SURVIVING OR THRIVING? A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE WELL-BEING

OF EXPERIENCED SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

by

Katherine Beth Carpenter-Ware

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the well-being of experienced special education teachers (SETs) in southeastern, Virginia. Experienced SETs' well-being is a relevant issue based upon the role-related stressors SETs grapple with daily. These stressors influence SETs' attrition and the SET shortages which have impacted much of the United States. The theory guiding this study was the well-being theory introduced by Martin Seligman in 2011. This theory indicates that there are five elements of well-being that are required to flourish. These elements are positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. The central research question for this study aimed at how experienced special education teachers described their well-being. In this study, experienced SETs were defined as having at least four years of teaching experience. Convenience, purposeful, and snowball sampling were used to gather twelve participants. In seeking to answer the central research question, the five elements of well-being were explored through a variety of data collection methods, to include: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and individual audio diaries. Using traditional transcendental phenomenological data analysis, the data were analyzed thematically and five themes were revealed. The five themes revealed were: students at the heart of practice, artful instruction, integral relationships, proactive footholds for tomorrow, and inescapable barriers. Efforts were made to enhance trustworthiness and to ensure ethical research practices. Through a discussion of the results, and the study's limitations and delimitations, there were remaining practical, theoretical, and empirical implications, each underscoring the criticality of teacher well-being.

Keywords: well-being, well-being theory, special education teacher, and experienced special education teacher

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the K-12 educators of 2020, including the twelve educators who gave of their time to participate in this study. Your dedication to our nation's children during the COVID-19 pandemic has been all-inspiring. This research is for you and because of you. May your immeasurable value to our country be acknowledged and celebrated and may your wellness be prioritized in the days ahead.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to acknowledge my committee, who truly emulate proactive footholds for tomorrow. To my chair, Dr. B., just as I was preparing to enter the profession, you taught me the basics of writing an IEP in one of my first classes. Sometime later, you took the time to chat with me on the phone. You talked me through the reality of the doctoral process and genuinely listened to my research interests. You also spoke to me, specifically, as a wife and mom. You inspired me. As I continued in the process, I was honored with the privilege of having you serve as my chair. Thank you for taking the time to talk, inspire, mentor, and advise. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Ryff and his contributions my dissertation process. Dr. Ryff, you brought a perspective built on a wealth of professional experience. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and expertise with me. You widened my point of view to an extent I would have never reached on my own.

Secondly, I would like to thank my husband, Abbot, for his unwavering support during my academic journey. You have witnessed me go from steppingstone to steppingstone and celebrated with me along the way. Thank you for prioritizing my dreams from the start, filling our home with a light-hearted warmth, and loving me every day.

I would also like to acknowledge my girls, Bella Kate and Raylynne. This dissertation has been a mountain for mama, but I strapped you two on my back and we climbed it together. Thank you for climbing with me. Your hugs, kisses, and smiles have meant the world to me on days when my mind was very busy, days when I felt tired, or days when I felt so far from the end. One day, you girls will be called to climb your own mountains. No matter what you traverse, it is my promise that you will never, ever go it alone. Just look to your right or left,

maybe down a bit (because you two will undoubtedly be moving quick!), and I will be there, climbing with you.

Also, I would like to thank my parents. Dad, thank you for laying the foundation for every opportunity I have ever had. I may not know the true extent of all you have sacrificed for us, but I certainly recognize that everything I have been able to do is because of you and the course you set for yourself and for us. Mom, thank you for always being my biggest cheerleader. Thank you for always answering the phone and driving up to school when I left my homework folder at home. Thanks for breakfast before school every day (hot breakfast on testing days), every pick-up and drop-off, every activity registration, every load of laundry (sometimes last-minute loads needed for the next day), and every evening meal that gave me what I needed to finish my homework. I am here because of you two and the life you envisioned and built.

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List of Abbreviations

Corona Virus Disease 2019 or 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

C-Reactive Protein (CRP)

Education for All Handicapped Children (EAHC)

Emotional disturbance(s) (ED)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Evidence-based practice (EBP)

General Education Teacher (GET)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

Intellectual disability (ID)

Learning disability (LD)

Learner with Exceptionality (LWE)

Special education teacher (SET)

Standards of Learning (SOLs)

Virginia Alternative Assessment Program (VAAP)

Well-being theory (WBT)

Workplace PERMA Profiler (WPP)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Special education teachers (SETs) have a dynamic role inclusive of providing individualized instruction for students of diverse backgrounds presenting with a range of educational needs (Brittle, 2020; Fowler, Coleman, & Bogdan, 2019; Robinson, Bridges, Rollins, Schumacker, 2019; Shepherd, Fowler, McCormick, Wilson, & Morgan, 2016; Woolf, 2019). On the surface, the role of the special educator includes providing effective instruction, teaching social and emotional skills, managing group instruction, and designing and maintaining individualized education plans for students (Bettini, Wang, Cumming, Kimerling, & Schutz, 2018; Brittle, 2020; Brownell, Bettini, Pua, Peyton, & Benedict, 2019; Fowler et al., 2019; Woolf, 2018). However, the reality of the SET role is not solely limited to tasks related to the instruction of students. Bettini, Kimerling, Park, and Murphy (2015) indicated that most of SETs' time is spent on non-instructional tasks. Among the many responsibilities of SETs is collaborating extensively in order to provide for the educational needs of learners with exceptionalities (Fowler et al., 2019; Mathews, Rodjers, & Young, 2017; Shepherd et al., 2016). Ultimately, there is a disconnect regarding the reality of SET roles and the understanding of the role by district administrators, building principals, and general education teachers (Bettini et al., 2018; Brittle, 2020; Fowler et al., 2019). Based on the many responsibilities of SETs, they are subject to experiencing high levels of stress (Bettini et al., 2017; Brittle, 2020; Garwood, Werts, Varghese, & Gosey, 2017; Mathews et al., 2017). High levels of stress can create burnout for SETs (Brittle, 2020; Cancio et al., 2018; Robinson, Bridges, Rollins, & Schumacker, 2019). SETs experiencing burnout are more likely to depart the profession (Brittle, 2020; Cancio et al., 2018). One-third of SETs will depart the field within the first three years of teaching (Bettini et

al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The attrition of

SETs has left a residual SET shortage, which is critical in the state of Virginia (Lesh, Shatz,

Harris-Looby, & Roberts, 2017; Virginia Department of Education, 2019).

In order to develop an understanding of those SETs who remain in special education

teaching positions beyond their initial three years of teaching, a transcendental

phenomenological study, using Seligman's (2011) well-being theory (WBT) as a theoretical

framework, was conducted. Based on the review of the literature to this point, using Seligman's

WBT to guide a study of well-being among SETs, has yet to be published. The choice to

investigate experienced SETs as opposed to novice teachers stemmed from a need to understand

why experienced SETs remain in the field when so many depart (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019;

Lesh et al., 2017). Additionally, there was a need to understand how they have perceived and

managed their working conditions over the duration of their careers (Bettini et al., 2018). For

this study, an experienced SET was defined as a SET who has taught for at least four years

(Ruppar et al., 2017).

This chapter includes: a background of the problem from a historical, social, and

theoretical context. The birth of special education in America and the many changes to the field

have shaped the role of present-day SETs, so these historical contexts were necessary to define

(Gerber, 2017; Yell et al., 2017a; Winzer, 1993). Socially, special education attrition research

consistently identifies the challenges that SETs face in the classroom, so a description of this

context was provided (Brittle, 2020; Cancio et al., 2018). Theoretically, the selection of the

WBT and its appropriateness for this inquiry is detailed with a description of its relevance to

various contexts and philosophical assumptions. A statement of the problem grounded in the

literature was also detailed. A clear purpose statement directing the study and the description of

the rationale for the research design selected was included. Lastly, a description of the research questions, grounded in Seligman's (2011) WBT, and the definition of relevant key terms were identified.

Background

Teaching is one of the most stressful occupations (Cook et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Um, Joo, & Her, 2019). Among teachers, SETs experience the greatest amount of stress, which was historically captured by the media in the early years of the profession (Brittle, 2020; Bettini et al., 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Garwood et al., 2018; Gerber, 2017; Shepherd et al., 2016). In comparison with other professions, a review of the literature revealed that the stress of SETs outweighs the stress experienced by those who work in nursing or medicine (Jennings et al., 2017). With job-related experiences contributing to SET stress levels, most SETs will choose to depart the field within their first three years of teaching, leaving lasting and costly societal impacts (Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Lesh et al., 2017). Due to the current critical shortage of SETs, and that SETs tend to depart within the first three years of teaching, it was of empirical significance to determine how experienced SETs are faring within their roles (Lesh et al., 2017). In focusing on the well-being of teachers, Seligman's (2011) well-being theory was selected to frame this study around the five pillars of well-being. Considering the historical development, societal impact, and theoretical underpinnings of the well-being of SETs, there were foundational elements that had to be explored in order to fully understand the problem at hand.

Historical Context

In the 20th century, the well-being of the nation was thought to stem from education (Gerber, 2017). According to Gerber (2017), individualized instruction was born out of this

mindset at the Henry Street Settlement House in New York City in the early 20th century. Elizabeth Farrell, a one-room schoolhouse teacher who moved to New York City with strong social and moral convictions to improve public education, introduced the concept of ungraded classrooms in 1903. Her practice of providing instruction for all students grew substantially and society took note. As quoted by Gerber (2017), in 1908, The New York Times described the work of "special class teachers" as, "…exhausting work, because they must put all of their vitality, their energy, and their enthusiasm into work from which there are no returns…" (p.11).

Although teachers worked for decades to individualize instruction for students, in the 1970's, only 20% of the nation's children with disabilities were receiving educational services and their instruction was not individually appropriate (Yell, Katsiyannis, & Bradley, 2017). It was not until November 19, 1975, that the federal government mandated the education for all students through the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children (EAHC). This legislation introduced the nationwide necessity for individualized instruction within the public education system and provided grants to higher education institutions to prepare special education teachers (Gerber, 2017; Yell et al., 2017). However, it was quickly noticed how inadequately prepared the federal government was to provide the necessary resources to educate all students (Gerber, 2017) and local schools and communities felt the pressure.

In 1990, EAHC became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Yell et al., 2017; Winzer, 1993). Since 1990, IDEA was amended in 1997 and again in 2004. As reflected within the changes to the legislation, what began as an emphasis to provide all students with access to education, had developed into an emphasis to provide all students with access to effective instruction (Yell et al., 2017). Teacher effectiveness is derived from a teacher's training, a teacher's personal beliefs, and a teacher's confidence about his or her students (Love,

Toland, Usher, Campbell, & Spriggs, 2019). In addressing adequate teacher preparation, the IDEA 2004 revisions indicated that SETs must be highly qualified (Sindelar, Pua, Fisher, Peyton, Brownell, & Mason-Williams, 2018). However, the IDEA 2004 legislation provided no direction for the recruitment and retention of SETs (Sindelar et al., 2018).

In providing each American child with access to a free, appropriate, and effective education, the responsibilities of SETs have increased and unceasingly morphed in order to meet students' unique educational needs and to meet the requirements of IDEA (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018; Yell et al., 2017). The 1908 impression of "special teachers" is not lacking in its consistency with the experience of present-day SETs. SETs have one of the most challenging and stressful roles in public education (Garwood et al., 2018; Shepherd et al., 2016). Grappling with the ongoing stress associated with teaching special education, SETs are prone to burnout (Cancio et al., 2018; Um et al., 2019). With many SETs succumbing to burnout, the field of special education has become increasingly impacted by teacher attrition, leaving a residual SET shortage (Cancio et al., 2018). With almost one-third of SETs fleeing within their first three years of teaching, the well-being of experienced SETs currently working in the field is an intriguing phenomenon (Bettini et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Lesh et al., 2017).

Social Context

Nationally, teacher attrition costs 4.9 billion dollars a year (University Council for Education Administration, 2018). When considering the field of special education, SET attrition is the leading cause for SET shortages (Cancio et al., 2018; Lesh et al., 2017). The shortage of SETs is expansive, impacting nearly every state in America (Dewey et al., 2017; Lesh et al., 2017). Virginia is currently experiencing a critical shortage for SETs, which outranks shortages

existent in other teaching disciplines (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). One of the greatest challenges when addressing the SET shortage is the retention of certified SETs, as some novice SETs are hired on provisional teaching licenses and are seeking certification (Brittle, 2020; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Brownell et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Lesh et al., 2017; Wong, Ruble, Yu, & McGrew, 2017). When considering the influences of SET stress, SETs have cited poor working conditions, managing their dynamic role, workload manageability issues, and lack of administrative support related to a distorted understanding of the role of the SET (Bettini et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2019; Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Conley & You, 2018; Fowler et al., 2019; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Lesh et al., 2017; Um et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2017). Additionally, when SETs were surveyed regarding what they feel they need in order to be successful, the top-ranking factors were the availability of resources and instructional tools to meet the needs of students' IEPs, smaller caseloads and class sizes, and administrators who support the IEP process (Fowler et al., 2019). The recruitment and subsequent retention of teachers is critical to future outcomes for students (Podolsky, Kini, Darling-Hammond, & Bishop, 2019; MacIntyre et al., 2019). With special education experiencing a critical shortage of teachers and many job-related factors influencing a negative affect among teachers, SETs' well-being is a necessary inquiry, nationally and locally. This inquiry also bears an importance to student outcomes (Cook et al., 2017; Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing, 2019; MacIntyre et al., 2019; Um, Joo, & Her, 2018).

Theoretical Context

There is a link between teacher well-being and teacher effectiveness (Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing, 2019; Mankin, von der Embse, Renshaw, & Ryan, 2018). In 2011,

Seligman (2011) created a model of well-being, which includes the following five separate

constructs: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment

(PERMA). Situated within the field of positive psychology, PERMA seeks to identify the

positive individual strengths that support the elements of well-being and lead to flourishment

(Seligman, 2011). When considering SETs, Seligman's (2011) model assisted in determining

which personal characteristics, experiences, working conditions, supports, or activities have been

instrumental or detrimental to the flourishing of SETs who have remained in special education

teaching positions beyond their novice teaching years and into their experienced years.

Previous SET attrition studies emphasized role problems, workload, lack of support, and

inadequate preparation as causes for attrition (Cancio et al., 2018; Hagaman & Casey, 2018;

Mathews et al., 2017). Previous SET attrition studies have created a rich and informative

literature base indicating what is driving SETs away from the profession. However, what is left

to understand is the state of experienced SETs' well-being among the challenges they face. In

order to fully understand what can be done to address the issues already identified, an

understanding of the SETs who have stayed is necessitated (Carver-Thomas & Darling-

Hammond, 2019; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Lesh et al., 2017). Using Seligman's (2011)

PERMA model, a rich description of experienced SETs' subjective well-being can be sought

within the context of the reality of their experiences, which situates this study appropriately

within a transcendental phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994). Not only did this

investigation unveil the strengths of currently practicing SETs, which may have equipped them

to manage the challenges in the field, but this inquiry may also emphasize the constructs within

well-being which may require additional assessment and support. As Seligman (2011) indicates,

each construct of well-being is individually teachable, which indicates that within each construct of well-being, growth can be sought (Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing, 2019).

Conclusion

Stress experienced by SETs influences their choice to remain in the field or depart teaching for a different profession (Brittle, 2020; Cancio et al., 2018). Historically, the work of the first SETs was described as all-consuming (Gerber, 2017). While this historical description of SET experience was documented in 1908, based on the literature, the experiences of present-day SETs remains synonymous (Bettini et al., 2019; Cancio et al., 2018; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Gavish, 2017; Garwood, Werts, Varghese, & Gosey, 2018; McKay, 2019). Theoretically, with the affective experience of SETs being influenced by the documented stressors within the field, the well-being of those SETs who chose to remain in the field into their fourth year of teaching and beyond is of significance and is framed well within Seligman's (2011) well-being theory.

<div align="center">

Situation to Self

</div>

In demonstrating commitment to the field of special education, this researcher designed a qualitative study of the well-being of special education teachers. As the literature conveys, the well-being of SETs is threatened by stress (Brittle, 2020; Cancio et al., 2018). The capturing of experienced SETs' well-being was warranted, as I sought to discover what it takes to thrive amidst the stressors. In preparing for qualitative inquiry, it was necessary for me to identify the research paradigm to base my perceptions throughout the research process. Lastly, the philosophical assumptions that I brought to the research process were identified.

Motivation

As a special education teacher, I found much satisfaction within my teaching role. Although I was satisfied and felt accomplishment during my time in the classroom, I decided to temporarily depart the profession to care for my own young children. In demonstrating my personal commitment to the field of special education, and in preparation for the day that I will return to the classroom, I embarked on a journey to understand what it takes to be a long-serving special education teacher. Through the process of this research, I hoped to gain further insight for my own professional development and to offer direction for other teachers who seek to flourish as educators, while optimally serving their students and school communities. Additionally, research related to the attrition of professionals is of interest to me because I departed the profession of nursing, another field laden with turnover, to pursue a career in special education.

Research Paradigm

Research paradigms encompass the "…commitments, beliefs, values, methods, outlooks…" (Schwandt, 2002, p. 217) that researchers use to interpret the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While PERMA is situated within positive psychology (Seligman, 2011), in completing this study, I did so with a social constructivist mindset. Social constructivists seek to understand the humans in the world in which they work through subjective development (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002). Lev Vygotsky indicated that humans construct knowledge and psychological mechanisms from external stimuli. The constructed knowledgebase of human beings ultimately assists them in managing the struggles around them (Vygotsky, Luria, & Knox, 1993). Social constructivists do not evaluate one perception, or reality, over another and all perceptions are reflective of individual realities

(Patton, 2002). Through this study, I sought to generate information regarding other SETs'

explanations of their reality. Carrillo and Flores (2018) emphasized that the wisdom and

expertise of experienced teachers is vitally important to educational research. Ultimately, I

aimed to discover the multiple realities portrayed by SET participants through the detailed

accounts of their experiences, expertise, and wisdom.

Philosophical Assumptions

  Philosophical assumptions direct research goals and outcomes. Philosophical

assumptions are rooted in the communities in which we train and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Creswell and Poth (2018) described that philosophical assumptions are unavoidably present in

qualitative inquiry, so their identification in the research process is necessary. Creswell and Poth

(2018) identified that there are ontological assumptions, epistemological assumptions,

axiological assumptions, and methodological assumptions. All researchers bring assumptions to

the research process, but qualitative researchers are tasked with addressing these assumptions

(Creswell & Poth, 2018).

  Ontological assumption. Ontological assumption relates to the nature of reality and

directs the capturing of reality through multiple views (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In aiming to

discover the well-being of experienced SETs, I sought to generate data based on the accounts of

the multiple realities as portrayed by multiple SETs. In seeking multiple realities, I acknowledge

that these realities will differ, as reality is individually constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

When analyzing the data generated from this study, I worked to develop themes from the

multiple realities captured and through various methods of data collection.

  Epistemological assumption. The epistemological assumption in qualitative research

entails the lessening of distance between the researcher and participants in order to depict a true

depiction of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In seeking to generate data from multiple realities, I used individual semi-structured interviews to collect subjective information from each participant. Additionally, throughout the research process, I used bracketing to set aside my own experiences and opinions to naively take in the individual realities and experiences of the SET participants (Moustakas, 1994), which supports the epistemological assumption. According to Patton (2002), it is through epistemological supports, that validity is generated.

Axiological assumption. Researchers bring values to the research process, but qualitative researchers are tasked with identifying these values (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Axiological assumption generates the acknowledgement of values and biases that are innately present within my role as the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I positioned myself as a former SET. Having worked in special education, I acknowledge that no two positions are congruent, and the retrieval of multiple realities, while utilizing epoché, are necessary for the study of SETs' well-being. Additionally, I value the unique strengths and experiences of each individual person and wanted to discover the strengths and experiences of individual SETs to construct an extensive view of SET well-being.

Methodological assumption. Methodological assumption entails the use of inductive logic to focus on details before drawing generalizations, studying the topic within the appropriate context, and employing an emergent design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In seeking to understand the status of experienced SETs, I chose to generate data directly from SETs who had, at least, begun their fourth year of teaching, situating my inquiry within the appropriate context. As I gained field experiences, I rearticulated my research questions as my field experience directed. Lastly, in aligning with transcendental phenomenology, I completed the research process following a process of bracketing and the use of an epoché (Moustakas, 1994).

Conclusion

In preparing to study the well-being of experienced SETs, I felt motivated to portray my commitment to the field of special education and the SETs who are currently working in the field. In striving to convey my commitment, I developed my study using a social constructivist research paradigm. Social constructivism directs data collection from multiple realities, as reality is individually developed. Social constructivism was interwoven throughout my philosophical assumptions, which directed my research goals and outcomes ontologically, epistemologically, axiologically, and methodologically. As a qualitative researcher, I included my situation to self, as I was tasked with identifying my position in the process as the researcher.

Problem Statement

With a need for SETs throughout the United States (Dewey et al., 2017), and attrition contributing to the shortage of SETs, it is imperative to know what factors impede SETs' well-being (Cook et al., 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). In striving to gain the greatest insight, subjective descriptions of SETs' career-related experiences were sought (Carrillo & Flores, 2019). Through these subjective descriptions, common experiences emerged as barriers to well-being. By electing to investigate the SETs which have remained working within the field, the information gleaned can support the retention of teachers in a field with distinguishably high turnover rates (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

According to Dewey et al. (2017), there was a 17% decline in SET employment in the United States between the years of 2005 and 2012. This decline is concurrent with the increased prevalence of specific disabilities (Dewey et al., 2017). With 316 vacant SET teaching positions, this problem is critical to the state of Virginia (Virginia Department of Education, 2017). A main contributor to this shortage is the high rate of SET turnover (Billingsley & Bettini, 2017).

Turnover is most likely within the first three years, or novice years, of teaching with one-third of novice teachers leaving the teaching profession (Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Hagaman & Casey, 2018).

The current literature on SET attrition identifies the characteristics of those who have left the field, the reasons for dissatisfaction in the workplace and the distinctly high levels of stress that they experience (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Brittle, 2020; Cancio et al., 2018; Conley & You, 2016; Mathews et al., 2017). With the consistent representation of the contributive factors of SET attrition and the negative indicators of teacher well-being, the literature contains limited data regarding the strengths of experienced SETs that exist within the elements underpinning well-being (Brittle, 2020; Mankin et al., 2018). This description could provide insight into why experienced teachers have remained in the special education field (Lesh et al., 2017; Mrstik, Pearl, Hopkins Vasquez, 2019). Seligman's (2011) well-being theory contains the five elements of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment that underpinned by individual strengths. Seligman's theory has not been applied to experienced SETs, although previous literature has called for the study of retained and experienced SETs (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Hagaman & Casey, 2018). The problem was that strengths and well-being of SETs who choose to stay in the field beyond their novice teaching years was unknown.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the subjective well-being of experienced special education teachers in southeastern Virginia. At this stage in the research, well-being was generally defined as the "…positive aspects…of teachers' successful and healthy functioning at work…" (Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2015, p. 289) and experienced SETs were defined as those who have taught special education for at least four

years, hold a valid special education teaching license, and are actively working in a special

education teaching position (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Ruppar, Roberts, & Olson, 2017).

SETs work in a variety of settings and have unique role-related experiences (Bettini et al., 2019).

In discovering the complex and unique roles of SETs, no specific setting or teaching assignment

was isolated for this study. The theory guiding this study was Dr. Martin Seligman's well-being

theory (WBT) as it identifies five separate elements, underpinned by strengths, which contribute

to an individual's ability to flourish (Seligman, 2011). The WBT was chosen because it has not

been applied to SETs. This application provided a fresh perspective on the factors that

contribute to SET retention amidst documented workplace challenges. Seligman's WBT is

based upon individual strengths, so it is fitting and was assistive in discovering why experienced

SETs have remained in the field. Lastly, Seligman (2011) indicated that well-being is something

that can be enhanced, so this study provided an insight into personal well-being. This could be

helpful with identifying opportunities for well-being improvement for educational stakeholders.

<div align="center">**Significance of the Study**</div>

This study was framed by Seligman's (2011) well-being theory and represents a unique

approach to addressing the challenge of SET attrition which yields practical, empirical, and

theoretical significance. Practically, through this study I aimed to address the need for studying

those SETs who have remained in the field of special education, which could be helpful to

educators, administrators, key stakeholders, and to those who prepare teachers in higher

education. Empirically, through this study I sought to fill the gap in the literature regarding

SETs' affective experiences and retention. Theoretically, through this study, I strived to address

the well-being of stayers in the field by using Seligman's WBT to frame this inquiry.

Considering these areas of significance, this study was necessary and indicative of a relevant inquiry that was responsive to the current challenges in the workplace for SET.

Practical Significance

Teacher attrition costs the nation 4.9 billion dollars annually (University Council for Education Administration, 2018). Within special education, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) indicate that SET attrition is a costly issue with states losing several hundred thousand dollars annually due to the fleeing of SET recruits. Gaining an understanding of what is supporting the well-being of experienced SETs, year-after-year, could offer additional insight on teachers' coping strategies and strengths. These insights could be integrated into the further development of induction and mentorship programs for novice teachers. There is a lack of current literature about teachers' coping strategies (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Since these programs have shown to impact teacher retention, if they were to be developed with a greater understanding of the well-being of the SETs who have stayed, this could support retention and decrease the loss of educational funds (Billingsley, 2004; Lesh et al., 2017; Mankin et al., 2018).

Previous studies have indicated the need to study experienced SETs, as an in-depth analysis is necessary for understanding why some SETs remain in the field for many years (Billingsley, 2004; Carrillo & Flores, 2018; Lesh et al., 2017). The significance of this study was enhanced by its retrospective undertones, as the goal was to discover the overall descriptions of experienced SET well-being during the current and previous teaching years. Seligman (2011) indicates that acknowledging well-being in the past, present, and looking towards the future with hope, is helpful in gaining an understanding of well-being. In collecting a retrospective description of well-being, the growth of teachers' knowledge basis, founding knowledge upon their previous knowledge base, can be sought (Brunsting, Strekovic, & Lane, 2016; Lesh et al.,

2017). This information could be useful to special education program administrators as they

strive to understand the role of the SET and develop professional development opportunities for

SETs, as professional learning communities (PLCs) have been documented to enhance well-

being (Bettini et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2019; Lesh et al., 2017; Owen, 2016). Additionally,

the information gleaned from this inquiry could support the development of pre-service teachers,

as they are preparing for their complex teaching roles and establishing their professional

identities (McKay, 2019).

Empirical Significance

Empirically, many previous studies on teacher attrition are representative of the negative

affective experiences that SETs encounter, such as stress and burnout, which have led to SETs

departing the field (Cancio et al., 2018; Mankin et al., 2018; Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2015;

Robinson et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2017). Among the positive affects which have shown to

support SET retention, self-efficacy, resilience, job satisfaction, and teacher commitment have

been explored as mediators for SET retention within the literature (Lesh et al., 2017; Love et al.,

2018; Mankin et al., 2018; Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, & Weatherby-Fell, 2016; Zee &

Koomen, 2018). Rather than focus on retention-related or attrition-related phenomena, the aim

of this study was to highlight the holistic well-being of retained SETs. Wellness has been

studied in the context of stress and the manifestation of illnesses related to ongoing experiences

of high stress (Ansley, Houchins, & Varjas, 2016).

Using the lens of positive psychology, through this study, I strived to apply a fresh

perspective to the problem of SET attrition by collecting detailed subjective accounts of how

SETs have managed their careers, focusing on the various elements of well-being, as identified

by Seligman (2011). I also aimed to gain a retrospective description of the elements of well-

being through various significant points within an experienced SET's career. Although the

literature on the negative contributors to teacher attrition is necessary, when considered in

conjunction with literature on the positive contributors to SET retention, a deeper understanding

can be drawn and applied to assist those preparing pre-service educators and those supporting

novice teachers (Cook et al., 2016; Mankin et al., 2018).

Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, the WBT has previously been applied to the workplace (Kun, Balagh, &

Krasz., 2016). In the workplace, well-being mediated work performance, attendance, and

motivation (Kelly & Snow, 2019). Additionally, the WBT has been applied within the realm of

education, where it has been applied mostly to students as posited by Seligman (2011), who

called for positive schools. The WBT has been applied to entire schools, inclusive of students,

teachers, and parents (White & Murray, 2015). While it has been applied to teachers within the

school setting, in an aim to enhance well-being, it was applied in a private all-boys' school in

Australia, where the participation of SETs or learners with exceptionalities (LWE) is unknown

(Seligman, 2011). While previous studies have used the WBT as a basis for the provision of

well-being enhancing interventions, this study used the WBT to collectively and subjectively

capture the factors which have supported or impeded SET well-being throughout the duration of

the teaching career, as this is the premise of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This

study may provide the basis for developing a study on necessary well-being interventions for

SETs. Based on my current review of the literature, WBT has not been used to develop an

understanding on the well-being of experienced SETs. Additionally, when considering various

workplace satisfaction theories, these seem to deemphasize the personal experience (Oldham &

Hackman, 2010). However, the WBT emphasizes the strengths of the individual and provided me with the framework necessary to highlight personal lived experiences.

Conclusion

Roberts, Gallagher, Daro, Iruka, and Sarver (2019) indicated that further study into teachers' positive attributes which contribute to their well-being is necessary in understanding how teachers manage the stressors in their professional lives. Empirically, by providing a detailed narrative of experienced SET well-being, investigated through the lens of the WBT, the current well-being status of other currently serving SETs and general educators could personally be considered through the same lens. Practically, although not generalizable, the detailed description of experienced SETs' well-being can be used to support the development of studies on well-being enhancing practices and interventions for teachers in the K-12 school setting (Mankin et al., 2018; Ruppar et al., 2017). Theoretically, this study bears significance because the WBT has not been applied to SETs and could offer a fresh perspective on issues related to SET retention.

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Research Questions

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This transcendental phenomenological study was guided by one central question and five sub-questions. These questions were developed in alignment with Seligman's (2011) WBT. The central question directed my inquiry towards the holistic well-being of SETs. Each sub-question is grounded in a singular element of well-being, which will aid in putting together a holistic description of SET well-being.

Central Question

How do experienced special education teachers describe their well-being within their professional roles?

Seligman (2011) indicated that the maximization of the five elements of the WBT contribute to the choices we make in life and, in the context of the workplace, well-being generally contributes to lower turnover rates (Neumeier, Brook, Ditchburn, & Phillipe, 2017). Among various professions, teaching is ranked among the most stressful, with SETs experiencing greater amounts of stress than their general education counterparts (Cancio et al., 2018; Skaavlik & Skaalvik, 2018). Teachers' stress may be derived from various job demands (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Because SETs have complex teaching roles , there is a need to know the state of the existent and experienced teacher workforce (Bettini et al., 2019; Cancio et al., 2018; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Gavish, 2017; Garwood, Werts, Varghese, & Gosey, 2018; Lesh et al., 2017; McKay, 2019). Investigating teacher well-being through Seligman's theory, offered the opportunity to discover the strengths of the educator, the supportive conditions of the workplace, and could lend opportunities for improvement, within the five elements of well-being.

Sub-Question 1

What role-related experiences generate positive emotions for SETs?

Seligman (2011) indicated that happiness and life satisfaction are factors of positive emotion and that positive emotion can only be measured via subjective reports. When personal strengths are being utilized, the highest positive emotions are experienced. Although "feeling good" is important to well-being, it is not the sole contributor, so positive emotions must be explored separately from the other elements of well-being. In the workplace, happiness has shown to enhance energy levels, productivity, and internal motivation (Singh & Aggarwal, 2018). Among SETs, job satisfaction has been reported to stem from having the ability to best serve students (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Harris et al., 2019). However, job satisfaction is an

indicator of satisfaction as it pertains to the defined role of the SET. In collecting data to answer

this question, I sought to discover the presence of positive emotions within the entirety of the

dynamic role of SETs, acknowledging prior experiences and not limiting my search to the

satisfaction derived from defined job responsibilities, but through the professional experiences as

perceived by individual SETs.

Sub-Question 2

What role-related experiences are engaging for SETs?

Seligman (2011) describes engagement as the experiences that make time stop for

the individual and the tasks that are completely absorbing. Unlike positive emotion, which can

be subjectively described in real-time, engagement can only be sought retrospectively.

Engagement occurs when strengths are employed, as it occurs when skills meet the level of

challenge (Falecki, Leach, & Green, 2019).

Sub-Question 3

How do SETs describe their role-related relationships?

Seligman (2011) indicates that many of life's high points occur in the presence of other

people and that there is profound impact of other peoples' presence or absence on the

well-being of an individual. Among SETs, mentorship and induction programs have shown to

influence a SET's intent to depart the field (Mathews et al., 2017; Mrstik, Pearl, Hopkins,

Vasquez, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). Additionally, administrative supports and team efficacy

have shown to influence SET retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Conley &

You, 2016; Robinson et al., 2019). Among SETs, the perception of workload manageability was

influenced by collegial relationships in the workplace (Bettini, Jones, Brownell, Conroy, &

Leite, 2018). Among non-teachers, inclusion, affiliation, and influence predicted job satisfaction

(Boyd, Nowell, Yang, & Hano, 2018), so the role of relationships in sustaining SETs' careers could provide insight into their overall job satisfaction, as well.

Sub-Question 4

What role-related experiences are meaningful for SETs?

Teachers' meaning at work influenced teacher-student relationships and, indirectly, predicted teacher job satisfaction (Lavy & Bocker, 2018). Seligman (2011) defined meaning as "…belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self…" (p. 17). Meaning contributes to well-being, as it is typically pursued for its own sake, and is identifiable in isolation. Fish and Stephens (2010) described that SETs indicate experiencing job satisfaction when they can help students. Through this inquiry, I sought to determine consistency with the previously established sources of SET satisfaction and discover what other experiences may contribute to the element of meaningfulness.

Sub-Question 5

What role-related experiences generate a sense of accomplishment for SETs?

A previous study indicated that 67% of experienced teachers reported a low sense of accomplishment (Rumschlang, 2017). Additionally, teachers struggle to remain dedicated when they feel as though they cannot be successful (Rumschlang, 2017). Accomplishment, synonymous with achievement, is pursued for its own sake and may or may not create residual positive emotions (Seligman, 2011). In establishing validity for the PERMA-profiler, accomplishment was strongly correlated to less burnout in the workplace (Butler & Kern, 2016). Since the experience of accomplishment is a component of a flourishing life, this question will guide the data collection towards discovering how SETs experience achievement. Based on my literature review so far, teachers, both special educators and general educators, who have

demonstrated high achievement in pre-career test scores, are more likely to depart the field (Billingsley, 2004). There is a residual need to know how teachers, specifically SETs, experience accomplishment related to their teaching roles.

Definitions

1. *Well-being* – The positive components of teachers' successful functioning at work (Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2015).

2. *Well-being theory (WBT)* – A theory, also known as PERMA, developed in 2011 by Martin E.P. Seligman, a positive psychologist. Underpinning the theory are strengths, which support the five elements of well-being: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011).

3. *Flourishing*—Flourishing is the "…dynamic optimal state of psychosocial functioning that arises from performing well across multiple psychosocial domains" (Butler & Kern, 2016, p. 2).

4. *Special Education Teacher (SET)* – SETs are responsible for providing individualized instruction for students of diverse backgrounds presenting with a range of educational needs. They must have an extensive knowledge base in special education practices, while remaining familiar with general education content and standards. SETs must remain proficient in the various technologies of instruction and assessment. SETs are also required to collaborate extensively, in order to provide for the educational needs of learners with exceptionalities (Shepherd et al., 2016).

5. *Learner with exceptionality (LWE)* – A LWE is a student who has been identified as having one or more disabilities and who may be eligible for special education services or other related services (Council for Exceptional Children, 2019).

6. *Experienced Special Education Teacher* – The literature currently identifies novice SETs as those teachers within their first three years of teaching (Bettini et al., 2018). Experienced SETs were defined as those who have taught special education for at least three years, hold a valid special education teaching license, and are actively working in a special education teaching position (Ruppar et al., 2017).

7. *Affect*- "An umbrella term for a range of emotional phenomena, from the experience of pleasant or unpleasant feelings to the goal-oriented physiological and cognitive changes associated with specific emotional concepts, all of which include longer term mood states" (Sbarra & Coan, 2018, p. 41).

Summary

The problem is that teachers are most likely to leave the teaching profession due to stress (Brittle, 2020; Wong et al., 2017). With one-third of SETs departing the field within their first three years of teaching, the well-being of SETs who have remained in the profession for longer than three years, is a study which will empirically contribute to the limited body of knowledge on the state of those SETs who do remain in the profession (Bettini et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ruppar et al., 2017). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the subjective well-being of experienced special education teachers in southeastern Virginia. This chapter included a background on SET attrition, retention, and SET shortage in the United States, a description of my situation within this study, a problem statement grounded in the literature, a clear purpose statement, a description of the empirical, theoretical, and practical significances of this study, and the definition of relevant key terms.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

According to Cancio et al. (2018), one-third of novice special education teachers flee the field within their first three years of teaching. This turnover rate has left a SET shortage among nearly every state in the United States (Dewey et al., 2017). This shortage is apparent in the state of Virginia, with 316 vacant SET positions (Virginia Department of Education, 2017). Generally, the shortage of SETs exceeds vacancies in general education teaching positions, and this was consistent with the 2016 data of teaching vacancies in Virginia (Conley & You, 2016; Virginia Department of Education, 2017). Kern, Waters, Adler, and White (2014), discovered that elements of school workers' well-being predicted life satisfaction, work engagement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. Based upon this and the review of other relevant theoretical frameworks, the selection of the WBT was discussed and supported as the beneficial and appropriate framework to guide this transcendental phenomenological study. Additionally, this literature review provides an overview of the current data regarding why SETs are departing the field and the affective experiences of SETs that are influencing these departures. Lastly, this literature review directs this study towards the discovery of experienced SETs' well-being, which could potentially benefit all educational stakeholders (Kern et al., 2014; Global Happiness and Wellbeing Council, 2019; Mankin et al., 2018).

Theoretical Framework

While theories central to the well-being of humans are multiple, they are representative of unique approaches to inquiry (Butler & Kern, 2016). Some well-being theories are focused on hedonics, or emotions, while others are focused on eudaimonics, or what it means to live the good life, and some theories blend the two (Butler & Kern, 2016; Holdsworth, 2019). An

example of a commonly referenced blended theory is Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (Butler & Kern, 2016).

The WBT was introduced in 2011 by Martin P. Seligman (2011). Seligman is the founder of positive psychology (Kun, Balogh, & Krasz, 2017), which is "…what we choose for its own sake" (Seligman, 2011, p. 11). The roots of positive psychology can be found within a presidential address given by Seligman in 1998 (Kun, Balogh, & Krasz, 2017). In the address, Seligman indicated that psychology was not a field that is solely focused on illness and damage, but also on individual strengths (Kun, Balogh, & Krasz, 2017). Positive psychology studies the optimal functioning of individuals or groups (Kern et al., 2014). Out of the field of positive psychology came an initial theory in 2002- authentic happiness (Seligman, 2011). Authentic happiness, rooted in hedonics, proposed that happiness could be analyzed within three different elements. As indicated by Seligman's original theory, the elements of authentic happiness are positive emotion, engagement, and meaning (Seligman, 2011). Ultimately, Seligman (2011) shifted the focus of positive psychology from happiness to well-being and the WBT was introduced in 2011.

The goal of authentic happiness was to increase life satisfaction, but the goal of the well-being theory is to increase flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Flourishing is the "…dynamic optimal state of psychosocial functioning that arises from performing well across multiple psychosocial domains" (Kern & Butler, 2016, p. 2). According to Seligman (2011), one cannot experience well-being in one's own head. One must have meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment in order to flourish (Seligman, 2011). Therefore, the WBT is not about simply feeling good, but is inclusive of constructs that can be measured (Kern & Butler, 2016; Seligman, 2011). In introducing the WBT, Seligman (2011) changed the focus of positive

psychology from happiness to flourishing. According to Butler and Kern (2017), well-being is not the lack of negative affect, but the existence of positive affect. For this reason, the WBT was chosen to frame the study of long-serving SETs. In reviewing the literature, the challenges that SETs encounter are consistently experienced, so the reality of the SET well-being amidst the challenges, fits well within the WBT. However, within the negative affective experiences, the WBT was used to discover the presence of positive affective experiences among the SETs.

PERMA Model

Within the WBT are some of the original elements of authentic happiness, including positive emotion, engagement, and meaning (Seligman, 2011). However, Seligman expanded these elements, adding relationships and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). Thus, within the WBT is PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment) (Butler & Kern, 2016; Kun et al., 2017; Seligman, 2011). Each element can be sought for its own sake, can be measured independently, and contributes to well-being (Seligman, 2011). Seligman (2011) also indicates that each element can be individually modified and can be "…robustly raised" (Seligman, 2011, p. 32). However, McQuaid and Kern (2018) compare well-being to body weight. Genetics influence well-being and it requires lifestyle changes, consistent practice and learning what individually works for oneself, over the course of time to bring about change (McQuaid & Kern, 2018). Additionally, the elements of well-being are underpinned by individual strengths (Seligman, 2011).

Positive emotions are the good feelings that motivate human behavior (Kun, Balogh, & Krasz, 2017). Negative and positive emotions can be experienced simultaneously by humans (Butler & Kern, 2014). Happiness, hope, joy, and calmness are examples of positive emotions (McQuaid & Kern, 2017; Neumeier, Brook, Ditchburn, and Sckopke, 2017). Watkins, Emmons,

Greaves, and Bell (2019) indicated that joy is a positive affect necessary for well-being and supported the connection between gratitude and joy. Similarly, Seligman (2011) explained that when we practice gratitude, we receive benefits from reflecting on pleasant memories. Among 1,979 participants across the United States, Ironson, Banerjee, Fitch, and Krause (2018) found a linkage between low positive affect and an increased C-Reactive Protein (CRP), which is a biomarker for inflammation in the human body. Similarly, Lin et al. (2018) reported that a connection between affect and health has been consistently confirmed. Lin et al. (2018) found independent association among positive affect and self-reported health. Therefore, positive emotion is not only essential to a person's emotional well-being, but is also of influence on their physical health status (Holdsworth, 2019). Seligman (2011) identified positive emotions as a lasting element from the previous authentic happiness theory and a cornerstone to the WBT. Positive emotion can only be assessed via subjective reports (Seligman, 2011).

Previously, the study of engagement has focused on flow (Butler & Kern, 2016). Butler and Kern (2016) described flow as an extreme level of psychological concentration, including intense concentration or attachment (Kun, Balogh, & Krasz, 2017). Seligman (2011) indicated that an individual's engagement is "…what makes time stop for you" (Seligman, 2011, p. 16). Engagement is central to happiness and is an element of authentic happiness theory, which remains an element of WBT (Seligman, 2011). In the workplace, relationships have been proven between engagement and job satisfaction, job performance, profitability, customer satisfaction, and employee retention (Anthony-McCann, Ellinger, Astakova, & Halbesleben, 2017). Engagement can only be determined subjectively and retrospectively, as thought and feeling are absent during the flow state (Seligman, 2011). When engagement was studied among teachers, it

was negatively associated with emotional exhaustion, which is a component of burnout according to Maslach (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Relationships are fundamental to life and have consistently influenced the physical and emotional health of human beings (Butler & Kern, 2016; Pietromonaco & Collins, 2018). Butler and Kern (2016) cited that over 18,000 articles were published prior to their publication, documenting the predicative relationship between social relationships and health outcomes. Physiologically, the presence of supportive individuals during stress can buffer cardiovascular reactivity, as manifested by an increased pulse and/or blood pressure (Pietromonaco & Collins, 2018). In the workplace, relationships predicted organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Kern, 2014). Sbarra and Coan (2018) indicated that social relationships influence affective responses, which is consistent with Seligman's (2011) indication that the best moments in life are experienced among other people. Among expert SETs, the need to form relationships with colleagues, community members, and parents was expressed to a degree that extended beyond the Council for Exceptional Children's explanation of collaboration (Ruppar et al., 2017). Relationships with colleagues are paramount to aiding SETs in managing their responsibilities (Cancio et al., 2018). Therefore, relationships are imperative to the career of the SET and the far-reaching health and emotional implications of positive relationships underscore their criticality as an element of well-being. Based on a previous study of teachers, social relationships representative of value consonance may be positively related to teacher well-being (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Meaning was described by Butler and Kern (2016) as having a direction, working towards a purpose, and feeling that one's life and contribution are valuable. Meaning is essential to the individual when he or she encounters life's challenges and may contribute to a person's

positive affect (Czkierda, Banik, Park, & Luszczynska, 2017). Meaning has been linked to greater physical health, reduced mortality risk, and increased life satisfaction (Butler & Kern, 2016). In a study of occupational stress among adults employed in a variety of career settings, individuals who reported higher levels of meaningful work, reported lower levels of depressive symptoms and reported engaging in behaviors that are risky to physical health (Lease, Ingram, Brown, 2019). Physiologically, meaning may impact the body's regulation of immune and stress-responses, impacting physical health (Czkierda et al., 2017). Meaning is not solely subjective and retains the ability to be objectively distinguished (Seligman, 2011). For example, a fleeting moment may be subjectively determined as meaningful in the moment, but when objectively reflected upon later, may not be of meaningful value (Seligman, 2011). Teachers of students with severe disabilities reported feeling that their role was primarily serving as an advocate for their students (Ruppar et al., 2017).

Accomplishment is typically pursued for its own sake, even when it does not yield meaning or positive emotion (Seligman, 2011). In western societies, achievement is recognized and acknowledged (Butler & Kern, 2016). Accomplishment can be determined by both subjective and objective measures, as success can be perceived differently (Butler & Kern, 2016). Accomplishment is one of three predictors for burnout, as well, as it is included on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Chetlan et al., 2019) and has been previously been used as an indicator for employee burnout. To achieve well-being, a person must be able to retrospectively determine what it is they have achieved (Kun, Balogh, & Krasz, 2017). Additionally, the celebration of positive life events enhances well-being (Pietromonaco & Collins, 2018).

Workplace Well-Being

Although the implications of the diminished elements of well-being were previously described along with PERMA, the overall relevance of well-being to the workplace is supported within the literature. With the increased prevalence for mental health issues within the workplace (Neumeier et al., 2017), well-being in the workplace is essentially fundamental to the success of an organization (Slemp, Kern, & Vella-Brodrick, 2015; Williams, Kern, & Waters, 2015). Additionally, because individuals spend a great deal of time at work, their multidimensional workplace well-being is incredibly relevant (Kun et al., 2017). Employees with diminished well-being may be less productive, have decreased ability to make decisions, may be more likely to be absent, and may make lacking contributions to the organization (Kun, 2017). There is value in studying the individual and contextual factors that influence workplace well-being when trying to develop an understanding of the conditions which contribute to the flourishing of individuals (Slemp et al., 2015).

Grounded within Seligman's (2011) WBT, Kern (2014) developed The Workplace PERMA Profiler, which addresses each element of well-being of the individual within the context of the workplace. The profiler also integrates self-reported health measures (McQuaid & Kern, 2017). As described by McQuaid and Kern (2017), much like body weight, one person's score may be just right for them, but may not match the makeup of another individual. The profiler is available to all consumers, for no charge, through the University of Pennsylvania (2019) to aid all people in stewarding their well-being (McQuaid & Kern, 2017). As McQuaid and Kern (2017) describe, the elements of well-being may fluctuate during different points of a career or life, but the survey can be used to provide a visual description of workplace well-being to assist employees in making informed choices.

The Well-Being Theory and Schools

With the introduction of the WBT, Seligman (2011) called for positive schools and advocated for well-being instruction in schools as a response to the prevalence of depression among young people (Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing, 2019). Seligman (2011) also indicated that well-being enhances the learning process, so it would be appropriate and beneficial to include in schools (Morrish, Rickard, Chin, & Vella-Broderick, 2018). The benefit of this could be due to the impact of schools on the influence of schools in maintaining cultural values (Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing, 2019; Kern et al., 2014). While Seligman's (2011) text speaks mainly to well-being instruction for students, it did not address the well-being modification of those who instruct students. However, Seligman (2011) discusses the findings of the Penn Resiliency Program, which aimed to provide students with coping skills for managing daily challenges. In discussing the results, Seligman (2011), indicated that the training of teachers or leaders was critical to this program, citing that effects were strong when teachers were trained and then closely supervised by the Penn Resiliency Program and concluded with the recommendation that teachers require intense training and ongoing supervision. Seligman (2011) also provided the example of the implementation of positive education at the Geelong Grammar School, where positive psychology was incorporated into all classes. After implementing this program, Seligman (2011) described that teachers were of high morale and that not a single teacher resigned. With teacher training being so influential to the outcome of students in this program, teacher well-being, is of significance, too. Most recently, this was confirmed by Halliday, Kern, Garrett, and Turnbull (2019) who utilized teachers as the providers of well-being curriculum. Halliday et al. (2019) identified the providers' training in well-being as imperative to adolescent mental health, which is consistent with Harding et al.'s (2019)

finding that teacher well-being predicted the well-being of students. The well-being of teachers

is not only relevant to the retention of the teacher workforce, but also to the well-being of

students (Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing, 2019; Morrish et al., 2018).

As of the most current report from the Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing

(2019), there is only one K-12 school in the United States which utilizes a school wide well-

being curriculum. This school is the Shipley School in Bryn Mawr in Pennsylvania. Since the

implementation of the school-wide well-being curriculum, students have experienced

improvements in most well-being domains and teacher surveys showed improved well-being,

demonstrating that schoolwide well-being efforts are fruitful, yet being underutilized in the

United States (Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing, 2019; White, 2016). With the

significance of teacher well-being to student outcomes (Global Council for Happiness and

Wellbeing, 2019; Harding et al., 2019; Morrish et al., 2018), there is still a limited availability of

literature regarding the well-being status of teachers (Bradley et al., 2018). In May 2017,

Congressman Tim Ryan called for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to research teacher

well-being. Although the bill was not passed, the significance of teacher well-being and the

critical need for further research was emphasized through this national action (Bradley et al.,

2018).

In 1975, Congress enacted Education for All Handicapped Children (EAHC) and

introduced the necessity for special education teachers (SET) within the public education system.

As of 2004, EAHC is known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and has

achieved its initial purpose of providing accessibility to a free and appropriate public education

for each American child (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2017). However, in providing each American

child with a free and appropriate education, the responsibilities of SETs have increased and

persistently morphed in order to meet students' educational needs. These increased

responsibilities have contributed to SETs having one of the most challenging and stressful roles

in public education (Garwood et al., 2018). Grappling with stressful roles, the field of special

education has become increasingly prone to teacher attrition, leaving a residual SET shortage

(Cancio et al., 2018). Based on the evidence that well-being was a predictor for job satisfaction,

organizational commitment, life satisfaction, and work engagement among school workers, well-

being served as an appropriate lens for investigating SET attrition from another point of view

(Kern et al., 2014). With almost one-third of SETs fleeing within their first three years of

teaching (Bettini et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019),

the well-being among experienced SETs is an intriguing phenomenon.

Related Literature

A recent phenomenological study found that all participants, all of whom were SETs,

entered the field of special education based upon a reported personal calling to teach learners

with exceptionalities (Lesh, Shatz, Harris-Looby, & Roberts, 2017). Similarly, among British

teachers, individuals reported that they entered the teaching profession primarily based on

intrinsic and altruistic motivations (Chiong, Menzies, & Meenakshi, 2017). Ultimately, teachers

are not primarily entering the field for external reasons, such as pay or benefits (Chiong et al.,

2017). Considering that the choice to become a teacher is driven largely by values and intrinsic

motivation, it is worth discovering how experienced SETs are faring within their role, while one-

third of novice SETs choose to exit the profession annually (Cancio et al., 2018; Skaalvik &

Skaalvik, 2018). In order to discover the current state of special education teachers, a review of

special education history is provided. Following this, a description of the known data regarding

SET retention and attrition is described. Consequences of ongoing stress is holistically explored,

from the pathophysiological impact on the human body to the impact on the teaching profession. The current literature regarding the stress management practices of teachers will also be considered.

Special Education History

Margaret Winzer (1993) indicated that development of the field of special education is aligned with social progression throughout history. The earliest records of special education can be traced back to the 1600's when pioneers scarcely documented their work and their students (Winzer, 1993). Because early records are sparse, the categorization and description of individuals with disabilities was not clearly delineated. A variety of individuals were grouped together, whether they were grappling with mental health disorders or living with a disability, they were identified as one (Rossa, 2017; Winzer, 1993). In the middle of the 18th century, Britain and Europe initiated the systematic instruction of individuals with exceptionalities (Rossa, 2017; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015; Winzer, 1993). During this period of Enlightenment, philanthropy, the recognition of social issues, and efforts to achieve social justice, became trendy and aligned with the philosophical suppositions of Locke, Diderot and Rousseau (Rossa, 2017; Winzer, 1993). By the end of the eighteenth century, just as medical advances were expanding, special education had become an accepted branch of education, with a lack of emphasis on schooling, but rather, an emphasis on providing charity and providing for social justice (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015; Winzer, 1993). While schools for individuals living with deafness and/or blindness were instituted earlier, the first school, the Bicetre school, for individuals with intellectual disabilities opened in 1826 in Paris (Winzer, 1993).

Although, the origins of systematic special education date back to the eighteenth century, special education in America did not take a systematic form until the early twentieth century,

during the same time period when teaching became a recognizable profession (Gerber, 2017;

Winzer, 1993). Before it took a systematic form, Alexander Graham Bell pointed out that

children with disabilities had a right to public education (Winzer, 1993). Following this was the

establishment of day schools for children with hearing impairments, the first category of students

to receive specialized education in America (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015; Winzer,1993). Although

this was an attempt at individualizing education, the students were separated from their peers in

restrictive environments and these day schools were largely criticized for their ethical flaws

(Winzer, 1993). Bell's day schools mark the first attempt at public special education in America

and by 1879, there was the first class for students with intellectual disabilities (Winzer, 1993).

By 1898, the first college training to prepare pre-service teachers for the instruction of students

with intellectual disabilities had commenced (Winzer, 1993).

  The twentieth century was a progressive time for America (Gerber, 2017; Spaulding &

Pratt, 2015). Despite women not yet having the right to vote, women were passionate advocates

for social issues, including the well-being of children (Gerber, 2017). During this time, women

of all social classes had limited choices when choosing a career and typically chose between

becoming a nurse or a teacher (Gerber, 2017). The progressive nature of the early twentieth

century, women's advocacy for the well-being of children, and the creativity of a passionate

teacher, Elizabeth Farrell, led to the creation of ungraded classrooms at the Henry Street

Settlement House in New York City in 1900 (Gerber, 2017). It is from this attempt to

individualize instruction that the experience of early SETs was captured by the media (New York

Times (Gerber, 2017).

  The Henry Street Settlement House was founded in 1895, in New York City, by Lillian

Wald, the founder of public health nursing (Gerber, 2017). The house was initially founded to

provide nursing visitation services to the nearby housing tenements (Gerber, 2017). In 1900,

twenty-nine-year-old Elizabeth Farrell, a one-room schoolhouse teacher with five years of

teaching experience, moved to New York City and began teaching at the Henry Street Settlement

House (Gerber, 2017). With Wald's support, within five years, Farrell had created ten ungraded

classrooms, evaluating students and differentiating instruction for all learners (Gerber, 2017).

By 1909, there were 100 ungraded classrooms in New York City, servicing 1,700 students

(Gerber, 2017). In 1908, The New York Times indicated that educating children with

developmental disabilities was one of the great humanitarian efforts of the Board of Education

(Gerber, 2017). In 1908, the work of the SET was described by the New York Times as

"…exhausting work, because they must put all of their vitality, their energy, and their

enthusiasm into work…" (Gerber, 2017, p. 11). Farrell would later become the first president of

the first professional organization within the field of special education, The International Council

for the Education of Exceptional Children (Gerber 2017; Winzer, 1993). By 1910, social

pressures had dictated that public education should be the norm for all children and a new

perception of children with disabilities and segregated classes were widely used (Winzer, 1993).

From 1910-1970's, segregated and restrictive models were used for the instruction of children

with disabilities (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015; Winser, 1993).

     In 1940, 5 million children were not attending school (Winzer, 1993). Although

compulsory education laws were enacted at this point, some schools refused to provide services

to certain children (Winzer, 1993). Sometime later, with the civil rights movement as the

backdrop, the national necessity for SETs came about when the education for all students was

federally mandated by the Education for All Handicapped Children (EAHC) on November 19,

1975 (Gerber, 2017; Mastropieri, Scruggs, & Hauth, 2017; Yell et al., 2017a). During this time,

a more humanistic perception of individuals with disabilities led to the advocating for the human rights of individuals with intellectual disabilities and the abandonment of segregated classrooms and centers (Winzer, 1993). Although teachers worked for decades to individualize instruction for students, in the 1970's, only one out of five children with disabilities were receiving public education services, and of these students, only half were receiving appropriate instruction, fitting of their needs (Yell et al., 2017a).

In 1990, EAHC was renamed as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Yell et al., 2017b; Mastropieri et al., 2017). While IDEA of 1990 emphasized access to education, it was not until the IDEA amendments of 1997 that emphasis was placed on student performance and the measurability of Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals (Yell et al., 2017b; Zigmond & Kloo, 2017). With the IDEA 1997 amendment, services for students were enhanced (Mastropieri et al., 2017), but teachers felt the additional paperwork legal requirements of the job (Yell et al., 2017b). In 2004, IDEA was amended again, and this time, SET accountability was introduced to the legislation and SETs were required to align all educative practices with the best practices as established by peer-reviewed research (Mastropieri et al., 2017; Yell et al., 2017b).

In concluding her text, Winzer (1993) indicated that, "…there remains widespread unease among teachers about the extent of support services available, their lack of training and exposure to exceptional pupils, and the extra demands that may be placed on them for program planning, delivery, and evaluation" (p. 385). This conclusion leaves a brief, yet historical, marker indicating the state of the profession at the time of publication, which occurred before the 1997 and 2004 IDEA amendments. The "unease" characterized by Winzer (1993) was detectable before the new era of accountability and responsibilities for educators, yet seems to predict the vast shortages of certified SETs that were to come.

With the evolution of special education and the introduction of IDEA, the growing shortages of SETs have been an ongoing concern for local, state, and federal educational agencies, as many schools have been unable to find and retain certified SETs (Billingsley & Bettini, 2017; Brownell, Bishop, & Sindelar, 2018; Vagi, Pivovarova, & Barnard, 2019). Sindelar et al. (2018) indicated that IDEA's Assurance 14 allows schools to hire any individual with a bachelor's degree, which addresses shortages, but influences the quality of education students are receiving. Additionally, the immense need for SETs influences the increasing number of paraprofessionals who provide student instruction, behavioral supports, and adapt lesson materials for LWE (Stewart, 2019). In the 2018-2019 school year, the Virginia Department of Education (2019) reported special education as having a critical shortage of teachers. The shortage of SETs in Virginia outranked all the other teaching disciplines (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). One of the greatest challenges within the SET shortage is the retention of certified SETs (Billingsley & Bettini, 2018; Brownell et al., 2018; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Wong et al., 2017). Nationally, the three-year attrition rate for SETs is approximately 25%, double that of general education teachers (GETs) with 22% of SETs leaving the field each year (Mathews et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2017). With this attrition rate, teacher retention is key to addressing the demand for SETs (Billingsley & Bettini, 2017). According to the previous literature, consistently explaining why teachers leave the field, additional information on SETs who remain in the field is a necessary area of inquiry, as the provision of supportive working conditions could aid in retaining SETs for the duration of their careers (Billingsley & Bettini, 2017; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Lesh et al., 2017).

Critical Special Education Teaching Shortage in Virginia

The SET shortage is a nationwide problem (Billingsley & Bettini, 2017; Conley & You, 2017; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Wong et al., 2017). When examining the SET shortage at the state level, there were 316 vacant SET positions in 2016 within the state of Virginia, and in 2018-2019, there was a critical shortage for SETs in the state of Virginia (Virginia Department of Education, 2017; Virginia Department of Education, 2019). This shortage surpassed the other highly ranked teaching disciplines with unfilled positions (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). In 2016, the second highest ranking teaching discipline with shortages was elementary education PreK-6, with 198 vacant positions (Virginia Department of Education, 2017). In comparison with 2006, there were 66 additional vacancies in 2017 (Virginia Department of Education, 2017). Among the divisions with the highest number of teaching vacancies following the 2016-2017 school year were the following divisions in southeastern Virginia: Norfolk City Public Schools, Suffolk Public Schools, Chesapeake Public Schools, and Portsmouth City Public Schools (Virginia Department of Education, 2017). The teacher shortage is a contemporary issue in education that is prevalent in Virginia and is impacting southeastern, Virginia, supporting this study's necessity and the selection of southeastern, Virginia as an appropriate setting.

Virginia governor, Ralph Northam, directed initiatives within state policy boards to address the K-12 teacher shortage problem at the university level, working with teacher preparation programs to produce qualified teachers through a shorter amount of time, in order to enhance the supply of qualified teachers to meet the high demand (Yarmosky, Pyle, & Osberger, 2019). Seven public universities in Virginia have changed their teacher preparation programs to span four years, instead of Virginia's previous five-year teacher preparation programs, which

previously matriculated students with masters' degrees (Yarmosky et al., 2019). Among the public universities modifying their teacher preparation programs in Virginia is a large public university located in southeastern, Virginia (Yarmosky et al., 2019). The change at this university signifies the emphasis of the governor's initiatives within the southeastern region of the state. In addition to the modified programs within Virginia's public universities, eight private universities modified their programs to enhance the supply of teachers (Yarmosky et al., 2019). Considering the enrollment at Virginia's public universities, Virginia prepares around 400 additional teachers per academic year (Yarmosky et al., 2019). While these modifications are estimated to enhance the supply of new teachers, these efforts do not represent a consideration of the retention of Virginia teachers. Also, it is unclear what these modifications may or may not do to the quality of pre-service teachers. When studied previously, greater pre-service teacher quality predicted a greater likelihood of teacher retention of a two-year period (Robinson et al., 2019; Vagi, Pivovarova, & Barnard, 2019).

Also, in response to the teacher shortage in Virginia, Senator Tim Kaine introduced the Preparation and Retaining Education Professionals Act (PREP) to congress on July 31, 2018 (Tim Kaine: Senator from Virginia, 2019). This act would have served as an amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965 and would have emphasized the retention of qualified teachers (Tim Kaine: Senator from Virginia, 2019). However, Recently, Senator Kaine introduced the Rural Educator Support and Training Act (REST) as another amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Tim Kaine: Senator from Virginia, 2019). This bill is currently in committee (Tim Kaine: Senator from Virginia, 2019). Unlike PREP, REST offers scholarship and student loan reimbursement benefits to teacher candidates or teachers who work in rural communities (Tim Kaine: Senator from Virginia, 2019). According to the literature, teacher

shortages are prevalent in rural areas (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sindelar et al., 2018). However, REST does include retention efforts for teachers in rural settings, but either bill places an emphasis on teacher well-being, aside from lessening the burden of educational expenses for certain teachers. Ultimately, Virginia's elected officials are currently making efforts to address the teacher shortage throughout the state, but numbers cannot solely solve the teacher shortage issue (Kelchtermans, 2017).

Issues Influencing Attrition

Teacher attrition is the leading contributor to the teacher shortage crisis in the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018) and varies according to different regions within the U.S. According to Kelchtermans (2017), teacher attrition and retention are much like a two-sided coin, representing one issue. While policy makers have focused on how to best prepare teachers for the profession, there is a lack of attention paid to teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). Nationally, there is an 8% rate of teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Among SETs, the rate of voluntary attrition is 46% (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Considering this percentage in comparison with other developed nations, such as Singapore and Finland, whose attrition rates are between 3% to 4%, the United States has an apparent and contemporary teacher attrition challenge (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Teacher attrition is more prevalent among teachers in Title I schools and in schools which serve more than 55% of students of color (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Among schools which serve more than 55% of students of color, SETs are 80% more likely to turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Glazer (2018) found that invested and competent teachers have chosen to leave the field due to a lack of instructional

autonomy. Within the field of special education, teacher attrition is largely impacting the current shortage for SETs and the increasingly criticality of the shortage that has been forecasted to further develop over the next ten years (Brownell et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2019). In order to address the well-being of those who are staying, and to focus this study on the retained teachers, the details of those who leave or who have provided feedback on the reasons why they would leave, were not reviewed.

        Characteristics of special education teachers who are likely to leave. In order to investigate the experiences of SETs who remain in the field beyond the novice years, it is critical to review the existing literature on those teachers who leave (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). Billingsley (2004) categorized SET attrition into four categories. First, teachers who remain in their same special education teaching assignment in the subsequent school year were categorized as "retention" (Billingsley, 2004, p. 40). Second, teachers who remain teaching special education, but transfer to a new special education teaching assignment were categorized as "transfers to another special education teaching position" (Billingsley, 2004, p. 40). Teachers who move to a new teaching position each year, represent an additional 8% of teachers, in addition to the 8% of teachers who leave the field altogether (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Third, special education teachers who transfer to a general education teaching assignment were categorized as "transfers to general education teaching" (Billingsley, 2004, p. 40). Lastly, teachers who left the field of education altogether were categorized under "exit attrition" (Billingsley, 2004, p. 40). For the purposes of considering the existing data on SET attrition, which is impactful on the shortage of SETs, the subsequent explanation will highlight the reasons SETs discontinue a position or leave the teaching profession altogether (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). It is worth considering that some teachers leave the field for personal reasons that

are set apart from the documented reasons causing attrition, such as staying home to care for family or retirement (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). However, both reasons influence the data on SET attrition and are of detriment to the field of special education. Ultimately, attrition impacts the size and capability of the special education teaching force leaving a residual impact on student outcomes (Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley & Bettini, 2017; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Wong et al., 2017). In addition to impacting student outcomes, SET attrition is also very costly to school districts (Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley & Bettini, 2017; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Lesh et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2017).

The demographic showing the strongest connection with SET attrition is age (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Conley & You, 2017). When evaluating a SET's intent to stay or leave, younger teachers expressed a greater intent to depart the field of special education (Conley & You, 2017). Although dated and prior to several amendments to IDEA, Boe, Bobbit, & Cook (1997) discovered that a teacher's intent to transfer to general education also diminished with age. SET teaching experience, while sometimes correlative with age in many situations, has also been linked with an increased likelihood to depart the field, with a greater intent to leave among SETs with less experience (Billingsley, 2004). Since younger and inexperienced teachers are more likely to leave, the hiring of young and inexperienced SETs to fill job vacancies once held by a young and inexperienced SET, is an almost perpetual and costly challenge for school administrators and influences the teacher shortage (Billingsley & Bettini, 2017; Mastropieri et al., 2017). In order to have a qualified workforce of SETs, there must be a supply of willing and able SETs to fill vacant positions (Bettiniet al., 2018; Billingsley & Bettini, 2017; Robinson et al., 2019).

Mastropieri et al. (2017) and Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond (2019) found that certification status has a relationship with SET attrition. Those teaching special education with provisional licenses are more likely to depart the field, as they are placed in teaching positions once held by seasoned SETs, for which they are not prepared (Mastropieri et al., 2017). With many vacant special education teaching positions, the hiring of uncertified teachers provides an immediate solution for school administrators (Bettini et al., 2017; Brownell et al., 2018; Mastropieri et al., 2017). Although the evidence is dated, Frank and Keith (1984) found that teachers, in general, who demonstrate greater academic abilities are more likely to leave the field. When considering this characteristic, a SET with greater academic abilities may have advanced degree opportunities or may feel that they can be successful in the pursuit of new career endeavors, which may be indicative of why the resignation of qualified teachers also contributes to the shortage of SETs (Mastropieri et al., 2017).

Role problems for special education teachers. There is a disconnect between the day-to-day reality of the role of SETs and administrators' understanding of SETs' roles, resulting in role ambiguity for SETs (Bettini et al., 2019; Rock et al., 2016). Additionally, there is a disconnect between the reality of the role and the perceptions of a student-SET (Fowler et al., 2019; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Gavish, 2017). Among SETs there is also role conflict and role overload (Conley & You, 2018). Role conflict and role ambiguity are damaging to the well-being of SETs (Garwood, Werts, Varghese, & Gosey, 2018). Although dated, Bettini, Kimerling, Park, and Murphy (2015) sought to determine how much of a SET's day was devoted to the various SET responsibilities. On average, Bettini et al. (2015) found that just over 32% of the SET's day was spent on instruction. When compared to general education teachers, who are primarily responsible for the standards-based instruction of all students within grade-level

content areas, the reality of the SETs' role is more ambiguous and complex than outsiders understand (Bettini et al., 2019). However, relationships between local special education administrators and SETs improved the awareness of the challenges SETs encounter (Bettini et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2019).

Role flexibility is a required skill for SETs (Woolf, 2018). Within their role, SETs must have knowledge of diverse learners and learning, as they are responsible for providing accommodations and modifications for learners with exceptionalities (LWE) within a variety of settings (Mastropieri et al., 2017). SETs must also have subject-area mastery in order to provide individualized instruction for students who have learning objectives spanning across content areas via an alternative set of learning standards (Mastropieri et al., 2017; Ruppar, Roberts, & Olsen, 2017). SETs also individually support the behavior of LWE (Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017). These instructional tasks are completed within the complex context of collaboration with other professionals and students' parents or legal guardians, which is necessary for the IEP (Bateman, 2017; Woolf, 2019). SETs also have many administrative tasks, including the development and modification of SWE's Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and documenting their individualized instruction and student progress (Bateman, 2017; Bettini et al., 2017; Rock et al., 2016). In order to holistically provide instruction and support the learning needs of LWE, SETs strive to balance many responsibilities, often poorly defined responsibilities, within their complex role (Bettini et al., 2019). Role problems have shown to influence a SET's intent to leave the field (Mathews et al., 2017), which is impactful to the supply of qualified teachers available to address the current critical SET shortage (Virginia Department of Education, 2019).

Workloads and caseloads. Within their complex role, SETs must manage their difficult, demanding, and challenging jobs (Bettini et al., 2017). When studied previously, workload manageability predicted a SET's intent to remain in the field (Bettini et al., 2017). Overwhelming workloads can reduce SETs energy levels, leaving them experiencing less engagement and feeling burnt out (Cancio, 2018). With many SETs citing workloads as a stressor, it would be intriguing to investigate the well-being of SETs who have remained in the field, while managing their complex workloads over the course of time.

The average size of a SETs' caseload is 16 students (Brownell et al., 2018). While this is a national average, this figure does not capture the variety of SET instructional positions and the fluctuation of caseload size according to teaching position. Virginia's Board of Education uses a point system to establish case load size commiserate with instructional setting, assignment, and student need (Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia, 2010). Points are determined based upon student disability category, level of services needed, and necessity for paraprofessional support (Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia, 2010). A SET's assignment will influence the size of the case load. Although case load size is cited as a source of stress and burnout for SETs, caseload size in Virginia has not be legislatively addressed since 2010 (Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia, 2010; Rock et al., 2018).

In present-day schools, SETs teach a variety of students, to include students with specific learning disabilities, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, emotional and behavior disorders, communication disorders, deaf and hard-of-hearing, blindness and low vision, traumatic brain injury, multiple and severe disabilities, special gifts and talents, and/or

intellectual and developmental disabilities (Council for Exceptional Children, 2019; Pullen &

Hallahan, 2017). Many SETs work with multiple categories within their teaching assignments,

so teachers must be prepared to work with various student populations within a variety of

settings (Brownell, 2018; Woolf, 2019). The diversity of SET caseloads has been cited as a

stressor and cause of burnout (Matthews, 2017). While LWE may present with a greater need

for instructional and behavioral supports in the school setting, direct relationships between

student characteristics and SET turnover is understudied (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019). Due to the

diversity among current SETs' caseload compositions and teaching assignments, studying

attrition-related phenomena categorically could be misleading in the context of today's public

education system.

   Paperwork. Paperwork is a contemporary challenge for SETs, especially for novice

SETs (Mastropieri et al., 2017). Among the paperwork demands associated with the SET

teaching role are numerous tasks associated with IEP development and modification, student

assessments, behavior plans, lesson plans, data collection on student progress and behavior,

student progress reports, and communication logs with parents and other related service

professionals (Bateman & Cline, 2016; Matropieri et al., 2017; Ruble, McGrew, Wong, &

Missall, 2018). Following the 1997 amendment of IDEA, SETs were inundated with additional

paperwork (Yell et al., 2017b). SETs report spending more time on paperwork than general

education teachers (GETs) (Bettini et al., 2017). These results partially reflect the SET

responsibility of developing, writing, and modifying students' IEPs and IEP progress (Bateman,

2017). Although paperwork comes with the territory in special education, excessive paperwork,

defined as, "…overwhelming, unnecessary, redundant and intimidating…" (Billingsley, 2004,

p.48), can be a problem for SETs. Teachers who remain in the field cite having adequate time

for paperwork as a reason for staying (Cancio et al., 2018). Considering the well-being of the

SET, specifically the importance of engagement to well-being (Seligman, 2011), amidst the

paperwork demands situated within the field, could provide meaningful insight on job

satisfaction amidst a mountain of paperwork and a hefty workload.

      Collaborative role. According to the requirements set forth by IDEA, the IEP requires

extensive collaboration (Bateman, 2017). Participative efforts are required of SETs, general

education teachers (GETs), representative of the public agency, a professional to interpret

instructional implications of evaluations, students, and parents or guardians of students

(Bateman, 2017). Additionally, others may be involved in the IEP development as determined

by the school district or parent of student (Bateman, 2017). Additional participants who may be

included are related service providers (Bateman, 2017). While collaboration with a variety of

individuals is necessary for IEP development and service delivery, many general and special

educators are ill-prepared for the extensive collaboration that is necessary to meet students'

educational needs (Gomez-Najarro, 2019). Collaboration is guided by having adequate time to

meet, effective communication strategies, and content knowledge (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood,

2017). Having time to meet is the greatest barrier to collaboration among educators (Da Fonte &

Barton-Arwood, 2017). With the responsibility of IEP development and modification on SETs

and the necessity of collaboration for service planning and delivery, collaboration must be

ensured by the SET. This is an additional component of the workload resting on SETs.

      Workplace conditions. Among teachers worldwide, workplace conditions influence the

decision to leave the profession (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Harris, Davies, Christensen,

Hanks, & Bowles, 2019; Lesh et al., 2017). A teacher's working conditions could include

increased workload, lack of job stability, physical materials and structural surroundings, student

behavior, and collegiality (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Among those that have previously

impacted the retention of SETs are school culture, administrative support, and collegial

relationships (Bettini et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2019). Poor working conditions have also led to

burnout among teachers (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018), which indicated that working conditions

are relevant to a teacher's well-being. However, Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) found that

perceived working conditions varied according to overall school performance and that teachers at

higher performing schools had better retention rates. Therefore, working conditions have shown

to influence both stress levels and turnover of SETs.

      School culture and climate. Effective school culture is synonymous with a

collaborative environment (Lee & Louis, 2019). A component of effective school culture is a

shared responsibility (Lee & Louis, 2019). Shared responsibility is paramount to the IEP process

and influential to the workplace experience of SETs (Bateman, 2017). An effective school

culture supports a teacher's commitment to teaching and contributes to teacher job satisfaction

(Bettini, Crockett, Brownell, & Merrill, 2016). Schools are dynamic systems where many

factors can contribute to teachers' motivation, satisfaction, and feelings of successfulness (The

Research Alliance for New York City Schools, 2016). When considering the dynamic

environment of schools and the complexity of the role of SETs, the school culture could be

supporting or hindering the elements of well-being for SETs.

      School culture is developed from shared responsibility and extent of collaboration and

school climate refers to the residual quality of school life based on the experiences of the those

within the school community (Gray, Wilcox, & Nordstokke, 2017; Harris et al., 2019; Lee &

Louis, 2019). School climate includes the goals, norms, values, and interpersonal relationships

(Gray et al., 2017). When previously studied, school climate predicted burnout and teacher work

commitment (Gray et al., 2017). SETs have a demanding schedule and workload which present challenges to their interaction and participation within the school community (Bettini et al., 2016; Geiger & Pivovaraova, 2018). As an additional challenge, among novice SETs, a negatively perceived school climate could hinder a novice SET from seeking resources or building the relationships they need to continue successfully (Mathews et al., 2017). Another study found that school climate can buffer anxiety or depressive symptoms (McLean & Connor, 2017). Ultimately, based on the impact of teachers' well-being on students, there is a tangible implication for the research of teacher well-being (Gray et al., 2017).

Administrative support. The perceived lack of administrative support is the greatest predictor of teacher turnover among all teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Harris et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). For SETs, there is oftentimes a disconnect between school administrators' understanding of special education and the reality of the ambiguous role of SETs (Bettini et al., 2019; Fowler et al, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). The lack of support from school administrators has been cited as a reason for leaving the field and a perceived lack of administrative support predicted teacher turnover (Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Conley & You, 2017; Fowler et al., 2019; Grissom & Batanen, 2019; Harris et al., 2019). Administrative support from central office personnel is also of critical importance (Conley & You, 2017). Ferguson, Mang, and Frost (2017) found that teachers will talk to colleagues and family and friends when they are experiencing stress related to their workload, but will avoid discussing with their principal, indicating that it may be difficult for teachers to approach administration for support in some cases. The support of school administrators is especially critical when novice SETs are working to understand special education policy and clearly define their new responsibilities (Matthews et al., 2017; Rock et al.,

2016). Ultimately, when teachers are provided with greater instructional supports, they are less likely to experience work-related stress (Wong et al., 2017).

        Collegial relationships. Among SETs, informal relationships with fellow teachers, which provide informal mentoring-type support, are especially meaningful and necessary for SETs (Collins, Sweigart, Landrum, & Cook, 2017; Ruppar et al., 2017). Additionally, many special education teaching assignments require that SETs work in co-teaching capacities (Fowler et al., 2019; Mathews et al., 2017; Woolf, 2019). When co-teaching, SETs work collaboratively with GETs to modify instruction and provide accommodations for LWE in the general education setting (Blanton, Boveda, Munoz, & Pugach, 2017; Woolf, 2019).   In order to effectively deliver services to LWE within the co-teaching model, teachers must work together to fill in the knowledge gaps for one another (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). Collaborative efforts are also a necessary component of IEP development (Fowler et al., 2019; Bateman, 2017). Feedback and participation from general education teachers is necessary to the development of an IEP which best represents the learning opportunities for LWE (Bateman, 2017). However, Mathews et al. (2017) discovered that these co-teaching relationships can generate much stress for novice SETs because many beginning SETs feel powerless in trying to meet students' needs without collegial support. Additionally, Fowler et al. (2019) discovered that many SETs do not have adequate time to participate in these collaborative efforts.

        Additionally, relationships are an integral element of well-being, so the perception of workplace relationships among SETs would be necessary in gaining an understanding of their well-being (Seligman, 2011). Ferguson et al. (2018) indicated that there's a need to study the role of social relationships among different groups of teachers. This is substantiated by the unique difficulty SETs have in identifying and connecting with informal mentors in the

workplace and why some districts use formal mentorship programs to support novice SETs (Billingsley, Bettini, & Jones, 2019). With SETs requiring much collaboration within their role, SETs' relational experiences could reveal information about their well-being and areas where the field is prohibiting or supporting the optimal functioning of teachers.

Affective Experiences of Special Education Teachers

Previous research has largely focused the impact of negative affective states on health outcomes (Ironson et al., 2018). Ironson et al. (2018) found that positive emotional well-being is related to lower levels of C-Reactive Protein (CRP). Among the special education literature, there is consistent information regarding the negative affectual experiences of special education teachers. However, the positive emotional well-being, inclusive of Seligman's (2011) PERMA, has yet to be explored. While positive emotional well-being is relevant to health, perhaps it will reveal information about teacher retention, as well. Within this section, the literature documenting teacher satisfaction, teacher dissatisfaction, and stress is considered.

Teacher satisfaction. Two-thirds of teachers depart the profession due to dissatisfaction (Cancio et al., 2018). According to Herzberg (2017), "…factors that lead to positive job attitudes do so because they satisfy the individual's need for self-actualization in his work" (p. 114). With many special education teachers experiencing dissatisfaction within their teaching role, the current literature is heavily comprised of the reasons why SETs leave the field or the factors which predict a SET may choose to leave (Billingsley, 2004). Among those SETs who remain in the field, satisfaction is cited as a reason (Cancio et al., 2018). An investigation into the well-being among experienced SETs is necessary in order to determine which components of the SET experience yield positive emotion. Perhaps these components are not universally

experienced and could provide insight for improving the retention of SETs and supporting

novice SETs.

   Stress. In general, teaching is one of the most stressful occupations (Cancio et al., 2018;

Cook et al., 2017; Elreda et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2018; Jennings et al., 2017; Macintyre et

al., 2019; Mankin et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Wong et al.,

2017). Among teachers, stress in an unpleasant emotion that results from a variety of aspects

related to the profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Robinson et al., 2019). Jennings et al.

(2017) discussed the results from a Gallep survey, which ranked teaching as more stressful than

careers in nursing or medicine. Among educators, SETs are under more stress than general

education teachers (Bettini et al., 2017, Cancio et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2018). Jennings et

al. (2017) discussed the results from a 2013 Metlife survey of American teachers. Among these

teachers, 59% reported feeling stressed, which was an increase from the 35% who reported

feeling stressed in 1985 (Jennings et al., 2017). Among teachers, SETs report feeling tired and

under a great deal of stress (Cancio et al., 2018; Conley & You, 2017; Garwood et al., 2018;

Robinson et al., 2019). Teachers who are stressed are more likely to leave the profession

(Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Brownell et al., 2018; Conley & You, 2017; Robinson et al., 2019;

Rumschlag, 2017; Wong et al., 2017). Overall, there is a lack of information about the coping

mechanisms of SETs (Cancio et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2018). Teacher stress has several

consequences, as it influences the quality of instruction, diminishes student IEP outcomes, and

decreases student engagement (Elreda et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2017). Teachers who experience

stress are less likely to have a sense of accomplishment and may have difficulty finding meaning

within their work (Cancio et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2019). Stress also impacts personal and

professional relationships (Cancio et al., 2018; Hagaman & Casey, 2018). With accomplishment

and relationships being elements of well-being, it is of critical significance that they are impeded by the stress experienced by teachers (Seligman, 2011). Thus, the well-being of SETs who have remained in the field for a long period of time, coping with the extreme and ongoing stress, is of significance.

Ongoing stress can lead to decreased motivation, lower job satisfaction, reduced well-being, negative affect, depression, decreased commitment, and psychosomatic responses (Cancio et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). A psychosomatic response could manifest as head and neck pain, sleep issues, or stomach pain (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Ultimately, chronic stress can lead to burnout among teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Robinson et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2017). Burnout is different from stress, as it manifests itself as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of personal accomplishment (Robinson et al., 2019; Wong et al. 2017). Wong et al. (2017) discovered a relationship between SET emotional exhaustion and student engagement, which indirectly impacted IEP outcomes. Also, teachers who report burnout and experience a negative affect struggle to care for and sympathize with students (Bradley et al., 2018). Much of the current literature relates to the negative experience of stress and is lacking in what teachers are doing to cope with the stressors; therefore, the study of retained SETs who have managed the stressful nature of the job over the course of time is of significance (Jennings et al., 2017; Mankin et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2017). The components of well-being can occur simultaneously with negative affect so the exploration of well-being within a field laden with stress is fitting (Burke & Minton, 2018; Seligman, 2011). Additionally, Roberts et al. (2019) indicated that further study into teachers' positive attributes which contribute to their well-being is necessary in understanding how teachers manage the stressors in their professional lives.

Furthermore, occupational stress can impact the physical health through coping via harmful behaviors, such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and poor nutrition (Lease, Ingram, & Brown, 2019). In terms of what SETs are mobilizing to manage their stress, Cancio et al. (2018) found that SETs cope with their stress via listening to music, support from family and friends, dancing, counseling, eating, prescription medications, recreational drugs, and alcohol use. While some of these methods represent healthy coping mechanisms, some of these methods are consistent with the literature indicating the stress-induced behaviors that are detrimental to physical health (Lease et al., 2019). Ultimately, perceived stress levels previously showed to predict behaviors that are harmful to physical health (Lease et al., 2019). Madsen et al. (2017) found that ongoing exposure to job-related stress may be more harmful to an individual than a stressor occurring once, as the individual may experience the phenomena of helplessness. Helplessness is a psychological phenomenon contributing to depression (Madsen et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Considering the literature on helplessness, the role of the SET, and PERMA, if a SET experiences stress related to the inability to help students, he or she may not be experiencing the well-being element of achievement (Seligman, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Thus, he or she could be more likely to experience depression. Thus, the emotional well-being is detrimental to the physical health outcomes of teachers.

Negative affect was previously associated with worse reported health via the manifestation of bodily aches and pains, worse day-to-day physical functioning abilities, and greater physical limitations, and positive affect showed a direct relationship with greater reported physical health (Lin et al., 2018). While the proposed study was qualitative and did not include data regarding the objective biological health of participants, C-Reactive Protein (CRP) is worth considering, as it is representative of the physical manifestation of stress. CRP is a biomarker

used to assess inflammation (Lee & Way, 2019). CRP is a protein that is activated in response to inflammation and released by the liver, which occurs when cytokines are released into the blood (Paolucci, Loukov, Bowdish, & Heisz, 2019). CRP elevation is heightened with perceived stress (Paolucci et al., 2019) and with lower levels of positive emotional well-being, as those with lower positive affect were 1.40 times more likely to have an elevated CRP (Ironson et al., 2018). Testing for CRP is not specific, but is used to determine the risk of an asymptomatic individual developing cardiovascular disease (Sproston & Ashworth, 2018). Therefore, diminished well-being and prolonged stress can be detrimental to the biological health of human beings, making the study of the well-being of teachers who experience high levels of ongoing stress, appropriate, relevant, and necessary. Also, when the relationship between positive affect and CRP was studied, health behaviors, including Body Mass Index (BMI) and exercise, partially mediated the relationship between positive affect and CRP, indicating that stress management could be of critical relevance to well-being and physical wellness (Celano et al., 2018; Ironson et al., 2018).

The literature on SET coping mechanisms and stress management is limited, and there is a need to further explore how SETs manage stress. The effectiveness of teachers' coping mechanisms influences teacher health, well-being, and commitment to the profession (Cancio et al., 2018). Cancio et al. (2018) investigated SET coping mechanisms based upon Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) text. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping is "…defined as acts that control aversive environmental conditions, thereby lowering psychophysiological disturbance" (p. 118). Based on this definition, and considering the stress that SETs encounter, it seems natural that the effectiveness of coping mechanisms could directly influence overall well-being.

There are limited studies focused on teachers and stress management or coping mechanisms, but the existing literature exposes both positive and negative modalities teachers use to manage their work-related stress (Cancio et al., 2018). Hong, Day, and Green (2017) found that school-based support influenced beginning teachers' coping. Although school-based support and beginning teachers' coping abilities were related, the specific coping devices were discussed with much limitation. Using a small sample of SETs, Cancio et al. (2018) found a variety of coping devices used by SETs. Ultimately, Cancio et al. (2018) found that SETs are engaged in coping strategies. In a previous study, interpersonal mindfulness significantly moderated the relationship between teachers' perceived stress and teachers observed emotional supportiveness (Elreda, Jennings, DeMauro, Mishenko, & Brown, 2019). Cancio et al. (2018) found that listening to music and the perceived support from family and friends were the most used coping mechanisms. Coping through eating was associated with increased stress levels (Cancio et al., 2018). Also, Cancio et al. (2018) found that dancing was the only activity that lowered stress levels for SETs. While Cancio et al. (2018) drew these conclusions, they caution that there is still a need to research what SETs are doing to cope with their high-stress jobs.

Another study of stress management among American teachers was centered around the CARE for Teachers Program, which aims to enhance teachers' social and emotional competencies (Jennings et al., 2017). Jennings et al. (2017) found that mindfulness training promotes emotional regulation and coping, therefore lowering stress and burnout for teachers. While Jennings et al. (2017) tested the effectiveness of a specific program, this program was not assessed among a homogenous group of educators, so its impact on SETs is unknown. Among another group of professionals, Jarden, Sandham, Siegert, and Koziol-McLain (2019) discovered that mindfulness enhances well-being and productivity among intensive care unit

nurses. However, the program's general impact on teachers could be useful in discovering what SETs are doing to manage the stress in their day-to-day roles.

Lastly, although the practice of gratitude has not been studied among SETs, gratitude does support the development of positive emotions, such as joy (Watkins, Emmons, Greaves, & Bell, 2018). Using gratitude, an individual may be able to find joy within a week where everything seems to not be going well (Watkins et al., 2018). Conclusively, the support of teachers' mental health could extend towards better educational benefits impacting students (McLean, Abry, Taylor, & Conner, 2018).

Coping. There is a lack of current data regarding coping strategies that support the retention of SETs (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Cancio et al., 2018). Although dated, Betoret (2006) found that teachers who have access to coping resources to aid in managing stress are less likely to experience burnout. Coping strategies can be categorized as avoidant or active (Strober & Rennert, 2008). When SETs are faced with many stressors, they may choose to leave the profession, which is a form of avoidant-coping and does not support retention, teacher well-being, or student outcomes (Cancio et al., 2018). Mayordomo, Viguer, Sales, Satorres, and Melendez (2016) discovered that problem-focused active coping strategies predict resiliency, and resiliency predicts positive psychological well-being. In a recent study, the commonly used adaptive coping methods used by SETs are listening to music and feeling support from family and friends (Cancio et al., 2018). However, there is a remaining lack of information on SET coping, specifically the coping of SETs with longer ranging professional experience (Cancio et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The demand for SETs is incredible and the shortage of SETs in Virginia is of critical status (Billingsley & Bettini, 2017; Virginia Department of Education, 2019). The many expectations within the ambiguous role of SET has yielded one of the most stressful jobs in public education and plagued special education with a notably high turnover rate within the first three years of teaching (Bettini et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Working conditions, including workloads, administrative supports, and collegial relationships, have contributed to SETs' intent to leave the field (Cancio et al., 2018). With much of the current literature focusing on what is causing attrition among SETs, current information regarding what experiences have supported the well-being among experienced SETs is limited (Mankin et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2018). However, it is known that teacher well-being is an important component of teacher effectiveness and the elements of well-being are impeded by teacher stress (Roberts et al., 2019). Perhaps looking at the issue from the perspective of retention, detailing the experiences of those SETs who remained beyond the novice years, insight could be gained to support the retention of special education teachers over the course of their careers and those hopeful student teachers who are yet to be employed in teaching roles, but are likely to flee within their first three years of their careers (Billingsley & Bettini, 2017; Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Summary

Currently, the literature indicates that SET attrition is a costly problem in the United States and the shortage of SETs is impacting most of the United States (Billingsley & Bettini, 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Dewey et al., 2017; University Council for Education Administration, 2018). The available literature on SET attrition provides data to

support that SETs flee the field for several reasons, to include: role problems, workplace

conditions, job dissatisfaction, and stress (Bettini et al., 2017; Brittle, 2020; Cancio et al., 2017;

Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Garwood, Werts, & Varghese, 2017; Harris et al., 2019; Lesh

et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2019; Rock et al., 2017).   In the literature, there is some

information regarding what is currently being done to support the well-being of teachers;

however, most of the information is relative to the negative affective experiences of teachers

(Wong et al., 2017). There is evidence that professional learning communities' support the

elements of well-being (Owen, 2016). Additionally, mindfulness has been explored to support

teachers and other professionals as they manage stress (Elreda et al., 2018; Jarden et al., 2019).

Lastly, well-being curriculums have been piloted in order to support the well-being of both

students and teachers (Bradley et al., 2018; Mankin et al., 2018). However, considering the

challenging responsibilities of SETs, the discovery of SETs' well-being, in isolation from other

teachers, is necessary (Bettini et al., 2017). While studying the working conditions and career

characteristics is of benefit, Seligman (2011) indicates that modifying disabling conditions is not

the same as building enabling conditions. Choosing to design this study upon the foundation of

the WBT and PERMA, this inquiry was steered towards the discovery of what enabling

conditions are already present among experienced SETs or what enabling conditions could be

supported in order to retain the SET workforce. Additionally, with one-third of SETs departing

the field within the first three years of teaching, and with data indicating a decline in SET

employment began in 2005, the well-being of experienced SETs, who are currently practicing,

have taught beyond the novice years, and who have obtained or remained employed since or

during the documented decline in SET employment in 2005, is of intriguing interest and

instructional significance (Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019;

Dewey et al., 2017).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the subjective well-being of experienced special education teachers in southeastern Virginia. At this stage in the research, well-being was generally defined as the "…positive aspects…of teachers' successful and healthy functioning at work…" (Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2015, p. 289) and experienced SETs were defined as those who have taught for four years, hold a valid special education teaching license, and omit actively working in a special education teaching position (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Ruppar, Roberts, & Olson, 2017). A transcendental phenomenological design allowed for the "Integrating of noematic and noetic correlates of intentionality into meanings and essences of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32). This chapter three included support for the selection of the transcendental phenomenological design and its alignment with the central research question and sub questions. A description of the setting of this study and a description of the participants utilized for data collection were supplied. The procedures for the study were outlined and led to the explanation of this researcher's role as a human instrument and researcher. Details supporting the various data collection methods, as they align with qualitative methodology, were provided. The procedures for analyzing the data according to phenomenological practices were supported. Lastly, the intentional methods allocated to enhance the trustworthiness of the study were identified. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the importance of ethics and the efforts that were made to pursue an ethical study.

Design

The elements of well-being were captured primarily through subjective means, aligning the study appropriately within qualitative methodology (Seligman, 2011). Additionally, there was a need to present a detailed description of experienced SETs' well-being and qualitative research that made real world phenomena visible (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative methodology is focused on the person and centralizes on the wholeness of experiences, so the illumination of the lived experiences of SETs was possible through qualitative research (Keegan, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated that theoretical assumptions are necessary for qualitative inquiry. Theoretical assumptions allow meaning to be ascribed from data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the theoretical assumptions of the well-being theory (WBT) directed data collection (Seligman, 2011).

According to Keegan (2009), qualitative research began in the United States after World War II, fueled by the growing mass communication mediums, increasing commercial interests, and the resurfacing of Freudian psychology. Moustakas (1994) indicated that the term *phenomenology* was used as early as 1765 by Hegel. At the time, phenomenology represented knowledge as it appeared in consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). In 1907, Husserl took phenomenology in a transcendental direction seeking value in both the subjective and objective realities (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varbio, 2019; Smith, 2019). Philosophically, Husserl assumed that one can only know what we have experienced through our senses (Patton, 2002). Husserl introduced the practice of intentionality and how it relates to internal consciousness and is comprised of noema and noesis (Moustakas; 1994 Smith, 2019). *Noema* refers to the phenomenon itself and *noesis* refers to the natural meaning or multiple meanings within the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2019). From intentionality, *epoché* was developed,

which refers to the visitation of phenomena with a fresh perspective, avoiding prior judgements or assumptions (Moustakas, 1994).

Among the qualitative methodologies, transcendental phenomenology requires epoché, or bracketing, in order to collect and analyze data in its raw form, just as it is provided by participants (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, SETs' experiences were sought without considering preconceived perceptions or experiences and the previous experiences of the researcher were identified and bracketed. As Moustakas (1994) described, phenomenology is concerned with accurate portrayal. Based on the various and diverse roles of SETs, transcendental phenomenology was chosen to seek wholeness by examining the well-being of multiple SETs, who make work in a variety of contexts, while seeking a unified understanding (Bettini et al., 2019; Moustakas, 1994). In considering the well-being of SETs, an accurate description of the status of their well-being was sought through transcendental phenomenology. While the use of the Workplace PERMA Profile can provide an overall description of participants' workplace well-being, the reality of the phenomenon can be captured through phenomenology and through the analytical commitment to the true lived experiences of SETs (Butler & Kern, 2016; Moustakas, 1994; The Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 2019).

Research Questions

CQ: How do experienced special education teachers describe their well-being within their professional roles?

SQ1: What role-related experiences generate positive emotions for SETs?

SQ2: What role-related experiences are engaging for SETs?

SQ3: How do SETs describe their role-related relationships?

SQ4: What role-related experiences are meaningful for SETs?

SQ5: What role-related experiences generate a sense of accomplishment for SETs?

Setting

The setting for this study included public K-12 educational facilities in southeastern, Virginia. In the state of Virginia, there is a critical shortage of SETs (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). Prior to the 2018-2019 school year, a superintendent of a public-school division in southeastern Virginia indicated that the shortage of SETs is a reality in southeastern Virginia (Harris, 2018). Participants were drawn from the Bonnett City public school (BCPS) division in southeastern, Virginia. Participants were also drawn from a regional special education program, Summer Beach School (SBS). The differences among special education teaching assignments amongst participants are identified in Table 1. BCPS is led by a superintendent and each school is led by principal and a varying number of assistant principals. Summer Beach School (SBS), the special education program, which is contracted to work within the BCPS division and other local school divisions, is led by an executive director. SETs who work for SBS are supervised directly by educational specialists and principals.

Based on the 2018-2019 school year, BCPS provided educational services for over 66,000 students. This school division employs 5,200 teachers. Among these teachers, 14.6 years is the median length of teaching experience. Among students, 10.8% of students receive special education services and 40.1% of students are economically disadvantaged. The school division is diverse, serving students from a variety of racial backgrounds (23.4% of students are African American, 48.4% of students are Caucasian, 11.6% of students are Hispanic/Latino, 0.2% of students are Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 9.7% of students are multiracial). Among these students, some receive services from SBS.

Participants

To provide a raw and realistic description of experienced SETs' well-being, transcendental phenomenology provided the design for this study. For this study, twelve experienced SETs were sought. Experienced SETs were defined as those who have taught special education for at least four years, held a valid special education teaching license, and were actively working in a special education teaching position (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Ruppar et al., 2017). Purposeful sampling logic was used to select participants from the sample (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling aligns with transcendental phenomenology and is indicative of qualitative sampling logic, as the most important factor when selecting participants is including those participants who have experienced the phenomena and their relevance to the explanation sought through this study (Schwandt, 2007). This ensured that data was collected from the most information-rich sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). The use of criterion sampling entailed the verification that each participant met criterion, to include that each participant was an experienced SET, with a minimum of four years of teaching experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), convenience sampling can save time and money during the research process. Convenience sampling allowed this researcher to access teachers from a school division located within close proximity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Sampling continued until saturation of data was achieved. Data saturation occurs when no new information is being yielded during data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

After sampling strategies were used, participants were contacted via email with contact information retrieved through convenience sampling or interested participants contacted this researcher directly. After interested parties were gathered, informed consent was obtained from

those participants selected to participate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participant consent form used is reviewable in Appendix B. All participants were identified within the manuscript using pseudonyms, of their choosing, and educational facilities were identified using vague geographical details and pseudonyms. The ages of the SETs and the length of SETs' employment were obtained and documented within Table 1. For this table, all identifying information was withheld and pseudonyms were used. Age was helpful to include in the analysis, as age has shown a strong correlation with SET attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Conley & You, 2017). Only SETs who teach in Virginia were included, as the shortage of SETs in Virginia was recently labeled as critical (Virginia Department of Education, 2019).

Table 1

Background of Participants

*Denotes a pseudonym
If school site is not listed as Summer Beach School, the teacher is employed with Bonnett City Public Schools.

Participant*	Age	Teaching Experience	Student Categories	Grade Level(s)	School Site*
Jean	53	24 years	ED, ID, LD	1st and 3rd grades	Lemon Elementary
Bambi	58	22 years	LD, ED, autism	9th-12th grades	Orange High School
Lynne	44	22 years	LD, ID, OHI	9th-12th grades	Orange High School
Ann	38	9 years	ID, ED	9th-12th grades	Orange High School
Ryan	55	29.5 years	Autism, SLD, OHI	9th-12th grades	Orange High School
Sally	49	20 years	LD, ED, OHI, autism	9th-12th grades	Orange High School
Laurel	39	5 years	Cross-categorical	2nd-3rd grades	Blue Sky Elementary School
Carrie	42	18 years	Autism, Down Syndrome, TBI, ID	9th-12th grades	Summer Beach School
Serenity	40	5 years	Autism, OHI	9th-12th grades	Summer Beach School
Mandy	55	32 years	ED	7th-8th grades	Summer Beach School
Elizabeth	62	37 years	LD, ED, BD, OHI, DD	K – 2nd grade and 4th grade	White Plains Elementary
Diane	52	15 years	Autism, ID, OHI	6th-12th grades	Summer Beach School

Descriptive Data: Workplace PERMA-Profiler

Prior to data collection, the Workplace PERMA-Profiler was used to assist in the

development of individualized descriptions of participants. The original PERMA profiler (Butler

& Kern, 2016) was created as a tool for individuals to measure their own well-being, considering

the elements of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. It

was tested for validity and consistency (Butler & Kern, 2016; Watanbe et al., 2018). Butler and

Kern (2016) found that the profiler demonstrated internal and cross-time consistency, as well as content, convergent, and cross-time validity. The Workplace PERMA-Profiler was created by Kern (2014), placing the questions into the context of the workplace (The Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 2019). McQuaid and Kern (2017) indicated that using PERMA assists in individuals understanding their own well-being. The use of this profiler will occur initially in order to provide the participants with the opportunity to reflect on their well-being prior to discussing it (McQuaid & Kern, 2017). According to Moustakas (1994), objective and subjective data is useful in transcendental phenomenology. This profiler was available online for no cost for non-commercial research purposes through The Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania (2019) through written permission on their website, which states, "The measure can be used for noncommercial research or assessment purposes. There is no cost involved in using the measure for these purposes." The profiler contains 22 questions, directly related to the elements of well-being (The Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 2019). The assessment is not for diagnostic purposes, but to provide the consumer with an insight into his or her overall workplace well-being (McQuaid & Kern, 2017). The profiler was useful, as objective and subjective data can be assistive in generating a description of the participants included in the study (Neubauer et al., 2019).

The Workplace PERMA-Profiler was given to the participating SETs at the onset of data collection and addressed the central question and each subsequent question. A link to the profiler was sent via email to SETs with instructions to print their completed profile or supply this researcher ith their login credentials, so results could be accessed when they finished. The profiler took approximately 15 minutes or less to complete. The Workplace PERMA Profiler and the permission for its usage can be found in Appendix C.

Procedures

The initial step in this study was to submit a proposal to the institutional review board

(IRB), seeking to obtain approval to execute the study. Following the IRB's initial review, any

necessary modifications were made in order to secure IRB approval upon subsequent

submission. During the IRB approval process, the research proposal was submitted to the

research review committees of the school division and special education program. Following

IRB approval, participants were either contacted directly or they reached out to express interest.

Informed consent was gained from all participants prior to scheduling interviews. See Appendix

B for participant consent form. The IRB approval letter is contained in Appendix A. Following

IRB approval, interview and focus group questions were piloted with experts in the field and no

recommendations to the formatting of questions was given. Then, participants' willingness to

participate in each method of data collection was confirmed and interviews were scheduled. See

Appendix B for the participant consent form. Lastly, member checking was utilized to support

the confirmability and credibility of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schwandt, 2007).

Interviews

Each participant was interviewed, as this is the primary data collection method for

transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). All interview questions were semi-

structured, allowing the participant to guide the conversation (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews

were individually scheduled with each participant and occurred via private Zoom meetings due

to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews were audio-recorded

and transcribed (Moustakas, 1994). Interview questions are in Appendix F.

Focus Group

  All participants were invited to participate in a focus group. A focus group brings together a group of people for a discussion on a topic and can be used in combination with other data collection methods (Schwandt, 2007). During focus groups, the interaction among participants yielded additional richness to the data, contributing to the universal essence of the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019; Patton, 2002). The focus groups were held online to ensure the health and safety of the participants and researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The transcript to the focus-group discussion was stored electronically on a password-protected hard drive. Appendix F includes the questions that were used to guide the focus group discussion.

Audio Diaries

  At the conclusion of participant interviews, participants were given additional instructions and a demonstration on how to use an electronic audio recording device for the completion and submission of audio diary entries. Participants were asked to complete and send a trial recording prior to data collection, if they desired. Using a singular, open-ended prompt, participants recorded an audio diary entry every day for five consecutive workdays (Filep, Turner, Eidse, Thompson-Fawcett, & Fitzsimmons, 2018). Participants were asked to submit each entry, as they were created, through email.

Member-Checking

  Member-checking is the process of seeking feedback from participants on a study's findings (Schwandt, 2007). Member-checking can support the confirmability and credibility of research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018), but can also enhance the ethics of research, as participants had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the findings that were drawn

from their statements (Schwandt, 2007). Additionally, member-checking provided an additional opportunity to gain insight that could contribute to the conclusive manuscript (Schwandt, 2007). Member-checking was integrated into the study by requesting participants review their transcribed interviews. Participants were asked to notify this researcher with any corrections or clarifications that they wished to make to their responses. The participants did not make any modifications to their transcribed interview responses.

The Researcher's Role

This researcher acted as a human instrument, collecting data herself through interview and focus group protocols that were created to develop a raw description of experienced SET well-being (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In doing so, this researcher's experiences as a special education teacher were bracketed, to naively consider the reality of the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The researcher did not work for the school division or special education program used at the time of data collection. However, the researcher did complete student teaching within the school division being sampled from and does live in a home located within this school division. This researcher was also previously employed by the special education program. Therefore, if there are any established relationships or former familiarity with any of the selected participants, these were described in detail and were pushed aside (Moustakas, 1994). At this point in the research, this researcher gained familiarity with some participants through previous student teaching experiences and personal relationships formed within the community. When analyzing the data, it was assumed that the participants responded with accuracy during the interviews. This researcher approached the data with no assumptions related to previous workplace experiences or prior interactions with any of the participants. Also, this study generated an accurate description of SET well-being

through qualitative data collection. It was not within the scope of the study to provide or

recommend any well-being interventions for any participant involved. The purpose of this study

was clearly articulated to participants prior to signing informed consent.

Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were sought in order to aid in data triangulation and to develop a

description of experienced SET well-being that was reflective of the universal essence of the

phenomena (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). Data triangulation is the process of

verifying the integrity of the meanings discovered from within the data and multiple methods of

data collection were used to seek consistency among the various sources (Patton, 2002;

Schwandt, 2007). Data collection occurred in the following order: semi-structured interviews of

SETs, audio diaries, and focus groups. All interviews included open-ended questions

(Moustakas, 1994). This order of data collection methods was purposefully chosen in order to

familiarize the SET with the elements of well-being and to allow them to begin considering the

experiences which contribute to their well-being before completing their audio diaries (McQuaid

& Kern, 2017). The Workplace PERMA-Profiler was used in the development of interview

questions. Aspects of the SETs' interviews allowed this researcher to consider initial

interpretations of meaning and allowed for this researcher to seek meaning from the social

context of the focus group and the personal presentation of experiences through the audio diaries

(Patton, 2002).

Interviews

Interviews can provide the most important source of data for phenomenological studies

(Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), interview questions should be

open-ended, allowing the participant, or co-researcher, to guide the conversation. Questions

were presented in an unbiased manner without previous assumptions (Moustakas, 1994). The

interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants and occurred via private,

password-protected, Zoom meetings to ensure the safety, health, and privacy of participants

during the COVID-19 pandemic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews did not occur while

participants were on school properties, but rather from within their homes. The interviews were

based on the PERMA profiler and Kern's adaption of the PERMA profiler for the workplace

(Kern, 2014; Butler & Kern, 2016; The Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 2019).

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions:

Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.

1. How has the school year been so far?

2. Would you please tell me about your teaching career?

3. Within your teaching role, what type of activities make you feel joyful at work?

4. Under what circumstances have you felt sad, anxious or angry at work?

5. What experiences or activities in teaching special education do you become fully
   absorbed in, generate excitement, or interest you?

6. Which workplace relationships have been most positive in your teaching career?

7. Which workplace relationships do you feel could use some improvement and how do you
   feel they could be improved?

8. In what ways do you feel your teaching role is meaningful?

9. In what ways have you experienced a sense of accomplishment at work?

10. What do you think has most impacted your choice to remain in the teaching profession?
    Question one and two are representative of informal conversation (Patton, 2002). These

questions were included to initiate the building of rapport with the participant (Patton, 2002). While these questions were informal, these questions provided flexibility for the participant to elaborate as she desired (Patton, 2002). Communication can be deepened through informal conversational interviewing (Patton, 2002). While informal conversation was used for these two questions, the question-style was changed into a standardized open-ended interview for the subsequent questions (Patton, 2002).

Question three was used to gain further detail about the SETs' careers. Billingsley (2004) indicated that the study of long-serving SETs is necessary. Additionally, the study of expert special education teachers could provide helpful contributions to teacher preparation programs, teacher induction, and SET in-service opportunities (Ruppar et al., 2017). Although experts were identified through their content knowledge versus their extended years of service, Ruppar et al. (2017) chose their study participants based on at least three years of teaching experience.

Questions four through eleven were developed based on questions within the PERMA Workplace-Profiler and addressed the elements of well-being, which include: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (Kern, 2014; Seligman, 2011; The Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, 2019). PERMA provided the theoretical framework for this study and supported the foundation of the development of the central question and subsequent questions that are guiding this inquiry. Question four is related to positive emotion (Kern, 2014; Seligman, 2011). This question is relevant to sub question one, which sought to discover what generates positive emotions for SETs at work. Positive emotions at work can enhance creativity, enthusiasm, and energy and are essential to flourishing (Singh & Aggarwal, 2018; Seligman, 2011; Watkins et al., 2017). Question five is directly related to negative

emotions (Kern, 2014). While negative emotions are not an element of well-being, they can

occur simultaneously with PERMA (Seligman, 2011). SETs experience more stress than general

education teachers (Cook et al., 2017). Therefore, negative emotions were worth exploring

during the interview, in order to not ignore the reality of the lived experiences of SETs as

documented in the literature (Singh & Aggarwal, 2018).

Question six is based on the element of engagement, which is a pillar of well-being

(Kern, 2014; Seligman, 2011). Also, question six addressed sub question two, which sought the

role-related experiences that are engaging for SETs. Questions seven and eight are based on

relationships (Kern, 2014; Seligman, 2011), which are a documented mediator for attrition and

retention in special education (Collins et al., 2017). These questions address sub-question three,

which sought to investigate the role-related relationships of SETs. Question nine is related to the

element of meaning (Kern, 2014; Seligman, 2011), which is relevant to sub question four. Sub-

question four sought to determine where SETs derive meaning within their teaching roles.

Meaning is a key cognitive process that is activated when an individual encounters stress

(Czekierda et al., 2017). Given the workplace challenges of SETs, determining their meaning

provided insight into experienced SETs' decision to remain in the field.

Question ten sought to gain further details regarding the SET's experience of

accomplishment within his or her role as a SET and the accomplishment experiences of SETs are

being sought through sub-question five (Kern, 2014). Decreased accomplishment is a factor of

burnout, which is the result of prolonged stress (Hussein, 2018: Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Question eleven served as a culminating question addressing the central research question. This

question revealed data related to what about the special education teaching career sustains the

elements of well-being among experienced SETs (Billingsley, 2004; Lesh et al., 2017; Mankin et al., 2018).

Focus Group

Focus groups allow for a group interview to occur through a discussion covering one topic or a range of issues (Schwandt, 2007). The total number of participants were divided into smaller groups for focus group participation, as beneficial discussion occurs in groups as small as four participants (Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, & Mukherjee, 2017; Patton, 2012). Creating smaller groups aided in equal participation by all participants and assisted in meeting the scheduling needs of all participants (Nyumba et al., 2017). The focus groups occurred after all individual interviews. To involve the greatest number of participants, the focus groups were scheduled according to the scheduling availabilities of most of the participants and were held via private and password-protected Zoom meetings. Each focus group lasted approximately 30-45 minutes (Nyumba et al., 2017). Focus groups are cost-effective and can enhance data quality, as members had the opportunity to provide checks and balances for one another (Patton, 2002). The transcribed focus group conversations were saved onto a password-protected hard drive.

Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions:

"Thank you for attending this focus group and for participating in this study. During this group, I will guide the conversation with a series of questions having to do with your choice to remain in special education. Research tells us that most of the special education teachers who will leave the field, will do so within their first three years of teaching, so you represent the teachers who have chosen to remain in the field. Feel free to interact with one another through agreement or disagreement. You are all experienced special education teachers, but your individual experiences may be different."

Why have you chosen to remain in the special education field?

1. How do you cope with the challenges and stressors that exist within your teaching roles?

2. What additional supports would assist you in navigating the stressors involved in your occupation?

3. What advice would you offer to a novice special education teacher?

4. Considering your teacher education program, is there anything you feel would have better prepared you for your career in special education?

Question one sought to acknowledge and integrate the usefulness of experienced teacher perceptions (Carrillo & Flores, 2018). With almost one-third of SETs fleeing within their first three years of teaching (Bettini et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019), the perspective of experienced SETs, currently working in the field, would be helpful. Additionally, the focus group provided the opportunity to gather perceptions about outcome and impacts that these experienced teachers have already encountered (Patton, 2002). This question addressed each of the sub-questions, as the elements of well-being were sought within the responses provided. Additionally, this question addressed the need to know why experienced and retained SETs have remained in the field (Vagi et al., 2019).

Question two was grounded in the need for additional information on the coping strategies of SETs (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Cancio et al., 2018). This question addressed the central research question, as coping is a process used to manage stress (Cancio et al., 2018). Internal resources allow individuals to care for themselves so they can manage challenges as they come along (McQuaid & Kern, 2017). Among other resources, Cancio et al. (2018) reported that SETs cope with their stress via listening to music, support from family and friends, dancing, counseling, eating, prescription medications, recreational drugs, and alcohol use. Including this

question within the social context of the focus group allowed for the verification of consistency or heterogeneity of these self-care and coping mechanisms among the group participants (Patton, 2002). Ultimately, this question supported the central research question. Additionally, the focus group conversation yielded additional information about what has proven to be useful to teachers over the course of time, which is information that can only be derived from experienced teachers (Carrillo & Flores, 2018).

Question three was based on the ways SETs perceive the presence of well-being supports within their workplaces, which is relevant because Vagi et al. (2019), directed future research to address why teachers remain in the teaching profession. This question addressed the central research question and was responsive to the literature indicating that there is a disconnect between the reality of SETs' roles and administrators' understanding of the role (Bettini et al., 2018; Brittle, 2020; Fowler et al., 2019). The extent of perceived well-being supports offered the opportunity to identify a variable that could be included in further studies on teacher retention and yielded direction for future research. Additionally, the participants' responses revealed which elements of well-being need additional support in the workplace.

Question four was included to provide an opportunity for the experienced SET to impart his or her wisdom to novice SETs or SET students, which supported thematic analysis and was included meaningfully within the discussion section (Carrillo & Flores, 2017). The teachers included in this study have remained in the field into their experienced years, so it was worth exploring how they would advise novice teachers (Carillo & Flores, 2017). Also, this question was not directing the SET to answer about a specific role or responsibility within his or her teaching assignment, so the teachers were allowed to freely discuss any component of their SET teaching role. Lastly, asking this question in the focus group allowed the SETs to collaboratively

explore what would be helpful for novice teachers to know (Patton, 2005). When considering the responses, it contributed to an interesting discovery of a common element of well-being or characteristic of the field that is emphasized among the groups.

Question five explored what may be helpful in preparing pre-service teachers for their professional roles and was responsive to the literature regarding the current changes in teacher preparation programs in Virginia. This was worth including because greater pre-service teacher quality predicted a greater likelihood of teacher retention (Robinson et al., 2019; Vagi, Pivovarova, & Barnard, 2019). Also, the input of experienced teachers generated a concept related to teacher well-being and teacher preparation that could be explored in-depth in a future study.

Audio Diaries

Audio diaries provided an opportunity for capturing the emotion that exists in everyday life, while investigating human lived experiences, which is paramount to phenomenological inquiry (Cottingham & Erikson, 2019; Kaun, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). Asking participants to keep audio diaries provided the opportunity to generate in-depth and emotional reflections, allowing for data collection that was aligned closely with the phenomenon. This aided in creating the descriptions of experienced SET well-being that was sought through my central research question (Cottingham & Erikson, 2019; Crozier & Cassell, 2016; Kaun, 2010). Additionally, audio data collection is helpful when looking at phenomena related to stress (Cozier & Cassell, 2016). Although this study aimed to highlight experienced SET well-being, the presence of stressors within the special education profession is heavily documented throughout the literature, making audio diaries an appropriate mode of data collection for these professionals (Cancio et al., 2018). Audio diaries also allowed for participants to reflect on the

past, while considering their present (Kaun, 2010). While discussing their present workplace

experiences, teachers had the opportunity to form connections with prior experiences, as they

explained their lived experiences related to the phenomena (Kaun, 2010). Lastly, digital

mediums are appropriate for collecting journal data, extending research into the digital footprint

of participants. Audio diaries were recorded using electronic audio-recording devices and

submitted via email (Filep, Turner, Eidse, Thompson-Fawcett, & Fitzsimmons, 2018; Kaun,

2010).

Over the course of a five-day work week, participants responded daily to a singular open-

ended prompt (Filep et al., 2018; Kaun, 2010). Diary entries were submitted electronically for

transcription, storage, and analysis. Audio files were stored on a password-protected hard drive.

Instructions for accessing and completing the diary entries can be found in Appendix G.

Open-Ended Audio Diary Prompt:

The five elements that contribute to a sense of well-being include positive emotion, engagement,

relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. In what ways did you experience any or all of these

aspects of well-being at work today?

This prompt was grounded in the elements of well-being as identified in the WBT

(Seligman, 2011). The five elements of well-being are positive emotion, engagement,

relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). This prompt allowed the

participants to identify with the elements of well-being that were most relevant to the reality of

their lived experiences during their work week. This prompt yielded elements of well-being that

were infrequently referenced and revealed elements which were frequently discussed with

consistency among the participant diaries. Discovering if there was an element or elements that

SETs consistently discussed, offered the opportunity to indicate a strength of the profession, or the teachers themselves, that has contributed to their retention.

Data Analysis

This study applied the transcendental phenomenological approach to data analysis. This approach was chosen because it entails the use of phenomenological reduction, which allowed this researcher to provide an accurate portrayal of the essence of experienced SETs' role-related experiences, as they truly exist, without interpreting meaning from these experiences (Phillips-Pula, Strunk, & Pickler, 2011). The accurate portrayal of experienced SETs' well-being was necessary because educator well-being predicts life satisfaction, work engagement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction (Jarden, Sandham, Siegert, & Koziol-McLain, 2019; Kern et al., 2014; Neumeier et al., 2017; Um, Joo, & Her, 2018). In addition, the essence of experienced SET well-being revealed opportunities for further research, opportunities for enhancing job design, and modifying SET preparation programs. Transcendental phenomenological analysis supported the accurate portrayal of experienced SETs' descriptions of their well-being. This addressed the need to capture the state of well-being of teachers. Initially, all interviews and audio diaries were transcribed using NVivo transcription software. Data transcription is centric to the data analysis process that follows and has become a common practice within qualitative research (MacLean, Meyer, & Estable, 2004). As data was transcribed, a protocol was used to ensure that the transcriptions met the expectations necessary for presenting reliable and valid findings (Clark, Burkhead, Fernandez, & Egger, 2017; MacLean et al., 2004). This protocol indicates that transcribed data should be complete, include a detailed verbatim representation of the pauses, silences, utterances, and vocalizations, and the data should be transcribed accurately (Clark et al., 2017). Once data was transcribed, the audio-files with the

transcriptions were used to check for accuracy and searched for misspellings, improper

quotations, improper or absent use of pseudonyms, and incorrect word placement (Clark et al.,

2017).

Data was analyzed according to Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colazzi-

Keen method, which occurs over a series of phenomenological reductions (Creswell & Poth,

2018; Patton, 2002). The Stevick-Colazzi-Keen method initiated with epoché. (Creswell & Poth,

2018). Paramount to transcendental phenomenology is transcendental subjectivity, which is the

continuous consideration of the impact of the researcher on the outcome of the analysis

(Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The first phase of phenomenological reduction was

epoché, sometimes referred to as bracketing. This process supported transcendental subjectivity

because preconceived judgements, biases, and ideas were identified and invalidated (Moustakas,

1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). A personal description of this researcher's experience with the

phenomena was described and entailed within an epoché journal, which can be found in

Appendix H (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, transcendental-phenomenological reduction was

employed. This entailed the individual consideration of each interview (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Using horizontalization, a list of significant statements was developed from all interviews

(Crewell & Poth, 2018). Horizontalization is the retrieval and extraction of every expression

related to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). During horizontalization, each statement was

perceived with equal worth and a list lacking repetition and overlapping was developed

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). From here, the significant statements were grouped into thematic

units, which provided the foundation for further interpretation during the final phase of

phenomenological reduction, the imaginative variation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer et al.,

2019). After themes were identified, each interview was reviewed in isolation to reveal recurring

statements or overlapping which yielded textural and structural descriptions (Phillips-Pula, Strunk, & Pickler, 2002). First, using verbatim examples, a textural description of what the participants' experienced was composed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), textural descriptions are constructed from the themes identified in the previous step. After a textural description was developed, a structural description, detailing the essence of the experiences of the SETs, was developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lastly, a composite description of the experienced SETs was developed, fulfilling the final phase of phenomenological reduction (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019). A composite description incorporates both the textural and structural descriptions, using textural-structural synthesis, and this indicated what was experienced by the SETs and how they experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

The Workplace PERMA-Profiler provided a description of each participant. After developing a description, the audio diaries were compared with the themes derived from the phenomenological reduction. The reported experiences within the diaries were then integrated with the interview and focus groups, to search for consistency, or difference, and to achieve data triangulation (Patton, 2002). Data triangulation was used as a means of checking the integrity of the data collected (Schwandt, 2007). The themes were developed from within the interviews, focus group discussions, and audio diary entries and then these were reviewed alongside of the descriptions initially provided through the Workplace PERMA-Profiler.

Additionally, NVivo was used as an assistive resource during data analysis. NVivo is a computer-assisted qualitative data management and analysis software (Creswell & Poth 2018). The software is described as assistive, as it alone cannot fulfill phenomenological reduction data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002). NVivo was used to aid in the secure storage and

organization of the data following transcription, locating, and sorting text during

horizontalization, locating comparable thematic labels, and to provide a visual representation of

the data to accompany the resulting composite description (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness establishes the rigor in qualitative inquiry and is what determines a

study's noteworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Intentional criteria were

established to support trustworthiness, enhancing the quality of qualitative investigation (Lincoln

& Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2007). In working to ensure quality throughout the data analysis and

the presentation of findings, this researcher made several considerations to intentionally address

the following criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Using the

guidance of research texts, this researcher developed an understanding of various practices which

enhance the quality of qualitative research and interwove these throughout the investigative

process.

Credibility

Credibility is the alignment of the results with the data source (Holloway & Galvin, 2017;

Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is the fit between the participants' views of their

experiences and the way they are portrayed within the manuscript (Schwandt, 2007). Patton

(2002) indicated that qualitative researchers must include any personal and professional

information that may have influenced the data analysis. This portrayal is necessitated in

transcendental phenomenological inquiry, as epoché is necessary when analyzing data

(Moustakas, 1994). To further enhance credibility, triangulation was employed through the

collection of data from multiple sources and consistency was sought from these various sources

to support conclusive themes (Patton, 2002). Member-checking was used in the accurate

portrayal of experienced SETs' experiences. The process of member-checking requests feedback from the participants regarding the accuracy of their portrayed experiences (Schwandt, 2007). Schwandt (2007) indicated that member-checking enhances the ethics of a study, as well.

Dependability

Dependability is the consistency of findings across researchers and over a course of time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and ensures that the investigational process is "…logical, traceable, and documented" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 299). Within the manuscript, details were included that detailed the procedures related to the sampling process, collecting informed consent from participants, and the data collection methods. The appendices include additional information that is related to the investigation. Lastly, during the analysis, the findings were compared with the data that was previously revealed through prior studies. These comparisons were presented within the conclusion, situating the findings within the present related literature.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which a researcher can genuinely report the perceptions of participants, which is paramount to transcendental phenomenology. This required the use of epoché to analyze data in its raw form (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). Confirmability was enhanced by reporting findings as accurately as possible, setting aside any prior notions or subjective opinions. To enhance confirmability, member-checking was used (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The process of member-checking entailed the requesting of feedback from the participants regarding the accuracy of their portrayed experiences (Schwandt, 2007). Additionally, direct quotes were used, whenever possible, to portray the experiences of the SETs in their rawest forms.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research is significant because it enhances the ability of a practitioner to determine whether the findings could apply within his or her setting (Hays & Singh, 2011; Schwandt, 2007). Patton (2002) indicated that the term *transferability* be replaced with *generalizability*, as generalization is the aim. The transferability of the findings was supported by providing a rich, detailed, yet anonymous, description of the participants being included in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2011). In developing rich descriptions, direct quotes and provided contextual descriptions were used. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations were made throughout this study. Initially, IRB approval was gained prior to any data collection. Additionally, permission to access participants and conduct research was sought from the superintendents and/or research specialists from each school division and/or educational program being included. Once permission was granted, participants were contacted via email or interested participants contacted this researcher directly. At this time, informed consent was sought. Participants were notified that their participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw participation at any time. Participants were also informed that confidentiality would be ensured throughout the written manuscript (Patton, 2002). Once participants confirmed their participation, each participant chose a pseudonym to be used throughout the manuscript to protect any identifying information. The names and specific locations of the schools which employ the participants were omitted completely from the manuscript. The schools involved were assigned a pseudonym and general geographical descriptions were used. Additionally, no identifying information of any students or colleagues

was included in the manuscript. All data is stored in a locked file cabinet on an encrypted hard drive (Patton, 2002). Data will be retained for five years, and then all components of the data will be destroyed (American Psychological Association, 2010). Any paper documents will be shredded, and all electronic files will be deleted from the USB.

Summary

To ensure an ethical transcendental phenomenological study, which sought to describe the well-being of experienced SETs in southeastern, Virginia, this chapter provided details on the research methods. Included in the methods was the rationale for choosing a transcendental phenomenological design, which aligned with the purpose of this study, as well-being is best captured through subjective means. Although well-being is primarily assessed via subjective measures, it can also be revealed via objective measures. To support the triangulation of data, multiple methods of data collection were used. A Workplace PERMA Profiler was initially used to develop a description of participants. Following the completion of this profiler, data collection commenced with individual semi-structured interviews of participants, focus group discussions, and audio diary recordings. Data was analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colazzi-Keen method. This chapter included a clear re-statement of the research questions, a description of the setting, identification of the participants, details of the procedures involved, the researcher's role, detailed description of data collection methods, plans for data analysis, and efforts to enhance trustworthiness. This chapter concludes with the intentional efforts being made to enhance the ethics of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe the well-being of experienced special education teachers (SETs) in southeastern, Virginia. To develop this description, data was collected from twelve experienced SETs using interviews, focus groups, and audio diaries. From the data collected, the following themes representative of SET well-being emerged: students at the heart of practice, artful instruction, integral relationships, proactive footholds for tomorrow and inescapable barriers to well-being. This chapter presents a description of each participant, the process of phenomenological reduction, textural and structural descriptions detailing each theme, and responses to each research question, with codes identified in tabular form. This chapter concludes with a composite description of experienced SET well-being.

Participants

To describe the well-being of experienced special education teachers (SETs), purposeful, convenience, and snowball sampling methods were used to gather study participants. Initially, permissions were obtained from one school division in southeastern Virginia, Bonnett City Public Schools (BCPS), and one regional public special education program in southeastern Virginia, Summer Beach School (SBS). BCPS required that permission be sought from school administrators prior to contacting teachers and seeking participation. Permission was gained from one high school administrator and three elementary school administrators. Snowball sampling was used to identify qualified teachers from within the school sites where permission from administration was gained. Following this, eight special education teachers employed by BCPS participated in the study. SBS contacted qualified teachers and those interested in participating in the study contacted this researcher to set-up their interviews and four special

education teachers employed by SBS participated in the study. The SBS teachers taught students in middle and high school grade levels. Overall, twelve consenting teachers participated throughout the duration of the study.

Eleven participants completed the Workplace PERMA Profiler (WPP). The WPP was used to generate descriptive data on the participants' typical workplace well-being prior to the interviews, focus groups, or audio diary submissions. Due to the recent change in workplace conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were asked to complete the profiler considering their typical workflow prior to school closures. According to the University of Pennsylvania Board of Trustees (2020), scores between 0-10 are assigned for the various elements of well-being. An overall well-being score of 9 or above is representative of high well-being, where an individual is functioning well and feeling great at work. A score between 5-8 is representative of normal functioning and a score below 5 represents that the individual may be struggling with that element of well-being (University of Pennsylvania Board of Trustees, 2020).

All communication with participants occurred via email, password-protected Zoom meetings, and text message. Due to COVID-19, there was no face-to-face interaction during the study. Additional permission was obtained from BCPS and SBS to communicate using Zoom technology with participants. Interviews were individually arranged with participants and were conducted using password-protected meetings on Zoom. Only the interviewer and participant were given access to the interviews. Three focus groups were held on Zoom and were also password-protected, so that only the applicable participants were allowed access into the meetings. Lastly, audio diaries were individually recorded by participants and submitted by email or text message.

All participants were licensed special education teachers (SETs) in Virginia, but their instructional experiences were diverse and, collectively, they teach in a variety of instructional settings. These settings included inclusion and co-taught content areas, self-contained, and resource classrooms. Participants' classroom teaching experience ranged from five years to thirty-seven years, and all participants were female. Pseudonyms were chosen by the participants and were used throughout the manuscript to protect their anonymity. Table 2 displays the demographic information and Workplace PERMA Profiler feedback of the participants.

Table 2

Background of Participants

Participant** **Denotes a pseudonym	Age	Teaching Experience	Student Categories	Grade Level	School Site*	Overall Workplace Well-Being	Elements of Well-Being: Positive Emotion (P), Negative Emotions (NE), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), Accomplishment (A), and Health (H)						
							P	NE	E	R	M	A	H
Ann	38	9 years	ID, ED	9th-12th grades	Orange High School	5	6.33	4.67	7.33	7.67	5	9.33	7
Bambi	58	22 years	LD, Autism	9th-12th grades	Orange High School (BCPS)	8	7.67	4	8.33	8	8.33	6	9
Carrie	42	18 years	Autism, Down Syndrome, TBI, ID	9th-12th grades	Summer Beach School		Did not complete profiler						
Diane	52	15 years	Autism, ID, OHI	6th-12th grades	Summer Beach School	7	7.33	3	7.33	7.67	8	7	7
Elizabeth	62	37 years	LD, ED, BD, OHI, DD	K – 2nd grade and 4th grade	White Plains Elementary (BCPS)	9	7.33	1.33	7.33	6.67	8.33	7.67	9
Jean	53	24 years	ED, ID, LD	1st and 3rd grades	Lemon Elementary (BCPS)	8	6.33	2	7	9	8.67	8.67	5.67
Laurel	39	5 years	Cross-categorical	2nd-3rd grades	Blue Sky Elementary School (BCPS)	8	6.67	3.33	9	7	8.67	8	3.33
Lynne	44	22 years	LD, ID, OHI	9th-12th grades	Orange High School (BCPS)	9	8.67	5.33	9	9	9.67	9	9.33
Mandy	55	32 years	ED	7th-8th grades	Summer Beach School	7	6.67	5	9	6.33	8.33	6.33	3.67
Ryan	55	29 years	Autism, SLD, OHI	9th-12th grades	Orange High School (BCPS)	8	8.33	3	8.33	7.67	9	8.33	9
Sally	49	20 years	LD, ED, OHI, autism	9th-12th grades	Orange High School (BCPS)	8	7.33	2.67	7.67	6.33	8	7.67	8
Serenity	40	5 years	Autism, OHI	9th-12th grades	Summer Beach School	8	7.33	3	5.67	8.33	8.33	8	9.33

Ann

Ann began her interview explaining that between providing virtual instruction for her students and assisting her own three children with their online learning needs, she was stretched thin. Ann's emphasis on her desire to candidly participate, even during such a hectic and unusual time, was striking. Ann vocalized a true desire to explicitly share her experiences in the special education field to support the future of the profession. Ann is a 38-year-old special education teacher (SET) who has spent fifteen years working in the public education system. She began her career as a security assistant at a middle school and then chose to transition into teaching. She became a special education teacher through the provisional licensure route and ultimately feels this route supported her successful navigation of her teaching role as a novice. Ann has taught students with emotional disturbances, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities for the last nine years. She currently teaches for Bonnett City, in a self-contained setting, at Orange High School, where she teaches students with intellectual disabilities (personal communication, May 4, 2020).

Ann is a single-mom and reports choosing and remaining in the teaching profession because it fits well alongside of her motherhood responsibilities. She actively engages with her school community, having served as an athletic coach for various sports over the course of several years. While she is no longer currently serving as a coach, she is pouring her attention and energy into her self-contained classroom and striving carefully to adhere to a work-life balance (personal communications, May 11, 2020, and June 5, 2020).

Bambi

Bambi is a 58-year-old SET with 22 years of special education teaching experience. She currently teaches for Bonnett City Public Schools and co-teaches geometry at Orange High

School to students that are on a standard diploma track. Bambi began her interview with a smile,

seeming eager to depart her new day-to-day norm of working in solitude at home away from her

esteemed colleagues and dear students. Just a few moments into the interview, the Zoom

connection was giving out, making it difficult to hear one another. Bambi was quick to offer to

interview over other technologies or to simply wait until later in the evening, demonstrating an

immediate flexibility. Once we resumed our interview, her love for those she works around, and

her students seemed to be emphasized in her responses during the interview, audio diary entries,

and throughout the focus group. Bambi began her teaching career teaching students with autism

for Summer Beach School (SBS). Her reasons for leaving SBS involved a feeling of isolation

and disconnection from the school community. Since she transitioned to BCPS, she has

consistently taught at Orange High School and describes the school community at Orange High

School like that of a "family." She stated, "... that's just the kind of environment that's been

created where we take care of each other" (personal communication, May 5, 2020). She

attributes the solid relationship bonds within her school community as vital during times of

tragedy, grief, and loss in her personal life. She also noted experiences with supportive

administration at Orange High School that have directly supported her functioning as a SET

(personal communication, May 5, 2020).

    Relationships and student outcomes have driven Bambi's choice to remain in the special

education field. When asked why she has stayed in the field, Bambi stated:

    Just the relationships, with not just the teachers, but with the kids. You know, just

    working with the kids in the classroom and being able to watch the light bulbs go on.

    And then being able to talk about it to people that understand what that means and what

that's like, you know? You know? I'll miss my family. I'll miss, you know, all that stuff (personal communication, May 5, 2020).

Carrie

Carrie is a 42-year-old SET who works for Summer Beach School (SBS). Carrie has 18 years of special education teaching experience. Her current classroom consists of seven students with severe disabilities and four paraprofessionals. Carrie serves as a mentor for novice SETs and described a willingness to share instructional materials with new teachers to alleviate some of their stress. When asked why she has chosen to remain in the special education field, Carrie smiled and stated, "Oh, it's definitely just being with the kids" (personal communication, May 11, 2020). When responding about the source of her negative emotions, her inflection changed, and her persona took upon that of a mama bear, while discussing the fair treatment of her students and how she advocates for their needs. In supporting the social skills of her students, Carrie developed a social skills club which invites all students, onsite BCPS and SBS students, to meet after-school for games and socialization. Carrie identifies this club as one of her accomplishments as a SET and her pride in this accomplishment was evident as she shared her students' experiences with the club (personal communication, May 11, 2020).

Diane

Diane is a 52-year-old SET with 15 years of teaching experience? She began her career in education as a teacher's assistant (TA) but received a provisional teaching license and transitioned into a professional teaching role with a cross-categorical teaching license in Bonnett City Public Schools (BCPS). After some time teaching with BCPS, Diane described in her interview, "I was teaching the same strategies. I had the same kids for the four years. And nothing I did--Nothing was changing and I was getting really burnt out on what I was doing"

(personal communication, May 18, 2020). At this point, Diane transitioned to a teaching

position with SBS, which she explained resolved her burnout (May 18, 2020). Diane was well-

spoken and her description of burnout was matter of fact. She currently teaches students with

autism in the self-contained setting and described, "So when I went to Summer Beach with these

students, every day is different" (personal communication, May 18, 2020). When asked why she

remained in the field of special education, Diane stated, "Working at Summer Beach, actually.

And then those, even the little accomplishments, that those students make. I mean, that's what

keeps me going" (personal communication, May 18, 2020). Her love for SBS and the students

shone through in Diane's words and demeanor. It was truly as if the SBS students themselves

revived her from the burnout, showing how personally powerful Diane's change in instructional

setting was to her well-being and retention.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a 62-year-old SET with 37 years of experience. Elizabeth explained that she

was preparing to retire at the conclusion of the 2019-2020 school year (personal communication,

May 13, 2020). With this interview occurring towards the end of the school year, as she was

approaching retirement, Elizabeth's relief was evident in her relaxed smile. Elizabeth teaches

students in kindergarten and second through fourth grades (personal communication, May 1,

2020). She describes her instructional setting as cross-categorical, teaching students with

learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, behavior disorders, other health impairments, and

developmental disabilities. During her interview, Elizabeth reported that she has remained in the

special education field for 37 years because:

> I like it. I mean, I like to--Well, you know, what else is really good about it, is that you
>
> start a year in September, and you are done in June. You know, my first job where I

worked for five years at 24/7, 365 days a year--That never ended. It just was continual, and you burnt out a lot faster. So, if you had a rough year in the public schools, your year ends in June and then you get that break and you get to start again (personal communication, May 13, 2020).

Jean

Jean is a 53-year-old special education teacher (SET) with 27 years of experience (personal communication, April 20, 2020). Jean works at Lemon Elementary in Bonnett City Public Schools (BCPS). She currently teaches students in first and third grades (personal communication, April 20, 2020). Jean was eager to complete her consent form and schedule her interview. She was my first participant. Jean's exhaustion and frustration with the demands of virtual learning were evident in her words. While she remained hopeful her work would help her students, she offered the reality that she had been out of touch with many students since the closure of schools in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was this reality that seemed to weigh heavy on Jean throughout our conversation. When discussing her teaching experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, Jean stated, "We're working really hard to push out this information and instruction and umm. People think we're not doing anything, or we are just sitting at home doing nothing, ugh. So not the case! I just hope it's appreciated and that somebody gets something out of it" (personal communication, May 1, 2020). Jean reported staying in the special education field because, "I don't think anybody else will hire me for anything else---because there have been some times over the years where I have wanted to just quit and go elsewhere, but I thought, well, I'm not going to be able to start somewhere else making what I make now" (personal communication, May 1, 2020).

Laurel

Laurel is a 39-year-old special education teacher (SET) with five years of teaching experience. Laurel teaches for Bonnett City Public Schools (BCPS) at Blue Sky Elementary. Laurel works with students with various disabilities in a self-contained classroom. Laurel is currently in school for behavior analysis and her excitement seemed to grow when talking about how she effectually uses applied behavior analysis to support her students in the classroom. Laurel stated:

So, I love behavior. So, I definitely get--- I love collecting data on the behavior, being able to see--- I'm very much antecedent based, like seeing what is happening before the behavior occurs. So, I love to just dive in and see" (personal communication, May 6, 2020).

When describing why she has chosen to remain in the field of special education, Laurel stated, "My kiddos. It's all about---It's my students. See, and I talk about like they're mine (personal communication, May 6, 2020).

Lynne

Lynne is a 44-year-old special education teacher (SET) with 22 years of experience. She has remained at the same high school in Bonnett City for the duration of her career and has built solid relationships within her school community. She described being fortunate to experience longevity working within the same school and in similar teaching assignments year-to-year. Currently, Lynne is a cross-categorical teacher, teaching students with a range of disabilities. She teaches in the inclusion setting, resource setting, and in the self-contained setting. An exemplary teacher, Lynne received the Teacher of the Year award in 2016 and several smaller awards leading up to it (personal communication, May 4, 2020). I interviewed Lynne during

Teacher Appreciation Week and she lovingly shared some of the messages and memos she has received from students. Her most cherished notes seemed to be from those students who have graduated and started their post-secondary lives but took the time to reach out to her to extend their appreciation. These messages were what comprised Lynne's visible pride and sense of accomplishment. While she has received notable awards, she explained that her sense of accomplishment is derived from student and parent feedback and her role as a mentor teacher to novice teachers. Lynne is also an active contributor to her school and local community. She consistently sponsors a club within the school, which provides students with opportunities to interact with a local non-profit organization. She also engages students in community-based instruction by having students work on finance skills in the retail setting with the intent to purchase and provide donated items to a local non-profit (personal communication, May 4, 2020).

Mandy

Mandy is a 55-year-old SET with 32 years of teaching experience. Mandy taught general education before transitioning into special education and currently teaches seventh and eighth grade students with emotional disturbances for Summer Beach School (SBS). Mandy reported that the 2019-2020 school year has been, "...the worst so far" (personal communication, May 15, 2020). Mandy's well-being was summarized through multiple descriptions of her workplace conditions. Although the challenges seemed to wear on Mandy, and she described exhaustion, she remained jovial. She smiled when she could and laughed as often as possible. Although Mandy reported feeling overwhelmed this school year, she explained that she chose to remain in the special education field because:

I love to teach and I still love it. I still have the passion. That's what remains. I like to

teach. I can't see myself doing anything else, nor do I want to do anything. There's times

that I can teach somewhere else, but I feel like changing schools and doing the

application--- I just-- I'm too old to do all that. I don't want to teach at another school

(personal communication, May 15, 2020).

Ryan

Ryan is a 55-year-old teacher with 29 years of teaching experience (personal

communication, May 7, 2020). Ryan currently teaches at Orange High School with Bonnett City

Public Schools. Ryan describes herself as "specialized" and described how she motivates kids to

work. She teaches students with autism, learning disabilities, and other health impairments.

Ryan describes her students as high functioning, many of them going on to college, trade

schools, or enlisting in the military (personal communication, May 7, 2020). When discussing

why she has remained in the field, Ryan stated, "I still like it. I mean---I still like working with

kids. The burnout hasn't hit me. I mean, there's days that you're frustrated, but I still like

working with kids. I still like seeing them successful" (personal communication May 27, 2020).

Ryan seemed to light up when discussing her novel-study literacy lessons that she uses with her

resource students. She described how she carefully previews and selects the novels. When

describing how eager and engaged her students are with the units related to studies of novels, she

seemed to glow.

Sally

Sally is a 49-year-old teacher with 20 years of special education teaching experience.

Sally currently teaches at Orange High School in the Bonnett City Public School division.

Following a day of virtual instruction, Sally chose to interview from outside. Previously, Sally

worked as a compliance support teacher, assisting SETs with the writing and maintenance of their IEPs. However, Sally missed working directly with students and chose to return to a special education teaching assignment, and her demeanor shifted when talking about these two experiences. When discussing why she has chosen to remain in the special education profession, Sally stated, "My joy at seeing students be successful. That's why I went into teaching and that's what's kept me in teaching" (personal communication, May 14, 2020).

Serenity

Serenity is a 40-year-old special education teacher with five years of special education teaching experience. Serenity entered the teaching profession as a paraprofessional, but then transitioned into the role of a teacher through provisional licensure. Serenity works for Summer Beach School (SBS), teaching students on the autism spectrum. Most of Serenity's students are on an applied studies diploma track. Serenity focuses much of her instruction on functional daily living skills and aligned state standards. When describing why she has chosen to remain in the profession, Serenity stated:

> Summers. Just kidding! Summers off [chuckling]. Yep, I do like that. That honestly, is a huge thing. Having the summers off and weekends and breaks like that's---that is something huge. But I really--- I like the--- I like the kind of camaraderie that comes with--- with teaching. Being the support that we receive and the--- and the students, too. I mean, like--- like I said, seeing the difference. The change in students and--- and we laugh so much. That--- that is one thing that I--- I don't know if I would get in like an office setting, you know? Just these kids! They're--- they're crazy and they're amazing (personal communication, May 12, 2020)!

Serenity seemed to beam with energy when reflecting on working directly with her students. The joy she described as being sourced from her students was evident in her smile and in her descriptions of them. Throughout the interview, it was also clear that Serenity was missing her students during virtual instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results

To address the central question and each sub question driving this study, each participant was asked to answer eleven open-ended questions during individual interviews. At the conclusion of the interview, each participant was given instructions on how to complete and submit five audio diary entries. The participants were able to answer the audio diary prompt freely, expressing their experience with one or more elements of well-being during their workday. For submission, participants either emailed or texted their audio diary entries. Once all participants were interviewed, three focus groups were scheduled. Each participant chose a focus group to attend based upon convenience. Focus groups ranged from three to five participants. Each of the twelve participants completed and fully participated in each method of data collection. Data triangulation was evident with informative data arising from the three methods of data collection.

Theme Development

To develop an accurate portrayal of the SETs' well-being, data analysis for this study aligned with transcendental phenomenology. Specifically, Moustaka's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colazzi-Keen method, which occurred over a series of phenomenological reductions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002), was employed. Initially, and throughout the data collection process, epoché was utilized to intentionally remove as much researcher bias as possible from the resulting data. Following this, transcendental-phenomenological reduction was

used for the individual consideration of each interview, audio diary entry, and focus group

response (Neubauer et al., 2019). Next, horizontalization was used to develop a list of

significant statements from all data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Table 3 portrays the

alignment of each research question with each method of data collection. After horizontalization

was used, thematic units were established. From the thematic units, structural and textural

descriptions were developed and provided within each theme (Phillips-Pula, Strunk, & Pickler,

2002). The last phase of theme development was the development of a composite description of

the SETs' experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The composite description

was provided as an answer to the central question and sub-questions.

Table 3

Research Question Alignment with Data Points

Central and Sub Research (SRQ) Question	Interview	Focus Group	Audio Diary
Central Question: How do experienced special education teachers describe their well-being within their professional roles?	What do you think has most impacted your choice to remain in the teaching profession?	Why have you chosen to remain in the special education field? How do you cope with the challenges and stressors that exist within your teaching roles? What additional supports would assist you in navigating the stressors involved in your occupation? What advice would you offer to a novice special education teacher? Considering your teacher education program, is there anything you feel would have better prepared you for your career in special education?	Considering your workday today, please describe one moment when: you felt a positive emotion (contentment, joy), engagement with a work-related task, the presence of a supportive colleague, a sense that you were completing valuable work, or a sense that you were able to accomplish your work-related goals.
SQ 1: What role-related experiences generate positive emotions for SETs?	Within your teaching role, what type of activities make you feel joyful at work? Under what circumstances have you felt sad, anxious or angry at work?	Why have you chosen to remain in the special education field? What additional supports would assist you in navigating the stressors involved in your occupation?	Considering your workday today, please describe one moment when: you felt a positive emotion (contentment, joy)...
SQ 2: What role-related experiences are engaging for SETs?	What experiences or activities in teaching special education do you become fully absorbed in, generate excitement, or interest you?	Why have you chosen to remain in the special education field?	Considering your workday today, please describe one moment when:... engagement with a work-related task...
SQ 3: How do SETs describe their role-related relationships?	Which workplace relationships have been most positive in your teaching career? Which workplace relationships do you feel could use some improvement and how do you feel they could be improved?	Why have you chosen to remain in the special education field?	Considering your workday today, please describe one moment when:... the presence of a supportive colleague...
SQ 4: What role-related experiences are meaningful for SETs?	In what ways do you feel your teaching role is meaningful?	Why have you chosen to remain in the special education field?	Considering your workday today, please describe one moment when:.. a sense that you were completing valuable work...
SQ 5: What role-related experiences generate a sense of accomplishment for SETs?	What do you think has most impacted your choice to remain in the teaching profession?	Why have you chosen to remain in the special education field?	Considering your workday today, please describe one moment when:... or a sense that you were able to accomplish your work-related goals.

Epoché. Epoché is the practice of the researcher setting aside his or her own experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although this cannot be done entirely, it is a necessary component of phenomenological analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a special education teacher, epoché was necessary to capture the essence of the participants' experiences. All prior notions, experiences,

or opinions related to teaching special education were listed and pushed aside throughout the

data collection and data analysis process. This was done by making a written list of personal

experiences related to the research question. All data was approached with naivety, seeking

participant descriptions or perceptions related to special education practices or experiences

previously encountered. Lastly, this researcher previously worked closely with one of the

participants during my own student teaching. These experiences were intentionally pushed

aside, and the data was approached anew, avoiding assumptions based on this familiarity.

Intentionality is necessary for phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality was

incorporated by seeking clarification on interview responses and utilizing direct quotes from

participants during data analysis. See appendix H to review this researcher's epoché journal.

Phenomenological Reduction. During phenomenological reduction, each component of

data was reviewed in isolation. While reviewing these components, the presence of the various

pillars of well-being, which include positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and

accomplishment were discovered. Barriers to these pillars were also discovered. Due to data

collection occurring between May and June of 2020, all participants were actively teaching

virtually in response to the school closures prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The

participants' responses were also sorted based upon whether it represented their typical teaching

experiences or whether the response reflected their experience teaching virtually during the

pandemic. This was necessary, as the teachers cited well-being-related experiences in relation to

both their typical teaching experiences and their recent experiences teaching virtually.

Moustakas (1994) indicates that phenomenological reduction requires the repeated examining of

the data. As the data was examined repeatedly, additional nodes were created within NVivo to

assist with organizing the data. Figure 1 portrays the progression of phenomenological reduction

in this study, which began by considering the elements of PERMA. This process continued and revealed data related to barriers of well-being and COVID-19. From here, data related to SET coping, retention, and implications were revealed.

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          ┌─────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────────┐
          │    COVID-19     │              │    Barriers to      │
          │     related     │              │    PERMA and        │
          │   experiences   │              │    negative         │
          └────────┬────────┘              │    emotions         │
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  ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐           ┌─────────────┐
  │ Barriers to  │  │ Elements of  │           │   Coping    │
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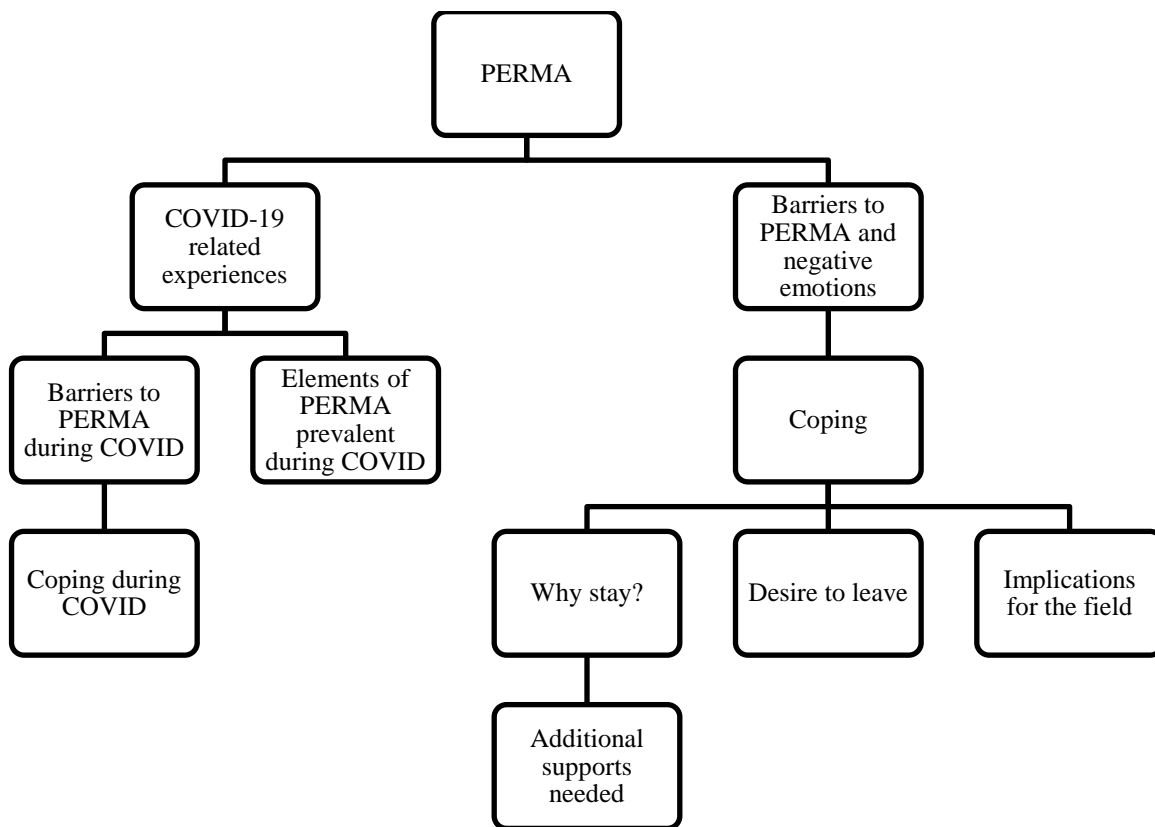
Figure 1. This figure portrays the process of phenomenological reduction.

Horizontalization and Imaginative Variation. As phenomenological reduction progressed, each component of data was reviewed repeatedly to extract each expression related to the well-being of the SETs (Moustakas, 1994). NVivo was used to highlight and sort each statement into nodes. From here, after each component of data was reviewed multiple times, NVivo was used to place the data into framework matrices. The framework matrices organized

the data by participant and assisted with reviewing each expression related to the individual nodes of the phenomenon. While using the framework matrices, each statement was perceived in isolation and a list was developed that lacked repetition. Lastly, imaginative variation was used to approach the data from various perspectives. During this phase, this researcher removed herself from any assumed truth and recognized the themes which existed within the statements reduced from the horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). From this, textural and structural descriptions of the phenomena were constructed.

      Themes. Within Nvivo, framework matrices were used to identify themes from within the nodes that resulted from the coding process. The Framework Method of analysis was developed by the National Center for Social Research (NatCen) and assists with systematic analysis, the development of an audit trail, and eases data navigation (National Center for Social Research, 2020). Additionally, the framework matrices assisted with the development of textural and structural descriptions of the phenomena, which are a necessary component of the Stevick-Colazzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994). While investigating the well-being of experienced special education teachers, five themes emerged as seeming conduits for their well-being. Within each theme, multiple elements of well-being were evident. Also, within each theme, COVID-19 and the experiences related to virtual teaching were evident. Figure 2 portrays the themes which informed the description of SET well-being generated during this study. Table 4 provides the frequency of thematic data retrieved from each data source.

Table 4

Frequency of Data Information each Theme Across all Sources

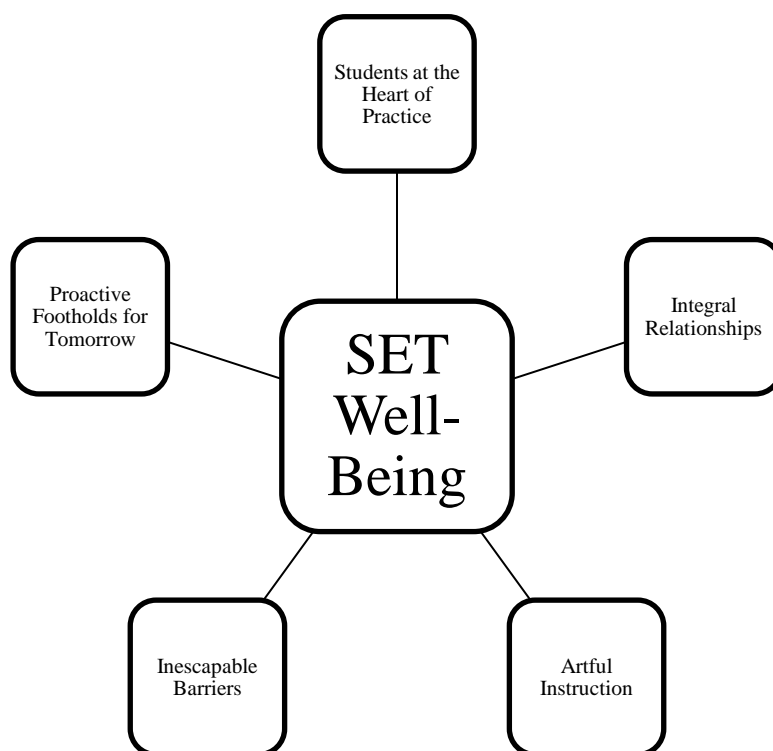| Theme	Interviews	Focus Group	Audio Diary
Students at the Heart of Practice	77	5	37
Integral Relationships	53	9	19
Artful Instruction	18	1	4
Inescapable Barriers	24	62	7
Proactive Footholds for Tomorrow	9	2	2

Figure 2. SET Well-Being

Students at the heart of practice. The most evident theme detectable throughout the data was a common care and centralized foci related to students. Multiple teachers synonymously referenced their students as "my kids" throughout our various interactions.

Students were the most referenced contributors to well-being within the elements of positive

emotion, meaning, and accomplishment. The equitable treatment of students was also

consistently referenced as a source of negative emotions. Additionally, students were the most

referenced reason for remaining in the field of special education. Students not only consistently

represented the force driving experienced SET retention, but also directly influenced three out of

the five elements of well-being. The lack of contact and direct interaction with students during

periods of prolonged virtual instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic was occurring

simultaneously with the data collection of this study. These virtual teaching experiences and the

emotions which resulted were discussed by teachers and are necessary to identify within this

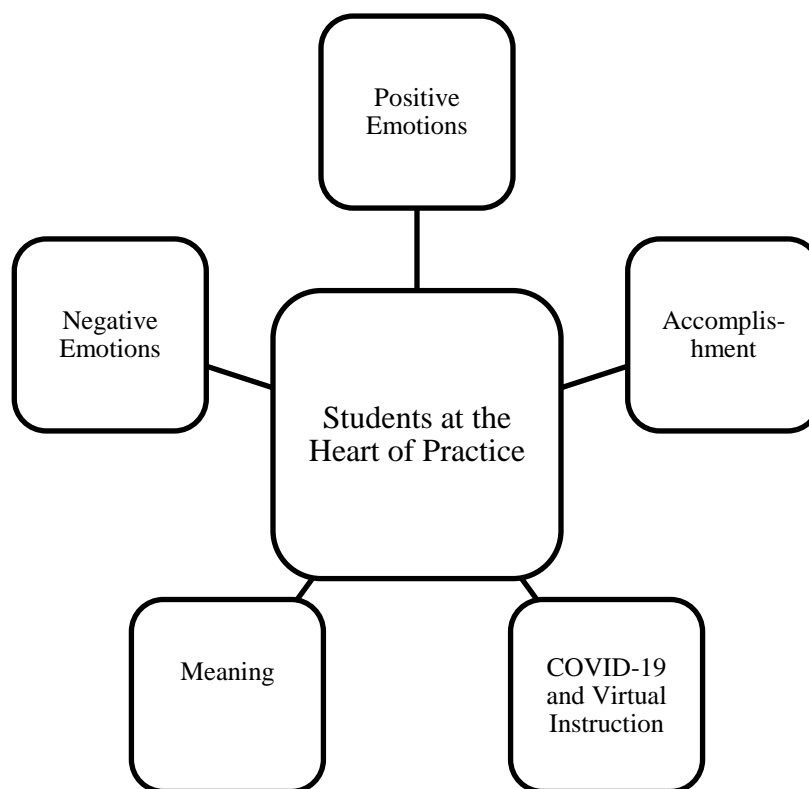major theme, as well. Figure 3 portrays the underpinning components of this theme.

Figure 3. Students at the Heart of Practice

Positive emotion. Teachers attributed positive emotions to directly instructing and working with students. As stated by Bambi in an audio diary entry, "working with kids is what brings me joy and contentment and makes me feel like I'm doing my job" (personal communication, May 14, 2020). Participants described this direct student instruction and interaction in the following categories: hands-on learning with students, functional instruction, or student success.

Hands-on learning with students was commonly cited as a source of positive emotions. During her interview, Sally stated, "Really, just any interaction with a student. When I could do group work with them or like small group or--- umm--- all my interactions with the students is my favorite" (personal communication, May 14, 2020). Mandy, a teacher to students with emotional disturbances, indicated that she found enjoyment in doing crafts with her students, providing the example of making cards or handmade gifts for students' caregivers. Another teacher indicated a similar emotion from working directly with students. In her personal interview, Carrie stated:

> I love doing anything hands-on with the kids. I love doing---umm---their literacy component because we have a good literacy component and I like doing their hands-on for their IEP goals. Because you really can see---See what they're getting. You can see the learning because of the data we take, too--- you can see. And when that kid has that moment---they're like, oh! (personal communication, May 11, 2020).

Serenity, attributed positive emotions to providing functional learning activities for her students. In her personal interview, she stated, "I really enjoy working with the students, like in--- in the in the functional setting. The social aspect, the--- Things that I think with the students that I work with, I really think that the things that matter most" (Serenity, personal

communication, May 12, 2020). Interestingly, Serenity and a few other teachers reported negative emotions resulting from allocating enough instructional time and planning time to teaching students standards-based content to accomplish Virginia Alternative Assessment Program (VAAP) requirements. VAAP was described by multiple teachers as time-constraining and not useful for certain groups of students. Carrie, a mentor to novice SETs, described working with novice teachers to assist in managing their VAAP-related tasks. For Serenity, teaching functional concepts that her students can generalize in other settings, to include post-secondary environments, elicits positive emotion. A teacher of another instructional setting, Lynne, indicated that positive emotions resulted from instruction related to functional skills. During her interview, when asked what yields positive emotions, Lynne stated, "Being able to collaborate with friends and co-workers to improve lesson plans and make them real life" (personal communication, May 4, 2020). Lynne approaches functional instruction by using community-based projects to create hands-on activities for her students.

The SETs described feeling positive emotions when their students demonstrate progress and are successful. Not only are positive emotions rooted in the accomplishment of IEP goals, but rather, witnessing the student experience her own success and accomplishment. Ryan attributed positive emotions to providing her students with lessons that allow students to experience their success. Ryan's positive emotions seemed to stem from her students' positive emotions. During her interview, Ryan stated:

> I would say that the activities that the kids demonstrate like they want to learn. They see success in what they're doing and they-- things that maybe they didn't think they could accomplish, that they do accomplish. And it makes them feel good about themselves.

It's almost like when they have that aha moment. And they want to keep going because

they see their own successes (personal communication, May 18, 2020).

Similarly, other teachers indicated that tracking student data and witnessing and

recording student progress, and eventual success, elicited positive emotions. Elizabeth, a SET

just a few weeks from retirement, described the highlights of her career rooted in student success

during her interview and audio diary entries. During her interview, she stated:

Progress [happy chuckle]. Anything--- I mean, whether it's behavioral or academic.

When you see that there is a kid that is making some progress--they seem to be maybe

more more tuned in. You know, they're into it. They're--- they're wanting something.

They're---they're proud of themselves for making the achievement. Whether they've

scored high on a test or they've gone for four or five days without exhibiting any

behavior. I mean, those are the big highlights of my--- my career for my life [happy

chuckle]" (Elizabeth, personal communication, May 13, 2020).

Meaning. The participants attributed much of their meaning to their students,

relationships with students, and student progress. Specifically, each SET reported a sense of

meaning in relation to student outcomes either academically, functionally, socially, or in relation

to students' post-secondary preparedness. In relation to academic student outcomes, Elizabeth

indicated that student progress not only makes her feel that her role is meaningful, but also has

supported her retention as a long-serving SET.   During her interview, Elizabeth stated:

Well, I think that it's great that you see progress with the kids. I think that kids that may

not have been making progress, and that's why they were referred and labeled, and then

all of a sudden things are starting to click because they've just got a little bit more help; a

little more attention---maybe pushing things, you know, in the right direction for them.

And I think that's--- I think that's wonderful. That's the reason I teach. You know? It's

not 100 percent for everybody that I work with. I mean, there isn't--- but there's enough

of them that it keeps me going (personal communication, May 13, 2020).

Similarly, during the focus group discussion, Ryan stated:

I think the fact that we can see them excel and be competitive to their age appropriate

peers makes me feel good about what I do. So, I think that's why I'm--- one of the

reasons I keep doing it (personal communication, June 8, 2020).

Some of the SETs identified that their meaning is derived from assisting students with

gaining functional skills and providing them with learning opportunities that assist them in

generalizing these skills. Interestingly, this was noted within teachers of both BCPS and SBS

and across both SETs of self-contained classrooms and SETs who work in the inclusion and

resource setting. Serenity, a SBS teacher working with students in the inclusion setting stated,

"…our students can really probably focus more of their time on…when I do those things, I really

feel like they actually are making a difference. And… giving them something that they can use

when they leave us…" (personal communication, May 12, 2020). Similarly, during Diane's

interview, she stated, "Everything is meaningful, like, you know, when they walk in and they're

getting off the bus. I mean, to me, that's meaningful because now they're using--- learning how

to use transportation" (personal communication, May 18, 2020).

The SETs also reported deriving meaning from relationships with students. This was also

a common thread among teachers of various classroom settings. Anne admittedly struggled to

identify where she derived her sense of meaning. However, she identified that her sole source of

meaning was rooted in student relationships and her role as a student advocate. During our

interview, Anne stated, "…I'm their friend, too…I think I'm very fair and I'm very real with

them…I don't treat them that they're different. I don't look at them because they have a disability…I think I'm more of an advocate for them" (personal communication, May 11, 2020).

Sally, a teacher in the inclusion and resource setting, indicated that her meaning was rooted in the privilege of getting to know students over the course of consecutive school years. When discussing this during her interview, Sally stated, "Well, having the privilege of getting to know a lot of kids at City View MS and then coming to Orange HS, where most of the City View MS kids go" (personal communication, May 14, 2020).

Post-secondary student preparedness also provided a sense of meaning for the participants who teach high school students. This was a source of meaning that was shared between the teachers of both BCBS and SBS. During her interview, Ryan, a BCPS teacher, stated, "… it's very seldom that I have a student who graduates---I follow them all four years--- who is either--- doesn't already have or is getting a job, going to college, going to trade school or going into a military" (personal communication, May 18, 2020). Similarly, a teacher in a self-contained setting at SBS, Serenity, identified meaning within preparing students for post-secondary life. Serenity stated during her interview, "...a lot of the--- of the instruction and work we do is to make them successful once they leave us. I mean, we have them till they're 22" (personal communication, May 12, 2020).

Accomplishment. Student progress and student outcomes were a common source of accomplishment for the SETs across instructional settings. Mandy reported feeling accomplished when her students with emotional disturbances demonstrate progress. When discussing her source of accomplishment, Mandy replied, "When kids start doing their work, when they start getting the concepts" (personal communication, May 15, 2020). Sally spoke of her inclusion math students, and reported a feeling of accomplishment related to students'

newfound positivity related to learning math. During her interview, Sally reported, "And a sense for me, a sense of accomplishment is that a student didn't enjoy learning something, but that they now enjoy it" (personal communication, May 14, 2020). Elizabeth described her accomplishment coming from student progress and from others seeing student progress, such as administrators and general education teachers. Lastly, Serenity discussed feeling accomplished through a student's post-secondary job placement. Serenity stated:

> ...situations like this student transitioning out and having getting a job… that's amazing---I've had her for the last three years and just seeing the growth and her ability to---do something consistently and---and have somewhere to go after she leaves---It---really does give a sense of accomplishment (personal communication, May 12, 2020).

Negative Emotions. While students represent a source for SETs positive emotions, much of teachers' negative emotions are rooted in the care and concern for their students. This was commonly evident across teachers of different instructional settings. During the focus group discussion, Ann described, "Stressors are that my students are mostly non-verbal and have severe cognitive abilities that they go home. And I know that they're getting better care with me at school" (personal communication, June 4, 2020). Similarly, Elizabeth expressed frustration over students' accesses to resources at home. Elizabeth stated:

> I work in a building that has children from very high-income families, all the way down to---I'm at school in the city, so we get a lot of kids who have been evicted from apartments. So, they're temporarily in hotels. They've been transient. They've missed a lot of school. And again, I feel very frustrated and upset for those kids. I get that the parents have more important issues, but I hate for the children to come second (personal communication, May 13, 2020).

COVID-19 and virtual Instruction. Students remained central to participant responses and perceptions related to the corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19). These responses were most-often noted in participant audio diary responses, but were certainly traceable to the other points of data. Multiple teachers expressed concern over learning gaps and inability to contact students or parents since the commencement of virtual instruction. However, some teachers reported meaning and value with the limited, but remaining, contact they did have with students. Mandy reported many obstacles in contacting students via any virtual face-to-face measures due to certain restrictions. She sent home paperwork packets for students, but reported very little contact with students during remote learning. Regarding one student interaction, Mandy documented a range of emotions in her audio diary. She stated, "So, that made me happy and did make me sad in some way, though, because when they do it--- I usually give them---make a big deal about it and give them a prize and some candy. But I sent her a GIF thingy. So, that was nice, but I was glad she was able to do that" (personal communication, May 20, 2020). During her interview, Lynne reflected on all the milestones with which her high schoolers would be missing out on. She stated, "So that's probably the hardest part. Just feeling sad for them" (Lynne, personal communication, May 4, 2020). Lastly, Bambi detailed in her audio diary the experience of seeing her students virtually via Zoom. Bambi stated, "And it just felt good to interact with kids again. I miss them. You know? I really-- I miss them today and it's been tough. So, that made me feel good [tearful]. Why am I crying? This is ridiculous" (personal communication, May 12, 2020).

Artful instruction. The participants described interest in preparing and executing instructional opportunities for students. This was a commonality that was noticeable among teachers of various grade levels and teachers of varying instructional settings. This was a

component of the special education teaching role, which contributed to well-being, that seemed

to be impeded by paperwork and other work demands of the special education teaching role.

Preparing and delivering instruction highly influenced teacher engagement and, thusly, impacted

teacher well-being when the delivery of instruction was largely impacted by the change to virtual

formats during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, it remained clear that the participants were

interested in the creation and delivery of student instruction. Figure 4 presents the underpinning

components of this theme.

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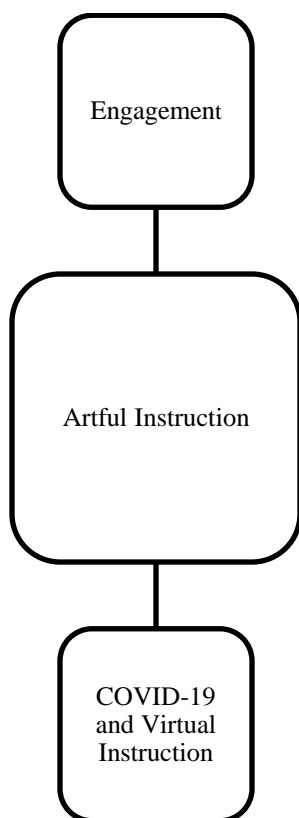
Figure 4. Artful Instruction

Engagement. When reviewing all participant statements related to engagement, the most

frequently utilized word among participants was "make." Most participants described

engagement with creating instructional opportunities for students. For this group of SETs, these

instructional opportunities were either rooted in technological-integration, development of classroom behavioral supports, or the creation of individualized instructional materials. Regarding the creation of instructional activities rooted in technology, Diane stated in her interview, "Using the smart board! I absolutely love using technology because it gets my kids up. I can spend hours at home doing smart board activities" (personal communication, May 18, 2020). Regarding the preparation to support student behavior in the classroom, during her interview, Laurel stated, "...collecting data and then graphing the data---sharing that. And a lot of times when we see that behavior occurring, it also leads to me creating the functional behavior assessment and then the behavior plan. But it's also-- I enjoy it" (personal communication, May 6, 2020). Lastly, the creation of instructional materials was frequently cited as a source of engagement for teachers. Ryan described her engagement stemming from preparing literacy units centered on novels for her students. She discussed the process of previewing the novels and preparing the units. She explained that students are excited to learn and read through the units she plans. During her interview, Ryan stated, "Because it makes them want to read. Because I'm really funny about the novels that I choose. If I-- If it doesn't capture my interest in the first three or four pages, then it's off the table" (personal communication, May 18, 2020).

COVID-19 and virtual instruction. When reflecting on their engagement during the prolonged period of virtual instruction during COVID-19, the participants reported a lack of face-to-face instruction with students. Teachers reported either having some virtual contact with students, but this was limited and varied from teacher-to-teacher. Some teachers reported a feeling of vulnerability related to using virtual technologies to communicate with students. They reported a lack of safety or worry with the concept of interacting virtually with students and have had less face-to-face instruction with students based upon this. One participant, Mandy,

described being prohibited from contacting students virtually, leading to the creation of paper packets that were distributed to students. These circumstances removed opportunity for face-to-face instruction for Mandy and her students during the COVID-19 pandemic and did represent a barrier for engagement for Mandy during this time.

On the other hand, some teachers expressed excitement from opportunities to prepare for future instruction for students following the return to in-person instruction. In her audio diary, Ryan stated, "We're excited about a program that we want to start planning for. Considering that students probably won't be in the classroom full time again next year" (personal communication, May 19, 2020). Another SET, Carrie, reported that she derives engagement from creating instructional materials for students from home. In her interview, she described that she continued with making instructional materials from her home and delivered them to students' porches during the COVID-19 pandemic. She stated, "I made kids hands-on materials and I delivered them to their homes and things like that. But there's only so much you can do with that" (personal communication, May 12, 2020).

Integral relationships. Relationships emerged as an apparent and existent component of the experienced SETs' well-being. While some opportunities for relationship improvement were cited by the participants, the positive, supportive, and nourishing at-work relationships were cited more often. Positive at-work relationships were frequently discussed in terms of paraprofessionals, co-teachers, administrators, and intra-department relationships. Additionally, several teachers working in the same school, commented on an exemplar department chair, Mr. A., who positively impacted a school community over the course of several years. In fall 2019, just months prior to the data collection for this study and the onset of COVID-19, Mr. A., died.

His passing impacted several teachers and they referenced it during their interviews. Figure 5

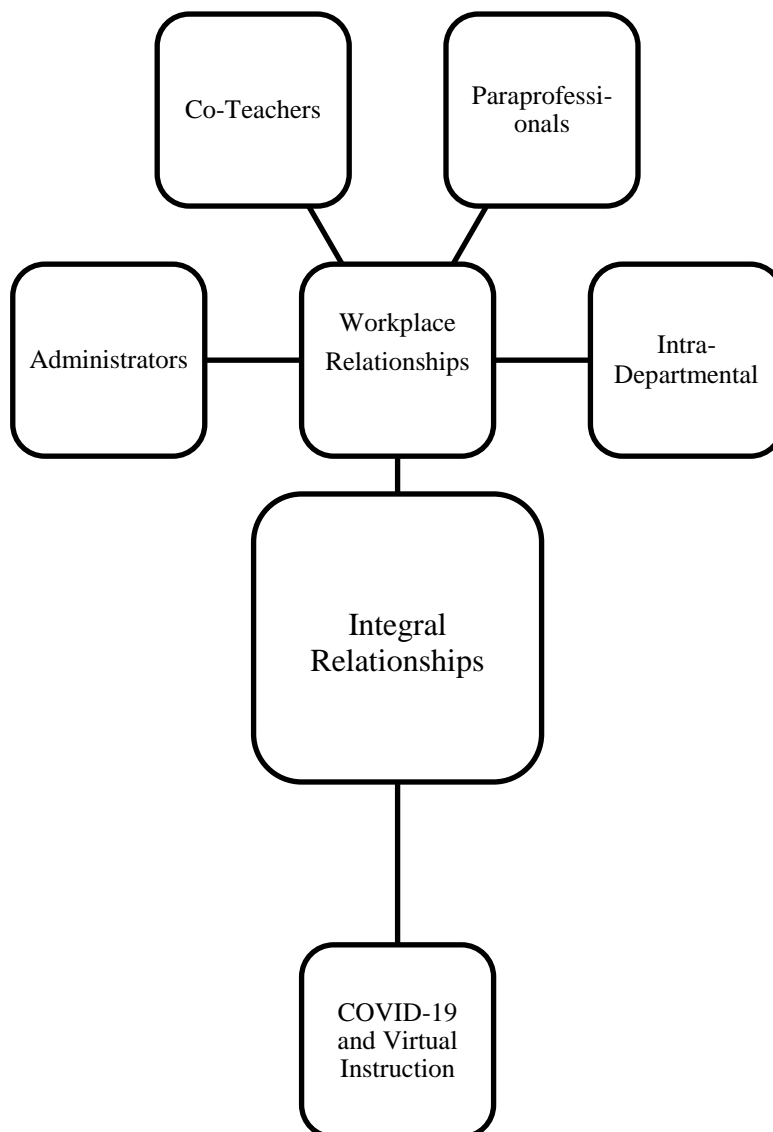portrays the underpinning components of this theme.

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Figure 5. Integral Relationships

Workplace relationships. Each experienced SET commented on positive relationships

within their workplace. Relationships with paraprofessionals were emphasized by teachers who

work in self-contained and resource settings. During her interview, Diane referred to the

paraprofessionals as her co-workers and stated, "...with my co-workers, I think that's-- that's the support. It's-- it's my co-workers. It's the people that are in my classroom" (personal communication, May 18, 2020). Co-teachers also were frequently referenced by participants as a source of support in the workplace. When referencing the strengths of a co-teaching relationship during her interview, Bambi stated, "You know.... we respected each other and we respected each other's strengths and weaknesses" (personal communication, May 5, 2020). The impacts of supportive administrators were also commented on by participants. Jean described, during her interview, that the strength of her relationship with her administrator was the administrator's previous special education teaching experience and her willingness to provide hands-on support in the classroom. Jean stated, "Very helpful. Having someone else in the building we can go to and she can give us a straight up answer because she knows, you know, the law and what types of cases came to her desk and their job" (personal communication, May 1, 2020). During the focus group discussion, Laurel shared, "I have a really good supportive admin that umm I am able to communicate with..." (personal communication, June 4, 2020). Intra-department relationships were also highlighted among the participants. Among all at-work relationships, during her interview, Lynne explained, "So definitely co-workers within my department have been the best" (personal communication, May 4, 2020). Also, of intra-department relationships, multiple participants who work at the same school cited positive support from an exemplary department chair who had recently died. In reference to his impact on her career, Ryan described during her interview, "...And to not let things get me so worked up to kind of deal with them in the way they came because he was so laid back about just kind of how he dealt with things" (personal communication, May 18, 2020).

COVID-19 and virtual instruction. Each participant described supportive at-work relationships. When referencing the COVID-19 pandemic, participants mentioned disconnection from this source of support that would otherwise be available at the physical workplace. When sharing during a focus group, Jean stated, "My co-workers are what helps get me through. They're awesome and I've missed them a lot" (personal communication, June 9, 2020). Several teachers described methods for connecting with their colleagues during this time of separation. These methods included: happy hour events on Zoom, weekly team meetings, routine meetings with administrators, and frequent text messaging throughout the workday (Bambi, Carrie, Jean, Serenity, and Sally; personal communication, June 9, 2020). Specifically, Sally described in her audio diary the opportunity to work alongside a colleague to celebrate the graduating seniors. Sally explained:

> Today, I felt the support of a colleague when I asked another teacher to go visit a student
> with me to give him his senior yard sign and she also worked with this young man for a
> couple years. And she is looking forward to it. So, it's nice to have colleagues that you
> can rely on and depend on (personal communication, May 21, 2020).

Inescapable barriers to well-being. The participants described role-related circumstances that interfered with their well-being. Each of the SETs cited a source for negative emotions in the workplace. Additionally, one SET, Diane, described her previous experience with burnout and what she did to overcome her burnout and to support her longevity in the field. When discussing novice SETs during a focus group, some participants described a need to warn young professionals from entering the field due to the demands of the role and the need for higher pay. Similarly, several participants cited reasons that would influence a decision to leave the profession. Figure 6 portrays the underpinning components of this theme.
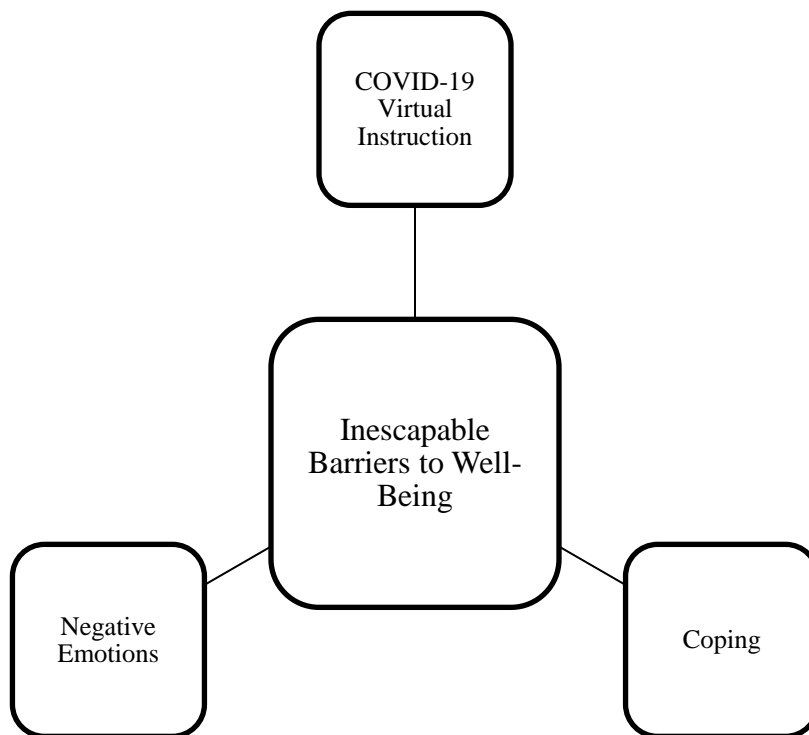
Figure 6. Inescapable Barriers to Well-Being

Negative emotions. Each participant cited sources of negative emotions during the

interviews. The sources for negative emotions ranged from paperwork to managing aggressive

student behavior. All participants described an immense workload inclusive of excessive

paperwork. During her interview, Serenity described the workload as, "...it's all the stuff that we

have to do constantly like progress reports, IEPs---you know, just all the---all the things. You

know? There's always--- it just never ends" (personal communication, May 12, 2020). Some

participants described time consuming paperwork that was redundant and seemingly

unnecessary. In her audio diary, Ryan stated, "While, on the other hand, the frustration of being

a special ed teacher and constantly having to deal with paperwork" (personal communication,

May 18, 2020). Elizabeth also described the workload demands of SETs. In her interview,

Elizabeth stated, "There's too much paperwork, there's too many meetings, too many

hours...you're dealing with behaviors that might take you out of your classroom and you miss--Missing hours for another student" (Elizabeth, personal communication, May 13, 2020).

Another source for negative emotions was student behavior. During her interview, Jean described, "With behaviors and not being able to get anything done about it, I did go through that every day---Sad for me, sad for all the other kids, and sad for the kid who is experiencing that" (personal communication, May 1, 2020). Notably, while Jean presented these circumstances as a source of her negative emotions, she also described unwavering hands-on support of an administrator in dealing with these behaviors. Similarly, Mandy stated that her negative emotions did not arise from the student behavior, but from being uninformed or unprepared to manage the behavior properly. In her interview, Mandy stated, "And then something blows up. I don't know---And if I had known previously what was going on, I might have handled it differently" (personal communication, May 15, 2020).

Several teachers also described a frustration with their feedback not being considered and a disconnectedness from division administrators and supervising administrators. Mandy described having limited input on the individualized education plans (IEPs) she was writing (personal communication, May 15, 2020). During the focus group, Mandy stated, "And I just it--makes me crazy because I don't feel like I'm listened to. That's what it really comes down to. I don't feel listened to at school. So, I would like to be listened to" (personal communication, June 8, 2020). Other participants described a disconnectedness from division-level administrators. Bambi described instances where the division requested feedback from SETs on surveys. Bambi described that her responses were similar to the other SETs' perspectives, representing a unified stance. However, the resulting outcomes that followed the surveys seemed misaligned from the true opinions of the SETs who provided feedback (Bambi, May 5, 2020). Similarly, during her

interview, Lynne stated, "...the biggest thing is when we are asked to do something from downtown without their support or their guidance..." (personal communication, May 4, 2020). Lastly, Bambi described the SET workload and the disconnectedness from division administrators to be related issues. During her interview, Bambi stated:

> Especially the higher the level, like from superintendent level---Like, he's so far removed from the day to day. Umm--- and the things that he expects and then that trickle down to us---It just feels like, you know, we're just asked more and more and we get less and less. We have less time to ourselves. We have less time to plan. You know? It's just kind of unreasonable---Well, they're teachers, they love the kids. They'll do it. They'll handle it (personal communication, May 5, 2020).

Lastly, a source of negative emotions for the participants was rooted within concern for equity for their students and their students' well-being. During her interview, Carrrie stated, "I get really angry when I feel like when one of my kids are being treated poorly. Or that something that's being done is not right for them" (personal communication, May 11, 2020). Similarly, Sally described the source of her negative emotions as, "If I think a student is being mistreated or not being treated fairly..." (personal communication, May 14, 2020). A lack of parental support was also described by multiple participants. During her interview, Ryan stated, "It's amazing to me how many parents, once their kids hit a high school level, say, oh, they're high school kids, I'm not helping them anymore. And that to me is frustrating" (personal communication, May 18, 2020). Ryan also went on to describe a seeming lack of priority being placed on high school education by parents. She described that some parents desire high school students to stay home and help with household responsibilities, such as childcare. Diane

similarly described negative emotions stemming from a lack of parental support. In her

interview, Diane stated:

> I asked the parents if they would support what we're doing at home and they say, no, I'm
>
> not going to do that. You're the teacher. You need to know. You need to be able to tell
>
> them how to do it and show them and they should just be able to do it at home. (May 18,
>
> 2020).

Diane described her previous experience with burnout. She previously worked in a

middle school, in the inclusion setting, and described negative emotions stemming from

standards of learning assessments (SOLs). Diane described this experience in depth during her

interview, but also shared her experience during the focus group. During the interview, Diane

shared, "I was getting burnt out doing SOLs, especially for students that were borderline ID/LD.

So, they weren't going to-- the SOLs weren't the best thing for them at the time" (personal

communication, May 18, 2020). SOLs also were a source of frustration for teachers in the self-

contained setting who assess students based on Aligned Standards of Learning (ASOLs).

Regarding ASOL assessments, Ann stated during a focus group:

> We do ridiculous testing that has nothing to do with their functioning ability and society
>
> because when they go out, do they need to know how to do algebraic equations or do they
>
> need to know how to successfully toilet themselves or advocate their needs and
>
> communicate that to somebody else (personal communication, May 11, 2020)?

Coping. While the participants described multiple sources for their negative emotions,

most participants described modalities for managing their negative emotions and coping with

their roles. One participant, Mandy, was unable to identify any methods for coping with

negative emotions and recognized this during the focus group. Mandy stated, "So obviously,

because I don't wanna answer this one--- is something I struggle with---ummm I'm going to

figure this one out" (personal communication, June 8, 2020). While a few participants briefly

mentioned the concept of burnout, only one participant described that she had previously

experienced it and overcame it. Diane described overcoming her burnout and remaining in the

field by switching instructional settings (personal communication, May 18, 2020). Of her

current setting, Diane stated, "I've been there for five years. I feel like every year is different. I

never have the same kids, maybe one or two, because...they age out of middle school, they get to

a different teacher for high school" (personal communication, May 18, 2020).

     COVID-19 and virtual instruction. Regarding COVID-19, the participants provided

details on the barriers to well-being during the time of prolonged virtual learning. In her audio

diary, Jean discusses her well-being being influenced by connecting with just a singular student

on a given day. Audio diary entries primarily captured the barriers to well-being during this

time. From these comments, it seems that these barriers were related to emotions,

accomplishment, and meaning. Related to a lack of accomplishment and negative emotions,

Bambi discussed paperwork. During her interview, Bambi stated, "Since COVID, it's just been a

lot of documentation. It's like CYA times--- It's exponential! Just like COVID spread---It's

exponential. The amount of the BS paperwork that we have to do" (personal communication,

May 5, 2020). Regarding the virtual instruction workload, Jean documented her experiences

with lack of meaning and accomplishment in her audio diary. Jean stated, "But still feeling like

doing all this work, putting things online and not getting that much feedback. So, feels kind of

like I'm beatin' my head against the wall" (personal communication, May 5, 2020).   Regarding

her experiences with a lack of meaning and accomplishment during virtual instruction, in her

audio diary Carrie stated, "It's frustrating and it makes the situation harder and makes me

antsy...I should be doing something, but I can't. What am I gonna do from across the computer screen? So that was frustrating for me today" (personal communication, May 12, 2020). In her audio diary, Diane reported feeling "...sad and anxious" while teaching virtually (personal communication, May 18, 2020). During her interview, Diane explained further, "So it's--it's been quite challenging--- losing a lot of sleep" (personal communication, May 18, 2020). The greatest barriers for coping during COVID-19 were described as the physical separation of SETs from their students and colleagues and the inability to physically separate the workplace from home. Regarding her well-being and her colleagues, Laurel stated in her audio diary, "...today was kind of-- it was a long, rough day...started out with some of my coworkers... getting moved to different grade levels...It was a very emotional morning and then working with students who struggled with distance learning" (personal communication, May14, 2020). Regarding the inability to separate work from home, Diane indicated that coping was a challenge. Diane stated during a focus group, "Right now, it's a little bit different because of the school closures. I'm bringing everything home" (personal communication, June 4, 2020).

Proactive footholds for tomorrow. The participants described taking part in the development of pre-service and novice teachers in various capacities. Based on participants' descriptions, supporting novice teachers yielded an opportunity to build relationship, rendered a sense of accomplishment for experienced SETs, but also highlighted needs within the profession. Additionally, participants described limitations of teacher preparation programs, which they have either noted as either a limitation of skill or knowledge evident within their own practice or a limitation of skills and knowledge that they have noticed among pre-service and novice teachers entering the field.
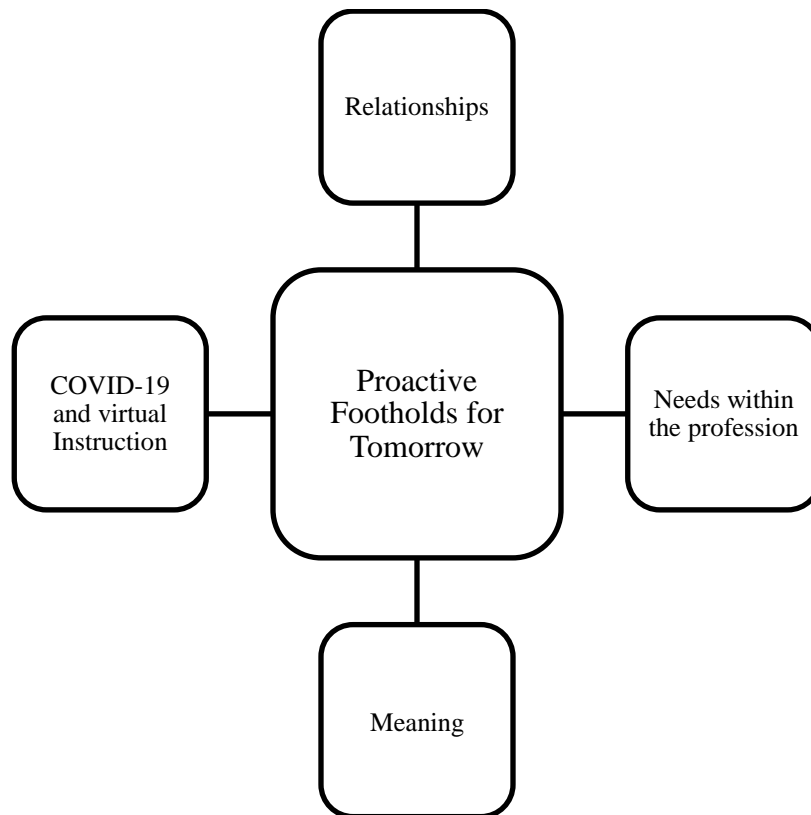
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Figure 7. Proactive Footholds for Tomorrow

  Relationships. The participants described relationships with pre-service and novice

teachers by either acting as cooperating teachers for pre-service teachers during student teaching,

supporting novice teachers informally, or developing relationships through mentorship

assignments. Serenity described not having a mentor available to her when she began teaching

and described it as a newer support offered at SBS. In her interview, she stated, "Like when I

was a first year, second year, third year, I did not have a mentor" (personal communication, May

12, 2020). Carrie described her role as an assigned mentor to two novice teachers. She

described being available to listen to her mentees. In her interview, Carrie stated:

  ...Whether you feel like you should know or you feel like you already know--You know,

  you don't want to ask your superior. You want to ask someone else. And if they ask me

something, I don't have to go--going up to administration, saying, I don't know--- you

know... (personal communication, May 11, 2020).

A few of the participants described making connections with novice teachers informally.

Elizabeth indicated that her positive workplace relationships have been rooted in these

connections. During her interview, Elizabeth stated:

I'm kind of on the end now, so it's like I'm more of a mentor for them because I've been

there longer. So, they usually will come to me and ask me, whereas in the beginning of

my career I was going to the people who had been onboard longer (personal

communication, May 13, 2020).

Meaning. Working with novice teachers provided a sense of meaning for experienced

SETs. While she has never served as a formal mentor for novice SETs, Bambi indicated that

being intentionally assigned to co-teach with novice general educators yielded a sense of

meaning for her. She stated, "I feel like that--that's one role that I have is educating educators"

(Bambi, personal communication, May 5, 2020). Laurel stated that her role as a formal mentor

contributed to her meaning. During her interview, Laurel stated, "I'm also--- I'm a mentor

teacher. So that's also helpful because I'm able to work with a first-year teacher" (personal

communication, May 6, 2020).

Needs within the profession. Working with novice teachers provided the participants

with knowledge of needs within the profession. These needs involve mentorship programming

and pre-service teacher preparations. Serenity described the needs related to her mentorship role.

As a mentor, Serenity described that while the relationship with the novice was helpful for the

novice educator, the programming needed additional organization. During her interview,

Serenity stated:

...I think that---that part---that's kind of blurred a little bit as far as, you know, who--

who's responsible for what, when it comes to like, you know, with a brand new teacher.

You know, I think probably the communication between admin and the mentors and, you

know, where does the-- where does the line you know, where does the line? How much

do they come to me and how much do they you know---is it the responsibility of admin

to, you know--- to actually train these brand-new teachers, you know? (personal

communication, May 12, 2020).

During a focus group, Lynne reported needing additional resources to mentor a novice

teacher. Lynne stated:

I almost feel knowing how much a good mentor of a new special ed teacher would have

to do, I feel like that could be a prep for them, that they should have one less class, so

they could really... The last time I mentored a special ed teacher was a long time ago, but

I needed more time than I had available to be a good mentor (personal communication,

June 9, 2020).

Ryan spoke of her experience as a cooperating teacher and continuing this relationship

informally as the teacher graduated and began her career as a novice educator.   During a focus

group, Ryan stated:

...the best student teacher I ever had---My own building wanted her and she ended up

going to an elementary school and they made her take her first year of teaching---They

made her be in charge of the special education committee. She wasn't ready. She was

incredible. And unfortunately, after three years, she's not teaching anymore because...

They put too much--- it wasn't an option for her. And they put too much on her first

(personal communication, June 9. 2020).

COVID-19 and virtual instruction. While the teachers described means for connecting with students, parents, and colleagues during prolonged periods of virtual instruction during COVID-19, connections with mentees and novice teachers were infrequently mentioned. In her audio diary, Bambi discussed continuing to support her novice co-teacher virtually by facilitating communication with parents and creating a workable balance with her co-teacher. Bambi stated:

> But I know Miss A was not--she was kind of freaked out. She's a first-year teacher. So, I went in and I called the parent and it actually ended up being really good. It was a good conversation. I felt like I really talked the mom down and gave her some good ideas (personal communication, May 15, 2020).

Additionally, in her interview, Bambi described readjusting the co-teaching responsibilities to fit the virtual instruction model. Bambi noted that the novice co-teachers she has worked with have strong technology skills which have contributed to a well-balanced classroom. During periods of prolonged virtual instruction, Bambi emphasized the benefit to co-teaching with a technologically savvy novice co-teacher. Bambi stated:

> You know, but I am horrible at technology. And so, she's had to take on all the video. And this is how, you know---Like, I knew how Zoom works because I used it in my church for meetings, but that was about it. I didn't know. She had to figure out breakout rooms and all this stuff... That's her. Her and Miss C are amazing---technology. So, they figure all that stuff out. And then they teach me (personal communication, May 5, 2020).

Research Question Responses

This study was directed by one central question and five sub-questions. Each theme evolved from the central research question and is responsive to one or more sub-questions. This section provided a narrative and direct response to each research question, incorporative of the

resulting themes, and provided information on the coding process that informed each theme. The themes do not respond to a singular sub-question and overlapping is evident. Additionally, a composite description was provided as a response to the central research question.

Central research question. The central research question guiding this study was: How do experienced special education teachers describe their well-being within their professional roles? According to Seligman (2011), there are five elements of well-being. These elements are positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). Each element of well-being is addressed within each sub-question. However, during this investigation, it was discovered that there were role-related barriers inherent to the well-being of SETs. These barriers are representative of typical practice and not a result of prolonged virtual instruction due to COVID-19. However, this investigation did reveal that there were newer barriers that were discussed by the SETs in relation to working from home and teaching virtually. Ultimately, the participants discussed the coping skills they have acquired or intentionally practice to meet the demands of the profession and to remain within the field. The participants also discussed how pre-service and novice teachers could be better supported, based on the barriers to well-being they described.

Overall, participants described sources for each element of well-being and identified coping mechanisms that they used to counteract the stressful working conditions that they encounter. The most heavily described element of well-being was relationships in the workplace. The participants discussed the various relationships that are integral to their teaching roles, including relationships within their special education departments, relationships with co-teachers, relationships with administrators, and relationships with paraprofessionals. Participants identified the usage of exercise, alcohol, and social supports as methods for coping with their

work-related stressors. Only one participant was unable to identify a coping mechanism that she

uses to combat the stress of workload and indicated that this may be influencing some of her

current work-related stress. Table 5 displays the open coding and resulting themes addressing

the central question.

Table 5

Open Coding and Resulting Themes for the Central Question

Open codes	Frequency of codes across data points	Resulting theme
Excessive workload/paperwork	21	Inescapable
Lack of support from division administration	11	Barriers
Lack of support from building or supervising administrators	17	
Need for instructional materials and curriculum	6	

Sub-question one. Sub-question one was: What role-related experiences generate

positive emotions for SETs? The participants revealed that their positive emotions stream from

working directly with students. The participants used the following descriptors for positive

emotions: happy, enjoy, love, joy, good, awesome, and nice. Also, multiple participants were

noted to have chuckled happily while discussing the source for their positive emotions. As

teachers documented their experiences teaching virtually during COVID-19, students remained

the source of positive emotions. Bambi described these emotions as she stated during her

interview, "...just anytime we're on-- we're live and a kid checks in. You know? I was like---

wow! There is a kid! You know? Out of 25 kids in the class, one will check in during class.

And you just get so excited [chuckle]" (personal communication, May 5, 2020). Teachers who

reported a lack of contact or limited virtual instruction attendance among students discussed this

across all data points, as well. For example, Carrie stated in her interview, "I'm really sad I'm

just not with the kids because it really--The kids who I don't get to see because they're not

coming" (personal communication, May 11, 2020). Lastly, the most obvious barrier to positive

emotion for teachers was the concern for how students are treated and a desire for students to be

treated fairly. During her interview, Laurel stated, "I am frustrated with seeing when students

are limited or not given opportunities that I feel that they---that they should be given" (personal

communication, May 6, 2020). Table 6 displays the open coding and themes addressing sub-

question one.

Table 6

Open Coding and Themes Addressing Sub-Question 1

Open Codes	Frequency of Codes Across Data Points	Resulting Theme
Teaching/working with students/kids/kiddos: Interacting, doing activities, teaching lessons, connected with students, group lesson plans and activities, being in classroom with students	18	Students at the Heart of Practice
COVID-19: presence of positive emotions related to student interaction or student participation with virtual instruction	21	
Negative emotions related to the welfare of students and/or the equitable treatment of students	24	Inescapable Barriers

Sub-question two. Sub-question two was: What role-related experiences are engaging

for SETs? The participants shared a common source of engagement which represented the

creative design and provision of instruction for students. Although this slightly differed by

participant, this involved the creation of materials for students. Some teachers discussed creating

Smart Board activities, while others discussed the creation of activities related to functional daily

skills. During her interview, Mandy stated, "Making lesson plans, doing hands on activities,

doing crafts with the kids, having them make gifts. I really like doing the behavior modification"

(personal communication, May 15, 2020). Participants described their engagement using the

words: enjoy, love, engaged, best, and interest. This element of well-being was the least

detectable among participant comments and descriptions of their experiences teaching virtually

during COVID-19. Regarding virtual instruction, Ann stated in her audio diary, "It was hard to

stay focused on doing work today. I did not have any interaction with my students, parents, or

colleagues" (personal communication, May 12, 2020). On the other hand, Carrie remained

engaged in the development of student materials while providing virtual instruction from home.

During her interview, she stated, "I made kids hands on materials and I delivered them to their

homes and things like that" (Carrie, personal communication, May 11, 2020). Table 7 displays

the open coding and themes addressing sub-question two.

Table 7

Open Coding and Themes Addressing Sub-Question 2

Open Codes	Frequency of Codes Across Data Points	Resulting Theme
Making/creating activities for kids, behavior plans, smart board lessons, providing hands-on opportunities, group-work lessons, differentiating instruction, making student materials, foldables	16	Artful Instruction
COVID-19: presence of engagement related to designing instruction	7	

Sub-question three. Sub-question three was: How do SETs describe their role-related

relationships? The participants discussed that relationships with their colleagues are integral to

their teaching roles and the combined frequency of the coded various relationships across all data

points was the most detectable element of well-being for SETs. The colleagues can be grouped

into the following categories: administration, intra-departmental relationships with other SETs,

co-teachers, and paraprofessionals. This element of well-being was described as sustainable

during periods of prolonged virtual instruction. Teachers discussed communicating frequently

with their colleagues via text messaging and online Skype or Zoom gatherings. In her audio

diary, Diane stated:

> ...we then had a Zoom with my team. We all talked about how we're all supporting each
>
> other. We're getting all of our work done. We're getting stuff ready for next year. We're
>
> talking about how the kids are doing well, when we speak with them. So,
>
> that just made me feel really good that we're there supporting each other (personal
>
> communication, May 22, 2020).

The participants also discussed relationships with novice teachers. Some of these

relationships were formal, as they were assigned to co-teach with a novice or assigned a novice

SET to mentor. Other relationships were informal, as some SETs came alongside of novices to

support and encourage them, just as other experienced teachers had done for them in the past.

Elizabeth described this by stating in her interview, "I'm kind of on the end now, so it's like I'm

more of a mentor for them because I've been there longer. So they usually will come to me and

ask me, whereas in the beginning of my career I was going to the people who had been onboard

longer" (personal communication, May 13, 2020). During virtual instruction during COVID-19,

the participants' maintenance of contact or support of novice teachers was infrequently

detectable within the data. Table 8 displays the open coding and themes addressing sub-question

three.

Table 8

Open Coding and Themes Addressing Sub-Question 3

Open Codes	Frequency of Codes Across Data Points	Resulting Theme
Relationships: Positive descriptions or influences with intra-departmental SETs	23	Integral Relationships
Relationships: Positive descriptions or influences with co-teachers	18	
Relationships: Positive descriptions or influences with paraprofessionals	11	
Relationships: Positive descriptions or influences with administrators	16	
COVID-19: Workplace relationships (all categories: intra-departmental, co-teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators).	10	
Relationships with mentees or novice educators	7	Proactive Footholds for Tomorrow
COVID-19: Relationships with mentees or novice educators	1	

Sub-question four. Sub-question four was: What role-related experiences are meaningful for SETs? The participants discussed their meaning was derived from student outcomes. The outcomes ranged and were dependent on the instructional setting of the participants. The outcomes cited varied from progress on an IEP goal, post-secondary student accomplishments, or an increase in students' functional skills. The SETs commonly described their meaning with the following descriptors: help, make a difference, or meeting student needs. Several participants also indicated that they derived a sense of meaning from their participation in supporting novice educators. Some participants were assigned as formal mentors or assigned to co-teach with novices, while other participants supported novice educators informally. Table 9 displays the open coding and themes addressing sub-question four.

Table 9

Open Coding and Themes Addressing Sub-Question 4

Open Codes	Frequency of Codes Across Data Points	Resulting Theme
Student success and outcomes	21	Students at the Heart of Practice
COVID-19: student success and outcomes	12	Students at the Heart of Practice
SETs supporting novice educators	6	Proactive Footholds for Tomorrow
COVID-19: SETs supporting novice educators	1	Proactive Footholds for Tomorrow

Sub-question five. Sub-question five is What role-related experiences generate a sense

of accomplishment for SETs? While some participants described being formally recognized

through various accolades during their careers, the participants commonly sourced their

accomplishment from student success or progress. The circumstances surrounding student

success varied based upon instructional setting. For example, during her interview, Laurel

stated:

> At the beginning of the school year, you know, they need support while getting off the
>
> bus to walking to my classroom because I'm at the other side of the school. But, by the
>
> beginning of March, they were doing it all independently and they were coming into class
>
> (personal communication, May 6, 2020).

In contrast, Bambi stated during her interview, "...anytime kids pass SOLs—anytime my

speds pass an SOL is a huge accomplishment or umm pass the class" (personal communication,

May 5, 2020).

When discussing accomplishment during times of prolonged virtual instruction, teachers discussed and documented feeling a sense of accomplishment when they completed various role-related tasks. For example, Jean stated in her interview, "When I finished writing all these distance learning plans and prior written notices and instructional logs and IEPs, I feel like, yes, I am getting somewhere. So good to have it done." (personal communication, May 1, 2020). Bambi described her accomplishment during COVID-19 during her interview by stating, "They are very diminished. They're not--I get a sense of accomplishment from much less. From the littlest thing" (personal communication, May 5, 2020). Another example, Ann, in her audio diary stated, "So yay. I got progress, done. I don't know how I feel about it. There's definitely not a whole lot of joy, but I did accomplish my work-related goal for today" (personal communication, May 11, 2020). Table 10 displays the open coding and themes for sub-question five.

Table 10

Open Coding and Themes for Sub-Question 5

Open Codes	Frequency of Codes Across Data Points	Resulting Theme
Student success or progress	19	Students at the Heart of Practice
COVID-19: Student success or progress	9	
COVID-19: Task Completion (IEPs, progress reports, zoom with student)	17	This does not inform a theme but does indicate a shift in source of accomplishment during COVID-19.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the study's purpose to describe the well-being of experienced special education teachers (SETs). From this, the study's data collection methods were reviewed, the phenomenological reduction process was described, and the resulting themes were presented through structural and textural descriptions. A connection of all data collection

methods to the research questions was also provided. The themes revealed from the data were:

Students at the Heart of Practice, Artful Instruction, Integral Relationships, Inescapable Barriers,

and Proactive Footholds for Tomorrow. Lastly, the codes were provided in tabular form,

providing a foundation for the resulting themes and the responses to each research question.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the subjective well-being of experienced special education teachers (SETs) in southeastern Virginia. This chapter provides a summary of the five themes that emerged from data analysis and situates these findings within the foundational theoretical framework, within the current literature on this topic, and within the most recent events impacting K-12 education. Following this, theoretical, empirical, and practical implications are detailed. Lastly, this chapter identifies limitations and delimitations of this study and provides recommendations for future study.

Summary of Findings

The central research question guiding this study was: How do experienced special education teachers describe their well-being within their professional roles? Seligman's (2011) well-being theory was used to foundationally direct this inquiry. The well-being theory indicates that positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment are the five elements of well-being. Based upon this, there were five sub-questions that were answered through the development of five themes.

Sub-question one was: What role-related experiences generate positive emotions for SETs? The participants revealed that their positive emotions stream from working directly with students. As teachers documented their experiences teaching virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic, students remained the source of positive emotions. The most expressed barrier to positive emotion among participants was the concern for equitable treatment for students with exceptionalities (SWE). The theme that was revealed through the addressing of this question was Students at the Heart of Practice.

Sub-question two was: What role-related experiences are engaging for SETs? The theme that revealed itself through the addressing of this sub-question was Artful Instruction. The participants shared a common source of engagement representing the creative design and provision of individualized instruction for students. This slightly differed by participant, with some teachers discussing technologically-based instructional methods, some mentioning socially supportive learning opportunities, and some discussing hands-on learning activities in the classroom. This element of well-being was the least detectable among participant comments and descriptions of their experiences teaching virtually during COVID-19.

Sub-question three was: How do SETs describe their role-related relationships? While addressing this sub-question, the data supported a singular theme indicating that there are Integral Relationships for SETs. The participants discussed that relationships with their colleagues are integral to their teaching roles and the combined frequency of the coded various relationships across all data points was the most detectable element of well-being for SETs. The colleagues discussed by the participants represented administrators, intra-departmental relationships with other SETs, general education co-teachers, and paraprofessionals. When discussing experiences related to teaching during COVID-19, this element of well-being was described as impacted, but sustainable by way of Zoom social events and ongoing group text messaging. The participants also discussed relationships with novice teachers. These relationships were either formal mentorship assignments or informal connections purposely sought to boost and support a novice teacher. During virtual instruction during COVID-19, the participants' maintenance of contact or support of novice teachers was infrequently mentioned within the data.

Sub-question four was: What role-related experiences are meaningful for SETs? While analyzing data, it was revealed that students contribute to the meaning of SETs, further influencing the theme of Students at the Heart of Practice. Additionally, the participants sourced meaning from assisting novice educators, influencing the Proactive Footholds for Tomorrow theme. When considering the meaning derived from students, student outcomes were dependent on the instructional setting and grade levels of the participants, but nonetheless provided a sense of meaning for the participants. For example, a student receiving a job after high school provided meaning for one participant, while another participant mentioned a student accomplishing an IEP goal related to a functional living skill provided meaning. Several participants also indicated that they derived a sense of meaning from their participation in supporting novice educators.

Sub-question five was: What role-related experiences generate a sense of accomplishment for SETs? While some participants described being formally recognized through various accolades during their careers, the participants commonly sourced their accomplishment from observing student success. This further informed the Students at the Heart of Practice theme. One participant, Elizabeth, described the lack of accomplishment that she experienced when she felt she was not able to guide a student to success during a previous school year. The circumstances surrounding student success varied based upon instructional setting and grade level. When discussing accomplishment during times of prolonged virtual instruction, teachers discussed feeling a sense of accomplishment when they completed various role-related tasks as witnessing student success in-person was not a possibility.

Discussion

This section will situate the study's findings within Seligman's (2011) well-being theory. In this section, the relativity of the findings to this theoretical framework and the resulting and lasting significance are described. Additionally, the findings are situated within the current literature on the topic of SET well-being. Specifically, the study's findings are considered as they either corroborate or differ from what other researchers have previously uncovered. Lastly, a contribution to the field will be described.

Theoretical Relatedness

In 2011, Seligman (2011) introduced the well-being theory. The well-being theory arose from within the field of positive psychology and Seligman has been named the father of positive psychology (Kun, Balogh, & Krasz, 2017). As described by Seligman (2011), positive psychology is what an individual "chooses for its own sake" (Seligman, 2011, p. 11). Positive psychology studies the optimal functioning of groups, so the well-being theory, focused on the flourishing of individuals. These characteristics of the theory made it an appropriately fitting framework for the study of experienced special education teachers.

The well-being theory indicates that there are five elements required to live a flourishing life. These elements are positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Butler & Kern, 2016; Kun et al., 2017; Seligman, 2011). Seligman (2011) indicated that each element can be considered individually, as they are not co-dependent upon one another. Based upon this, each element can be robustly raised or modified (McQuaid & Kern, 2018 & Seligman, 2011). This theoretical characteristic supports the appropriateness of using this theory to investigate experienced teachers, as these teachers have worked amidst the documented challenges in the field of special education. Results relative to the WBT are not

final, but are rather a true representation of a contribution to literature which can be built from, allowing for future study, practical modifications, and teacher growth.

To provide a description of the participants included in this study, the Workplace PERMA Profiler (WPP) was used to collect information related to the participants' typical workplace well-being. Setting apart teacher's typical workplace functioning during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants responded to the profiler without consideration of the workplace and workflow changes that resulted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eleven of twelve participants completed the profiler. Although this was used to generate descriptive data on the participants, while relating the study's findings to the WBT, the participants' WPP results were discussed. According to the Pennsylvania Board of Trustees (2020), scores between 0-10 are assigned for the various elements of well-being. An overall well-being score of 9 or above is representative of high well-being, where an individual is functioning well and feeling great at work. A score between 5-8 is representative of normal functioning and a score below 5 represents that the individual may be struggling with that element (University of Pennsylvania Board of Trustees, 2020).

Considering typical practice, the mean positive emotion score among participants was 7.24. The participants indicated that positive emotions were derived from working with students/kids. Participants described this direct student instruction and interaction in the following categories: hands-on learning with students, functional instruction, or student success. However, participants indicated that negative emotions were sourced from a perceived lack of equitable treatment for their students. Negative emotions are also measured by the WPP. The mean negative emotion score among participants was 3.39, indicating that negative emotions do not fall within the range of struggling. Among these participants, this is encouraging, as

previous research consistently associated affect with physical health (Holdsworth, 2019; Ironson et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2018). As it is discussed further, while this study incorporated participant coping modalities, it did not include the assessment of participants' physical health, which would provide an indication of participant health which could be compared with participants' self-reported health. However, this study highlighted the subjective reports of participant positive emotion, which aligns with Seligman's (2011) portrayal of the element of positive emotion.

The mean engagement score among participants was 7.81. Most participants described engagement with creating instructional opportunities for students. For this group of SETs, these instructional opportunities were either rooted in technological-integration, development of classroom behavioral supports, or the creation of instructional materials. The experience of engagement is synonymous with flow, which is the extreme psychological concentration (Kun, Balogh, & Krasz, 2017). In the general workplace, engagement has been associated with job satisfaction, job performance, profitability, customer satisfaction, and employee retention (Anthony-McCann et al., 2017). Considering the mean engagement of the participants, their engagement could be a contributing factor to their retention as experienced SETs. However, the inhibition of engagement during prolonged periods of virtual instruction could be indicative of a potential impact on the retention of experienced SETs, as this element was altered by the abrupt and prolonged change of K-12 education to a virtual instruction model during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Integral relationships were a resulting theme of the data analysis, but also represent an essential element of well-being, according to Seligman (2011). Not only are relationships an essential element of well-being, but relationships are also a fundamental component of the physical and emotional health of human beings (Butler & Kern, 2016; Pietromonaco & Collins,

2018). In the workplace, relationships predicted organizational commitment and job satisfaction

(Kern, 2014). Relationships emerging as an independent theme could indicate that relationships

have been commonly paramount to the retention of SETs, not only within the profession, but

within specific school sites or programs. This study consisted of participants who described

longevity of service within their respective school sites, making the relationships within these

school communities of interest. When participants discussed the maintenance of their

relationships with co-workers during periods of prolonged virtual instruction, they were able to

describe technologically-based modalities for maintaining connection with these integral

relations. Based on previous research, relationships with colleagues assist SETs in managing

responsibilities (Collins, Sweigart, Landrum, & Cook, 2017; Ruppar et al., 2017). Perhaps, the

ability to remain connected with colleagues during the period of prolonged virtual instruction

during the COVID-19 pandemic was helpful in managing the abrupt newness and unusuality of

prolonged virtual instruction for K-12 teachers.

The participants' average meaning score represented the highest average among all the

elements at 8.21. The participants attributed much of their meaning to their students,

relationships with students, and student progress. Each SET reported a sense of meaning in

relation to student outcomes either academically, functionally, socially, or in relation to students'

post-secondary preparedness. Meaning provides employees with sense of direction, working

towards a purpose, or feeling like life is valuable (Butler & Kern, 2016). When encountering

challenges, meaning is an essential contribution to positive affect (Czkierda et al., 2017). While

meaning is not solely subjective, the meaningfulness experienced by the SETs during the

COVID-19 pandemic may be better assessed as society normalizes and SETs can retrospectively

reflect on their meaning during an unusual time of societal uncertainty. However, the meaning

experienced by the SETs within their profession assisted with the navigation of the challenge of the abrupt change to a prolonged virtual instructional work environment. In consideration, this is impactful. A teacher with lower levels of meaning may struggle to cope with unanticipated challenges and may be at higher risk for depressive symptoms or risky behaviors (Lease, Ingram, & Brown, 2019). While SETs do encounter inherent challenges with their professional roles (Bettini et al., 2019; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Harris, et al., 2019; Lesh et al., 2017; Rock et al., 2016), it could be their meaningfulness that supports their prolonged service to their students and school communities, especially during heightened stress, representing a characteristic strength of the profession.

Accomplishment is an element of Seligman's (2011) WBT, but is also an indicator for burnout according to the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Chetlan et al., 2019). The mean accomplishment score on the WPP among participants was 7.81. As indicated by Butler and Kern (2016), success can be interpreted differently and could either be perceived subjectively or objectively. This was evident during the data analysis process of this study, as some of the participants did mention receiving objective accolades but emphasized student success as the primary source of accomplishment. This subjective experience with accomplishment was a common occurrence among the participants and seems to further underscore that students are at the heart of practice for SETs. There seems to be an existent gap between the perception of accomplishment and retention. If using these participants as an example, the subjective perception of accomplishment could have been a supportive element for retention for these experienced SETs. However, it would be intriguing to discover if this is a common perception among a larger group of educators or if it is a unique characteristic for the participants included in this study. Determining how teachers perceive accomplishment could be helpful to

administrators as they support retention and workplace well-being of all teachers during times of teacher shortage.

Empirical Significance

The findings of this study relate to the previously confirmed research in the field. This section will review the relevance of this study's findings to the special educator shortage in the United States, and specifically, in Virginia. This section will also review the previously documented challenges in the field of special education and relate this to the reported experiences of the participants included in this study. Additionally, the experiences described by the participants of teaching virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic is discussed throughout, as these experiences relate to the already existent challenges within the field.

Special educator shortage. Prior to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher retention and attrition, Virginia reported a critical shortage of SETs (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). According to one school division in Southeastern, Virginia, the COVID-19 pandemic is making it harder to fill teaching vacancies (Smith, 2020). The increased difficulty is the result of the pre-pandemic teacher shortage combined with a change in instructional delivery (Smith, 2020). At the time of these remarks in October 2020, this southeastern, Virginia school division had 178 teaching vacancies (Smith 2020).

One method of addressing the shortage during the COVID-19 pandemic, within this division, was the examination of current division employees who could qualify for a provisional teaching license (Smith, 2020). Although this was a method of sourcing additional certified teachers, the participants of this study had mixed perceptions regarding the entrance into the field via provisional licensure. Some participants felt that traditional teacher preparation, inclusive of a traditional, yet well-rounded, student teaching assignment, benefitted their retention and

success in the profession. Other participants, who entered the profession by way of provisional

teaching licensure, felt that hands-on experience in the classroom with students combined with

teacher preparation coursework optimally prepared them for the inevitable challenges that SETs

must grapple with day-to-day. Previous research indicates that teachers who begin their teaching

careers with provisional licenses are more likely to depart the field (Carver-Thomas & Darling-

Hammond, 2019; Mastropieri et al., 2017). However, the outcome of any potential increase in

the employment of provisionally licensed teachers is one that will have to be reviewed

retrospectively, after society has normalized following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the participants, one participant was candid about her plans to retire following the

2020-2021 school year and indicated that the pandemic solidified her decision to depart the

profession at that time. During her interview, Bambi stated, "But I'm just--- I'm fried and this

year has definitely been the death nail. I think. Because next year is not going to be normal. I

mean, it's--- I have no idea what's happening" (personal communication, May 5, 2020). Another

participant explained that she was just weeks from retirement at the time of interview (Elizabeth,

personal communication, May 13, 2020). However, her choice to retire had been made prior to

the onset of COVID-19. The true impact of experienced and long-serving SETs choosing to

depart the field earlier is worthy of additional investigation, as this could be creating additional

challenges for the addressment of the teacher shortages in Virginia that could outlast the

COVID-19 pandemic.

Role problems for special educators. Previous research indicates that role conflict and

role overload are damaging to the well-being of SETs (Conley & You, 2018; Garwood et al.,

2018). According to Woolf (2018), role flexibility is a necessary skill set for SETs, as the SET

role is more complex than those outside the field can understand (Bettinit et al., 2019).

However, several participants in this study described a feeling of being a specialist in some aspect of their teaching role. Elizabeth, an SET approaching retirement, expressed a strong interest and knowledge base in psychological testing (personal communication, May 13, 2020). Laurel, an SET with five years of experience, described a proficiency with applied behavior analysis and writing effectual behavior intervention plans (personal communication, May 6, 2020). Ryan described herself as "highly specialized" with certain student groups and described a skillfulness with teaching students with learning disabilities and ADHD (personal communication, May 18, 2020). Another participant, Ann, described her engagement streaming from the paperwork responsibilities associated with her teaching role. These are a just a few examples, but each teacher brought forth a description of some unique strength or skillset that they contribute to the profession. These specialties, which varied from teacher-to-teacher, could be an indication that the role of SETs is inefficiently ambiguous. Perhaps within the pool of SETs, there lies unique skill sets that could be more efficiently utilized and maximized within specific segments of the SET role. As the profession exists now, role flexibility is a necessity, and during the focus group, Lynne emphasized this as an essential characteristic of a novice SET (personal communication, May 26, 2020). However, further discovery into the potential benefits of more explicitly organizing and specifying SET teaching assignments, so that SETs are able to practice within clearly defined specialties, which align with personal strengths, may be helpful towards the retention and well-being of SETs.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, role problems were an influencing factor among SETs choosing to leave the profession (Mathews et al., 2017). A misunderstanding of the SET role is one of the role problems that persists within the field (Garwood, Werts, Varghese, &

Gosey, 2018). Ryan described a relationship barrier with some general education teachers who express a misunderstanding of the role of SETs. Ryan stated:

> I think, honestly---I think there's a lot of regular education teachers out there who struggle to understand the role of a special ed teacher and what we do. Like, we'll get comments from teachers---Oh, you don't know what it's like because you only have eight kids in your room or you don't know what it's like because you only have 10 kids in your room (personal communication, May 18, 2020).

However, Ryan went on to explain the intentional efforts of her administration to bridge the gap of understanding that exists between general education teachers and SETs. During her interview, Ryan stated:

> ...the beginning of the year, when we have like that first week of in-service, she has---umm--- set up like meeting---like mandatory meetings. Just kind of going over like what our job is, what the importance of our job is explaining the importance of doing educationals, explaining the importance of following accommodations. I mean---and she does it every year (personal communication, May 18, 2020).

Workloads and paperwork. Hefty workloads and excessive paperwork were evident within the inescapable well-being barriers described by participants throughout interviews, focus groups, and audio diaries. In previous research, workload manageability predicted a SET's intent to remain in the field (Bettini et al., 2017). Workload was touched upon by the study's participants, specifically in relation to efforts to maintain a work-life balance. Bambi indicated that 90% of her responsibilities related to student IEPs are managed during her personal time on the weekends (personal communication, May 5, 2020). However, Ann indicated that her personal responsibilities at home are immense, as she is currently raising three children (personal

communication, May 11, 2020). Ann described that she strives for balance by completing her work-related tasks within the school building before departing. During the focus group discussion, Ann went on to stay that intentionally prioritizing work was a necessary skill for novice SETs (personal communication, May 26, 2020). During a focus group discussion, Serenity similarly described how she strives to complete her work-related tasks at school before heading home (personal communication, May 27, 2020). Serenity described the benefit of this by stating, "I'm gonna have to deal with it tomorrow, no matter what. So, when I come home, just kind of separate, you know, and not try to stress about it" (personal communication, May 27, 2020).

Having additional planning time was something that the participants described as being potentially beneficial to assisting SETs with managing their workloads. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants reported having additional planning time built into their work week (Bambi, personal communication, May 11, 2020). Lynne described that the typical SET workload impedes on the realistic amount of time necessary to mentor a novice SET appropriately and effectively. Lynne stated, "The last time I mentored a special ed teacher was a long time ago. But I needed more time than I had available to be a good mentor" (personal communication, May 27, 2020). While additional planning time was a component of the virtual instruction model, this is something that participants felt could be beneficial to addressing the SET workload following the normalizing of society following the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, based upon Lynne's comments on mentorship, additional planning time could be of benefit to novice educators, as they glean from a mentorship. A theme arising from this study's findings was the proactive footholds for tomorrow that experienced SETs emulate. These SETs are supportive of the future of the profession, so this need stood out from within the data.

Following the implementation of the 1997 amendment of IDEA, paperwork demands

increased for SETs (Yell et al., 2017b). SETs report having more additional paperwork demands

than general education teachers (Bettini et al., 2017). During this study, paperwork was

discussed by participants alongside of workload. Serenity described paperwork demands of her

role by stating, "And, you know, it's all the stuff that we have to do constantly like progress

reports, IEPs, you know, just all the all the things, you know. There's always--- it just never

ends" (personal communication, May 12, 2020). Bambi, a teacher approaching retirement in the

next year, described her desire to return as a substitute following retirement. Bambi stated, "But

I don't have all the paperwork [chuckles]. I'll just be able to work with kids in the classroom

without all the bullshit" (personal communication, May 5, 2020).

Bambi emphasized the increase in paperwork tasks that accompanied the abrupt switch to

virtual instruction in March 2020. Regarding the paperwork tasks required during the COVID-

19 pandemic, Bambi stated,

> It's been---it's been all the frustrating things about special ed, which is the paperwork and
>
> listen to what downtown says, whether it makes sense or not, and having to do things.
>
> It's--- it's been all of that and none of the reward because I don't get to see my kids. So,
>
> there's just been a lot of filling out forms and doubles and triples and duplicates and
>
> recording everything, you know--Contacts that you make in several different places
>
> (personal communication, May 5, 2020).

While some participants reported not having sufficient planning time built into their

typical workday, some participants reported not having any time in their daily schedule for

lunch. A need for additional time was obvious among these participants, but with the shortage of

SETs, the feasibility of providing additional time to teachers to manage their workload and

paperwork was uncertain. Elizabeth, a participant nearing retirement, was candid about the

hours spent on paperwork. Although it is a tangible issue, she simply did not have an answer for

it. The paperwork and workload demands described by participants align with the details

produced within previous literature and reflect a barrier to well-being.

Collaborative role. While the participants described role problems, immense workloads,

and excessive paperwork, the collaborative role of the SET was described positively and

influenced one of the major themes of the study. Relationships are integral to SET well-being.

While Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood (2017) described time being the biggest hurdle for

collaboration among teachers, the SETs did not describe this as an obstacle for them. Bambi

described that her collaborative planning must occur during the school day, so that is why most

of her paperwork is completed at home (personal communication, May 5, 2020). However, it is

the collaboration that elicited positive emotion and accomplishment for teachers, seemingly

separating it from the daunting workload.

Workplace conditions. Workplace conditions have influenced teachers' decisions to

leave the profession (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Harris et al., 2019; Lesh et al., 2017). In

addition to the hefty workload of SETs, which is an inescapable barrier to SET well-being and a

component of workplace conditions, a few participants discussed a need for additional

instructional resources. As the participants presented themselves as proactive footholds for the

future of the profession, the sharing of instructional materials with novices was a practice

suggested and implemented by several.

Additionally, Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) reported that teachers at higher performing

schools have greater retention rates. Several participants within this study were drawn from the

same school site. Within these participants, it was discovered that several have experienced

longevity within the same school site. The workplace conditions of school sites who have demonstrated a higher incidence of retention, especially among SETs, should be further investigated. The conditions specific to these sites could be informative towards the well-being of teachers.

      School culture and climate. As described in the literature, effective school culture is a collaborative environment (Lee & Louis, 2019). As mentioned, regarding workplace conditions, several participants reported longevity working within the same school site. These participants were able to describe integral relationships that have contributed to their well-being and to their retention.   Among participants from this specific school site, during a focus group discussion Lynne stated, "I feel umm like the support systems we have are really good with department chair and assistant principal and compliance, and SEC, we have great supports" (personal communication, May 27, 2020). This was not a description detectable only from her, but was a common portrayal from other teachers at this school site. For example, Bambi stated, "It's just that's just the kind of environment that's been created where we take care of each other" (personal communication, May 5, 2020). For the participants drawn from this school site, it seems that the descriptions of school culture provided by participants supported the well-being of SETs, which aligns with the literature indicating that effective school cultures can contribute to teacher motivation, satisfaction, and feelings of successfulness (The Research Alliance for New York City Schools, 2016).

      Additionally, in previous literature, the perceived lack of administrative support was the greatest predictor of SET turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Harris et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). Evident among the descriptions of the participants of this study was a perceived lack of support. However, the participants in this study, more often described

supportive relationships with their building administrators, which influenced the theme of integral relationships. Jean reported her administrator supporting her through a hands-on approach, assisting her with aggressive behaviors in the classroom. Bambi reported her administrator advocating for the SETs when unnecessary demands were being requested of them from division administrators. Laurel described that her administrators are approachable. The common perception of supportive administration could have been an influence in the SETs' well-being and their retention in the profession, as evidenced by the number of reported years of service each SET shared.

Affective experiences of educators. Previous literature has indicated that SETs are under more stress than general education teachers (Bettini et al., 2017; Cancio et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2018). The inescapable barriers to well-being described by the participants surfaced within all modes of data collection and co-existed with the theme of students at the heart of SET practice. Based on participant responses, it seems that they derive much of their workplace well-being from students but are still under great amounts of stress at work. The SETs included in this study are experienced and have chosen to remain in the profession long enough to become experienced. This is notable because the teachers were able to highlight methods of coping with the negative affective experiences that arose from the workload demands of the field. The modalities described fit within the positive and negative methods determined by Cancio et al. (2018). Within this study's group of participants, some indicated that exercise was helpful with coping, while others managed the stress with alcohol. While there is still an existent lack of information about the coping modalities of SETs (Cancio et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2018), the proven retention of the participants in this study indicates that further study into the

impact of coping skills, both positive and negative, on managing negative affect could be beneficial (Cancio et al., 2018).

Additionally, one participant described her experience with burnout. Previous literature indicated that burnout could result from chronic stress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Robinson et al., 2019). This participant described a strength of the profession was the ability to shift instructional settings and assignments, which is unique to the field of special education. Considering the limitedness of the virtual instruction model during COVID-19, if a teacher, either a SET or general education teacher were to experience burnout, there is little modification or change that can be sought under current conditions. This further underscores an additional need to assess and monitor teacher affect and well-being during times of heightened societal stress.

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Implications

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This study revealed theoretical, empirical, and practical implications related to SET practice, teacher well-being, teacher preparation, and educational leadership. Of these implications, there are resulting notions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and teachers during periods of prolonged stress and uncertainty, such as assessing teacher well-being periodically. Additionally, the implications from this study provide a basis for further research and growth in the field. Within the WBT, there is the possibility for growth within the elements of well-being. Therefore, the elements provide a solid basis for the implications provided within this section.

Theoretical

Theoretically, the further use of the well-being theory to evaluate teachers would be of benefit to our communities, especially under times of immense societal stress, such as experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020). The

use of the well-being theory to guide this study was a decision made prior to the onset on the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the use of this theory allowed the study participants a space to reflect on the elements of well-being during moments of unusual and unanticipated stress that was atypical of their average work-related affect. The further application of this theory to teachers in studies during and following the COVID-19 pandemic is fitting and necessary (MacIntyre, Gregerson, & Mercer, 2020). The World Health Organization (2020, March 18) indicates that it is critical to evaluate individual needs and feelings during times of societal uncertainty. It is critical that the well-being of teachers continues to be an opportunity for periodic investigation and growth.

The application of positive psychology to entire school communities has been beneficial in combating depression in students (Seligman, 2011) and it aids in enhancing the learning processes of students (Morrish et al., 2018). While, this study focused on the well-being of SETs, there is a remaining and ever-critical opportunity in contemporary society to restructure school communities. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the literature indicated that teachers were under a great deal of stress (Cancio et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2017; Elreda et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2018; Jennings et al., 2017; Macintyre et al., 2019; Mankin et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Wong et al., 2017). While society is optimistic about the future opportunity for a return to normal day-to-day societal functioning, there is space, and a need, for a focus on well-being in American schools. (Harding et al., 2019; Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing, 2019; MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020; Morrish et al., 2018; Selgman, 2011). The current application of well-being curriculum in American schools is underprioritized and underutilized (Global Council for Happiness and Wellbeing, 2019; White, 2016), however it is of critical necessity.

The Workplace PERMA Profiler (University of Pennsylvania Board of Trustees, 2019) would be an effectual resource for school administrators to use to assess if teachers are thriving at work (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020). This resource is easy to use and serves as a way for individuals to understand their own well-being and choose actions based in improving the elements of their well-being that are diminished (McQuaid & Kern, 2017). Considering a singular element of well-being, if most teachers in a single school community were commonly experiencing low accomplishment, this would be such a critical piece of information for an administrator to have. The most encouraging aspect of the well-being theory is that each element can be improved, but if there is a lack of awareness about which elements are suffering, actions to support improvement cannot be intentionally made (Seligman, 2011; McQuaid & Kern, 2017).

Additionally, if school-wide actions to evaluate well-being are not taken, teachers can use the Workplace PERMA Profiler (University of Pennsylvania Board of Trustees, 2019) to assess their own individual state of well-being. This assessment tool is currently available at no-cost to non-commercial users (University of Pennsylvania Board of Trustees, 2019). This would be beneficial because teachers could create individual action plans for themselves to boost elements of their well-being and strive to thrive at work (McQuaid & Kern, 2017). An excellent resource for teachers to review is McQuaid and Kern's (2017) book titled *Your Wellbeing Blueprint: Feeling Good and Doing Well at Work*. This text provides a straight-forward explanation of the PERMA model, directs individuals to the Workplace PERMA Profiler, and assists with practical information on boosting well-being (McQuaid & Kern, 2017).

Empirical

Empirically, there are inescapable barriers to the well-being of SETs. Hefty workload and excessive paperwork were one of the most prominent barriers described by study

participants. Workload manageability influences teacher retention (Bettini et al., 2017).

However, the requirements of the SET role are not modifiable, and based on participant

descriptions, seem to be ever-building. Coping skills are a critical aspect of functioning within

the role of SET (Cancio et al., 2018). Based on the negative affect that streams from the

immense workload, teacher education programs should include instruction on coping skills.

Enhanced positive coping of teachers may assist them in lowering stress and burnout once they

enter the profession (Jennings et al., 2017). Preparing teachers for managing the stress that is to

come may contribute to retention efforts.

Furthermore, mentorship programs for novice educators seem to be a source of

accomplishment and relationship for experienced SETs, as described by the participants in this

study. This suggests that while mentorship programs are beneficial to the novice, mentorship

programs are beneficial for the well-being of the mentor, as well (Collins, Sweigart, Landrum, &

Cook, 2017; Ruppar et al., 2017). While this is an area requiring additional research, division

administration should consider that mentorship is a necessity to onboarding novice teachers and

sustaining those who are already seasoned in the profession. Mentorship programs could also

reinforce coping skills for new teachers, as experienced teachers can model what has benefited

them.

Lastly, the methodical re-structuring of the role of the SET could be of benefit to

teachers, administrators, and students. The participants in this study described that there are

unique talents, gifts, and specializations within a pool of SETs. With the role of the SET existing

ambiguously and including a variety of tasks, SETs could be further categorized to work within

more clearly defined roles relative to their unique specializations. In other fields, such as

nursing, specialization enhances the quality and safety of practice and is critical to the further

professionalization of nurses (Pergert et al., 2019; de Alemeda Souza et al., 2020). Using nursing as an example, the further specialization of special educators could be of benefit and could assist with addressing the evidenced role problems and hefty workloads experienced by SETs in the field (Cancio et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2018; Mastropieri et al., 2017; Mathews, 2017). Ultimately, this warrants additional investigation and immense planning. This is not an easy fix, but the specialization within other professional fields could illuminate a path forward for the special education profession.

Practical

The misunderstanding of the role of SETs is previously documented in the literature (Bettini et al., 201). The reality of this was described by participants in this study, but in the context of how administrators have worked to bridge this gap of understanding. While all school administrators may not have an extensive special education background, based upon data collected in this study, administrators who provided school-wide professional development on the role of special educators were deemed as supportive. Intentional efforts to bridge this gap of misunderstanding could align with the research that an enhanced understanding of the role brings awareness to the unique challenges that persist within the field (Bettini et. al, 2017; Robinson et al., 2017). Additionally, collaboration among school administrators from differing backgrounds could assist in further developing the understanding of SETs roles within individual school communities.

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Delimitations and Limitations

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This section will provide a description of the delimitations and limitations of this study. The delimitations represent intentional choices made to complete the research process in a specified way. These choices are discussed within this section. The limitations represent

components of this study that are identifiably weaker, or components which could have had an impact on the resulting themes. While these are not intentional components of the study, there are identified and discussed within this section.

Delimitations

The choice to use a transcendental phenomenological design was necessary to capture the lived experiences of special education teachers. Other designs would not have been appropriate to truly bring light to the experiences of these teachers. This design was additionally beneficial to the investigation of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it allowed the reality of real-time lived experiences to be of added illumination to this study, bringing light to teachers' experiences during this time.

The choice to only include SETs was critical in addressing the previously evidenced heightened stress that SETs experience in comparison to general education teachers. However, this study could be replicated to include a mix of special education teachers and general education teachers. Similarly, this study sought to capture the experience of experienced SETs. This choice was made to highlight the well-being of those who have coped with the evidenced field-related stressors over the course of time and who have not fallen subject to attrition within the novice years, which is when attrition is most likely to occur. This choice was intentional as it provided the opportunity to discover why SETs have stayed in the field. The average years of service among the participants was 20 years. This sample enabled this researcher to discover that students are at the heart of SET practice and have largely influenced long-serving SET retention. It was also discovered that integral relationships have sustained SETs. However, this study could be replicated with novices, to determine their well-being at the onset of their careers.

An additional delimitation was the choice to only use the initial and original elements of PERMA, as theorized by Seligman (2011). Since Seligman's theory was published, the addition of Health as a pillar has surfaced (PERMAH) (McQuaid & Kern, 2017). While the physical health of SETs is important and beneficial to well-being, a mixed methods design, combining health-related data, such as weight and blood pressure, would be suitable.

Limitations

The sample size of this study was of limitation. A larger sample size could yield additional insight or further underscore the themes that were revealed from within the data. Additionally, sampling was conducted shortly after the onset of school closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This unavoidable characteristic of this study may have further impacted sample size.

This study was designed to investigate SET well-being prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, data was collected following the closure of schools because of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the data was undoubtedly influenced by experiences related to prolonged virtual instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, the design of the study was not purposed to incorporate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers. Therefore, the further investigation of teacher well-being during and following the COVID-19 pandemic is critical, emphasizing data collection tools that will illuminate pandemic-related emotions and experiences among study participants.

This study was conducted at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, and taking data towards the end of the school year, as opposed to the beginning, could have influenced teacher perceptions and attitudes in a way that is untraceable. Replicating this study at the onset of the school year could produce differing results. Additionally, this study only included female

participants and lacked racial and ethnic diversity. Therefore, the experiences of experienced male SETs, and SETs from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, are absent from the data and the results of this study. This limits the scope of understanding that can be drawn from the results. Future studies should incorporate diversity among genders and professionals of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds to provide a more holistic understanding of SET well-being. Lastly, the literature clearly outlines the challenges inherent to the practice of SETs across the nation; however, this study only included participants from southeastern, Virginia.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research on teacher well-being is imperative, with an even greater criticality during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. The teacher shortage was existent prior to the onset of COVID-19 and the increased number of teacher vacancies related to the pandemic is a tangible challenge impacting school communities (Smith, 2020). The further emphasis on research centralized on teacher well-being could have far-reaching impacts, as society looks towards normalizing amidst post-pandemic impacts on well-being. Since teacher well-being influences student outcomes, research on teacher well-being is incredibly important, as students are also grappling with uncertainty and stress related to COVID-19. Additionally, retrospective phenomenological studies on teacher well-being during the pandemic could be of future benefit to our society. Times of societal uncertainty and unrest are likely to occur again and information could be gleaned from the experience of those professionals who pressed onward during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The lack of diversity in this study's sampling is a clear limitation. Further study on teacher well-being, with purposeful sampling allowing for a more diverse group of participants, would be beneficial to truly capturing the essence of SET well-being. Additionally, including

participants from a variety of school sites would be beneficial, as this study did include several participants from the same school site.

Several of the SETs included in this study reported longevity within a specific school site. School sites which have proven to be environments where multiple teachers have remained over the course of their careers, could serve as ideal settings for single case study research. This study's phenomenological design highlighted this as an opportunity for future case study exploration that could provide far-reaching implications for the profession. Defining what characteristics comprise these school communities and influence these school cultures, supporting the retention of educators, would be of empirical benefit.

Additionally, this study provided a sample of 12 teachers with a combined average of 20 years of service in the profession. Due to this characteristic of the sample, many of the participants were beyond their childrearing years. However, a few participants, with fewer years of service, were still in the process of raising their children at home. During a focus group discussion and her interview, one participant spoke of her motherhood responsibilities, describing them as hefty. However, she described that her responsibilities at home force her to prioritize her workplace responsibilities and complete work-related tasks at work. Relatively, providing virtual instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic posed an additional challenge for her. Ann described supporting the virtual learning experience for her three children at home while providing virtual instruction to her students. The external stressors of SETs, such as raising children, could influence individual well-being and may impact workplace well-being. The perceived stress of SETs, stemming from various points within one's lifespan, is a phenomenon worthy of additional investigation. This variable may also be worthy of isolating when

retrospectively considering SET experiences with virtual instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As described by the participants in this study, SET workload is a barrier to well-being. Therefore, the ongoing assessment of SET workload, inclusive of the breakdown of the SET workday, documenting the number of minutes spent on certain role-related tasks could be beneficial. As suggested previously, further specialization with special education, following the example of other professions, could potentially support enhanced practice. However, a radical change in the structure of the already ambiguous role of SETs will require additional research and planning, bringing together both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Lastly, a future study incorporating the physical health of SETs, using the framework of the PERMAH model, could be beneficial. A mixed methods design, combining the Workplace PERMA Profiler and health-related data could be beneficial in investigating if a causal relationship exists between the pillars of PERMAH and objective indicators of physical health, such as weight or blood pressure. A mixed methods study would be of added benefit as to not abandon the lived subjective experiences of teachers that can be highlighted through qualitative methodologies.

Summary

The illumination of teachers' well-being is of critical importance in contemporary society. The well-being theory offers a suitable framework to the investigation of teachers' well-being and should be further used to continually evaluate how teachers are doing. While this study was focused on special educators, future studies could incorporate the well-being of all teachers. The evaluation of teacher well-being now and in the future, as teachers continue to work through the pandemic and in post-pandemic society, can be of benefit to future society. It

is imperative that research glean from the experiences of the educational professionals who

pressed on during times of heightened stress and uncertainty, so that future professionals can be

further supported through times of stress.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 25, 2020

Katherine Carpenter-Ware

Sandra Battige

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-106 Surviving or Thriving? A Phenomenological Study of the Well-Being of Experienced Special Education Teachers

Dear Katherine Carpenter-Ware, Sandra Battige:

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

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

101(b):

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

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

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether

possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at

irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: Surviving or Thriving? A Phenomenological Study of the Well-Being of

Experienced Special

Principal Investigator: Katherine Carpenter-Ware, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, (1) you must be a

licensed special education teacher, (2) actively working in a special education teaching position,

(3) and have at least four years of special education teaching experience. Taking part in this

research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in

this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to describe the subjective well-being of experienced special education teachers in southeastern Virginia.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

Allow me to access and utilize your responses from an online workplace well-being profiler. The completion of this profiler should take no longer than 15 minutes

Participate in a recorded interview session consisting of 11 questions related to your experiences as a special education teacher and your well-being. This should take no longer than 60 minutes to complete.

Participate in an online focus group discussion on the well-being of special education teachers. This should take between 60-90 minutes to complete.

Participate in recording an audio diary during each day over the course of a five-day work week. You will receive an open-ended prompt and will complete five separate recordings, with no minimum or maximum time constraints. You will then send your audio records to the researcher via email.

Once your interview is complete, it will be transcribed and returned to you to check for accuracy. You will have the opportunity to make any corrections to your responses at this time. Reviewing your transcribed interview may take up to two hours.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

In any report that I might publish, all identifying information, making it possible to determine the identity of participants, will be omitted. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data will be stored on an encrypted flash drive and only the researcher will have access to the flash drive.

Interviews, focus groups, and audio diaries will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be

stored on a password locked hard drive for three years and then erased. Only the researcher and a

data transcriptionist will have access to these recordings.

While it is strongly discouraged, I cannot assure that information shared during a focus group

discussion is not repeated or discussed by another participant in the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your

current or future relations with Liberty University, your school division, or school. If you decide

to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting

those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email

address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data

collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be

included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the

focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Katherine Carpenter-Ware. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at ███████████ ███████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sandra Battige, at ████████████.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

_____   _____

Printed Subject Name   Signature & Date

APPENDIX C: COPYRIGHT PERMISSION FOR WORKPLACE PERMA PROFILER

[External] Re: [EXT] New Form Entry: Contact Form

Peggy Kern < >

Tue 2/16/2021

1:34 PM

To: Carpenter-Ware, Katherine Beth < >

That would be fine to include the profiler in your manuscript.

~~

Peggy Kern | Associate Professor

Centre for Positive Psychology | Melbourne Graduate School of Education

APPENDIX D: WORKPLACE PERMA PROFILER

Penn | **Authentic Happiness**

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Home / Questionnaires / The Workplace PERMA™ Profiler

The Workplace PERMA Profiler

Please read each of the following questions, and then select the point on the scale that best describes, your feelings and experiences at work.

All questions must be completed for this questionnaire to be scored.

1. How often do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your work-related goals?

○ 0 = Never
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Half the Time
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Always

2. At work, how often do you become absorbed in what you are doing?

○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Always

2. At work, how often do you become absorbed in what you are doing?

○ 0 = Never
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Half the Time
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Always

3. At work, how often do you feel joyful?

○ 0 = Never
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Half the Time
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9

○ 10 = Always

4. At work, how often do you feel anxious?

○ 0 = Never
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Half the Time
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Always

5. How often do you achieve the important work goals you have set for yourself?

○ 0 = Never
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Half the Time
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Always

6. In general, how would you say your health is?

○ 0 = Terrible
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Fair
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Excellent

7. To what extent is your work purposeful and meaningful?

○ 0 = Not At All
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Moderately
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Completely

8. To what extent do you receive help and support from coworkers when you need it?

○ 0 = Not At All

8. To what extent do you receive help and support from coworkers when you need it?

○ 0 = Not At All
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Moderately
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Completely

9. In general, to what extent do you feel that what you do at work is valuable and worthwhile?

○ 0 = Not At All
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Moderately
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Completely

10. To what extent do you feel excited and interested in your work?

○ 0 = Not At All

10. To what extent do you feel excited and interested in your work?

○ 0 = Not At All
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Moderately
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Completely

11. How satisfied are you with your current physical health?

○ 0 = Not At All
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Moderately
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Completely

12. At work, how often do you feel positive?

12. At work, how often do you feel positive?

- ○ 0 = Never
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5 = Half the Time
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10 = Always

13. At work, how often do you feel angry?

- ○ 0 = Never
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5 = Half the Time
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10 = Always

14. How often are you able to handle your work-related responsibilities?

- ○ 0 = Never

14. How often are you able to handle your work-related responsibilities?

- ○ 0 = Never
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5 = Half the Time
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10 = Always

15. At work, how often do you feel sad?

- ○ 0 = Never
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5 = Half the Time
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10 = Always

16. At work, how often do you lose track of time while doing something you enjoy?

- ○ 0 = Never

16. At work, how often do you lose track of time while doing something you enjoy?

- ○ 0 = Never
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5 = Half the Time
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10 = Always

17. Compared to others of your same age and sex, how is your health?

- ○ 0 = Terrible
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5 = Fair
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10 = Excellent

18. To what extent do you feel appreciated by your coworkers?

18. To what extent do you feel appreciated by your coworkers?

- ○ 0 = Not At All
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5 = Moderately
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10 = Completely

19. To what extent do you generally feel that you have a sense of direction in your work?

- ○ 0 = Not At All
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ 4
- ○ 5 = Moderately
- ○ 6
- ○ 7
- ○ 8
- ○ 9
- ○ 10 = Completely

20. How satisfied are you with your professional relationships?

○ 10 = Completely

22. Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are with your work?

○ 0 = Not At all
○ 1
○ 2
○ 3
○ 4
○ 5 = Moderately
○ 6
○ 7
○ 8
○ 9
○ 10 = Completely

The Workplace PERMA Profiler: Step 1 of 1

FINISH

The measure can be taken online at www.authentichappiness.org for free, after registering. (This will give you your scores and report, but not the data; if you want to collect data with the measure, you will need to set up your own survey with the questions. For access to the questionnaire and instructions, please see www.peggykern.org/questionnaires.html) The measure can be used for noncommercial research or assessment purposes (citation: Kern, M. L. (2015). The Workplace PERMA™-Profiler. Available from www.peggykern.org/questionnaires.html) There is no cost involved in using the measure for these purposes. For commercial purposes, please contact the Penn Center for Innovation (pciinfo@pci.upenn.edu). The measure should not be used for diagnostic purposes.

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APPENDIX E: THE WORKPLACE PERMA PROFILER INSTRUCTIONS

You will complete an online profiler for your workplace well-being. The profiler contains 22 questions. For each question, you will respond by selecting a number one through ten, with one indicating "not at all," and ten indicating "completely."

To access the profiler, please go to https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/home

Under "Questionnaires" click on The Workplace PERMA PROFILER

You will need to create a free account to proceed. Create a username and password. Record these items here so we can access your profiler later, if needed.

Username _____

Password _____

Complete the profiler.

Print your results page.

APPENDIX F: STANDARDIZED OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.

2. How has the school year been so far?

3. Would you please tell me about your teaching career?

4. Within your teaching role, what type of activities make you feel joyful at work?

5. Under what circumstances have you felt sad, anxious or angry at work?

6. What experiences or activities in teaching special education do you become fully absorbed in, generate excitement, or interest you?

7. Which workplace relationships have been most positive in your teaching career?

8. Which workplace relationships do you feel could use some improvement and how do you feel they could be improved?

9. In what ways do you feel your teaching role is meaningful?

10. In what ways have you experienced a sense of accomplishment at work?

11. What do you think has most impacted your choice to remain in the teaching profession?

APPENDIX G: STANDARDIZED OPEN-ENDED FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Why have you chosen to remain in the special education field?

2. How do you cope with the challenges and stressors that exist within your teaching roles?

3. What additional supports would assist you in navigating the stressors involved in your occupation?

4. What advice would you offer to a novice special education teacher?

5. Considering your teacher education program, is there anything you feel would have better prepared you for your career in special education?

APPENDIX H: AUDIO DIARY INSTRUCTIONS

To capture the elements of well-being within your daily work experiences, please maintain an audio diary using the following guidelines:

Respond to a prompt each day for five consecutive workdays, for a total of five entries.

There are no time restrictions for your audio entries. The recordings may be as long or as short as you decide.

You will respond to the same prompt every day. The prompt is as follows:

Considering your workday today, please describe one moment when: you felt a positive emotion (contentment, joy), engagement with a work-related task, the presence of a supportive colleague, a sense that you were completing valuable work, or a sense that you were able to accomplish your work-related goals.

As you record your audio-diaries, please email them to:

APPENDIX H: EPOCHÉ JOURNAL

Personal Experience with the Phenomena	Points of Epoché
Familiarity with the profession	Personal well-being throughout times of practice. Instances of burnout, lack of support, of any feelings of anxiety related to paperwork. Experiences within various settings of instruction. The fluctuation of well-being form year-to-year.
Familiarity with participants	Bambi served as my cooperating teacher for student teaching. I am bracketing out my interactions, perceptions, and assumptions about her experience as a SET as I collect data. During student teaching, I worked alongside of Ryan during various times. I am bracketing out my interactions, perceptions, and assumptions about her experiences as a SET as I collect and analyze data.

Familiarity with Orange High School	I previously completed my student teaching at Orange High School. I am bracketing out my experience at this school to observe naively the experience of participants. I am bracketing: My experience with the school culture. My experience with the special education department. My experience and interaction with administrators.
Familiarity with Summer Beach School (SBS)	I previously taught for SBS. My experiences with this organization were pushed aside to consider the experiences of the participants. I am bracketing: Positive and supportive interactions with administration. Availability of assistive professional development. A sense of balance based on prioritized planning time for teachers.