawrence,

Sure, you may use it but please be sure to cite me as the source.

Eileen

On Jul 2, 2016 7:17 AM, "Randolph, Lawrence" [REDACTED] wrote:

Good morning,

My name is Lawrence Randolph, and I recently defended my dissertation at Liberty University. My dissertation was A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF RURAL CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS' EXPERIENCES IN SUPPORTING MARGINAL SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS. I am in the works of publishing my dissertation in the Liberty University Digital Commons and the Proquest database. I am requesting permission to reproduce a copy of the figure you used in your article: Johnson, E.S. (2008). Ecological systems and complexity theory: Toward an alternative model of accountability in education. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, 5 (1), 1-10. The figure I am referring to is Figure 1: A working model of the ecological context of an individual school. I would greatly appreciate your help and consideration is allowing me to use this figure.

Thank you,

Dr. Lawrence W. Randolph