A DESCRIPTION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADMINISTRATORS SUPERVISING

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Kristen Marie Richtberg Wilkins

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how novice, public school administrators experience and learn to supervise special education programs. This study was founded in epistemological assumptions that specific knowledge is required to provide supervision for special education programs. This study was additionally framed using Knowles' adult learning theory, which theorizes that adults bring their personal experiences to bear and are intrinsically motivated to learn information that they need (Knowles, 1970, 1973). For the purposes of this study, adult learning theory related to the lived experiences of administrators as they learn to supervise special education programs. The central research question examined was: What are the lived experiences of novice, public school administrators as they learn to supervise special education programs? A transcendental phenomenological design was utilized. Ten novice public school administrators from Virginia were selected as participants in an attempt to aggregate their shared experiences with the phenomenon of supervising special education programs. Data were collected via participant journals, interviews, and focus groups. Data were analyzed by coding, identifying themes, developing textural and structural descriptions, and arriving at the essence of the experience for participants (Moustakas, 1994). The five themes that emerged were: formal preparation experiences, not having the knowledge or expertise, daily tasks required, motivation for success, and acquiring the knowledge necessary. Ultimately, the study revealed that these novice administrators lacked the preparation to supervise special education programs, and upon discovering their inadequacies, they used intrinsic motivations and discovered the information necessary.

Keywords: administration, adult learning theory, special education, supervision

Dedication

It is with great love and pride that I dedicate this manuscript to my family, who are a constant source of love, encouragement, and blessings in my life.

Mom and Dad, thank you for always pushing me to follow my heart. You taught me not only to dream but how to put in the hard work and dedication necessary to turn dreams into reality. I have always been grateful for the path you forged for our family and the example you have provided for my children and me. Thank you for being there every step of the way, for always believing me, and for helping me to achieve this goal. I love you.

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Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975 (EAHCA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

free and appropriate public education (FAPE)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)

individual education plan (IEP),

Institutional Review Board (IRB),

Interstate School Leadership Consortium (ISSLC),

least restrictive environment (LRE),

local education agency (LEA),

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

specially designed instruction (SDI)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how novice, public school administrators experience and learn to supervise special education programs. This chapter sets the background for the supervision of special education programs by providing necessary historical, social, and theoretical context. Special education students are protected by federal statutes. Administrators who are responsible for supervising special education programs in their buildings, historically, have not entered into their supervisory roles with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to supervise these programs (Martin, Little, Miller, & Gourwitz, 2014; Schaaf, Williamson, & Novak, 2015). Regardless of their level of preparation, they have become licensed to supervise the programs in addition to evaluating the teachers (Lawson & Cruz, 2018a; Steinbrecher, Fix, Mahal, Serna, & McKeown, 2015). This situation is further aggravated by a society where parents rely heavily on litigation to rectify special-education-related issues. While litigation is on the rise, special education administrators are, nonetheless, finding ways to supervise special education programs within their buildings (Karanxha & Zirkel, 2014; Weber, 2017). This chapter contains the context of this study, situation to self, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, and definitions.

Background

The background of the study begins with the historical context, including the legal context of the study. This section also provides the social and theoretical context for the study.

Historical Context

The first real protections for students with disabilities in the United States appeared with the passage of Public Law 94-142, which was signed by Gerald Ford in 1975 and is referred to as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975 (Ballard & Zettel, 1977). The EAHCA provides for a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for children with disabilities within public school buildings and offers protections to those students and their families. The law further provided local governments with assistance providing FAPE and monitoring the effectiveness of the law and subsequent programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). The EAHCA further promoted reform to teacher preparation programs across the country and school programming options to implement EAHCA effectively (Blanton, Pugach, & Boveda, 2018).

The EAHCA has been the subject of amendments and revisions since 1975 and is currently referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) as amended in 2004 (Essex, 2016). Through the amendment process, the basic intent of EAHCA has been to provide appropriate education and protections for students with disabilities (Blanton et al., 2018; Essex, 2016). IDEIA outlines education and licensure requirements for special education teachers; these education and licensure requirements, however, do not extend to special education building administrators (Essex, 2016). Additional legal protection was extended to students with disabilities with the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The ESSA requires schools to provide high-quality instruction to all students while maintaining equity for students with all levels of need (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Through the passage of the EAHCA, IDEIA, and ESSA, the legal protections for students with disabilities have increased over time.

In school buildings across the country, administrators are hired as instructional and operational leaders. Building administrators are subject to state administrator certification programs, which usually require higher education degrees in administration and supervision or a comparable program (Martin et al., 2014). Administrative preparation programs in the United States mostly utilize the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISSLC) standards to determine the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions administrators need prior to serving in the field (Voltz & Collins, 2010). Administrator preparation programs do not offer significant training in special education. McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy, and Terry (2010) conducted research on the amount of special-education-related coursework in administrator preparation programs and found:

> approximately half of the respondents (49.2%) indicated that their preparation program contained no specific courses pertaining to special education, 26.2% ($n = 16$) indicated one course, 14.1% ($n = 8$) indicated two courses, and 11.5% ($n = 7$) indicated three or more courses on special education. (p. 8)

While candidates graduate from programs with endorsements in administration, these endorsements allows them to supervise the special education programs within school buildings, as determined by their individual contracts and assignments regardless of the amount of coursework they may have received (Steinbrecher et al., 2015).

To become licensed in administration and supervision for special education programs, a master's degree or more is required in 23 states, with only 13 states requiring prior experience with special education students (Boscardin, Weir, & Kusek, 2010). The lack of experience with special-education-related tasks during their teaching experiences, coupled with minimal special education training during higher education administrative programs, leaves novice administrators

with special education responsibility without the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to carry out the job. Further, research on principal turnover indicates that the decision to leave the role of principal can be influenced by the number of special education students in a given building (Rangel, 2018). This is a further call for research into the training that administrators receive in special education program administration. It is clear that administrators are responsible for special education programs and do not always receive significant training in higher education programs. Boscardin et al. (2010) evaluated the certification requirements by stating, "it is evident that special education does not suffer from a lack of standards and categories, but instead needs to reconcile the national titular and professional standard ambiguities that dictate licensing requirements" (p. 71). If administrators are not receiving training during their pre-service education, it is important to the educational community to determine how, when, and where they are receiving this relevant training and whether it is effective.

Social Context

Among the many responsibilities of administrators, the supervision of teachers, including special education teachers and programs, is a significant requirement (Steinbrecher et al., 2015). Administrators who are trained to provide quality supervision and oversight are able to build capacity within teachers and programs (Alila, Maata, & Uusiautti, 2016). Practicing school administrators do not consistently demonstrate knowledge of special education practices or comfort with supervising and evaluating special education teachers (Lawson & Cruz, 2018a). Assessing the social context of school administrators who are charged with learning to provide oversight and supervision to special education programs that they do not fully understand deepened the relevance of this study. Special education programs are designed to provide

specially designed instruction for the students who qualify, currently 13% of the student

population (NCES, 2018). A deeper understanding of how special education administrators

navigate this territory seems warranted. Further, by principals sharing their learning processes in

a public manner with teachers, the entire learning community grows and builds capacity (Psencik

& Brown, 2018).

Additional social context is provided by the litigious nature of special education in the

United States. In 2017, the U.S. Supreme Court delivered two special-education-related

decisions that involved individual students and school districts (Weber, 2017). In both Fry v.

Napoleon Community Schools and Endrew F. v Douglas County School District RE-1, the

school divisions' implementation of IDEIA was in question (Weber, 2017). These cases are now

landmark Supreme Court decisions, and their full implications have yet to be realized in the

United States. In Fry v. Napoleon Community Schools, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that

families can go to court for special-education-related disputes without going through each and

every due process provision listed in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The Fry Supreme Court decision opened the opportunity for families to litigate sooner than

previous interpretations of IDEA. In Endrew F. v Douglas County School District RE-1, the

Supreme Court determined that students receiving special education services should be making

more than minimal progress from year to year, and therefore, their educational programming

should be set up to facilitate this progress properly (Weber, 2017). As a society, special

education litigation has been on the rise for the past 15 years (Karanxha & Zirkel, 2014). IDEIA

has a due process system that allows school districts and parents to go before a one-tiered or two-

tiered hearing committee before filing court proceedings. Even with this safeguard in place,

court cases in special education were up 67% for the five-year period between 2008 and 2012

(Karanxha & Zirkel, 2014). In the absence of information regarding any other singular area of education that is litigated at this rate, special education may very well be the most litigated area of education. To navigate the legal aspects of special education, collaborate with families, and provide direction to special education teachers, "principals should have a basic understanding of exceptional education including issues related to legislation, funding, student characteristics, and instructional methods and accommodations that support access to the general education" (McHatton et al., 2010, p. 8).

Theoretical Context

This study examined how administrators come to know the information necessary to supervise special education programs through the lens of adult learning theory. Adult learning theory was introduced in the early 1970s by Malcolm Knowles and poses that adults learn inherently differently from children (Knowles, 1970, 1973). According to adult learning theory, when adults encounter a new learning experience, they utilize their own self-concept and past experiences to become motivated, active participants in the learning experience (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2015). The active learning experiences that this study examined related to how a group of novice administrators learned about the supervision of special education programs. According to adult learning theory, adults seek new learning for practical experiences and a desire for andragogy, or a say in what they are learning as well as the process they are engaging in to learn (Knowles et al., 2015). Adult learning theory is particularly relevant, as it applies to professional development and how administrators obtain the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to supervise special education programs (Knowles et al., 2015; Zepeda, Parylo, & Bengston, 2014). Professional development experiences should be relevant to participants and meaningful in their everyday interactions for them to obtain the maximum

benefit from the instruction (Cox, 2015). This study sought to obtain information from participants regarding how their lived experiences can be viewed through the lens of adult learning theory.

Situation to Self

As a middle school assistant principal and former special education teacher, I have direct experience with administrators who supervise special education programs. As of this writing, I am now responsible for the supervision of the special education program in my building. During the course of my career, I have encountered many administrators who have expressed that they are personally unprepared to supervise special education programs. This prompted my desire to understand the experiences of administrators as they assume responsibility for special education programs. It also deepened an axiological value where I value the proper training for administrators relative to the special education process. Special education is a deep passion of mine, and I support proper training for administrators and teachers to provide students with disabilities and their families with an education that meets their needs.

Now that I have transitioned into administration and I am living the experience of supervising a special education program, I am consistently surprised by the amount of time and energy that I exert supervising special education programs. I wonder if I would be as effective as a supervisor, instructional leader, and advocate for my special education program and students if I did not have a master's degree in special education and 10 years of teaching experience with special education students. When I meet new assistant principals at conferences or division-wide meetings, I find myself questioning how a high school mathematics teacher, for example, comes to supervise a special education program with no prior training in this area. It seemed that a call for action and research is necessary in this area, and I was prepared to discover all that I could

relative to this topic to deepen the overall understanding of this lived experience.

My epistemological assumption that specific knowledge about the special education process is required to supervise special education programs prompted this study. The existence of a special education program would indicate the presence of students who require SDI from qualified personnel (Veale, 2010). Administrators assigned to supervise special education, according to my epistemological belief, must know and understand what will help students and teachers to be successful within special education programs to provide appropriate leadership. I further hold the ontological belief that the experiences of administrators as they supervise special education programs are multifaceted, and to arrive at the essence of the experience, it is necessary to gain multiple perspectives from participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study exemplifies a rhetorical assumption by using the qualitative methodology (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach was selected because to convey the voice of the participants, the lived experiences are described in a manner that is highly personal and descriptive.

Social constructivism is the research paradigm that I brought into the study. I believe that individuals develop their own meanings based on their individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through transcendental phenomenology, I sought to examine how the participants developed their individual meanings based on their experiences supervising special education programs. The research site consisted of three local school districts, where I did not have any supervisory role over any of the participants.

Problem Statement

This research study is intended to add to the existing body of research regarding the preparation of public school administrators to supervise special education programs and how they subsequently became prepared. Current research suggests that public school administrators

are not adequately prepared to supervise special education programs when they begin their administrative journeys (Martin et al., 2014; Schaaf et al., 2015). Special education leadership at the building level must be explored because the needs of special education programs are different from those of general education programs (Blanton et al., 2018). Additionally, there are numerous laws that govern special education programs that administrators must be thoroughly trained and versed in so that they can effectively manage the programs within the limits of existing legal boundaries (Karanxha & Zirkel, 2014; Veale, 2010). Studying special education leadership in public education can help to inform public policy and administrative preparatory programs. Administrators are supervising special education programs without the knowledge and experience necessary to provide that supervision. The problem that this study examined was the lived experiences of novice administrators as they assumed responsibility for special education programs; examination of this issue could inform policy and practice recommendations. At this point in time, there is little known about the lived experiences of novice administrators as they supervise special education programs, so this study examined areas of need as well as areas of success in administrative preparation programs.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how novice, public school administrators experience and learn to supervise special education programs. For the purpose of this study, *supervision* was generally defined as the administration of the attitudes, rules, regulations, instruction, curriculum, and staff and community interaction for the special education programs in a school building (Stevenson-Jacobson, Jacobson, & Hilton, 2006). The theory guiding this study was adult learning theory, which indicates that adults learn through andragogy, a method of learning unique to the adult experience. Andragogy assumes that adult

learning is fueled by the need to know, the self-concept of the learner, personal experience, readiness to learn, orientation for learning, and the motivation to learn (Knowles et al., 2015).

Significance of the Study

This study contributed to the knowledge base regarding the experiences of novice administrators as they supervised special education programs. Recent research demonstrated that administrators are not adequately prepared to supervise special education programs when they first assume responsibility for those programs (Martin et al., 2014; Schaaf et al., 2015). Therefore, this study provided information regarding how a group of administrators experienced the phenomenon of supervising special education programs without first possessing the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Additionally, this study provided information regarding how those administrators later came to know and possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to supervise special education programs.

Theoretically, this study provides a structure for applying adult learning theory to the context of administrators acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to supervise special education programs (Knowles et al., 2015). If the principles of adult learning theory apply to the knowledge, skill, and disposition acquisition process relative to special education supervision, then school divisions and higher education have a starting point regarding preparation programs and professional development. For the sample being studied, these participants were able to examine their own paths and are now better able to acknowledge their needs. Their work conditions may have been improved because of a greater awareness of the supervision of special education programs in their daily lives and the obstacles that they overcame.

This study could be used further for policy implications as higher education programs are determining what knowledge, skills, and dispositions are necessary for the supervision of special education programs. Additionally, licensure practices can be examined as they relate to administrator preparation programs, and consideration can be given to the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions that administrators need when they begin their supervision journeys. Ultimately, the lives of special education students and their families could be affected by this study because it may uncover useful next steps with regard to special education supervision, licensure, and policy. Education is ultimately about students, and research in the educational field can help to improve the overall educational experience for current and future students.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer one central research question (CRQ) and three subquestions to arrive at the lived experiences of novice administrators learning to supervise special education programs. The research questions were formulated through the lens of andragogy and the six assumptions regarding how adults learn: the need to know, the learner's self-concept, the role of the learner's experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn (Knowles et al., 2015). The CRQ was as follows:

What are the lived experiences of novice, public school administrators as they supervise special education programs?

The CRQ stems from the knowledge that novice, public school administrators do not traditionally receive training from higher education to supervise special education programs, and yet, they are required to do so when accepting a position in a building that houses a special education program (Lawson & Cruz, 2018a). It is crucial to understand how administrators come to know the information necessary to supervise special education programs to inform

special education administration preparation and professional development programs as well as policy (Martin et al., 2014; Schaaf et al., 2015).

The subquestions were as follows:

1. What prior experiences do novice administrators bring to their positions that motivate them to learn about special education supervision?

Administrators likely have many learning experiences to draw upon as they learn to supervise special education programs. This study identified which of those experiences these administrators determined to be the most relevant and meaningful experiences (Knowles et al., 2015; Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

2. While supervising special education programs, what challenges prompt novice administrators to seek additional information about their practice?

Administrators are likely to have had problems they failed to solve and frustrations during their novice years supervising a special education program. This study identified the challenges that administrators navigate throughout their special education supervision journeys (Knowles et al., 2015; McHatton et al., 2010).

3. How do novice administrators tailor their individual learning experiences to deepen their understanding of special education programs?

If novice administrators, traditionally, do not receive the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to supervise special education programs in their teaching experiences or in their higher education programs, it is important to understand their experiences as they navigate learning supervision skills relative to special education (Lawson & Cruz, 2018a; Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

Definitions

- *Administrator* - The individual in the building responsible for the special education program this could be the principal or assistant principal, depending on the school system (McHatton et al., 2010).

- *Andragogy* - The process through which adults learn; andragogy is based on the premise that adult learning is fueled by six assumptions: the need to know, learner's self-concept, the role of the learner's experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation (Knowles et al., 2015).

- *Dispositions* - The importance and attitudes that are held toward special education programs and students (Horrocks, White, & Roberts, 2008).

- *Knowledge* -The information required regarding policy, legal, foundational, and contextual information (Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

- *Novice* - Administrators with three or fewer years of experience in administration (Petzko, 2008).

- *Skills* - The ability to navigate special education programs regularly, including observing teachers, advocating for students, participating in meetings, reviewing lesson plans, and ensuring that the needs of students are being met (McHatton et al., 2010).

- *Special Education Program* - a school-based program responsible for the education of students who identified as requiring SDI per federal law (Cobb, 2015).

- *Supervision* - The administration of the attitudes, rules, regulations, instruction, curriculum, and staff and community interaction for the special education programs in their buildings (Stevenson-Jacobson et al., 2006).

Summary

The problem is that administrators are encountering the supervision of special education programs with little preparation to supervise these programs. The current lack of knowledge regarding the lived experiences of novice administrators as they supervise special education programs leaves school districts and administrator preparation programs without critical feedback that can inform policy and practice initiatives. While most administrators lack preparation, some are required to assume supervision of special education programs as novice administrators. This study intended to examine the lived experiences of administrators as they learn to supervise special education programs and acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to do so. This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach that sought to understand the essence of the experience for participants as they supervise special education programs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study could inform policy and practice regarding how to prepare administrators best to assume responsibility for special education programs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This study was structured according to the theoretical framework of adult learning theory, which indicates that adult learning is fueled by the need to know, self-concept, personal experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn (Knowles et al., 2015). This chapter sets out the theoretical framework of adult learning theory and presents literature related to the study. Related literature supports the need for the study by demonstrating that administrators in public education are often assigned the task of supervising special education programs within their buildings without proper preparation. Special education programs provide SDI to students with disabilities in compliance with federal and state regulations. Regardless of their licensure endorsement, assigned special education administrators are instrumental in ensuring a proper education is delivered to students with disabilities (Martin et al., 2014). Administrators must be aware of the inner workings of special education policy, procedure, and law, including local and state interpretations, and be prepared to defend the decisions made within their buildings daily (Cobb, 2015). The related literature further examines the role of school administrators, administrator preparation programs, licensure requirements, and the professional development experiences of administrators relative to special education.

Theoretical Framework

This study was conducted through the lens of adult learning theory and how it relates specifically to the learning that takes place as administrators learn to supervise special education programs and advance their practice as special education leaders (Zepeda et al., 2014). Adult learning theory is based on the premise that adults learn significantly differently than children do

(Knowles, 1970, 1973). Examining how school administrators learn to supervise special education programs by way of looking at their collective learning experiences and the impacts provided a deep understanding of the experiences of these administrators.

Adult learning theory was first introduced by Malcolm Knowles in 1973 with the publication of the first edition of *The Adult Learner* (as cited in Knowles et al., 2015). Adult learning theory indicates that adults learn through the process of andragogy, which is based on six distinct assumptions:

- "The need to know: Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it" (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 43).

- "The learners' self-concept: Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, their own lives. Once they have arrived at that self-concept, they develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction" (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 44).

- "The role of the learners' experiences: Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from that of youths" (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 44).

- "Readiness to learn: Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations" (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 45).

- "Orientation to learning: In contrast to children's and youths' subject-centered orientation to learning (at least in school), adults are life-centered (or task-centered or problem-centered) in their orientation to learning. Adults are motivated to learn to the

extent that they perceive that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with

problems they confront in their life situations" (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 46).

- "Motivation: Adults are responsive to some external motivators (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, and the like), but the most potent satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like" (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 47).

These pillars of adult learning theory are based on the theoretical concept of andragogy, which postulates that adults require context and motivation for learning that is inherently different from the way in which children learn. Self-concept is examined within this motivation and context to position learning so that adult learners are open to receiving all that can be offered to them from the experience. Knowles et al. (2015) indicated that adult learners would be more receptive to learning that is self-directed and considers their prior experiences, as opposed to teacher- or facilitator-directed learning. Adult learners are intrinsically motivated and validated, in stark contrast to children who receive most of their motivation and validation externally. Intrinsically motivated individuals learn best when their own self-concept is honored and acknowledged (Knowles et al., 2015). If professional development experiences incorporate the motivation of learners and provide them with voice and choice, the learning is more meaningful and systematically improved (Cox, 2015; Hagen & Park, 2016).

Tied into the self-concept and intrinsic motivation are the availability and readiness of adult learners. If they are not ready to receive information due to a barrier that exists, then the learning is not meaningful (Knowles et al., 2015). Those who wish to deliver training or new learning experiences to adults must attend to the environmental and personal factors that exist with the learner to maximize the benefit of the educational experience. According to adult learning theory, if professional development experiences are developed with andragogy in mind,

then participants more readily receive the knowledge and maximize their benefit from the experience (Tanish, 2016; Zepeda et al., 2014). Finally, adults are oriented to learn information that they recognize as helping them in their everyday lives, "Adult learners thrive on respect and are practical and goal-directed" (Garwood, 2015, p. 42). If information is not immediately perceived as helpful and delivered in a manner that respects the learner, adult learners are less likely to assimilate the information deeply (Garwood, 2015; Knowles et al., 2015).

This study examined the lived experiences of administrators as they learn to supervise special education programs. School administrators are college-educated, certified, and experienced educators (Boscardin et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2014). However, the literature indicates that administrators are not properly prepared to supervise special education programs when they first embark on their administrative careers (McHatton et al., 2010). The lived experiences of administrators as they learn to supervise special education programs are relevant to the knowledge base surrounding special education administration. Identifying the learning experiences that administrators attribute to their own knowledge about the supervision of special education can have policy and practice implications for special education administration preparation and professional learning opportunities. This study examined the lived experiences of administrators through the six pillars of andragogy to determine if they participated in learning experiences that maximized the opportunity available to adult learners. The learning experiences of administrators may include professional development activities, administrator preparation programs, prior teaching experiences, personal experiences, on-the-job training, and any other experience that they identified as having an impact.

Related Literature

The related literature includes information on special education programs and the students with disabilities who are served by these programs. The literature outlines federal statutes and best practices in education, including documents and processes in place to protect and educate students with disabilities. Additionally, the literature outlines the role of school administrators and the specific responsibilities related to the oversight and supervision of special education programs by administrators, licensure requirements, and the preparation of administrators to supervise special education. Literature related to special education outlines practices that are legally driven and heavily regulated.

Special Education Programs

Special education protections are extended by the federal government to students who meet the necessary criteria (IDEA, 2006). Special education programs and IDEA are regulated by the federal government by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services to ensure compliance (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). To remain in compliance with IDEA, school districts must have a variety of placements available so that students can be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). To ensure that school divisions comply with the LRE requirements, a continuum of placements must be available (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). According to McCloskey (2018), "The continuum is an ordered placement by the degree of restrictiveness, usually defined by the ratio of students to teachers (and sometimes aides) that are available in a school district" (p. 766). Special education continuum placements can range in possibilities from special education support within the general education classroom to special education classrooms within traditional school buildings to alternate placements where students are educated away from nondisabled peers. Each of these programs

has a set of criteria for students for which eligibility is determined by a multidisciplinary team of individuals (Sadeh & Sullivan, 2017).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2018) reported that in 2015, of the school-age students ages 6-21 with disabilities, 95% were enrolled in regular, public schools. Within the regular school placement, three time percentages were reported: 63% of students spent at least 80% of their time in general education classes, 19% of students spent 40-79% of their time in general education classes, and 14% of students enrolled in regular schools spent less than 40% of their time in general education classes. Of the students not enrolled in regular public schools, 3% were enrolled in separate schools (public or private) specifically for students with disabilities, 1% were enrolled in regular private schools by choice of their parents, and fewer than 1% were placed in homebound situations, hospitals, residential facilities, or correctional facilities (NCES, 2018). Based on these numbers for LRE, school administrators are encountering the majority of students with disabilities in their school buildings and must be prepared to provide leadership for these students and their teachers.

When staffing special education programs, building administrators must keep in mind that special education teachers are required to be highly qualified for their positions, as outlined in federal law (Brownell, Bishop, & Sindelar, 2018). To hire teachers who are highly qualified, have high expectations for all students, and who comply with all regulations, school administrators must be aware of the regulatory requirements in place. School administrators who supervise special education programs may not be formally trained or prepared in special education; therefore, examining their lived experiences as they learn to supervise these programs is relevant (McHatton et al., 2010).

Students with disabilities. A student with a disability must meet the eligibility criteria for IDEA under section 300.8 of the statute by meeting the outlined criteria for one of the following disabilities: mental retardation, hearing impairment (including deafness), speech and language impairment, visual impairment (including blindness), emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities (IDEA, 2006). According to the NCES (2018), 6.7 million students in the United States, ages 3-21, are receiving special education services, which is equivalent to 13% of all students enrolled in public schools. The majority of students being served are those with specific learning disabilities (34%) followed by speech or language impairment (20%), and other health impairment (14%). The percentages of students within other disability categories are as follows: autism (9%), developmental delay (6%), intellectual disability (6%), emotional disturbance (5%), multiple disabilities (2%), hearing impairment (1%), and orthopedic impairment (1%). Students with deaf-blindness, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment make up fewer than 0.5% each of the students with disabilities (NCES, 2018).

Students who are suspected of having one of the identified disabilities, where the disability is affecting their education, are subject to a comprehensive evaluation process to determine eligibility (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). From the time the evaluation is determined necessary and consented to by a parent, it must be completed within 60 days, and the team must convene to make an eligibility determination based on the determined criteria for the disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). Once a child is found eligible for special education services, the individualized education plan (IEP) team must convene within 30 days to develop an initial IEP for the student (IDEA, 2006). While special education teachers are

expected to adhere to the many requirements of students with disabilities and evaluation timelines, administrators are not always prepared to provide adequate oversight to these programs (McHatton et al., 2010).

Individualized education plan. According to federal statute, an IEP must be developed for a student with a disability; this plan is required to be reviewed at least annually (IDEA, 2006). The IEP details what the student needs and what will be delivered to the student through a variety of required sections, including: present levels of academic and functional performance, measurable annual goals, benchmarks or short-term objectives, services (including special education and related services), participation with children without disabilities, participation in state and division-wide assessments, the duration, frequency, and location of services, a progress reporting schedule, and transition information to secondary schools (Petcu, Yell, Cholewicki, & Plotner, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). IEPs are developed by a team of individuals, which must consist, at a bare minimum, of a parent, a special education teacher, a general education teacher, and an administrator (IDEA, 2006; Varvisotis, Matyo-Cepero, & Ziebarth-Bovill, 2017). Parents must be included in the development of an IEP and are required to receive prior notice of the meeting, which should take place at a mutually convenient time (Couvillon, Yell, & Katsiyannis, 2018). Administrators must ensure that parents not only participate in the IEP process but also that FAPE, placement, and services are not determined prior to convening the meeting (Couvillon et al., 2018; IDEA, 2006).

Administrator presence is required at IEP team meetings regardless of the knowledge level, training, or level of comfort of the administrator. Other members of the team may be invited or required on a case by case basis. The IEP team determines how and where the child is educated by assigning services and the location of services resulting in an LRE determination.

The LRE determination ensures that students are receiving their education, to the greatest extent possible, with same-age nondisabled peers and that they are only excluded necessarily for the delivery of SDI (Sumbera, Pazey, & Lashley, 2014). The administrator consents to the implementation of the IEP, as do the other members of the team.

IEP meetings have budgetary implications because local education agency (LEA) representatives (school administrators) have the ability to allocate resources to meet the needs of students with disabilities if they are determined to be appropriate by the IEP team. This means that school administrators must be familiar with the resources available so that appropriate recommendations can be made. Student needs cannot be denied based on funding; however, appropriate substitutions for requests can be provided if they serve the same function (IDEA, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). Administrators who are not aware of the regulations can improperly deny a request or neglect to offer a viable substitution that can meet the needs of a child.

Specially designed instruction. Elder, Rood, and Damiani (2018) stated:

Though not an easy task, providing all students with and without disabilities access to the general education curriculum is the job of all teachers. If students do not learn the way we teach, it is our responsibility as educators to change the way we teach. (p. 128)

To provide an education to all students, specially designed instruction (SDI) is provided to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment within a special education program. SDI is the specific instruction provided to students at their deficit level to make progress toward a defined goal (Alkahtani, 2016; IDEA, 2006). The SDI should be delivered by qualified personnel using evidence-based practices (Brownell et al., 2018; Cook & Cook, 2011; Roberts & Guerra, 2017). Evidence-based practices, often termed research-based practices or

high leverage practices, are defined as, "practices that are supported by multiple, high-quality studies that utilize research designs from which causality can be inferred and that demonstrate meaningful effects on student outcomes" (Cook & Cook, 2011, p. 73). According to Steinbrecher et al. (2015), "Students receiving special education services are often identified because their needs could not be met in a general education classroom" (p. 100). Special education teachers are trained to identify the impact of the disability on students and SDI that specifically targets the students' unique needs and deficits, enabling the student both access to the curriculum and the opportunity to make progress toward his or her goals (Riccomini, Morano, & Hughes, 2017).

Building administrators are assigned to supervise special education teachers in their delivery of highly qualified instruction (Martin et al., 2014). In addition to SDI, it is crucial that both teachers and administrators hold students with disabilities to high expectations and believe in their own ability to provide instruction and/or supervise that instruction (Gregory, 2018). Knowledge of specially designed instructional practices is not sufficient for educators to educate students with disabilities properly. Instead, "educators must possess a desire to use the skills and techniques that will ensure the curriculum is accessible to all children" (Gregory, 2018, p. 128).

The Role of School Administrators

Special education administration and supervision are positioned within the greater context of the role of school administrators. Administrators have multifaceted positions that require a balance of duties and responsibilities to be effective. While administrator responsibilities can vary by district, some of the common responsibilities include: master schedule planning, student discipline, managing employee contracts, special education, Section 504, communication at the building, district- and community-level legal issues and

responsibilities, facility management, budgetary concerns, after-school programs, club activities, student supervision and safety, working with community organizations and parent groups, maintaining student records in accordance with local and federal laws, time management, observing and providing feedback to teachers, conducting formal evaluations of teachers, planning for effective parental involvement, transportation issues and concerns, response to intervention (RtI), ensuring achievement is on track for federal, state, and local requirements, and monitoring attendance for truancy concerns (Psencik & Brown, 2018; Sebastian, Allensworth, & Huang, 2016; Tobin, 2014).

While administrators balance their varying operational and instructional leadership tasks, they must determine how to approach each of these decisions and how much time to devote in each category as well as which responsibilities can be partially delegated. Sebastian et al. (2016), "Leaders have many competing responsibilities, and it is not always clear which aspects of their work matter most for student outcomes" (p. 71). Student outcomes and well-being are at the heart of school administration, and school administrators must remain current on research, pedagogy, law, and regulatory requirements to make informed decisions that positively affect students. Part of this balance involves creating a learning environment that enables students to thrive, teachers to teach, and parents and other stakeholders to feel comfortable, one that ultimately fits the mission and vision of the school district.

School divisions and stakeholders place a tremendous amount of trust in school administrators and having the right school administrator in a particular building can positively impact the entire community (Psencik & Brown, 2018). Leadership style can have a myriad of impacts, and there is some research to support that teachers thrive under democratic-styled administrators (Ch, Ahmad, Malik, & Batool, 2017; Shepherd-Jones & Salisbury-Glennon,

2018). Shepherd-Jones and Salisbury-Glennon (2018) reported that teachers experienced higher

levels of "autonomy, relatedness, and competence under a democratic leader" (p. 120). A

democratic leader is one who "guides teachers while working with them, believes teachers are

capable of doing their own work, and encourages communication among teachers" (Shepherd-

Jones & Salisbury-Glennon, 2018, p. 100). The type of leadership style of a building

administrator impacts teacher happiness, retention, and empowerment (Ch et al., 2017; Hughes,

Matt, & O'Reilly, 2014; Shepherd-Jones & Salisbury-Glennon, 2018). While school

administrators make a litany of decisions and balance the needs of a significant number of

stakeholders, they are often responsible for being special education leaders within their schools.

The Role of Special Education Leadership

The role of an administrator who provides oversight to a special education program

includes monitoring compliance with the legal standards governing special education programs.

Nationally, special education students make up 13% of the population, and administrators can

spend upward of 21% of their workweek tending to special education-related matters (NCES,

2018; Van Vooren, 2018). Additionally, special education administrators are responsible for

creating, "the conditions that will allow principals, teachers, and others to do their jobs

effectively" (Martin et al., 2014, p. 27). These conditions are created through the development

of critical knowledge, skills, and dispositions, as well as providing adequate resources and

structures to support the work required to educate all students (Schechter & Feldman, 2019).

Administrators who are tasked with supervising special education programs must

understand the responsibilities of the special education teacher to provide appropriate guidance

and oversight. While all special education programs are monitored and supervised, only 27

states require a specific license or certification to become a special education administrator

(Boscardin et al., 2010). Regardless of whether administrators in a particular state hold a special education administrator license, they may be required to provide this supervision in at least 23 states (Boscardin et al., 2010). This includes knowledge of IDEA and an understanding of how students are expected to receive a FAPE education in the LRE (Crockett, 2002). Administrators must know and understand how IEPs work and their role in the process. This series of acronyms (i.e., IDEA, FAPE, LRE, and IEP) is only the beginning of what could read similar to an entire dictionary of terms, policies, procedures, and practices with which school divisions, and by extension, administrators are bound. It is reasonable to expect individuals to possess the knowledge and skills to understand the rules by which they must abide within their school buildings. Building administrators are responsible not only for knowledge of but also compliance with the activities within the school building relative to special education at the federal, state, and local levels.

Additional skills that administrators may require to be effective special education leaders may include the ability to find effective, dynamic educators to teach within their program (Voltz & Collins, 2010). These leaders must possess critical skills in instructional leadership related to special education (Veale, 2010). This instructional leadership must address collaboration, communication, capacity building, and the ability to solve problems (Seltzer, 2011). If administrators do not receive sufficient training on how to identify exceptional special education teachers, their hiring practices could be adversely affected (Steinbrecher et al., 2015).

Teacher supervision and evaluation. School administrators are the primary supervisors of all teachers, including special education teachers, at the building level (Seltzer, 2011). Special education teachers are traditionally observed, evaluated, and mentored through the same process as their general education peers (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016). Supervision is oriented toward

professional standards, professional goals, and building-level practices. However, when conducting observations utilizing rubrics and observation forms designed to monitor general education teachers, administrators may not receive a true picture of what is happening in the classroom (Lawson & Cruz, 2018b; Rodl, Bonifay, Cruz, & Manchanda, 2018). Rating forms designed for general education can arguably neglect the specially designed, individualized, ever-changing, and often non-traditional methods that special education teachers employ to provide an adequate education to students with disabilities (Johnson, Moylan, Crawford, & Ford, 2016; Lawson & Cruz, 2018b). While some rubrics have been developed with special education supervision in mind, they are not commonly utilized; therefore, special education administrators must be certain that they are considering the tools they are utilizing to evaluate teachers (Johnson, Zheng, & Crawford, 2018).

Rubrics are not the only issue; even if rubrics are designed to properly target the job responsibilities of special education teachers, administrators still need to know exactly how to utilize these rating tools properly. Lawson and Cruz (2018b) found that administrators were unable to agree during observations (reliability = 1.0) on whether a special education teacher was meeting the needs of students. Meeting the needs of students is the primary job responsibility of most special education teachers. To provide quality teacher supervision, it is critical that administrators have the proper training to give meaningful feedback to all teachers, including those in special education (Alila et al., 2016). Special education teachers benefit from critical performance feedback to improve practice and grow as educators, and this feedback also positively impacts student outcomes (Collins, Cook, Sweigart, & Evanovich, 2018; Schles & Robertson, 2019). Lawson and Knollman (2017) reported that seasoned administrators feel most confident conducting evaluations and observations of special education teachers due to their

years of experience with this task. Novice administrators do not have the benefit of years of experience preceding the expectation that they supervise and provide constructive feedback to teachers—special education or otherwise.

The passing of the ESSA in 2015 cited the importance of teacher supervision by providing funding to states and localities to facilitate training on supervision and feedback for administrators (Rodl et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Even with training on supervision and observation, administrators assigned to supervise and evaluate special education teachers may not be adequately equipped to discern what proper SDI is and whether the special education teacher is educating students in the LRE (Schaaf et al., 2015). Administrators reported feeling a degree of inadequacy with supervising special education programs because they did not fully understand the expectations of these programs (Roberts & Guerra, 2017). Part of this inadequacy stems from the lack of prior experience with special education that many administrators bring to their positions (Rodl et al., 2018). This lack of administrative knowledge relative to teacher supervision and evaluation has been shown to contribute to the rising attrition rate of special education teachers in the United States (Seltzer, 2011). Andrews and Brown (2015) found that participants did not receive the amount of administrative support that they would like to have with the amount of contact and encouragement cited as lingering issues. Teachers prematurely leaving the profession negatively affects student performance, specifically students with disabilities, and therefore, administrators need to work to support the existing workforce to positively impact retention (Hagaman & Casey, 2018).

Programming. School administrators oversee the implementation of school-based programs, including special education programs. This includes student and teacher schedules. When programming for special education students and teachers, administrators must be aware of

the requirements of the IEPs that exist within their buildings and how student schedules are affected by their unique needs as outlined in these documents (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2017). Special education students must be included, to the greatest extent possible, with students who are nondisabled (U.S. Department of Education, 2007b). Attention to these details requires awareness and knowledge of special education processes. School administrators must ensure that teachers are certified to teach in the settings where they are assigned and that students are properly programmed for as specified in their IEPs. Additionally, administrators must make sure that special education case managers are properly assigned based on the disability of the student and the type of license that the teacher holds (Virginia Department of Education, 2016). School administrators must utilize the continuum of placements within their buildings to schedule students properly into classes and facilitate appropriate participation with nondisabled peers (Sadeh & Sullivan, 2017). School administrators should also analyze the continuum of placements available to ensure that they are appropriate and that they are structured to enable students to make adequate progress (Lemons, Vaughn, Wexler, Kearns, & Sinclair, 2018).

Discipline. Knowledge and understanding of discipline practices for students with disabilities are necessary for school administrators to remain compliant with best practices and special education law (Essex, 2016; Lewis, 2017). The discipline of students with disabilities who are protected under IDEA must conform to specific rules (IDEA, 2006). Since building administrators are responsible for discipline, to remain compliant, they must abide by the regulations. The discipline, specifically the suspension of a student with a documented disability for up to 10 days, is permissible. If an administrator is seeking to suspend a student with a disability for more than 10 school days, a manifest determination meeting must be held (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). During the manifest determination meeting, the team must

decide whether the punishable offense is a result of the student's documented disability. If the offense is not a manifestation of the disability, then school administrators can impose the discipline as they normally would. By contrast, if the student is determined to have acted in a manner that is consistent with the documented disability, the school cannot continue to suspend or exclude him or her for this action. Additionally, if the school has not properly implemented the student's IEP, the student cannot be disciplined for this action (Lewis, 2017).

The strict requirements that regulate the discipline of students with disabilities stem from a demonstrated disproportionality between the discipline of students with disabilities compared to students without disabilities (Bradley-Williams, Bryant-Mallory, Coleman, Goetel, & Hall, 2017; Raj, 2018; Richard & Hardin, 2018). Even with the imposition of strict requirements, students with disabilities continue to be suspended up to twice as frequently as their nondisabled peers for the same offenses (Raj, 2018; Richard & Hardin, 2018). The disproportionate discipline of students with disabilities demonstrates a gap in the statutory language of LRE and FAPE and the practices of schools issuing discipline (Raj, 2018). Bradley-Williams et al. (2017) stated, "reducing disproportionality as it relates to discipline referrals and special education eligibility determination is incumbent on the creation and consistent implementation of fair, unbiased school policy" (p. 248). The policies exist in the form of federal and state laws. However, consistent implementation of these policies is lacking. School administrators must receive proper education and training to provide appropriate discipline to students with disabilities that enables students to derive the maximum benefit from their educational programs while avoiding inequitable practices (Bradley-Williams et al., 2017).

Meetings. Administrators who supervise special education programs attend meetings for numerous reasons to support special education students and their families. These meetings

include those where referrals are made to determine whether a student requires an evaluation for

the consideration of special education services (Smeets & Roeleveld, 2016). Following referral

meetings, in the event that a child is evaluated, the team convenes an eligibility meeting where it

is determined if the child requires the provision of specially designed instruction due to meeting

the criteria for a specific disability as outlined in IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2007b;

IDEA, 2006). Each child who qualifies for special education services receives an IEP, which

must be reviewed, at a minimum, annually at an IEP meeting where the document is revised to

reflect progress and current needs (CEC, 2017). Additionally, the eligibility of students with

disabilities is reviewed, at a minimum, every three years at a meeting where the team determines

whether the student continues to meet the criteria for special education and whether additional

testing is required to make that determination (Zirkel, 2017a).

As discussed with discipline, students who are experiencing behavioral difficulties

requiring disciplinary suspension beyond 10 school days require a manifest determination

meeting where the behavior is analyzed relative to the documented disability (Lewis, 2017).

Each member of an IEP team has the right to call an IEP team meeting at any time to discuss an

issue regarding a student (Diliberto & Brewer, 2014). Another type of meeting that

administrators may attend for students with disabilities is to establish the need for and gain

consent for a functional behavioral assessment, which seeks to determine the root cause of

problem behaviors (Scott & Cooper, 2017). Following a functional behavioral assessment, if a

root cause is determined, the team meets to put a behavior intervention plan in place to assist the

student with the problem behavior at school (Zirkel, 2011).

While this is not an exhaustive list of the types of meetings that administrators may

encounter during the supervision of special education programs, it provides context for the

occasions in which administrators are expected to participate as informed members of a duly constituted team (Hartmann, 2016). During special education meetings, there are documents that need to be prepared, signed considerations that need to be made, and specific participants who need to be invited and included (IDEA, 2006). Administrators are required to draft prior written notice documents and send them to parents indicating what was proposed and/or refused during the meeting and what actions are being taken as a result of the meeting. The information contained in prior written notice documents is legally binding, and such documents must be provided within 10 days of the meeting to parents. There are procedures for invitations, excusal, and permission to proceed without a parent that must be thoroughly considered (U.S. Department of Education, 2007a). If administrators lack the appropriate knowledge, they may agree to something that they cannot deliver or inappropriately deny a request made by a member of the team.

Administrator Preparation to Supervise Special Education

According to Fan, Gallup, Bocanegra, Wu, and Zhang (2019), "It is vital that today's special education administration programs prepare competent leaders to ensure successful implementation of special education services in school" (p. 40). Despite the continued need for special education programs to serve students with disabilities, research shows that public school administrators are not adequately prepared to supervise special education programs when they begin their administrative journeys (Martin et al., 2014; Schaaf et al., 2015). In a study conducted by Schaaf et al. (2015), more than half of the administrators who were surveyed on their preparedness to supervise special education programs indicated that they did not feel adequately prepared to fulfill their role. Regardless of licensure endorsement, assigned special education administrators are instrumental in ensuring a proper education is delivered to students

with disabilities (Martin et al., 2014). This lack of training is not only a concern instructionally but also legally. According to Cobb (2015), "Principals must not only be aware of special education law but also be prepared for possible legal conflicts in relation to a school's orientation" (p. 213). Principal turnover can be affected by the number of special education students receiving special education services in a given school building (Rangel, 2018). While the national special education population is approximately 13% of all students, school administrators have been reported to spend upward of 21% of their time on special-education-related matters (NCES, 2018; Van Vooren, 2018).

Knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to supervise a special education program involve awareness of the laws, policies, and procedures in place at the federal and state level (Boscardin et al., 2010). Strong (2019) indicated that to supervise special education programs properly, "it takes skillful leadership, strong interpersonal ability, as well as advanced knowledge of instructional methods" (p. 58). Administrators with prior special education experience reported spending more than average time on special-education-related tasks; the level of comfort associated with experience is evident (Stevenson-Jacobson et al., 2006). School administrators have identified critical competencies that they must possess to supervise a special education program properly, to include: managing education of students in the LRE, collaborative teaching strategies, special education procedures, state and federal requirements, and the supervision of special education teachers (Cobb, 2015; Stevenson-Jacobson et al., 2006).

Administrators are further responsible for the social and behavioral aspects of special education, proper discipline, and the entirety of the special education process in the building (Cobb, 2015). One critical disposition of a special education administrator is "balancing the

views of a wide variety of stakeholders who may, at times, have diverging perspectives on student needs and supports" (Cobb, 2015, p. 229). Special education teachers can be adversely affected if their administrators lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to provide adequate support. Novice special education teachers reported feeling unsupported by their building administrators due to a lack of knowledge regarding special education practices (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). Special education teachers reported feeling less stress and lower levels of burnout when they were supported properly by the administration (Caputo & Ricci, 2017). In a field where it is crucial to retain employees, support provided by the administration is critical.

A lack of appropriate knowledge regarding special education policy and law can have catastrophic consequences for school divisions. If administrators make errors regarding properly educating a student with a disability or fail to follow the proper procedures while providing such an education, legal action can be taken by families (Couvillon et al., 2018). Administrators must utilize available resources, ask questions, and make informed decisions to determine whether appropriate action is being taken during special education meetings. While this can seem like a daunting task, the legal protections and precedents are clear that the procedures, policies, and laws are in place to protect the child and the family and, therefore, must be followed explicitly.

To clarify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for administrators, organizations have developed standards that provide a measure for administrators. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the CEC outline specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions for administrators (Seltzer, 2011). While the ISLLC standards are broadly adopted into administrator preparation programs, the CEC standards are not required of administrator preparation programs but rather recommended by the CEC. Even with the

existence of clear standards and expectations for special education leadership, "administrators need better preparation in understanding the types of knowledge and skills demanded of effective special educators" (Steinbrecher et al., 2015, p. 100).

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium. The ISLLC consists of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association, with the purpose of reforming school leadership standards (Storey & Johnson, 2017). ISLLC issued standards for educational leadership policy initially in 1996 and then updated these standards in 2008 (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). The revised ISLLC standards were readily adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2008). Many higher education institutions and state licensure boards utilize the ISLLC standards to instruct students who are enrolled in educational administration coursework (The Wallace Foundation, n.d.). McCarthy, Shelton, and Murphy (2016) reported that 45 states and Washington DC have utilized the ISLLC standards in pure form or adopted them in some way before incorporating them into licensure requirements for school administrators. ISLLC describes a basic listing of what the National Policy Board for Educational Administration believes should be required of school administrators prior to accepting a position within a school. The standards are:

- Standard 1: An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared by all stakeholders.

- Standard 2: An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

- Standard 3: An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

- Standard 4: An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

- Standard 5: An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

- Standard 6: An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context. (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2008, pp. 3-5)

The repetitive use of the phrase "every student" in the ISLLC standards places value on students from all backgrounds with all types of learning needs indicating that special education students are also considered within the standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2008). While the ISLLC standards are inclusive of every student, they do not provide a roadmap for preparation programs to determine who various student groups are and how to prepare administrators to supervise these students. It is ultimately up to each individual preparation program to incorporate standards according to state licensure requirements.

Council for Exceptional Children. The CEC's mission statement is, "The Council for Exceptional Children is a professional association of educators dedicated to advancing the success of children with exceptionalities. We accomplish our mission through advocacy, standards, and professional development" (CEC, 2019). Part of this mission includes outlining standards for administrators who oversee special education programs. The CEC standards

provide some commonalities with ISLLC standards; however, the CEC outlines specific

knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to supervise special education programs (Council

for Exceptional Children, 2010). The CEC standards for administrators are:

- Leadership and policy: Advocate for legal and ethical policy that supports high-quality

  education for individuals with exceptional learning needs; provide leadership to create

  procedures that respect all individuals and positive and productive work environments.

- Program development and organization: Improve instructional programs at the school and

  system levels; develops procedures to improve management systems; design professional

  development to support the use of evidence-based practices; coordinate educational

  standard with the need of children with exceptionalities to access challenging curriculum

  standards; use understanding of the effects of cultural, societal, and economic diversity

  and variations of individual development to help develop programs and services for

  individuals with exceptional needs.

- Research and inquiry: Use education research to improve instructional and intervention

  techniques and materials; foster an environment that supports instructional

  improvements; and engage in action research.

- Student program evaluation: Design and implement research to evaluate the effectiveness

  of instructional practices and program goals, apply knowledge and skill at all stages of

  the evaluation process for student learning of the general education curriculum and

  individualized IEP goals.

- Professional development and ethical practice: Safeguard the legal rights of students,

  families, and personnel; present and evaluate professional development that focuses on

  effective practice; continuously broaden personal, professional knowledge, including

expertise to support student access to learning through effective teaching strategies, curriculum standards, and assistive technology.

- Collaboration: Understand the importance of collaboration and foster the integration of services for individuals with exceptionalities; understand the role of collaboration of internal and external stakeholders to promote understanding, resolve conflicts, and build consensus to provide services to these students and their families; understand the interactions of language diversity, culture, and religion and use collaboration to enhance opportunities for individuals with exceptionalities. (Council for Exceptional Children, 2010, p. 1)

Steinbrecher et al. (2015) found that school administrators lacked sufficient knowledge on the CEC standards, particularly in relation to utilizing research-based practices for students with disabilities. A needs assessment for administrators relative to the CEC standards revealed that administrators need further training on the development of programs, instructional practices, and appropriate educational practices for students with disabilities (Bai & Martin, 2015). There are no existing requirements that direct higher education programs to incorporate CEC standards into administrative preparation programs; therefore, it is often up to administrators to immerse themselves in these standards.

Administrator preparation programs. The quality and type of administrator preparation programs drive the outcomes and impact that administrators have upon graduating and accepting positions as school leaders (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). Candidates should examine and review programs that suit their professional learning needs as well as career goals. As far as admission requirements, most programs in the United States that prepare administrators require letters of recommendation, Graduate Record Exam scores of a certain threshold, as well

as transcripts from prior schooling experiences to determine admission (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). Often, there is a level of experience and/or education required prior to candidates being considered for licensure; however, this may not be a requirement for admittance into the preparation program (Crockett, 2002).

Hirth and Valesky (1990) noted that a significant percentage of administrative preparation programs do not require significant coursework in special education programs. While nearly 30 years have passed since Hirth and Valesky (1990) revealed the issue with administrator preparation programs, current research indicates that there continues to be minimal exposure to special education throughout administrator preparation programs (McHatton et al., 2010; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Schaaf et al., 2015; Seltzer, 2011). According to Schaaf et al. (2015), "The skills required of school administrators to provide effective leadership have expanded in recent years to include responsibility for responding to the needs of increasingly diverse student and teacher populations" (p. 172). The dynamic student and teacher population includes special education teachers and programs.

Research has shown that although administrators are responsible for supervising special education programs, they have not received what they perceived to be adequate training during their higher education journeys to provide oversight to these programs effectively (McHatton et al., 2010; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Schaaf et al., 2015; Seltzer, 2011). The lack of preparation that administrators receive during their formal administration programs can be offset by the on-the-job training offered at some job locations (Miller, 2018). On-the-job training varies by job location and is not standardized. There is little research to support the best methods for on-the-job training for special education administrators.

Administrators who feel underprepared to support special education programs do not appear to have received training on the published competencies that the CEC has outlined. Additionally, "the knowledge and skill areas that go beyond those reflected in the CEC and ISLLC standards include areas related to staff recruitment and retention equity issues, instructional leadership, collaboration, and assessment" (Voltz & Collins, 2010, p. 72). Furthermore, school administrators must be properly trained to set the tone for the building regarding the culture of how students are included and how special education programs are viewed (Horrocks et al., 2008). Higher education programs must address the need for public school administrators who are charged with supervising special education programs to possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to provide that supervision properly.

In a study conducted by Schaaf et al. (2015), more than half of the administrators who were surveyed about their preparedness to supervise special education programs indicated that they did not feel adequately prepared to fulfill their role. This finding was in alignment with Seltzer (2011), who indicated that of 20,000 administrators, fewer than 1% who are responsible for special education programs have a special education endorsement. The lack of direct training for administrators to supervise public school special education programs was the focus of this research study.

Current research does not indicate what the essence of the experience is for administrators as they learn to supervise special education programs. Existing preparation and training programs are criticized for their alignment to the actual job responsibilities of school administrators (Black, Martin, & Danzig, 2014). It is necessary to determine which steps training and preparation programs must take to align and prepare administrators for the jobs they

are seeking. Understanding the essence of novice administrators' experiences as they supervise special education programs helped define the steps for future professionals.

       Licensure. Special education administrators at the building level could be the same individuals who are responsible for general education programs. Crockett (2002) interviewed 40 administrators with no formal special education training, and each indicated responsibility for the special education programs within their building. The combined role of general education and special education administrator is the result of many states adopting an approach to licensure that provides a standard endorsement in administration and supervision while only 27 states require a specific license to supervise special education programs (Boscardin et al., 2010; Crockett, 2002). To become certified in administration and supervision, administrators must meet the certification requirements issued by the state in which they work, "States' principal licensure systems aim to serve as a primary means for guaranteeing some level of leadership quality by establishing minimum requirements for new school leaders" (Grissom, Mitani, & Blissett, 2017, p. 248). It is up to individual states to determine the best way, if at all, to incorporate the recommendations of the CEC into their certification requirements. In general, states tend to require that administrative candidates complete an approved preparation program, have a certain number of years of teaching experience, and pass some sort of licensure exam (Grissom et al., 2017).

       At least 20 states and the District of Columbia utilize the School Leadership Licensure Assessment exam to grant licensure to school administrators, which is administered by the Educational Testing Service (2019). The School Leadership Licensure Assessment exam is aligned with ISLLC standards, which do not necessarily focus on special education administration like the CEC standards (Grissom et al., 2017). In addition to existing licensure requirements, since the passage of the ESSA, states have spent time reviewing the impact of

administrators and allocating funds to support these school leaders (Scott, 2018). In 2018, 36

states introduced legislation related to school leader preparation and licensure initiatives

indicating that additional updates to requirements may be forthcoming (Scott, 2018). Regardless

of the licensure endorsement pathway, assigned special education administrators are instrumental

in ensuring a proper education is delivered to students with disabilities. The role of

administrators as LEAs places them in the position to monitor the climate and implementation of

IDEA within their buildings (Martin et al., 2014).

Professional development. School administrators attend professional development

sessions to deepen their understanding of educational practice, learn new methodologies, or gain

exposure to varying pedagogy. States require that school administrators participate in

professional development activities to recertify their licensure in administration and supervision

(Spanneut, Tobin, & Ayers, 2012). Administrators reported attending conference-styled

professional development (94%), followed by visiting other schools (72%), and taking college-

level courses (25%) to fulfill their professional development needs (Lavigne, Shakman, Zweig,

& Greller, 2016). While some districts and organizations offer ongoing support for school

administrators through structured leadership academy-styled courses, this is not broadly granted

to individuals, nor is the content regulated to ensure maximum benefit (Allen & Weaver, 2014).

Administrators report feeling isolated in their decision making regarding which

professional development opportunities to attend (Black et al., 2014). This level of isolation

does not necessarily provide administrators with the necessary professional development and

direction required to expand and deepen their practices. Time is another variable that can

prevent administrators from appropriate professional development activities related to special

education practice or any other administrative responsibility. Administrators have numerous

responsibilities that require a significant amount of time and effort to carry out. The time devoted to professional learning may not be enough to deepen fully the understanding of special education leadership practices (Bai & Martin, 2015).

Administrators are not only responsible for knowing and understanding the existing special education laws, policies, and procedures but also remaining current on changes that are being proposed. Specifically, special education legal cases can result in decisions that inform future practice and policy and ultimately change the landscape of how special education looks in school buildings (Couvillon et al., 2018). Failure to remain current on special education case law can have expensive consequences for administrators and school buildings. Administrators must consider their individual, personal, professional development plan, and intentionally incorporate professional learning related to special education (Bai & Martin, 2015; Couvillon et al., 2018).

Interpretations of special education law. IDEA is a federal law that regulates special education; however, federal agencies, state governments, and local school districts have the ability to interpret this federal law in different manners. The U.S. Department of Education and the Office of Special Education Programs often issue interpretations and guidance relative to special education law, which school administrators are expected to know and understand (Zirkel, 2017b). Additionally, state governments can add additional rights to students with disabilities and require more strict regulations (Rosen, n.d.). The U.S. Supreme Court has heard 12 cases regarding special education, and those decisions provide additional interpretation and guidance to school divisions (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2019). Some common interpretive differences include eligibility, FAPE, LRE, procedural safeguards, early intervention, age of eligibility, and age of transition services (Rosen, n.d.). Cobb (2015) stated, "it is important to note that while jurisdictions might have similarities, special education axioms are neither static nor universal"

(p. 214). Therefore, educational leaders who receive their training and experience in one state may need to become educated on the differences between their initial training and the practices and policies if they move to another state.

The method for determining eligibility for a specific learning disability, developmental delay, or for transition services is often different by state and local interpretation (Rosen, n.d.; Zirkel, 2017b). IDEA provides three methods for determination for a specific learning disability; response to intervention, a pattern of strengths and weaknesses, and a severe discrepancy; which states then need to determine how to best interpret and utilize (IDEA, 2006). The category of developmental delay is not defined fully by IDEA (2006) and leaves states and localities the freedom to determine what constitutes a delay and what age certain difficulties can no longer be considered a developmental delay. The identification and criteria for determining an intellectual disability also vary by state interpretation and guidance (McNicholas et al., 2018). IDEA requires that transition planning for after high school begins at age 16; states and localities may begin this process sooner if they desire to do so. Administrators and special educators are accountable for federal laws, state laws, and local interpretations as they relate to special education. Administrators cannot assume similarities between LEA and states if they change employers, as the regulations can actually be quite different.

IDEA outlines specific procedural safeguards regarding the special education processes, including the order of steps, timelines, and complaint procedures. States' interpretations of timelines may include more strict time limitations as well as specifications involving business days as opposed to calendar days. To remain compliant with all regulations, teams must ensure they comply with all timeline regulations, including federal, state, and local. Complaint procedures are another largely interpreted subsection of IDEA (Hansen & Zirkel, 2018). IDEA

provides specific guidance on which components must be a part of complaint procedures; however, states and LEAs have the ability to specify exactly how complaint procedures take place within their locality (IDEA, 2006). Hansen and Zirkel (2018) reported that complaint procedures could often be ambiguous for school stakeholders. Administrators must, therefore, be extra vigilant to ensure that they are aware of, and in compliance with, complaint procedures.

States and localities are provided latitude with regard to providing FAPE and LRE because IDEA indicates that a variety of placements must be available; however, it does not detail what specific placements must be available within the range (IDEA, 2006; Rosen, n.d.). The variable availability of placements within localities means that special education administrators must be certain of the placements available when considering FAPE and LRE for special education students.

Summary

Students with disabilities are serviced in special education programs that are mandated by federal law and have many specific requirements that need to be followed by individual schools. School administrators are often mandated to supervise special education programs within their buildings where they are held to the legal boundaries set by federal, state, and local governments. While supervising special education programs within school buildings, administrators are responsible for teacher supervision and evaluation, programming for students, the discipline of students with disabilities, and attending meetings regarding special education processes. School administrators are required to have attended a state-approved preparation program and hold a license in administration to be offered a position in a school building (Martin et al., 2014). However, the current literature strongly supports the idea that higher education preparation programs do not provide sufficient preparation for administrators regarding the supervision of

special education programs (Martin et al., 2014; Schaaf et al., 2015). Furthermore, licensure considerations do not require significant training on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to provide supervision for special education programs prior to receiving an endorsement in administration and supervision (Crockett, 2002). While there are organizations that publish administrator standards such as ISLLC and the CEC standards, administrative programs continue to deemphasize the special education needs of new administrators (Schaaf et al., 2015).

The current literature does not address the experiences that novice administrators have as they assume responsibility for special education programs and their experiences as they acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to provide adequate supervision. This study addressed the gap in the literature by providing an analysis of the essence of the shared experience of novice public school administrators as they assume responsibility for supervising special education programs. This unique perspective brings insight into the successes, failures, and frustrations of novice administrators. Additionally, this study could inform future policy and practices regarding the preparation of administrators to supervise special education programs properly.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how novice, public school administrators experience and learn to supervise special education programs. This chapter explores the qualitative, transcendental phenomenological design that was used for this study. Participants were solicited from schools in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia by using purposive sampling from three selected school districts. This chapter describes the participant selection and data collection procedures, including participant journals, interviews, and focus group sessions. Data analysis procedures are described with the purpose of arriving at the essence of the shared experience. Finally, the trustworthiness and ethical considerations are outlined.

Design

This was a qualitative study using a phenomenological design. This research required a deep and thorough investigation into the varying special education experiences of a small population of novice public school administrators regarding special education supervision, which made qualitative research the most appropriate. The varying responsibilities of building-level administrators as they relate to special education and the level of preparedness that those administrators felt when executing their responsibilities were explored. A phenomenological design was used for this study because I sought to identify the essence of learning to supervise special education programs across multiple administrators (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology, as it is known today, stems from the work of Edmond Husserl in the early 1900s (as cited in Moustakas, 1994). Husserl described the practices for obtaining knowledge based on consciously available information that can be viewed by individuals. Moustakas (1994)

extended and applied Husserl's phenomenology to human research methods. The phenomenon examined in this study was the shared experiences of a group of novice public school administrators as they supervised special education programs. Transcendental phenomenology derived from the concept of emerging beyond prior experience to engage anew with phenomena to arrive at the crux of an encounter or existence (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) stated, "phenomenology is rooted in questions that give direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced" (p. 59). Through using transcendental phenomenology, I was able to reach beyond my personal experiences to determine what it means to learn to supervise a special education program when administrators are historically ill-prepared to perform such supervision (Martin et al., 2014; Schaaf et al., 2015). A transcendental phenomenological approach means that this study could influence policy and practice in the field of administration and supervision. Special education supervision requires specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and it is necessary that higher education, as well as licensing boards, be informed regarding how administrators acquire this information.

Research Questions

The CRQ was as follows:

What are the lived experiences of novice, public school administrators as they supervise special education programs?

The subquestions were as follows:

1. What prior experiences do novice administrators bring to their positions that motivate them to learn about special education supervision?

2. While supervising special education programs, what challenges prompt novice administrators to seek additional information about their practice?

3. How do novice administrators tailor their individual learning experiences to deepen their understanding of special education supervision?

Setting

The setting was local school divisions in the Hampton Roads area, located in the southeastern part of Virginia. The sample was taken from administrators at school divisions with varying percentages of special education students relative to the total population. The range for the region was approximately 11-16% (Virginia Department of Education, 2016). According to the NCES (2018), the national percentage of students with disabilities is 13%. While this sample was convenient to the researcher, it was also representative of the proportion of special education students in the national population. Therefore, the sample was drawn from administrators who, generally speaking, encounter an average (approximately 13%) special education population within their school buildings (NCES, 2018).

Participants

The sample pool for this study consisted of all of the willing novice school administrators in three public school districts in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. Utilizing purposive sampling, of novice public school administrators from this pool who were responsible for supervising special education programs in their school, I sought 12 to participate; ultimately, 10 participants completed the study (see Table 1). Only novice administrators with fewer than three years of experience as administrators who were currently serving in a school with a special education program were selected. The two participants who did not complete the study withdrew due to personal and work commitments.

Table 1

Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Job Title	Level	Number of years of experience
Amy	Female	AP	Elementary	1
Ann	Female	AP	Elementary	1
Earl	Male	AP	Secondary	2
Jamie	Female	AP	Elementary	2
Lisa	Female	AP	Secondary	2
May	Female	AP	Secondary	3
Ryan	Male	P	Elementary	3
Scarlett	Female	AP	Elementary	1
Suzanne	Female	P	Elementary	1
Thomasine	Female	AP	Elementary	3

Note. AP = assistant principal, P = principal.

Procedures

Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to the collection of any data (see Appendix A). Three school districts were identified and consented to participation in this study.

Data collection tools were reviewed by two experts in the field to ensure face and content validity. The first expert reviewer had a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and a background in special education and school administration. The second expert reviewer held a Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Foundations and Leadership with a background as a school administrator. Based on the expert reviews, I adjusted some of the interview questions to reduce

redundancy, broaden the scope of questioning, and to position the supervision of special education within the greater picture of administration.

Once full IRB approval was acquired, a pilot study was conducted with two participants to test the data collection tools and refine interview skills. Pilot study participants met all study criteria; however, the data collected from the pilot were not analyzed. While no adjustments to interview protocols or data collection tools were made, the pilot study strengthened my interview skills and provided an opportunity to test recording equipment and transcription. After transcribing pilot study tools by hand, ultimately, a professional transcription service (Rev.com) was selected to transcribe the data for the remainder of the study.

After the pilot study was completed, participants were recruited by first reaching out to all public school administrators in the participating school districts using an electronic recruitment letter (see Appendix B). The recruitment letter included an electronic screening survey (see Appendix C) to ensure that participants met the study criteria. After receiving the screening surveys, the administrators who met the criteria for participation received an acceptance, and those administrators who did not meet the criteria received a rejection email (see Appendix D). Consent forms were emailed to participants who received acceptance emails and returned signed electronically (see Appendix E). Prior to data collection, participants were asked to select a pseudonym that was used as an identifier throughout the research process.

Once I received the consent forms, participants were provided with their electronic journals. Following the journaling process, each participant was interviewed individually and then asked to participate in a focus group session. As participants completed individual interviews, the recordings were transcribed by Rev.com. Transcripts were emailed to participants for member checking, and they had the opportunity to approve the transcript or issue

corrections prior to data analysis. All participants approved their individual interview transcripts prior to analysis. Focus group sessions were also transcribed by Rev.com prior to analysis. Once all data were collected, they were analyzed by following the procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994).

The Researcher's Role

When I served as a special education teacher, my administrators had not received significant preparation on how to supervise special education programs. Conversely, as a special education teacher, I received significant pre-service and in-service training on best practices in special education to keep my knowledge current and increase the breadth and depth of my skills. While I was building capacity as a special education teacher, I noticed that my administrators were not alongside me on that journey. Instead, I was tasked with properly implementing new initiatives that I learned with minimal or no oversight. The administrators whom I worked for did not question my decisions relative to the special education process. While I appreciated their confidence in my abilities at that time, I later realized that I was the expert they were relying on when making special-education-related decisions.

As the human instrument in this qualitative study, I served an important role in data collection through interaction with participants. I served as the point of contact, interviewer, and data analyst. This role required that I utilized the *epoche* process to acknowledge my personal biases and bracket them out to appropriately analyze the data. I have professional relationships with several individuals whom I invited to participate in this study because they met the participant criteria. However, I am not, nor have I ever been, in a position of authority over the participants whom I invited to participate in this study. While it is possible that some

participants may have been sympathetic to my desire to complete this dissertation, none of them cited that as a reason for participation.

Data Collection

To collect data appropriately for transcendental phenomenology, the research question must be thoroughly justified so that the nature of the study is evident (Moustakas, 1994). The primary method of data collection in this investigation was the interview process, where the researcher engaged with participants by asking questions and allowing the appropriate time and space to respond (Moustakas, 1994). To triangulate data and develop a true qualitative study, participant journals and focus group interviews were appropriate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By using participant journals, interviews, and focus groups, this study sought to determine the essence of the experience for participants.

Participant Journals

To achieve a deep understanding of the lived experience of supervising special education programs as a novice administrator, participants journaled their special education experiences for two weeks. Participant journaling took place prior to interviews to gain the participants' views of their experiences prior to them hearing the interview and focus group questions. Participants received an electronic journal template to record their thoughts for two weeks relative to their experiences with special education supervision (see Appendix F). Participants received all of the prompts at the same time and were provided an electronic reminder at the 7-day and thirteen-day marks (see Appendix G). Participants were provided prompts as a guiding source; however, they were invited to include any relevant information regarding their special education experiences. After two weeks, journals were electronically collected for data analysis. Each participant received the same style of electronic journal and set of instructions. The journals had open-

ended prompts to assist participants in their journaling. There was a disclaimer that indicated the prompts were only to guide their thinking; participants were free to describe the experience as they saw fit. Participants were asked to journal as much as possible in the two-week period to gain as much insight into their experiences as possible. Participants received a reminder email about the journaling process at the one-week point in their journaling experience. The guiding prompts were as follows:

- How did your prior experiences assist you in the supervision of special education?

- Reflect on your recent experience with special education supervision.

- What opportunities for growth do you have regarding special education supervision?

- How do you maximize your success in supervising special education programs?

- What other thoughts do you have regarding your supervision of the special education program in your school?

These guiding prompts were based on the (Knowles et al., 2015) principles of adult learning. Specifically, these prompts were designed to tap into the andragogy of participants relative to special education supervision (Knowles et al., 2015). At the conclusion of the two-week period, participants turned in their journals to the researcher, and the interview process began.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of participant experiences relative to the phenomenon being investigated. Interviews were conducted at a place convenient to each participant. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the Rev.com professional transcription service. Detailed participant interviews are at the heart of a transcendental phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994). Interview questions (see Appendix H) were

worded to allow maximum coverage of the research objectives and questions while allowing

participants the space to elaborate and provide their individual experiences.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your prior experiences before becoming an administrator.

2. How do your previous experiences inform the supervision of special education programs?

3. What do you wish you knew about special education supervision prior to assuming responsibility?

4. Describe your role in the supervision of special education in your building.

5. How do you feel about being able to support special education teachers?

6. Are you motivated to learn more about special education supervision? If yes, what motivates you to learn more about special education? If no, why not?

7. How do you know that you are successfully supervising special education?

8. How do you balance the needs of special education programs with the other things you have to learn?

9. What is your main source of professional learning regarding special education supervision?

10. If you attend educational conferences that have a special education track for administrators, how often do you select those sessions (frequently, sometimes, maybe one session, rarely, or never)?

11. What other learning experiences do you participate in to deepen your knowledge of special education programs?

12. What has been the most meaningful learning experience for you regarding the supervision of special education programs?

13. How do you acquire the knowledge to solve everyday problems related to special

    education supervision?

14. What satisfaction have you gained, or what frustrations do you have with supervising

    special education? How have you resolved any frustrations?

15. What is the most important thing for new administrators to know and understand as they

    assume responsibility for special education programs?

16. What advice do you have for new administrators who will assume responsibility for

    supervising special education programs?

17. What, if anything, do you wish was included in your administrator preparation program

    regarding the supervision of special education programs?

18. Is there anything else that we have not discussed that you would like to share?

Question one was designed to open the conversation by establishing a relationship and grounding the conversation in the foundation of the research study, administration, and supervision (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additional interview questions were designed to tap into the essence of the research questions using accessible terminology. The research questions were designed to understand the essence of the experiences of novice administrators as they supervise special education programs (Martin et al., 2014; Schaaf et al., 2015).

Questions 2 through 12 are related to Knowles et al.s' (2015) adult learning theory. Knowles et al., (2015) indicated that adults who are in situations where they must acquire new information process this information differently than children do. These questions framed the participants' experience with the supervision of special education programs in the context of andragogy to ground this study further within the context of the existing adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 2015).

Questions 12 through 18 are designed to analyze the value of knowledge that participants have regarding the supervision of special education programs. While special education supervision requires the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the assigned value of this knowledge and these skills by participants deepens the understanding of the shared experience. Participants were asked to determine the most important thing for new administrators to know, what information they wished they knew before supervising special education, and what advice they had for new administrators regarding special education. These questions tapped into the essence of what is valuable for participants and what holds the most meaning (Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

Questions were semi-structured in nature, allowing for follow-up and clarifying questions depending on participant responses.

Focus Group

To triangulate participant responses and deepen the understanding of the phenomenon, two focus group sessions were conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants received a choice about which focus group session they wanted to attend. Focus groups took place at sites centrally located to the participants. Focus group questions were designed to deepen the understanding of the lived experiences of participants. Focus group questions were semi-structured, and the group was recorded and transcribed by the Rev.com professional transcription service. Participants had the opportunity to come together and discuss their experiences supervising special education programs as novice administrators. Conducted in a face-to-face format, the focus groups were audio-recorded and consisted of semi-structured questions (see Appendix I).

Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to the group by describing your higher education degrees, job title, and the number of years that you have supervised special education programs.

2. What single prior experience has helped you the most during your supervision of special education programs?

3. What do you wish you knew prior to assuming responsibility for a special education program?

4. What has been the most impactful learning experience for you as you supervise special education programs?

5. How have you navigated frustrations and failures relative to special education programs?

6. What problems have you experienced with supervising special education programs?

7. Where do you turn for problem-solving expertise when you encounter a special-education-related issue?

8. What motivates you to acquire more information regarding the supervision of special education programs?

9. What recommendations do you have for professional learning experiences for other administrators supervising special education programs?

10. What would you like to see included in administrator preparation programs regarding the supervision of special education programs?

11. Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important to you?

12. Is there anything else that we have not talked about that you would like to share with this group?

Question one was designed to build rapport and make participants comfortable with the

experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions two through eight were based on (Knowles et al., 2015) adult learning theory. Adult learning theory indicates that adult learners obtain new information differently than children do based on their self-concept, personal experience, readiness to learn, problem centeredness, motivations to learn, and purpose for learning (Knowles et al., 2015). These focus group questions aligned with the questions asked in the journals and interviews to triangulate data properly and tie the study to adult learning theory. Questions nine through 12 were designed to reach the heart of the experience and determine what was most important to participants.

Data Analysis

Data in this transcendental phenomenology were analyzed through a systematic process of coding, identifying themes, developing textural and structural descriptions, and arriving at the essence of the experience for participants (Moustakas, 1994). Data were analyzed from participant journals, interviews, and focus group sessions to triangulate the information to properly arrive at the true essence of the experience. Commonalities across participants and data sources were sought. The sections below describe how data have been coded and analyzed to arrive at the essence of the experience.

Epoche

Analysis in this transcendental phenomenological study began with the process of *epoche*, which Moustakas (1994) defined as "a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time" (p. 85). As part of *epoche*, I utilized a reflexive journal to bracket my experiences with the phenomenon (see Appendix J). I found that I had to bracket out prejudices against higher education programs because I believe that they should

include more training for special education leadership. This journal began prior to the collection of data and continued throughout the study. Once *epoche* was complete, prior experiences and opinions were bracketed out of the study, and I examined only what remained (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following *epoche,* intentionality has a strong role in transcendental phenomenology because it requires a researcher to examine consciousness and the level of attention given to various concepts (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological Reduction

Through the process of transcendental phenomenological reduction, researchers seek to analyze singular experiences without regard for their own previous understandings. I had to examine the data without regard for my personal experiences and what I know about special education leadership. In transcendental phenomenology, phenomenological reduction begins with bracketing through the *epoche* process and then proceeds through horizontalization. A list was developed of all the relevant terms used by participants during the data collection phase, giving equal value to all statements (Moustakas, 1994). The next step in data analysis was to examine the data carefully and find the statements that were repeated multiple times (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All data were coded, and 101 codes were identified utilizing horizontalization. The coding process included reading each piece of data collection a minimum of three times, highlighting, coding, and discarding irrelevant terms. The statements that were repeated multiple times were deemed to be significant, and all continued to be regarded with equal value. Irrelevant terms were discarded (Moustakas, 1994). This process of defining significant statements ensured that repetitive and significant statements were attended to properly throughout the analysis process. Similar statements were grouped together into significant statements. The horizontalization process left 23 significant statements (see Appendix K).

Significant statements were repeated from 13 times (analyzing data for measurable growth) to 92 times (on-the-job training as the method for learning regarding special education supervision). Similar statements were grouped together into categories, which informed theme development.

Identify themes. Similar statements were grouped together into themes by participants to determine the experience for that individual (Moustakas, 1994). This was important to the process because it created groupings to eliminate repetitive statements (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The thematic analysis focused on references to special education and preparatory-related concepts. In addition to the projected themes, there was a possibility that unexpected themes would emerge through the research process. All themes that emerged were examined during the analysis.

Develop textural descriptions. Using the themes that emerged, textural descriptions were developed that explained what participants experienced relative to the phenomenon of supervising special education programs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The textural descriptions were derived from noema and consisted of objective descriptions of what participants experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Textural descriptions that emerged include what participants experienced as they assumed responsibility of special education programs and how they acquired the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to do so.

Develop structural descriptions. Structural descriptions focused on how participants experienced the phenomenon, including the context and surrounding factors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The structural descriptions explored the noesis through a subjective process (Moustakas, 1994). After examining themes and textural descriptions, structural descriptions were developed to aid in the development of individual participant experiences to develop a deep understanding of the essence of the overall experience.

Arrive at the Essence of the Experience

The individual themes, textural descriptions, and structural descriptions were merged to develop an aggregate experience that described the essence of the phenomenon shared across participants (Moustakas, 1994). During this step, an examination took place regarding what the experience of the participants was, as described by the participants during the interview phase (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This step analyzed the individual participant textural and structural experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This phase of data analysis focused on the combination of what participants experienced with how they experienced it to develop a description of a shared experience (Creswell & Poth). Ultimately, the textural and structural descriptions have been married to uncover the essence of the overall phenomenon of the supervision of special education programs (Moustakas, 1994).

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Trustworthiness

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Ethical qualitative research must maintain trustworthiness by examining credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Creswell & Poth). Lincoln and Guba (1985) presented credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as the measures of trustworthiness for qualitative research. Regarding trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, "the issue is no longer the investigator's characteristics but the characteristics of the data: Are they or are they not confirmable?" (p. 300). This study maintained trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the degree of accuracy and confidence that can be ascribed to the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One threat to credibility is the prior experiences and assumptions of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To maintain credibility, I utilized a memoing process by taking notes and recording my thought process throughout the research

phases in a reflexive journal. These notes assisted with bracketing out my own assumptions and

biases through *epoche*, which were then disclosed and documented (Moustakas, 1994). To

further the credibility of the study, triangulation procedures were utilized to find emerging

themes and codes across multiple data sources to include interviews, journals, and focus groups

(Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When themes occur across all three data

collection sources, their credibility is well established.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability refer to the extent to which this study was able to

accurately capture the experiences as described by participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To

ensure dependability and confirmability, information for a dependability audit was available (see

Appendix L) in the event that an independent individual was needed to review the data collected

during this study. This audit trail was maintained from the onset and transparently described the

process (Creswell & Poth). The purpose of a dependability audit was to ensure the correct steps

were followed throughout the data collection and analysis phases; this process increases the

reliability of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking was also utilized

where participants had the opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure that their experiences

were properly captured (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking gives participants, "an

immediate opportunity to correct errors of fact and challenge what are perceived to be wrong

interpretations" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314).

Transferability

Because this study examined a small group of participants utilizing qualitative measures,

there was no expectation that the results would be generalizable or transferable to a broader

population. Instead, I provided a thick and rich description of the experiences of participants to

give others the opportunity to determine whether elements of these experiences also apply to other situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, these experiences could be replicated elsewhere; therefore, this study may prompt future studies. There is the potential that higher education training programs could learn from the experiences of these novice administrators to fill potential gaps in their course offerings. This study could be utilized as a basis for future research and consideration of policy and practice reviews.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure that the risk to participants was minimal, IRB approval was obtained prior to the collection of data. Once IRB approval was granted, participants were selected and presented with an informed consent document to read and sign. Throughout the study, physical data were safeguarded in a locked file cabinet in my home office, and electronic data were safeguarded on a password-protected computer where it will remain for a three-year period. After the three-year period, physical data will be shredded, and electronic data will be deleted. School districts and participants were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Additionally, the personal background of the researcher in special education has been acknowledged and bracketed properly throughout the study to fully acknowledge the frame in which the research was set.

Summary

This study utilized a qualitative, transcendental phenomenological design that sought to arrive at the essence of the shared experience for participants relative to the supervision of special education programs. This study further examined the acquisition and evaluation of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to supervise special education programs. Participants were selected from the Hampton Roads area of Virginia and were delimited to novice school administrators with three years of experience or less supervising special education

programs. Participants were first asked to journal their experiences relative to special education supervision within their buildings for a two-week period. Following the journaling phase, participants were interviewed individually in a semi-structured process. The final step in the data collection process was the utilization of a focus group where a small group of participants were invited to come together and answer questions in a group format regarding the phenomenon. Data analysis procedures were systematically utilized to arrive at the essence of the experience for participants (Moustakas, 1994). Measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness and ethical considerations were maintained.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how novice, public school administrators experienced and learned to supervise special education programs. This chapter provides the results collected from this study, beginning with a detailed description of the participants and continuing through the entirety of the data analysis. The analysis process in this study began with *epoche* to bracket out personal experiences. The process of phenomenological reduction was completed utilizing horizontalization, theme identification, textural descriptions, structural descriptions, and the description of the essence of the experience for the participants. The five themes that emerged were: formal preparation experiences, lack of knowledge or expertise, required daily tasks, motivation for success, and acquisition of the necessary knowledge. The essence of the experience answered the CRQ: What are the lived experiences of novice, public school administrators as they supervise special education programs? Finally, utilizing the themes, the three subquestions were answered. The subquestions were as follows:

1. What prior experiences do novice administrators bring to their positions that motivate them to learn about special education supervision?

2. While supervising special education programs, what challenges prompt novice administrators to seek additional information about their practice?

3. How do novice administrators tailor their individual learning experiences to deepen their understanding of special education supervision?

Participants

A total of 12 participants responded to the screening survey. Ultimately, two participants withdrew due to other time commitments, and 10 participants completed all three stages of data collection for this study (i.e., journals, interviews, and one focus group). A tabular description of the participants can be found in Table 1. There is a deeper description of each participant in this section.

Amy

Amy was an elementary school assistant principal in her first year of experience supervising a special education program. She began her career after obtaining a Bachelor of Arts in criminal justice and a Master of Social Work, working with the rehabilitation of students who were serving time in juvenile detention centers. Following this work, she began helping parents of those students who were seeking general education development certification to obtain the necessary education and find employment. After assisting adults, Amy returned to work with students by taking a job as a school-based therapist and doing crisis work within school buildings. It was during her time as a school-based therapist that Amy discovered she desired to become a teacher. Amy went back to school and earned a master's degree in teaching. She then taught inclusion students for 16 years from second grade through sixth grade. When Amy felt called to administration, she obtained a master's degree in educational leadership. This was her first year as a school administrator. While Amy did not necessarily feel prepared to supervise special education programs, she was ready to assume the responsibility.

Ann

Ann was in her first year of building-level administration, including the supervision of a special education program. She started out as a preschool teacher for one year while sorting out

school-age licensing. Following her job as a preschool teacher, Ann taught sixth grade English for five years. During that time, Ann became certified as an administrator and served in a supplemental role as an administrative aide to gain some of the experience necessary for an administrative role. Ann was serving as an assistant principal in an elementary school that educated students in grades four through six. Ann held a Bachelor of Science in childhood education and a master's degree in educational leadership. Despite having taught students with disabilities in her English classes, and serving as the administrative aide, Ann felt underprepared to serve as a special education administrator when she assumed responsibility.

Earl

Earl was a secondary assistant principal in his second year of supervising special education. Prior to administration, he served as a middle school history teacher for five years in a rural town where he did not have significant exposure to special education programs. Earl served one year as an elementary administrator prior to assuming his current position in the secondary school. Earl held a Bachelor of Science in history and social science and a Master of Education with a concentration in administration and supervision. In a rural setting, Earl had an extended internship spanning two years, where he assisted with the running of the school building. Following his teaching experience, higher education training, and internship, Earl did not feel prepared to assume responsibility for a special education program.

Jamie

Jamie was a second-year elementary school administrator. Jamie taught kindergarten through third grade for 11 years. Each year that she taught, Jamie had inclusion students in her classroom and worked closely with special education teachers. Jamie's higher education experiences included a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education and a master's in science in

administration and leadership. Now that Jamie was supervising a special education program, she realized that she did not know what would be required of her prior to assuming responsibility. Jamie stated, "You just have the façade of a classroom teacher of what it's like, but I had no idea of any of the paperwork side and the legal pieces that went along with it before getting this position" (focus group one, 2019).

Lisa

Lisa taught for 21 years, with many of those years focusing on mathematics, prior to becoming an administrator. The first four years of Lisa's teaching experience did not include special education students; because of the small size of the school building, the school did not have a special education program. The remaining 17 years of Lisa's teaching experience were in a collaborative setting, including special education students and teachers. During her years of teaching, Lisa specialized in mathematics education and was sought by her administrators to consult on cases with students with disabilities in mathematics who required significant accommodations and scaffolding. Lisa held a bachelor's degree in liberal studies and a master's degree with a concentration in administration and supervision. After discussing her teaching and education experiences, Lisa noted, "As far as feeling prepared to supervise SPED [special education], I don't feel prepared at all" (focus group one, 2019).

May

May was a third-year administrator serving in a secondary school. This was her second year as an administrator at the secondary level. She had one prior year of service as an elementary school administrator. May was a middle school English teacher for 10 years. She began teaching reading intervention for the next 10 years. May then made the transition into instructional coaching, where she served for one year prior to stepping into administration.

During her years as a teacher, May was also a coach and athletic director for 20 years. May holds a Bachelor of Arts in English, master's in education, and an education specialist degree in educational leadership. May felt completely unprepared to assume her role as a special education supervisor and sought guidance whenever possible.

Ryan

Ryan was currently serving in his first year as principal in an elementary school. He began his teaching career by getting licensed through the state career switcher program with a bachelor's degree in business administration. Ryan then taught middle school mathematics, grades six through eight, for four years. During his time as a teacher, Ryan earned a master's in educational leadership. He then became an assistant principal in a middle school for one year, a high school for one year, before promoting to his current position of principal at an elementary school. Ryan felt as though his prior classroom experience did not prepare him to supervise a special education program at the building level. Additionally, he did not believe his higher education program prepared him for the task of special education supervision. As an assistant principal, Ryan thought he was in more of a position to ask questions, whereas now, he was the person who was being asked questions. This required a deeper level of knowledge.

Scarlett

Scarlet was serving in her first year as an assistant principal after teaching special education for 15 years. Scarlet taught special education at every level, elementary through secondary. Additionally, she taught students in every setting from inclusion through self-contained. She served as an instructional coach for special education for one year, and now was an assistant principal in an elementary school. Scarlett held a Bachelor of Science in leisure studies, a master's in special education, and an education specialist degree in special education

administration. During her time as a teacher, she gained administrative experience through a supplemental role as an administrative aide. While Scarlett felt prepared for certain aspects of special education supervision through her role as a special education teacher and special education instructional coach, she still did not feel as though she had the practical knowledge necessary to supervise special education programs. Scarlett stated, "Even with my background, and I think I'm a step ahead of my peers because of that, you still never know everything. There's still probably 75% of SPED [special education] that you never know" (interview, 2019).

Suzanne

Suzanne was serving in her first year as a building principal in an elementary school with grades preschool through fifth grade. This was her first year supervising a special education program. Suzanne's career began as a kindergarten teacher and continued through teaching second and third grade. After teaching for nine years, Suzanne then obtained a central office position for the next seven years, where she served as a Title 1 specialist for the division, preschool coordinator, coordinator for Titles 2, 3, and 4, and the K-12 English coordinator. Suzanne held a Bachelor of Arts in interdisciplinary studies, a master's degree in early childhood education, and an education specialist degree in educational leadership. At that time of this study, Suzanne was a doctoral candidate working on a Doctor of Philosophy in Early Childhood Education. Suzanne believed her prior work with federal grant programs and supporting students with differing needs helped her in a small way to prepare for supervising special education. However, as a first-year administrator with no assistant principal, Suzanne believed she had a lot of questions regarding how to best approach special education.

Thomasine

Thomasine was a third-year elementary school administrator. As a teacher, Thomasine served in third grade for 11 years. Following her time in the classroom, Thomasine became a reading teacher for two years and then a reading specialist for seven years. Her final role before stepping into administration was that of an instructional coach for one year. Thomasine held a Bachelor of Arts in English from kindergarten through 12th grade, master's degree in mathematics from kindergarten through Algebra 1, a reading endorsement, and an education specialist degree in educational leadership. Thomasine was a doctoral candidate working on a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership. Thomasine had experience teaching special education students and assisting with students on special education caseloads as a reading specialist. Thomasine felt unprepared to assume responsibility for the role of special education administrator, even with the years of educational experience and higher education training.

Results

The results of the study are presented through the data analysis structure developed by Moustakas (1994). Three data collection sources were used in the analysis: journal entries, interviews, and focus groups. Specifically, after *epoche*, the data were coded through horizontalization, themes were identified, textural descriptions were identified, structural descriptions were identified, and the essence of the experience was described (Moustakas, 1994). The five themes that emerged were: formal preparation experiences, not having the knowledge or expertise, daily tasks required, motivation for success, and acquiring the knowledge necessary (see Figure 1). The themes are described in detail relative to the data collected in this section.

Theme Development

Following horizontalization, five themes were developed using the codes detailed in Appendix K and grouping similar codes together. Figure 1 demonstrates how the significant statements were merged to form the five themes.
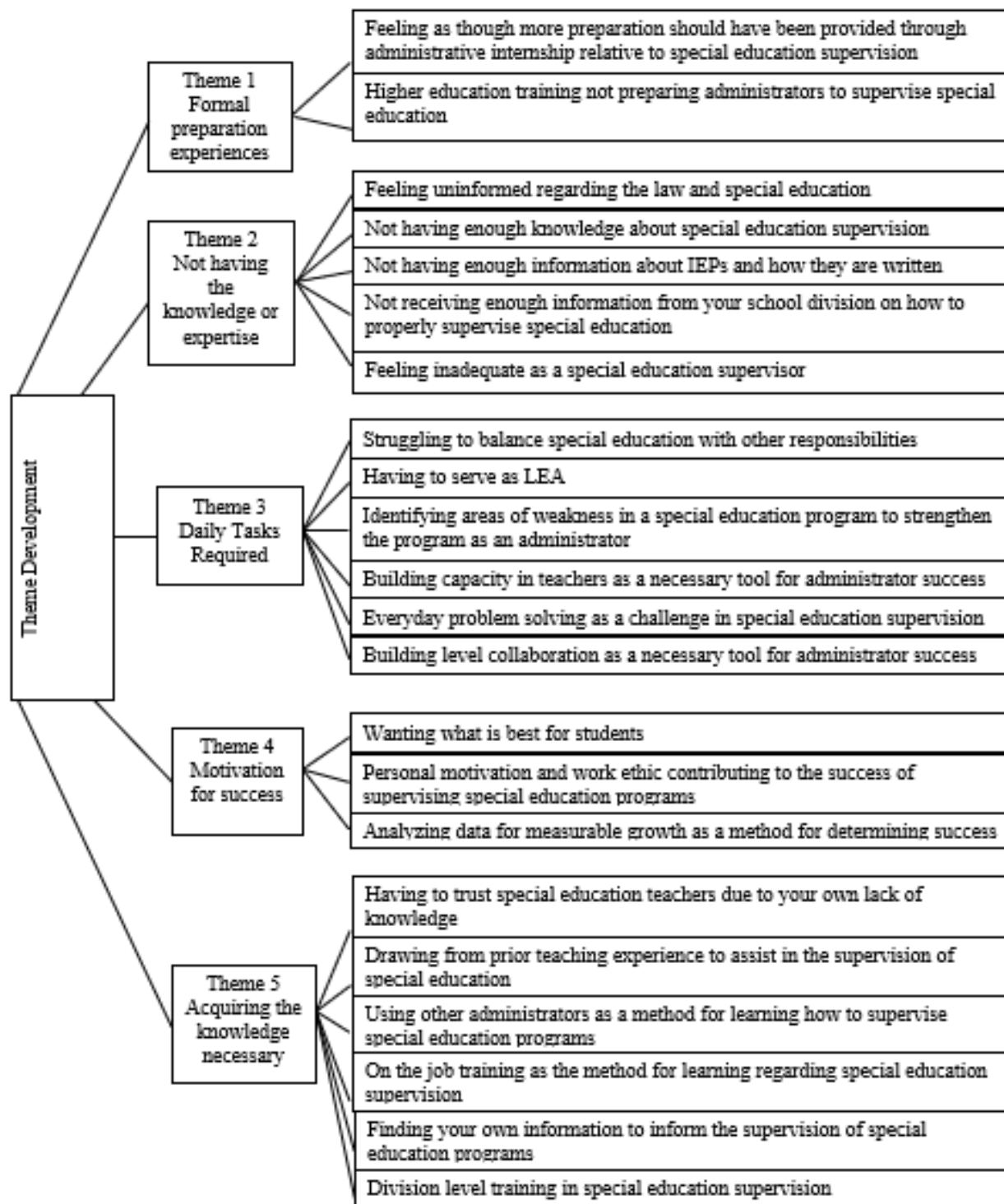
Figure 1. Theme development.

Theme one: Formal preparation experiences. The first theme describes participants'

formal preparation experiences, including higher education programs and their administrative

internships.

Table 2

Codes in Theme One by Participant

Participant	Feeling as though more preparation should have been provided through administrative internship relative to special education supervision	Higher education training not preparing administrators to supervise special education programs
Ann	X	X
Amy	X	X
Earl	X	X
Jamie	X	X
Lisa	X	X
May	X	X
Ryan	X	X
Scarlett	X	X
Suzanne	X	X
Thomasine	X	X

All 10 participants held higher education degrees at the master or educational specialist

level in educational administration or some variation of administration. Additionally, each

participant was required to complete an administrative internship as part of their higher

education program to obtain licensure in administration and supervision. Despite this formal

training, none of the 10 participants felt prepared to supervise special education when they

accepted their first jobs as administrators (see Table 2). Ann noted, "While we all know that

'on-the-job training' is where most of the knowledge about what any job really entails comes

from, I feel that my leadership training left much to be desired regarding special education"

(journal, 2019). The experience that Ann shared was echoed in Earl's interview, where he indicated:

> We took a law class, and we did a very brief, maybe two class periods worth of special
> education law, not a whole lot. So, I felt woefully underprepared for special education. I
> got, well, I'll put to you this way, I had more special education training in my
> undergraduate training to be a teacher than I did as an administrator. (interview, 2019)

This emerging theme of higher education not providing significant preparation was echoed across all 10 administrators; even Scarlett, who had a specific degree in special education administration, did not feel prepared to utilize her education in a practical manner. Regarding her higher education program, Scarlett stated, "It was all philosophy and abstract. You don't need theories. It needs to be more hands-on and practical" (focus group two, 2019). Through the emergence of this theme, it was apparent that the participants desired more training during higher education, even if that meant more coursework. Regarding his higher education experience, Ryan stated:

> Well, I wish anything was in there. There was nothing. So, I think that it is arguably the
> most important aspect of your job, especially as an AP, and there was literally nothing
> provided. So, anything would have been great. And really, multiple classes I think
> would've been appropriate. (interview, 2019)

The second part of the theme included a desire for hands-on, practical training in special education supervision through the administrative internship process. While all of the administrators participated in an administrative internship, none of the internships described focused significantly on the supervision of special education programs. Jamie and Ann felt as though they should have advocated for their internship hours more, asking for specifics related to

special education (focus group two, 2019). Jamie more specifically indicated that her internship

required a certain number of hours in various settings; however, these hours were not specific to

the supervision of specific tasks or programs within schools (interview, 2019). On the same

note, Suzanne expressed that practical experiences would have been helpful for her:

> I think that the programs are really good about having the book knowledge, but for me,
>
> it's not meaningful until I can connect it to an experience. I think those on-the-job things
>
> through internships, through some coaching opportunities, things like that, I think, would
>
> be most helpful. (interview, 2019)

Amy would have liked to examine actual IEPs during internship:

> And maybe have an IEP in front of me that's really good and an IEP that's not so good.
>
> And having to go in and target what those things are and just having a lot of discussion, I
>
> think, and not even just having the administrator there, but the special education teacher
>
> as well. (interview, 2019)

This theme clearly indicated that, for this group of participants, higher education training did not

prepare them for the responsibilities of supervising a special education program. Participants did

not know that their programs and internships were not fully preparing them for the task of

supervising a special education program; however, they discovered this once they assumed

responsibility.

Theme two: Not having the knowledge or expertise. The second theme that emerged

was administrators not having the knowledge or expertise to supervise a special education

program upon assuming responsibility (see Table 3).

Table 3

Codes in Theme Two by Participant

Participant	Not Feeling informed regarding the law and special education	Not having enough knowledge about special education supervision	Not having enough information about IEPs and how they are written	Not receiving enough information from your school division on how to properly supervise special education	Feeling inadequate as a special education supervisor
Ann	X	X	X	X	X
Amy	X	X	X		
Earl	X	X	X	X	
Jamie	X	X	X		X
Lisa	X	X	X	X	X
May		X	X	X	X
Ryan	X	X	X		
Scarlett	X	X		X	
Suzanne	X	X			X
Thomasine		X			

Participants indicated not having enough information about the law, not having enough information on how to actually supervise special education, not having enough information about IEPs and how they are written, not receiving enough information from their school divisions on how to supervise special education, and feeling inadequate as a special education supervisor.

Eight of the participants indicated that they did not have proper knowledge of the law. Ann wrote, "My biggest fears are that I will unknowingly violate a law or policy, or that I will make the wrong choice for a student, simply due to my lack of experience with special education" (journal, 2019). Ann's frustrations are echoed by Suzanne, who expressed concerns not only with not knowing the law but with not knowing where to find the proper legal information, "The protocols, I wish I knew more about what the current laws are, know where to

find information about the current laws, know who to talk to if particular things arise"

(interview, 2019). This barrier was further elaborated on during the focus group discussions.

Focus group two specifically had a discussion where they were expressing fear of going to jail or

losing their jobs over the legal aspects of special education. Jamie stated:

> I'd like to know enough to stand my ground and do what's best for the kids and to remain
>
> in compliance with the law, because it's legal and that if there's a lawsuit, the first thing
>
> they're going for is the prior written notice. (focus group two, 2019)

This comment sparked agreement from the other members of the focus group, who also feared

the potential career implications of making a legal mistake with special education. As noted by

Earl, novice administrators do not have significant coursework in special education law during

their administrative preparation programs.

This theme was further developed by all 10 participants indicating that they did not have

enough knowledge about special education supervision and how to supervise properly. Suzanne

stated, "Where I think that I lack is again, that specific knowledge in how to move forward"

(interview, 2019). Suzanne is not alone in this feeling. Thomasine indicated that she felt

unprepared when assuming responsibility for special education, "As a special education

supervisor, it was obvious that I did not know nearly enough to fulfill my responsibilities"

(journal, 2019). Ryan echoed the same difficulty with having the knowledge necessary to

supervise special education:

> However, in terms of being prepared to act in the capacity that I would be asked to act as
>
> an AP (assistant principal), my experiences as a classroom teacher did very little to
>
> prepare me for that. Additionally, I wish that I had have a little bit more training as to
>
> just big do's and don'ts just, Hey, here's some things that you shouldn't say and why.

Here's some things that if you're going to say, you need to say them like this. (interview,

2019)

In addition to not having enough knowledge to supervise special education, Jamie stated that she

did not know which areas she was lacking in, "There are so many missing pieces that one doesn't

even know that they are missing when you start this job, that saying, 'you don't know what you

don't know'" (focus group one, 2019). The fact that all 10 participants presented codes on this

portion of the theme indicates that this truly contributed to the experience of supervising special

education programs for these novice administrators.

Seven of the administrators further developed this theme of not having enough

knowledge or expertise by indicating that they did not have enough information about IEPs and

how they were written to supervise special education properly. Thomasine wrote, "One

challenge that I had entering the supervisory role is that I had never written an IEP before"

(journal, 2019). May elaborated on this deficiency by stating:

> In terms of goal writing and objectives and any of the terminology, just SPED
>
> terminology with, for example, if you tell me what people scored on when you go over a
>
> psychological or if you go over what a diagnostician would do, I have no idea what those
>
> scores actually mean. So, in that case, I don't have any knowledge about IEPs.
>
> (interview, 2019)

This lack of knowledge about IEP writing did not come without the drive or desire for more

information. In her individual interview, Amy stated, "I would love more research-based stuff

with IEP writing" (interview, 2019). It is clear that these administrators, occupying a position to

supervise special education programs, lacked the proper knowledge regarding the driving force

of a child's special education journey, the IEP.

The theme of not having enough knowledge or expertise to supervise special education was deepened with the expression from five participants that they had not received enough information from their school divisions on how to supervise the special education program properly that they were assigned to supervise. On this note, Lisa stated, "What is it that you're expecting me to do? What does that look like? You tell me, if you show me what it looks like, I'll do it every time" (focus group one, 2019). The conversation further developed with focus group one (2019), indicating that they did not fully understand their responsibilities as they related to special education supervision and that they would like to receive further guidance to supervise their programs properly. Focus group two (2019) echoed the same conversation where participants believed they did not receive initial training or expectations from their divisions. Ann stated:

> Anything. Everything. A boot camp would have been helpful. Like a true in and out, some sort of handbook or something. Because I feel like I'm constantly contacting or bothering everybody to figure it out. And I don't like doing that on the fly. (focus group 2, 2019)

Participants believing their division owed them the training needed to supervise special education was deepened in the other data sources. May wrote:

> I mean, if somebody would even sit down with me with the training of, okay, these are the things that we're using to evaluate or assess the student, and so therefore, these are the things that we're thinking needs to go into the IEP. (journal, 2019)

The desire for training from the school divisions was even indicated by Scarlett, a former special education teacher, in her journal where she wrote:

> As a special education supervisor, I feel that I would have benefited from more training regarding the processes in our district regarding special education. Even though I have worked in my school district as a teacher, I was not as familiar with district-level processes because I did not have to do them. (journal, 2019)

The desire for more training from school divisions, not having enough information about IEPs, not having enough knowledge about special education supervision, and not having enough information about the law all round out to the final aspect of this theme, feeling inadequate as a special education supervisor. Five of the participants reported feeling inadequate as a special education supervisor. Ann stated:

> I hate to admit it, but I think there's too much trust in new assistant principals. You just assume that, okay, you attend a three-day boot camp or whatever, and it's not even focused on special education, but they assume that you know everything you need to know to supervise and be and administrator, and I don't. (interview, 2019)

Ann's statement was echoed in focus group two (2019) when Lisa stated:

> Twenty-one years in the classroom as a collaborative teacher with special education and the person they called it on for all of the tough math cases, whatever they needed, especially RtI. But as far as feeling prepared to supervise special education, I don't feel prepared at all. So, I still don't know what a good goal is, really you could snowball me on that. And that's what I don't like. I don't like when people have the power that they can talk around me in circles because they know I don't know.

With half of the participants feeling inadequate as a special education supervisor, it was crucial to examine across all data collection sources. Suzanne wrote, "I think that it's still a work in progress. I think that because I'm uncovering some things that we need to do better at, it's an

ongoing process, so I don't really feel successful yet" (journal, 2019). Suzanne's sentiment, while framed in the positive of not feeling successful "yet," still indicated a feeling of inadequacy. Theme two of not having the knowledge or expertise united all participants across at least one code and was indicative of the experiences that this group of participants had regarding the supervision of special education programs.

Theme three: Daily tasks required. The third theme that developed was the daily tasks required of participants while supervising special education programs (see Table 4).

Table 4

Codes in Theme Three by Participant

Participant	Struggling to balance special education with other responsibilities	Having to serve as LEA	Identifying areas of weakness in a special education program to strengthen the program as an administrator	Building capacity in teachers as a necessary tool for administrator success	Everyday problem solving as a challenge in special education supervision	Building-level collaboration as a necessary tool for administrator success
Ann	X	X	X	X	X	X
Amy	X	X	X	X	X	
Earl	X	X	X		X	X
Jamie		X	X	X	X	X
Lisa	X	X	X	X	X	
May	X	X	X	X	X	
Ryan		X		X	X	
Scarlett	X	X	X	X	X	
Suzanne	X	X	X	X	X	X
Thomasine	X	X		X	X	X

This theme uncovered that eight participants reported struggling to balance special education with their other responsibilities as administrators. All 10 participants reported needing

to serve as LEA in their buildings, eight participants reported needing to identify areas of weakness in their building-level special education program, five participants reported needing to facilitate building-level collaboration in their special education programs, nine participants reported needing to build capacity in their teachers to succeed as special education supervisors, and all 10 participants reported everyday problem solving as a challenge in supervising special education.

In her journal, Ann brought up the struggle to balance and learn everything required where she wrote, "while I know I am a competent individual, there seems to be so much to learn and no time to learn it" (journal, 2019). Scarlett echoed the struggle to balance during focus group two (2019) when she stated:

And the other thing that I run into is, I'm sure you guys do too. I spend so much time now on student behavior and student discipline that finding the time to get my PWNs [prior written notice documents] done and all this stuff done and sending home notices, like that's difficult because you're all day like emergency mode, a lot of times.

Scarlett's comment was met with agreement from the other focus group participants. Suzanne echoed this concern when she stated:

I'm finding that really special education is up there on the list of priorities, it's a difficult balance. Really, I have to address what is happening at the moment and then always reprioritizing what needs to be done. While there are only so many hours in a day.

This struggle to balance was an everyday task that participants must engage in to remain compliant and complete their responsibilities. While balancing responsibilities, another task that participants needed to engage in was serving as LEA for their programs. Participants reported not only needing to serve as LEA but feeling unprepared or overwhelmed in doing so. Earl

stated, "When I was going into that first child study, I mean, I had absolutely no idea what I was doing, and it was terrifying. It was trial by fire" (focus group one, 2019). Despite feeling unprepared, participants found that they were required to serve in this role of LEA as new administrators. May stated, "And then LEA. I mean, if I'm in charge of making a decision for what the county can and can't do, I don't feel comfortable knowing what that is" (interview, 2019). May's discomfort was shared across all 10 participants, and therefore, was a crucial piece to this theme.

Each of the 10 participants also struggled to solve everyday problems that arose with regard to the special education program. Regarding everyday problems, Ryan stated, "There's always something, seemingly every day, that pops up where I don't really know the answer to these questions" (interview, 2019). Participants shared scenarios regarding individual students and difficulties that arose with behavior, discipline, or advocates regarding their special education programming. Thomasine acknowledged the difficulty with everyday problem solving with a growth mindset point of view, "Each year we find ourselves with unique and challenging cases. They are opportunities to learn and grow. I have discovered that you will never know it all" (journal, 2019). One particular scenario that emerged in school buildings was needing to implement IEPs for students who transfer in from other school divisions. There was rich discussion regarding this difficulty during focus group two when Jamie brought up a particular case:

> We a lot of times get IEPs from other divisions or even schools that are in our division, and it's like, who wrote this? How did you, how did this even get implemented? Because it just makes no sense, or the service minutes are absurd. (focus group two, 2019)

The group went on to discuss how there were difficulties with knowing what to do when transfer students arrived with special education needs and the varying strategies that they implemented to attempt to comply with these cases.

As these participants were struggling to balance their responsibilities, properly serve as LEA, and solve everyday special education problems; they were also tasked with identifying areas of weakness in their programs, building capacity in teachers, and fostering collaborative relationships to help their special education programs thrive.

Eight of the participants reported needing to identify areas of weakness in their special education department while also learning how to supervise a special education department. Earl shared frustrations with identifying weaknesses where he discussed his all-new administrative team and their difficulties with identifying weaknesses in their special education department:

> We know, we know what it's not supposed to look like, because clearly, that's what we have right now. What we have right now is what it shouldn't be, but our frustration is, is we're not sure what steps to take to get it to look like it should look or even in some cases, I'm not sure what it's supposed to look like. (focus group one, 2019)

Earl's frustrations were shared by Amy, who discussed, "I am tasked with looking for areas of weakness in our special education department and trying to streamline the program" (interview, 2019). Amy, a new administrator, needed to find the areas of weakness in a department that she made clear she did not fully understand. This experience was shared further by Lisa in her journal, where she described a plan that she had to create to monitor her special education department's required tasks:

I know that this plan will bring a lot of negative emotions/animosity/resistance from our

special education staff because they are used to not being monitored. They (our special

education teachers) have been able to do what they want for too long. (journal, 2019)

Lisa was steadfast in finding a way to monitor the department and implementing this unpopular

plan because this was the requirement of her job.

Participants took a positive stance when discussing building capacity in teachers to

support the special education program. Suzanne discussed helping teachers rise to the occasion

with challenging students in her journal. As the building principal, it was her responsibility to

close these gaps. She wrote:

In my current role, overseeing our building's special education program can be a

challenge. We still have children (special education and non-special education) with

significant social, emotional, and academic needs. These needs seem to be increasing for

our students. As a result, teachers seem frustrated because they are trying to be

everything (teacher, counselor, etc.) to every child who is in need of support while trying

to honor the division-level expectations. (journal, 2019)

Suzanne knew that it was her responsibility to help coach teachers and prepare them for all

students. Amy echoed this responsibility by stating, "I think just constantly reminding the staff

of why we're here, and what we're here for and that the kids don't fit in a box, I think is what's

helpful and seeing some positive stuff" (interview, 2019).

The task of building capacity in others while also building capacity in oneself is not a

small one. Scarlett discussed molding young teachers and explaining the gravity of special

education compliance during focus group two. She indicated that she was currently "trying to

help mold them (special education teachers)" and notes that "they weren't purposely doing it

wrong" (focus group two, 2019). Scarlett found that some protocols were not being followed properly and found it to be her responsibility not only to coach them but also to empathize with their position.

This theme was rounded out by the need for administrators to build collaborative environments to fully support the special education program in their buildings. Amy stated:

> The satisfactions I have gained is when I see teachers working together collaboratively. And not, that's your child. No, that's my child. We've had to do a whole lot of work about 'these are all ours' and that accountability piece. (interview, 2019)

Amy's satisfaction with building-level collaboration was echoed by Thomasine, where she stated that collaborating with fellow administrators was also critical to the success of special education programs:

> I discovered that the best resource, in the beginning, is building a relationship with your principal because you must be on the same page. At the end of the day, everything that happens in the building is the responsibility of the principal, no matter whose name is on it. (journal, 2019)

Thomasine indicated that her desire to do a good job caused her to deepen her relationship with her principal, both to learn from her and to rise up to her principal's expectations. Focus group one discussed the need not only to collaborate at the building level but also to expand to collaborating with others who were doing similar work. Lisa stated:

> If there was just a time in the month where the secondary people could come together for an hour, and just here's what's going on in my building, what am I missing? What should I do? How would you handle this? Even if it's something I can't use, it's still valuable because it might be something I could use.

This desire for collaboration was met with agreement from the group of participants present during the focus group. Participants who had already indicated that they were struggling to balance their responsibilities and feel inadequate were attempting to close this gap by building collaborative bridges while executing the responsibilities of their appointed positions.

Theme four: Motivation for success. Throughout data collection, participants cited their individual motivations for success, including wanting what is best for students, possessing a strong personal work ethic, and analyzing the data for measurable growth (see Table 5).

Table 5

Codes in Theme Four by Participant

Participant	Wanting what is best for students	Personal motivation and work ethic contributing to the success of supervising special education programs	Analyzing data for measurable growth as a method for determining success
Ann	X	X	
Amy	X		X
Earl	X	X	X
Jamie	X	X	X
Lisa	X	X	X
May	X		
Ryan	X	X	X
Scarlett	X		X
Suzanne	X		
Thomasine	X	X	X

Each of the 10 participants cited wanting what was best for students as their greatest motivator for success. On this note, Lisa wrote, "I'm ready to do this work, but I know I'm doing what's best for students, and that's always what drives my daily work" (journal, 2019). Lisa's sentiments were clear that although this work was challenging, she wanted what was best

for her students and would persevere to the end. Ryan further spoke about being motivated by the students, when he stated:

> But I think that's also what can make it frustrating is when you don't have the knowledge or professional capacity to act in certain instances, or you have to hesitate, or you have to look for answers, or you're not sure, you're a little bit behind in something that you may have been able to implement earlier, these are very real consequences. There's a very human element to the deficiencies that you may have as a special education administrator as well, and that can make it a very frustrating experience. (interview, 2019)

This human element was echoed by each participant across every data collection source, which provided a deep description of the participant pool and their motivations to succeed. These novice administrators, while frustrated, were motivated by the students they were appointed to serve and sought to overcome failure to supervise the program properly so that all students could succeed. Earl echoed this during focus group one, when he stemmed discussion regarding being motivated to cure deficiencies in the program so that all students could succeed. Earl stated:

> I mean, the status quo is not sufficient for our kids right now. And it's, I think there's a real sense of urgency to figure it out and to get a better system in place because they're not succeeding like they should. (focus group one, 2019)

The participants in the focus group agreed that the students were the primary driving factor. With each of their careers beginning in the classroom, they always had student success at the forefront.

In addition to being motivated by student success, six of the participants cited their own personal motivation and work ethic as contributing to the success of supervising special education programs. Earl wrote in his journal, "As I grow as a leader, it is important to ensure

that items like this [special education] are not overlooked" (journal, 2019). Earl indicated a strong preference for the growth of his career, with special education being a necessary focal point for his continued growth. Jamie further described this motivation when she indicated:

> You just work all the time. You just work. You get it done. It's just, it has to get done, so you get it done. Whether you stay at work late or you go in early, or you take it home or whatever it is. I mean these are, this is the job that I wanted and I want to make sure it's done right. So, if I have to work longer to get it done, then I will. (interview, 2019)

Jamie's drive to succeed and personal work ethic were echoed in focus group one where Lisa stated, "If you're going to lose your license, it's going to be to do with something with money or special education" (focus group one, 2019). The personal motivations and work ethic of participants further drove their success with supervising a program that they felt ill-prepared to supervise and lack the knowledge to support fully.

The final motivator for participant success that was uncovered in this theme was analyzing data for measurable growth as a method for determining success, which was cited by seven participants. Thomasine summed up this portion of the theme, when she said:

> It's reflecting, just looking at your practices and then seeing what's working and what's not working, looking at the data from our students and seeing where the gaps are and then working with our teachers, and once you look at the data and if you're closing those gaps then you can definitely say that you're successful, but I also don't think that it's just about me, that it takes a team of us. (interview, 2019)

This data-driven approach was shared by other participants during focus group two, where Scarlett stated:

I think the proof is in, you know, the data. Are the students mostly being successful?

Are they showing growth? Are behaviors getting better? I feel like those kinds of things,

the actual data, will show you how successful you are. (focus group two, 2019)

The motivation for data demonstrated success rounded out the theme of motivation for these

participants. Participants were significantly motivated by wanting what was best for students

and further motivated by their own ethics, and finally, by data-driven results.

Theme five: Acquiring the knowledge necessary. The final theme that emerged was

that of acquiring the knowledge necessary to supervise a special education program. Participants

reported needing to trust their special education teachers due to their own lack of knowledge,

drawing from their own prior teaching experiences to assist in the supervision of special

education, using other administrators as a method for learning how to supervise special education

programs, on-the-job training as a method for learning how to supervise special education

programs, finding one's own information, and division-level training (see Table 6).

Table 6

Codes in Theme Five by Participant

Participant	Having to trust special education teachers due to your own lack of knowledge	Drawing from prior teaching experience to assist in the supervision of special education	Using other administrators as a method for learning how to supervise special education programs	On-the-job training as the method for learning regarding special education supervision	Finding your own information to inform the supervision of special education programs	Division-level training
Ann	X	X	X	X	X	
Amy		X	X	X	X	X
Earl	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jamie	X		X	X	X	X
Lisa	X	X	X	X	X	X
May		X	X	X	X	
Ryan	X	X	X	X	X	X
Scarlett	X	X	X	X	X	X
Suzanne		X	X	X	X	X
Thomasine		X	X	X	X	X

Six participants reported needing to trust special education teachers in their novice role due to their own lack of knowledge relative to special education. Earl stated, "And what ends up happening is we end up relying a lot on the special education teachers to sort of give us guidance. Well, that's great and works well if you can trust people" (focus group one, 2019). This need to rely on individuals who reported directly to you to guide your leadership was echoed by Ryan when he stated, "Yeah, I have to trust my team. So, I have to identify leaders within the special education department, as well as my other administrators, who have the ability, who have the prior experience" (interview, 2019). This survival tactic indicated that these administrators needed to find the information necessary from a reliable source. In some

cases, this source was those who reported directly to the administrators because they had the knowledge and experience necessary to guide the conversation. Jamie cited the assistance provided by her department when she said, "Having a staff that are well versed in special education helped me tremendously" (journal, 2019). Jamie indicated that she relied on her staff not only because she believed it was necessary but also because she trusted their knowledge and experience.

Nine participants also reported drawing from their prior teaching experiences to assist in the supervision of special education programs. Earl stated:

> And so, I generally try to think back to when I was in a classroom, how a student would be successful with say, ADHD, or Autism, or something along those lines. What I did in the classroom, and how is that reflected in his current IEP, or if it's even relevant. Sometimes, it's not, it's not relevant, but I try to pull from memory sort of what I've gone to first. (interview, 2019)

The memories and experiences from his years of teaching informed some of what Earl did in his daily activities as a special education supervisor. In her journal, Amy wrote about her prior teaching experiences laying the foundation necessary to become a good administrator. In reference to her teaching experience, Amy wrote, "These experiences have laid the foundation for me to become a special education leader as the bulk of my career has been spent advocating for underserved families" (journal, 2019). By contrast, Jamie did not find her prior teaching experiences to be as helpful, "I mean, I taught inclusion every year that I taught before I got this job, and it didn't help" (focus group two, 2019). Whether prior teaching experiences helped these participants to acquire the knowledge necessary to supervise special education programs, they attempted to utilize those earlier career experiences to inform their current roles.

While eight of the participants reported acquiring information on how to supervise special education programs from training that was offered by their school divisions, this was not the case for all participants. Thomasine wrote about her experiences with division-level training, "My division offers constant support to new and seasoned administrators. The special education department requires special education administrators to attend monthly meetings where updates and overviews are given" (journal, 2019). Thomasine found her division-level training to be extremely helpful to her practice, and this same sentiment was echoed by Suzanne, who stated, "I would say currently it (the most helpful training) would be the professional development sessions or trainings offered by the division" (interview, 2019). Focus group one also had a vivid discussion regarding how helpful it was to have time devoted to problem-solving and asking questions at the division level. Lisa summed this up by saying:

> I think that's why I like our (monthly, division) PLC [professional learning community] meeting because I don't like to reach out to people because I feel like I'm bothering them. We're all very busy. So, I feel like when we get enough PLC meetings, we all get our one hour to problem-solve for each other. (focus group one, 2019)

The participants who reported partaking in division-level training for special education found the training to be helpful and informative. Some participants thought their current training programs were not providing sufficient information. Jamie wrote, "The only training I was given, was done during the summer after I had been hired—and while I am 100% thankful for that, I don't believe it was enough" (journal, 2019). The difference between Jamie's comment that her training was insufficient and Thomasine's comment that she was extremely supported and well-trained speaks to the differences in training programs across divisions.

All 10 participants reported acquiring knowledge to supervise special education using the final three codes: using other administrators, on-the-job training, and finding your own information. Each participant clearly stated that they reached out to other administrators who supervised special education who they felt comfortable calling for help. Ryan stated that speaking to others was his primary method of acquiring the knowledge necessary to supervise special education:

> I would say it's probably speaking with colleagues, like "I need to make a phone call right now," and so I will contact other administrators, central office support staff, and really get a lot of information that way. That's the primary way that I am learning right now. (interview, 2019)

While all participants noted that they reached out to others, as described by Ryan, there did not appear to be a firm method for how participants selected the individuals who they called for help. Scarlett indicated that she relied on friends and other people whom she knew well, "So people that I'm friends with, that I know in the division, that know, we kind of bounce ideas off each other. And then my coordinators, the director, any of them, I'll call" (focus group two, 2019).

Suzanne noted that not only was this her primary method for learning but also, she felt as though reaching out to other administrators was a necessary tool for becoming a successful supervisor of special education:

> Every situation regarding a child with special needs must be handled on an individual basis but within the guidelines of special education. Therefore, communicating with individuals who have a solid background in special education is critical for the success of a special education administrator. (journal, 2019)

The concept of reaching out to other administrators for expertise and knowledge was one method that participants used to deepen their information pools. However, they also used other sources to find their own information. Thomasine wrote:

> I started special education folders on Pinterest to assist with ideas that I could use to support my teachers and myself. I participate in webinars and my professional organization. This helps to keep up with the latest trends and changes in education. (journal, 2019)

Suzanne indicated the same level of finding information from various sources when she stated:

> I think it's just doing your homework as much as you can. I think if you're just proactive about learning as much as you can and utilizing that knowledge at the same time of need, I think that's about as much as you can do in this situation because things change all the time. (interview, 2019)

As participants worked on finding their own information or through other sources, they also reported on-the-job training as the primary method for learning regarding special education supervision.

Thomasine wrote, "What I know for sure is that experience is the best teacher" (journal, 2019). This sentiment was echoed in each and every data collection tool, when participants reported not feeling fully prepared to supervise special education bur rather, learning the job as they went along. Ryan stated, "I think you just work to get better. There's really no amount of complaining or being frustrated that's going to help anything. You just need to accept that seemingly, in many areas of education, it's trial by fire" (interview, 2019). These participants were all extremely willing to find their own information and learn on the job. A positive growth mindset assisted with this task. Ann stated, "Honestly, it's just getting experience with the day-

to-day situations that arise. I'm not totally satisfied, but I know more than when I started in July.

It's a very small win, but I know more than when I started" (interview, 2019).

Synthesis

Following the theme development, textural descriptions were developed to describe what

participants experienced while supervising special education programs as novice administrators

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants experienced entering into roles where they did not have

formal preparation experiences to complete the job responsibilities necessary (theme one). The

group of participants all had formal training through both higher education courses and an

internship program; however, these formal preparation experiences did little to prepare these

administrators for supervising special education programs. While learning to supervise a special

education program, administrators experienced supervising a program without the knowledge or

expertise to do so effectively or with conviction (theme two). Participants reported being

unprepared and not knowing enough about the law, the procedures, IEP documents, and other

special education processes to find success with special education supervision.

These participants were hired to supervise a special education program, among other

responsibilities, and had daily responsibilities to that program (theme three) without the

knowledge and expertise necessary. Daily responsibilities reported by participants included

serving as LEA, coaching teachers, identifying weaknesses in the program, and problem-solving

special-education-related issues. Through their own motivations and work ethic (theme four),

participants acquired the knowledge necessary to supervise special education programs (theme

five) through a variety of methods. These participants were motivated by the desire to improve

the lives and education of their students, by their own career aspirations, and by the measurable

growth and data that were reported. Participants were offered some training through division

programs and on-the-job training, but for the most part, they had to seek out special education

teachers, other administrators, or their own information sources.

Structural descriptions were developed to describe how participants experienced the

phenomenon of supervising special education programs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Following the

development of themes and textural descriptions, structural descriptions were developed to

deepen the understanding of the experiences of participants while experiencing the phenomenon.

Participants experienced their higher education experiences and internships with the hopes that

they would prepare them for their new positions (theme one). Upon accepting their first

administrative positions, they discovered that they did not feel prepared (theme two).

Participants experienced feeling uninformed regarding special education and lacking the

knowledge and expertise to supervise special education programs properly. The lack of

preparedness presented feelings of inadequacy as a special education supervisor for the

participants.

Participants experienced needing to serve in a variety of daily tasks (theme three),

including: needing to serve as LEA, identifying weakness in a special education program,

building capacity in teachers, building collaboration in their buildings, and solving special

education problems in their buildings. As participants learned to navigate the completion of

these daily tasks, they found that they struggled to balance the needs of the special education

program with their other responsibilities as administrators. The struggle to balance led to

continued frustrations and feelings of inadequacy as a special education supervisor and as a

novice administrator.

Despite the lack of knowledge and feelings of inadequacy, participants found that they

were highly motivated to succeed with the supervision of a special education program (theme

four). The motivation stemmed mostly from a deep desire to do what was best for the students in the special education program and for all students in the building. Therefore, participants found that they acquired the knowledge necessary to supervise a special education program by any means possible. Participants utilized division-level training, on-the-job training, and other trusted individuals to deepen their knowledge to a comfortable level. The desire for knowledge was so engrained in these participants that they strongly desired more knowledge, even if it meant devoting more working hours to receive training.

Research Question Responses

The CRQ for this study was: What are the lived experiences of novice, public school administrators as they supervise special education programs? The essence of the experience for the participants, which utilized all five themes and combined the textural and structural descriptions, answered the CRQ. Novice, public school administrators who were supervising special education programs entered into the role largely unprepared to assume the responsibilities necessary. These administrators entered into their new positions feeling as though their formal preparation experiences must have prepared them for the role of special education supervisor. However, they later discovered that this was not the case. Novice administrators, based on the participant responses, found that they did not have sufficient knowledge to carry out effectively their daily responsibilities and that this caused feelings of inadequacy.

Utilizing their motivations for success, participants sought out the knowledge necessary to supervise special education effectively for the benefit of the students they served and their own professional needs. Ryan described realizing he was unprepared to supervise the special education program, "I guess I wish I knew more about the process from the beginning. I always felt like I was stepping into a half-finished novel without a lot of context as to how we got there"

(Interview, 2019). Ann deepened the feelings of inadequacy in her description of her daily responsibilities when she wrote:

> Quite honestly, it has been very overwhelming entering a position that requires me to have knowledge of special education laws, policies, procedures, best practices, etc. when I do not feel I have had formal enough training on the subject. We have real legal and moral obligations related to special education, and it's a shame that it's left up to individual schools to train new assistant principals, in my case—we simply cross our fingers and hope for the best? (journal, 2019)

These administrators described an obviously stressful experience, which they ultimately overcame by finding the necessary knowledge to fulfill their duties and serve all students. Thomasine reminded the focus group of this when she said, "For me, it's always about the children. That's always our motivation" (focus group one, 2019). Using intrinsic motivation, mostly related to the children served, novice administrators sought the information that they needed. May described this when she said, "Well, I don't know if people get annoyed by me or not, but I ask a million questions. I mean, and I asked whomever" (interview, 2019). These administrators found the information that they needed through any means necessary. Jamie stated, "I read a lot of articles. I've read a couple of books, but mostly it's just interactions with people who I know have a vast background and knowledge" (interview, 2019). Novice administrators, after persevering through finding the knowledge necessary to supervise special education programs, found success in serving students. In addition to the CRQ, three subquestions drove this research study. The existing themes answered these research questions and rounded out the essence of the experience, as described by the response to the CRQ.

Subquestion one. The first subquestion was: What prior experiences do novice administrators bring to their positions that motivate them to learn about special education supervision? Novice administrators, as evidenced in theme one, brought formal preparation experiences to their roles as special education supervisors. Suzanne noted, "in regards to formal training experiences, my college coursework was minimal with respect to learning about students with special needs" (journal, 2019). Participants were motivated not only by their realized lack of higher education preparation to be a special education administrator but also by their personal work ethic. Scarlet noted, "Oh, I feel like higher ed didn't prepare me at all for anything, honestly" (focus group two, 2019). These novice administrators desired to do the right thing for students and helped them work to their greatest potentials. Therefore, they were willing to learn more about special education programs by any means necessary. Participants were motivated by measurable growth and data, personal motivations, work ethic, and what was best for students to learn more about special education supervision (theme four). Suzanne noted, "learning side by side on the job with the child in front of you, is the best learning opportunity you can have" (interview, 2019).

Subquestion two. The second subquestion was: While supervising special education programs, what challenges prompt novice administrators to seek additional information about their practice? Participants were challenged by not having the knowledge or expertise necessary to properly supervise special education programs (theme 2). Earl stated:

> I have had cases where I don't think that we can do that or this and come to find out we can or we can't. And a lot of that I think too is I don't have the depth of knowledge and expertise to be able to immediately figure it out. (journal, 2019).

Additional challenges included struggling to balance special education responsibilities with the remaining administrative duties and learning to run a program effectively without the necessary knowledge and expertise (theme three). Scarlett wrote, "When you have multiple roles, which most supervisors do, the biggest challenge is giving everything the attention it deserves" (journal, 2019). Earl echoed Scarlett's difficulty balancing during the focus group when he stated:

> And you know as well as I do that there's not a lot of free hours in the day to sort of learn. Sometimes special education is time-consuming in a lot of ways, and it can be frustrating when you're dealing with 15 kids over all students. (focus group one, 2019)

In the wake of these challenges, novice administrators were prompted to seek additional information about their practices to gain efficacy.

Subquestion three. The third subquestion was: How do novice administrators tailor their individual learning experiences to deepen their understanding of special education supervision? Upon realizing that they did not have the necessary knowledge and expertise, participants sought to deepen their understanding of special education supervision (theme five). They tailored these experiences by first drawing upon their prior higher education training and teaching experiences where applicable. Earl noted that he first drew upon his teaching experience when trying to problem-solve with a special education student (interview, 2019). This was echoed by eight other participants who also cited relying on their special education exposure while in the classroom. Novice administrators access their division-level training to benefit from the division-specific information to assist in the proper execution of their positions. Ryan stated, "The only other thing that comes to mind is going to be through our division programs that the special education department is involved in" (focus group two, 2019). Ryan's

sentiments were echoed by eight other participants who also found benefit in division-level training. Participants also utilized on-the-job training, which may include learning from daily problem-solving experiences and learning through serving as the special education supervisor. Suzanne wrote, "All of these experiences have helped me to grow in learning more about how to serve students with special needs" (journal, 2019). Finally, participants found their own information, learned from their special education teachers, or sought to learn from other administrators. Amy noted, "But just again, it's putting myself out there to get that information because it's not always just provided for us" (interview, 2019). Participants were eager for additional information regarding the supervision of special education supervision and found that they would utilize any avenue necessary to supervise their special education program adequately. Throughout the data collection phase, participants described interactions with colleagues and how they actively sought to surround themselves with individuals who might possibly be able to inform their practices. Ryan summed up the seeking of new knowledge when he stated:

> You just accept that you're not going to have all the answers to every question, but you're going to have new experiences on a very regular basis, and you just need to put those all in your bank of knowledge and have it continue to grow and expand so that you do become more comfortable and less frustrated going forward. (interview, 2019)

Novice administrators are continually seeking more information to become more effective special education supervisors.

Summary

This chapter presents the results of the study and answers the given research questions. Detailed descriptions of each of the 10 participants are provided, followed by the phenomenological reduction process. Finally, the responses to the research questions are

provided utilizing the themes developed through phenomenological reduction. The five themes that emerged were: theme one: formal preparation experience, theme two: not having the knowledge or expertise, theme three: daily tasks, theme four: motivation for success, and theme five: acquiring the knowledge. The participants' experiences were described in rich detail through each of the five themes and textural and structural descriptions were provided. Ultimately, the essence of the experience was provided, which answered the central research question. Finally, the answers to the subquestions were provided utilizing the previously developed themes.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how novice, public school administrators experienced and learned to supervise special education programs. This chapter contains a summary of the findings, a discussion of how the findings are situated within the literature base and theoretical framework, the implications of the study, the delimitations and limitations of the study, and finally, the recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Through the process of phenomenological reduction, five themes emerged. These themes tell the story of the participants' experience regarding the phenomenon of supervising a special education program. The first theme was formal preparation experiences, which described the higher education experiences of participants, including their mentorship programs. Participants ultimately did not believe these experiences prepared them for supervising a special education program. The second theme was not having the knowledge or expertise necessary to supervise a special education program. Participants reported not having the knowledge necessary to provide proper supervision, which caused feelings of inadequacy as a special education supervisor. The third theme describes the daily tasks that participants were required to engage in as special education supervisors. These novice administrators reported needing to complete tasks that they did not have the proper training and expertise to do properly. The fourth theme was the motivation for success; participants were motivated by the students in their building-level special education programs, their own personal motivations, and the data that were collected for their programs. The fifth theme that emerged was a description of how participants acquired the knowledge necessary to supervise a special education program successfully. The largest sources

of information included: finding one's own information, asking other administrators for information, and on-the-job training.

Ultimately, after textural and structural descriptions were developed, the essence of the experience was uncovered. The essence of the experience answers the CRQ: What are the lived experiences of novice, public school administrators as they supervise special education programs? As novice administrators who supervise special education programs, these participants entered into administration believing they were prepared for their new roles. What the participants discovered, upon beginning to supervise a special education program, was that they were ill-prepared to do so because their higher education training and internship program did not provide them with the necessary knowledge and experience. Scarlett captured the lack of prior preparation when she stated, "Oh, I feel like higher ed didn't prepare me at all for anything, honestly" (focus group two, 2019). After being frustrated by their own lack of knowledge and feelings of inadequacy, participants found motivations in their students and work ethic and sought out their own information to execute their job responsibilities properly. Lisa indicated her preparedness to learn new material to support students in her journal, "I'm ready to do this work, but I know I'm doing what's best for students and that's always what drives my daily work" (journal, 2019). The results of the study also provided rich answers to the three subquestions.

Subquestion one was: What prior experiences do novice administrators bring to their positions that motivate them to learn about special education supervision? The participants were motivated by their prior teaching experiences that showed them the needs of special education students and developed in them a desire to assist all students on their educational journeys.

Participants were additionally motivated by having successfully completed a higher education administrative preparation program and an internship that they did not consider was enough.

Subquestion two was: While supervising special education programs, what challenges prompt novice administrators to seek additional information about their practice? The novice administrators who participated in this study were motivated by the feelings of inadequacy to complete daily tasks that they were hired to accomplish. Earl wrote:

I have had cases where I don't think that we can do that or this and come to find out we can or we can't. And a lot of that I think too is I don't have the depth of knowledge and expertise to be able to immediately figure it out. (journal, 2019)

Earl was joined by the other participants who reported experiencing challenges and not being able to answer basic questions or effectively complete special education processes, which motivated them to seek additional information.

Subquestion three was: How do novice administrators tailor their individual learning experiences to deepen their understanding of special education supervision? Participants tailored their individual learning experiences by personally filling the gaps in their own knowledge. Amy stated, "But just again, it's putting myself out there to get that information because it's not always just provided for us" (interview, 2019). First, participants accessed scheduled training that was available to them, and then they tailored their learning needs by accessing resources available to them, including other people.

Discussion

The results of the study relate to the literature review that was conducted and described in Chapter Two. The empirical discussion examines the results of the present study related to

previous research. The theoretical discussion examines the results of the study connected to adult learning theory.

Empirical Discussion

The results of this study indicate that formal preparation, such as prior teaching experiences, higher education programs, and internship experiences does not prepare novice administrators to supervise special education programs. Despite their lack of preparation, novice administrators are often assigned to supervise special education programs, which aligns with previous research (Boscardin et al., 2010; Rodl et al., 2018). Lack of prior preparation leaves administrators without the knowledge or expertise necessary to supervise special education programs properly, even though it is well documented that they require this knowledge (Couvillon et al., 2018; IDEA, 2006; McHatton et al., 2010; Sadeh & Sullivan, 2017).

Without preparation, administrators were required to complete a variety of tasks that were not only legally binding but necessary for the success of a building-level special education program. Novice administrators struggled to balance the needs of their special education programs and complete the daily tasks necessary to make the program run smoothly and remain within the legal boundaries, which was also in alignment with previous research (Crockett, 2002; Lawson & Cruz, 2018a; Martin et al., 2014; Schaaf et al., 2015). The consequences of not having the proper knowledge are well documented through litigation. Weber (2017) noted landmark Supreme Court cases that highlighted the importance of school divisions, including administrators, being aware of and properly enforcing special education law and procedures, and the consequences of not having that knowledge or intent. Even without formal preparation, these administrators were the assigned supervisors of the special education program at their site to include supervising special education teachers (Seltzer, 2011). The results of this study indicated

that novice administrators tended to turn to their special education teachers for knowledge and expertise; this juxtaposition placed the administrator in a complex position regarding special education teacher evaluations.

Roberts and Guerra (2017) found that administrators felt inadequate while supervising special education programs due to their lack of knowledge, which also aligned with the results of this study. Even while feeling inadequate, administrators wanted what was best for their students and were motivated not only by students but also by their personal drive to be effective leaders. Building leaders are instrumental in the success of all students despite their level of knowledge or expertise (Gregory, 2018; Martin et al., 2014). The results of this study indicated that administrators took responsibility for all students and held the students at the forefront of their desire to improve their practices.

Previous research did not describe the experiences of administrators as they learned how to supervise special education programs. This study indicated that administrators were unprepared to supervise special education programs but also that they were highly motivated to close the gap of what they knew and what they needed to know. Black et al. (2014) noted that administrators are often in the position to choose their own professional learning path; this is in direct alignment with the results of this study, where administrators thought they largely had to find their own information regarding special education supervision. In the absence of prior knowledge, administrators will access a variety of information sources to find knowledge and become competent special education supervisors. Information sources include trusting other people such as administrators and special education teachers, on-the-job training, finding their own information, drawing from their previous expertise, and participating in division-level training. These novice administrators strongly desired the knowledge necessary and reported

learning most of what they needed to know during on-the-job experiences while self-guiding their learning.

Theoretical Discussion

Adult learning theory drove this study to examine the learning of administrators when they assumed new roles as special education supervisors (Zepeda et al., 2014). Adult learning theory is founded upon the six assumptions of andragogy (Knowles et al., 2015). This section describes the results of the study as they relate to the assumptions of andragogy.

According to adult learning theory, learners benefit from drawing on their previous experiences to acquire new information (Knowles et al., 2015). The results of this study indicate that novice administrators are not only willing to build upon their prior experiences but also that they are eager to use their prior experiences to inform new learning. Suzanne discussed building on her time in the classroom when she stated,

> As a teacher in the classroom, of course having students who have special needs in the classroom, you're working with children all the time, depending on what they're coming to you with in regards to their backgrounds and experiences and their needs. (interview, 2019)

Thomasine further described the need to inform new learning when she wrote, "Once I was accepted as an assistant principal I began reaching out to colleagues in special education, gathering data that might support me in my journey (journal, 2019)."

Andragogy assumes that adults must know the reason for learning something before they are ready to learn it, must be ready to learn the information, and must be motivated and oriented to learn the information (Knowles et al., 2015). This study uncovered that by the time novice administrators assume responsibility for a special education program, they are well aware of the

reasons that they need additional knowledge to execute their duties. School divisions should realize that administrators are prepared to receive new information on special education, even as they balance their other responsibilities, when planning professional development programs.

Another assumption of adult learning theory discusses the self-concept of the learners, in this case, the novice administrator (Knowles et al., 2015). While the novice administrators in this study were self-directed in their learning, they did not fully desire to be self-directed. In most cases, the administrators desired additional guidance from some source about what information they should learn and what problem-solving steps they should take in a given situation. School division leadership should consider whether administrators have too much self-direction when learning to supervise special education programs. Providing a simple structure, including some voice and choice, may be more appropriate.

Implications

The results of this study have empirical, theoretical, and practical implications. Based on these implications, recommendations to stakeholders were made.

Empirical Implications

Existing research indicates that administrators who have proper training are able to coach teachers and build programs more effectively (Alila et al., 2016). The present study demonstrated that novice administrators were not prepared to coach and build capacity in special education programs. This could potentially contribute to inequitable practices in buildings where administrators feel comfortable coaching and building capacity in general education teachers but not with special education teachers. Division leadership must be certain that special education programs are receiving the attention that they deserve at the building level by providing the necessary structures and training.

Further, the lack of existing empirical research on the experiences of novice administrators as they learn to supervise special education programs speaks to the systemic nature of the problem. There appears to be an empirical acknowledgment that novice administrators are unprepared to supervise special education programs; however, no adjustments have been made to correct this issue (Crockett, 2002; Lawson & Cruz, 2018a; Martin et al., 2014; Schaaf et al., 2015). Existing research provides detailed descriptions of the tasks that administrators should be able to complete to serve all students properly, including those with disabilities (McHatton et al., 2010; Psencik & Brown, 2018). Stakeholders at each level are urged to come together and form a comprehensive plan, informed by existing research, to deliver the proper training to novice administrators.

Theoretical Implications

The results of this study indicated that novice administrators who are learning to supervise special education programs first draw upon their own knowledge that they gained from teaching students with disabilities that is in alignment with adult learning theory. Adult learning theory indicates that honoring prior experiences will cause adult learners to receive new information more readily (Knowles et al., 2015). The results of this study deepen the understanding of adult learning theory, as it applies to novice administrators supervising special education, by indicating that novice administrators are extremely motivated to learn information that will help them to serve students and their own careers better. These motivations are in direct alignment with adult learning theory, which indicates that adult learners are more prepared to receive information when they are motivated to do so, and it is relevant to their current needs (Garwood, 2015; Knowles et al., 2015).

Adult learning theory states that adult learners who are offered voice and choice experience learning with greater impact (Cox, 2015; Hagen & Park, 2016). The administrators in this study have not been offered much voice and choice as they learned to supervise special education programs. From a theoretical standpoint, rather than attend some purposeful mandatory division training and seek the additional knowledge independently, novice administrators could potentially deepen their understanding of special education supervision were there a variety of options available to suit their individual needs. Division leadership should consider whether a completely self-directed path can produce the level of results that they desire. Novice administrators are reaching out to sources that they trust; however, the results of this study did not reveal a significant vetting process as far as the selection of those sources. Division leadership cannot be guaranteed that administrators are receiving accurate or relevant information through a completely self-directed path.

Practical Implications

The present study revealed that novice administrators supervising special education programs are not prepared to fulfill their responsibilities upon stepping into their current roles, potentially putting them in a position to violate ESSA or IDEIA (Essex, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). It is crucial that a plan is developed by stakeholders to ensure that novice administrators receive the necessary knowledge and training both pre-service and in-service so that they can adequately serve special education students and their families. Since the prior literature and this current study agree that administrator preparation programs do not typically include sufficient information on special education supervision, this training must be provided through another mechanism (McHatton et al., 2010; Steinbrecher et al., 2015). Policymakers should examine the requirements of licensure for administrators and consider including special-

education-specific tasks prior to issuing licenses. Higher education administrators could work alongside policymakers to include meaningful special education supervision tasks either through coursework, internship, or both. Higher education institutions may consider interviewing recent graduates to determine what knowledge and skills were required of them during their initial administrative assignments. Feedback from graduates can help to inform future higher education programming.

With special education litigation increasing in recent years, school divisions should also consider how they are preparing novice administrators to supervise special education programs (Karanxha & Zirkel, 2014). Superintendents and other division leadership must be aware of the contents of higher education programs and existing internships, particularly with regard to the lack of special education information included in these programs (McHatton et al., 2010; Steinbrecher et al., 2015). Placing novice administrators in full charge of special education programs without the necessary knowledge and expertise leaves the school division legally vulnerable. Further, school divisions should communicate with higher education programs and policymakers so that all stakeholders are aware of the actual job requirements of novice administrators.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations were intentionally placed on this study to keep the study focused on the lived experiences of a particular group. Limitations emerged due to the design selected and the research choices made.

Delimitations

Participants in this study were delimited to novice, public school administrators with three years or less of experience in administration to capture the experiences of new

administrators navigating the supervision of special education programs. Administrators with more than three years of experience were excluded, and no administrators from private or charter schools were included since many of those schools do not have building-level special education programs. Additionally, administrators who did not supervise special education programs were excluded because their experiences did not relate to the phenomenon being studied.

Participation in this study was further delimited to administrators in three divisions in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia, which was a sample convenient to the researcher and representative of a population of special education students that matches the national average. This choice was made to keep the study manageable for individual interviews and to facilitate face-to-face focus groups. While allowing for data saturation, the small sample size, 10 novice administrators, still left the potential for different results with a different set of administrators. This sample did not describe all novice, public school administrators who supervised special education programs. The design was limited to a qualitative, transcendental phenomenology, which excluded certain data collection methods that may be found in different designs. Transcendental phenomenology was utilized because the study intended to understand the experiences of participants as they experienced the phenomenon.

Limitations

This study held several limitations. The first limitation was researcher bias. Since, at the time of this study, I was a novice administrator who supervised a special education program, I had to intentionally bracket out my experiences to let the participants' experiences speak for themselves. Additionally, this study only examined a small population of administrators in one geographical region, which means that the results may not hold for a broader population. A larger sample size over a broader geographical region may have produced different results. The

present study relied on participants self-reporting their experiences. It is possible that participants did not accurately describe their experiences or that they answered in particular ways to please the researcher or the focus group members.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study examined the lived experiences of novice administrators as they supervised special education programs. The results of the study indicated that novice administrators were not fully prepared to assume responsibility for special education programs when they began their administrative journeys. These novice administrators were charged with daily tasks and responsibilities that they did not have the knowledge or expertise to complete. Utilizing their motivations for success, these administrators acquired the knowledge necessary to supervise special education programs through a variety of methods. Future research should examine the differences between administrator preparation programs to include internship programs and the actual job responsibilities of novice administrators. It is possible that there are additional gaps between preparation programs and job responsibilities that need to be uncovered. A multiple case study design could be utilized to examine local preparation programs compared with the responsibilities of recent graduates who accept administrative positions.

Future studies should also examine, expanding upon adult learning theory, the best model for novice administrators to gain the knowledge and expertise to supervise special education programs. This could potentially be completed through a mixed-methods design that examines quantitative measures for effective learning opportunities as they relate to qualitative measures, which describe the experiences of participants in more depth. This study could be completed with both novice administrators and seasoned administrators to determine what were the most meaningful learning experiences for both populations as they assumed responsibilities.

A case study analysis could be conducted to examine the existing lawsuits against a cohort of school divisions. The cases could be viewed through the lens of the administrators supervising the special education programs to determine not only what went wrong, but also, what remedial steps need to be taken.

Finally, special education student outcomes should be examined with regard to the building administrator's preparation to supervise the special education program. A causal-comparative design could be utilized to examine the achievement and progress of special education students relative to the administrative preparation in special education to determine if there is a relationship.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how a group of novice, public school administrators experienced and learned to supervise special education programs. Utilizing adult learning theory with the assumptions of andragogy, this study examined the processes that novice administrators experienced as they learned to supervise special education programs. Data were collected from 10 participants by using three qualitative measures (i.e., journals, individual interviews, and focus groups) and analyzed by coding, identifying themes, developing textural and structural descriptions, and ultimately arriving at the essence of the experience for participants. Five themes emerged from the analysis of the study: formal preparation experiences, not having the knowledge or expertise, daily tasks required, motivation for success, and acquiring the knowledge necessary. The essence of the experience was that these novice, public school administrators were largely unprepared to supervise special education programs even after participating in higher education preparation programs. These novice administrators were assigned to complete daily tasks, which they could not complete

adequately, due to their lack of knowledge and expertise. The feelings of inadequacy caused these novice administrators to utilize their motivations for student success, data-driven outcomes, and their own career successes to seek out the necessary knowledge utilizing a variety of sources.

It is critical that policymakers, higher education administrators, and school division leadership collaborate to develop a plan to ensure that novice administrators are prepared to accept the responsibilities of a special education program prior to entering into the role. Further, a systematic professional development plan needs to be in place to inform the future learning of these administrators once they are actively supervising special education programs. Students with disabilities deserve administrators who have the knowledge and expertise to provide an equitable education for them. Additionally, administrators who are informed can properly structure building-level programs to ensure access and opportunity for special education students. Without adequate leadership, equity will be unachievable.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 11, 2019

Kristen Marie Richtberg Wilkins
IRB Exemption 3864.091119: A Description of the Lived Experiences of Administrators
Supervising Special Education Programs: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Kristen Marie Richtberg Wilkins,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance
with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration
(FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you
may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved
application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in
which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

> (2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude,
> achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual
> or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

>> (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of
>> the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects,
>> and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any
changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued
exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a
new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether
possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at
irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Recruitment Letter

Dear Administrator:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for an Education Doctorate in Educational Leadership.   The purpose of my research is to describe the lived experiences of novice, public school administrators as they supervise special education programs and I am writing to invite you participate in my study.

If you are a public school administrator with three or less years of experience in administration, you supervise a special education program, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to journal your special education experiences for two weeks by writing a minimum of four journal entries, participate in an interview, and participate in one focus group session. Focus group sessions are scheduled for November 9, 2019 and December 7, 2019 at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮. Additionally, you will be asked to review the transcript of your interview and provide any corrections to me. It should take approximately three and one-half hours total for you to complete the procedures listed. Your name and/or other identifying information will be collected as part of your participation, but this information will remain confidential.

To participate, click on the link provided and complete the screening survey.

If you meet the criteria for the study based on your screening survey responses and are selected to participate, a consent document will be attached to your acceptance email (emailed) via the digital signature tool SignRequest^{TM}. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please electronically sign the consent document. Once I receive your signed consent document, you will receive your electronic journal and I will contact you to set up your interview.

Sincerely,

Kristen M. Richtberg Wilkins, Education Specialist
Doctoral Candidate. Liberty University

Appendix C: Screening Survey

1. Are you a public school administrator?

Yes

No

2. How many years of experience do you have as a public school administrator?

Less than 1

1

2

3

More than 3

3. Do you supervise a special education program in your building (this includes inclusion and/or self-contained classes)?

Yes

No

4. Are you willing to participate in the research study: A Description of the Lived Experiences of Administrators Supervising Special Education Programs?

Yes

No

5. What is your email address?

Appendix D: Acceptance and Rejection Emails to Potential Participants

Acceptance Email

Dear Administrator,

Thank you for your interest in participating in the research study titled: A Description of the

Lived Experiences of Administrators Supervising Special Education Programs. You have been

selected to participate in this study. Attached, please find the electronic consent form. Please

return this form signed via email to ███████████████ within seven days. If you have

questions or concerns, please reach out to me using the contact information listed below.

Sincerely,

Kristen M. Richtberg Wilkins, Education Specialist
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University
████████████████

Rejection email

Dear Administrator,

Thank you for your interest in participating in the research study titled: A Description of the

Lived Experiences of Administrators Supervising Special Education Programs. At this time, you

have not been selected to participate in this study. Thank you for being willing to contribute. If

you have questions or concerns, please reach out to me using the contact information listed

below.

Sincerely,

Kristen M. Richtberg Wilkins, Education Specialist
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University
████████████████

Appendix E: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM
A Description of the Lived Experiences of Administrators Supervising Special Education
Programs
Kristen M. Richtberg Wilkins
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study to describe the lived experiences of novice, public school administrators as they supervise special education programs. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a public school administrator with three or less years of experience in administration and you supervise a special education program. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Kristen M. Richtberg Wilkins, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experiences of novice, public school administrators as they supervise special education programs. The central research questions is: What are the lived experiences of novice, public school administrators as they supervise special education programs?

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Journal your special education supervision experiences for two weeks using a digital journal template. This should take you approximately 5 to 15 minutes each time over a two-week period with a minimum of four journal entries.
2. Participate in an individual interview which will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. This interview should take approximately one hour.
3. Participate in one focus group session. The focus group session should take approximately one hour and will be video and audio recorded.
4. Review the transcript of your individual interview and your contributions during the focus group to ensure their accuracy. This should take approximately 15 minutes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, you may benefit from the collaborative conversation that occurs in the focus group session with other novice administrators who are also supervising special education programs.

Benefits to society include: This study can be potentially used for policy implications as higher education programs are determining what knowledge, skills, and dispositions are necessary for the supervision of special education programs. Additionally, licensure practices can be examined as they relate to administrator preparation programs and consideration can be given to the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions that administrators need when they begin their supervision journeys. Ultimately, the lives of special education students and their families could

be impacted by this study because valuable information could be uncovered regarding the necessary next steps with regard to special education supervision, licensure, and policy. Education is ultimately about students and research in the educational field can help to improve the overall educational experience for current and future students.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

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. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will select a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

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: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Kristen M. Richtberg Wilkins. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 843-798-8617 or krichtberg@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Gail Collins, at glcollins2@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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information 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.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix F: Electronic Journal Template

Participant Pseudonym: _____

Electronic Journal Instructions: Please journal your experiences with supervising special education programs over the next two weeks. Journal a minimum of four times over the course of the two-week period. Guiding prompts are provided as suggestions however, you are free to describe your experiences however you see fit. Please write as much as possible using a minimum of 100 words and date each entry.

Guiding Prompts:

- How did your prior experiences assist you in the supervision of special education?

- Reflect on your recent experience with special education supervision.

- What opportunities for growth do you have regarding special education supervision?

- How do you maximize your success in supervising special education programs?

- What other thoughts do you have regarding your supervision of the special education program in your school?

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G: Reminder Emails

Dear Participant:

Thank you for your participation in my research study. This is a reminder that you are in the participant journal phase of the research study. This is the one-week mark out of a two-week journaling period. Please journal as much as possible regarding your special education supervision experiences. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to me using the contact information listed below.

Sincerely,

Kristen M. Richtberg Wilkins, Education Specialist
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University
███████████

Dear Participant:

Thank you for your participation in my research study. This is a reminder that you are in the participant journal phase of the research study. This is the 13 day mark out of a two-week journaling period. Please journal as much as possible regarding your special education supervision experiences. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to me using the contact information listed below.

Sincerely,

Kristen M. Richtberg Wilkins, Education Specialist
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University
███████████

Appendix H: Interview Questions

Standardized open-ended interview questions

1. Tell me about your prior experiences before becoming an administrator.

2. How do your previous experiences inform the supervision of special education programs?

3. What do you wish you knew about special education supervision prior to assuming responsibility?

4. Describe your role in the supervision of special education in your building.

5. How do you feel about being able to support special education teachers?

6. Are you motivated to learn more about special education supervision? If yes, what motivates you to learn more about special education? If no, why not?

7. How do you know that you are successfully supervising special education?

8. How do you balance the needs of special education programs with the other things you have to learn?

9. What is your main source of professional learning regarding special education supervision?

10. If you attend educational conferences that have a special education track for administrators, how often do you select those sessions (frequently, sometimes, maybe one session, rarely, or never)?

11. What other learning experiences do you participate in to deepen your knowledge of special education programs?

12. What has been the most meaningful learning experience for you regarding the supervision of special education programs?

13. How do you acquire the knowledge to solve everyday problems related to special education supervision?

14. What satisfactions have you gained, or what frustrations do you have with supervising special education? How have you resolved any frustrations?

15. What is the most important thing for new administrators to know and understand as they assume responsibility for special education programs?

16. What advice do you have for new administrators who will assume responsibility for supervising special education programs?

17. What, if anything, do you wish was included in your administrator preparation program regarding the supervision of special education programs?

18. Is there anything else that we have not discussed that you would like to share?

Appendix I: Focus Group Questions

Standardized open-ended focus group questions:

1. Please introduce yourself to the group by describing your higher education degrees, job title, and the number of years that you have supervised special education programs.

2. What single prior experience has helped you the most during your supervision of special education programs?

3. What do you wish you knew prior to assuming responsibility for a special education program?

4. What has been the most impactful learning experience for you as you supervise special education programs?

5. How have you navigated frustrations and failures relative to special education programs?

6. What problems have you experienced with supervising special education programs?

7. Where do you turn for problem-solving expertise when you encounter a special education-related issue?

8. What motivates you to acquire more information regarding the supervision of special education programs?

9. What recommendations do you have for professional learning experiences for other administrators supervising special education programs?

10. What would you like to see included in administrator preparation programs regarding the supervision of special education programs?

11. Of all the things we discussed, what is the most important to you?

12. Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you would like to share with the group?

Appendix J: Reflexive Journal

Sample Entries

Date:	Notes:
2/18/19	I began working in special education in 2005 as an instructional assistant in a self-contained building for students with autism who could not be serviced in their regular school districts. This was my first formal experience with students with disabilities. I learned the principals of applied behavioral analysis (ABA) and worked in this building for three years. During the three years that I worked in this school, I obtained a master's degree in Inclusive Elementary and Special Education from Hofstra University, which was conferred in December 2007. I knew that I wanted to be a special education teacher and help students with disabilities and their families. I immediately began applying for full-time teaching positions and began working as a full-time inclusion teacher in August 2008. I was assigned to work with 44 students with disabilities in grades 3-5 at a public school in South Carolina. I learned how to work with teachers and parents to best educate students with disabilities. Throughout this experience, I worked closely with my assistant principal who was assigned to oversee the special education department. She was a hard-working assistant principal with lots of experience. Ultimately, she defaulted to the special education teachers to write IEPs and determine what was best for students with disabilities and she would sign off on our expertise. I appreciated the vote of confidence at the time and worked hard to make sure that I made decisions in the best interest of students and proposed to the team my recommendations. In 2010, my family relocated to another state and I obtained another job as a special education teacher in an inclusion setting. In this school, I was assigned 12 kids who were in grades one and four. I found out that the state regulations on caseload limits were different and that is why I had significantly less students. I quickly realized that I could do much more with my students when there was less of them. This was an eye-opening experience as a young special education teacher. It was in this place that I became interested in the topic of this dissertation. My assistant principal was again in charge of the special education program and she would take the minutes as the meetings, sign off on our decisions, and support our recommendations to the team. I continued to appreciate the vote of confidence. However, it was during this time that an outside person came to observe my classroom and make recommendations to me that did not make sense for the students I was teaching. I complained to my administrator who supported my decisions. I inquired how someone who was assigned to work at the district level and make decisions about instruction could be so detached from the needs of special education students. My principal encouraged me to go back to school for an endorsement in leadership so that I could attempt to make the types of policy changes I was stating needed to be made. At the time, I was not in a place in my life to go back to school so I waited. I took a break from teaching from 2013-2015 as I had two children under two years old at home who needed me. In 2015, I returned to teaching in a different state and began pursuing a leadership endorsement. In this new school division, I once again observed that my administrators defaulted to my recommendations and did not question the decisions that I was making. I became more in tune to how I was being

	supervised and discovered that not only was no one reading the paperwork I was drafting but also, they were not observing my instruction. I was teaching special education students as part of a multidisciplinary team who was defaulting to my recommendations and not providing any contrary recommendations. In 2016, I was offered a position that was closer to home teaching inclusion for third-grade students. During this time, I was also the process facilitator for the building in charge of scheduling child study meetings for students being referred to special education for consideration of evaluation. I began working extremely close with the building administrators who disclosed to me that they really had no idea what they were looking at and that they felt unprepared to properly weigh in on special education-related decisions. At this point, I became interested in this topic and began asking administrators that I encountered what their preparation to supervise special education was like. I also began reading on the topic and the same theme of unpreparedness emerged. At this time, I decided that I was being called to research this topic in depth. In 2018, I was asked to be the assistant principal at a middle school. This was my first administrative assignment and left me in charge of the special education department. I have found that my previous experiences as a special education teacher helped me tremendously with my supervision of this program. I wonder if I could be an effective leader in this position without those experiences.
3/9/19	

Appendix K: Significant Statements and Number of Times Repeated

Significant Statements	#
Analyzing data for measurable growth as a method for determining success	13
Building capacity in teachers as a necessary tool for administrator success	58
Building-level collaboration as a necessary tool for administrator success	64
Division-level training in special education supervision	27
Everyday problem solving as a challenge in special education supervision	30
Feeling inadequate as a special education supervisor	65
Finding your own information to inform the supervision of special education programs	81
Higher education training not preparing administrators to supervise special education	39
Identifying areas of weakness in a special education program to strengthen the program as an administrator	36
Feeling as though more preparation should have been provided through administrative internship relative to special education supervision	25
Not having enough information about IEPs and how they are written	23
Not having enough knowledge about special education supervision	61
Feeling uninformed regarding the law and special education	43
Not receiving enough information from your school division on how to properly supervise special education	20
On-the-job training as the method for learning regarding special education supervision	92
Using other administrators as a method for learning how to supervise special education programs	83

Personal motivation and work ethic contributing to the success of supervising special education programs	56
Drawing from prior teaching experience to assist in the supervision of special education	47
Having to serve as LEA	62
Struggling to balance special education with other responsibilities	40
Having to trust special education teachers due to your own lack of knowledge	14
Wanting what is best for students	36

Appendix L: Audit Trail

Date:	Action:
9/11/19	Full IRB approval obtained
9/11/19-9/15/19	Solicit pilot study participants
9/18/19-10/11/19	Conduct pilot study and utilize results to inform study
10/12/19-11/1/19	Solicit study participants
10/12/19-11/15/19	Send acceptance emails to participants with consent forms
10/12/19-11/15/19	Send journal links to participants
10/28/19-12/5/19	Conduct individual interviews
11/9/19	Conduct focus group 1
12/7/19	Conduct focus group 2
10/28/19-12/7/19	Send interview and focus group audio files to be transcribed by Rev.com
12/8/19	Aggregate data, print all transcripts and journals
12/9/19-1/13/20	Complete data analysis, begin drafting Chapter Four
1/13/20-1/25/20	Write Chapter Five and submit to chair for review.