

ADMINISTRATOR PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT JOB SATISFACTION OF SPECIAL
EDUCATION TEACHERS IN RURAL SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA: A COLLECTIVE CASE
STUDY

by

Donna Jean Ragan Poskas

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this collective case study was to describe special education teacher and administrator perceptions of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers in a rural Southwest Virginia public school district. The theory guiding this study is Herzberg's motivational-hygiene theory of job satisfaction (1959). Purposeful convenience sampling was used to select 11 participants who are administrators or special education teachers who currently work in the rural public school setting. Face-to-face interviews, observations, and a focus group were used in order to seek to answer the questions: How do special education teachers and administrators describe practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers? How do administrator practices that motivate special education teachers increase job satisfaction? How do administrator practices that improve the school environment influence special education teacher perceptions of job satisfaction? How does enriching the school environment by an administrator influence the job satisfaction of special education teachers? Analysis of the data was performed using categorical aggregation to identify codes and themes, which were then used to determine what is meaningful to the study in the data collected. Results showed that when administrators initiate practices that support the job satisfaction of rural special education teachers and enrich the school environment, it is likely that job satisfaction will increase which may influence special education teacher decisions to remain in their positions.

Keywords: administrator practices, job satisfaction, retention, rural, job enrichment

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to special education teachers who work diligently with loving hearts to provide students with disabilities the skills they require to become successful in their chosen fields, and more importantly, the desire to reach for the stars.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my family for the loving support they have given me as I strived to achieve a lifelong goal that was instilled in me by my dad. He always believed that education was a priority and I so wish that he were here to celebrate this accomplishment with me. I would like to thank my husband Michael for being a caring and loving partner in this process. I would also like to acknowledge my mother, my sons Scott and Steve, daughter-in-law Michelle, and grandchildren Alex, Brandon, Katie, and Jacob for always encouraging me to complete my journey and giving me the love and support I needed to succeed. It is my hope that they will remember that you are never too old to have a new dream and accomplish it.

Although this journey has been challenging, I have been blessed to have Dr. Swezey and Dr. Smith to guide me through the process and provide me with the encouragement I needed to see the process through to its completion.

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List of Abbreviations

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this study is to describe special education teacher and administrator perceptions of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers in rural Southwest Virginia. Studies have linked supervisor support to higher job satisfaction and a higher likelihood that teachers will remain in their positions (Charoensukmongkol, Moqbel, & Griterrez-Wirching, 2016; Green & Munoz, 2016; Kaden, Patterson, Healy, & Adams, 2016).

After tracking teacher retention in school districts in Appalachia for nearly 20 years, researchers have found that teachers were more likely to leave the area rather than move into it and were more likely to exit the profession than in other areas of the country (Cowen, Butler, Fowles, Streams, & Toma, 2012). For more than two decades, special education teacher shortages have been a concern for administrators who have the responsibility of recruiting and retaining qualified staff (Berry, 2012; Billingsley, 2004; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). The retention of special education teachers is crucial to student learning. Without qualified special education teachers, students with disabilities are at risk of receiving inadequate educational experiences, reduced achievement levels, and insufficient preparation for higher education and the workplace (Billingsley, 2004; Hong, 2012). Administrative support has been cited in numerous studies as being a major influence on teachers' job satisfaction and decisions to leave or remain in the field of education (Berry, 2012; Bennett et al., 2013; Conley & You, 2016; Jones & Watson, 2017).

Chapter One provides a summary of the most relevant literature related to job satisfaction and the retention of special education teachers from a historical, social, and theoretical context.

As an advocate for children with special needs, I will explain my motivation for conducting a study on administrator practices that support special education teacher job satisfaction in rural schools. Gaps in the research linking special education teacher job satisfaction, retention, and administrator support are identified in order to justify this investigation. The problem of acquiring job satisfaction and special education teacher retention is discussed. The purpose for conducting a study of teacher and administrator perspectives through description of administrator practices that support job satisfaction and retention is provided. In addition, I describe how obtaining additional knowledge will impact administrator practices, special education teachers, and students with special needs. In conclusion, research questions focusing on what is hoped to be learned through the study are stated. Pertinent terms are defined in order to assist the reader in understanding the basic concepts of the study.

Background

This section examines the current research addressing the problem of job satisfaction of special education teachers in rural Virginia. The problem of job satisfaction is investigated through the existing literature from a historical, social, and theoretical perspective. Although researchers have documented that the rural problem of teacher training, recruitment, and retention has changed over time, the need to investigate these issues prevails (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Brownell, Bishop, & Sindelar, 2018). From a historical perspective, a review of the literature seeks to describe how the issue of special education teacher job satisfaction, retention and attrition in rural areas has evolved. Socially, economic issues which impact administrators, student learning, and school division management are considered. In conclusion, literature based on the motivational-hygiene theory is discussed (Herzberg, 1959). This theory examines the factors that influence job satisfaction and dissatisfaction as it is related to the work environment.

Findings have shown that job satisfaction is an issue that has been a concern for policymakers and administrators who have the responsibility of providing qualified staff to instruct students with disabilities (Billingsley, 2004; Vittek, 2015). The consequences of not fulfilling this commitment not only impacts the school division but also the learning of students (Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Stevenson, 2013; Zhang, Wang, Loinski, & Katsiyannis, 2014).

Historical Perspective

As early as 1912, Fishpaw noted that educators were describing how addressing the issues of demographics, migration, economics, and social changes in a rural environment would be ineffective unless there were qualified teachers to provide instruction to students (Biddle & Azano, 2016). A review of literature was conducted which focused on rural teacher training, recruitment, and retention and how these issues have changed over time (Biddle & Azano, 2016). The authors noted that although the rural school problem (training, recruitment, and retention) has appeared to wane, the importance of addressing the issues in rural schools continues to be crucial in order for rural communities to provide the resources that will enable their students to move forward into the age of global capitalism (Biddle & Azano, 2016).

As stated earlier, special education teacher job satisfaction, retention, and attrition have been a significant concern for those who have the responsibility of retaining qualified, capable staff to teach children with special needs (Billingsley, 2004; Vittek, 2015). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, reinforced by The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) 2004, mandated the provision of highly qualified special education teachers which presented challenges in retention and recruitment for rural school districts (Brownell, Bishop, & Sindelar, 2018; Sindelar, Pua, Fisher, Peyton, Browell, Mason-Williams, 2018). Although NCLB was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) 2015,

nullifying the highly qualified requirement, current circumstances in rural areas continue to be taxing as evidenced by ongoing teacher shortages (Sindelar et al., 2018).

According to the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education (2011), 44 states reported teacher shortages in the area of special education with a 17% increase expected through 2018 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). The 2016-2017 Teacher Shortage Area Nationwide Listing, Department of Education, reported that 48 states in the U.S. are in need of special education teachers. With the declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs from 2009-2014, as reported by the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Enrollment in Teacher Preparation Programs (2015), the importance of retaining teachers is even more vital.

Social Perspective

Social circumstances such as declining industries, immigration, eroding tax bases, and an aging population have created challenges for rural schools (Biddle & Azano, 2016). Though the special education teacher shortage has been an ongoing issue for many years, the continued implications will over time not only impact the school division but also the academic achievement of students with disabilities (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Cowen, Butler, Fowles Streams, & Toma, 2012; Westling & Whitten, 1996). School divisions are forced to pay the cost of recruiting and training new teachers as teachers leave their positions (Bozonelos, 2008). Because there is an insufficient supply of special education teacher candidates, vacancies left unfilled by teachers who choose to leave the profession remain unfilled (Bennett, Brown, Kirby-Smith, & Severson, 2013; Zhang, Wang, Losinski, & Katsiyannis, 2014).

Administrators are affected by the problem of job satisfaction and retention (Sedivy-Benton & McGill, 2012). When schools experience high rates of teacher attrition, the learning

of the students and accomplishments of the organization are negatively impacted (Hong, 2012; Shaw & Newton, 2014; Shila & Sevilla, 2015). Teachers who are dissatisfied tend to be less committed to the vision, mission, and goals of the school and are more likely to leave (Shila & Sevilla, 2015; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). By utilizing practices that are supportive, administrators improve their chances of increasing job satisfaction and teachers remaining in their positions (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Studies have suggested that qualitative research focusing on the special education teachers' perspective, could be helpful in determining what resources and relationships are needed for training and professional development for administrators, consequently enabling them to gain an understanding of supportive practices and influence teachers' attitudes toward remaining in their positions (Conley & You, 2016; Langher, Caputo, & Ricci., 2017). Findings indicate that practices of administrators who value teacher contributions increase job satisfaction and have a positive influence on the retention of teachers (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Bolger & Nir, 2012; Urick, 2016). Administrators who understand the role and responsibilities of teachers exhibit practices that demonstrate their desire to build positive relationships which positively impacting teachers' perceptions (Berry, 2012; Bennett et al., 2013).

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective that will be guiding this study is the motivational-hygiene theory (Herzberg, 1959). The theory was first conceived from an examination of events in the lives of engineers and accountants that resulted in the conclusion that the factors involved in producing job satisfaction are separate and distinct from those that lead to job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1966). Herzberg (1959) identified two types of factors related to job satisfaction. Motivator factors are the primary cause of satisfaction and hygiene factors are the primary cause

of unhappiness in the workplace. The motivational-hygiene theory suggests that work can be enriched to make the work meaningful, motivating employees and increasing job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). *Job enrichment* is defined as seeking to improve task efficiency and human satisfaction by building into peoples' jobs greater scope for personal achievement, recognition, challenging and responsible work, and an opportunity for individual advancement and growth (Herzberg, 2003). *Meaningful work* is defined as work that is significant, facilitates personal growth, and contributes to the greater good (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012).

Herzberg (1966) addresses five criteria for a meaningful job that enables employees to find job satisfaction in doing the work. First, the job should allow opportunities to achieve which results in the employee's ability to increase their knowledge about the occupation or particular job. Recognition of this achievement reinforces learning and encourages the employee to be less dependent on others' input, relying on their own evaluation of achievement in the workplace. Second, increasing the employee's responsibility leads to a better understanding of the task and the various components that are required to be successful. Third, there should be an opportunity for personal growth and creativity, which encourages satisfaction. Fourth, the opportunity for advancement in either rank or presentation of higher order tasks gives the employee the chance to be successful in ambiguity and leads to higher-level psychological growth. Fifth, making a task directly related to the interest of the employee can provide a sense of personal worth (Herzberg, 1966).

Situation to Self

As a former special education teacher who resides in a rural community that experiences a high level of poverty and has few resources for special education teacher training, I am motivated to investigate practices that will increase the likelihood that qualified special education

teachers will remain in their positions. Over a period of 25 years, I have observed a decreasing number of certified special education teachers being hired and an increasing number of experienced, certified special education teachers wanting to leave the field. It is difficult to understand the demands of being a special education teacher as an administrator unless administrators personally have their experiences to guide them. I believe that if administrators knew what practices motivated special education teachers to stay in their positions, they would utilize that information to build relationships in the school setting that were supportive and decrease the likelihood that teachers would leave.

I will make the reader aware of my ontological, epistemological, rhetorical, and axiological beliefs in order to inform them of any personal assumptions that may influence the study. Assumptions will be defined and described as they are related to my personal beliefs and biases.

Ontology refers to the nature of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My ontological assumptions are that each person has a different perspective that must be considered when developing themes in the findings of the study. I believe that multiple forms of evidence using the participants' actual words should be used in describing their reality in order to assure that each participant's voice is heard and considered. Each participant's responses will be considered when analyzing the data to determine the findings of the study. Data collection will consist of interviews, observations, and a focus group. Transcriptions will be reviewed to assure accuracy and member checks conducted to give the opportunity for participant feedback.

Epistemological assumptions consider what counts as knowledge, how this knowledge is justified, and what relationship exists between the researcher and that being researched (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I believe it is necessary to go into the schools and meet face-

to-face with the participants. Through the interview, focus group, and observation process, I will be able to go into the schools where the research is being conducted and spend time building relationships with participants in order to be viewed as an insider rather than someone who is isolated from their situation. With this, it is my hope that participants will share their stories more freely and view the experience as an opportunity to become a part of a productive endeavor.

Axiological assumptions consider the values the researcher brings to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I acknowledge that I have had experiences as a special education teacher and coordinator that may create biases in my views of administrator practices that support job satisfaction and how that satisfaction influences retention of teachers. Findings in the study will present an interpretation of the voices of the participants based on my personal experiences.

Methodological assumptions involve the process of research and its language (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I will use inductive logic when conducting the study, considering the perspectives of the participants. Although I have many years of experience with administrators as a special educator, I will strive to be impartial and not allow my beliefs to guide the study. I believe that as the study develops, there may need to be modifications in some aspects of the study, such as questions, data analysis, or data collection, in order to develop a better knowledge of the problem.

The paradigm through which I view the study is social constructivism. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) social constructivism focuses on the way individuals seek understanding of the world where they live and work through varied and multiple meanings of their experiences as they interact with others. I will rely on participants' views by obtaining thick-rich descriptions through interactions with administrators and special education teachers

using multiple sources of data collection. I realize that my own experiences as an educator may influence the interpretation of the data, but I would strive to obtain objective meanings from the experiences of the participants and respect their views as individuals.

Problem Statement

The problem this collective case study will seek to address is administrator practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers in rural Southwest Virginia. Findings have shown that there is a direct effect between administrator practices, job satisfaction, and the retention of special education teachers (Conley & You, 2016; Jones & Watson, 2017; Shila & Servilla, 2015; You & Conley, 2014). The retention of special education teachers is a challenge that is facing the country's educational system (Leland & Mutardha, 2011; Tyler & Brunner, 2014; Vittek, 2015). According to the 2014-2015 Teacher Shortage Area Nationwide Listing, Department of Education, 94% of the states in the U.S. are in need of special education teachers. Likewise, the Virginia Department of Education 2017-2018 report on Critical Shortage Teaching Endorsement Areas in Virginia identified special education as the number one area of concern. Special educators are also twice as likely to leave their positions as general educators (Tyler & Brunner, 2014).

Recent research has notes a direct effect between administrator support, job satisfaction, and special education teachers' intentions to leave their positions (Conley & You, 2016; Jones & Watson, 2017; Shila & Servilla, 2015; You & Conley, 2014). After searching a variety of databases, few studies were found that provided special education teachers and administrators an opportunity to hear each other's voices on the issue of increasing job satisfaction through an investigation of administrator practices. Research on leadership behaviors that impact teacher retention is timely and necessary (Jones & Watson, 2017). The gap between the number of

special education teachers available, the number of special education students identified, and the number of positions that are currently left unfilled is increasing (U. S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2015 Title II Report). In order to become an effective administrator, it is necessary to investigate practices that increase teacher satisfaction and the likelihood that teachers will choose to remain in their positions as educators.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this collective case study is to describe special education teacher and administrator perceptions of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural southwest Virginia special education teachers. At this stage in the research, the term *job satisfaction* will be defined as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Locke, 1976). *Administrative support* will be defined as administrators who show appreciation, take an interest in teachers' work, provide constructive feedback, and let teachers know what is expected of them (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013). The motivational-hygiene theory is the lens through which the study will be guided (Herzberg, 1959). This theory suggests that job satisfaction increases the likelihood that employees will remain in their positions (Herzberg, 1959). By gaining insight into administrator practices that increase job satisfaction, a more positive outcome related to the retention of special education teachers may occur, benefitting administrators, special education teachers, and students (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Westling & Whitten, 1966).

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this section is to describe the contributions this study will make, theoretically and empirically, to the knowledge base and the practical significance it will have to the school division. This study will make a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge base

that exists related to administrator practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers and the ensuing impact on retention. Herzberg (1968) states that when work is enriched, the motivation of employees increases, creating a positive impact on job satisfaction.

Theoretically, findings from the study will seek to provide further evidence that supports the impact of enriching the work environment to increase job satisfaction of special education teachers through supportive administrative practices (Hardre, 2007; Shila & Servilla, 2015; Urick, 2016; You & Conley, 2014). By further analyzing these factors through the voices of special education teachers and administrators, additional knowledge will be gained which can be applied to the theory in order to promote teacher retention.

The study will relate to other studies that have investigated job satisfaction by seeking to describe administrator practices that increase job satisfaction and the retention of special education teachers. However, after reviewing existing research, few studies were found that provided an in-depth understanding through the perceptions of special education teachers and administrators of administrator practices that increase job satisfaction and motivate special education teachers to remain in their professions. There is a lack of research investigating specific strategies used by administrators which increase job satisfaction and retention (Berry, 2012; Bolger & Nir, 2012; Hong, 2012; Vittek, 2015). Examination of administrative supports that impact special education teachers' attitudes toward their jobs and their intention to remain is needed (Conley & You, 2016; Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017). There have been no conclusions as to which leadership behaviors have the greatest impact on teacher retention. Research on specific leadership behaviors is still considered timely and necessary (Jones & Watson, 2017).

The study is important in order to prevent the loss of such valuable resources as special education teachers that influence the success of the school and student achievement (You & Conley, 2014). Rural areas, such as in Southwest Virginia, who struggle with declining tax bases, poverty, and the inability to retain qualified personnel need to find ways to increase job satisfaction of their special education teachers which will motivate them to remain in their positions (Biddle & Azano, 2016). The implications of this research will impact central office personnel, administrators, and other stakeholders as they evaluate administrator support as it relates to career commitment and the provision of educational opportunities for students with disabilities. With the increasing shortage of qualified special education teachers in rural areas, it is critical that every effort is made to understand what can be done to reverse the trend (Cowen et al., 2012; Westling & Whitten, 1996). Leaders need to be compelled to seek out those who are more knowledgeable in the area of social/emotional skills in order to increase their awareness of practices that will benefit their relationships with their teachers (Hensley & Burmeister, 2008). As administrators and teachers work as a team in a collegial environment that respects the needs of each individual, not only will they benefit, but the students will benefit as well. According to Bennett et al. (2013), the effectiveness of administrative leadership and school environment is a significant factor related to teacher retention. Findings have identified stress of the profession (behavioral issues, requirements of paperwork, and state mandated tests) as reasons teachers leave their jobs (Bennett et al., 2013). Therefore, one of the most important challenges for administrators is to find ways to create a supportive environment that motivates teachers to remain in their positions. Results of the research indicate that there is a strong correlation between community building and job satisfaction which may lead to teacher retention (Harris et al., 2016; You & Conley, 2014).

Administrators are people managers who hold the key to providing students with the best education possible. They are responsible for providing an opportunity to learn from professionals who are respected and valued for the important job that they are undertaking. It is crucial that administrators become sensitive to the needs of their staff and adopt practices that support those needs in order to retain special education teachers (Urick, 2016). As stakeholders, school divisions, administrators, teachers, parents, and students are impacted by teachers' job satisfaction which is linked to student achievement and organizational advancement (Shaw & Newton, 2014; Shila & Sevilla, 2015).

Research Questions

The purpose of this section is to identify research questions that I will seek to answer in the study. The questions will be related to administrator practices that support job satisfaction in rural special education teachers from the perceptions of the special education teacher and administrator.

The central question this research will seek to answer is: How do rural special education teachers and administrators describe administrative practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers?

Sub-Question One: How do administrator practices that motivate special education teachers increase job satisfaction?

Sub-Question Two: How do administrator practices that improve the school environment influence special education teacher perceptions of job satisfaction?

Sub-Question Three: How does enriching the school environment by an administrator influence the job satisfaction of special education teachers?

The central question relates to the theoretical framework that will guide the study. The motivational-hygiene theory identifies job satisfaction as a factor that would positively influence the work environment and impact employee decisions to remain in their positions (Herzberg, 1959). Likewise, the motivational-hygiene theory notes that supportive administrator practices play a key role in decreasing job satisfaction if they are not present (Herzberg, 1966).

The motivational-hygiene theory identifies factors that support job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). The theory was developed to assess what motivates employees in the workplace (Mawoli & Babandako, 2011). Motivators increase satisfaction by addressing individuals' needs for meaning and personal growth. Individuals who have positive experiences are more likely to be satisfied in their position (Herzberg, 1968; DeShields et al., 1987). By providing these motivational factors, the quality of the work experience is improved and job satisfaction increases (Herzberg, 1966).

Likewise, the motivational-hygiene theory identifies hygiene factors as a primary cause of job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). Unlike motivators which create job satisfaction when they are present, hygiene factors create dissatisfaction when they are absent (Herzberg et al., 1959). By addressing factors that may cause dissatisfaction, the administrator seeks to improve the environment in which the employees work resulting in more positive job attitudes (Herzberg, 1966).

By enriching the working environment, administrators will increase job satisfaction which influences employees to remain in their positions (Herzberg, 1968). Evidence of the provision of an enriched environment, as defined by Herzberg (2003), will be determined by the provision of documentation of opportunities for personal achievement, recognition of employees, provision of challenging and responsible work, and opportunities for individual advancement and

growth for special education teachers. Based on this premise, as job satisfaction increases, so does the likelihood that special education teachers will be motivated to remain in their positions.

Perceptions of administrators by teachers which were considered less than positive do not appear to motivate teachers to work hard or remain (You & Conley, 2014). Based on these observations, administrators who strive to increase job satisfaction and retain their teachers understand the importance of building a positive school environment that emphasizes respect for those people they supervise (Bennett et al., 2013; Bolger & Nir, 2012; You & Conley, 2014).

Definitions

1. *Achievement* – Achievement is meeting one’s goals or accomplishments (Herzberg, 1968)
2. *Administrator* – An administrator is a supervisor of employees (Herzberg, 1998).
3. *Administrator support* – An administrator who shows appreciation, takes an interest in teachers’ work, provides constructive feedback, and lets teachers know what is expected of them (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013).
4. *Data Triangulation*- The use of a variety of sources in a study in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomena (Patton, 2002).
5. *Hygiene factor* – The hygiene factor is a motivational element of Herzberg’s motivational-hygiene theory which identifies extrinsic factors related to the work environment such as pay, job security, physical working conditions, administrative practices, and relationships which are the primary cause of unhappiness on the job (Herzberg, 1968).
6. *Interpersonal relationships* – Interpersonal relationships interactions and communication among workers and supervisors (Herzberg, 1968).

7. *Job enrichment* – Seeking to improve both task efficiency and human satisfaction by means of building into people’s jobs greater scope for personal achievement and recognition, challenging and responsible work, and opportunity for individual advancement and growth (Herzberg, 1987).
8. *Job satisfaction* – Job satisfaction is a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences (Locke, 1976).
9. *Motivation* - The attribute that moves us to do or not to do something (Broussard & Garrison, 2004).
10. *Meaningful work* – Work that is significant, facilitates personal growth, and contributes to the greater good (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012)
11. *Motivator factor* – Motivator factors are factors identified in Herzberg’s motivation – hygiene theory as the primary cause of satisfaction on the job (Herzberg, 1968).
12. *Organizational citizenship*-Organizational citizenship is identified as workers being more committed to the organization (Williams & Anderson, 1991).
13. *Poverty* – Poverty is identified as economic deprivation of economic resources that are required to meet the food, shelter, and clothing needs necessary for physical well-being (Ross, Shillington, & Lochhead, 1994).
14. *Recognition* – Recognition is recognizing a person for their achievements (Herzberg, 1968).
15. *Retention* – Retention is remaining in the same position as the previous year (Billingsley, 1993).
16. *Rural* – A rural county is defined as having 50% of its population living in towns with no more than 2,500 people (U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1974).

17. *Supervision* – Supervision is providing assessment of the performance of employees (Herzberg, 1968).
18. *Well-being*-Teacher’s personal sense of wellness, satisfaction, and happiness in relation to their workplace (Chan, 2011).
19. *Working conditions* – Working conditions are the environment that is established in the workplace both physical and emotional (Herzberg, 1968).

Summary

Special education teacher job satisfaction and retention in rural areas has been a problem that has been documented throughout the 20th and 21st century. The implications of losing qualified special education teachers is far reaching. Student achievement and financial consequences for school divisions makes this a priority for educational leaders as they struggle to meet the demands of increasing numbers of students being identified with disabilities. It is essential that researchers address this problem by investigation of administrator practices that support job satisfaction and special education teacher retention. The purpose of this collective case study is to describe special education teachers and administrator perceptions of administrator practices that support job satisfaction and thus the retention of special education teachers in rural Southwest Virginia public schools. Studies have suggested that administrative support is a key factor in job satisfaction and the retention of teachers. Identifying those practices that influence teachers’ decisions to stay or leave their positions is critical. By giving a voice to special education teachers and administrators who experience the effects of teacher shortages, information will be gained which could be used to increase the likelihood that special education teachers would remain in their positions. In addition, findings would provide

administrators guidance in choosing the practices which will make a positive impact on teacher retention.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two offers a review of the existing research on job satisfaction, focusing on administrator practices. Included in the review is a description of the motivational-hygiene theory which will be the lens that will guide the study. The chapter will provide a synthesis of existing literature on rural education, job satisfaction, and the retention of special education teachers, administrator support, and practices. In conclusion, the need for continued research in the area of job satisfaction will be discussed and its importance in furthering the understanding of administrator practices that increase the likelihood that special education teachers will remain in their positions.

Theoretical Framework

This section provides a description of the motivational-hygiene theory, its origination, and relationship to the study of job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Through investigation of the motivational-hygiene theory, knowledge of studies that have been based on the theory will be noted in addition to contributions the theory has made in field of job satisfaction, working conditions, and retention of employees.

Herzberg's Motivational-Hygiene Theory

Frederick Herzberg was a distinguished professor in industrial psychology, consultation, and administration of public health at the University of Utah. He developed and chaired the department of Mental Industrial Health at Case Western Reserve University and offered consultation services to corporations and governments throughout the world. Dr. Herzberg is well known as a scholar in academics and management. His book *Work and the Nature of Man* was recognized in 1995 by the International Press as one of the ten most important books on

management theory and practice in the 20th century. Herzberg was one of the most influential psychologists in the field of business management whose motivational-hygiene theory benefitted workers in various fields such as science, medicine, manufacturing, and the military (Ispas & Mirea, 2009).

Frederick Herzberg developed the motivational-hygiene theory based on two types of human needs identified as the motivational factor and hygiene factor (Herzberg et al., 1959). The theory involves two different needs of people. First, there are needs stemming from the animal nature of man which involves avoidance of pain in the environment and basic biological needs. The second area of human needs are related to the ability to achieve and through achievement to experience psychological growth. The stimuli for growth needs are related to job content. In contrast, the stimuli inducing pain-avoidance behaviors are found in the job environment. Hygiene factors, according to Herzberg, do not motivate employees but do minimize dissatisfaction. According to Herzberg's theory, factors involved in producing job satisfaction and motivation are separate and distinct from the factors that lead to job dissatisfaction. Satisfaction is only gained if hygiene factors are absent. In contrast, motivators create satisfaction by meeting the individuals' needs for meaning and personal growth. Hygiene factors are identified by Herzberg as aspects such as company policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations and working conditions. These issues are related to the work environment. Motivators are issues such as achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility and advancement. Herzberg stated that once the hygiene areas are addressed, the motivators will promote job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1966).

The motivational-hygiene theory suggests that by understanding and utilizing the motivational-hygiene factors, work can be enriched to bring about effective utilization of

personnel and increase job satisfaction leading to an increased institutional commitment by employees (Herzberg, 1968). Job enrichment is defined as improving work efficiency that increases job satisfaction by providing an opportunity for personal achievement and recognition, challenges the employee, and creates the possibility for achievement and growth (Herzberg, 1987). When work is enriched, it is designed with consideration of a variety of contents, has a higher level of skills and knowledge, and gives the employee responsibility in planning and controlling their job. In addition, there is an opportunity for personal growth and meaningful work experiences (Reif, Ferazzi, & Evans, 1974). Enriched jobs are designed to give employees higher levels of meaning, direction, and knowledge of the results of their efforts (Yang & Lee, 2009). Job enrichment has an indirect relationship between an employee's decision to remain in their position and increased job satisfaction (Yang & Lee, 2009).

When employees are dissatisfied they may exhibit behaviors that do not result in positive organizational outcomes. These behaviors may include withdrawal from collaboration, frequent complaints, anger, increased absenteeism, leaving their position, and displaying lower levels of performance (Byrne, 2006; Ford, 1969). In contrast, employees who have participated in an enriched work environment enjoy a more meaningful work experience. *A meaningful work experience* is defined as having a positive influence on personal growth and contributing to the greater good (Steger, 2012). Findings have shown that meaningful work is a mediator between leadership and outcomes that have positive effects on an organization and on the supervisor/employee relationship which results in a higher organization commitment (Tummers & Knies, 2013). In addition, when work is viewed as meaningful to employees, their feeling of depression, anxiety, or stress may be lowered resulting in a higher level of job satisfaction (Allen, Dexter, Kinsey, & Parker, 2018; Blake, Dexter, Kinsey, & Parker, 2018; Koop, 1993).

The motivational-hygiene theory originated from an examination of experiences of engineers and accountants (Herzberg et al., 1959). Participants were interviewed and asked to describe when there was a time they felt good or bad about their job. Responses were categorized into high and low sequences which aided in the development of the motivational and hygiene factors. In addition, the results of the study showed evidence that job loyalty will vary with the degree of job satisfaction of the employee (Herzberg et al., 1959).

The motivational-hygiene theory has informed the literature on job satisfaction. Herzberg (1968) noted that at least 16 studies had been conducted, at that time, which made the original research one of the most replicated studies in the field of job attitudes. Each of these studies utilized the motivational-hygiene theory in order to determine job satisfaction which improved the quality of the work experience. The motivational-hygiene theory can be applied to real-world practice (Hill, 1987; Lacy & Sheehan, 1997; Smerek & Peterson, 2007). Findings have shown that individuals who have positive experiences are more likely to be satisfied with their positions than those who do not have those experiences (DeShields et al., 1987). The motivational-hygiene theory has provided researchers with a tool to utilize in assessing employees perceptions of job satisfaction which enables them to identify characteristics that enrich the work environment.

The motivational-hygiene theory relates to the investigation of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers. Understanding administrative practices that lead to increased job satisfaction may provide the knowledge that is needed to ensure that those factors that enrich the work environment are implemented by administrators in order to increase the likelihood that rural special education teachers will remain in their positions (Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017; Shila & Sevilla, 2015; Sutton, Bismuth, O'Connor, Pae, &

Payne, 2014). This investigation will seek to gain a better understanding of the factors that increase job satisfaction through the voices of the participants. By giving the participants the opportunity to tell their stories without the restriction of one answer surveys or limited questionnaires, details may come to light that have not been identified in the current theory that could expand the knowledge base related to job satisfaction and improve the outcome for school divisions, administrators, teachers, students, and parents.

Related Literature

This section provides a synthesis of the existing knowledge on special education in rural settings, job satisfaction and the retention of special education teachers, and administrator practices that support job satisfaction resulting in the retention of special education teachers. Connections will be made between the existing knowledge on special education in rural settings, job satisfaction, and the need to further investigate administrator practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers in rural areas which impacts the school division, administrators, special education teachers, and student learning.

Special Education in Rural Settings

Researchers have identified rural-teacher training, recruitment, and retention as recurring issues in rural-school education (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Westling & Whitten, 1996). Although there are positive aspects of being a special education teacher in a rural setting, many challenges exist that may impact rural-special education teachers' levels of job satisfaction (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Gehrke, & McCoy, 2007; Harde, 2007; Sutton, Bismuth, O'Connor, Pae, & Payne, 2014; Westling & Witten, 1996). Findings have shown that teachers in rural areas, such as Appalachia, are more likely to leave than transfer into them (Cowen, Butler, Fowles, Streams, & Toma, 2012). When comparing rural and urban special education teachers, special education

teachers in rural areas have higher rates of turnover and more difficulty recruiting (Harde, 2007; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Sutton et al., 2014). This is especially true for southern- rural communities where a majority of public school children are low-income (Sutton et al., 2014). Special education teachers in rural settings are two and one-half times more likely to leave their position in the first years of teaching (Gehrke & McCoy, 2007).

The geographic location, culture, organizational systems, structures, and lack of resources impact staffing of schools with qualified special education teachers in rural areas threatening the ability of school districts to provide a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities (Brownell et al., 2018; Johnson & Howley, 2015). Federal legislators are often not considerate of these differences between rural and non-rural schools and adopt policies that result in regulations that are not effective and can even be detrimental to rural schools and communities (Johnson & Howley, 2015). With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, rural school districts were put in a position where they were unable to meet the requirements of securing qualified special education teachers, impacting their ability to serve students with disabilities (Brownell et al, 2018; Sindelar et al, 2018). Although lawmakers acknowledged the importance of the quality of the education by passing laws that support providing certified teachers to students with disabilities, there were no provisions to address the needs of school divisions in rural areas where training and availability was limited and special education teachers serve in multiple core areas across a wide spectrum of disabilities (Brownell et al., 2018). With the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), legislators ended the requirement for highly qualified special education teachers. However, the problem that rural areas face with teacher retention and shortages remained (Sindelar et al., 2018). Likewise, findings have shown that shortages of

special education teachers in rural areas will become more of a concern as special education enrollment increases, teachers retire, attrition rates increase, and the number of qualified special education teachers diminishes (McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004).

Poverty is an issue that challenges special education teachers in rural areas (Berry, 2013; Sutton et al., 2014). Payne (1996) states that low achievement is correlated with a lack of resources. Children of poverty lack cognitive strategies which result in low performance, making instruction more challenging (Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007; Payne, 1996). Data has indicated that children living in poor families have lower academic scores, poorer graduation rates, and lower college enrollment rates than children who live in more affluent families (Sutton et al., 2014). Parents of students in poverty appear to place less value on an education (Sutton et al., 2014). Living in areas of high poverty makes the likelihood of lower school funding more prevalent limiting resources for materials, lower pay scales, and providing fewer opportunities for professional development (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Harde, 2007; Sutton et al., 2014).

Special education teachers in rural areas appear to experience professional isolation which results in a lower level of job satisfaction and commitment (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Billingsley, 2004; Westling & Whitten, 1996). Professional isolation limits opportunities to participate in professional development and results in a lack of social interactions creating occupational stress (Billingsley, 2004; Dussault, Deaudelin, Loiselle, & Royer, 1999; Westling & Whitten, 1996). Included in the context of professional isolation in rural areas are instructional concerns. Special education teachers have noted a lack of support from general education teachers, parents, and administrators which creates a lower level of job satisfaction. Many teachers reported that they felt they had the responsibility of educating students with

disabilities on their own (Berry & Gravelle, 2013). In addition, there is a lack of opportunity to participate in social and cultural activities in rural areas that are available in urban districts which isolates the rural special education teacher from experiences others may have (Berry & Gravelle, 2013).

Findings have shown that rural schools have unique characteristics that impact teacher retention in comparison to urban schools related to policy and procedures, working conditions, socio-economic factors, and administrator roles (Green & Munoz, 2016; Mafora, 2013; Trehan & Paul, 2014). As a result, rural districts experience the negative effects of high teacher turnover, extended delays in replacing teachers, employment of underqualified staff, loss of continuity, commitment, time, and costs (Mafora, 2013; Hanushek, 2004). Rural areas experience barriers to teacher retention due to a lack of facilities and services that may be available in urban areas. In addition, studies have shown that rural areas appear to be less able to provide a salary structure or financial incentives that would provide motivation to teachers in hard-to-staff schools (Mafora, 2013). Seven factors that have been identified as important to rural teachers' quality of work life include job satisfaction, self-contentment, institutional milieu, effort recognition, impact of low esteem, prejudice, dogmas, and a sense of self-achievement. However, both rural and urban teachers place job satisfaction as their number one priority in determining work quality (Trehan & Paul, 2014).

Job Satisfaction and the Retention of Special Education Teachers

There have been only a few studies of job satisfaction of special education teachers in rural areas (Berry, 2012; Green & Munoz, 2016; You & Conley, 2014). However, understanding job satisfaction is key in cost management for school divisions, working conditions, performance of students with disabilities, and the retention of rural- special education teachers (Green &

Munoz, 2016; Larkin et al., 2016; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). When special education teachers become dissatisfied with their job, they are more likely to leave their position and threaten the continuity and quality of instruction (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Shila & Sevilla, 2015).

Job satisfaction is multi-dimensional (Shila & Sevilla, 2015). The phrase *teacher job satisfaction* has been associated with the work itself, working conditions, pay, security, colleagues, responsibility, advancement, recognition, and attrition (Kaden, Patterson, Healy, & Adams, 2016; Shila & Sevilla, 2015). Job satisfaction has been defined as a pleasurable or positive emotional state that was related to a job or experiences of the job (Locke, 1976). Teachers who are satisfied with their jobs appear to have an affective commitment, are motivated, connected to their organization, exhibit better performance, and have a sense of belonging to the organization (Larkin et al., 2016; Shila & Sevilla, 2015). There is evidence that job satisfaction is an important element that contributes to the accomplishment of the organization (Shila & Sevilla, 2015). Teachers who have a high level of satisfaction with their jobs have an increased ability to meet the needs of the students (Berry, 2012). In contrast, unsatisfied employees exhibit signs of fatigue, frustration, overlooking responsibilities, high rates of absences, stress, and a lack of motivation and engagement (Major, 2012; Phash & Piotrowski, 2006; Shila & Sevilla, 2015). Special education teachers face challenges that cause high rates of attrition due to stress, job dissatisfaction, and low motivation (Major, 2012). Dissatisfaction occurs when there are unclear policies, school environments are disrespectful, and practices fail to include special education teachers in the daily functions and interactions among staff (Waltman, Bergom, Hollenshead, Miller, & August, 2012). Special education teachers begin to feel professional isolation which decreases their level of job satisfaction

(Major, 2012; Waltman et al., 2012). Once a teacher becomes dissatisfied with a job, the more likely they are to leave their position (Shila & Sevilla, 2015).

Research has found that employee satisfaction is linked with organizational citizenship (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Durmmond & Halsey, 2014; Sesen & Basim, 2012). Organizational citizenship has been identified as workers being more committed to the organization (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Educational leadership has been shown to have a positive impact on the perception of organizational citizenship of teachers impacting their willingness to go beyond their formal obligations, display lower rates of job movement, exhibit higher productivity, and work quality (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Sesen & Basim, 2012). The more satisfied the teacher is with the job, the more extensive their organizational commitment, and the more organizational citizenship behaviors they will display which increases the effectiveness of the school (Sesen & Basim, 2012).

Job satisfaction is a predictor of teachers' intentions to leave their position and their commitment to the organization (Berry, 2012; Larkin et al., 2016). Findings have shown a negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention (Kabungaidze & Mahlatshana, 2013). The more satisfied the teacher, the less likely they will experience job turnover intentions (Kabungaidze & Mahlatshana, 2013). High levels of job satisfaction enable teachers to develop commitment that forms a sense of attachment and instills a desire to remain in the position (Shila & Sevilla, 2015). Teachers' sense of loyalty and commitment could have an influence on their willingness to continue working even though conditions are not ideal (Green & Munoz, 2016). Commitment to an organization brings about a sense of belonging, which helps teachers identify with the vision, goals, and values of the organization, and supports the school's efficacy (Berry, 2012; Major, 2012; Shagholi, Zabihi, Atefi, & Moayedi, 2011;

Shila & Sevilla, 2015). Job satisfaction, work commitment, and career commitment are mediators of teachers' intentions to leave their position (You & Conley, 2014).

The capacity of the teaching force in special education is insufficient to meet the needs of school divisions. There are not enough qualified special education teachers to serve the educational needs of students with disabilities (Kelchtermans, 2017). The shortage of special education teachers leads to higher caseloads, reduced quality of services, and decreased satisfaction which increases the burden on those special education teachers who continue to fill the positions (Benjamin & Black, 2012). Workplace conditions and variables that directly affect the decision of special education teachers to remain have not been adequately addressed (Berry, 2012; Green & Munoz, 2016; You & Conley, 2014). There is evidence that designing the job of the special education teacher for participatory empowerment and positive working conditions increases the chances of job satisfaction (Herzberg, 2001; Major, 2012). An individual must have hygiene factors met to alleviate dissatisfaction in their job (Herzberg, 2001). A combination of motivational and hygiene factors result in improved performance and attitude toward the work experience (Herzberg, 2001). Determining factors that increase teacher satisfaction is critical information needed to create positive school environments that increase job satisfaction and the retention of teachers (Berry, 2012).

Researchers have investigated factors that influence special education teachers' decisions to remain or leave the field of special education. Studies have identified job satisfaction as a significant characteristic that may guide the career choices special education teachers make (Larkin, Brantley-Dias, & Lokey-Vega, 2016; Shaw & Newton, 2014; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Likewise, investigation of conditions in the workplace that increase job satisfaction may lead to the discovery of practices that would motivate special education teachers to remain in their

positions (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Herzberg, 1968). The motivational-hygiene theory suggests that work could be enriched to motivate employees and increase job satisfaction which would likely increase the retention of employees (Herzberg, 1968).

Administrative support was identified in the motivational-hygiene theory as a factor that could cause the dissatisfaction of employees if it was not present (Herzberg, 1968). Numerous studies corroborate Herzberg's findings, citing administrative support as a major influence on teachers' decisions to leave or remain in the field of education (Bennett et al., 2013; Berry, 2012; Conley & You, 2016; Jones & Watson, 2017).

Administrator Support, Job Satisfaction, and Retention

Administrative leadership has been shown to have a significant influence on teacher outcomes (Dou, Devos, & Valcke, 2017; Lambersky, 2016). Studies have found that leadership behaviors of school administrators impact the organizational commitment of teachers (Bolger & Nir, 2014, Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016). Likewise, findings have shown that administrator behaviors have a positive impact on the perception of the teacher's desire to remain with the organization as a permanent member of the school (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016). Teachers have a stronger sense of organizational commitment when administrator behaviors reflect the desire to appeal to the staffs' interests (Lambersky, 2016). There is evidence that administrator support could significantly improve the level of job satisfaction and commitment of teachers (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, & Wyckoff, 2009; Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Waltman et al., 2012).

Administrative support has been cited in numerous studies as being a major influence on teachers' decisions to leave or remain in the field of education (Berry, 2012; Bennett et al., 2013; Conley & You, 2016; Jones & Watson, 2017). Findings have shown that nearly forty percent of teachers who left teaching identified a lack of administrative support as the main reason for their

decision to leave (Luckens, 2004). Studies have indicated that teacher engagement and commitment is impacted by the behavior of the administrator (Lambersky, 2016; Leko & Smith, 2010) making administrative support a critical factor in retaining teachers (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2009; Tickle, Chang, & Kim, 2011). Special education teachers who perceive their administrator as being a strong supporter are less likely to leave the field, less stressed, and more committed to their job (Leko & Smith, 2010). The Virginia Department of Education 2017-2018 report on the Critical Shortage Teaching Endorsement Areas in Virginia identified special education as the number one area of concern. Likewise, The U. S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2015 Title II Report identified a gap between the number of special education teachers available, the number of special education students identified, and the number of positions that are currently left unfilled. To address this problem, administrators should initiate practices that foster administrator support which are linked to higher job satisfaction and a higher likelihood that teachers will remain in their positions (Charoensukmongkol, Moqbel, & Griterrez-Wirching, 2016).

Four dimensions of administrator support- emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support- have been identified as effective in increasing special and general educators job satisfaction and school commitment (House, 1981). Administrators demonstrate emotional support when they convey esteem, trust, and worthiness of concern to teachers through open communication, appreciation, interest in the teachers' work, and consideration of the teachers' ideas. Instrumental support is shown through directly helping with tasks including providing needed materials, space, resources, time, and management concerns. Administrators exhibit informational support by providing information that will improve classroom practices related to inservice and workshops, information on effective

practices, suggestions for improving instruction, and classroom management. Finally, appraisal support is exhibited through the provision of ongoing appraisal in the form of constructive feedback, effective teaching characteristics, and clear guidance of job responsibilities (House, 1981). Teachers who experience administrator support will likely participate more freely in activities of the school such as extracurricular initiatives, professional learning communities, and literacy committees (Lambersky, 2016).

Administrators, who are school managers, strive to bring a balance between the satisfaction of the individual and the achievement of the organization's objectives. Four dimensions of effective administrative leadership practices have been identified as building school vision, developing goals and priorities, offering individualized support, and developing a collaborative school culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). As a result of these practices, work is made more meaningful for teachers resulting in more positive outcomes (Reif et al, 1974; Tummers & Knies, 2013). As work becomes more meaningful to employees, relationships between employees and the leader, organizational commitment, and work effort improve (Tummers & Knies, 2013). When leaders increase the meaningfulness of the job, the employees become aware of their ability to make a difference and begin to see a relationship between their contribution and the overall success of the organization (Tummers & Knies, 2013). The administrator plays a vital role in increasing the job satisfaction of employees through improving the work itself by enriching jobs (Byrne, 2006). In order to accomplish this task, the school administrator must strive to become knowledgeable about the potential of job enrichment and become embroiled in promoting and implementing the practice in the school (Reif et al., 1974). It is the school administrator that is most often responsible for providing an enriched work environment (Sirota, 1973).

Administrators who do not create conditions that motivate teachers to remain in their positions are often cited by teachers as their reason for leaving their positions (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Findings which investigated the interactions between teacher salary, satisfaction, student behavior, teaching experience, administrative support, job satisfaction, and teacher intent to stay in teaching resulted in four basic conclusions that demonstrate the importance of administrative support, job satisfaction, and intent to stay in teaching. According to the study, administrative support was the most significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction and a significant predictor of teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession. In addition, job satisfaction was found to be a significant predictor of teachers' intent to stay in teaching (Tickle et al., 2011).

Although policymakers and administrators have developed strategies to address the shortage of qualified teaching staff by revising certification requirements, offering mortgage subsidies, providing on-line applications, and funding mentoring programs, limited understanding of teacher concerns and their schools has impacted their effectiveness (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). When administrators believe that they are helpless and ineffective in their control over factors that influence teachers to leave, their ability to deal effectively with the problem of retention creates a barrier that is difficult to overcome (Mafora, 2013). Therefore, administrators need to understand what motivates teachers to stay in order to increase job satisfaction and maintain a proactive focus to address teacher concerns (Kabungaidze & Mahlatsana, 2013).

Values teacher contributions. Findings have suggested that practices of administrators which value teacher contributions increase job satisfaction and have a positive influence on the retention of teachers (Bolger & Nir, 2012; Cancio et al., 2013; Urick, 2016). Administrators who

understand the role and responsibilities of teachers exhibit practices that demonstrate their desire to build positive relationships where teachers perceive the administrator as willing to establish an environment where there is shared leadership and shared responsibility for educating students (Berry, 2012; Bennett et al., 2013). Teachers who perceive their school as a place that values their contribution are more likely to be intrinsically and extrinsically satisfied (Bolger & Nir, 2012).

Special education teachers have numerous responsibilities beyond instruction which could cause frustration and dissatisfaction. As a special education teacher, the responsibility of meeting individual student needs, maintaining compliance related to federal and state laws, meeting accountability requirements, managing behaviors, numerous meetings, and extensive paperwork is challenging (Harris, Hinds, Manansingh, Rubio, & Morote, 2016). Without administrative support the combination of these issues can create anxiety and diminish the desire to remain in the profession. Teachers have indicated that a team approach, where administrators share in the responsibility of educating students with disabilities, is key to job satisfaction and the retention of teachers (Berry, 2012). Therefore, administrators who are willing to assist teachers with behavior management, parental communication, assure active participation in the educational program, and facilitate involvement in the decision- making process are more likely to retain valuable staff. In addition, administrators who provide constructive feedback about job performance, encourage participation in decisions about school issues, show concern for the teachers' students and programs, and promote a sense of teachers' importance may positively influence job satisfaction and impact the teachers' intent to remain in the field (Littrell et al., 1994).

Decision-making is one of the six dimensions of teacher empowerment (Rinehart, 1992). By enabling teachers to provide input into the decision-making process, administrators demonstrate their belief in the teachers' professional opinions and confidence in the decisions they make which has a positive impact on how teachers feel about the school and their positions (Bolger & Nir, 2012). There is evidence that veteran teachers who have opportunities to control their classroom environment are more likely to consider remaining in the field of education (You & Conley, 2015). Administrators who practice shared leadership enable their teachers to have a perception of empowerment, become part of a decision-making team, and participate in a school environment that respects teacher input.

Appreciation is a characteristic of administrative support that has been shown to be significantly correlated with teachers' job satisfaction and intent remain in the field (Cancio et al., 2013). Noticing the teachers' efforts and giving the teacher a sense of importance demonstrates that the administrator has an appreciation for the teachers' work (Cancio et al., 2013). It is important that administrators realize the benefits of expressing appreciation and the positive impact the practice may have on their relationship with their staff. In addition, findings have suggested that status and respect are areas identified by researchers that confirm administrators' practices that value the contributions of teachers (Harris et al, 2016; Cancio et al., 2013; You & Conley, 2014). One of the most powerful dimensions of empowerment for teachers that predicts job satisfaction is earned status and respect (Bolger & Nir, 2012). Administrators who demonstrate trust in teachers as professionals and have confidence in the decisions they make are likely to influence positively those teachers' decisions to remain in their positions (Cancio et al, 2013; Harris et al., 2016). Findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between guidance and feedback, opportunities for growth, appreciation, and trust in

determining the intent of teachers to continue teaching long-term or short-term and job satisfaction (Cancio et al., 2013). Teachers who did not see recognition for their achievements or advancement through promotion are likely to be those leaving in the short-term (Cancio et al., 2013).

Recognition. Researchers have suggested that recognition of teachers' work efforts is a significant factor in influencing teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction and commitment (Bolger & Nir, 2012; Conley & You, 2017; Shila & Servilla, 2015; You & Conley, 2015). Findings have identified key administrator behaviors that are critical in influencing teachers' perceptions. These behaviors include showing professional respect, encouraging and acknowledging teacher effort, and providing protection (Lambersky, 2016). Thus, teachers who had been acknowledged by their administrator were more willing to go beyond their contractual requirements to give of their personal time, which benefitted students outside the classroom and was a major influence on their intention to commit (Lambersky, 2016). Likewise, there is evidence that job satisfaction is closely related to working with students, societal attitudes, status of teachers, recognition, and achievement (Holdaway, 1998). Findings of recent literature recognize the importance of acknowledging work efforts (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Conley & You, 2017). Therefore, school leaders should construct a school culture that stresses the recognition of work efforts (Bolger & Nir, 2012). Teachers who are recognized are less likely to consider leaving teaching or taking another job in a different school (Conley & You, 2017). Teachers should be recognized for going the extra mile to assure that students are achieving, developing supportive relationships with peers, and taking on additional responsibilities in a professional manner that reflects well on the school organization. Many times unfinished paperwork, extracurricular demands, and concern for students goes beyond the few hours that are

spent in the school setting. Recognition of staff members may offset negative effects of a burdensome workload and increase job satisfaction (Conley & You, 2017). Findings suggest that recognition, which is one dimension of job satisfaction, is also significant to the affective commitment of teachers on remaining in their job (Shila & Sevilla, 2015). Teachers who perceived supervision that included teacher recognition would be more likely to view their efforts as a job well done and worthwhile, increasing the chances of staying in their position (You & Conley, 2015).

Findings indicate that when teachers perceive the administrator as appreciating their contributions and demonstrating recognition of the positive impact they made on the students and the school, the results will convey a greater commitment and willingness to dedicate an increased effort to make the school and students successful (Lambersky, 2016; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). Feelings of acknowledgement are a critical contributor to satisfaction with work and future commitment, which enhances the quality of the teaching and learning process (Demirta, 2010; Lambersky, 2016; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). For example, individual recognition by the administrator, even in the form of small gestures such as a word, note, or personal thank you by administrators demonstrates that teachers are appreciated and their efforts are noticed, resulting in increased teacher engagement and commitment to remaining in their position (Lambersky, 2016). Likewise, a lack of recognition by the administrator causes dissatisfaction resulting in a lack of focus and negativity on the job (Basaka & Ghoshb, 2011; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017).

Creating positive school environments. The effectiveness of administrative leadership and school environment is a significant factor related to teacher retention (Bennett et al., 2013; Trehan & Paul, 2014). Behaviors of administrators effectively shape the climate of the school (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016). Administrators influence the school climate through fostering

collaboration, collegiality, and allowing teachers to share in decision-making (Leko & Smith, 2010). Findings identified stress of the profession (behavioral issues, requirements of paperwork, and state mandated tests) as reasons teachers leave their jobs (Bennett et al., 2013). Therefore, one of the most important challenges for administrators is to find ways to create a supportive environment that motivates teachers to remain in their positions.

Findings indicate that there is a strong correlation between community building and job satisfaction, which may lead to teacher retention (Harris et al., 2016; You & Conley, 2014). Therefore, altering the workplace conditions where community building is a goal will reduce teachers' intentions to leave (Herzberg, 1968; You & Conley, 2014). In addition to community building, the use of a high level of communication with teachers increases the chances of the school environment becoming more peaceful (Memduhoglu, 2015). Special education teachers in general feel that they do not receive the encouragement and contact that is needed from school leadership (Andrews & Brown, 2015). However, teachers who perceive their administrators as providing a supportive environment are more inclined to be satisfied and remain (You & Conley, 2014). Findings have shown that on seven out of eight scales that measure ideal perceptions of school environments, only one assessment, supportive environments, had a higher rating for current experiences of special education teachers. On the scales measuring colleagues, administration, classroom, success, resources, workload, and parents, special education teachers rated their perceptions below what they would perceive as ideal, indicating the need to gain insight into the quality of special education teachers' professional experiences (Andrews & Brown, 2015). Teachers identified enforcement of rules for student conduct, a clear vision, and teacher recognition as supportive. However, perceptions of administrators which were identified as less than positive did not appear to motivate teachers to work hard or remain (You & Conley,

2014). Administrators who strive to retain their teachers, understand the importance of building a positive school environment that emphasizes respect for those people they supervise (Bolger & Nir, 2012).

Findings have shown that administrators who enhance the school environment curb high teacher turnover (Guramatunhu-Mudiwa & Scherz, 2013; You & Conley, 2014). Hard-to-staff schools that are characterized by students who live in high poverty, produce low test scores, have high teacher turnover, and experience large numbers of provisionally certified teachers exhibit less satisfying working environments which impacts teacher retention (Berry, 2005; Lashway, 2003). While administrators have little control over financial motivators, the use of psychic income which provides satisfaction from intangibles, yields benefits that are successful and support teachers' commitments to their jobs. Findings have shown that qualities of administrators such as competency, caring, nurturing, sensitivity, collaboration, and empowerment have been shown to influence working conditions in the school and present in the ideal work environment. As administrators, who are the key ingredient in improvement of the school environment, begin to utilize strategies such as intangibles that produce satisfaction, retaining effective teachers in schools with high poverty- level students may become less challenging (Guramatunhu-Mudiwa & Scherz, 2013). School climate has a positive effect on teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Teachers who experience a higher level of school climate cite improved levels of satisfaction and commitment resulting in improved teacher collaboration, innovation, and participation (Dou et al., 2016).

Communication skills. Administrators communicate with their teachers but how this communication is perceived may influence teachers' feelings about that person and their job (Memduhoglu, 2015; Hensley & Burmeister, 2008). This is especially true for schools that

experience high levels of students who live in poverty (Tyler, 2016). Skillful communication has been noted as an important leadership attribute in a number of fields such as business and medicine, as well as education (Aspergren, 1999; Tyler, 2016). Findings have shown that communication skills are essential in building trust between administrators and teachers in order to assure effective educational practices (Tyler, 2016). Communication between an administrator and staff directly impacts aspects of the teachers' perception include: trust, mood, productivity, motivation, and organizational commitment. When people are working together as a group, the role of communication becomes an important aspect of the school environment. In an organization, communication is a social process which allows people to exchange ideas and views, and express wants and needs (Memduhoglu, 2015; Tyler, 2016). Research indicates that articulation of a clear vision for the school and expressing clarity about work goals and objectives were areas of administrative communication that may impact their attitude toward their job and their decision to remain (Conley & You, 2017, You & Conley, 2015). Findings have shown behaviors of the administrator, which related to effective communication, involved face-to-face and personal communication, minimal use of whole-school meetings, and weekly participation in grade level meetings were what motivated teachers to perform to a high standard (Tyler, 2016).

Administrators hold a high opinion related to their communication skills. In contrast, when teachers were asked to rate the administrators' skills, they characterized them as only moderate communicators. Although teachers felt that administrators held a high level of reliability in their sincerity, frankness in expressing their message, stating facts, sharing data and expression of their opinions, teachers noted there were areas of concern (Lambersky, 2016; Memduhoglu, 2015). Findings have indicated that administrators' listening skills were identified

as often insincere and inflexible. Teachers indicated that they believed that administrators only partially responded to input they were given and gave feedback at only a moderate level, with little consideration for individual differences. When feedback was provided, teachers felt there were not many instances when the feedback provided a positive message that was motivational (Memduhoglu, 2015).

Communication skills are important for an administrator as they plan, organize, and lead the school (Lunenburg, 2010; Tyler, 2016). Communication skills have been found to be significant in the success of school leadership and key in improving outcomes for the school (Tyler, 2016). Because communication is the root of an organization's culture (Hensley & Brumeister, 2008), inadequate communication skills may significantly interfere with organizational effectiveness (Lunenburg, 2010). It is difficult to build meaningful context of schools and school systems if the school systems do not attempt to hear the voices of their students, teachers, and parents (Lambersky, 2016; Ryan & Rottmann, 2009). Being a visible presence provides the administrator with an opportunity to interact socially with teachers and communicate gratitude for the job they are doing, setting a positive tone with staff and students (Lambersky, 2016). In contrast, administrators who do not take the opportunity for social communication increase the emotional distance between themselves and staff, creating decreased morale, lowered commitment, and a decline in cooperation (Lambersky, 2016).

Administrators who are effective leaders know that the language they use with their teachers can inspire or destroy them (Hensley & Brumeister, 2008). Teachers want to be heard by principals as they listen to their needs, respect their talents, and concerns (Lambersky, 2016). When teachers can see the administrator's vision, they are more able to understand the rationale for decisions and embrace its importance, becoming supportive rather than demotivated

(Lambersky, 2016). Relationships can be built between stakeholders in the school, including teachers, by encouraging relationships that enable dialogue (Ryan & Rottmann, 2009). Studies have identified ten characteristics of good communication that build good interpersonal communication skills between the administrator and teachers: clarify ideas before communicating, examine the true purpose of each communication, consider the total physical and human setting, consult with others in planning communications, be mindful of the overtones in addition to the basic content of the message, convey something of help or value to the receiver, follow up on communications, communicate long-range goals as well as current ones, make sure actions support their communications, and seek to be a good listener (Lunenburg, 2010).

Providing mentors. When teachers give up, students give up (Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005). The need for administrators to provide teachers with the support and tools they need to be successful is critical. Studies suggest that one characteristic of a supportive administrator is providing mentors to novice and struggling teachers (Bennett et al., 2013; Conley & You, 2016; Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017; Thorton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). Among the most significant success factors related to administrators is mentoring (Johnson, 2001). Administrators who assign mentors who are knowledgeable in special education practices and policies positively impact teacher frustration and confusion and encourage confidence (Leko & Smith, 2010).

With retention of teachers being a concern that plagues school divisions, awareness of the impact mentoring may yield could provide teachers a direction in a profession that is ever-changing and challenging. A lack of mentorship influences the chances that teachers will leave the field (Bennett et al., 2013; Johnson, 2001; Schlichte et al., 2005). Likewise, mentoring is a

protective factor that might reverse attrition (Schlichte et al., 2005). Effective mentoring has been shown to significantly correlate with teachers' plans to remain in special education (Whitaker, 2000). The Council for Exceptional Children (1998) stated five purposes of a mentorship program for special educators. First, mentors assist teachers in applying knowledge and skills. Second, mentors impart advanced knowledge and skills to special education teachers. Third, mentors help special educators adjust to the school climate. Fourth, mentors reduce stress and heighten the feeling of job satisfaction. Finally, mentors support professional induction (Whitaker, 2000).

Findings indicate that a supportive environment decreases teacher burnout and increases job satisfaction (Langher et al., 2017; Thornton et al., 2007). Mentoring fosters collaborative work efforts that result in collegial work relations (Conley & You, 2016). These relationships have a powerful impact of teacher attrition (Schlichte et al., (2005). First-year teachers who identified relationships as a common thread that would perhaps reverse their decision to leave the teaching profession. By enabling teachers to have access to a support system that addresses their needs and supports their efforts to become productive in their field, an administrator provides them with a sense of security and empowerment (Schlichte et al., 2005). Teachers value having the support of a mentor familiar with their field from whom they receive emotional, procedural, curricular, and instructional information (Gehrke & Coy, 2007; Leko & Smith, 2010; Schlichte et al., 2005). Providing a supportive environment through mentoring programs that focus on a structure that incorporates schoolwide participation has been shown to promote the growth of professional cultures within the school, increasing the willingness of the staff to share ideas and benefit from professionals across all experience levels (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Caring for the well-being of teachers. Studies have shown that teachers who consider their school a place where their well-being is valued are likely to be satisfied with their jobs and more likely to remain in their positions (Bolger & Nir, 2012; Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; Hong, 2012). The well-being of teachers affects society now and in the future (Zahoor, 2015). Teacher well-being is defined as having a personal sense of wellness, satisfaction, and happiness related to their workplace (Chan, 2011). Findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between well-being and job satisfaction among teachers (Zahoor, 2015). Teachers who have a feeling of well-being are more satisfied, have greater levels of self-esteem, good attitudes, manage tension, and deal more effectively with negative thoughts and feelings (Zohorr, 2015). Financial, economic, and social consequences related to education and the educational experience may result when the well-being of individual teachers is not addressed (Zahoor, 2015). Teacher well-being at work not only has a positive impact on their professional careers, but also on student motivation and the environment in the classroom (Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009). When teachers are satisfied at school, they will more likely provide better quality and more consistent instruction and perform better on the job (Stasio, Fiorilli, & Benevene, 2017; Wright & Cronpanzano, 2000); Zahoor, 2015). However, teachers who do not feel supported are less motivated to do their best in the classroom (Pillay, Goddard, & Wilss, 2005).

An administrator who cares about the well-being of teachers reflects that belief in their behavior by demonstrating, through their actions, a passion for making the school environment one that is considered supportive of its teachers (Bolger & Nir, 2012). Administrator support is key to teacher's well-being and the likelihood that teachers are satisfied with their job (Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994). Self-efficacy is described as the most influential dimension of

empowerment that determines a teacher's intrinsic satisfaction with their job (Bolger & Nir, 2012; Hong, 2012). Therefore, administrators who use verbal persuasion with their teachers contribute to their sense of self-efficacy and increase their resilience to situations that may impact their desire to remain in the school (Hong, 2012). In order to accomplish this goal, administrators should provide encouraging feedback while recognizing and acknowledging teachers' efforts and achievements (Hong, 2012, Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016, Langher et al., 2017)). Teachers want to hear how well they are doing from their supervisor. Findings have shown that organizations whose administrators develop processes that are perceived to advance teachers increased satisfaction and likely their desire to remain in the profession (Bolger & Nir, 2012). For those supervisors who choose not to recognize the efforts of their teachers, the end result may be a demotivation in the desire to achieve high job performance impacting student achievement and job satisfaction (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016).

Stress of the teaching profession, especially in the area of special education, resulting from behavioral issues, excessive paperwork, and state mandated testing has caused teachers to leave the field (Berry, 2015; Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016). Researchers studying administrator practices that support retention of teachers have identified key factors related to the well-being of the staff. Teachers who are burdened with little support and stressful working conditions often suffer from burnout. In order to prevent burnout and help employees diminish the feeling of stress, administrators should provide an environment that is socially supportive, allowing teachers to develop more favorable attitudes toward their jobs (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016). Studies have shown that when teachers perceive the administrator as supportive, a negative correlation results which would reduce emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and burnout (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; Langher et al., 2017).

Equally as important as administrators addressing achievement goals is the role of administrative support that considers psychological factors that may impact teachers' health and their ability to provide students with instruction that facilitates learning. Major psychological factors that are key in understanding the thought patterns of teachers who intended to stay or leave the profession were identified as value, self-efficacy, beliefs, and emotions (Hong, 2012). Studies have shown that perceived administrative support reduced emotional exhaustion of teachers, which allowed them to enhance their personal accomplishments and lessen the chances that they would experience burnout (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; Hong, 2012; Langher et al., 2017). When administrators provide opportunities to share emotional issues and provide training and input into handling charged situations, teachers may make a decision to stay in the field (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016).

Findings have shown the implications of administrator practices that establish a caring culture within the school community (Bennett et al., 2013; Hensley & Burmeister, 2008; Smith & Montello, 1992; Witmer, 2006). Novice and experienced teachers have named administrative support and relationships as prominent influences of whether or not they intended to remain the field of education (Bennett et al., 2013). According to current studies, when teachers interact frequently with their administrator, there is a higher degree of optimism in the school (Littrell, et al., 1994). These teacher/administrator relationships are the foundation of effective education which play an important role in establishing a supportive and productive environment that would encourage student success (Whitmer, 2006). Relationship building has been noted as a key factor of effective education (Witmer, 2006). Understanding the various types of relationships and how to facilitate meaningful interactions are crucial to building strong bonds between not only teachers but also in the formation of teacher student connections. Likewise, interpersonal skills have been identified as a foundation of effective leadership (Smith & Montello, 1992). Administrators should not only provide one source of support for teachers, such as a mentor, but

foster a collegial environment where the stressors teachers encounter every day are alleviated through caring relationships with others who understand their needs (Schlichte et al., 2005).

Physical attending, empathy, respect, and concreteness are demonstrated by persons who are successful in managing the behavior of others and are related to the development of interpersonal relationships (Smith, Montello, & White, 1992). Administrators as a whole are not prepared to deal with the demands of becoming personally involved with their teachers (Smith & Montello, 1992; Hensley & Burmeister, 2008)). If leaders want to direct people toward a common purpose and retain those teachers that are valuable to the success of the school, they must develop supportive relationships. The best teachers will become dissatisfied and leave if they are not supported (Hensley & Burmeister, 2008).

Development of interpersonal relationships. A significant theme related to administrator practices that support retention of teachers is the environmental culture (Bennett et al., 2013; Hensley & Burmeister, 2008). Administrators need to be facilitators of positive interactions in order to encourage teachers to stay (Bennett et al., 2013). Administrators many times must build relationships with people who sometimes have different outlooks than themselves. There are six relationship connectors that when used together with fidelity will enable the educational leader to move people in a positive direction. These connectors are communication, support, safety, competence, continuous renewal, and trust. All of these concepts require interactions with staff. When a leader makes people feel safe and cared for, a positive school culture emerges, allowing teachers to feel the joy and energy that enables them to do their job well (Hensley & Burmeister, 2008).

There are sustainability concerns with early career teachers just as with experienced teachers which supports the need to understand their experiences and investigate new ways to solve the problem of attrition (Le Cournu, 2013). The feeling of isolation for teachers when faced with challenging situations such as those found in schools hinders their ability to focus on the job at hand: student learning. Researchers have found that when an administrator supports

team building which includes developing interpersonal relationships with other teachers and the administrator, positive outcomes result (Berry, 2012; Conley & You, 2012; Bennett et al., 2013). Thus, when administrators build relationships based on respect, trust, care and integrity, teachers appear to become more involved in the school culture, creating a sense of belonging and social connectedness. This connectedness promotes a sense of confidence and empowerment which helps in the development of teaching skills and encourages confidence to participate in activities of the school and in the community (Le Cournu, 2013). As a result, human interactions are facilitated through teams within the school which facilitates the fulfillment of the need to share successes and challenges with others (Witmer, 2006). Administrators who are aware of the importance of addressing these issues allow teachers to become more satisfied with their job and more likely to remain in their position. Findings have shown that team efficacy has a major effect on special education teachers' intent to leave (Conley & You, 2012). Support of the administrator and co-workers reduces emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and perceived lack of accomplishment (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016). As administrators create teams of teachers based on common interests, they acknowledge that they are aware of the consequences of feeling alone and the impact on the success of the individual as a person and instructor (Johnson, 2001).

Characteristics of administrators who are successful managers of people were identified as those who displayed behaviors which indicated that they were physically attending, displayed empathy, had respect for others, and exhibited concreteness (Smith, et al., 1992). Likewise, additional studies note the importance of administrators being successful managers of people and displaying qualities possessed by those who valued interpersonal relationships (Conley & You, 2016; Bennett et al., 2013; Schlichte et al., 2005; Hensley & Burmeister, 2008). The existence of emotional respect is recognized by the teachers' commitment to an administrator who has established a psychological bond between themselves and their teachers (Conley & You, 2016). That administrator realizes the importance of keeping emotions under control when

communicating with staff (Hensley & Burmeister, 2008) and displays authenticity by building community and valuing people (Harris et al., 2016; Schliche et al., 2005).

Summary

In order to become an effective administrator, it is necessary to investigate practices that increase teacher satisfaction and the likelihood that teachers will choose to remain in their positions as educators. Studies have shown that leaders who value their teachers, recognize their efforts and accomplishments, create a positive school environment, communicate, provide mentors, care for teachers' well-being, and develop interpersonal skills are more likely to earn their trust and commitment. Determining which administrator practices influence teachers' intentions to stay or leave the teaching profession is a complicated process but worthy of consideration. If the variables that influence teachers' job satisfaction and choices to remain can be identified, perhaps administrators can prevent the loss of such valuable resources that influence the success of the school and student achievement (You & Conley, 2014). The implications of the research impact central office personnel, administrators, special education teachers, students, and parents as they evaluate administrator support as it relates to job satisfaction and career commitment. With the increasing shortage of qualified special education teachers, it is critical that every effort is made to understand what can be done to reverse the trend. Leaders need to be compelled to seek out those who are more knowledgeable in the area of social/emotional skills in order to increase their awareness of practices that will benefit their relationships with their teachers (Hensley & Burmeister, 2008). As administrators and teachers work as a team in a collegial environment that respects the needs of each individual, not only will they benefit, but the students will benefit as well. Administrators are people managers who

hold the key to providing students with the best education possible and the opportunity to learn from professionals who are respected and valued for the important job that they are undertaking.

This study will seek to address gaps in the existing literature related to rural special education teachers' job satisfaction and administrator practices that support job satisfaction. Few studies tell the stories of special education teachers in rural settings and administrators in order to gain a better understanding of the role of administrator practices that support job satisfaction. By investigating job satisfaction of rural special education teachers and administrator practices, information will be gained which will seek to discover additional factors related to manipulation of the work environment in order to increase job satisfaction. In addition, the study will investigate and provide information on what leadership behaviors will increase job satisfaction and which specific strategies will assist administrators in providing support that increases the level of job satisfaction of special education teachers.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This qualitative collective case study describes special education teacher and administrator perceptions of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers. Chapter Three identifies the type of study and research design with an explanation of why these methods were chosen to investigate administrator practices, job satisfaction, and the retention of special education teachers. The rationale for selecting a qualitative collective case study is linked to the purpose of the study. A description of the participants is provided with an explanation of the type of sampling used in the selection process. Steps in conducting the study are outlined in detail in order to assure that the study can be replicated. The role of the researcher as the human instrument is explained in order to inform readers of potential bias, relationship to the participants, and research setting that may influence the data analysis. Data collection techniques are identified in the order they will be conducted. Data analysis techniques are explained with a rationale for choosing each technique. In conclusion, trustworthiness and ethical considerations are described.

Design

Qualitative and quantitative research differ in many ways (Stake, 1995). Quantitative research methods seek cause and effect relationships that lead to theory which establishes generalizations that attempt to discard uniqueness as error. In contrast, qualitative research values uniqueness of individual cases and contexts and facilitates understanding of the human experience (Stake, 1995). While quantitative researchers employ formal measurement and statistical analysis to describe what is happening in terms of descriptive variables qualitative researchers perceive experiences in testimonies or episodes, representing them through their

interpretation of stories to help the reader gain an experiential understanding (Stake, 1995). Because this study is seeking to gain an understanding of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers in a rural setting through the voices of special education teachers and administrators, a qualitative research design was chosen. Research will be conducted by the researcher who is responsible for interpretations in the field through observations in the natural setting, subjective judgments, and analyzing and synthesizing patterns in data with the awareness of their own consciousness (Stake, 1995). This study seeks to empower administrators and special education teachers to share their stories. It is the aim of the study to gain an in-depth understanding of the contexts in which administrators and special education teachers address the issue of administrator practices that support job satisfaction and special education teacher retention.

A case is a unique entity, a bounded system rather than a process, that is not understood (Stake, 1995). The origin of case study research can be traced to modern social science disciplines. Disciplinary origins for case study research are drawn from psychology, law, political science, and medicine. Anthropologists and sociologists conducted case study research as early as the 1920's (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case is complex, specific, functioning, and involves people and programs rather than events or processes (Stake, 1995). In order to study the case, a case study is carried out. The case study is organized around an issue or issues related to problems about which people cannot agree within situations and contexts. By identifying the issues, data sources and data-gathering procedures are chosen. The concepts of the study may change as the study progresses. By seeking multiple perspectives understanding will be enhanced. Observations are made during ordinary activities and places. The case study is subjective and relies on previous experience in its interpretations. The reader is informed of

personal experience of data gathering. Triangulation is used to minimize misunderstanding and to validate the conclusions of the study. Readers and the researcher are afforded the opportunity to make interpretations. Qualitative case study is personal with the quality of the research being based on the meanings being valued rather than reproducibility (Stake, 1995).

There are three types of case studies identified as intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Stake, 1995). Intrinsic case study involves learning about a particular case. Instrumental case study seeks to understand a general question through the investigation of a case. If the situation requires the researcher to choose several cases to study, each being instrumental to learning about the issue, the study is a collective case study (Stake, 1995). Because this study involves studying several cases which are instrumental in gaining understanding, a collective case study design was chosen.

The characteristics of a qualitative collective case study are linked to the purpose of this study (Stake, 1995). The rationale for using this design is to empower administrators and special education teachers to share their stories and hear their voices. Narratives will describe the cases and tell the stories of the teachers and administrators. The bounded cases that are studied are two schools in rural southwest Virginia. The study seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of issues related to administrator practices that support special education teacher job satisfaction and retention in rural areas. This study will use multiple sources of data collection in a natural setting to gain a thick-rich description of special education teachers' and administrators' perceptions of administrator practices that support job satisfaction and thus retention. Data will be considered from each individual school when establishing patterns and making assertions. Although judgements may be subjective, the researcher's experiences will be made known to the reader.

Readers as well as the researcher will be afforded the opportunity to create their own interpretations.

Research Questions

Central Question: How do rural special education teachers and administrators describe administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers?

Sub-Question 1: How do administrator practices that motivate special education teachers increase job satisfaction?

Sub-Question 2: How do administrator practices that improve the school environment influence special education teacher perceptions of job satisfaction?

Sub-Question 3: How does enriching the school environment by an administrator influence the job satisfaction of special education teachers?

Setting

Berry (2012) noted the importance of perceived support in rural areas where needier students are found. For this collective case study, multiple sites were used to collect data to illustrate the issue of job satisfaction and special education teacher retention (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The setting for the study was two schools in a public school district in rural southwest Virginia. The setting was chosen based on its characteristics as a rural area whose school division is experiencing an increasing number of students with special needs who live in poverty and difficulty attracting and maintaining high quality staff.

The school division consists of 13 public schools who serve students with special needs. According to the most recent data, the population of the county is 42,150 with 95.8% being white (U. S. Census Bureau, 2016). Only 13.5% of the population have bachelor's degrees or higher and 17.2% live in poverty. There are only four institutions of higher education in the county including a community college, private college, law school, and pharmacy school

(Executive Summary, Advanced Ed. 2016). Portions of the Executive Summary citation were withheld to protect the name of the county and administrator. The leadership structure of the setting consists of an elected school board, superintendent, assistant superintendent, and directors of secondary, middle, and elementary education. The special education director works with principals of the district schools to assure students with disabilities are provided services that comply with federal and state regulations. Principals in each building oversee the day-to-day functioning of the special education program in their school.

Participants

The sample pool consists of special education teachers and administrators who are currently employed in a public school district in rural Southwest Virginia. Purposeful sampling is defined as intentionally choosing a group of participants for the study that will best inform the researcher about the problem that is being investigated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Convenience sampling is defined as non-probability sampling in which participants are chosen based on convenience to the researcher (Lavrakes, 2008). Purposeful sampling with a convenience sampling procedure was used to select 11 participants, which satisfies Liberty University's required participant number, who are currently working as administrators or special education teachers. These sampling procedures were noted by Creswell and Poth (2018) as appropriate for case study research. Participants were chosen based on their current job placement as a rural special education teacher or administrator. Convenience sampling was used based on the willingness of the school division to participate in the study and the limited availability of schools in the rural-school district.

Procedures

In order to obtain consent to conduct research in the school division, a face-to-face meeting was held with the school division superintendent. Within ten days of successfully defending the proposal, an application for the use of human research participants was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and completed. Included in the IRB process is site consent, signature page verifying an understanding of federal regulations and Liberty University's expectations of researchers, and completed application checklist for chair review and approval. Once approval had been granted, a letter requesting a meeting with the administrator of each school chosen to participate was sent. The researcher met personally with each administrator to provide information about the study, obtain consent to conduct the study, and meet with special education teachers who may be prospective participants in the study. Informed consent was obtained from the administrators at the time of the meeting. See Appendix B for the informed consent form. Special education teachers were contacted personally, provided information and expectations involved in the study, and provided a consent form to complete if they choose to participate. See Appendix B for the informed consent form. Participants were informed of procedures that will be used in the study to protect their privacy which include the use of pseudonyms for names, schools, and the district. Informed consent provided the purpose of the study, the participant responsibilities, risks and benefits, an explanation of the voluntary nature of the study, and the ability to withdraw at any time.

Once participants consented, face-to-face interviews were scheduled in a setting where others would not hear their responses. Interviews with special education teachers and administrators were digitally recorded and stored on a password protected computer. See Appendix D for the interview protocol. A focus group was conducted and video taped. The

focus group meeting was transcribed verbatim in order to assure the accuracy of the dialogue and interactions of the participants. Invitations to participate in the focus group consisted of administrators and special education teachers who consented to participate in the study. The focus group meeting was arranged at a time and location that was convenient to the participants. See Appendix E for the focus group protocol. Video recordings were downloaded and stored on a password protected computer. Observations of the participants were made and documented on an observation protocol in the school setting during field visits by the researcher. Descriptive and reflective notes are included. See Appendix C for the observation protocol. All paper documents involved in the study were kept in a locked filing cabinet to assure their security. Only the researcher had access to the data stored on the computer and in the locked filing cabinet. Data will be kept for a period of three years past the study as mandated by federal law. After that period of time has lapsed, computer files will be deleted and paper files shredded to assure security of the data. Upon completion of data collection and the member checking process, participants were given a \$20.00 gift card as appreciation for giving of their time and input.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in this qualitative collective case study was one of human instrument for the collection of data, data analysis, and interpretation of the findings. Just as quantitative researchers perceive happenings through descriptive variables represented by scales and measurements, qualitative researchers gain understanding through their own direct interpretation and stories (Stake, 1995). Interpretations may be impacted through the experiences of the researcher as well as decisions about what is included in the study (Stake,

1995). It is the researcher, as the human instrument, that is responsible for assuring that the study is ethical and honest (Stake, 1995).

Growing up in a rural community where poverty is prevalent has made me aware of the challenges special education teachers and administrators face as they strive to provide the best education possible with few resources and many obstacles to overcome. Although the school division may attempt to employ qualified staff, there just aren't enough candidates available due to limited higher education resources and the lure of destinations with more attractive opportunities. The teachers who do remain face increased workloads and responsibilities. I believe that it is the relationship between the administrator and special education teachers that drives the special education teachers' will to continue their quest for excellence in student learning.

As a previous special education teacher and coordinator, I have worked with potential participants in the schools that will be used in the study. However, I did not have any supervisory power over the participants at any time. I have had numerous opportunities to observe teacher/administrator interactions during meetings and in the school environment as a whole. I do hold the assumption that administrators and special education teachers who work with students with disabilities should create an environment that is supportive and holds high expectations for themselves and their students. I believe that special education is a field that is generally challenging for administrators and teachers. As a special education teacher and coordinator, my perspective may be biased due to observations made which may have been created by a situation rather than a standard practice. I would strive to remove these perceptions during the data collection and analysis in order to gain a true understanding of the participants' perceptions.

My role as the researcher in this qualitative collective case study was to allow participants' voices to be heard and reflected in the analysis of the data collected through rich-thick description. I strived to present the data collected from multiple sources in an accurate and precise manner that presents a variety of perspectives on the issue of administrator practices that support job satisfaction and special education teacher retention. I reported the interpreted meaning of the case and the lessons learned through the data analysis by developing codes, categories, identifying themes, and generalizing the lessons learned into a larger meaning that adds to the existing research and improves practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the case in qualitative case study research, multiple forms of data collection methods are required (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). Data triangulation is defined as the use of a variety of sources in a study in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomena (Patton, 2002). Data triangulation has three sub-types identified as time, space, and persons (Denzin, 1989). Data triangulation has been achieved in the study through the use of multiple data collection methods consisting of interviews, observations and a focus group at various times, in a variety of locations, and with a number of participants.

After receiving IRB approval, permission to access the sites, and consent from participants, interviews, observations, and a focus group were used to collect data. The sequence of data collection was determined by the ability to gain a better understanding of the phenomena and to provide an opportunity to confirm, interpret, and seek conflicting evidence in order to make accurate interpretations. The interview is identified by Stake (1995) as the main road to multiple realities when discovering the descriptions and interpretations of others. As such, the

interview was used as the anchor or beginning point of data collection with the observations and focus group providing an opportunity to seek confirmation and provide an option for contrasting interpretations. Findings have shown that as data becomes available, the results may be used to shape the next set of observations (Dooley, 2002). Data gathering begins from first impressions and focuses on the experience of the researcher in determining what is worthy of attention in order to obtain meaningful conclusions (Stake, 1995). What is observed in the field was guided by the research questions and recorded on a data-gathering form, which documented the definition of the case, list of research questions, data sources, allocation of time, expenses, and intended reporting (Stake, 1995). Face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to build relationships with participants and give them the opportunity to tell their stories so that their voices may be heard. Observations were made in the school setting in order to document the interactions between participants in the natural setting. Finally, a focus group was used in order to provide the participants an opportunity to share their experiences and allow for open discussion.

Interviews

An interview is an interaction between the researcher and the research participant, using oral questions by the interviewer and oral responses from the interviewee (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The interview provides an opportunity to obtain multiple views of the case through descriptions and interpretation (Stake, 1995). The use of interviews, in this case study, is appropriate because it allowed participants to have their voices heard as they describe their point of view related to administrator practices that support job satisfaction and the retention of special education teachers. Interview questions were formed based on what needs to be known about the interviewee's unique experiences and their stories (Stake, 1995). The interviewer listened and

probed in order to control the interview and gain an understanding of the meaning of the responses (Stake, 1995). I asked the participants open-ended questions in a conversational manner. Questions may have been rearranged based on responses by the participants. I probed into responses by the participants if additional information could be gained through seeking further description. Data was collected through face-to-face meetings with participants in the school setting where distractions are limited and others cannot hear responses. Interview times were designated by the administrator of the building and confirmed with the participant. An interview protocol was used to guide the process. See Appendix D for the interview protocol. The interview was digitally recorded to assure the accuracy of the statements and transcribed verbatim. Responses given during the interview were used to seek the answer to the central research question and sub-questions.

Questions one through four are designed to build rapport and gain insight into the participants' perceptions of being a special education teacher or administrator in a rural area. There is evidence that, although there are positive aspects of being a special education teacher in a rural setting, challenges exist that may influence the special education teacher's job satisfaction (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Harde, 2007). For rural special education teachers, issues such as poverty and professional isolation create environments where lower levels of job satisfaction are likely (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Westling & Witten, 1996; Sutton et al., 2014). Hearing the participants' stories will provide an opportunity to bring personal meaning to the challenges and benefits of special education teachers who work in a rural setting. Through their voices, issues can be identified that will justify a purpose for further study.

Findings have suggested that teacher job satisfaction is key to the ability of school divisions to manage costs, create positive working conditions, impact the performance of

students with disabilities, and retain special education teachers (Green & Munoz, 2016; Larkin et al., 2016; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Questions five through eight are designed to gain insight into the perceptions of special education teachers and administrators related to factors that influence the issue of job satisfaction (Larkin et al., 2016; Major, 2012; Shila & Sevilla, 2015). Teachers who have high levels of satisfaction appear to have an affective commitment to their profession, are motivated, connected to their organization, and exhibit better performance (Larkin et al., 2016; Shila & Sevilla, 2015). Because job satisfaction has been identified as a factor that may guide career choices of special education teachers, it is beneficial to investigate the perceptions of special education teachers and administrators related to job satisfaction (Larkin et al., 2016; Shaw & Newton, 2014; Stempien & Loeb, 2002).

Findings have shown that administrative support may positively impact the level of job satisfaction and the commitment of teachers to their jobs (Boyd et al., 2009; Cancio et al., 2013; Waltman et al., 2012). Question nine invites the participant to reflect on the central issue that is being investigated, job satisfaction and administrative practices. The question encourages the participant to begin to reflect on administrative practices that are perceived as supportive and to what extent those practices would influence job satisfaction.

Studies have shown that practices of administrators that value and recognize teacher contributions lead to higher levels of job satisfaction and increase the chances that teachers will remain in their positions (Bolger & Nir, 2012; Conley & You, 2017; Urick, 2016). Because special education teachers have many challenging responsibilities (Harris et al., 2016), administrators who understand the impact of those responsibilities and exhibit practices that indicate their desire to share in those responsibilities create an environment where teachers are more intrinsically and extrinsically satisfied and are more likely to make decisions to remain in

their positions (Bolger & Nir, 2015; You & Conley, 2014). Questions 10-14 probe into the participants' perceptions of administrator practices that value and recognize teacher contributions. When teachers view their school as a place where administrators demonstrate a belief in teacher's opinions and their ability to make decisions, a sense of empowerment results that is a predictor of job satisfaction (Bolger & Nir, 2012; Harris et al., 2016).

Question 15 invites the participant to reflect on the importance of providing mentors to teachers. Teachers who have given up have negative influences on their students (Schlichte et al., 2005). Studies have suggested that administrators who provide mentors increase the chances that the teacher will be more satisfied with their job and likely to remain in the field (Bennett et al., 2013; Johnson, 2001; Schlichte et al., 2005). The question provides an opportunity for participants to share personal experiences and express their perceptions about how being provided support by administrators impacts their satisfaction in their job.

Administrators who demonstrate that they care for the well-being of teachers provide a school environment that encourages teachers to be satisfied with their jobs and likely to remain in their positions (Bolger & Nir, 2012; Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; Hong, 2012). In contrast, administrators who do not choose to provide teachers with a caring environment create a workplace where teachers are unmotivated, impacting their desire to achieve high performance, encourage student achievement, and obtain high levels of job satisfaction (Charoensukmongkol et al. 2016). Question 16 asks participants to discuss an administrator who has exhibited behaviors that reflected a desire to care for the well-being of teachers. After answering, participants will be asked to describe how this behavior would influence their job satisfaction and desire to remain in their position.

Studies have indicated that teachers' perceptions of how administrators communicate

may influence their feeling about the administrator and their job (Memduhoglu, 2015; Hensley & Burmeister, 2008). Communication allows people to exchange ideas and express their wants and needs (Memduhoglu, 2015). Questions 17 and 18 investigate the participant's feelings involving the importance of communication in developing relationships, which encourage commitment to the school and a higher level of job satisfaction. Good communicators build interpersonal relationships that support organizational effectiveness and enables productive dialogue between administrators and staff (Luenburg, 2010; Ryan & Rottmann, 2009).

There is a strong correlation between community building and job satisfaction related to leadership practices (Harris et al., 2016; You & Conley, 2014). Herzberg (1968) noted that by enhancing workplace conditions, employees' intentions to leave their positions were reduced. Question 19 gives the participant an opportunity to reflect on administrator practices that support positive school environments. Findings have suggested that teachers who perceive their administrator as providing a positive school environment are more likely to work harder and remain in their positions (You & Conley, 2014).

Allowing a person to put themselves in another person's role helps them to understand others' perspectives and gain a deeper insight into their beliefs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions 20 and 21 provide an opportunity for participants to look inside the world of the administrator and their interactions with special education teachers. By telling their stories, valuable information will be gathered which will be used to gain understanding of their perception of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers. After discussing the various administrator practices that support job satisfaction, the participant will be given an opportunity to state their views of administrator practices that support job satisfaction and justify their value as they perceive them.

Observations

Observation is the act of noting a phenomenon in the field setting using the five senses which may include watching the physical setting, participants, activities, interactions, conversations, and the behavior of the observer (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Observations are carefully planned and lead the researcher to documentation of episodes of relationships that create a story or describe the case resulting in a greater understanding of the case (Stake, 1995). In order to provide vicarious experiences for the reader, the physical situation should be well described (Stake, 1995). Observations are appropriate for this case study because they enable the researcher to document the interaction of special education teachers and administrators in the natural setting to observe their interactions which may provide an understanding of their relationships. I was a nonparticipant observer in order to gain an insider view and obtain objective data by watching and taking field notes from a distance. An observation protocol was used to document descriptive and reflective notes and summarize the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). The observation protocol included information about the setting of the observation, descriptive notes for recording a description of the activities, and reflections. See Appendix C for the observation protocol. Descriptive notes were taken describing the activities that occur during the observation time and summarizing, in chronological order, the flow of the activities. Reflective notes were taken which described the process, reflected on the experience, and summarized the activities. Observations were scheduled and based on time periods when interactions are likely to occur between the special education teacher and the administrator. Being respectful of their position, consent to observe was obtained from the administrator of the building in order to inform them of my desire to be present in the building, gain access to meetings where the administrator and special education teacher are interacting, the burden the

observation may bring to the administrator and special education teacher, and provide an estimate of the timeline that will be required to obtain the observations.

Observations of interactions between administrators and special education teachers were made during staff meetings, special education meetings based on ethical and legal compliance, and school activities. These opportunities to observe will enable me to gain a better understanding of the relationships that exist between the administrator and special education teacher and the issue of administrator practices that increase job satisfaction not only in one-on-one encounters but also in social situations.

Focus Group

A focus group is defined as collections of individuals who are participants in the study who discuss topics to obtain data (Kitzinger, 1995). Although not described as a data collection resource by Stake (1995), a focus group provides an opportunity to obtain data from direct interactions of the participants involved in the case. Using a focus group to collect data in a case study is appropriate because it allows ideas and behaviors to emerge from interacting with others as they express and discuss their opinions, giving the researcher valuable information that may not be obtained from an individual (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The discussion will provide a wider range of information and richer insight into administrator practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers. The focus group consisted of five special education teachers from Ridgeview Elementray. The group was asked open-ended questions related to the issue of administrator practices that support the job satisfaction of special education teachers. All participants were given an opportunity to respond. After each person responded, the floor was opened for comments and further discussion. In order to show consideration for the participants' time, the discussion was terminated at the time agreed on by the participants prior to meeting.

Focus group questions were designed to be respectful of the participants' role and do not intend to create a climate where any group is uncomfortable giving responses. A focus group protocol was used to guide the session. See Appendix E for the focus group protocol. The focus group sessions were video recorded to assure accuracy. Videos were stored on a password protected computer.

Question one allows the participants to become familiar with each other and identify their role in the school. It will provide an opportunity for me to discuss the purpose of the study and ground rules for the group meeting.

Being a special education teacher in a rural area is challenging (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Westing & Whitten, 1996). This is especially true for schools in the rural south where findings have shown that teachers are more likely to leave than transfer in and the majority of students come from low-income families (Cowen et al, 2012; Sutton et al., 2014). Students who live in poverty suffer lower achievement and lack cognitive strategies making instruction more challenging (Ferguson et al., 207; Payne, 1996). Living in areas of high poverty creates issues related to professional isolation, lower school funding, limited resources, lower pay scales, and fewer opportunities for professional development (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Billingsley, 2004; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007). Question two allows participants to tell their stories about teaching in a rural area with limited resources and high rates of poverty. Each participant has unique experiences they may share that will enable understanding of the setting for the study.

Questions three through six investigated the perceptions of participants concerning administrator practices that support job satisfaction. Studies have indicated that administrator practices that support teachers could significantly increase the level of job satisfaction and commitment (Boyd et al., 2009; Cancio et al., 2013). Likewise, practices that foster

administrator support are linked to higher job satisfaction and a higher likelihood that teachers will remain in their positions (Charoensukmongkol et al, 2016). These questions encourage the participants to reflect on their personal experiences in order to determine what administrator practices result in a higher level of job satisfaction and allow them to begin to think about the issue of administrator support and their commitment to their profession. Value judgments were made by the participants in order to determine how effective specific practices increase job satisfaction with the hope that the discussion will lead to new meanings and understanding of the issue. Further discussion was encouraged as participants compared their perceptions.

Question seven enables the participants to use their knowledge and experience to look into the future to see just how the issue of job satisfaction can impact individuals, schools, and students' lives (Bennett et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2014). By looking at the bigger picture, it is likely that an expanded understanding will result and justification for the study be confirmed.

Data Analysis

Analysis is defined as taking apart in order to gain meaning (Stake, 1995). In order to reach meaning, categorical aggregation of instances and direct interpretation of the individual instances were used (Stake, 1995). Patterns and consistency were sought in order to find meaning. Strong patterns (correspondence) were used in making assertions. Coded data or direct interpretation was used in the analysis of data. Codes were identified but may have been revised as the study progressed when new codes were revealed. Although suggested by Stake (1995), pre-established codes were not used in data analysis to limit preconceptions of the meaning of participants' stories. In order to make the case understandable, generalizations are made. Naturalistic generalizations are conclusions that are obtained through personal

engagement in experiences. The circumstances of the readers was taken into account when helping readers gain understanding.

The case and setting of the study is described in detail (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995). Data was transcribed verbatim and stored on a password protected computer. Paper files were stored in a locked file cabinet to assure the security of the documents.

Managing and Organizing the Data

At the beginning of the analysis process, data was organized into digital files using a file naming system which indicates the type of data and participant/participants. Direct interpretation of the individual instances and aggregation of instances was used to gain new meanings about the cases. The action was sequenced, properties categorized, and tallies made. The instances were pulled apart and put back together to gain more meaning employing analysis and synthesis in direct interpretation (Stake, 1995). With the collection of instances the researcher sought to discover emerging issue-relevant meanings.

Reading and Memoing Emergent Ideas

Data was reviewed and interviews read several times to identify details and gain meaning (Stake, 1995). Patterns that were consistent within certain conditions were identified, looked over again, and triangulated. The repetitions in the correspondence table were isolated to determine if the data was adequate for the assertion that was made (Stake, 1995). Memoing helps to track the development of ideas and lends credibility to the data analysis process and outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Memos were written on field notes and transcripts, reflections, and summaries, which assisted in code development. Memos were organized in order to enable them to be retrieved, sorted, and captioned. Initial codes were formed and described in detail.

Describing and Classifying Codes Into Themes

A detailed description within the context of the setting of the person was constructed. Codes created by aggregating the data into categories of information were assigned a label that matched text segments. A codebook was created naming the code and its shortened label which describes the code and its boundaries. Listed in the codebook was when the code was used and when it was not used. An example of a segment of the text was provided for each code. Themes were identified to aid in interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Developing and Assessing Interpretations

Categorical aggregation was used to establish themes or patterns. Themes were organized into larger units in order to interpret what is meaningful to the study in the data collected. Peer feedback was obtained to assist in describing the patterns identified.

In order to provide a comprehensive and accurate description of the case and interpretations, triangulation of data was utilized (Stake, 1995). The researcher sought to minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding. Triangulation allows the researcher to assume the meaning of an observation is one thing, but through further inquiry there may be grounds for reconsideration of the interpretation (Stake, 1995). Data were triangulated through data source triangulation and investigator triangulation. Data source triangulation means that the case will be observed to determine if the observations and reporting remains the same at other times, in other places, or as participants interact differently (Stake, 1995).

Representing and Visualizing the Data

A cross-case synthesis was conducted to look for similarities and differences across cases (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). A synopsis of each case was provided and comparison completed. Naturalistic generalizations are developed from the data analysis in order to identify what can be

learned from the case for the individual or others in a similar setting (Stake, 2018). Naturalistic generalizations are conclusions arrived at through personal interactions or by vicarious experience (Stake, 1995). The researcher will assist the reader in making naturalistic generalizations by providing rich description of narrative accounts of participants and detailed descriptions through vicarious experiences (Stake, 1995).

Upon completing of the analysis, a description of the case was provided with detailed aspects of the case, what has been learned, and how it can be compared and contrasted to existing literature on administrator practices that support job satisfaction and special education teacher retention.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is defined as making practices visible and auditable in order to be able to track and verify the research process (Sandelowski, 1993). In order to assure that rigor is established in qualitative research, four processes, which determine trustworthiness, must be addressed by the researcher: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the value and believability of the finding of the study as it is related to prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to establish credibility, sufficient time was spent to obtain data that contains thick-rich description. The participants were observed in a variety of settings with close, frequent contact. Multiple sources of data and methods were used to corroborate the evidence (triangulation). An external colleague supported the credibility of the findings. I stated

and clarified my personal bias. Member checking of data, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions was offered to participants to determine accuracy of the account.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are achieved through outlining the study's decision-making process to provide a rationale for the interpretive judgment of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An external consultant examined the process and product of the account in the study to assure accuracy. The process of the study was examined by maintaining an audit trail which will consist of comprehensive notes on the background of the data and the rationale for the methodological decisions made (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Transferability

To ensure transferability, the context of the research must be described in detail so that judgments can be made (Koch, 1994). In order to establish transferability, details of the study were described using rich-thick description so that others may replicate the study to other settings to determine if the findings can be transferred (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Direct quotes from the participants and excerpts from field notes were provided to illustrate how themes developed from the data collection.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues that may become apparent in the study have been considered. The needs of participants, sites, stakeholders, protection of disclosures that may put the participant at risk, protection of vulnerable populations, power relationships, and assuring that the voices of the participants have been heard have been implemented into the research development (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to assure respect for persons involved in the study, concern for their welfare, and justice, approval to conduct the research from the university was presented prior to

conducting the study. Approval was granted through the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University. Respect for persons involves the treatment of persons and their data by providing measures that seek to assure privacy and clear communication, including the right to withdraw from the study if they should choose to do so. Concern for participants' welfare includes ensuring protection and not putting participants at risk. Justice assures that participants are treated fairly and equitably in selection and site choice (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Prior to conducting the study, site consent was obtained from the school division superintendent and building administrators. When planning data collection, the study site and participants' time were considered to minimize distraction within the school setting. The study utilized pseudonyms in identifying participants and the setting of the study to protect the participants' and school division privacy. Electronic files were password protected. Paper files were locked in a cabinet for security.

Face-to-face meetings were conducted with each participant to explain the purpose of the study. Responsibilities of the participants and details of the research process were disclosed. Informed consent was provided to all participants to review in order to determine their willingness to participate as a volunteer who was informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. In order to minimize the risk of sharing their stories, participants were made aware of the intention of the research as providing administrators and special education teachers' insight into practices that would positively influence practice and increase job satisfaction. Therefore, interview and focus group questions were formatted in a manner that did not prompt negative responses but allowed the participants to respond in a manner that accurately expressed their perceptions. Participants had the right to review and amend any portion of the data collection that they determined did not accurately reflect their views. Each participant's input

was considered when analyzing data to provide multiple perspectives, gain better understanding, and allow for comparisons. Information about publication of the study was provided to participants and stakeholders. Participants who fulfill their roles will be given a \$20.00 gift card to demonstrate appreciation for their time and effort.

The issue of the influence of power was considered. As a former employee of the school division, I did not have any supervisory power over the participants in the study. The interview process may create a power imbalance through a hierarchical relationship that may be developed between the researcher and participant (Creswell & Path, 2018). The possibility of this imbalance has been respected by the avoidance of leading questions and development of a trusting relationship with participants and stakeholders.

Summary

The methodology that was used in this qualitative collective case study is described in Chapter Three. After consideration, a qualitative research design and collective case study approach were chosen to allow special education teachers and administrators' voices to be heard and seek to provide an in-depth understanding of administrator practices that support job satisfaction and special education teacher retention. The setting of the study was two schools in a rural Southwest Virginia public school district that struggle with poverty and retention of qualified special education teachers.

Procedures for conducting the study are outlined. As the human instrument, the role of the researcher is discussed and efforts to free the study from bias are described. Data collection was conducted using interviews, observations, and a focus group in order to gain thick-rich descriptions from a variety of perspectives. In order to assure rigor of the study, the means of

assuring credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are presented. Finally, ethical issues that may arise while conducting the study are addressed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this collective case study was to describe special education teacher and administrator perceptions of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers in a rural Southwest Virginia public school district. Two schools, one elementary and one high school, in a rural school district in Southwest Virginia were selected as research sites based on their willingness to participate and similarity to school division characteristics that would represent the population of special education teachers in a rural area in southwest Virginia (Stake, 1995, p.5). Face-to-face interviews, observations, and a focus group were used to collect data from 11 special education teachers and administrators.

Chapter Four begins with a detailed description of the participants, their demographic information, and interview procedures. Each case is described by identifying the grade levels served and demographic information related to economic disadvantage, minority rate, teacher count, and graduation rate for students with disabilities. Results of the data analysis are organized under the sub-headings of Results and Research Question Responses. Codes which informed themes are identified and presented in tables. Themes that were generated describe special education teacher and administrator perceptions of administrator practices that support the job satisfaction of rural special education teachers. Research questions consisting of a central question and three sub-questions are answered using the data collected and themes developed. In conclusion, a summary of Chapter Four is provided.

Participants

The participants for the study included nine special education teachers and two administrators from a high school and elementary school in rural Southwest Virginia. The

Meadow High School participants included four special education teachers and one administrator. Ridgeview Elementary participants included five special education teachers and one administrator. I met with the administrators and special education teachers face-to-face to determine their willingness to participate in the study, provide information about the study, and to obtain informed consent. Interviews were scheduled based on convenience for the special education teacher and administrator and consideration for the protection of instructional time. Interviews were conducted in areas that were free of distractions and protected the confidentiality of the participants. Table I provides demographic information related to the study participants. Name (pseudonyms), gender, experience, and position in the school are noted. In addition, a detailed description of each participant is provided.

Table 1

Participant Demographic

Name	School	Gender	Experience	Position
Mike	Meadow High School	Male	New	Special Ed Teacher
Matt	Meadow High School	Male	Veteran	Special Ed Teacher
Michelle	Meadow High School	Female	New	Special Ed Teacher
Melinda	Meadow High School	Female	New	Special Ed Teacher
Mandy	Meadow High School	Female	Veteran	Administrator
Ragan	Ridgeview Elementary	Female	New	Special Ed Teacher
Raine	Ridgeview Elementary	Female	Veteran	Special Ed Teacher
Rose	Ridgeview Elementary	Female	Veteran	Special Ed Teacher
Riley	Ridgeview Elementary	Female	Veteran	Special Ed Teacher

Robin	Ridgeview Elementary	Female	Veteran	Special Ed Teacher
Rachael	Ridgeview Elementary	Female	New	Administrator

*New teacher/administrator has five or less years of experience in the position.

*Veteran teacher/administrator has more than five years of experience in the position.

Mike

Mike is an inclusion special education teacher at Meadow High School. He graduated from a local college in 2016. Mike states that he loves his job, likes the people he works with, and enjoys coming into work each day. He says that although sometimes he has a bad day, he tries to go home every day with a positive attitude and focus on what was accomplished.

Although he feels the job of a special education teacher is hard, he finds it satisfying to think that he has helped put out a fire or helped a kid in a way that may impact their life. Mike is satisfied with where he works and with what he does.

Matt

Matt is an inclusion teacher at Meadow High School. He has taught in the field of special education for six years at the same school. He says that he has just fallen in love with his job and is thankful for what he does every day. Matt sees his job as fun. He is a mentor for a new special education teacher. Matt is concerned with the welfare of his students whom he feels are many times hard to reach academically and have challenges in their home setting that may interfere with their school performance and relationships. Matt feels that if you are truly happy with what you do, you are more likely to stay in that career.

Michelle

Michelle is a special education teacher in a self-contained classroom at Meadow High School. She is a new teacher who came to the school division from a non-profit marketing background. Her decision to accept the position as a special education teacher was influenced by her family and the desire to have more quality time with them. Michelle describes teaching special education as hard. She says that sometimes she feels that she isn't going to make it. She states that she may have looked at all the positives but did not consider the negatives. Michelle believes that she may not always have all the tools she needs and that kids are getting more difficult with little backup provided. However, when she sees the end result, perhaps a light bulb coming on for the first time for a student, it is satisfying. Michelle feels that it is important to feel good about what you do for a living and not lose your moral compass.

Melinda

Melinda is a special education teacher at Meadow High School. She has a self-contained classroom. Melinda had always wanted to be a teacher. She has realized that her role is not only to instruct but also to be a mother figure to her students who struggle with issues related to living in poverty. Melinda says that she treats her students as if they were her own, helping with hygiene and providing food and supplies that they may lack. She stated that although she has more responsibilities than she first imagined, it still doesn't affect how much she loves her job and the satisfaction she received from it. Michelle grew up in the area but would have to consider what is best for her family when making a decision as to whether or not to remain in the area. She feels that our area has limited resources, impacting the salaries of teachers in the school division. However, for now, she is fine with where she is. Melinda believes that feeling supported and valued by administrators is very important.

Mandy

Mandy is an administrator at Meadow High School. She feels that teaching special education is hard. Mandy stressed that in the field of special education the diverse needs of the students, amount of paperwork required, and obstacles the special education staff face each day makes it a demanding profession. Mandy feels that there is a need for more training for special education staff but due to a limited budget, providing additional staff development is difficult. Mandy feels that it is important to develop relationships with parents and staff. She believes an open- door policy enables people to feel welcome and share their concerns. Mandy feels that knowing the students and their families plays an important part in making the day better and helping special education staff feel like they are understood. She says that knowing what a person's job is makes you appreciate them more. Mandy feels that it is important to encourage open communication between administrators, staff, students, and families.

Ragan

Ragan is an inclusion special education teacher at Ridgeview Elementary School. Ragan is a new special education teacher who feels very blessed to have a wonderful administrator that is supportive and encouraging. Ragan feels she can talk to the administrator about anything. She has had experiences where this was not the case, which resulted in questioning whether or not she had made the right decision to pursue a career in special education. Ragan has found this school year to be stressful due to communication issues. She feels that it is difficult to keep up with changes when something is one way one day and different the next. Ragan believed that special education was black and white but has found that there are gray areas. Ragan says that if she is going to do a job, she is going to do her best. She does look for opportunities and weighs the pros and cons of each.

Raine

Raine is a special education teacher at Ridgeview Elementary who also travels to other locations in the school division to provide services. Raine feels that she is tugged and pulled in many directions but is willing to help out when and where she can. She says that what makes her job rewarding is when she sees a light bulb come on for kids who have really struggled and finally get something. At times, she feels frustrated because there is not much follow-through at home, which makes her efforts more difficult. Raine prefers to be happy in what she is doing. When the work gets heavy, she feels that she becomes frustrated and carries it home to her family and then back to work with her the next day. Raine states that she would be looking to go elsewhere or do something else in the future due to the financial incentives offered in the private sector.

Rose

Rose is an inclusion special education teacher at Ridgeview Elementary who feels that being happy is a key factor in whether or not she would be more open to remaining in her position. Rose has taught in two schools in the district. She believes that fairness is a quality that would make her job more satisfying. Rose feels that sometimes her efforts are overlooked when compared to the recognition general education teachers receive. She has considered relocating but wants her family to have a stable environment while her children are in school. Rose becomes anxious when she feels there is a problem and the administrator is going to reprimand her. She states that this has been a difficult year for her, which has affected her as a person and as a teacher. It has made her question why she was still here and why she was doing this.

Riley

Riley is a special education teacher in a self-contained classroom at Ridgeview Elementary. Riley has taught special education at a middle school and elementary level. Riley wants to see the children succeed. She says that is the most satisfying part of her job. She has been in the same school district for 15 years. Riley states that she is not always happy with the administrators she has worked with or the decisions they make, but she stays for the kids. She describes the job of a special education teacher as hard. Riley would like to see more support from administrators.

Robin

Robin teaches special education in a self-contained classroom at Ridgeview Elementary. She says that sometimes a special education teacher can get overwhelmed because they try so hard to make a difference for their students. Robin feels very close to the team members that work in her room. They get along well both in the school setting and outside the classroom. Robin thinks that it makes a big difference if you like who you are working with. Sometimes, she is with her school staff more than her family. She describes her job as enjoyable because she has always been a person who likes to help the underdog. Robin says that if she is satisfied doing her job, she will stick around no matter what but if she doesn't feel satisfied in her job she might switch careers altogether and go into something completely different than special education.

Rachael

Rachael is an administrator at Ridgeview Elementary. She has worked in the school system for over twenty years but this is her first year as an administrator. Rachael feels that her role is to make sure the IEP's are followed and that the special education teachers are using the

appropriate tools and strategies that meet the students' individual needs. She believes that students in this area may be lacking in prior knowledge and experiences more than those students in a more urban area. Rachael wants to make the teachers she supervises feel supported. She says that special education teachers appreciate an administrator who understands what they are going through and that it makes them want to come into the building each morning. Rachael believes that showing appreciation and acknowledging the work of special education teachers will increase their satisfaction and motivate them to stay. She says that in order to encourage teachers to go the extra mile for the school and the students, administrators have to communicate with them and show they care about them professionally and personally.

Case Descriptions

Case One: Meadow High School

According to the Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profile, Meadow High School is an accredited school in rural Virginia that serves grades 9-12. The enrollment is reported as 561 with 48% being considered economically disadvantaged. The student population includes 20.7% of students with a disability and a minority rate of 6%. Meadow High School employs 42 teachers, five of whom teach special education. It is one of three high schools in the school division. Meadow High School had an on-time graduation rate of 88.2% for the 2017-2018 school year for students with disabilities (Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profile, 2018).

Case Two: Ridgeview Elementary

Ridgeview Elementary is an accredited school in rural Virginia that serves grades PK-5. According to the Virginia Department of Education School Quality Profile (2018), the enrollment is reported as 435 with 13.6% of the population identified as students with disabilities

and 35.6% economically disadvantaged. Ridgeview Elementary is one of the largest elementary schools in the district. Ridgeview serves an area of sixty square miles. According to the school mission statement, Ridgeview Elementary strives to provide a safe learning community committed to increasing student achievement by engaging stakeholders to maximize student success.

Results

The purpose of this qualitative collective case study was to describe special education teacher and administrator perceptions of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers. The results of individual interviews, observations and a focus group are described in detail below. Nine special education teachers and two administrators participated in the study. I invited each participant to attend the focus group session. Five of the special education teachers from Ridgeview Elementary chose to attend. Observation data was collected through random visits to each school during meetings and activities. Focus group and observation data support codes and themes discovered in individual interviews. Data obtained from each case provides insight into answering the research questions and performing triangulation of the data collection. Using categorical aggregation of instances and direct interpretation of individual instances, as suggested by Stake (1995), patterns and consistency of each case were determined, codes assigned, and themes extracted in order to gain issue-relevant meaning, first individually and then across cases. An account of theme development and research question responses are provided.

Theme Development

Three methods of data collection were employed. The section below provides a description of how I analyzed my data to extract themes.

Face-to-Face Interviews. Individual interviews were conducted in the school building in a location that was free from distractions and provided privacy for participants to share their stories. The recorded interviews lasted approximately one hour with participants being given the opportunity to pause to think or ask questions if they did not understand. It appeared that all participants were engaged and willing to share their perceptions freely. There were no requests to not answer any of the questions asked. Member check was offered. However, none of the participants requested to read or review the transcript of their interview.

Focus Group. The second method of data collection was a focus group. The focus group was held at Ridgeview Elementary. The hour session was video recorded and recorded. Although all participants were invited to participate, only five special education teachers from Ridgeview Elementary chose to attend the session. Predetermined questions were presented to the group as a whole. Each member of the group was given an opportunity to provide feedback and present questions and concerns to other participants. Focus group members appeared to be actively involved and often carried on conversations among themselves as issues based on the focus group questions would arise. The group did have a short period of distraction when discussing responsibilities of state assessments.

Observations. The third method of data collection was observations. Because of the confidential nature of the special education process, meetings with parents or students that addressed IEPs or other issues related to the student's educational progress were not accessible. However, on numerous occasions, I did observe, in both sites, interactions between administrators and special education teachers in various settings such as casual meetings in the office, meetings between administrators and special education teachers, and organizational meetings for programs that were being implemented in the school. These observations were

documented on the Observation Protocol see Appendix C. Consent to be in the building was provided by the administrator.

Codes. Data gathered from individual interviews and the focus group were transcribed, read many times, and reviewed. Participants were offered an opportunity to read transcripts of face-to-face interviews and the focus group interview to assure accuracy and revise their statements if needed. Memoing of the text allowed me to keep track of the development of ideas in order to organize the data to gain meaning. As opposed to developing a codebook before data collection, I constructed the codebook after memoing to avoid preconceived ideas. I used direct interpretation of individual instances and aggregation as recommended by Stake (1995) to gain new meaning about the cases. Coding was completed by hand to gain a better understanding of the text. Sections of text were selected and a code assigned that reflected the essence of the participant's response. As additional text was reviewed, the same code was given to ideas that expressed the same meaning establishing patterns and consistency. During review, codes were revised and additional codes added to the codebook by case. Nineteen codes emerged from the data. Codes were described and categorized in order to assist in identifying consistent themes that would enable the reader to gain meaning from the voices of the participants. Table 2 below provides a list of codes and the frequency of their occurrences.

Table 2

Codes

Codes	Frequency of Responses Meadow High School	Frequency of Responses Ridgeview Elementary
Administrator Support	44	42
Cares About Well-Being	14	8
Provides for My Needs	7	13
Communicates	28	28
Administrator Practices	18	29

Personal Feelings	9	17
The Work Itself	36	49
Resources	24	14
Personal Achievement	22	21
Recognition	21	11
Rewarding	19	23
Personal Growth	21	7
Visits Class	12	5
Knows Curriculum	6	2
Knows Parents/Students	26	15
Participates in Special Education Process	17	14

Themes. After the text was coded, I began to search for themes by bringing together ideas found in the coding process and determining what the codes have in common that would bring meaning to the study. Because the interview and focus group questions were based on the theoretical framework that guided the study and current research, it appeared that the final themes I identified were closely related to those sources. Four themes were discovered in the analysis process: (a) job satisfaction; (b) job dissatisfaction; (c) working conditions; (d) personal involvement in the special educational process. As suggested by Stake (1995), I not only focused on themes that were related to theory or current research, but attempted to discover themes that were unique to the study provided by my data collection. Based on the consistency of the occurrences, strong patterns, and the passion demonstrated by participants when expressing their perceptions, personal involvement in the special educational process was included as a theme. Table 3 provides a list of themes, codes, and the frequency of their occurrences.

Table 3
Theme Development

Themes	Codes	Theme Frequency
Job Satisfaction	Administrator Support, Cares About My Well-Being, Provides for My Needs, Communication	214
Job Dissatisfaction	Administrator Practices, Personal Feelings, Work Itself, Resources	196
Working Conditions	Personal Achievement, Recognition, Rewarding, Opportunity, Growth,	145
Personal Involvement	Takes Part in the Classroom, Knows Students and Parents, Knows Curriculum, Caring Relationships, Participates in Special Education Process	100

Each theme is described in detail below.

Job satisfaction. The first theme that I identified was job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was a recurring theme as special education teachers and administrators discussed factors that influenced their perception of their job as a positive experience, which would motivate them to likely remain in their position. This theme describes the characteristics of an administrator that the participants identified as supporting job satisfaction.

Administrator support. Ragan said that being supported by your administrator could make all the difference in whether or not you are satisfied with your job. She noted,

The first two years were rocky. I didn't feel supported by the administrator and many times, I felt like leaving. This year I've been very blessed with an administrator who is

supportive. I'm satisfied and don't think about what else is out there. I've had an administrator who is all in and I can go to them to get things off my mind. I feel very supported and satisfied. Before I was in a situation where getting up and coming to work was hard. This year I don't mind coming to work because I feel like I know that someone has my back and that's a wonderful feeling.

Likewise, when discussing administrator support Melinda said, "Administrator support can make or break a teacher and determine their job satisfaction. If an administrator supports you, then you are more likely to be happy and stay in that building." Michelle agreed with Melinda and Ragan. She feels there is a direct correlation between administrator support and job satisfaction. Michelle noted, "Just having an administrator that asks what would help you would let you know that you are valued." Rachael agreed that an administrator who takes the time to ask what a teacher needs increases their confidence in that administrator. Mandy also provided input into the importance of administrator support. Mandy said,

The work is hard and it's not always a pat on the back. I just don't think you would continue if you feel like you're not appreciated. When special education teachers don't feel supported they don't stay in their jobs and they are very unhappy. The school is depending on special education teachers with SOLs and everything else to make a difference. They are vital to the school's accreditation. If they know that the administrator appreciates them and sees the work that they do, then they are much more satisfied, coming each day to take on those challenges. I think it just makes a difference.

Riley confirmed Mandy's statements. Riley emphasized that administrator support was big. She felt that administrators should give special education teachers more thought. In her opinion, many times special education teachers are left out and administrators don't think about what

would help them do their job. She believes that administrators are not aware of the negative impact these practices have on the kids and on the teachers. Likewise, Rachael noted that if special education teachers know that you support them and appreciate them and the work they do, they will go above and beyond for the school and the students. Robin agreed with Rachael about the importance of administrator support. Robin said,

I feel it is very important to have administrator support. When you have your administrator on your side, it makes a huge difference especially for special education teachers because we have to deal with so much like paperwork, meetings, behaviors, and parents. I think the more you have the administrator supporting you, the bigger the impact on if you are satisfied with your job or not.

Rachael, Raine and Stephanie discussed the importance of having an administrator who has faith in their decisions and is willing to listen. Raine said, "I feel like having your administrator support me definitely makes me feel more comfortable and more satisfied. I am more at ease with making decisions." Stephanie respects an administrator who treats everyone fairly and is willing to listen. She states that she spends the majority of her time with the kids and knows what they need. Raine says that she has been under two different administrators with two different philosophies on support of staff. She said,

I feel like having an administrator that supports your decisions and is willing to hear out your thoughts on why you've made decisions and choices that you've made makes me feel more comfortable and more satisfied. I think it is obvious and goes without saying that if I'm more satisfied in my position, I am more likely to remain in my position. If I'm not satisfied in my position, then I'm definitely going to be looking to go elsewhere or do something else.

Robin summarized the impact of administrator support. She said, “If an administrator is supportive, it really does increase job satisfaction. I think just knowing that you have your administrator’s support, that they have your back, makes it easier to come back day after day to do it all again.” Rachael explained that if special education teachers do not feel supported by the administrator, you are just going to get the bare minimum from them. Just as in the individual interviews, during the focus group conversation, participants agreed that an administrator who is supportive, listens, and has your back increases job satisfaction, happiness, and the likelihood that you will stay in your position.

Caring for my well-being. Caring for the well-being of special education teachers was a topic that many participants felt strongly about. Rachael, an administrator, explained that being pleasant, friendly, and taking time to get to know the special education teachers on a personal level increases their feelings of success. Riley also noted that it makes a difference when the administrator knows about you and your family. For Raine, it is very important that an administrator be sensitive to personal situations. She stated that if an administrator cares for her family, they care for her. Raine said, “Just asking me about my family shows that they are caring and have a sense of who I am and where I come from. That makes you more satisfied with your job.” Michelle described her experience with an administrator who displayed compassion in a family crisis. She said,

I think it’s really important to feel good about what you do for a living and important to not lose your moral compass. I tried not to miss a lot of school but at the end of the day, my family comes first. I had a mother-in-law who was very ill and my grandfather passed away. I had to take a few days to do what you need to do. My administrators were wonderful. I wondered how I was going to manage but they were really behind me.

On that part, it made it a little easier and gave me a new respect for them and their understanding, which made me appreciate them and become more satisfied in my job.

Mike agreed with Michelle. He described his perceptions of an administrator who values a teacher's sense of well-being as higher than those who do not. He stated, "I look at them with respect."

Provides for my needs. Being in a rural area, special education teachers many times do not have what they need to perform at their best. This can impact the way they see their job and their job satisfaction. Mike said, "Being a special education teacher in a rural area, sometimes we do not have the proper resources or the proper amount of help that we need to assist the students. We have to be creative." Ragan described what she felt would make her happier with her job and more satisfied. She noted that sometimes special education classrooms are forgotten. Perhaps the administrator had not checked in to see if there was anything you need or had forgotten that you don't have a computer in your room. Michelle described her experience as she moved from a non-profit to the school division. Michelle stated,

I didn't know what I was getting into. Sometimes, I don't think I can make it. I thought I would be able to help kids and have more time with my family. I didn't take into account the fact that special education is difficult. I don't have many of the things I need. For example, we have to share the laptop.

Mandy discussed job satisfaction and the administrator's role in providing training.

Mandy noted that special education teachers were expected to be pros in providing an appropriate education to students with a wide range of disabilities. However, they are not given the tools they need to be successful. She feels that in order to be satisfied with your job as a special education teacher, an administrator needs to provide individual training rather than the

current practice of having someone else go to the training and expect them to come back and provide instruction that is as effective as being there.

Communication. An administrator's ability to communicate, both verbally and non-verbally, with staff is key to job satisfaction according to study participants. It can be the one factor that determines whether or not teachers have a good or bad day. Mandy explained that when there is an open line of communication between the administrator and special education staff, who share the responsibility of educating students with disabilities, teachers are more satisfied and will stay longer. Mike said,

I love the way you can go from extremely positive that you are doing a good job right to extremely negative. It's just the fact that if you sat down to talk to me like an adult, I respect you more. But, if you're talking to me like I'm below you then I'm not going to really respect you. I mean my job is hard and it's going to be harder if I have my administrator breathing down my back telling me I'm doing it all wrong. Constructive criticism, that makes you feel good about your job, will definitely determine whether or not you are satisfied in your position.

Michelle and Melinda agreed with Mike that communication is extremely important. Just silence, Michelle says, will make you doubt yourself and put you on edge. She feels that just a thank you or have a good day will influence how you feel about your job and your administrator. Melinda expressed her feeling about communication as being key to everything that is done in school. She feels that being comfortable expressing your feelings to your administrator determines how you feel about your job. She noted that administrators who greet you and say good morning or have a good day will really impact your mood and give you confidence in your ability. Melinda said, "It is better to be able to go to your administrator than someone else in the

school or take it home with you. It makes your job satisfaction much higher. On a scale from one to ten, I would rate communication a 10.” Raine noted that just a shout-out over the intercom in front of the whole building or an email provided a confidence booster that made her feel more satisfied in her position and opened the door for her to be more likely to have the confidence to share with her administrator. Rosa described her experience:

If I hear the heels coming down the hall, I know something’s wrong and I’m going to get out of the way. If you hear yelling, you just steer clear. That will tell you what kind of day it will be. Communication is huge in determining job satisfaction. If there is a lack of communication it really affects you as a person and as a teacher. At some point you start to question why am I even here or what am I doing this for.

Non-verbal communication is also an important element of job satisfaction. Raine and Michelle expressed their opinions about using texts and emails as a means of sharing information. They had concerns that what was said may not be interpreted as it was meant. Without that personal face-to-face discussion and opportunity to provide immediate feedback, the teacher could feel threatened by not knowing whether they had done something wrong. Michelle explains it as walking on eggshells all day if you do not have a clear understanding of what is being asked of you.

Members of the focus group discussed administrator communication and its impact on their feeling about their job. The group agreed that open communication was a must. They felt open lines of communication were a necessity that enabled them to be happier in their jobs and to stay in their positions. Listening to them and knowing that the administrator would give them an opportunity to present their side even with parents was important to the group.

Job dissatisfaction. Addressing issues that special education teachers and administrators perceived in their jobs as creating dissatisfaction is important when striving to increase special education teacher job satisfaction. Participants were forthcoming in describing circumstances that they perceived to be related to dissatisfaction in their job, impacting their performance and organizational commitment. Key topics that were identified were administrator practices, personal feelings, working conditions, and resources.

Administrator practices. Administrator practices appeared to be a major concern for participants. Participants were eager to discuss circumstances where they felt administrators were lacking. Mandy, Melinda, and Michelle agreed that administrators many times are not aware of what goes on in special education. Mandy talked about the implications of administrators who do not have any idea what a special education teacher does. She noted that when a job is not understood, it is difficult to appreciate the people who are working day-after-day to educate students with disabilities. Michelle said,

I think administrators don't take notice. They just have other things going on. I literally text my students' parents multiple times a day. My relationship with them is often overlooked. It seems like if I can just keep my kids in my room and make sure they don't get in the way and don't cause disruption I'll have a happy life. Sometimes I believe they think we just color and watch Disney movies. There is no respect for our curriculum. Then there is all the paperwork and outside agencies I deal with on a daily basis. Sometimes administrators don't even know who the physical therapist or occupational therapist is when they come in the building. They don't recognize the fact that you have so many jobs. It would be really cool if someone gave us some extra time for making

calls, doing paperwork, or getting meetings done. I would definitely be more willing to stay if others understood what I do on a daily basis.

Melinda agreed with Michelle. She said, “It’s just that feeling of being appreciated and recognizing that what you do makes a difference.” Matt noted that some administrators don’t know about special education. He feels that makes it hard because the special education teacher would have to stop and explain to the administrator what is going on with paperwork, legal requirements, or even appropriate strategies for working with students with a wide variety of disabilities.

Members of the focus group agreed that their job is more difficult when an administrator does not realize how much time goes into completing paperwork or how many hours they spend at night planning and writing IEPs. The focus group participants stated that these were all tasks that should have time allotted for in the school day. The group agreed that it made their job extremely challenging and caused them to be less satisfied in their position.

A lack of communication from an administrator can impact a special education teacher’s sense of satisfaction. Michelle recalled how she felt as a new special education teacher when information was not relayed to her. She said,

I think that there is a lack of communication from the top down. The person at the top tells people underneath them what is supposed to be happening but many times that does not get relayed to the teacher appropriately. I think we all need to be hearing the same thing. That makes perfect sense. I wanted to change the world but instead struggled to survive. Teachers need to be assured that they are informed. Maybe then, they will be more apt to stay.

Rosa, Robin, and Riley talked about their perception of administrators who appeared to show more recognition to general education teachers than special education teachers. Rosa stated,

We are not recognized for what we contribute. If our kids do well on SOLs, it's not way to go or you guys are awesome like it is for general education teachers. But, if we do poorly, it is shame on you. That's exactly how it is and how I feel about it.

Riley and Robin agree with Rosa. They believe that lots of times special education teachers are left out. Riley indicated that she wished administrators gave more thought to what would help special education teachers do their job and how not having this support impacts them and their students. Riley said, "To make special education teachers more satisfied, there has to be the same rules for everybody. If you want me to do it this way, then everyone should do it the same way." She believes there are inconsistent expectations between special education teachers and general education teachers. Riley goes on to say that special education teachers don't get a lot of recognition for the things they accomplish. She would like the administrator to recognize not only the big things like SOLs but also the little things. She noted that recognition would make special education teachers more satisfied with their job. Robin stated, "Like we said during a discussion with other special education teachers the other day, that when things go wrong you know it very quickly. But, when things go right, special education teachers aren't given the praise. I think it would be important for administrators to understand what it would be like if they did not have special education teachers." Raine explained,

I think as a special education teacher you're just expected to do what you do. Especially as an inclusion teacher, you have to go along with someone else's decision and so you are not going to get the recognition when something big happens in the class. So even if you

are a part of teaching those children in that classroom, for me, you are an outsider, looking in. I think it is really frustrating.

Personal feelings. When administrators do not show respect for the personal feelings of special education teachers job dissatisfaction increases. Participants discussed their perceptions when they don't feel they are important to administrators. Mandy noted that many times special education teachers are not looked at as teachers but as aides. They have been given the impression by administrators that they can be replaced quickly, impacting their self-esteem and desire to do their best in their job. Melinda explained that special education teachers are not always allowed to work their magic because they are left out of the decision-making process, which makes them feel insignificant. She noted that special education teachers want to feel important and acknowledged. It increases their motivation to do their job well, their self-confidence, and their willingness to stay in their position. Melinda stressed that when she feels like she has done a good job it makes her feel confident in herself as a teacher but not all administrators express their appreciation. Matt said, "If you are happy, truly happy with what you do, you're more likely to stay in the career. If you don't feel your administrator cares about your feelings, you might look for other options. If the administrator is having a bad day, don't take it out on you." Likewise, Rosa explained, "When an administrator actually cares about your happiness and recognizes that you are a person who has feelings and struggles, it makes you feel really good about them and more willing to work hard for them and the students."

Work itself. The work of a special education teacher itself can be challenging. Participants described what it was like to be a special education teacher and how their job could be less than satisfying if their administrator did not provide for their needs. As I interviewed the special education teachers and administrators, the words they used were reflective of a job that

was rewarding yet difficult. Participants used specific adjectives such as *not happy, hard, stressful, overwhelming, dreaded, tough, and difficult* to portray their feelings about their job.

Michelle, who is a Christian woman, finds it very hard when students use inappropriate language with the teacher or peers. She feels it is important not to lose your moral compass in a job that exposes her to difficult situations that challenge her moral compass each day. Melinda described her experience. She went on to explain:

I was ready to quit my job because I felt as though regardless of what I did, right or wrong, it was still wrong. I know that I do a good job. My paperwork is done on time. I know that my kids are taken care of and I'll make sure they are learning. I feel confident in myself as a teacher but it is extremely difficult when you're told one thing, you do it, and then it is wrong. It is hard to be in a building where you can't ask questions but have to go along with whatever is told to you. You become dissatisfied with your job and want to leave. The only reason that I'm still here is because an administrator took an interest in me and supported me through some tough times.

Being a special education teacher is not easy. Ragan provided a description of how special education is. She said,

You go to school all these years to change the world and then you walk into a special education classroom. I ask God what am I going to do because these kids are not listening, this kid didn't do this, and this happened to this kid last night. As their teacher you have all these things to deal with not to mention the paperwork, the timelines, the meetings, and the parents who don't respond or come to help you help their children. Nothing in special education is black and white and things constantly change so you become overwhelmed trying to keep up.

Like Ragan, each participant had their own story to tell about the students they work with and the challenges they face. Being a special education teacher in a rural area with a high rate of poverty provides even more challenges to an already stressful job. The stories were all similar. Here is how Michelle explains her situation as she transitions from the marketing world to special education teacher. Michelle had a really hard week. It made her question why she was even there. She had to go into the office and shut the door to talk to a student whose mom was recently released from prison. The student got in her face, yelled and screamed. She had never had anyone do that to her before. As she thought about what to say or do, she realized that this kid lives with yelling and screaming and sees violence all the time. Rachael also talked about teaching students who come from poverty and how it influences special education teachers. She has observed that many times these students do not have the prior knowledge and experiences that other students may have. The special education teacher has to find different tools to make these students successful, which is challenging. She goes on to say that parental support is limited. Many times, they don't see the importance of school or don't have the resources to help their children with academics. Rachael said, "I'm sure special education teachers get very discouraged because even though they try to work with students and give them the tools that will help them to succeed, they don't get the home support. It makes the teachers feel like it is no-win situation. It isn't just an eight to three job for special education teachers in rural areas with high rates of poverty. They take it home. Likewise, Ragan stated that she had observed kids who have a lack of things like transportation, supplies, clothes, and food, which impacts their ability to learn and the teacher's ability to provide them with the education they will need to live a good life. Robin said,

Kids come to school and don't have electricity or running water at home so when they get there they are already frustrated and dirty. So before our day can begin, we help them wash their face and hands and brush their teeth and make sure they have clothes that are comfortable and clean. We make sure they are fed so they will be able to learn.

All of the stories that describe the life of a special education teacher assist in understanding how important it is that an administrator strive to provide working conditions that support the special education teacher and address job dissatisfaction.

Resources. Resources were another area of concern for special education teachers and administrators. Working in a rural area with a high rate of poverty creates circumstances that could cause job dissatisfaction. Mandy explained that because it is a rural area, the budget is limited. There is not a lot of funding and school divisions frequently have to work tirelessly to provide for the needs of the division. She explained that this limits our opportunities for staff development and training teachers need. Mandy said, "We just don't do it anymore. We throw people out there. It makes it hard, really hard."

As industries move out of the area, people leave and tax revenue decreases, making it more difficult to find qualified special education teachers and provide them a competitive pay rate. Ragan and Michelle took a pay cut to work for the local school system. Ragan doesn't know if she will be teaching special education in ten years. She goes on to say that although she believes she is doing great things for the kids and feels it is very rewarding, in the back of her mind, she also thinks about the pressure that is involved in her job and the resources she still needs to do her job. Melinda says that she has to think about her future family. If she has to leave her position to make more money to provide for her family, she will.

In addition to not being able to provide a competitive pay scale and training for teachers, rural areas who struggle with poverty many times cannot provide the staff that is needed, making the special education teacher's job more difficult and an increased likelihood of job dissatisfaction. According to Michelle, the resource that is most needed in special education is more qualified special education teachers. She noted that nothing replaces human interaction, someone to hug students and talk with them about their needs. Because we have few resources, it is difficult for the school division to hire qualified special education teachers. For a school division that does not have the money to hire additional teachers, it would be almost impossible to offer a wage that would be financially motivating. The focus group noted that there are only two colleges in the area that are providing special education training. However, because of pay and more opportunities in other places, those graduates are not remaining in the area.

Members of the focus group were in agreement with their peers. They agreed that it was challenging being a special education teacher in a rural area because they don't have the resources that other schools have. Members of the group discussed the topic and said, "Money is always tight. We never have money so we don't have all the resources that could help our kids. There are great things out there for them but we don't have the funds to pay for them or to train special education teachers to use them."

The focus group also described their perception of their job and job dissatisfaction related to how they feel special education teachers are perceived. The majority of the group felt that so many people don't know exactly what they do and do not look at them as teachers. In their opinion, many times administrators and regular education teachers do not consider how much time they put in on paperwork, meetings, and the hours they spend at night working on IEPs. According to the focus group, special education is a challenge and is not easy.

Working Conditions. From the data collected, I found that special education teachers need the school environment to provide them with opportunities to gain a sense of personal achievement and growth in their field. Administrators play an important role in this process that impacts job satisfaction by including special education teachers in decision-making, giving them recognition for a job well done, and providing opportunity for growth. When administrators assure that the school environment provides opportunities to positively influence a student's education, special education teacher perceptions of their work environment are more positive and job satisfaction is likely to increase.

Personal achievement. Being included in the decision-making process enables special education teachers to share their expertise, gives them a feeling of accomplishment, and raises the level of job satisfaction. Michelle and Melinda stated that it makes them feel important to be included. They believe that an administrator who takes advantage of their skill and knowledge set makes them a valuable asset to the school team. Because of their extensive training, Raine feels that special education teachers have a different take on things, allowing them to bring a different perspective to educational planning. Likewise, Rachael has observed that when special education teachers are included, they see things that maybe an administrator misses. Matt said, "I think it is very important to include special education teachers in the decision-making process in the school. We can be the voice for the voiceless. I have seen a lot of kids who would not speak up for themselves. We have established a lot of trust with them and I think we can bridge the gap." Mandy described her perception of special education teachers and the impact of personal achievement. She said,

I have worked with special education teachers for a long time. They are so resourceful, accomplished, and creative. It is all the extra work, the trust, and the relationships that

special education teachers have that make them an asset to the school. With SOLs and in every area of the school, we are depending on the special education teachers to make that difference. They are a vital part of the school.

Observation data from Meadow High School provided an example of administrators who give special education teachers an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process in the school. During a meeting to plan a new program that was going to be implemented for special education students, the administrator gave special education teachers involved in the project responsibility for program planning and oversight. The special education teachers were asked to conduct the meeting and document information. Special education teachers appeared to take on the challenge willingly and take pride in being able to demonstrate their ability.

Recognition. Special education teachers want to be recognized for their accomplishments. To make the school environment more satisfying, participants felt that the administrator needs to show that they appreciate those who go the extra mile and celebrate successes. Personal communication plays an important role in this process by making the special education teacher feel that they work in a supportive environment that makes them happier and more committed to their job.

Mandy stated that if a special education teacher knows that the administrator sees and appreciates the work that they do, then they are much more satisfied and more willing to come back each day to take on the challenges of the position. Melinda, Riley, Robin and Rachael support Mandy's perspective. They note that when an administrator recognizes the accomplishments of a special education teacher, the teachers are happier and much more satisfied. Melinda said, "Anyone who feels appreciated will want to do more. You are going to enjoy working there and want to stay." Rachael, an administrator, agrees. She said, "If they feel

appreciated then they will go above and beyond. They will be happy to come to work. They'll know they're valued. Satisfaction happens when you appreciate and acknowledge their work and they will want to stay." Mike noted that just a few small words saying you're doing a good job or we appreciate you makes you feel like you're doing something right. He continued by saying that when an administrator recognizes your efforts it means a lot and increases job satisfaction.

Rewarding. Special education teachers are more motivated and have higher levels of job satisfaction when they perceive their jobs to be personally rewarding. A school environment where special education teachers have an impact on students' lives and become problem solvers provides an opportunity for those teachers to build their self-confidence and engage in a career that is gratifying. Michelle talked about student success as rewarding. She said, "I would describe job satisfaction as seeing the end result. I think it is satisfying to see a light bulb kick on for a kid who couldn't grasp a concept but after I have given it my best, that kid learns. It is the most satisfying part of my job." Rachael also believes that student success impacts job satisfaction. She explained, "You want to make sure special education teachers are happy with their job. They see those light bulbs come on when their student gets it or when they remember the way, you showed them. It can be a very rewarding job." Although it can be a very challenging job, Raine expressed her thoughts about her students' success. She said, "When I see those light bulbs go off for those kids, I am going home feeling more satisfied with what I've done and how I've done it. It definitely motivates me to come back the next day and be able to face those challenging moments and be a little stronger." Likewise, Mike described his experience.

Sometimes we go home and at the end of the day and think did we accomplish anything and then sometimes we go home and think we accomplished a lot. I try to go home every day positive that maybe I put out a fire or I helped a kid. If you know that you have made some kind of an impact on their life, you enjoy your job. Sometime it's coming into work every day knowing that you have a purpose that makes it a rewarding.

Mandy agreed with her peers. She stated, "It's not just a job to me. It's about what you feel you have accomplished, regardless of how big or small. It's a feeling of getting something done that makes a difference."

Special education teachers are problem solvers. As I observed a meeting between an administrator and special education staff, I noted that the administrator gave the special education teacher the opportunity to be a valuable part of the conversation. The special education teacher provided feedback based on experience with the student and knowledge. The administrator appeared to listen and then implement the suggestions made by the special education teacher. Special education teachers work each day to help their students with disabilities overcome barriers to reaching their goals. What could be more rewarding than seeing a student thrive? Living in a rural area with a high rate of poverty presents many challenges for special education teachers but their determination and love for their students allows them to overcome these challenges and provides the teacher with a sense of accomplishment. Matt explains,

I have just fallen in love with my job and I am thankful for what I can do every day. We have hard to reach kids academically. When they have so much going on at home, you really have to reach out to them and build that trust. I take care of my students and

expect the best from myself. The kids make me feel positive. That makes me more satisfied with my job and more likely to remain committed to it and the school division. Mike also talked about being a problem solver. He said, “We don’t have some of the things we need to assist students. I feel like you become more creative with your ideas. A lot of times I’m raising these kids I work with. I get closer with them than my own family sometimes. Job satisfaction for me is just coming into work every day knowing that you have a purpose.” Riley stated that although there are challenges when you teach students who live in poverty, there are also rewards in finding the answers. She goes on to say, “Challenges do not change my job satisfaction because I really want to see those children succeed, no matter what. I love to see them when they accomplish something. Seeing children succeed, that’s the most satisfying part of my job.”

Members of the focus group discussed the rewards of being a special education teacher and how it affects their job satisfaction. They noted that every day you have to deal with issues and solve problems in your classroom. Special education teachers have to help each other and listen to each other. However, in the end, student success is most important and gives special education teachers the most joy. Likewise, observation data showed that special education teachers were being given an opportunity to become problem solvers. While I was observing in the hallway, a special education teacher, an administrator and a student who was experiencing a crisis were having a discussion. The administrator allowed the special education teacher, who had experience with the student, to lead the discussion and present options, which deescalated the situation. Even though the administrator was there for support, the special education teacher appeared to be given an opportunity to demonstrate competency in problem- solving which resulted in positive feedback from the administrator.

Growth. A school environment where special education teachers are provided an opportunity to stay current with issues and resources, receive training to better serve the school and students, and be provided with a chance to further their education will likely motivate them to be more satisfied with their jobs and more committed to remaining in their position. When the resources are not available, many times special education teachers become disenchanted with their positions and begin to question their career choices. Melinda stated her view of job satisfaction. She said, "Job satisfaction is just being content with having the resources that you need, having support from your colleagues and your administration. Having an opportunity to grow where you are. I have been encouraged to grow by taking more classes and a part of more conferences but the budget just isn't good." Mandy supported Melinda's perception by saying,

I think to increase job satisfaction, special education teachers need more training. They are expected to be pros and we are not by any means. I just think more staff development where the information goes directly to the special education teachers is needed. I think because we live in a rural area and our budget is limited it limits our opportunities for training. There is a trend to use train the trainer to save money. You don't learn the same because it is a ten minute summary of a whole day in training coming from someone else. That is not the way to learn. We just throw people out there. It is hard, really hard.

Likewise, Michelle talked about living in a rural area and the opportunity for growth. Having few resources limits the ability of the school division to find qualified special education teachers. She went on to say that there needs to be more emphasis on future teachers and making sure that financially they are where they need to be with access to training and educational opportunities.

Members of the focus group expressed the same concerns for opportunity and growth. They discussed the limited number of colleges in the area that provide training for special education teachers. It was the feeling of the group that other areas attract special education teachers because they have more opportunities and more pay. After further discussion, the focus group members concluded that there is also a lack of training that would allow them to grow in their profession.

Personal involvement. The final theme that I identified was personal involvement. Participants appeared to be passionate when discussing this issue and linked it to job satisfaction. Taking part in the classroom, knowing the kids and parents, knowing the curriculum, participating in the special education process, and developing caring relationships were named as areas of concern. Michelle, Matt, Melinda, and Robin all confirmed that administrator involvement increased their job satisfaction.

Takes part in the classroom. Taking part in the classroom enables the administrator to build relationships with the students and teachers and gives them insight into the strengths and needs of the classroom. Michelle said, "I think the administrator could be much more involved in special education. It's very rare that they come in my classroom. I'm not a person who wants to be observed all the time but I feel that it is beneficial for the administrator to be part of the classroom." Likewise, Melinda believes that administrators are not always aware of what goes on in special education. She goes on to say that it makes a difference when administrators spend more time in the classroom. She feels that this will provide a better understanding of what the teacher is doing and make the administrator aware of situations instead of having the teacher backtrack and explain.

Michelle and Mandy would like to see the administrator spend time participating in daily activities such as eating lunch with the students in the classroom when they have cooked or providing instruction. Rachael states that knowing where the students are academically would enable the administrator to support the teacher and provide strategies that will improve instruction. Matt, Ragan, Robin and Melinda stressed that teachers feel valued when the administrator takes time out to come to their room and check on them and their students.

Knows students and parents. In order to build trusting relationships with students and parents, participants believed that administrators need to make an effort to know them both professionally and personally. Many times a student's home life influences their performance and behaviors at school. Living in a rural community with a high rate of children living in poverty makes this even more important. Melinda explained that her ability to teach children with special needs who live in poverty plays a huge role within the classroom. She goes on to say,

It is not unusual for students to come to school who have not eaten dinner the night before. They may not be dressed appropriately because they only have only one pair of pants. Perhaps they do not have running water in their home so they are not going to be able to clean themselves. Dad or mom may be in jail and they may have had to spend the night at the police station or have been involved in drugs. You have to know where the kids are coming from in order to teach them.

Michelle, Mandy, and Robin agree that the administrator should spend more time getting to know the students. Michelle has found that the kids need to know the administrator and feel free to talk with them. Mandy said, "The students need the administrator to talk with them to

encourage them to do their best and to have appropriate behaviors. Robin described her perceptions of her principal who is involved with students. She explained,

My principal knows the kids by name and their families and knows that everything is running okay because she is involved. Especially on Mondays, she will come down just to make sure everybody is good and talks to the kids. I think that makes a big difference. It makes our job as a special education teacher easier”

During a visit to Riverview Elementary, I observed the administrator stop to talk to a student and their aide in the hallway. The administrator took the time to build a relationship with the student. Smiling, the administrator, aide, and student proceeded to the classroom with the administrator pushing the student’s wheelchair.

Having relationships with parents is also very important for an administrator. Melinda described administrator communication with parents of students with special needs as key to having a good relationship with students. She noted that forming those relationships with parents enables the administrator to make informed decisions about student discipline and their education. Melinda went on to say that when administrators have not opened up those lines of communication with parents, many times the special education teacher may have to act as the mediator, putting the special education teacher in a difficult position.

Knows the curriculum. According to participants, to be an administrator who is involved in educating students with disabilities, it is necessary to know the curriculum that the teacher is using with students. Although at first glance it may appear to be significantly different than what is being taught in the regular classroom for that grade level, you must remember that accommodations and modifications are made for special education students to meet their individual needs. According to Michelle, it is important for the administrator to value what the

special education teacher is trying to teach the students. She goes on to say, “Regardless of whether it is tying shoes, developing better writing skills, or passing an SOL, from the smallest thing to the largest thing, you know the student has grown throughout the school year.” Melinda explained that sometimes, even though she is in a high school setting, you have to teach students how to take care of their basic needs such as brushing their teeth or cleaning their hands. She feels an administrator needs to know these things when they are assessing a teacher’s performance. She stated, “I had it in my head that all I was going to be was a teacher. I did not realize that the job also would come with being a mother to these kids.”

Participates in the special education process. Administrators who participate in the special education process not only gain vital knowledge about students and parents but also give special education teachers the support they need to be effective in their positions. During the interviews, participants discussed how administrators could provide this support and increase job satisfaction. Mike stressed how sometimes it feels like you are just getting thrown out there by yourself. Rosa and Raine stated that they believe special education teachers were more satisfied when someone shared the load.

Michelle wondered if the administrators realize that a special education teacher has so many jobs. Michelle said, “I don’t think administrators take notice. They just have other things on their mind. I mean, I literally text my parents multiple times a day, and then there is the paperwork, the planning, and making sure the kids are taken care of, and meeting with outside agencies and support staff, and then taking care of my school duties, and making accommodations, and finally teaching.” Likewise, Ragan and Michelle suggested that the administrator could just ask if there was anything they could do or check- in to ask how work was going.

I found that each of the participants believed that it was important for the administrator to participate in the special education process. Ragan and Michelle noted that just having an administrator ask if there was anything they could help out with or even check in with you in the classroom to ask how the work was going would result in a higher level of job satisfaction. Matt and Melinda expressed their views on this issue. Matt stated, "I have seen a lot of administrators that don't know a lot about special ed and that's kind of hard because then you have to stop and explain to them what is going on with your paperwork or with parent communication. I want an administrator that wants to be involved more in all the components of special ed. It increases satisfaction with your job and makes a better working environment." Mike and Raine explained that if the administrator understands the process, then valuable time will not have to be spent explaining the procedures or backtracking. Mike said, "Sometimes you just get thrown out there and have to handle it all by yourself. It's nice to have an administrator to help you. It definitely influences your level of satisfaction." Likewise, Raine stated, "I'll gladly take all the help I can get. It definitely makes me more satisfied with my work when someone is willing to help share the load."

When discussing how the administrator could participate in the special education process, participants identified specific areas that they felt were important in making them more satisfied with their positions. Michelle, Matt, and Rosa indicated that helping with paperwork, meetings, behavior management and parent communication was essential. During an observation at Ridgeview Elementary, a special education teacher was waiting to enter the administrator's office to review an IEP and discuss any modifications needed. Special education teachers at the school stated that the administrator always goes over the IEP with them. They feel that this helps the administrator understand the IEP process, the needs of the student, and supports the special

education teacher. Michelle said, "I would love for them to come down and ask if I needed them to help get any paperwork signed. It would be really beneficial and make my job a lot more satisfying." Matt stated that he would like the administrator to think about the time that is required to complete paperwork. He feels that being given more time in the day to actually complete paperwork would be awesome. Likewise, Rosa said, "Helping you with paperwork gives you extra time to do those things that are required to actually teach the students." Robin described an administrator who was very involved in the special education process. She said, "I think it makes a huge difference on job satisfaction when the administrator takes a lead and shares in the special education process. My administrator knows the whole special education process. She knows the paperwork and she knows each student by name and their families." Matt stated, "I would like an administrator that wants to be involved more in all the components of special ed, especially parent communication. It would make me more satisfied with my job."

Melinda wants the administrator to become more involved in the decision-making process involving IEP development and student education. She went on to say that the administrator needs to take time to go to the IEP meetings. Matt, Ragan, and Rachael agreed. They want the administrator to become part of their team. Making decisions together, they feel, will enable them to build professional relationships and better serve the needs of the students.

Melinda would like to be informed about discipline matters. She said,

If I were the administrator, I would include my special education teachers in discipline matters. It is something when you get a call from the placement academy and you have no idea what happened. It is also extremely difficult when you have parents come in and they talk about things the administrator has said or done but you were not part of the conversation so you don't know how to respond.

Mike, Rosa, and Ragan want the teacher and administrator to come together in making decisions. Rose explained, “Maybe it would improve success if the administrator brainstormed with us a little bit more. It would be beneficial because sometimes they just have no idea that you are on your own.” Mike presented a unique idea. He said, “If I had a communication log with both of my administrators and we discussed things that I do daily, weekly, monthly, it would help them be on the same page as I am. Together, we could be making decisions about what’s right for the students and teachers.”

Develop caring relationships. The final area that participants discussed related to personal involvement of administrators was developing caring relationships with special education teachers through getting to know them, communication and valuing their contributions. Matt said, “Happy people make for happy places, which makes a huge impact on whether or not a special ed teacher wants to remain in their position.” Rosa described her administrator as a caring person. She found it comforting that when someone in the building was going through a rough time, the administrator would bring everyone together and ask for support for him or her. To Rosa, this was a way of demonstrating that the administrator really did seem to be concerned with their well-being and happiness. She said, “They see you as who you are, a person that has feelings and struggles but has triumphed and they recognize that. I think that is really good.”

Many of the participants expressed their appreciation for administrators who demonstrated concern for their families and personal lives. Raine states that just having an administrator ask her about her family makes her feel like they care for them and for her. That makes her more satisfied with her job. Riley also feels that it makes her feel her administrator cares for her when the administrator personally knows her, what’s going on in her family and

with her health. Riley said, "It makes a difference when you have a genuine care." Rachael confirmed Riley's thoughts. She said, "I feel like if they're happy, it's a positive atmosphere. People like to be part of a family and a team. You know, work does not feel just like work, you are part of a family and truly care about what is going on in each other's lives."

Throughout the interview process, I found that communication was important in building personal relationships with administrators. Michelle said,

I think maybe it's just like Chick-Fil-A when they say have a blessed day. I just want to thank them for being so nice to me. I think that goes for pretty much all of the places in life. I get it administrators have bad days too, crappy days. I think if a little more emphasis was placed on the fact that we are all here for the kids. You know, have a bad day but we are all there for the same reason. It would be really beneficial for someone to just say have a wonderful day or it's going to get better."

Matt and Rachael concurred. Matt explained, "Sometimes they are just busy and sometimes they're not having a good day and they let you know it. It gives you a little boost when the administrator says something that is kind, just like good morning or how are you." Likewise, Rachael emphasized that getting to know special ed teachers on a personal level makes the relationship more than just a basic employer-employee one. It makes special education teachers feel happier in their job. She says that everyone has bad days but needs to leave it at the door. Rachael goes on to say, "It depends on how you come at them. A nice pleasant tone or that dreaded look on your face sets the mood for the day." Robin, Rosa, and focus group participants explained that when an administrator talks to you and listens, it greatly increases job satisfaction.

For Robin and Rachael, valuing the contributions they make each day gives them the perception that their administrator is personally involved with their work and knows their needs.

Robin describes an administrator who values the contributions a special ed teacher makes as “highly important.” Rachael also describes the key to teacher satisfaction as appreciation and acknowledging a special education teacher’s work. She continues to say, that by providing special education teachers with appreciation and acknowledgement of their work, they’ll be happy and want to stay in their jobs.

Research Question Responses

The following section provides answers to my study’s research questions. In order to gain knowledge of participant perception of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers, a central question and three sub-questions were developed. Special education teachers and administrators participated in face-to-face interviews and a focus group. In order to confirm the accuracy of the data collected, I went into the schools to observe interactions between special education teachers and administrators.

Central Question: How do rural special education teachers and administrators describe administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers? In my study, administrator practices that support the job satisfaction of rural special education teachers was described by participants as those practices that influence special education teacher perceptions of job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, working conditions, and administrator personal involvement in the special education process.

Participants discussed the importance of administrator support, caring for their well-being, providing for their needs, and communication as factors that could make all the difference in whether or not a special education teacher was satisfied with their job. Ragan stated that she believed there was a direct correlation between administrator support and job satisfaction. Having an administrator who supports you and appreciates the work you do motivates the special

education teacher to go above and beyond for the school and the students. Robin agreed and said, “I think the more you have the administrator supporting you, the bigger the impact on if you are satisfied with your job or not.” She went on to explain that knowing you have your administrator’s support makes it easier to come each day and do it all again. Rachael also stated that if special education teachers do not feel supported by their administrator, they are just going to do the bare minimum. Likewise, during the focus group conversation, participants agreed that an administrator who is supportive, listens, and has your back increases job satisfaction, happiness, and the likelihood that special education teachers will stay in their position.

Participants indicated that an administrator who cares about their well-being increased their job satisfaction. Participants noted the importance of building personal relationships. Making an effort to know the families of the special education teachers and being sensitive to their personal situations was important to them. Raine stated, “Just asking me about my family shows that they are caring and have a sense of who I am and where I come from. That makes you more satisfied with your job.” Mike also described his perception of an administrator who values a teacher’s sense of well-being. He said, “I look at them with respect.”

Likewise, providing for the special education teacher’s needs was an administrator practice that participants felt supported their job satisfaction. Being in a rural area with a high rate of poverty sometimes limits the resources a school division can provide. Special education teachers describe not having the resources or the amount of help that they need to perform their job, which impacts their job satisfaction. Michelle said, “I didn’t take into account the fact that special education is difficult. I don’t have many of the things I need. For example, we have to share the laptop.” A lack of training opportunities was also discussed. Mandy talked about being a special education teacher who was expected to be up-to-date with strategies and tools for

educating students with disabilities. She stressed that in order to be satisfied as a special education teacher, an administrator needs to provide individual training rather than being given a summary of what someone else has learned.

Participants discussed administrator communication skills as impacting their job satisfaction. Participants noted that both verbal and non-verbal communication was key to job satisfaction. They noted that what the administrator says to a special education teacher can determine if that teacher perceives their day as good or bad. According to the participants, when there are open lines of communication teachers are more satisfied and will stay longer. Mike said, "It's just a fact that if you sat down to talk to me like an adult, I respect you more." Michelle noted that just silence makes you doubt yourself and put you on edge. She goes to say that just a *good morning* or *good job* will influence how you feel about your job and your administrator. Melinda said, "On a scale from 1 to 10, I would rate communication a 10."

As we talked, participants addressed issues that they perceived as creating dissatisfaction in their job. They noted that if an administrator displayed these behaviors, it would impact their performance, satisfaction and organizational commitment. Topics that were identified related to job dissatisfaction were administrator practices, personal feelings, the work itself, and resources.

Administrator practices were a major concern for participants. Mandy, Melinda, and Michelle noted that many times administrators are not aware of what goes on in special education. They believe that the job of a special education teacher is not understood. The special education teacher has so many responsibilities that they deal with on a daily basis that are often overlooked. Melinda said, "It's just that feeling of being appreciated and recognizing that what you do makes a difference." Many participants felt that the hours they spend at night or during the day juggling between meetings, paperwork, and instruction are often ignored. For

others, it is the difference some administrators make in recognizing general education as opposed to special education. Riley said, “To make special education teachers more satisfied, there has to be the same rules for everybody.” She believes there are inconsistent expectations between special education teachers and general education teachers. Raine said, “Especially as an inclusion teacher, you have to go along with someone else’s decision and so you are not going to get the recognition when something big happens in the class. So even if you are a part of teaching those children in that classroom, for me, you are an outsider looking in. I think it is really frustrating.”

Participants also talked about the role of the administrator in showing respect for the personal feelings of special education teachers. Special education teachers become dissatisfied with their jobs when they feel that the administrator does not perceive them as important in the school. Statements indicating that you could be replaced quickly affect their self-esteem and their desire to do their best. Melinda, Rosa, and Matt indicated that special education teachers want to be a part of the decision-making process, feel important, and acknowledged by the administrator in order for them to feel confident as a teacher. Rosa said, “When an administrator actually cares about your happiness and recognizes that you are a person who has feelings and struggles, it makes you feel really good about them and more willing to work hard for them and the students.”

Participants often described the work itself of a special education teacher as hard, stressful, overwhelming, difficult, and less than satisfying if administrators did not provide for their needs. Various scenarios were presented that documented the stressful conditions special education teachers were exposed to on a daily basis. Nearly all of the participants described how they had to first become caregivers and then provide instruction, do paperwork, conduct

meetings, and meet timelines because of the significant personal needs of their students. In a rural area with a high rate of poverty, many times the special education teacher is the one who makes sure that the student has food, clean clothes, and is ready to learn. Participants noted that many times students who live in poverty don't have the background knowledge or parental support that is required to be successful. Rachael said, "It isn't an eight to three job for special education teachers in rural areas with high rates of poverty. They take it home."

During face-to-face interviews, participants discussed the lack of resources in a rural area with a high rate of poverty as a cause of job dissatisfaction. Having a limited budget, participants felt, was a primary reason for the lack of opportunities for staff development and training that teachers needed. Mandy said, "We just don't do it anymore. We throw people out there. It makes it hard, really hard." Taking pay cuts and concerns for their families were issues that faced the participants. Likewise, participants noted that because of not being able to hire additional staff, special education teachers' jobs had become more difficult and challenging. In the focus group discussion the participants said, "Money is always tight. We never had money so we don't have the resources that could help our kids. There are great things out there for them but we don't have the funds to pay for them or to train special education teachers to use them."

When administrators provide working conditions that give special education teachers a sense of personal achievement, recognize them for their efforts and successes, make the job personally rewarding, and provide an opportunity for growth there is an increased sense of job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Many participants expressed the importance of being included in the decision-making process in the school. Michelle and Melinda stated that it made them feel as if the administrator viewed them as a valuable asset to the school team. As I observed at Meadow High School, teachers who were given an opportunity by the administrator

to not only participate in a planning meeting for a new program but to take a leadership role and take charge, guiding the process to a successful conclusion. The special education teachers appeared to take pride in their achievement.

Recognition also plays an important role in job satisfaction according to the participants. Mandy described how administrators who recognized and displayed appreciation for a special education teacher's work could make that teacher more satisfied and want to come back each day to do their job. Rachael said, "Satisfaction happens when you appreciate and acknowledge their work and they will want to stay." Likewise, Mike acknowledged the importance of recognizing a special education teacher. He went on to say that an administrator who recognizes the special education teachers' efforts means a lot and increases job satisfaction.

Several participants discussed increased job satisfaction when the administrator provided opportunities, which special education teachers perceived as rewarding. Mandy stated, "It's not just a job to me. It's about what you feel you have accomplished, regardless of how big or small. It's a feeling of getting something done that makes a difference." I observed the enthusiasm in the special education teachers when they talked about student success. It appeared to be a factor that made them smile and want to share stories about their students who accomplished even the simplest goal. When they talked about their administrator who had gone the extra mile to provide them with resources or even extra staff to make these things happen, it was always positive.

Being given opportunities for growth by the administrator was identified as a factor that influenced the job satisfaction of special education teachers. Several participants talked with me about the impact of a lack of training and limited opportunities to further their education. Melinda said, "Job satisfaction is just being content with having the resources that you need,

having support from your colleagues and your administration. Having an opportunity to grow where you are. I have been encouraged to grow by taking more classes and a part of more conferences but the budget just isn't good." Mandy also addressed the lack of opportunity to grow. She said, "I think to increase job satisfaction special education teachers need more training." The focus group discussion included many of the concerns that had been expressed by special education teachers and administrators. They also added that there were a limited number of colleges in the area that provided special education training and lack of financial incentives to make special education teachers more satisfied with their job.

As I talked with participants, personal involvement of the administrator appeared to be an area of great concern for them and their perception of job satisfaction. Participants described taking part in the classroom, knowing the students and parents, knowing the curriculum, developing caring relationships, and participating in the special education process as administrator practices that would increase job satisfaction and make them want to remain in their positions.

Michelle and Melinda stressed the importance of an administrator who comes into the classroom. By being present, the administrator will have more knowledge of what the teacher is trying to accomplish and gain an awareness of situations in that classroom that need attention. Michelle said, "I think the administrator could be much more involved in special education. It's very rare that they come in my classroom." Several participants want an administrator to participate in daily activities. Matt, Ragan, Robin, and Melinda feel valued when the administrator takes out time to come to their room to check on them and their students. Robin said, "I think that it makes me think she appreciates what I do because she understands that it's hard and so coming down here to check and making sure that everything's still running smoothly

so that way you know if she is needed and I think that makes a big difference.” Matt also stated that an administrator who wants to be more involved in all the components of special education was awesome. It increases the special education teacher’s level of job satisfaction and creates a better working environment.

Knowing the students and parents enables the administrator to build trusting relationships and helps special education teachers provide for the needs of students who may not only have barriers to learning but also have challenging home lives. Michelle said that kids need to know the administrator and feel free to talk with them. Opening up lines of communication with students and parents takes some of the stress off the special education teacher who, many times, must act as mediator between the family and the administrator. Melinda stressed that forming relationships with parents enables the administrator to make informed decisions about student discipline and their education. She goes on to say that often special education teachers are put in difficult positions. When administrators can intervene, teachers’ jobs are less stressful and they are more satisfied.

Participants want the administrator to be involved, which includes knowledge of the curriculum they are teaching. Unlike regular education, special education teachers modify the curriculum based on individual student needs. As we talked, participants noted that many times they feel that other teachers or the administrator does not understand what they are teaching. Examples were given which involved high school teachers having to teach self-care skills. When an administrator is involved and knows the needs of the students, participants believe small accomplishments that would not ordinarily be recognized would be valued. Michelle said, “Regardless of whether it is tying shoes, developing better writing skills, or passing an SOL, from the smallest thing to the largest thing, you know the student has grown throughout the

school year.” Melinda also explained that sometimes she had to teach students how to take care of basic needs such as brushing their teeth or cleaning their hands. She feels an administrator needs to understand before making judgments about a teacher’s performance.

Mike, Rosa, and Raine stressed that having an administrator who was involved in the special education process increased their job satisfaction. Many participants believed that they were just thrown out there to do their job and that the administrator did not realize what a hard job it was. Michelle said, “I don’t think administrators take notice.” Having an administrator who takes the time to check in or ask what they could do would result in a higher level of job satisfaction according to Ragan and Michelle. Likewise, Mike and Raine stated that valuable time could be saved by having an administrator understand the process rather than having to explain procedures.

Mike and Raine agreed that it would increase their job satisfaction if the administrator would share the load. While discussing administrator participation in the special education process, helping with paperwork, meetings, behavior management, IEPs and parent communication were identified as areas in which administrators could actively become involved. Matt, Ragan, and Rachael would like the administrator to become part of their team, making decisions together to better serve the needs of the students. Rosa said, “Maybe it would improve success if the administrator brainstormed with us a little bit more. It would be beneficial because sometimes they just have no idea that you are on your own.”

Developing caring relationships through getting to know them, communication, and valuing their contributions were also identified by participants as ways administrators could become involved. Rosa said, “They see you as who you are, a person that has feelings and struggles but has triumphed and they recognize that. I think that is really good.” Likewise,

Raine, Riley, and Rachael stressed that when an administrator makes an effort to know their family, it makes them feel as if they really care, increasing their job satisfaction. Riley said, “It makes a difference when you have a genuine care.”

Becoming involved in the special education process also includes how administrators communicate with special education teachers. Many participants noted that they realize that everyone has a bad day sometimes, but saying something kind or just realizing that body language carries a strong message could change how a special education teacher feels about their day and their job. Rachael stated, “It depends on how you come at them. A nice, pleasant tone or that dreaded look on your face sets the mood for the day.” Robin and Rachael noted that an administrator who acknowledges a special education teacher’s work is key to their satisfaction. Rachael stated that, in her opinion, by providing that appreciation of their work, special education teachers would be happy and want to stay in their jobs.

Sub-Question 1: How do administrator practices that motivate special education teachers increase job satisfaction? Motivator factors are factors identified in Herzberg’s motivation – hygiene theory as the primary cause of satisfaction on the job (Herzberg, 1968). Participants in my study discussed administrator practices that they perceived to be motivational and therefore resulted in higher levels of job satisfaction. According to the participants, when an administrator provides support, cares about the special education teachers’ well-being, provides for their needs, and communicates, they are more likely to be motivated to remain in their position and more satisfied with their job. Melinda said, “Administrator support can make or break a teacher and determine their job satisfaction.” Many participants agreed that if an administrator supports you, you would more likely be happy and remain in your position. Many

participants noted that when special education teachers don't feel supported, they don't stay in their jobs. Robin affirmed the importance of administrator support. She explained,

When special education teachers don't feel supported, they don't stay in their jobs and they are very unhappy. If they know that the administrator appreciates them and sees the work that they do, then they are much more satisfied, coming each day to take on those challenges. I think it just makes a difference. If an administrator is supportive, it really does increase job satisfaction.

Riley, Raine, Michelle, and Mike explained that an administrator who cares about their well-being motivates them to be more satisfied with their job. Just asking about their family and being sensitive to personal situations demonstrates that the administrator cares for them. Raine said, "Just asking me about my family shows that they are caring and have a sense of who I am and where I come from. That makes you more satisfied with your job." Likewise, Mike explained that he viewed an administrator who values a teacher's sense of well-being as higher than those who do not. He replied, "I look at them with respect."

Having an administrator who provides for their needs was a factor that participants revealed motivated them to become more satisfied in their jobs. Many participants talked about being in a rural area that has a limited budget impacting the resources that are available to teachers. Mike said, "Being a special education teacher in a rural area, sometimes we do not have the proper resources or the proper amount of help that we need to assist the students. We have to be creative." Ragan stressed that she would feel more satisfied and happier in her job if the administrator would just check in to see if there was anything she needed.

Providing training opportunities was also identified as a motivational factor that could influence job satisfaction. Mandy discussed the need for training and how it impacts job

satisfaction. She went on to say that if administrators would provide individual training rather than the common practice of having one person attend training and then train others, special education teachers would be more satisfied with their job. This was also an issue that was discussed in the focus group. It was of concern that the very people who are not in the classroom were the ones who received training. They felt that administrators should put the people on the ground floor, the special education teachers, in the trainings. With the knowledge they would gain, they would feel more confident in their jobs and more satisfied.

How an administrator communicates with special education teachers is a factor that is key to job satisfaction according to study participants. Many participants discussed how just a word or look from an administrator could motivate them to have a good day or could influence them to have a bad day. Mandy explained that an open line of communication could mean that teachers are more satisfied and will stay longer. Mandy said, "If I hear the heels coming down the hall, I know something's wrong and I'm going to get out of the way. If you hear yelling, you just steer clear. That will tell you what kind of day it will be. Communication is huge in determining job satisfaction." Michelle, Melinda, and Mike agreed that communication was extremely important. Michelle expressed that just saying *have a good day* or *thank you* could influence how you feel about your job and your administrator. Members of the focus group also perceived open communication as a necessity that enabled them to be happier in their jobs and to stay in their positions.

Sub-Question 2: How do administrator practices that improve the school environment influence special education teacher perceptions of job satisfaction? Herzberg (1966) states that by addressing factors that may cause dissatisfaction, the environment of the workplace improves resulting in more positive job attitudes. As I talked with participants, they discussed

administrator practices, personal feelings, the work itself, and lack of resources as factors they perceived as impacting the school environment and their satisfaction with their job.

Administrator practices were a major concern for many of the participants. Being aware of what is going on in special education and knowledge of special education teacher responsibilities were issues that were discussed. Michelle said, "I think administrators don't take notice. Likewise, Melinda stated, "It's just that feeling of being appreciated and recognizing that what you do makes a difference." Raine explained her feelings. She said,

I think as a special education teacher you're just expected to do what you do. Especially as an inclusion teacher, you have to go along with someone else's decision and so you are not going to get the recognition when something big happens in the class. So even if you are part of teaching those children in that classroom, for me, you are an outsider, looking in. I think it is really frustrating.

Matt noted that he feels he must stop and explain to the administrator what is going on with paperwork, legal requirements or even appropriate strategies for working with students with a wide range of disabilities. Focus group participants also felt this was an issue that could cause dissatisfaction with their job. During the conversation, they noted that their job was more difficult when the administrator does not realize how much time goes into completing their paperwork. They agreed that it caused their job to be extremely challenging and caused them to be less satisfied in their position.

The participants discussed administrator respect for their personal feelings as a practice that could cause dissatisfaction in their job. I talked with them about their perceptions of not feeling important and being able to be replaced quickly. Mandy stated that she felt special education teachers were looked upon as aides rather than certified teachers, which impacted self-

esteem and the special education teacher's desire to do their best in their job. Likewise, Melinda agreed with many of the other participants in saying that special education teachers are not included in the decision-making process, which implies that their input is not important and creates feelings of being insignificant, impacting job satisfaction. Rosa said, "When an administrator actually cares about your happiness and recognizes that you are a person who has feelings and struggles, it makes you feel really good about them and more willing to work hard for them and the students."

The work itself was identified as a factor that may cause job dissatisfaction for special education teachers. The participants described their job as hard, stressful, overwhelming, dreaded, tough, and difficult. As they talked, similar stories emerged that voiced concerns over needs not being met, difficult situations to deal with, lack of confidence shown by the administrator, encounters with parents and students, poverty, responsibilities, and liability. Melinda said, "I was ready to quit my job because I felt as though regardless of what I did, right or wrong, it was still wrong. You become dissatisfied with your job and want to leave." Ragan and Michelle also expressed their feelings. Ragan said,

You go to school these years to change the world and then you walk into a special education classroom. I ask God what am I going to do because these kids are not listening, this kid didn't do this and this happened last night. As their teacher you have all these things to deal with, not to mention the paperwork, the timelines, the meetings, and the parents who don't respond or come to help you help their children. Nothing in special education is black and white and things constantly change, so you become overwhelmed trying to keep up.

Michelle described her week as really hard. She had dealt with a student getting in her face, yelling and screaming. Rachael expressed the concerns about lack of prior knowledge and experiences and parental involvement for students who live in poverty as challenging for special education teachers. Many of the participants noted that as an administrator addresses each of these issues involved in the job of a special education teacher, job dissatisfaction is decreased resulting in increased job satisfaction.

I found that as participants discussed the school environment and issues that created the perception of job dissatisfaction, a lack of resources was a concern. Mandy noted that living in a rural area with a high rate of poverty creates budget concerns for administrators which results in limited available resources and training opportunities for special education teachers, impacting their job satisfaction. Ragan and Melinda talked about how the lack of funds, the pay scale and not having what they need to instruct students made their job more difficult and influenced their decision to remain in their positions. Focus group participants were also concerned with the lack of resources. They stated, “Money is always tight. We never had money so we don’t have all the resources that could help our kids. There are great things out there for them but we don’t have the funds to pay for them or to train special education teacher to use them.” By providing the resources needed, most participants believed that job satisfaction would increase.

Sub-Question 3: How does enriching the school environment by an administrator influence the job satisfaction of special education teachers? Participants described two areas of the school environment, working conditions and administrator involvement, which could be used by administrators to enrich the environment and increase job satisfaction of special education teachers. Included in the discussion of working conditions was personal achievement, recognition, rewarding job, and opportunity for growth. Issues involving administrator

involvement were taking part in the classroom, knowing the students and parents, knowing the curriculum, caring relationships, and participating in the special education process.

According to participants, administrators play an important role in assuring that working conditions in the school provide special education teachers with experiences that support perceptions of job satisfaction. They said that special education teachers want to feel a sense of personal achievement that reflects a belief in their skills and respect for their expertise.

Including special education teachers in the decision-making process was named as one way to accomplish this task. Matt said, "I think it is very important to include special education teachers in the decision-making process in the school. We can be the voice for the voiceless."

Observation data confirmed this assumption. As I observed a meeting to plan a new program at the high school, the special education teachers who were involved appeared to be eager to take on the challenge of leading the program planning and implementation. They appeared to take pride in the confidence the administrator demonstrated in them by giving them this opportunity.

During the interviews, administrators and special education teachers discussed how important and satisfying it was to them to be recognized for their efforts. By being personally recognized, special education teachers would be more willing to go the extra mile for the school and the students. Mandy, Melinda, Riley, Robin, and Rachael all agreed that when an administrator recognizes their accomplishments, it makes them happier and more satisfied with their job. Melinda said, "Anyone who feels appreciated will want to do more. You are going to enjoy working there and want to stay." Likewise, Rachael said, "If they feel appreciated then they will go above and beyond. They will be happy to come to work. They'll know they're valued. Satisfaction happens when you appreciate and acknowledge their work, and they will

want to stay.” Mike concluded that an administrator who says that they appreciate your work and recognize your efforts means a lot and increases job satisfaction.

Participants noted that special education teachers are more motivated and have higher levels of job satisfaction when they perceive their jobs to be personally rewarding. When administrators enrich the school environment by providing opportunities that are personally rewarding it creates higher levels of job satisfaction. Michelle, Mike, and Rachael noted that student success influences job satisfaction. They noted that when administrators give them the opportunity and tools that are needed by their administrator to make their students successful, they are more satisfied with their positions. Rachael said, “You want to make sure special education teachers are happy with their job. They see those light bulbs come on when their student gets it or when they remember the way you showed them. It can be a very rewarding job.” Raine agreed, saying, “When I see those light bulbs go off for those kids, I am going home feeling more satisfied with what I’ve done and how I’ve done it. It definitely motivates me to come back the next day and be able to face those challenging moments and be a little stronger.” Having an administrator who encourages special education teachers to be problem solvers and implement their suggestions that lead to student success increases job satisfaction. Matt explained,

We have hard to reach kids academically. I take care of my students and expect the best from myself. The kids make me feel positive. That makes me more satisfied with my job and more likely to remain committed to it and the school division.

Riley also stated, “Seeing children succeed, that’s the most satisfying part of my job.”

When the administrator assures that special education teachers are given opportunities for growth by staying current with issues and resources, receiving training, and being given a chance

to further their education, it will likely motivate them to be more satisfied with their job and more likely to remain in their position according to participants. Melinda said,

Job satisfaction is just being content with having the resources that you need, having support from your colleagues and your administrator. Having an opportunity to grow where you are. I have been encouraged to grow by taking more classes and a part of more conferences but the budget just isn't good.

Mandy stated, "I think to increase job satisfaction special education teachers need more training." Members of the focus group also expressed concerns for opportunity and growth. They explained that there were limited colleges in the area that provided special education training that would allow them to grow in their profession and budget concerns that affected teacher pay and their job satisfaction.

When the administrator enriches the school environment by being personally involved, teachers perceive their jobs as more satisfying. Participants named taking part in the classroom, knowing students and parents, knowing the curriculum, participating in the special education process, and developing caring relationships as factors they considered to be necessary to the development of a school climate where special education teachers were satisfied and more likely to stay in their positions.

By taking part in the classroom, administrators build relationships with special education teachers and students and gain new perspectives of their needs. Michelle explained, "I think the administrator could be much more involved in special education. It's very rare that they come in my classroom. I'm not a person who wants to be observed all the time but I feel that it is beneficial for the administrator to be part of the classroom." Participating in daily activities allows the administrator to get first-hand experience with the job of a special education teacher

and interact with the students. Rachael noted that knowing where students are academically gives administrators a better understanding of how to effectively assist the special education teacher and make their job more satisfying.

Michelle, Mandy, and Robin said that the administrator should get to know the students and parents both professionally and personally. Special education teachers in rural areas with high levels of poverty deal with many issues related their students' home life. Robin said, "My principal knows the kids by name and their families and knows that everything is running okay because she is involved. I think that makes a big difference. It makes our job as a special education teacher easier." Forming relationships with parents also enables the administrator to make informed decisions about students and their education and gives them a better understanding of teacher challenges. Melinda explained that when administrators do not have that open line of communication with parents, it makes the special education teacher's job more difficult and less satisfying.

Knowing the curriculum gives the administrator insight into the special education teacher's decision-making and instructional practices. Michelle noted the importance of an administrator who values the special education teacher's job. She said, "Regardless of whether it is tying shoes, developing better writing skills, or passing an SOL, from the smallest thing to the largest thing, you know the student has grown throughout the year."

Administrators who participate in the special education process gain knowledge about students and parents and give special education teachers support needed to be effective and satisfied in their position. Some participants stated that sometimes you feel like you are just being put out there by yourself. Rosa and Raine stated that they believe special education teachers were more satisfied when someone helped share the load. Just having an administrator

ask if there was anything they could help with or check in with the classroom would result in a higher level of job satisfaction. Matt said, “I want an administrator that wants to be involved more in all the components of special ed.” Likewise, Raine stated, “I’ll gladly take all the help I can get. It definitely makes me more satisfied with my work when someone is willing to help share the load.” Michelle, Matt, and Rosa felt it was important for the administrator to be actively involved in helping with paperwork, meetings, behavior management, and parent communication. Melinda, Matt, Ragan, and Rachael wanted the administrator to become more involved in the decision-making process involved in IEP development and student education. Rosa concluded, “Maybe it would improve success if the administrator brainstormed with us a little bit more. It would be beneficial because they just have no idea that you are on your own.”

Finally, to develop enriched school environments, participants believe that administrators need to develop caring relationships with special education teachers by getting to know them personally, through communication, and by valuing their contributions. Rosa said, “They see you as who you are, a person that has feelings and struggles but has triumphed and they recognize that. It think that is really good.” Concern for teachers’ families and their personal lives, participants believed, demonstrated the administrator’s appreciation for them. Raine explained that having an administrator ask about her family made her feel that they cared and made her more satisfied with her job. Riley said, “I feel like if they’re happy, it’s a positive atmosphere. People like to be part of a family and a team.”

How an administrator communicates with special education teachers is important to building personal relationships. Rachael said, “It depends on how you come at them. A nice pleasant tone or that dreaded look on your face sets the mood for the day.” Robin, Rosa, and focus group participants also stated that when an administrator talks to you and listens, it greatly

increases job satisfaction. When asked, many participants rated communication as the most important aspect of administrator-teacher relationships. . Melinda said, “It is better to be able to go to your administrator than someone else in the school or take it home with you. It makes your job satisfaction much higher. On a scale from one to ten, I would rate communication a 10.”

Results of my study indicated that participants believed that having an administrator who values the contributions special education teachers make each day promotes a sense of caring and increases the special education teacher’s perception of job satisfactions involved with their work and their needs. Rachael and Robin described an administrator who values the contributions a special education teacher makes as highly important and key to teacher satisfaction. Likewise, Rachael explained that by acknowledging a special education teacher’s work and showing appreciation, the teacher would be happy and want to stay in their job.

Summary

Chapter Four presents the results of the data analysis. The chapter began with an overview of the chapter content, including the purpose of the study. Participants included 11 special education teachers and administrators from two schools in a rural school division in southwest Virginia. A detailed description of each participant in the study gave details about their position in the school and background information. Table 1 was used to document participants’ demographics. Each case was described to inform the reader about unique characteristics of each school. Data collection that included face-to-face interviews, observations, and a focus group were explained. Using interpretation of individual instances and data aggregation, 16 codes were discovered and illustrated in Table 2. After codes were described and categorized, four themes emerged: job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, working conditions, and personal involvement. Table 3 furnished a list of themes, associated codes, and

the frequency of their occurrences. Narrative that included participant quotes was used to describe each theme and the codes that are associated with it. I have provided answers to my research questions using the data collected and the themes that were developed. Participant quotes are used to support the responses to the research questions which were: Central Question: How do rural special education teachers and administrators describe administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers?; Sub-Question 1: How do administrator practices that motivate special education teachers increase job satisfaction?; Sub-Question 2: How do administrator practices that improve the school environment influence special education teacher perceptions of job satisfaction?; Sub-Question 3: How does enriching the school environment by an administrator influence the job satisfaction of special education teachers?. In conclusion, a summary is provided.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative collective case study is to describe special education teacher and administrator perceptions of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers. Chapter Five begins with a summary of the study findings based on answers to the research questions. Next, I discuss the relationship of my study to the empirical and theoretical literature on job satisfaction and administrator practices found in Chapter Two. Through this investigation, I address how my study corroborates and extends the previous research, the novel contributions it makes to the field of special education teacher job satisfaction, and new light it may shed on the motivational-hygiene theory. The implications of the study findings are provided as well as recommendations for stakeholders which may lead to increased perception of job satisfaction of special education teachers. Delimitations and limitations of the study are explained relating to the selection of a case study design, participant selection, and case selection. Recommendations are made based on the limitations and delimitations that were identified which should lead the researcher to expand on the findings of this study. In addition, I made suggestions for future research. Finally, a summary of the chapter is provided.

Summary of Findings

This section provides a summary of the study findings related to my research questions. One central question and three sub-questions based on theory that guided the study and current research were used to gain meaning from the voices of the participants in determining how

administrative practices influence the perception of job satisfaction of rural special education teachers.

Central Question

The central question asked, “How do rural special education teachers and administrators describe administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers?” In my study, special education teachers and administrators described supportive administrator practices as practices they perceived to influence their perception of job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, working conditions, and administrator involvement in the special education process. Participants stated that in order for them to feel satisfied in their job, they believed it was important for the administrator to be supportive, care for their well-being, provide for their needs, and communicate appropriately with them. By implementing supportive practices, they are more motivated to go above and beyond for the school and students, happier, and more likely to stay in their position. Likewise, participants stated that caring for their well-being by building personal relationships and providing for needs increases job satisfaction. Administrator communication was also identified as playing a significant role in job satisfaction when the administrator has open lines of communication with staff and makes an effort to respond with a pleasant greeting.

Factors that were identified by participants as causing job dissatisfaction were administrator practices, personal feelings, the work itself, and resources. Not being aware of what is going on in special education, having inconsistent expectations, not respecting personal feelings, and a lack of resources were identified as influencing job dissatisfaction. Participants felt dissatisfied when the administrator did not perceive them as important in the school. Special

education teachers and administrators used words like *hard, stressful, overwhelming, and less than satisfying* to describe special education.

Working conditions that were recognized by participants as giving special education teachers a sense of personal achievement, recognition, personal reward, and growth increased their perception of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Administrator practices that allowed special education teachers to become a part of the decision-making process and recognized their efforts made participants feel as if the administrator viewed them as a valuable asset to the school team. Likewise, participants noted that when the administrator provided opportunities for personal growth, which resulted in student success, special education teachers were more satisfied.

When participants were describing administrator practices and job satisfaction, the administrator's personal involvement in the special education process appeared to be a factor that was considered key. Coming into the classroom and participating in activities, checking on teachers and students, knowing the students and parents, knowledge of the curriculum, sharing the load, communication, and developing caring relationships were named as factors that could influence job satisfaction and the work environment.

Sub-Question 1

Sub-question one asks, "How do administrator practices that motivate special education teachers increase job satisfaction?" Study participants described how administrators could implement practices they perceived to be motivational and therefore increase their job satisfaction. When an administrator provides support, cares about the special education teachers' well-being, provides for their needs, and communicates appropriately, special education teachers are more likely to be motivated and more satisfied with their jobs. Melinda said, "Administrator

support can make or break a teacher and determine their job satisfaction. According to study participants, just asking about family or having sensitivity to personal situations reveals that the administrator cares for them and makes them more satisfied with their job. Many participants discussed limited resources and how an administrator who can provide for their needs motivates them to feel more satisfied and happier. Likewise, participants noted that how an administrator communicates is key to job satisfaction. They stated that just a look or word from the administrator could motivate them to have a good day or influence them to have a bad day. Mandy said that administrator communication is huge in job satisfaction.

Sub-Question 2

Sub-question two asks, “How do administrator practices that improve the school environment influence special education teacher perceptions of job satisfaction?” According to study participants, addressing factors that may cause dissatisfaction improve the school environment, which results in positive job attitudes and increased levels of job satisfaction. Participants noted that administrator practices, personal feelings, the work itself, and lack of resources were areas of concern that administrators needed to focus on in order to influence their perception of the school environment and create higher levels of job satisfaction. Taking notice of what is going on in special education through understanding and recognition of the time involved in doing the job could make their job less challenging and more satisfying. Special education teachers will likely be more willing to work hard if they believe their feelings are considered by the administrator. Likewise, recognizing that the work itself in special education is difficult may assist the administrator in lessening feelings of dissatisfaction. As participants discussed the school environment, a lack of resources which limits opportunities for training and materials influenced how satisfied special education teachers were with their job. If

administrators provided those resources, most participants believed that the school environment would improve and job satisfaction would increase.

Sub-Questions 3

Sub-question three asks, “How does enriching the school environment by an administrator influence the job satisfaction of special education teachers? Participants described two areas of the school environment, working conditions and personal involvement they believed could be enriched by the administrator that would increase their perception of job satisfaction. Participants discussed the administrator’s role in promoting opportunities for personal achievement, recognition, perceptions that their job was rewarding, and personal growth. Participants noted that special education teachers want to feel respected for their skills and their expertise. They want to be recognized for their efforts and feel appreciated which makes them happier and more satisfied with their job. Participants stated that when special education teachers are able to see the success of their students, they have a sense of personal achievement and want to come back day-after-day. Their jobs become rewarding. They take pride in the confidence the administrator has shown in them. Participants believed that being recognized for their efforts encourages special education teachers to go the extra mile for the school and the students and makes them happier and more satisfied in their job. According to participants, in order to stay current, special education teachers should be given the opportunity for personal growth through training and educational opportunities. This will likely motivate them to be more satisfied with their job and give them the confidence to strive to be the best teacher they can be.

Many participants discussed how administrators could enrich the school environment by being personally involved. Participants identified taking part in the classroom, knowing students

and parents, knowing the curriculum, participating in the special education process, and developing caring relationships as factors which would positively influence the school climate and increase job satisfaction. By being in the classroom, participants believed administrators could build relationships with teachers and students that would enable them to have a better understanding of the special education teacher's job and how to effectively make their jobs more satisfying. Participants noted that building relationships with teachers, students, and parents helps the administrator in making informed decisions, which make the teacher's job less challenging. Likewise, the participants stated that knowing the curriculum provides the administrator with insight into the special education teacher's decision-making process and instructional practices so that they can assess the teacher's performance in a more respectful manner. Many participants expressed the need for administrators to be more involved in the special education process itself. Participants would like administrators to become actively involved in paperwork, meetings, behavior management, and parent communication. In conclusion, participants believed that administrators needed to develop caring relationships by getting to know them better, through communication, and by valuing their contributions.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature that were introduced in Chapter Two. A comparison is provided which explains how my study corroborates and extends previous research, contributes to the understanding of job satisfaction of rural special education teachers and administrator practices, and extends the motivational-hygiene theory that guided the study.

Empirical Literature

The results of my study corroborate with findings of existing research on special education in rural settings, job satisfaction and retention of special education teachers, and administrator support and job satisfaction. As I reviewed the results of my study, I found that many of the thoughts expressed by the participants were also discovered in the literature review as I have discussed below. However, while my study corroborates previous research on job satisfaction of rural special education teachers in many respects, it also extends the previous research and makes some novel contributions to the field. There have been only a few studies of job satisfaction of special education teachers in rural areas (Berry, 2012; Green & Munoz, 2016; You & Conley, 2014). My study adds to the current research by providing an opportunity for the voices of the participants to be heard. Few studies were found that provided an in-depth understanding of administrator practices that increase job satisfaction and motivate special education teachers to remain in their professions through the voices of the participants. Likewise, there is a lack of research investigating specific strategies used by administrators which increase job satisfaction and retention (Berry, 2012; Bolger & Nir, 2012; Hong, 2012; Vittek, 2015). Past research stated that an examination of administrative supports that impact special education teachers' attitudes toward their jobs and their intention to remain is needed (Conley & You, 2016; Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017). Those people who are actually in the schools, doing the jobs of rural special education teachers and administrators, provide insight and new meaning into what it is like to be in their positions and what impacts their job satisfaction with the hope that by sharing their personal beliefs, others may benefit.

Special education in rural settings. Researchers identified rural-teacher training, recruitment, and retention as issues in rural-school education (Biddle & Azano, 2016; Westling

& Whitten, 1996). Likewise, participants in my study noted that due to industries moving out of the area, people leaving, and tax revenue decreasing, it was difficult to find qualified special education teachers and provide them competitive pay. Literature has noted that this is especially true for southern-rural communities where a majority of public school children are low-income (Sutton et al., 2014). Special education teachers in rural settings are two and one-half times more likely to leave their position in the first years of teaching (Gehrke & McCoy, 2007). Ragan stated that although she feels she is doing a good job, she still has to consider the pressure in her job and the resources she is unable to obtain. Melinda said that she has to think about her family. If she has to leave her position to make more money she will. Likewise, Michelle confirmed the need for qualified staff. She noted that the resource that is most needed are more qualified special education teachers. However, because of the lack of financial resources, it is difficult for the school division to hire qualified special education teachers.

Although lawmakers have attempted to address the rural problem of retention, findings of past literature have shown that rural areas continue to face special education teacher shortages and have higher rates of turnover and more difficulty recruiting (Harde, 2007; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Sutton et al. 2014). Rural special education teachers, such as in Appalachia, are more likely to leave than to transfer in (Cowen et al., 2012). Mafora (2013) said that rural areas appear to be less able to provide a salary structure that would motivate teachers to come to hard-to-staff schools. Michelle confirmed this finding and added that other areas offer more opportunities that motivate new teachers to relocate. Many participants noted that because of the challenges rural special education teachers face, veteran teachers also leave the field.

Research has shown that living in areas of high poverty makes the likelihood of lower school funding more prevalent and provides fewer opportunities for professional development

(Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Billingsley, 2004; Westling & Whitten, 1996). Training was also a concern in my study. Participants said that because money is tight, the school division doesn't have the resources that would provide training for special education teachers. Members of the focus group also stated that there was a lack of training which impacted their ability for growth in their profession. Mandy said,

I think to increase job satisfaction, special education teachers need more training. They are expected to be pros and we are not by any means. I just think more staff development where the information goes directly to the special education teachers is needed. I think because we live in a rural area and our budget is limited, it limits our opportunities for training. There is a trend to use train-the-trainer to save money. You don't learn the same because it is a ten minute summary of a whole day in training coming from someone else. That is not the way to learn. We just throw people out there. It is hard, really hard.

Researchers have found that although there are positive aspects of being a special education teacher in a rural setting, many challenges exist that may impact rural special education teacher job satisfaction (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Gehrke & McCoy; Harde, 2007; Sutton, Bismuth, O'connor, Pae, & Payne, 2014; Westling & Witten, 1996). Each participant had their own story to tell about their job as a special education teacher in a rural area with a high rate of poverty and the challenges it presents to an already stressful job. Ragan talked about teaching students who come from poverty. She noted that these students do not always have the prior knowledge and experiences, resources, and cognitive strategies which impacts their ability to learn. Special education teachers must work harder to find tools that will make these students successful. Participants noted that many times there is little home support and a lack of importance put on education by parents. Likewise, current literature has shown that parents of

students in poverty appear to place less value on an education (Sutton et al., 2014) Findings in current research also identified characteristics described by participants in students living in poverty which present challenges to teachers. Payne (1996) noted that low achievement is correlated with a lack of resources. Children of poverty lack cognitive strategies that result in low-performance which makes instruction more challenging (Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007; Payne, 1996). Findings indicated that children living in poor families have lower academic scores, poor graduation rates, and lower college enrollment rates than children who live in more affluent families (Sutton et al, 2014).

Job satisfaction and retention of special education teachers. The participants in my study believed that the more satisfied the special education teacher was, the more likely they were to remain in their positions. Raine stated, “I think it is obvious and goes without saying that if I’m more satisfied in my position I am more likely to remain in my position. If I’m not satisfied in my position, then I’m definitely going to be looking to go elsewhere or do something else.” Mandy stated that teachers who are more satisfied stay longer. These participants’ beliefs supported previous research which stated that job satisfaction was a predictor of teachers’ intentions to leave their positions and their organizational commitment (Berry, 2012; Larkin et al., 2016). Likewise, Kabungaidze and Mahlatshana (2013) found that the more satisfied the teacher, the less likely they will experience job turnover intentions.

Participants also discussed the impact job satisfaction had on organizational commitment. Participants said when a special education teacher was satisfied in their job, it impacted both their performance and organizational commitment, their willingness to go above-and beyond, and to work even when working conditions were challenging. Matt said, “If you are happy, truly happy with what you do, you’re more likely to stay in the career.” He went on to say, “Happy

people make for happy places which makes a huge impact on whether or not a special education teacher wants to remain in their position.” Shila and Sevilla (2015) noted that high levels of job satisfaction enable teachers to develop commitment that forms a sense of attachment and instill a desire to remain in the position. Likewise, findings have found that teachers’ sense of loyalty and commitment could have an influence on their willingness to continue working even though conditions are not ideal (Green & Munoz, 2016).

Findings have shown that designing the job of the special education teacher for participatory empowerment and positive working conditions increases the chances of job satisfaction (Herzberg, 2001; Major, 2012). By investigating conditions in the workplace that increase job satisfaction, special education teachers may be motivated to remain in their positions (Gersten et al., 2001; Herzberg, 1998). Participants in my study also stated that working in a supportive environment makes them happier and more committed to their job. Melinda said, “Anyone who feels appreciated will want to do more. You are going to enjoy working there and want to stay.” Rachael agreed, she said, “Satisfaction happens when you appreciate and acknowledge their work and they will want to stay.” Focus group participants agreed that when you have working conditions that increase the job satisfaction of special education teachers, they will want to stay in their position. They went on to say that teachers who work in a supportive environment are happier and more committed to their job.

Administrator support, job satisfaction, and retention.

Practices that foster administrator support are linked to higher job satisfaction and a higher likelihood that teachers will remain in their positions (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016). Investigating the conditions in the workplace that increase job satisfaction may lead to identifying practices that motivate special education teachers to remain in their positions

(Gersten et al., 2001; Herzberg 1968). Therefore, administrators need to understand how to motivate teachers to stay in order to increase job satisfaction and maintain a proactive focus on teacher concerns (Kavungaidze & Mahlatshana, 2013). Participants in my study confirmed these findings and discussed practices they believed influenced their perception of job satisfaction, job dissatisfaction, working conditions and personal involvement of the administrator that increased their job satisfaction and desire to remain in their positions.

Findings have also shown that administrator support could significantly improve the level of job satisfaction and commitment of teachers (Boyd et al., 2009; Albrecht & Johns, 2013; Waltman et al., 2012). Numerous studies cite administrative support as a major influence on teachers' decisions to remain in the field of education (Bennett et al., 2013; Berry, 2012; Conley & You, 2016; Jones & Watson, 2017). The results of recent research have shown that administrative support is the most significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction and a significant predictor of teachers' intent to remain in the teaching profession (Tickle et al., 2011). The participants in my study also reported that administrator support could make all the difference in whether or not special education teachers are satisfied with their job and would remain in the field. By telling their stories, participants in my study were able to explain how they believed administrators could increase job satisfaction and retention. As they talked, they addressed leadership behaviors and specific practices they perceived to be a major influence on job satisfaction. Melinda said, "Administrator support can make or break a teacher and determine their job satisfaction. If an administrator supports you, then you are more likely to be happy and stay in that building." Ragan felt there was a direct correlation between administrator support and job satisfaction. Likewise, Mandy stated, "When special education teachers do not feel supported, they don't stay in their jobs and they are very unhappy."

The results from my case study supported the findings of researchers that identified administrator practices that support job satisfaction and retention through a work environment that is enriched through administrator practices. Multiple researchers talked about how enrichment would be accomplished by administrators who implemented practices that increased job satisfaction (Conley & You, 2016; Gersten et al., 2001; Herzberg, 1968; Langher et al., 2017; Tyler & Brunner, 2014). My participants reported several factors related to administrator practices and enriched school environment that influenced their job satisfaction. Administrator support, caring for their well-being, providing for their needs, and communication were perceived by the participants as necessary for job satisfaction.

Administrator support was key to job satisfaction according to several of my participants. Ragan said, "I didn't feel supported by the administrator and many times I felt like leaving. This year I've been blessed with an administrator who is supportive. I'm satisfied and don't think about what else is out there." Researchers have also linked administrator support to higher job satisfaction and a higher likelihood that teachers will remain in their positions (Boyd et al., 2009; Cancio et al., 2013; Charoensukmongkol et al, 2016; Jones & Watson, 2017). Likewise, participants felt that administrators who were pleasant, friendly, and got to know them on a personal level increased their feeling of success and made a difference in how satisfied they were with their job. Raine stated, "Just asking me about my family shows that they are caring and have a sense of who I am and where I come from. That makes you more satisfied with your job." Michelle also noted that when she experienced a family crisis, her administrators were wonderful to her. She said that it gave her a new respect for them which made her appreciate them and become more satisfied in her job. This connects to the findings of Bolger and Nir (2012) and Hong (2012), who indicated that teachers who consider their school a place where

their well-being is valued are likely to be satisfied with their jobs and more likely to remain in their positions.

Several participants in my study shared how providing for their needs impacted the way they see their job. Because they live in a rural area where school system budgets can be tight, many times teachers do not have the resources they need to perform at their best. Michelle said, “I didn’t take into account the fact that special education is difficult. I don’t have many of the things I need. For example, we have to share the laptop.” Ragan also noted that sometimes special education classrooms are forgotten, saying “Perhaps the administrator has not checked in to see if there is anything you need or has forgotten that you don’t have a computer.” She went on to say that she would be happier with her job and more satisfied if these things were addressed. Mike stressed that sometimes we do not have the proper resources or proper amount of help we need to assist the students. A lack of training opportunities was also identified as impacting job satisfaction. Mandy felt that in order to be satisfied with her job as a special education teacher an administrator needed to provide opportunities for individual training. Findings from past research has shown that special education teachers in rural areas appear to experience professional isolation which results in lower levels of job satisfaction and commitment (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Billingsley, 2004; Westling & Whitten, 1996). Just as in the results of my study, this professional isolation limits opportunities to participate in professional development resulting in occupational stress (Billingsley, 2004; Dussault et al., 1999; Loiselle & Royer 1999).

I found that administrator communication was a major concern for participants when considering job satisfaction. Participants wanted administrators to be aware of how they verbally and non-verbally shared their message. They believed that open lines of communication with

opportunities to present their side were essential. Participants noted that administrator communication can make them doubt themselves and put them edge. Just saying have a good day, according to participants, could determine whether or not a special education teacher feels good or bad about their day and their job. Several participants talked about the impact of texts and emails as opposed to face-to-face contact. They believed that many times these forms of communication can be misinterpreted and create unnecessary anxiety. Mandy explained that open lines of communication between the administrator and special education staff result in more satisfied teachers who will stay longer. Melinda said, “On a scale from one to ten, I would rate communication a 10.” Rosa noted, “Communication is huge in determining job satisfaction. Likewise, House (1981) identified open lines of communication as an emotional support for teachers. Findings have shown that how administrators communicate with their teachers influences the teachers’ feelings about them and their job (Memduhoglu, 2015; Hensley & Burmeister, 2008). Communication between teachers and administrators directly impacts teachers’ perception of trust, mood, productivity, motivation, and organizational commitment. Likewise, findings have shown effective communication related to face-to-face and personal communication motivated teachers to perform at a high standard (Tyler, 2016) just as in the results of my study.

In my study, it was found that administrator practices such as not showing appreciation, not recognizing teachers, not acknowledging efforts, a lack of communication, learning special education teachers were being left out, and displaying inconsistent expectations impacted the job satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment of my participants. Mandy talked about the implications of administrators who do not have any idea what a special education teacher does. She said that when a job is not understood, it is difficult to appreciate the people

who are doing the work. Michelle also confirmed that she did not believe administrators take notice. She went on to say that they have so many things going on that they don't realize how many jobs a special education teacher does and the time and effort required to do it well. Focus group members agreed that their job is more difficult when the administrator does not acknowledge the challenging nature of special education. Several participants talked about their perception of administrators who do not recognize their contributions. Rosa said, "We are not recognized for what we contribute." Robin and Riley agreed. They believe that administrators are equally as responsible for student success as general education teachers causing special education teachers frustration. Previous research supports these assumptions. Kabungaidze and Mahlathshana (2013) found that administrators need to understand what motivates teachers to stay in order to increase job satisfaction and maintain a proactive focus to address teacher concerns. Findings have shown that special education teachers do not feel they receive the encouragement and contact they need from school leadership (Andrews and Brown, 2015). Bolger and Nir (2012) stated that teachers want to hear how well they are doing from their supervisors.

Bennett et al. (2013) and Hensley and Burmeister (2008) discussed the importance of administrator practices that support the environmental culture. They went on to say that administrators need to be facilitators of positive interactions and build relationships with people who sometimes have a different outlook from their own. Administrators who build relationships of care, respect, and trust create a sense of belonging and social connectedness in the school (Le Cournu, 2013). Administrators who address these issues enable teachers to become more satisfied with their job and more likely to remain in their position (Conley & You, 2012). This is supported in my study, as many participants talked about dissatisfaction related to administrators who do not show respect for their personal feelings. Mandy noted that many times special

education teachers are not looked upon as teachers but as aides. She went on to say that they have been given the impression by administrators that they can be replaced quickly, impacting their self-esteem and desire to do the best in their job. Melinda noted that special education teachers are not always allowed to work their magic because they are left out, making them feel insignificant. Matt said, "If you are happy, truly happy with what you do, you're more likely to stay in the career. If you don't feel your administrator cares about your feelings, you might look for other options." Rosa explained, "When the administrator actually cares about your happiness and recognizes that you are a person who has feelings and struggles, it makes you feel really good about them and more willing to work hard for them and the students."

A theme that emerged from my study that did not appear to be addressed in my literature review and extends the understanding of the topic in previous research was the personal involvement of the administrator. Although some of the factors related to this theme were included under other topics in my study, as documented above, I found that all of my participants included personal involvement of the administrator in their responses as being crucial to how they viewed their job and their job satisfaction. My research showed that when administrators take part in the classroom, know the students and parents, know the curriculum, participate in the special education process, and develop caring relationships with special education teachers, job satisfaction increases.

Participants in my study noted that taking part in the classroom enables the administrator to build relationships with the students and the teachers and gives them insight into the strengths and needs of the classroom. Michelle said, "I think the administrator could be much more involved in special education. It's very rare that they come in my classroom. I'm not a person who wants to be observed all the time but I feel that it is beneficial for the administrator to be

part of the classroom.” This includes not only checking in but actually participating in daily activities with students and sharing the responsibility of providing instruction. Participants believe that this will give the administrator a better understanding of what the teacher is doing and insight into what goes on in the special education classroom. Matt, Ragan, Robin, and Melinda emphasized that teachers feel valued and more satisfied in their position when the administrator takes time out of their day to personally interact.

My participants reported that in order to build trust, administrators needed to establish personal and professional relationships with students and parents. Michelle stated that kids need to know the administrator and feel free to talk with them. Mandy noted that it makes a big difference when the principal knows the kids by name and their families. She went on to say “It makes our job as special education teachers easier.” Melinda said administrator relationships with parents enable them to make informed decisions about instruction, discipline, and become a mediator who can support the special education teacher.

In our discussions, I found that participants believed that administrators should know the curriculum the teacher is using with the students. They felt that many times they are judged based on what is being taught in the regular classroom as opposed to what is appropriate for the student with special needs. Michelle said that an administrator should value the instruction the special education teacher is presenting and be informed the content based on student need. She went on to say that even in high school students may need to learn self-care.

For all the participants, administrator participation in the special education process was a topic of concern. Participants emphasized that they have so many jobs to do in special education. Mike stressed that sometimes you just feel like you are getting thrown out there by yourself. Ragan and Michelle noted that just having the administrator ask if they could help out

or check in on the classroom would make them more satisfied in their position. Matt said, “I want an administrator that wants to be involved more in all the components of special ed. It increases satisfaction with your job and makes a better working environment.” When discussing how the administrator could specifically be involved that would make them more satisfied in their job, participants named helping with paperwork, meetings, behavior management, parent communication, IEP development, knowing the special education process, and decision-making, Mike said, “It’s nice to have an administrator to help you. It definitely influences your level of satisfaction.” Likewise Raine explained, “I’ll gladly take all the help I can get. It definitely makes me more satisfied with my work when someone is willing to help share the load.”

In conclusion, participants perceived an administrator who is involved as one who develops caring relationships with them by getting to know them, personal communication, and valuing their contributions. Matt said, “Happy people make for happy places which makes a huge impact on whether or not a special ed teacher wants to remain in their position.”

Participants found it comforting when the administrator demonstrated that they cared for their personal situations and supported them in their time of need. Rosa said, “They see you as who you are, a person that has feelings and struggles but has triumphed and they recognize that. I think that is really good.” Just taking time to tell the teacher to have a good day or using a pleasant tone gives them a boost that can make them happier in their job. Rachael said, “It depends on how you come at them. A nice pleasant tone or that dreaded look on your face sets the mood for the day.” In addition to developing caring relationships and communication, participants wanted administrators to value their contributions. Robin and Rachael felt that by personally acknowledging how much a teacher is valued, the administrator conveys an interest in

the special education teacher's work and knowledge of their needs. Rachael described appreciation and acknowledgement of a teacher's work as key to job satisfaction.

Theoretical Literature

Herzberg's (1959) motivational-hygiene theory was used to guide my study. This theory provided researchers with a tool to assess employees' perceptions of job satisfaction, which enabled them to identify characteristics that enrich the work environment related to job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. Herzberg (1959) developed the motivational-hygiene theory based on two types of human needs, which he identified as motivator factors and hygiene factors. Motivators identified as being close to the work itself were growth, achievement, recognition, responsibility, and advancement. Hygiene factors were identified as company policy, administrative policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions. According to Herzberg (1959) motivators create job satisfaction by meeting the individual's needs for meaning and personal growth. Whereas, job satisfaction is only gained when hygiene factors are absent, Herzberg (1959) stated that once hygiene factors are addressed, the motivators will promote job satisfaction. Herzberg's findings also suggest that by understanding and utilizing these factors, work can be enriched, which will increase job satisfaction leading to increased institutional commitment by employees (Herzberg, 1968).

Herzberg (1959) identified motivational factors that were the primary cause of job satisfaction as growth, achievement, recognition, responsibility, and advancement. Likewise, participants in my study also identified these factors as related to their perception of job satisfaction. In Herzberg's (1959) study, he simply asked each participant two questions concerning what they felt made them perceive their work day as good or bad. He then categorized their responses into motivational and hygiene factors. In comparison, in my study,

participants use their own experiences to describe factors that they perceived to increase job satisfaction and how they were related to administrator practices. By providing the participants an opportunity to hear their voices, new meaning was gained from the interpretation of their experiences which identified and described specific practices that could be utilized to increase job satisfaction and retain employees.

Herzberg (1959) stated that by addressing hygiene factors that may cause dissatisfaction, the environment of the workplace improves, resulting in more positive job attitudes. Included in his list of hygiene factors were company policy, administrative policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relationships, and working conditions. In my study, company policy was not a factor participants identified as being related to job dissatisfaction. However, my research did indicate that administrative policies, supervision, salary, interpersonal relationships, and working conditions were related to how administrator practices that could improve the school environment and their satisfaction with their job.

Herzberg (1959, 1996) stated that addressing the hygiene factors was not enough to decrease job dissatisfaction and increase job satisfaction. He argued that the only way to really make employees feel good about their work was then to also increase the motivational factors which would result in increased job satisfaction. Contrary to Herzberg's findings, my research did not indicate that a neutral state existed after the administrator addressed factors that caused job dissatisfaction. It was reported in my study that as an administrator addresses each of the issues that cause dissatisfaction, participants' perception of job satisfaction increased.

The motivational-hygiene theory suggests that by utilizing the motivation and hygiene factors, work can be enriched to increase job satisfaction which leads to increased institutional commitment by employees (Herzberg, 1968). Herzberg (1987) defined job enrichment as

improving work efficiency that increases job satisfaction by providing an opportunity for personal achievement and recognition, which challenges the employee and creates the possibility for achievement and growth. Likewise, my research indicated that when the administrator enriches the school environment, job satisfaction of teachers will likely increase. Participants described working conditions and personal involvement of the administrator as factors that could be used by the administrator to enrich the school environment.

In my study, many participants described the importance of the administrator enriching the school environment through motivational factors by providing opportunities for personal achievement, growth in their field, responsibility for decision-making, rewarding work through student success, and recognition. Several participants noted that when they are given the opportunity and tools that are needed to make their students successful, they are more satisfied in their positions. Likewise, hygiene factors appeared to be key to participant's job satisfaction as they discussed administrator policies which gave special education teachers equal representation and respect in the school community, supervision, interpersonal relationships, salary, and working conditions, just as in Herzberg's (1959) study.

A factor that was not included in Herzberg's study that could shed new light on the motivational-hygiene theory was personal involvement of the administrator in the special education process. My participants wanted the administrator to participate actively in classroom activities, share the load, understand the process, and help with paperwork, meetings, parent communication, and behavior management. Likewise, participants wanted the administrator to be part of their team that respected their expertise and allowed them to become valuable members of the staff. Finally, the participants went beyond the concept of interpersonal relationships to describe their desire for caring relationships, where the administrator

demonstrated a genuine interest in their well-being and that of their family. Included in the participants description of caring relationships was the way the administrator communicated with them: taking time to listen and being aware of their tone. Rosa, Robin, and the focus group participants stated that when an administrator talks to you and listens, it greatly increases job satisfaction. Rachael said, “It depends on how you come at them. A nice pleasant tone or that dreaded look on your face sets the mood for the day.”

Implications

This section discusses the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study in relationship to administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers. As stakeholders in the special education process, recommendations are provided for administrator training staff, school board members, administrators, teachers, and parents as appropriate.

Theoretical Implications

Herzberg’s (1959) motivational-hygiene theory guided my study. The theory identified motivational and hygiene factors which influence job satisfaction. According to Herzberg (1959), motivator factors create satisfaction by meeting the individual’s’ needs for meaning and personal growth. However, when considering hygiene factors, satisfaction is only gained when hygiene factors are absent and motivators are then provided. Likewise, by understanding and utilizing the motivational and hygiene factors, the theory suggests that work can be enriched to increase job satisfaction which leads to increased commitment of employees (Herzberg, 1968).

There are several theoretical implications related to Herzberg’s theory and the findings of my study. First, based on the input provided by my participants, I found that each of Herzberg’s (1959) motivational and hygiene factors, with the exception of company policies, were identified

as characteristics which were related to the job satisfaction of rural special education teachers. Therefore, it is likely that an administrator who is knowledgeable about these factors and utilizes the information to motivate special education teachers will increase job satisfaction and the likelihood that they will remain in their positions. Next, unlike Herzberg's theory, my study suggests that participants do not require increased motivators to be initiated after hygiene factors are addressed to increase their job satisfaction. In my study, participants noted increased job satisfaction whenever a hygiene factor was absent. Administrators who address hygiene factors are perhaps more likely to increase job satisfaction of special education teachers and increase their organizational commitment. Finally, as in Herzberg's theory (1959), enriching the school environment through a variety of contents was found to be a method that was effective in increasing job satisfaction and the commitment of special education teachers. Findings have shown that when work is enriched, work becomes more meaningful, which results in a higher level of job satisfaction and institutional commitment (Allen et al., 2018; Blake et al., 2018; Koop, 1993; Yang & Lee, 2009). It seems that as a result of enriching the environment, special education teachers will possibly be more satisfied and more likely to be influenced to continue to teach.

Although it was not identified in Herzberg's (1959) motivational-hygiene theory, the participants in my study considered the personal involvement of the administrator as a primary factor that influenced rural special education teacher job satisfaction and their decision to remain in their position. Participants in my study spoke about the importance of having an administrator who would visit their class, knew their curriculum, built relationships with students and parents, and participated in the special education process. These factors were noted as influential in special education teachers' level of job satisfaction and their desire to remain in their position.

With this in mind, administrators who want to retain their special education staff and increase their level of job satisfaction perhaps would consider incorporating these characteristics into their management style as a means of assuring special education teachers that they are a vital component of the school staff who are respected and valued.

Empirical Implications

In my review of the literature related to administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers, I found few qualitative studies that provided rural special education teachers and administrators an opportunity to have their voices heard and their experiences documented. Through this investigation, knowledge was gained that likely has implications for future research on job satisfaction of rural special education teachers and administrator practices.

Special education in rural settings. Current findings have shown that many challenges exist that impact the job satisfaction and retention of rural special education teachers (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Harde, 2007; Sutton et al., 2014; Westling & Witten, 1996). The results of my study confirmed these findings as participants described the challenges they face each day. According to my results, rural special education teachers were likely to leave their positions due to the pressure of their jobs, lack of qualified staff, limited resources, few training opportunities, impact of poverty on their students, and lack of parental involvement. Gaining an understanding of these issues by federal, state, and local politicians, administrators, and community leaders could possibly demonstrate the importance of addressing these issues and impact the rural special education teacher's perception of job satisfaction which would increase the likelihood that the school division would retain these valuable employees.

Job satisfaction and retention of special education teachers. Trehan and Paul (2014) identified job satisfaction as the number one priority for rural teachers in determining their work quality. It is the key to cost management for school divisions, working conditions, performance of students with disabilities, and the retention of rural special education teachers (Green & Munoz, 2016; Larkin et al., 2016; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Likewise, Kabungaidze and Mahlathshana (2013) noted that the more satisfied the teacher, the less likely they experience job turnover intentions. The results of my study indicated that the more satisfied the special education teachers were in their job, the more likely they were to remain in their positions. By providing a supportive environment where special education teachers are appreciated and acknowledged, perhaps it will improve their performance, their organizational commitment, and their job satisfaction.

Administrator support, job satisfaction, and retention. After researching the topic of rural special education teacher job satisfaction and administrator practices and through my many years of involvement as a special education teacher and coordinator, I had the impression that many times administrators were not given the opportunity to gain knowledge about special education teacher job satisfaction and their unique needs. Likewise, it was my impression that there were few resources available that could guide an administrator as they strived to increase job satisfaction and retain their special education staff. Although I experienced many of the same concerns my participants described and heard from numerous special education teachers about their struggle to remain motivated, I believed that burn-out for special education teachers was customary and leaving the field a common occurrence. However, through the voices of my participants, I have concluded that it is likely that special education teachers and administrators

have a desire to learn in order to make their jobs more satisfying and improve the educational system for the benefit of themselves, their school and their students.

Jones and Watson (2017) stated that there is no conclusion about which leadership behaviors have the greatest impact on satisfaction and retention. They went on to say that research on leadership behaviors was considered timely and necessary. Previous research has shown that practices that foster administrator support are linked to higher job satisfaction and a higher likelihood that teachers will remain in their positions (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016). The results of my research imply that investigating conditions in the workplace that increase job satisfaction may lead to the identification of administrator practices that support job satisfaction and the retention of special education teachers. The participants in my study stated that administrator support could make all the difference in whether or not they were satisfied with their job and whether they would remain in their position.

Furthermore, not found in my review of the literature related to job satisfaction and administrator practices, the study results imply that the personal involvement of the administrator has an influence on job satisfaction and retention of special education teachers. Each of the participants included personal involvement of the administrator in their responses as being crucial to how they viewed their job and their job satisfaction. When administrators take part in the classroom, know the students and parents, know the curriculum, participate in the special education process, and develop caring relationships with special education teachers, it is likely that job satisfaction will increase.

Practical Implications

Local, state, and federal policy makers, training program coordinators, administrators, teachers, and parents should consider the findings of the study in order to increase the job

satisfaction and retention of rural special education teachers who are a valuable resource in educating students with disabilities. The results of my study provide insight into rural special education and administrator practices that support the job satisfaction of rural special education teachers. Through their own voices, each participant offered to share their experiences as rural special education teachers or administrators and provide feedback that may increase job satisfaction and retention. The participants expressed concern for our school division due to financial constraints that prevent the provision of resources needed to meet the demands of the students and teachers. They also discussed administrator practices that they perceived as being vital to job satisfaction and retention. Bringing attention to the problem of rural special education teacher job satisfaction and retention and developing an action plan to address these concerns could possibly result in teachers being happier and more committed to their jobs, more willing to go the extra mile for the school and the students, and increased student achievement. Following are recommendations based on the findings of the study for policy makers, training program coordinators, administrators, and parents.

Policy makers. Policy makers should consider the challenges that are present for rural districts with high rates of poverty when writing legislation and determining funding. Many times rural districts do not have the funds that more affluent areas have to train staff, provide a competitive wage that supports teacher retention, and maintain qualified special education staff. Students who live in poverty many times experience a lack of resources and background knowledge that would enable them to learn. Special education teachers who are responsible for providing instruction become stressed when they do not have the tools and training required to address these issues and become less satisfied in their positions. Because qualified special education teachers are considered in high demand, it would be beneficial to initiate practices that

support increased job satisfaction and retention. It is recommended that these policy makers take time to hear the voices of those teachers and administrators who work in the field each day and give school divisions the resources to meet their needs.

Training program coordinators. For those who provide training to administrators, whether it is in a college administrator preparation program or staff development program, instruction in administrator practices that support job satisfaction of special education teachers and enriching the school environment is needed. By providing this opportunity for training, administrators will likely become more knowledgeable in these practices and use this knowledge to motivate special education teachers to remain in their school, benefitting the school and the students.

Administrators. It is recommended that administrators initiate practices that support the job satisfaction of special education teachers. When special education teachers are satisfied with their jobs, they are happier and more likely to remain. In order to accomplish this task, administrators should address factors that influence job dissatisfaction and create conditions that are satisfying by enriching the school environment to make the work meaningful to their employees. It is possible that by becoming personally involved in the special education process with special education teachers, the teachers become more satisfied in their work, go the extra mile, and become more committed to the success of the school and the students. It is also recommended that administrators pursue additional training if they do not feel that they have the expertise to accomplish this task.

Parents. Because parents are an integral part of the student's educational team, it is important for them to realize that their support and participation in the special education process is essential to the success of their child and the job satisfaction of the special education teacher.

By communicating with school staff, attending meetings, and building relationships with those people who are responsible for your child's education, school staff are able to determine how to meet the student's unique learning needs. When special education teachers struggle to meet their responsibilities of designing an education program that is appropriate for a student, it puts stress on that teacher that will influence their satisfaction with their job and likely their desire to remain in their positions. Therefore, it is recommended that administrators strive to assist special education teachers in involving parents in the special education process and encourage them to become active team members who value education as a pathway to their child's future success.

Delimitations and Limitations

This section discusses the delimitations and limitations of the study. Delimitations are purposeful decisions that I made as the researcher to limit or define the boundaries of the study. I made these decision based on the availability of the research sites and the willingness of the school division to participate in my study. Limitations of the study are weaknesses that cannot be controlled. Limitations identified were the setting of the study, school and sample size, ethnicity, time, exclusion of previous special education teachers, and observation data related to confidentiality.

Delimitations

I chose to use a sample pool which consisted of only special education teachers and administrators who were currently employed in one elementary and one high school in a rural school district in Virginia. This sample pool was chosen because of their availability and their willingness to participate in the study. Every special education teacher and administrator in both schools were invited to participate. I used purposeful sampling to select rural special education teachers and administrators who were actively involved in the special education process due to

their ability to best inform the study about administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers. Likewise, convenience sampling was selected based on the willingness of the school division to participate and administrator agreement to allow the study to be conducted in the school. This decision was also based on the researcher's ability to access the research sites.

Limitations

As in most studies, there are limitations in the current study which could have impacted the findings. The setting for the study was a small rural school division that has a high rate of poverty. Poverty itself brings many challenges for educators which may not be experienced in rural areas that have a more affluent population. Responses by the participants may be influenced by these challenges and therefore cannot be generalized to all rural areas. In addition, only two schools were used to collect data from special education teachers and administrators which limited the sample size. With the inclusion of more schools or even more school districts in the study, there would be an opportunity to gather data from a larger and more diverse sample which would perhaps influence the findings of the study.

All of the participants in the study were Caucasian. The inclusion of a more ethnically diverse population could provide additional meaning to the study that had not been considered with the current sample. An additional limitation to the study was time. Because the study was conducted during school hours, when instruction had to be the primary focus, participants were sometimes limited in the amount of time they could spend responding to questions. If more time were given during face-to-face interviews, some participants may have provided new meaningful information that could be used in interpretation of the data. Special education teachers who had left the profession or transferred to general education were not included in the sample pool. The

responses from these individuals could provide a perspective on special education job satisfaction and retention that those working in the field would not be able to express.

Finally, because of the confidential nature of special education, it was difficult to plan observations of administrators and special education teachers interacting with each other. I was fortunate to have been given the opportunity to observe a number of times in situations but was careful in reporting only those instances that would not violate policy or the trust that had been given to me. I think that consideration should be given to the findings of the study based on the need to screen reported information during observation time.

Recommendations for Future Research

This section discusses recommendations and directions for future research based on the study findings, limitations, and delimitations of this study. Included are suggestions for additional populations that could be included in the study as well as research designs that would be beneficial in investigating the problem of rural special education teacher job satisfaction and administrator practices.

I would recommend that future studies focus on representative samples from all rural areas, not just those that have a high rate of poverty. Based on the challenges that exist for rural special education teachers who teach in areas where there are a great number of children who live in poverty, it would be beneficial to take this factor out of the sample pool for some participants in order to gain more diverse responses when determining how administrator practices and enriching the school environment impact the job satisfaction or rural special education teachers.

I would also recommend that more school districts, sites and participants be included in the study. Using only one rural school district and two schools limited the sample pool and the ability to gain more meaningful knowledge about the topic. With the inclusion of additional settings and research sites and participants, the results of the study could be generalized across more settings benefitting the school division, administrators, teachers, and parents.

The population in the study included special education teachers and administrators who currently worked in a rural school division in Virginia. In order to gain a better perspective of special education teacher job satisfaction and retention, special education teachers who have left the profession or transferred to general education could be included in the sample pool. These special education teachers, who had made the decision to leave special education, would have valuable input into how administrator practices and job satisfaction influenced their choices and how administrators could have made their jobs more satisfying.

Further investigation of how personal involvement of the administrator influences the job satisfaction and retention of rural special education teachers is an area worthy of further study. Personal involvement was a factor that participants in this study felt strongly about as they discussed job satisfaction and retention. Information gained from this study would provide administrators with knowledge that may enable them to increase the job satisfaction of their special education teachers and influence their decisions to remain in their positions.

An additional recommendation related to the amount of time that was available for interviews, focus groups, and observations would be to begin the data collection in the first semester rather than at the end of the year. The majority of administrators and special education teachers appear to be more flexible at the beginning of the year as compared to the end when they are focused on SOL testing and completing required coursework.

Finally, I would recommend that additional collective case studies be used to investigate administrator practices and job satisfaction of special education teachers. As I reviewed the literature, there were few qualitative collective case studies that provided an opportunity for special education teachers and administrators voices to be heard. In addition, a phenomenological study could provide researchers an opportunity to explore the lived experiences of special education teachers in a rural area with a high rate of poverty. As I conducted my study, special education teachers wanted to explain what it was like to have the responsibility of not only educating students with disabilities but also acting as a parental figure, work with administrators, and struggle to become a part of the school culture. Finally, a quantitative study that investigated what practices administrators were initiating to support the job satisfaction of rural special education teachers would be beneficial in determining the need for additional training. This investigation could also measure administrator fidelity in implementing practices that increased job satisfaction of rural special education teachers and their intention to remain in their positions. Without knowledge of practices, initiation, and fidelity, these factors would likely not have a significant impact.

Summary

This qualitative collective case study investigated administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers. The theory that guided the study was Herzberg's (1959) motivational-hygiene theory which has informed the literature on job satisfaction for many years. A qualitative collective case study design was chosen to enable rural special education teachers and administrators an opportunity to tell their stories and hear their voices. Multiple data collection sources (face-to face-interviews, observations, and a focus group) were

used in order to seek the answer to the central question: How do special education teachers and administrators describe practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers? In addition, three sub-questions were developed based on theory and current literature which enabled me to obtain multiple views of the case through the voices of the participants and interpretation as recommended by Stake (1995).

The methodology that was used in my study and procedures for conducting the study were described in Chapter Three. Two schools in rural Virginia were selected as research sites. A detailed description of participants which included demographic information was included. Categorical aggregation of instances and direct interpretation was used to establish patterns and consistency, codes were assigned, and themes extracted in order to gain meaning from the data first individually and then across cases. An account of theme development and research question responses was provided.

Chapter Five presented a summary of findings related to my research questions. The relationship of my study to theoretical and empirical literature on administrator practices and job satisfaction of rural special education teachers was discussed. Theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study were noted. I also discussed delimitations and limitations of my study as well as recommendations for stakeholders. In conclusion, I provided suggestions for future research.

Based on the implications of my study, I feel that it is important for administrators to initiate practices that support the job satisfaction of rural special education teachers and enrich the school environment in order to increase special education teacher job satisfaction and influence their decisions to remain in their positions. Policy makers should provide the needed resources that would enable local school divisions to offer training to administrators who desire

to gain knowledge about these practices and their benefits. In addition, according to the participants, there is a need for administrators to become more involved in the special education process both personally and professionally. Each participant described the job of a rural special education teacher as hard and noted that administrator support was key to making their job more satisfying. As I listened to their stories, I realized that they wanted the administrator to be part of their classroom, to know their students and their parents, to eat lunch with them and participate in activities and instruction, and assist with the many responsibilities associated with being a special education teacher. Demonstrating the importance of administrator support, Ragan described the impact her administrator made by being involved. She said,

So I have to say that this year, I've been very blessed so it's not about what's out there. I've had an administrator that is all in and I can go to and get things off my chest. I feel very supported and very encouraged that I have the best of both worlds. I don't mind coming to work because I feel like I know that I have someone that has my back and that's a wonderful feeling especially because we do have so many things we deal with each day.

In conclusion, when considering the importance of retaining qualified special education staff, especially in rural areas with high rates of poverty, it is crucial that administrators initiate practices that support the job satisfaction of special education teachers. With the increasing demand and continued shortage of special education professionals comes a responsibility for administrators to gain an understanding of how they can play an active role in influencing special education teacher perceptions of job satisfaction and increase the likelihood that they will remain in their positions. In the future, perhaps those who are responsible for administrator training

programs may want to consider the impact administrator practices may have on special education teacher job satisfaction and make it a priority in their instructional programs.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 12 2019

Donna Jean Ragan Poskas

IRB Approval 3710.03 1219: Administrator Practices that Support Job Satisfaction of Special Education Teachers in Rural Southwest Virginia: A Collective Case Study

Dear Donna Jean Ragan Poskas,

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

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects, 45 CFR 46.101 and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

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

Sincerely

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Ethics Office

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APPENDIX B

Participant Release Form

The Liberty University
Institutional Review Board has
approved this document for use
from

3/12/2019 to 3/1 1/2020
Protocol # 3710.031219

CONSENT FORM

Administrator Practices that Support Job Satisfaction of Special Education Teachers in Rural
Southwest Virginia: A Collective Case Study
Donna Jean Ragan Poskas
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers. You were chosen as a possible participant in the study based on your current position as a special education teacher or administrator in a rural area in Virginia. Please read this form and contact me with any questions or concerns you may have before agreeing to participate. You may contact me by emailing dposkas@liberty.edu.

Donna Jean Ragan Poskas, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to investigate administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers in Virginia.

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

- I. Participate in an audio recorded personal interview which will last approximately one hour.
2. Participate in a video recorded focus group with other special education teachers and administrators which will last approximately one hour,
3. Participate in observations which will help gain an understanding of the interactions between administrators and special education teachers which will not require giving of your time.
4. Review the transcript of the interview, observation, and focus group session if you are a participant in order to assure accuracy of interpretation and transcription. This will require approximately one hour.

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

Benefits: By participating in the study, participants may benefit by gaining knowledge of administrator practices that support job satisfaction which may possibly impact the equality of their workplace and increase the chances that they will remain in their position. When special education teachers have increased job satisfaction they are more likely to remain in their positions which impacts the school division, administrators, and student learning.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. A \$20 Amazon gift card will be given to participants that complete the requirements of the study as named in the procedures section of this consent document.

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.

Institutional Review Board has
approved this document for use
from

3/12/2019 to 3/11/2020

Protocol # 3710.031219

Participants and study sites will be assigned 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 or Tazewell County Public Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you 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 Donna Jean Ragan Poskas. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at dposkas@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Angela Smith, at amsmith1@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.

C] 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

Preferred Contact Information: Phone

Email

APPENDIX C

Observation Protocol

Date: _____ Time: _____ Length of activity: _____ minutes

Site: _____

Participants: _____

Descriptive Notes

Reflective Notes

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Physical Setting:	
Impressions:	

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Date: _____ Time: _____ Length of activity: _____
 Site: _____ Participant: _____

In order to gain a better understanding of administrator practices that support job satisfaction of rural special education teachers, I will be interviewing rural administrators and special education teachers. Your responses will be kept confidential.

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. (Teacher) Please explain what it is like to be a special education teacher in a rural area.
 (Administrator) As an administrator, please explain what you feel it is like to be a special education teacher in a rural area.
3. (Teacher) What role do you believe poverty plays in your ability to teach children with special needs?
 (Administrator) What role do you believe poverty plays in a special education teacher's ability to provide instruction to students with special needs?
4. (Teacher) Consider for a moment the challenges you identified when teaching students with special needs in a rural area with a high rate of poverty. How do these challenges affect your perception of job satisfaction?
 (Administrator) Consider for a moment the challenges you identified of special education teachers who instruct students with special needs in a rural area with a high rate of poverty. How do you feel these challenges affect special education teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction?
5. (Teacher) As a special education teacher, how would you describe job satisfaction?

- (Administrator) As an administrator, how would you describe special education teacher job satisfaction?
6. How is job satisfaction related to organizational commitment?
 7. Please tell me how job satisfaction impacts a special education teacher's ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities.
 8. Describe how you feel job satisfaction influences special education teachers' career decisions?
 9. What impact do you feel administrator support has on the level of job satisfaction of special education teachers?
 10. If you think about administrator practices that support job satisfaction, how important is it that the administrator values the contributions special education teachers make to the school?
 11. Please explain the importance of including special education teachers in the decision-making process in the school?
 12. Please describe your perception of job satisfaction when an administrator shares in the responsibilities of educating students with special needs (behavior management, parent communication, educational planning, and paperwork/meetings).
 13. How does an administrator who demonstrates appreciation of teachers' efforts influence their level of satisfaction with their job?
 14. Think for a moment about a special education teacher who has gone the extra mile for students and their school. Explain your feelings about the importance of recognizing those efforts and how they may impact job satisfaction.
 15. Please explain the value of providing a mentor that is familiar with the field of

- special education to a special education teacher's sense of security, empowerment, and satisfaction in their job.
16. Tell me about your perception of an administrator who values a special education teacher's sense of well-being?
 17. Please share how administrators communicate with teachers both verbally and non-verbally. How does this communication impact whether or not a special education teacher feels good or bad about their school day?
 18. (Teacher) How would you rate communication as a factor that would determine whether or not you were satisfied in your position? Please explain your answer.
(Administrator) How would you rate communication as a factor that would determine whether or not a special education teacher would be satisfied in their position? Please explain your answer.
 19. How would a school environment that facilitated positive interactions between administrators and school staff impact job satisfaction of special education teachers?
 20. Today we have discussed many issues related to job satisfaction and administrator practices. What practices would you implement that would increase the job satisfaction of special education teachers?
 21. How do supportive administrative practices that increase job satisfaction impact special education teachers' decisions to remain in their position? Please explain.

Interviewer's Comments:

APPENDIX E

Focus Group Protocol

Date: _____ Time: _____ Length of activity: _____

Site: _____

Participants: _____

1. Let's begin by introducing ourselves and identifying our position in the school.
2. Please describe what it is like to be an administrator or special education teacher in a rural school division?
3. Considering the many challenges faced by rural special education teachers, what types of administrator practices would increase the likelihood that rural special education teachers would have increased job satisfaction and more likely remain in their position?
4. How would you propose to enrich the school environment by implementing the administrator practices mentioned above in order to increase job satisfaction of special education teachers and increase their commitment?
5. Which administrative practices do you feel are most important in increasing job satisfaction and impacting the decisions of special education teachers to remain? Please explain why you chose those particular practices. (values teacher contributions, recognition, positive school environments, communication skills, providing mentors, caring for the well-being of teachers, interpersonal relationships)
6. What are other administrative practices that you feel support job satisfaction and retention that were not named in the previous question? Explain why you feel they are important.

7. Job satisfaction and the retention of special education teachers is a major concern throughout the country. What issues do you foresee will be occurring if this problem cannot be resolved?

Interviewer Comments: