

THE PERSPECTIVES OF BEGINNING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS REGARDING
THEIR PREPARATION AND INDUCTION EXPERIENCES

by

JANE R. ADAMS

(Under the direction of C. THOMAS HOLMES)

ABSTRACT

The study examined the perspectives of three beginning special education teachers about their induction and preparation levels both prior to their first year of teaching, and within the first few years of their teaching. The study sought to uncover the thoughts of these teachers about what preparation and induction training they received, and how this training affected their success and effectiveness with students in the classroom. Purposeful sampling was used to select three special education teachers with one to four years experience from one high school in northeast Georgia. Data were collected in semi-structured face-to-face interviews and analyzed using the constant comparative method. Data from each case were analyzed separately and then across cases in which three common perspectives emerged: 1) Beginning special education teachers experience high levels of support within their local school. Ongoing staff development is helpful for beginning special education teachers when entering the classroom. (2) Beginning special education teachers perceive themselves as successful and effective in the classroom with their students. (3) Problematic issues experienced by beginning special education teachers are individualized and varied. Discipline, paperwork, lack of self-confidence, lack of time for

specialized programming, and students low motivational levels are all cited as issues that interfere with beginning special education teachers' success. Findings of this study indicate that support at the local school level includes mentoring, administrative intervention, and help from experienced special education teachers. Ongoing staff development at the county and local school levels is essential for beginning special education teachers' success in the classroom, especially in the area of special education law

INDEX WORDS: Special education, Beginning teachers, Induction, Teacher Preparation, Mentoring, Staff Development

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DEDICATION

To my husband and best friend, Sam, who has always been selfless throughout this entire process. You have been my strength and inspiration. Thanks for nights without sleep, the gentle pushes when I needed them, the pats on the back, the encouraging words, the comforting hugs, and for all the baby baths and meal cooking! Thanks for being both Mom and Dad at all the times I couldn't be there. We can have a "life" again now, and I am looking forward to every minute of it! I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When they leave college, many beginning teachers often believe they are unprepared to meet the rigorous expectations of the classroom (Mastropieri, 2001). Problematic issues include discipline, paperwork, classroom management and organization, and stress management (Veenman, 1984). Beginning teachers, as a whole, have noted disparities between job assignment and their preparation (Mastropieri, 2001). Research has indicated that first year teachers (of both regular and special education classes) experience many complications from an apparent lack of preparation from various training sources (college programs, school district staff development programs, student teaching, and practicum experiences) (Griffin, 1991; Gonzalez, 1996). Student teaching has also been targeted for reform, criticized for lacking a theoretical and conceptual framework and commonly espoused goals, and judged harshly for not fulfilling its potential to prepare teachers to enter the field (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Four out of every 10 special educators entering the field leave special education before their fifth year of teaching, and this turnover has undermined the quality of special education services in our nation's schools (CEC, 1998)

Research has linked teacher preparation to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Raths, Rennert-Ariev, & Valli, 2001). Training programs for teachers have demonstrated a positive impact on teacher behavior and student learning (CEC, 1998; Sparks & Horsely, 1989). Inservice education is somewhat effective in changing teachers and in improving student achievement, attitudes, or behavior (Zepeda, 1999). Better-prepared teachers are believed to

provide optimal learning experiences for students, resulting in higher student achievement across many areas. Special education students require and deserve the opportunity to reach their maximum potential. If this research is valid and generalizable, better training and preparation for teachers of these students should yield the desired outcome: greater student achievement in areas targeted by any given special education program. Improving teacher preparation is seen as a foundation for overall school reform (Little, 2000).

Background of the Study

Much research has been done to investigate teacher preparation programs for beginning teachers in general education fields (Whitaker, 2000). The result of this research has been the identification of problematic areas which inhibit the success of beginning teachers in classroom endeavors. While these issues apply to beginning special education teachers in a general sense, there are other, more specific areas within the special education field that require attention. While work has been done to explore the differences in preparation required for those entering the special education field, there exists a gap in knowledge in the research to specifically identify problematic issues as they relate to success in the classroom (Brownwell, Smith, & McNellis, 1997). Perhaps this study will serve as an impetus for further exploration of the issues that beginning special education teachers encounter.

The importance of identifying the additional obstacles encountered by beginning special education teachers as they enter the classroom lies in the purported adjustments that might be made to increase beginning special education teachers' chances for success with students in special education. An understanding of what occurs during the first few years of teaching in special education may shed light on preparation programs and the support systems needed for beginning special education teachers (Mastropieri, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

The extreme shortage of special education teachers and the increasingly high turn-over rate in special education positions has become a point of contention for school administrators across the nation as they try to ensure the quality of special education programs within their schools (Ingersoll, 1999). The legal ramifications from a lack of adequate special education services within the public schools have led educators to look at the caliber of instruction administered to students with exceptional needs (Petzko, 1998). Keeping qualified special education teachers in the profession and subsequently allowing consistency in the provision of services for special education students has become a major goal for school administrators (Whitaker, 2000).

Studies on beginning teachers show that the first three years play a crucial role in shaping their perceptions of the profession and their decision to stay or to leave (Bobbitt, Faupel, & Burns, 1991; Miller, Brownwell, & Smith, 1999). The high turnover rate as a result of lack of preparation may impact overall student achievement. There is a critical need for special education teachers across the nation, and there is an increasing shortage in America's schools of qualified special education teachers to fill school district positions (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The shortage has become so extreme that not-fully-certified individuals are hired provisionally with the assumption that they must enroll in relevant coursework and eventually obtain their teaching certification (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, & Terbanian, 1998; Goor & Mastropieri, 2001). The number of students being taught by untrained and unprepared teachers has triggered researchers, practitioners, and others vested in education to search for solutions (NCES, 1999). In light of the shortages due, in part, to unqualified applicant pools, how do we keep special education teachers in the field? What happens during the first year of teaching?

How do induction and preparation experiences of beginning special education teachers affect their desire to continue teaching after the first few year? These are the questions that led the researcher to this topic.

The first year's experience for teachers in special education is thought to be critical for teacher socialization and in the development of an individual's attitude toward the profession (Billingsly & Tomchin, 1992; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998), and this is why researchers believe that part of the answer to reduce attrition is to improve the quality of teacher preparation programs to keep teachers in the special education field (Whitaker, 2000). By examining teachers' perspectives about their preparation programs and their self-reported programs, perhaps we can identify and improve those areas of weakness that influence beginning teachers' perceptions of their success in the special education classroom. This study was designed to uncover the perspectives of three relatively new special education teachers to gain insight on their preparation to meet the realities of the special education classroom. The researcher also sought to uncover the perspectives of these teachers about the support they received during the beginning years of teaching.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to uncover the perspectives of three special education teachers with four or less years of experience. More specifically, the researcher sought to gain the perspectives of these teachers relative to the areas in which they perceived themselves adequately or inadequately prepared in college for the realities of the classroom. Additionally, the researcher examined the perspectives of these three teachers regarding their induction experiences at the local school level.

Conceptual Framework

Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969), the conceptual framework for this qualitative case study is based on three principles:

1. Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. These meanings are the product of social interaction in human society.
3. These meanings are modified and handled through an interpretive process that is used by each individual in dealing with the signs each encounters. (p. 4)

Symbolic interactionists believe that people assign meanings to words, and that people construct reality through language (Manis & Meltzer, 1978). The humanistic approach behind symbolic interaction theory allows the researcher to bring people's values into the open. Since the researcher's goal was to uncover the perspectives of the participants regarding their preparation and induction experiences in their first few years of teaching, symbolic interactionism was the logical theoretical framework for the current study. The open-ended and flexible nature of this framework was conducive to the researcher's goal of identifying specific problematic areas perceived by the participants as detrimental to their preparedness for the classroom. In keeping with the principles of symbolic interactionism, the researcher was able to provide the opportunity for teachers to make their needs and wants for preparation and induction programs known (Garfinkel, 1967).

Research Questions

The following overall research questions guided this study:

1. How effective and successful do new teachers (specifically those who teach special education) believe they are with students in the classroom?

2. How adequately do new special education teachers believe they were prepared to be effective in the classroom?
3. What are the most problematic issues that present themselves in the first three years of special education teaching as perceived by the teachers themselves?
4. What induction methods are being used and what are the perceived effects on beginning special education teachers?

Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. The beginning teachers chosen for this study were the best source of information to relate their experiences with teaching special education.
2. The participants were truthful in what they related to the researcher relative to their preparation and the experience of being a beginning special education teacher.

Definition of Terms

The following definition was used within the context of this study:

Beginning Special Education Teacher: A special education teacher who had one to four years experience teaching in a special education classroom.

Limitations

The data were based on the perspectives of three special education teachers who had four or less years experience; therefore, generalizations of findings could not be made.

Significance of the Study

There has been much research regarding the quality and effectiveness of teacher preparation programs at the college level and teacher induction programs at the local school level. Teachers' perspectives in these areas have been examined repetitiously (Whitaker, 2000)

in an attempt to implicate goals for overall improvement in the preparedness of special education teachers for the classroom. Special Education teacher preparation and induction become issues because of the complicated nature of their job requirements (Kilgore & Griffin, 1998). While these teachers have the same job requirements as their peers in other teaching fields, special education teachers are required to perform additional tasks specific to the students with whom they work. Paperwork for special education teachers is both large in volume and lengthy in processing (Whitaker, 2001).

Behavioral, remedial, medical, and adaptive issues of the students that special education teachers work with, add further to the specialization of the jobs in the field. The differences in nature between special education teachers and others in the field sparks questions in the minds of those who design preparation and induction procedures for these teachers: How can we meet the preparation and induction needs of beginning special education teachers in order to increase their chances for classroom success in their ever changing, highly specialized, and unique field of study?

Conderman and Stephens (2000) explored the reflections of 13 first and second year special education teachers regarding their support and induction programs to determine whether or not those programs were helpful to them. Results of this study identified five possible issues which were problematic for the beginning teachers surveyed: approaching general educators who were unsupportive in mainstreaming endeavors, being unsuccessful in inclusionary settings, working collaboratively with parents and other service providers, working with paraprofessionals, and experiencing feelings of inadequacy or loneliness (Conderman & Stephens, 2000). Whitaker (2001) additionally identified supports that could be used by mentors and other special education teachers, by administrators, and by preparation and induction

programs that would assist beginning special education teachers in being successful in the classroom.

Whereas a number of studies have examined the first year of teaching for teachers in general, little research has focused on the first year of teaching for special education teachers (Whitaker, 2000). While some research does exist in this area, the intent of the current study was to expound on and further explore how beginning special education teachers perceive themselves as prepared or unprepared for the classroom based on their college experience. The existing shortage of special education teachers and the resulting hiring of teachers on a provisional basis to fill the legally required number of special education positions, has made induction programs even more critical in ensuring these out-of field educators success in the special education classroom.

It was important to the researcher to examine both provisionally and traditionally certified special education teachers with four or less years experience for their perceived level of preparedness resulting from college preparation and induction processes at the local school level. By investigating induction issues of both college-prepared and provisionally certified special education teachers, perhaps some salient implications can be drawn for improvement of the induction process within the local school system chosen for this study. School administrators often struggle with research-based suggestions regarding how to implement recommendations to provide realistic solutions to the teacher attrition problem (CEC, 1998). The significance of this study lies in the information and implications it may provide for improving the beginning teacher induction programs in the chosen school with regard to the specialized nature of their jobs in the classroom within the context of special education. The CEC (1998) made the following statement:

Qualitative and Quantitative inquiry regarding this phenomena is prevalent and the literature is replete with findings and suggestions. However, little information is available that identifies practical, realistic school-based practices that consider the resources of local education agencies. (p. 6)

Overview of the Research Procedures

The researcher chose a case study approach to examine the perspectives of three high school special education teachers with four or less years experience regarding their preparation and induction experiences. Three interviews were held with each teacher over a six month period. After each interview, the researcher used the constant comparative analysis approach to analyze the collected data and to identify emergent themes.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consisted of five chapters. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study, including the background of the problem, significance of the study, the statement of purpose, the research questions, the assumptions, the limitations, and the definition of relevant terms related to the study. Chapter 2 examined related research on beginning teachers, both regular and special education, mentoring and induction, and selected areas of teacher preparation. Chapter 3 described the rationale, context, data collection, and data analysis methods for the study. Chapter 4 presented the findings and analysis of the results of the teachers' perspectives of their preparation and the induction they received during the beginning of their teaching careers. Chapter 5 summarized the findings of the study, conclusions, recommendations, and implications for future research

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Since the introduction of legislation in 1975 that provided educational services for handicapped children, educators and their supporters have struggled to understand how to improve and implement the policies, which will enable these students to be successful in the classroom. As the years have passed and new legislation has come into play, educational professionals have taken a careful look at how the handicapped are being educated (Bergert & Burnette, 2001). This interest in educating these students has required and included input from many sources.

Lawmakers have played an important role in ensuring that programs for the handicapped population within our schools are being implemented both at the state and local levels. The revision of laws and suggestions for implementation are necessary in achieving this end. Laws are changed and revised in response to the needs of political environment and actors of the time (Spring, 1996). Legislative issues directly affect how teachers must be prepared both at the college and local school system levels (Mastropieri, 2001). A review of the laws pertaining to the education of disabled students will lend insight into how teacher preparation programs might be designed to meet the ever changing needs of special education students within our schools. College personnel, certification officials, administrators, and teachers alike need specific knowledge about special education law in order to determine the direction of teacher education programs (CEC, 2000). A review of relevant literature in the legal and certification

areas of special education is necessary in designing teacher preparation programs that have the capacity to benefit handicapped students in our schools.

Historical Overview

P.L. 94-142 was passed in 1975 to ensure all handicapped children received public school education. This law has gone through and continues to go through many changes and revisions, which significantly impact how we work with handicapped students in public schools (Mastropieri, 2001). Since special education teachers play a pivotal role in implementing all special education laws, it is important to look at how these laws have historically evolved into their current state. Additionally, teacher certification in the state of Georgia has seen changes since it's beginning in 1858. As requirements for certification have changed, so have teacher preparation programs. With the advent of special education programs in the public schools, so came the development of college preparation programs for teachers to meet the expectations of special education classrooms (Holmes Group, 1986). Teacher certification as it relates to the field of special education has become a controversial issue over many years of legal reform and implementation. Special education legislation (and its corresponding impact on the public schools) and teacher certification play a major role in how colleges and school systems view their position in teacher education and preparation for the education of handicapped students (Darling-Hammond, 1994).

Special Education Law

On June 4, 1997, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 were signed into law. This legislation represented an addition to the revision in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 when some important substantive changes were enacted. These changes included provisions for “transition services” and changes in terminology

including a change from “handicapped children” to “children with disabilities” (Dayton, 1999). Also in 1990 was the congressional passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which extended anti-discrimination provisions similar to section 504, which was enacted in 1973 to prohibit discrimination against handicapped persons in programs receiving federal funds. These section 504 protections in public institutions were extended through ADA. to many private sector areas including employment, public accommodations, transportation and telecommunications (Dayton, 1999). Of these three laws (§ 504, P.L. 94-142, and IDEA), IDEA has had the most significant impact on public schools (Dayton, 1999).

The IDEA amendments of 1997 and their corresponding 1999 federal regulations have further influenced the implementation of special education law in America’s public schools. The revisions to the original laws include provisions for increased parental input in the IEP process, changes in formal testing and evaluation procedures, changes in disciplinary procedures, increased formal reporting of progress on IEP goals, transition planning at age 14, increased use of assistive technology, changes in the eligibility requirements for “developmental delay,” and consideration of inclusionary options, among others (Warger, 1999).

This major overhaul of the special education laws opened a plethora of unexpected issues regarding implementation of the laws within public school settings. These issues have stimulated discussion regarding the best practice of teacher preparation programs at the college and local school levels. While some problems were anticipated, as with any changes in legislation, other problems became apparent after the law was passed and implementation was expected by local school districts (Dayton, 1999). In addition to trying to untangle the usual garbled messages that typically saturate our legislation and survive the political struggle to determine the most

important aspects of the law, educators and administrators struggled to understand just exactly what was expected of them at the local level from central offices to individual classrooms. The roles of personnel were unclear, the guidelines were confusing, and time restraints interfered with the ability to fully understand “what to do” before they were required to do it (Dayton, 1999). For this reason, among others, the law is currently under revision again and will again be presented to congress for approval. The push to implement these constant revisions has forced colleges and local school systems to take a closer look at how well special education teachers are prepared to implement the specifics of the law, and consequently provide a better education for our handicapped population in the public schools.

Recent literature on the 1997 revision of the law, the 1999 regulations, and the current plan for revision points to several areas of concern. These areas, which were problematic in the implementation of the 1997 revision, will be addressed in the upcoming revision and include, but are not limited to: effectively providing assistive technology for disabled students, creating clearer guidelines for functional behavioral assessments, clarifying discipline procedures based on implementation difficulties, refining the IEP process, providing more specific guidelines for alternate assessments, and developing tools for appropriate interpretation of the regulations regarding transition of students with disabilities from school to adult life (Dayton, 1999). Also of particular concern throughout the current literature is teachers’ and administrators’ apparent lack of knowledge about legal issues and requirements in general including those of IDEA. Beginning teachers lack sufficient knowledge to implement the specifics of special education law in the classroom (Monts, 1998). Additionally, colleges and school systems find themselves trying to determine how they can improve their special education teacher preparation curriculum to meet the growing needs of special education programs in schools. The constant revisions in special

education laws further complicate this process as principals and teachers alike try to acquire the knowledge and preparation necessary to implement the legislation successfully (Garner & Monts, 2000).

President Bush has emphasized the need for educational reform across the country and has introduced legislation and appointed commissions to address the wide range of improvements which must take place in improving our educational system in America. While it is not written specifically for special education purposes, the newly introduced *No Child Left Behind Act (2001)* will have a significant impact on special education services within the schools. This impact should be considered when designing teacher education programs. In response to the growing need for improvement in the special education field, which includes provisions from *No Child Left Behind*, President Bush appointed the Commission on Excellence in Special Education to report the current state of special education in our public schools (July, 2002). These two legal entities (*No Child Left Behind* and the Commission on Excellence in Special Education) should influence the quality of our teacher preparation programs particularly in the special education arena.

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* was signed into law in January of 2002 and will change the federal government's role in kindergarten through 12th grade education by introducing four basic education reform principles to America's schools: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work (National Center on Educational Statistics, 2002). All of these issues apply to special education and should be addressed in teacher preparation programs. Testing is a particular area of concern for teachers if their effectiveness is to be based on testing results. Many special education students are unsuccessful on standardized

tests because they are below grade level academically. Special education teachers are now being asked to provide assessments to test their students' levels of performance (O'Neill, 2001). If these results are to be tied to teacher evaluations, colleges and local school systems must find a way to prepare teachers to implement alternative testing strategies.

The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education was appointed by President Bush to analyze and indicate weaknesses in the special education area of our public schools to increase the likelihood of successfully implementing the No Child Left Behind Act. The commission's report (July 2002) lists several recommendations for the reform of IDEA and focuses on improving accountability for results, empowering parents, supporting and improving teacher quality, and increasing school flexibility. These findings fall right in line with the guidelines of NCLB and will directly affect how money is spent and the special education field through college teacher education programs and teacher development programs within the local school systems in Georgia.

Certification of Special Education Teachers

Based on assumptions citing the increase in diversity in special education, and that sustained involvement of families is essential to successes in educational service, the Council for Exceptional Children adopted standards for special educators entering into professional practice (Swan & Sirvis 1992). These standards include:

1. Having no less than a Bachelor's Degree that encompasses the knowledge and skills consistent with entry level into special education practice.
2. Knowledge and skills in the following areas:
 - Philosophical, historical, and legal foundations of special education.
 - Characteristics of learners.

- Assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation.
 - Instructional content and practice.
 - Planning and managing and teaching and learning environment.
 - Managing student behavior and social interaction skills.
 - Communication and collaborative partnerships.
 - Professionalism and ethical practices.
3. Knowledge and skills in at least 1 of the areas designated as specialized.
 4. A minimum of a 1-year mentorship during the first year of special education practice in a new role.
 5. Approval of special educators in practice for a limited time period with periodic renewal.
 6. Participation by special education professionals in at least 25 clock hours of planned, pre-approved, organized, and recognized professional development activities related to their field of practice.

The professional standards suggested by the Council for Exceptional Children have come to serve as a guide for teachers and administrators as they try to improve the quality of special education services for students with disabilities.

Teacher certification in Georgia has become more complex since its beginning in 1858. At this time, the first provisions were made requiring certificates of all teachers in schools receiving state funds. These certificates qualified individuals “to teach” and “to be of good moral character” and were issued by the County Board of Examiners (GA-PSC, 2001). A permanent state license was authorized and issued by the State School Commissioner in 1887, but it was not until 1924 that the State Division of Certification was established. In 1946, the dual system of

state certification and county certification was discontinued. Since this time, all teachers in Georgia's public schools are required to hold a state teacher's certificate. When this requirement was put into effect, certification in Georgia began a series of changes including increases in the requirements for initial preparation, the addition of many new fields of certification, new trends in alternative preparation, developments in the initial and continuing assessment of educators, and moves towards national trends in certification (GA-PSC, 2001). The development of certification in Georgia has been a cooperative effort between the State Legislature, the Department of Education, teacher preparation institutions, and the state professional teachers associations.

The state of Georgia requires that all teachers seeking a special education teaching certificate complete an approved teacher preparation program. Applicants must meet the following requirements: coursework in the identification and education of children with special needs, coursework in the teaching of reading, the appropriate assessment (Praxis), and recency of study/ experience in the special education field for which you are applying for certification (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2001).

Provisional Certification

There is a substantial and chronic shortage of fully certified special education teachers nationally (Office of Special Education Programs, 1996). Provisional certification has become a point of contention for administrators trying to fully staff their special education programs. As a result of the increase in the number of provisionally certified teachers working in the special education field, school districts must find a way to provide effective staff development to further the chances of these teachers to be successful in addressing the unique needs of special education

students. A customized induction program is needed to meet the specialized needs of alternatively certified teachers (Chesley, Wood, & Zepeda, 1997).

As laws have been passed and educational reforms have been implemented, the certification process has had to change in response to the growing needs of local school systems. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC) was created by mandate in 1991 as a means by which to address these constant changes. A separate government agency, removed from the Georgia Department of Education, the GA-PSC was established to streamline the certification/licensure process so that it is understandable and flexible in order to remove barriers and to attract qualified individuals to the teaching profession (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2001). Also included in the duties of the PSC are establishing professional practices and regulations for the ethical behavior of educators. The PSC guidelines have added yet another dimension to the teacher education dilemma. Colleges and school systems continue to grapple with teacher preparation issues as they relate to the continually growing accountability of teachers as dictated by legally mandated agencies such as the Professional Standards Commission.

Teacher Shortage in Special Education

There is a severe shortage of special education teachers in America (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The reasons vary from noncompetitive teacher salaries to poor working conditions for teachers in low-income areas (Salzer, 2002). Georgia schools hired more than 12,000 new teachers in 2002, and the projected annual need is expected to reach nearly 20,000 by the end of this decade. The state's college of education programs only graduated about 3,500 students last year, and most hires are coming from out of state or are former teachers returning to the profession (Salzer, 2002). Besides implementing recruitment incentives and allowing retired

teachers to return to teaching with decreases in pay, Georgia has adopted two new programs to address its teacher shortage in general: The Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (TAPP) and the Georgia Responds Program.

Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (TAPP)

The Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program was implemented as part of Governor Barnes' 2001 education reform bill. It is this program that fast-tracks certification as a way of alleviating the teacher shortage of content-knowledgeable professionals in critical need areas in Georgia's classrooms (Augusta Chronicle, 2002). This program allows professionals with Bachelor's Degrees with no teaching credentials to gain certification through intensive summer classroom instruction and a mentoring process that spans two years of experience in the classroom. Critics of this program have indicated that, while content knowledge is important, it takes a lot more than subject matter to be effective (Augusta Chronicle, 2002). Teachers must learn how to control their students as well as other management skills, including dealing with some complex legal issues. Since special education has been identified as a critical need area in the state of Georgia for the next three years (Georgia Student Finance Commission, 2002), colleges and school systems must seriously consider the criticisms of the TAPP program when looking at teacher preparation issues.

Georgia Responds Program

The Georgia Responds Program (2001) is designed to help schools meet critical staffing needs resulting from the significant shortage of qualified teachers. It is intended for those with lapsed or expired teaching certificates that want to reenter the teaching profession and those with significant work experience who can become prepared as teachers in Georgia's classrooms (Broyles, 2001). The components of this program (among others) include rigorous, intensive, and

supervised classroom practice, year long supervision for teachers, training in research-proven competencies required of new teachers, and extensive state-wide collaboration among the state universities' Colleges of Education. This program will influence the preparation of teachers who choose special education as the critical field in which they desire supervision.

Provisional Certification

Along with the continuing increases in numbers of special education students comes an increasing need for special education teachers based on the number of positions school systems are unable to fill with qualified personnel (Annual Report to Congress, 1991). Estimates from the last decade indicate that approximately 10% of the special education work force was not licensed, and given the recent increase in shortage, these estimates have risen (Annual Report to Congress, 1999). Nationwide, the shortage of special education teachers is expected to grow, fueled by expanding demand and high teacher attrition rates (Whitworth, 2000).

As a result, provisional certification in special education is being granted to out-of-field teachers so that legally mandated slots can be filled at the local school level. Provisional certification of teachers for special education positions is risky for principals as they try to maintain quality educational programs for students with varying levels of disability. Chesley, Wood, and Zepeda (1997) emphasize the need for customized induction programs to meet the needs of such teachers. Alternatively certified teachers struggle as they try to deal with insufficient resources and materials, training needs, and relationships with mentors and principals.

Special Education in Rural Areas

The quality of beginning special education teachers employed in rural areas has been frequently discussed throughout the area of special education teacher preparation (Gold, 1999;

Menlove & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2001; Whitworth, 2000). There is a shortage and high turn-over rate of rural special education teachers as a result of poor working conditions, lack of resources, teacher isolation, and lack of teacher preparation instruction specifically designed to meet the needs of rural special education programs (Menlove & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2001). Suggestions for combating this shortage and ensuring the provision of special education services in rural areas include university-school district partnerships, training specific to the needs of rural schools, and improving the quality of practicum programs. Studies on the training of rural special education teachers cite several areas of concern. Areas of concern for rural systems and special education include the use of technology, recruiting, and retaining teachers, preparation for rural special education teachers, and alternative certification.

Technology Needs

As special education enrollment increases, so does the need for assistive technology. Many beginning teachers have little training or technical assistance in assistive technology. Funding of and delivery of materials for assistive technology are difficult tasks in rural areas (Henderson, Kyger, & Guarino-Murphy, 1998). Assistive technology training opportunities for beginning teachers in rural areas has become a focus in teacher preparation programs at the college level. Technology support networks have been formed for beginning teachers to receive training and share ideas and experiences (Henderson et al., 1998).

The use of two-way audio/video teleconferencing technology allows on-campus and on-site supervisors of beginning teachers to hear and see the remote site classroom at the same time (Menlove & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2001). This allows beginning teachers in rural areas to receive the same quality of feedback and training that students receive on campus. The use of technology is

vital to the success of beginning special education teachers, especially in rural areas. The use of technology as an instructional tool is critical to teacher training needs (Whitworth, 2000).

Recruitment and Retention of Teachers

The shortage of teachers in rural areas has led educators across the nation to pay careful attention to developing methods of retention and procedures for recruitment of special education teachers in these rural areas. The attrition of special education teachers in rural areas is related to teacher training needs based on the unique aspects of rural schools, inclusive collaborative settings, bilingual and multicultural settings, and the need for a system of professional support (Whitworth, 2000). Activities put in place to combat shortage and attrition of special education teachers in rural areas have included developing a manual covering topics and common problems in special education, peer support groups, a newsletter for ongoing communication, and a resource center.

Suggestions for the recruitment of special education in rural areas included a recruitment video, a student financial aid manual, faculty visits to area high schools, and meetings with community leaders to discuss recruitment of local minority high school students. Whitworth (2000), in talking about recruitment and retention of rural special education teachers, also noted that improvements are needed in teacher preparation programs for teachers in rural locations which included inclusion, technology, diversity and collaboration.

Teacher Preparation Programs for Rural Special Educators

In investigating the shortage of qualified special education teachers in rural areas, research identifies teacher preparation as an area of major concern (Fallon & Hammons 1998). Addressing the professional development needs of special education teachers in rural areas has also become an issue (Gold, 1999).

Practicum experiences of intern special education teachers in rural areas have been cited by teacher education programs and rural educators as integral in the transition from training programs to the diverse challenges of the workplace (Fallon & Hammons, 1998). Multimedia programs have been cited as beneficial for special educators in rural areas due to their self-instructional nature (Ludlow, Foshay, & Duff, 1998). These programs allow for use of desktop software by teacher preparation instructors to tailor programs for their own specific instructional uses. Prospective special educators can then access these modules to observe and study aspects of professional practice without the time and expense of actual field experience (Ludlow et al., 1998). This is a practical way to deliver teacher preparation instruction to prospective rural special education teachers. Several other models for teacher preparation of rural special education teachers have been suggested as means by which to alleviate the shortage of special education teachers in rural areas (Gold, 1999; Fallon & Hammons, 1998).

Alternative Certification in Rural Areas

Cates and Smiley (2000) noted that many special education teachers in rural districts serve students with disabilities for which they are not certified as a result of limited resources to hire additional specialists, and parental desire for education of their children in local inclusive settings. Because of the lack of traditionally certified teachers, many students with multiple or severe disabilities are being inappropriately served in inclusion settings. University teacher preparation programs should restructure their curricula and combine certification programs to transcend categories of disabilities (Cates & Smiley, 2000).

General Teacher Preparation in Special Education

Beginning special education teachers are faced with many issues particular to their field in their first few years of teaching (Whitaker, 2000). Recent research in the special education

teacher preparation field has resulted in the identification of several key areas of concern that teachers note in their first few years of teaching. Table 2.1 contains the salient special education teacher preparation issues that are frequently cited in the current literature. These areas include paperwork, legal issues, discipline, scheduling and planning, assessment, transition services, diversity, connecting experience with preparation and induction, and inclusion and resource models.

Concerns of Beginning Special Education Teachers Regarding
Preparation and Induction

Issue	Studies Citing
Assessment	Anderson et al(1994);Wigle & Wilcox (1998); Council for Exceptional Children (2000); Whitaker(2000, 2001), Conderman & Stephens (2000)
Connecting Experience with Preparation/Induction	Karge et al.(1995); Freytag(2001); Miranda (1997); Whitaker(2000)(2001); Conderman & Stephens (2000)
Discipline	Eves (2001); Karge et al.(1995);Wigle & Wilcox(1998); Miranda(1997); Whitaker(2000, 2001); Conderman & Stephens (2000)
Diversity	Anderson et al.(1994); Karge et al.(1995); Pugach (1996); Obiakor & Utley (1997); Whitaker(2000, 2001); Conderman & Stephens (2000)
Legal Issues	Garner (2000); Monts (1998), Petzko (2001); Gullatt & Tollett (1997); Leschied et al. (2000;,, Katsiyannis (1999); Williams (1998);Whitaker(2000, 2001); Conderman & Stephens (2000)

Table 2.1. Concerns of Beginning Special Education Teachers Regarding Preparation and Induction

(table continues)

Concerns of Beginning Special Education Teachers Regarding
Preparation and Induction

Issue	Studies Citing
Inclusion/ Resource Models	Karge et al. (1995); Freytag(2001); Wigle & Wilcox(1998); Pugach (1996); Whitaker (2000, 2001); Conderman & Stephens (2000)
Paperwork/Technology	Henderson (1998); Anderson et al.(2001); Wigle & Wilcox (1998); Miranda (1997); Whitaker (2000, 2001); Conderman & Stephens (2000)
Scheduling/Planning	Freytag (2001); Miranda(1997); Whitaker(2000, 2001); Conderman & Stephens (2000)
Transition Service	Council for Exceptional Children (2000); Katsiyannis (2001); Kleinart et al.(2000); Whitaker (2000, 2001); Conderman & Stephens (2000)

Table 2.1 (cont'd)

Paperwork /Technology

The amount of paperwork required of a general education teacher can be monumental at times (Dunican & Chaney, 2000). The detailed reporting procedures used in grading and attendance can take many hours by itself. Adding time for parent contacts and committee meetings leaves little time for classroom planning and organization. This becomes a major hurdle for beginning teachers in any field of discipline. The beginning special education teacher must be able to handle the same paperwork as a general educator in addition to writing Individualized Educational Plans, collecting intensive numerical and anecdotal data on students, working

collaboratively with administrators and regular ed teachers to ensure student success, writing behavior management plans for students, contacting parents of these students two to three times weekly, and writing individualized lesson plans based on students' IEP goals.

Paperwork becomes a daunting task for beginning special education teachers as they struggle to keep their heads above water in their classroom during the school day. To complete the required paperwork, beginning teachers must first acquaint themselves with the system policies and requirements for paperwork and then attempt to link the acquired information with the generic information they learned in college (Rotanz, 2001). They must learn the computer programs to do attendance and IEPs in addition to the written paperwork required. This overwhelming task, coupled with the minimal knowledge they have gained in college programs, is not conducive to successful experiences in this area. Many special education teachers leave the profession in the first few years of teaching because they simply can't stay afloat (Fredericks, 2001).

Current literature is readily available about the merits of using assistive technology devices and services in K-12 special education. While the law requires school systems to commit to use of assistive technology, many obstacles to actual practice have evolved. Of particular concern is the lack of computer knowledge by both teachers and administrators, and the lack of qualified personnel to train teachers to use assistive equipment (Smith, 1999). While money has become readily available for teachers to purchase assistive technology materials, their lack of knowledge prohibits them from using the money effectively. Many school systems currently have some very "hi-tech" equipment that no one knows how to use. Provisions for inservicing teachers, specifically special education teachers, with appropriate training in the assistive technology area should be addressed in the next revision of IDEA.

Legal Issues

Knowledge of special education law is a critical need for beginning special educators as they enter the profession. A lack of skill in this area can “make or break” a teacher’s success in the school environment. Special education teachers in their first year of teaching are generally not well versed in issues of liability and required due process and student service provision issues (Petzco, 2001). This area is also of major concern to principals as they attempt to implement the laws within their schools with limited knowledge, sometimes, of the legal mandates in special education (Monts, 1998). Principals should become experts in special education law to provide better training programs for beginning special education teachers to address legal issues (Williams & Katsyannis, 1998).

Discipline

Beginning teachers struggle on a daily basis with managing the behavior of their students in their classroom. While college preparation programs provide some information about behavior management, beginning teachers are not prepared, sometimes, for the barrage of behavioral issues they are faced with throughout the day. Beginning special education teachers are even more challenged by the unique behavioral needs they encounter with their students. Many of these issues are so unique in nature that intensive research on the part of the beginning teacher must be done in order for these special education students to benefit from special education services. The additional pressure on the beginning special education teacher to serve also as “behavior specialist” can be overwhelming and discouraging. Beginning special education teachers need supplemental support in this area.

Discipline of special education students has been at the forefront of educational controversy ever since laws requiring the education of handicapped were put into place. This is

still at issue and seems to have become even more of a dilemma since the 1997 revision of IDEA. The new provisions described in the law required a change in the roles of public school personnel (Conroy et al., 1999). Functional Behavioral Assessments and Behavioral Intervention Plans require more involvement from others within the school rather than just the special education teacher. Administrators and regular classroom teachers have had to become integral parts of the development of plans for behaviorally involved students. Schools must apply long-term solutions to student learning and behavior problems by viewing those problems as errors in learning that can be ameliorated through quality instruction (Gable et al., 2000). Because of the increased responsibility of others outside of special education to being accountable in working with discipline issues, discipline problems are less likely to be reported. Data collection is time consuming and undesirable by some teachers. These issues are thought to hinder the implementation of the discipline aspects of the revision.

Although provisions are made for Interim Alternative Educational Settings, fewer are being used possibly due the issues mentioned (Telzrow, 2001). On the other hand, a 1997 Congressional report from Middle and High schools indicated that only 20% of the administrators believed that discipline procedures under IDEA were “burdensome and time consuming” (Fine, 2001). It would be interesting to know how they feel about these procedures now that they have been put into practice. Are there less discipline issues with special education students now because of implementation of the procedures, or because of less reporting of discipline issues because of the need to implement procedures? Further research of the literature should be done in this area.

Scheduling/Planning

Whether working in a self-contained, resource, or inclusionary /collaborative setting, special education teachers in their first few years of teaching experience difficulty in the areas of time management and scheduling. College teaching preparation programs and local system induction programs lack concentration in this area that is sorely needed. Many beginning special education teachers are not successful in their first few years of teaching as a result of poor organizational skills. Additionally, scheduling for students and auxiliary services (speech, occupational and physical therapy, vision, and assistive technology services) becomes overwhelming for special education teachers in the induction phase. Supports at the local level to alleviate beginning teachers anxiety about scheduling issues related to the provision of legally mandated services are suggested throughout the literature.

Assessment

Finding ways to assess accurately student progress on Individualized Education Program goals has become an additional responsibility for special educators since the IDEA revision in 1997. Alternative assessment requirements for students not participating in standardized assessments has added additional strain on beginning teachers who are already struggling to simply teach the material as outlined in the IEP. In light of the recent push to tie test scores with teacher effectiveness, the testing issue has become a point of serious contention for college and local school system preparation and induction programs. Such programs currently lack the content needed to ensure beginning teachers' success in the testing arena. If teachers are to retain their jobs and salaries are based on test results, preparation and induction programs must include an assessment component that will assist these teachers in doing what is required of them. States have found little to guide their work in developing alternative assessments for handicapped

individuals as required by IDEA (Kleinart et al., 2000). The challenges faced in implementing IDEA provisions regarding alternate assessments are numerous (Katsiyannis & Dulan, 2001). Suggestions made to address these issues are noted throughout the literature and include aligning all aspects of alternative assessments with the regular assessment, focusing on school accountability, giving teachers a front line role in designing of the system, including administrators at each step, giving careful thought to scoring, and designing the system to create as little additional paperwork for teachers as possible (Kleinart et al., 2000). Alternate assessment continues to be a dilemma when considering revision of the law. It is still open to much interpretation and needs to be refined and more specific. Teachers are finding difficulty finding concrete ways to assess low functioning students. More parameters and boundaries are needed to make this part of the law work.

Transition and IEPs

Special Education teachers, especially at the middle and high school levels, are required to provide special education students with transitional services to ensure their success in the workplace and in the community after graduation. Beginning special education teachers at the high school level are often not adequately trained in the transition area. Students in special education often do not receive the quality of transition services that they deserve and that are legally mandated as a result of beginning teachers' lack of preparation in this area.

Although transition services have been required under IDEA for 10 years, problems still exist with putting transition plans into place. Litigation is extensive in this area as a result of confusion regarding coordination and responsibility for services and the content and construction of transition plans (McAfee & Greenawalt, 2001). Students are less likely to achieve successful transition outcomes without research-validated academic and behavioral interventions, strict

adherence to procedural safeguards, and increased meaningful involvement of parents (Katsiyannis & Dulan, 2001). The planned revision of the law will address these and other issues as they pertain to effectively transitioning students with disabilities into adult life.

Inclusion/Resource Models

Limited instruction in the areas of inclusion and collaboration is inadequate to provide teachers with the skills necessary to serve all students in inclusive classrooms (Reed & Monda-Amaya, 1995). Beginning teachers who are hired to teach in inclusionary and resource settings are faced with the task of collaborating with general education teachers and administrators to monitor the success of their special education students in the regular classroom. Many beginning special education teachers lack the interpersonal skills to be successful in this area. Most training programs do not require them to take courses in counseling and interpersonal skills. Beginning teachers need further development in these areas prior to or during their induction phase of teaching.

Diversity

Current demographic trends clearly indicate that the number of youth from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is on the rise, while the number of professionals who are culturally and linguistically diverse and are entering the special education field is declining. As a result, professional standards are needed to guide professional practice in ways that are relevant to the multicultural populations served in special education (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998). Beginning teachers are often not prepared for the diversity they face in the school environment both in the area of cultural diversity and in the area of disability diversity. The ability to multi-task and change methods and personality according to cultural and disability differences is not come by easily and is achieved through practice and self-training. Helping

beginning special education teachers to develop an awareness of diversity issues should be a key component in both college preparation programs and local school system special education teacher induction programs.

Connections Between Experience and Preparation/Induction

For beginning special education teachers to implement successfully their learning experiences in the classroom, connections must be made between their experiences and job assignment and their induction and preparation programs. These connections can be addressed through mentoring, coaching, and video analysis. Special Education teachers must have skills and knowledge that are derived from practices that have been determined through research and experience to be successful (Orkwis, Decarme, & Glover, 2000).

Suggested Supportive Methods for Beginning Special Education Teachers

Throughout the literature, suggested support mechanisms that have been proven to be effective are discussed. These support mechanisms included individualized teacher support programs and mentoring programs for teachers entering the special education field.

Several factors must be addressed when providing support programs for beginning special education teachers. These factors are specific to the individual and to the teaching environment and tasks to be accomplished by the teacher (Rosenberg, Griffin, & Kilgore, 1997). Beginning special education teacher's needs are based on the demands of their teaching situation and on their individualized needs (Karge, Lasky, & McCabe, 1995) University and district collaborative support models which provide substantial support to intern teachers minimize their concerns with organization, time, and special education issues.

Mentoring, when used as a strong component of teacher induction programs, is cited throughout the literature as both effective and instrumental in easing the entry of beginning

teachers into the field (Huling-Austin, 1986; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Recruiting New Teachers, 1999). Beginning teachers have a better chance of staying in the profession, and an increased support network when mentors are available in the workplace (Eves, 2001). According to Whitaker (2000):

Concern for the needs of the first-year teacher, the existing shortage of special education teachers, and the high rates of teacher attrition in special education have led to the recommendation that mentoring be provided as a support to all beginning special education teachers. (p. 28)

In Chapter 2, the researcher reviewed the literature on the history of special education, teacher certification, teacher shortage in special education and corresponding programs, and problematic issues for teachers of special education. This knowledge guided the researcher in exploring beginning special education teachers perspectives of their preparation and induction programs. Chapter 3 includes the research questions, the design, the theoretical framework, the data sources, the data collection procedures, the data analysis methods, trustworthiness, including validity, reliability, generalizability, and neutrality, and the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of beginning high school special education teachers regarding their preparation and induction to the profession. The study was designed to examine whether or not teachers perceived their college level preparation programs and their local school level induction programs as effective and adequate to prepare them for their jobs, moreover, this study sought to identify areas perceived by these teachers as problematic in their first few years of teaching.

A qualitative case study approach was used to help the researcher examine the perspectives of high school special education teachers with between one and three years experience to gain insight on their views regarding their preparation for the classroom and the support they received at the beginning of their careers. The study used a qualitative case study approach with the constant comparative method of data analysis.

This chapter included a discussion of the theoretical framework, the research design and the questions, the data sources, a profile of the participants and context, the data collection and analysis procedures, and statements regarding the trustworthiness, reliability, generalizability, neutrality, and limitations of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Blumer(1969) coined the term “symbolic interactionism.” According to this theory, society is socially created by people acting together in social groups. Reality is created by people struggling to define themselves and the world around them (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In sharing

these definitions of ourselves and our world with others, we create the patterns of belief and thoughts that give meaning to our lives. People often make decisions based on what they think or believe (Stainback & Stainback,1988). In looking at beginning teachers' perspectives of their preparation and induction, the researcher sought to gain insight from the experiences that the three teachers had with teaching at the beginning of their careers.

The present study was based on the premises of symbolic interactionism as it sought to delve into the meanings that three beginning special education teachers attached to their preparation and induction experiences. The study allowed the participants to look introspectively at themselves and the contexts in which they perceive themselves, and to share those perceptions with others through the researcher.

Symbolic interactionism sees the interaction of people as continuous dialogues through which people watch, think through the intentions of one another, and react to those intentions. During these dialogues, social meanings are created and changed (Whyte,1982). It is this kind of dialogue that the researcher sought to create with the three beginning special education teachers. In creating this type of dialogue, the researcher hoped to encourage the participants to share their thoughts in a truthful and unrestrained manner, so as to increase the validity of the results of this study (Lincoln & Guba,1985).

Blumer's theory is based on three premises:

First, human beings act towards things on the basis of meanings that those things have for them, Second, these meanings arise out of the interaction of the individual with others, and third, an interpretive process is used by the person in each instance in which he must deal with things in his environment. (p. 4)

The premises of symbolic interactionism guided the direction of this study as the researcher analyzed and interpreted the perspectives of the participants regarding their preparation and induction experiences. The ways in which these beginning teachers defined

preparation and induction within their personal interpretive framework were examined in more depth through the theoretical basis employed in the study.

The interpretive approach afforded by Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism enabled the researcher to more fully construct meanings while analyzing the data. The meanings attached to the preparation and the induction experiences by the three beginning teachers interviewed became evident through the data collected. In this study, the researcher's goal was to derive information from the participants' dialogues about the meanings that they attached to their induction and preparation for the classroom.

Research Design

This was a case study based on qualitative inquiry and participant interviews. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method of analysis. Careful consideration was given to other forms of analysis related to data including fieldnotes and selected artifacts such as college transcripts.

The perspectives of three special education teachers with four or less years experience were examined by the researcher throughout three interviews with each teacher over a six month period. Interviews were held at the school site for convenience purposes for both the participants and the researcher. Collecting data at the school location also allowed the researcher to become reacquainted with the general atmosphere of the school and to develop background knowledge regarding the shaping of the participants perspectives of their preparedness for the classroom in their first few years of teaching. Interviews questions were open-ended, semi-structured, and conversational (see Appendix A). After an initial interview to gather baseline data, participants were interviewed again with questions chosen to specifically address those issues which emerged

as themes during the first interview and each of the subsequent interviews to address issues specific to each participant.

A third interview with each teacher allowed the researcher to further pinpoint and to explore more deeply areas identified about preparation and induction processes for these beginning special education teachers. Probing questions were used to clarify and to allow for more in-depth introspection into the meanings that preparation and induction experiences held for each of the participants. Each interview allowed for open-ended communication between the researcher and participants to develop an active dialogue on their perspectives of their respective exposure to preparation and induction at the college and local school system levels.

Data Sources and Selection

Three teachers of special education who had four or less years of teaching were interviewed for this study. The selection of teachers to be interviewed was based on their teaching within the same high school within the same county. The sampling was purposeful in that the location and participants were chosen based on convenience for the researcher. The school was personally known by the researcher and is located 45 minutes away from the researcher's home. The close proximity of the participants allowed for ease of access and the convenience of familiarity. Further, the availability of three beginning special education teachers all employed in the same school made the participants a logical choice because the participants would have the same school system as a commonality.

Research Questions

The following overall research questions guided this study:

1. How effective and successful do new teachers (specifically those who teach special education) believe they are with students in the classroom?

2. How adequately do new special education teachers believe they were prepared to be effective in the classroom?
3. What are the most problematic issues that present themselves in the first three years of special education teaching as perceived by the teachers themselves?
4. What induction methods are being used and what are the perceived effects on beginning special education teachers?

Profile of the Participants

Three special education teachers with less than three years of experience were chosen to participate in this study: Donald Neister, Suzi Anderson, and Hans Franz. Donald is in his first year of teaching special education and holds provisional special certification pending the completion of his Master's Degree. He teaches a self-contained class for behavior disordered students. Suzi holds a T-4 Certificate in Mental retardation and works in a self-contained class of Mildly Intellectually Disabled Students. This is her fourth year teaching special education. Hans holds a T-4 in Mental Retardation and is the Related Vocational Instruction Coordinator. He will complete his RVI endorsement this summer. This is Hans' fourth year teaching special education and his fourth new position since he started teaching. All three beginning teachers work at Valhalla High School in a rural county of northeast Georgia.

Data Collection

Before data collection began, the researcher made contact with the system in which the study was conducted. The researcher obtained clearance from the appropriate department at the University of Georgia to do research with human subjects, requested permission from the superintendents of the targeted county to locate participants for the study and contacted the

participants to explain the research. The participants signed two informed consent forms (one for the participant; one for the researcher). Each participant was interviewed three times.

Data collection occurred in the Winter of 2004. Each of the three beginning teachers were interviewed three times over a six month period. Possible teacher interview questions are attached. The number and type of questions asked during each teacher interview was adjusted based on the participant's responses and comments in previous interviews (see Appendix A). The initial interview included basic personal information questions so that the researcher could develop rapport with each participant to "set the stage" for subsequent interviews. The information provided by the participants during the first interview provided baseline data to direct the researcher in designing and choosing appropriate questions for the following interview. In this way, the researcher was able to pinpoint particular areas of concern specific to each participant, while also allowing themes to emerge that were common amongst all participants.

Three interviews were conducted with the three special education teachers over a six month period. Audiotapes were transcribed and coded after each interview. Interview questions for subsequent interviews were developed based on the previous interview responses and the researcher probed for clarification and follow-up.

A pseudonym was assigned to each teacher for the purposes of labeling the audiotapes. Interviews were approximately 50-60 minutes in length. Subsequent interviews were longer in length as the researcher probed for further information identified from previous interviews. The second and third interviews would last approximately 90 minutes.

The district and local school report card along with the description of the induction program and other artifacts were collected. Fieldnotes were collected to complete this research.

Teachers provided individual, demographic, and ethnographic information about their school and themselves to orient the researcher to their workplace.

Data Analysis

The constant comparative analysis design was used in this study to allow the researcher to make informed statements about the perspectives of the participants regarding their preparation levels and induction experiences. The researcher listened to each interview and transcribed the tapes. From each transcription, the researcher began a coding system to track emerging ideas. As categories emerged, a code was developed to track the meaning of the data. This process of reading and coding continued throughout the process after each interview.

In total, 41 codes were developed (see Appendix C). A sample of these codes are presented in Table 3.1.

Code	Meaning
ACC	Access to info
BD	Behavior Disordered
DIS	Discipline
INT	Internship
RC	Returning to college

Table 3.1. Sample of Codes

As new meanings emerged, new codes to represent the meanings were developed. This process continued until a category became saturated. Moreover, as categories were examined, some codes were subsumed because the properties were too similar in meaning. Data were further delimited until higher levels of meaning were achieved and displayed as themes (see Table 3.2)

Codes	Donald	Suzi	Hans
ACC	X		X
AI	X	X	X
BD	X		
BS	X	X	X
CE	X	X	
CG	X		

Table 3.2. Sample of Code Matrix

This method allowed the researcher to identify emerging themes from the transcriptions through coding and category formation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The use of the constant comparative analysis design prevented the researcher from establishing pre-determined categories through its open-ended approach of interviewing. During the initial interviews, the researcher purposely allowed the participant to verbally “ramble,” thus enabling the interview to mold itself into the meanings the beginning teachers attached to their preparation and induction experiences. During the initial interviews, the researcher attempted to minimize interjections, which encouraged the participants to express themselves freely.

In the constant comparative analysis method, each stage of research provides the basis for the next stage. The researcher compares observations and collected data simultaneously. Observing, comparing, identifying emerging categories and themes, and theorizing are the salient components of the constant comparative analysis method.

Trustworthiness

The researcher strengthens the trustworthiness of a study by applying four imperatives in reporting data: validity, reliability, generalizability, and neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness is important in any form of inquiry (Merriam, 1998), and is established when participants are convinced that their responses are valuable and worthwhile (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher audio-recorded interviews and kept fieldnotes and a journal chronicling thoughts during and after each interview. Through the constant comparative method, preliminary findings and the interview transcripts were presented to the participants for their feedback and clarification.

Validity

Validity is a measure of how closely the findings of a research study match reality (Merriam, 1998). Do the findings show the right answer (Kirk & Miller, 1986)? To give the chosen participants in this study an opportunity to confirm the trustworthiness of the research throughout the data collection period, respondent validation was the type of validation used. The researcher recorded findings after each of the interviews, and then reported these findings back to the participants.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which ones findings can be replicated (Merriam, 1988), and yield the same results regardless of the “how” or “when” of carrying it out (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Triangulation was used in this study to satisfy the reliability issues of this study, thus allowing the researcher to revisit assumptions. The use of multiple data sources in triangulation increases the reliability of the data (Creswell, 1998). Triangulation in this study was accomplished through collecting and analyzing the following data sources:

1. Transcripts of interviews: Each participant was interviewed three times and a tape recording was made and transcribed for each interview.
2. Artifacts collected at the school site: Artifacts included contextual information, and state, district, and local 2002-2003 report cards.
3. Fieldnotes included research observations and recordings during interviews with the three high school teachers in this study.

Generalizability

This study was not intended to make wide, rash generalizations about the perceived quality of special education preparation and induction programs for all beginning special education teachers, because the participants are limited to the three beginning high school special education teachers with between one and three years experience within the same school and county. The perspectives of the quality of the preparation and induction processes of the three participants impedes generalizability to other settings given the small size of the sample.

Neutrality

The researcher attempted to prevent any preconceived notions from influencing the results of this study. Control of subjectivity and bias by the researcher prevents the data analysis from being influenced both during and after data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The researcher must make every effort to reveal any personal biases and use appropriate means of transcending them (Bogdan & Biklen 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

To control researcher subjectivity and bias in this study, each participant was asked the same open-ended questions in their initial interviews. The interview transcripts were read repeatedly at different points in time for the researcher to look at the data through different perspectives. Transcripts were also re-coded over time so that the researcher could look again at

the data with a fresh perspective. Revealing the perceptions of the participants in this way allowed the researcher to attempt to limit bias and subjectivity.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to the perspectives of three beginning special education teachers with between one and three years experience regarding the quality of their preparation and induction experiences. Hence, the knowledge and experiences of these three teachers who work in one setting could not be applied across settings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of beginning special education teachers regarding their preparation and induction experiences. The following questions were specifically addressed in this study:

1. How effective and successful do new teachers (specifically those who teach special education) believe they are with students in the classroom?
2. How adequately do new special education teachers believe they were prepared to be effective in the classroom?
3. What are the most problematic issues that present themselves in the first three years of special education teaching as perceived by the teachers themselves?
4. What induction methods are being used and what are the perceived effects on beginning special education teachers?

In this chapter, the participants of the study were profiled and context of the study site was described. Also reported in this chapter are the findings, the themes from each of the three interviews with each of the three participants, and further delimiting of the themes presented. Emerging themes from the interviews are concentrated on the beginning teacher's perspectives of their induction experiences at the local school level and on their perceived level of preparedness for the classroom as a result of their college preparation experiences. Each of the participants and the context in which they work was profiled.

The Context of the Study

Three special education teachers with one to four years experience who worked in the same high school were interviewed for this study. The school is over 25 years old with few renovations. Confidentiality of the study site was maintained through the use of a pseudonym: Valhalla High School. Two of the teachers were male and one was female. All three teachers were Caucasian. The school was a typical high school comprised of grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. The school has several special education programs including one self-contained class for moderately and severely intellectually disabled students, two self-contained classes for mildly intellectually disabled students, one self-contained class for emotionally/ behaviorally disordered students, three interrelated resource classes to serve mildly intellectually disabled students, learning disabled students, behaviorally disordered students, and a related vocational instruction program. Of the participants in this study, one taught self-contained mildly intellectually disabled students, one taught self-contained emotionally/ behaviorally disordered students, and one worked with students eligible for related vocational instruction.

The work of the special education department at Valhalla High School is facilitated by the department head who has been teaching a total of six years, all in an interrelated resource program at Valhalla. She had no experience working in a self-contained environment with students with behavior/emotional disorders or with students with moderate, severe, or profound disabilities. As a result, her ability to supervise and mentor teachers in these areas is limited to her general knowledge of such programs rather than actual hands-on experience.

Of all of the special education teachers in the school, five were relatively new to the field, having from 0 to 3 years experience. Four of these five teachers have worked under or are presently working under provisional certification in their respective special education field.

Three of these five teachers are coaches, two of which came to Valhalla High School as part of the coaching team with the new football coach who was transferred from a neighboring school in the same system. Only two of all of the beginning special education teachers at Valhalla High School had previous experiences in the education field and/or the special education field. There were no beginning special education teachers at Valhalla High School who had been involved in a formalized special education student teaching program prior to their entering the classroom.

Valhalla High School has a student minority rate of 35%, and 10% of all students at the school were enrolled in or received consultative services from some type of special education program. The majority of students in special education within the school fall within the learning disabled or mildly intellectually disabled range of intelligence. The mildly and moderately intellectually disabled programs are community-based and life-skill oriented. Interrelated resource students who are mildly intellectually disabled, learning disabled, or behavior disordered, and who are working on regular diplomas, attend special education classes two or less periods a day to receive remedial assistance in achieving goals toward a college preparatory or technical seal.

The self-contained behavior/emotional disorders class is designed to assist students in remediating their behavioral deficits in to transition successfully back into the general school program and its curriculum. A related vocational instruction program is housed at Valhalla High School where a special education instructor attends vocational classes with special education students to assist them in completing required assignments or to provide modifications for these students on a needs basis. The beginning special education teachers at Valhalla High School, though willing to learn what is necessary to get the job done, are atypical of other beginning special education teachers as a whole throughout the state. With no student teaching experience,

limited classroom experience, and few who are validly certified to teach in the field, it would seem that the beginning teacher group at Valhalla High School, as a whole, would be less likely to demonstrate effective and successful teaching practices in their first few years of teaching. Because of this, it would seem that these teachers would be less likely to continue in the special education field unless it was an absolute necessity.

The results of this study, however, show an entirely different picture of this scenario, as seen through the eyes of three of the five beginning special education teachers at Valhalla High School. These teachers felt generally adequate as a result of their preparation and induction experiences at the college, system, and local school levels and perceived themselves as successful in their classroom endeavors so far in their teaching career. Each of them would like to continue in the field, although they all note that problematic issues have come up for them which have been “bumps in the road,” but not “stop signs.”

Profile of the Participants

The three participants were teachers at a rural high school in Northeast Georgia at the time of the study. None of the three participants had chosen special education as their first career choice. Two of the beginning teachers had left business careers, while the other had planned to go into education, but in middle school social studies and coaching. All three teachers taught in the field of special education, but in different areas of exceptionality. The participants had varied levels of experience with special education students, education, and general teaching experience. Two of the teachers were on provisional certification for the exceptionality area in which they taught, while the other was fully certified in her field. Each participant appeared to have had some type of experience in preparation and induction programming for their teaching field, either through college experiences or through induction programs at the system and local level.

Table 4.1 summarizes the participants' profiles.

Participant	Educ. Lev.	Educ. Exp.	Cert.	First Career Choice	Teaching Background	Current Position
Donald Neister	B.S.	6 mnths.	PT-4 B.D.	Business	none	High School B.D. – S.C.
Suzi Anderson	B.S.	3 yrs.	T-4 M.R.	Business	M.I.D. Middle School-Res High School- S.C.	High School M.I.D. – S.C.
Hans Francis	B.S.	3 yrs.	T-4 M.R. R.V.I.- E	Mid. Sch. Soc. St.	M.I.D.- S.C. Middle/High Sch High School- RVI	High School RVI- Coord.

Table 4.1. Summary of Participants' Profiles

Donald

Donald's case yielded four themes, one related to induction experiences, one related to problematic issues, one related to student success, and one related to "love of the job". These are presented in Table 4.2.

Topic	Theme
Induction Experiences	County induction procedures for beginning special education teachers are effective and useful. Staff development in the county is an ongoing process.
Problematic Issues	Paperwork, procedural guidelines, discipline problems, and the all-inclusive aspect of teaching special education all interfere with beginning special education teachers' effectiveness in the classroom
Student Success	Student success is a measure of teacher success.
"Love of Job"	Teaching is a meaningful and rewarding experience.

Table 4.2 Donald's Themes

Donald was in his first year of teaching high school special education. He worked with behavior-disordered students in a self-contained program. After a career in advertising, he decided he wanted to do something different. Donald's wife had been a teacher and a middle school assistant principal for her entire career. He stated, "I have an understanding of the job. Although to be honest, I never thought I would enjoy teaching EBD self-contained as much as I do." Donald was teaching with a provisional T-4 certificate in behavior disorders pending completion of the required coursework to validate his regular certificate. He was working on his Master's Degree in behavior disorders during the period of this research.

Because he had no courses in education and because his degree was in economics, Donald describes his teaching background as "very limited." Regarding his previous experience in the field of education, Donald explained, "I spent half the 2002-2003 school year as a "stellar" substitute teacher. I had the opportunity to cover all the special education classes and a wide variety of regular education classes." Donald clarifies that "stellar" in this particular system meant "full-time."

After completing a half -year serving as a full-time (stellar) substitute in a school in a neighboring county, Donald started his first full-time teaching job at Valhalla High School in the fall of 2003. His induction experiences with the county are detailed in his interviews.

I attended an orientation for all teachers new to the system, as well a session specifically targeting beginning special education teachers. During this session, which was during pre-planning, paperwork and guideline issues were discussed. The orientation for beginning teachers in general included insurance and financial details as well as training on lesson planning.

When asked specifically to talk about his county and local school induction program for beginning special education teachers, he appeared pleased with all of his teacher orientation and more specifically, he described the special education staff development as "very well done."

Additionally, he describes what his county did to help him in his new job: “They have ongoing staff development throughout the year, and all the programs have been very well done.”

Donald reported having positive experiences with staff development in his first few months of teaching. He specifically spoke about the last staff development program he attended. Donald reported, “Our last staff development day was great. Toby Price from the Viking Justice Center spoke to the entire department about peaceful dispute resolution.” It was obvious that Donald was benefiting from his county and school staff development programs.

Another induction program that Donald deemed highly effective was his being mentored by an experienced teacher. In his case, Donald’s mentor also served as the special education department chairperson. This relationship proved helpful in Donald’s transition into full-time teaching in special education. He describes his “mentoree” experiences in a positive light:

My mentor is the department chair and she has an answer to all my questions, and if she does not have the answer, she has access to an answer. Working closely with my department chair has been very helpful. I ask a lot of questions.

He also commented that the department chair did a “fantastic job” and is an “exemplary role model.” Donald seemed to have been able to rely on his mentor’s knowledge and resources to help him get through the first few months of his teaching. His mentor served as a “resource and support” to help Donald ensure success in his first year. Donald felt that consistent mentoring and ongoing staff development were both “helpful” and “useful” for beginning teachers in their initial efforts for success in the special education classroom.

Donald talks about several problem issues that he has experienced in his first few months of teaching. Although he works specifically with students with behavior disorders, Donald is concerned about his students’ severe behaviors. Beginning special education teachers in general find classroom behavior management to be challenging in their first few years of teaching. One

can only imagine the difficulties that might be faced when working in a self-contained class with students identified as behavior-disordered, first, as a new teacher, and on top of that, as a new special education teacher with very limited training in the field. Because new teachers are concerned about classroom control, Donald's feelings of inadequacy in this area are understandable. His desire for his students to be successful (which, incidentally, he sees as a measure of his success, as discussed later in this analysis) is thwarted by these behavioral issues that he has difficulty dealing with. When asked to identify problematic issues that he had encountered so far in his teaching experiences, he cited:

Many behavior problems, one resulting in a student dropping out of school, one change of placement, and one pending disciplinary action. I overlook some behaviors to get the maximum academic performance out of them.

Regarding additional problematic issues, Donald was concerned about giving his students "enough room to make their own decisions and trying not to be outwardly disappointed when they often times fail to use good judgment." Given Donald's desire to see his students succeed, and when asked what he found most problematic, he also reported, "The kids not seeing the big picture. I try to impress upon them that things that are worthwhile take hard work and there are no guarantees."

Donald's concern about discipline issues is pervasive throughout the interviews. His need to see students succeed, while admirable, did seem to inhibit his ability to adequately handle more difficult discipline issues. He mentioned spending "a lot of time in verbal discourse with students rather than in active behavior management." While he demonstrated awareness regarding the failure of this discipline method in managing his particular classroom, he lacked the appropriate tools necessary to implement the appropriate discipline strategies with his students. For example, Donald stated, "I try to talk to the students. I want to impress upon them

that the decisions they make now can alter their futures. Their behavior can interfere with their future plans.”

Paperwork and procedural guidelines are other areas of concern for Donald as a beginning special education teacher. His responses regarding additional areas that college preparation programs are lacking in and should address center around special education legal and procedural guidelines. He states, “I would like to see the inclusion of a special education law class that would be mandatory for all teachers.” He notes that the government’s most recent emphasis of the Least Restrictive Environment guidelines has “introduced a lot of very important information that all teachers need to know.” It is interesting to notice that when asked about his own college coursework that he found to be most helpful, Donald said:

Most of all, the law in the classroom class was most helpful. It was very informative and we spent a lot of time talking about what not to do. Its amazing how many legal issues are involved in my teaching everyday.

Legal issues and the “ever-increasing amount of paperwork” involved in the special education teaching field is noted throughout all the literature on the subject. Donald’s perspectives on the problematic issues involved in beginning a special education teaching career are clearly in-line with the perspectives of others in his position.

Another salient theme seen throughout the interviews with Donald was a “love of his job.” He frequently expressed that he saw his job as “rewarding.” “Nothing seems to be more motivating for any teacher than to feel they are doing something meaningful for their students,” Donald stated. It was this emotional aspect of the job that appeared to motivate Donald to seek preparation and mentoring assistance so that he could make a “difference in his students lives.” Donald “loved his job” and finds it “rewarding” because he is seeing his “students succeed.” He perceived himself as successful because his students were making gains. He emphasized that he

chose teaching because he wanted to “help kids with emotional/ behavior disorders succeed academically and throughout life,” and he reported, “That’s why I chose special education. Donald seemed proud that special education in the field of emotional/ behavior disorders was his “first and only choice”. The idea of “choosing” the field was mentioned several times throughout the interviews. Donald perceives his “choice as admirable and meaningful.” His love of his job is evident throughout his discourse. His advice for prospective special education teachers clearly shows his perception of the job and defines his perception of “choice” like this:

Teach special education because you love it, not because you need a job, or you want to be a social studies teacher or a P.E. teacher and they didn’t have a spot open for you yet. Teach special ed because you want to help kids.

When asked about his plans to continue in his present field, Donald showed no hesitation. He was emphatic and shared, “I do, I find it very rewarding. I hope to make a difference in some of my students’ lives.” Donald’s perspectives about his job were student centered. He saw his students’ progress as a measure of his success as a beginning special education teacher. When asked if he perceived himself as effective and successful with students in his special education classroom, he responded, “I would like to think so. I care, I teach, and I advocate for my students. I hope so, but I don’t know. I guess only time will tell.” Donald’s hesitancy to answer positively in this instance is even more convincing evidence that he perceives his effectiveness as dependent upon his “students’ outcomes and successes.” His “wait and see” attitude further emphasizes his goals for student success. Donald’s feelings regarding his success, again perceived by him only as a function of his students’ progress, are questionable. He struggles when trying to describe any successes that he has had since he started teaching. He gives a specific example of one of his successes in his first few months of teaching special education:

It is rewarding to see my students make behavioral progress. They are all doing better with their behavior in my class. I teach them the majority of their academics. Other

teachers think that my students don't have to work hard. I try to simulate what goes on in the regular classroom. My academic instruction is as close as I can get to what the regular teachers are doing. I try not to modify unless I have to. I guess my first semester was a success in terms of my students' academic progress. All of my students who completed their first semester made a legitimate A or B in their courses.

Donald's overall perspectives regarding his preparation and induction experiences in his first few years of teaching were positive in nature. His responses indicated that his county had provided induction experiences that were "adequate and conducive to his present needs." In fact, at his local school, Donald perceived his experiences with induction as "highly valuable." He was especially complementary of the work he did with his mentor who was an experienced teacher: "She is the special education department head, and a very valuable resource to the beginning special education teachers in this school." It would be interesting to see if Donald's responses would be the same if his mentor was not the department head. One must wonder, if perhaps, Donald may have had an advantage over other beginning special education teachers because his mentor was the department head, and is supposed to have more knowledge than most teachers in the field. "Having the department head as my mentor makes things a little easier for me. She usually has an answer or finds an answer for me," he explains.

It was enlightening to hear a beginning teacher describe his job as "rewarding" and to know that he is "invested in student success." These emotional aspects of the beginning teachers' experiences are often overlooked in the fog of problematic issues that must be handled. Donald's emotional attachment to his job may be what motivates him to remain in the field. Perhaps exploring these emotional issues when talking about beginning teachers' experiences may help counties and local schools to improve their preparation and induction programs, and as a result, decrease the attrition rate in the special education teaching field.

Suzi

There were five themes that emerged from Suzi's case, one related to prior experiences, one related to induction experiences, one related to problematic issues, one related to student success, and one related to "love of the job." These are reported in Table 4.3.

Topics	Themes
Prior Experiences	Mentoring, field experiences, and internships are valuable methods of induction for beginning special education teachers.
Induction Experiences	County induction procedures for beginning special education teachers are effective and useful.
Problematic Issues	Excessive paperwork, procedural guidelines, and lack of adequate time to do what is needed are hindrances to teaching in the field of special education.
Student Success	Seeing students make gains and succeed is motivating and encourages teachers to stay in the field.
"Love of Job"	Teaching is a meaningful and rewarding experience.

Table 4.3. Suzi's Themes

Suzi was starting her fourth year as a special education teacher, her third year teaching at rural Valhalla High School in Northeast Georgia. Prior to her entrance to the education field, Suzi held an accounting job in a local business. After several years in this profession, she experienced a Carpal Tunnel injury from the repetitious movement of her hand. She was forced to change jobs as a result, and she wanted to find a profession that would not involve the repetitious movement of one hand. She stated early in the interviews that after being told that she would be disabled, she decided she would create a new job that she could do. She went back to college and started teaching. She found teaching to be the "most rewarding job" she had ever had. Suzi emphasizes that she "loves it."

While she attended college at a local university, she worked as a special education paraprofessional for seven years in the same system in which she now teaches. After receiving her Bachelor of Science in Education, she started her teaching career as a resource teacher at Davidson Middle School, and then moved into her current position at Valhalla High School in a self-contained resource program for mildly intellectually disabled students. Suzi holds a Georgia T-4 Certificate in Mental Retardation and an English as a Second Language Endorsement.

Suzi describes her job now in the following way:

I teach mildly intellectually disabled students life skills and job skills. We travel in the community and we work in the community under the CBVI [Community Based Vocational Instruction] program. I love what I do. I also work with the Special Olympic program with my students.

Suzi taught 3, 90 -minute segments during each school day, 1 of which was Community Based Vocational Instruction. She described her curriculum as “Life Centered Curriculum Education.”

Suzi held her previous experiences in the education field in high regard when discussing her level of adequacy and preparedness for a job teaching special education. When asked about her college experiences in terms of preparation for the classroom, Suzi’s responses indicated that she was “well-pleased” with the programs she participated in when in college. She first attended a junior college and received her Associate’s Degree in Education and then moved to a local college to complete her Bachelor’s of Science in Education. Suzi states that because of her unique circumstances, she was not required to student teach. She worked as a long-term sub for the first few months after she began teaching. She did, however participate in a university-supervised internship during her first year in the classroom to satisfy her student teaching requirements. Her response, when asked about college preparation, did not indicate to the researcher that her lack of a student teaching experience prior to taking a job was detrimental to her effectiveness with students in the classroom. Suzi elaborated:

Yes, I feel that I am prepared more than many of my coworkers are. I feel that Peach College prepared me well for the job that I am currently doing. I am returning to Peach to get my Master's Degree.

She stated that her college courses had provided a "good background" in terms of preparation for the classroom. Suzi reported, "We did field experience and the class work was not busy work, but work that I use in my classroom today." She obviously valued the functionality of the work she had done in college. Suzi's perception of her preparedness was linked to how she felt about her ability to put the concepts she learned in college to use. Suzi describes what was most helpful to her from her college experiences in terms of her preparation for the classroom, and she said:

The creation of portfolios for work that could be used in the classroom. The laws and discussion of those laws I have used many times. I feel those two things were very beneficial for reference once I was in the classroom.

Suzi stated that she relied heavily on her previous experiences as a paraprofessional in a special education classroom in a neighboring school to guide her current practices in the classroom. She describes her paraprofessional experience as "invaluable" in terms of preparing her for her current job. She states, "I feel that the parapro experience made me prepared to handle the job I have now. As a matter of fact, she credits her paraprofessional job for being the impetus for her desire to enter the teaching field. Suzi said, "After working as a parapro, I knew this is what I wanted to do." Suzi was able to take much of what she learned as a paraprofessional to use in her classroom although she is now at the high school level. Although the age is different, "many of the organizational concepts and methods are the same," Suzi explained. In Suzi's words, "I helped the classroom teacher keep up with her paperwork, so I was familiar with the process. We dealt with a lot of behaviors also." While her job was to assist the teacher, when she started back to college to pursue her own degree, Suzi began to make decisions about how she would run her own classroom. She states that she paid "special

attention” to things that were being done as she learned about them in her college program. The teacher she worked with was helpful in sharing her ideas and was supportive of Suzi’s desire to go into the field. Suzi states, “There were a lot of things I wanted to do that she didn’t, but also some things that worked for her that I knew I would be able to use.”

The researcher had prior personal knowledge of this participant, and interestingly, Suzi had observed in the researcher’s classroom on many occasions as part of her college requirements. Conversations with the participant at this time indicated to the researcher that her transition into the role of “teacher” rather than paraprofessional would be very different than what she thought it would be. Because Suzi had worked with her supervising teacher for so long, she had developed a solid opinion about some of the methods she used. In her interviews with the researcher at that time, she began many of her thoughts with, “When I get to do this job...” When asked about those conversations during the most recent interviews, Suzi’s opinions had been altered dramatically by her change in classroom status. Suzi admitted, “It’s a whole different ball-game when you’re the one in charge. The decisions are not so easy to make when it comes back on you. Yeah, its very different than what I thought.” She added later, that teachers who were once paraprofessionals need to be careful about “passing judgment too quickly. It’s different in the teacher’s shoes.” Nonetheless, though she had become “enlightened,” Suzi continuously emphasized the value of time as a paraprofessional as this time was able to give her preparation for her own class. She had this advice for prospective special education teachers:

It is in their best interest to obtain as much classroom experience prior to attending college and being placed in the classroom. I feel that no one can be prepared for something without being immersed into the situation first. It’s been a big help for me, I know.

Suzi had “limited” formal induction experiences in her county and local school prior to her actual teaching. Her paraprofessional work had to be sufficient. Her circumstances were

unique in that her daughter became ill with cancer during her college program. For insurance reasons, she was unable to quit her job as a paraprofessional to do student teaching. The county worked with her, and she was allowed to begin teaching on a long-term substitute contract until she moved into an intern position when she finished her college teaching program. Suzi sounded appreciative: “It was kind of like they counted my paraprofessional experience towards my student teaching. I was lucky. They kept me from losing insurance benefits on my daughter.” She summarized her induction experiences at the county level like this:

My case was a special one. I never actually went through orientation for new teachers because I started as an intern. I understand that our county now has a great orientation program for new teachers, with some information sessions for special education, however, I have never experienced it.

Suzi also mentions staff development as part of her induction and preparation for the classroom. She was involved in the mentoring program at the first school she worked in and described it as “helpful” to her. She says, “At Crow Middle School, I had a mentor who was very helpful to me and was always there to make sure I understood the process of special education procedures.”

While she does not spend much time talking about her first year of teaching, since she has been at Valhalla High School (VHS), Suzi has developed a support group that has helped her get through the tough times in these last two years. She has two experienced special education teachers who she works consistently with when she needs assistance with paperwork, curriculum, or discipline. Suzi talked about these two teachers in positive terms. She elaborated, “The people that have been the most helpful to me are Jan Carswell and Eve Burns. These two ladies love to work with others and help with any problem that comes up.” She says also, “I have collaborated with many experienced teachers.” It is this work with other teachers that Suzi has found to be an important part of her induction experiences into her county and Valhalla High

School. Formal staff development courses have been a vital part of her growth through the first few years.

Suzi felt that her county local school administrators were “vital to the process” as well.

Suzi summarized:

I take staff development anytime that it is offered. I have had the new WIAT [Weschler Intellectual Aptitude Test] training, new curriculum training, and many more. I have collaborated with many experienced teachers. Our special education administration at central office is very good. They spend time with teachers as needed. Our local coordinator is very efficient and always willing to be available to each teacher.

According to Suzi, her county is providing her with all the help she needs to be “effective and successful” in her job. She discusses the specifics of what assistance she received when she said, “The central office helped me with the paperwork to get my certification. The special education department was very cooperative to help me with learning the procedures expected of me.” When asked about areas in which she felt her county could have done a better job of preparing her, she responded, “No. In many cases you cannot know what to expect from one year to the next. I feel that my job expectations were explained appropriately.” She further commented on whether or not she did things outside off her job description, “Every special education teacher does things that are not in a job description. I feel that a job description is almost impossible to follow for a true special education classroom teacher.” Suzi believes other teachers at her stage in her career have similar thoughts.

Suzi is candid about problematic issues that she has encountered in her three years of teaching in special education. Her problems have been “student-related” in that she seems to desire more direct contact with the individuals with whom she works. She is interested in meeting student needs on an individual basis to an extent that is “almost overwhelming” in nature. Time is the major theme that emerged. “Time for paperwork, time for procedural

guidelines, time for planning, and time for students,” are problematic for Suzi. She simply does not have enough time to do all the things she wants to do to be effective and successful in the classroom. Suzi states, “The most difficult things are being able to meet the needs of all the students that I serve. There is not enough time to work with students on a more individual basis.” When asked early in the interview process about what she perceived to be problematic, Suzi was very specific, and reported, “Vocational Rehabilitation referrals are the most difficult to complete to help our kids have a future after high school.” Again, Suzi’s problems centered on her concern for students. Suzi summarizes the problematic issues she has encountered:

Each child has individual problems and therefore it is difficult to have enough time in a day to teach what needs to be taught, take care of personal needs and training, and keep up with the amount of growing paperwork. I feel that more time is needed to work individually because each student has different problems and different levels that must be addressed and many times there is not enough time to spend equally with all students. However, every teacher has this same problem.

Suzi wants the best for her students. She is intent on finding the most appropriate way to meet their individual needs as one can see in her concern about their future.

Suzi’s feelings about her effectiveness and success with students in the classroom are centered on her students’ progress. She, like Donald, links her successes with her students’ successes. Her comments in this area are unique in that she talks about the “big picture.” Suzi sees success at different levels in unique instances. She describes her strengths so far in her career like this, “I feel that one student of mine has finally come to the realization of having to go to school and is now working in janitorial services and loves it.” When her students succeed, she has succeeded. Suzi further comments, “I have worked with the students regularly and feel that they are gaining.” Other more concrete ideas of success are detailed throughout her interviews, which include students making progress in the community, and students with discipline problems “turning themselves around.” While general education teachers may measure success by test

scores and benchmarks, Suzi sees her success as a result of her students progressing to the next step in their lives. She wraps it up:

I feel that I am successful in the classroom. I enjoy my job and my students. I feel that success is based not only on academic achievement, but also on good socialization skills and advancement of peer interaction. I spend a lot of time working on social skills and how we are expected to act in the real world. I feel this makes a successful student and in turn makes a successful classroom.

Throughout the interviews, it was obvious to the researcher that the “love of her job” was what kept Suzi in the field, and she expressed plans to stay in the field “at least another ten years.” Suzi was obviously dedicated to her profession. She has an emotional attachment to certain aspects of her job. She states, “Each day brings new challenges that can be used as learning experiences.” A teacher who sees teaching in this light is highly likely to remain in their profession. It would be easy for a beginning special education teacher to flee the challenges they are presented with in their first few years of teaching; however, Suzi’s perception of her role in meeting these challenges was a determining factor in her decision to stay in her current job. Suzi perceives her job as rewarding and embellishes, “This is the most rewarding job I have ever had. I love it!” While not concrete in nature, Suzi’s additional words were direct:

I feel that loving these kids is the first thing I must do and then take that love and turn it into success for the student. I love my job and most of all the children I work with. This makes every day a good day of teaching. Not everyone gets up and goes to a job they love. I feel lucky in that respect.

Hans

Three themes emerged throughout the three interviews with Hans. The topics he elaborated on the most included induction and college experiences, problematic issues, and student success. These topics and their related themes are outlined in Table 4.4.

Topics	Themes
College Experiences/ Induction	College preparation is limited in its generalizeability to the rigors of the special education classroom. Induction procedures for beginning special education teachers are limited and overwhelming. Practicums, internships, working with experienced teachers, and summer orientation programs are fairly effective in helping beginning special education teachers be effective and successful with students in the classroom.
Problematic Issues	Lack of time, classroom management, feelings of insecurity, lack of subject knowledge, low student motivation levels, stamina to “keep going”, lack of curriculum, and organizational and paperwork issues are all issues that a beginning special education teachers might encounter in their first few years of teaching. These problematic issues can influence beginning special education teachers’ attitudes about whether to go from or stay in the special education field.
Student Success	Success in the first few years of teaching special education is hard to gauge. When students are successful and discipline is at a minimum, then a beginning teacher is successful.

Table 4.4. Hans’ Themes

Hans’ decision to teach was a secondary thought. He went to college on a scholarship to play baseball, having no ideas on what he wanted to do in his future. He worked several jobs after college graduation, one of which was with a soft drink company. “I hated it!” he exclaimed. Hans had changed majors several times and really had no idea in which direction he would go. When asked why he chose teaching, Hans had some interesting answers:

A couple of my friends were kind of getting into it and I had checked into it. I started and I was going to teach history. I felt like I wanted to be around a school system. I wanted to do something with kids. I can honestly say that I was influenced by my friends that were doing it, and I was able to coach. The college I was at didn’t offer very many other choices that I was interested in, and I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. So, really up until past graduation, I still didn’t know what I wanted to do. So I decided to give teaching a try.

His comments about choosing to teach special education were simple. He casually explains, “Wyatt got into it and he graduated before me. I actually came down to Valhalla High School to visit. I visited him in his classroom and I was like, “This is ‘pretty cool’!” Hans decided to “check into” teaching even though it would take him another year to get certification in special education. Hans elaborated, “Wyatt said the jobs are wide open, and I would be able to get a job easy. I went that direction and I didn’t student teach, so I had to take the Praxis.” Hans’ baseball scholarship money had run out, and he had to make a decision quickly. He described what happened:

I had been playing baseball pretty much my whole college career. I didn’t know what I wanted to do. If you went back and looked at my records, I’ve got all kinds of classes from different areas. I got a major in history, but I am not certified in history. I explored many different options, like athletic training or physical therapy. They didn’t really have a major like these at Peach.

Hans went into teaching as a last resort and thought it might only be a temporary thing until he found “a better option.” At this point in his life, coaching and playing baseball was of major importance to Hans. He was willing to do anything to get to coach. He says without shame, “I love baseball, and I’ve always wanted to coach. I knew if I taught, I could get into coaching.”

Hans is in his fourth year of teaching special education in a rural county in Northeast Georgia at Valhalla High School (VHS). He currently holds a T-4 certificate in Mental Retardation. Previously, he worked on two provisional certificates, one in interrelated, and one in mental retardation before he became fully certified in that area. Hans has taught an interrelated resource class, a Mildly Intellectually Disabled self-contained class, and is now the Related Vocational Instruction (RVI) coordinator at VHS.

Hans describes his obtaining his first teaching job as “pure luck.” He ended up passing the praxis. “I passed one part the first time, and it took me four times to pass the second part,” he explained. He had substituted at Crow Middle School once. He told what happened next: “I had interviewed with Dr. Simon, and she liked me, and when I passed the Praxis, she called and offered me a job. I was in the middle school for one year, the Fall of 2000.”

Describing his current job, Hans said, “I basically work with the special education students in their vocational classes and help them with the transitioning process from high school to enter the workforce, college, or technical school.” While the certification he presently holds in Mental Retardation is sufficient for his position at this time, Hans must attend a three week training seminar this summer to receive his RVI endorsement. He is currently working on a Master’s Degree in Special Education as well. When asked how he got into his current position, Hans’ explained:

My principal offered me the position of RVI coordinator. Before your first year of teaching in this position, you are supposed to attend a three -week training seminar in the summer at Peach South University. This training teaches the tasks and responsibilities of an RVI teacher. I have not attended this yet. I will attend this training this summer. I am currently involved in an internship with Peach South University to complete my endorsement.

Hans definitely must have good rapport with the “powers that be” to be given the opportunity to serve in his current position without the proper training. Hans obviously is determined to teach special education as evidenced by his willingness to work in different positions until he found his current niche. He plans to stay in his RVI position for the present time.

While he has found it overwhelming at times, due to the unique responsibilities of the job, Hans likes the challenges involved in working with these students in the various vocational classes throughout the school. He coached baseball as well, and had a RVI work program in place during lunch where students sell ice-cream and assist with the maintenance of the cafeteria.

There are only three other RVI teachers in the county in which Hans works, which highlights the specialization of his position. Having a position that not everyone understands is difficult for an experienced teacher, so it follows that a beginning teacher who is already in his own transition from college to work, would become further compromised by the demands of a more specialized job in a rare field. Hans seems to be handling these issues quite well, overall. When asked about whether he planned to stay in the special education field, he stated:

To be honest with you, I was ready to quit my first year. If you would have gone and talked to me at any time throughout my whole first year, except the last week or two, I would have told you 'I'm not coming back.' It was something that I did not feel confident in. I didn't feel like, 'I was doing anything.' I think it was because I was out of my league, in unfamiliar territory. I didn't know what to expect, or what was expected of me. I was overwhelmed.

Between his first year and now, Hans changed his mind. His story continues.

Hans had much to say about his college preparation. He graduated from college with a major in history and a minor in mental retardation. This made for a very interesting combination. He attended master's classes his second year of teaching to complete the requirement to validate his provisional certificate in interrelated special education. Hans' perception of his level of preparation resulting from his college program is questionable. He shared mixed feelings about his preparation at the college level, as he related, "Some of the courses I took did help in preparation, but there were some that did not." He felt prepared to "take on" a self-contained classroom of lower functioning intellectually disabled students, but expressed that he felt "unsure" of himself in other special education teaching situations. He explained, "My undergraduate degree is in mental retardation and most of the strategies and techniques that were taught really dealt with a self-contained room in which academics were not taught."

Hans struggled when he was asked to work with students at varying academic levels on traditionally academic goals. Hans notes, "In my Master's program, I felt like some of the classes

gave us some good strategies and techniques to use with kids that struggle.” He continues to talk about his college preparation, and he shared, “Terminology, data collection, and certain strategies were given to me for preparation to the classroom, but not any organization techniques, classroom management, or how to deal with kids with problems or even other teachers that you work with.”

When asked about what he thought was missing in his college preparation, Hans was clear about his ideas. “You don’t have a curriculum to go by. It’s like, teach them what they need to know, and I didn’t know really what they knew or what they needed to know.” He became frustrated with the “academic aspects” of the job while at the same time “trying to stay on top of other difficulties.” He felt “somewhat defeated” and expressed, “I was having all kinds of things thrown at me, and trying to get things organized. On top of that, I had four blocks to fill.” Hans would like to see two major areas covered in college programs for prospective special education teachers: “what all is involved and what issues are dealt with in an IEP,” and “more observations or working with students with disabilities.” Hans was emphatic about this, stating, “There needs to be classes that teach how to deal with students that are out of control or not working.” Hans hesitated, then continued, “Knowing how to turn a bad situation into good one, and/or learning how to be patient and getting the best out of the student.”

Hans describes several parts of his college preparation that he found to be helpful when he entered his first special education classroom. Although he believes teachers learn best through hands-on practice, Hans tells about what was most helpful or least helpful in his college coursework:

I felt like the tests and measurement class with the labs we had were helpful. The introductory class to special ed was helpful. The classes that Dana Anderson taught were very helpful, I felt, which included classes such as applied behavior analysis, mental retardation, language instruction for students with disabilities, and several more that I

cannot remember the names of. Most of her classes dealt with data collection and how to apply interventions and see if they work or not. When I first got into teaching, which was a MI self-contained class, I did not have to do these things. I was teaching academics because they were high MI's. I still have not used the data collection procedures. Of course, as you know, I have switched positions four times now.

Overall, Hans summarized that his college preparation for teaching special education was lock-step in that, "I did an internship with Peach, the whole year, with Dana Anderson. I had to write papers and she would come observe me, this and that." He went on to say, "After that first year, not the next year, but the next, I started on my Master's. I am a firm believer in 'you learn most of what you know on the job.' Hans is able to laugh at himself as he admits, "When I look back at the undergraduate level, I really did not learn hardly anything." His honesty is admirable as he laughs while sharing, "To be honest, I didn't know the difference between self-contained and resource. That was probably my fault, because I know it was taught to me in the 'Foundations of Special Education' class."

When Hans was asked if he felt he was prepared to do his job before he started working, he doesn't hesitate when he responds:

No, not really. I felt like I could work through it being that I knew the old coordinator and he was willing to help me. Also, the training I will be attending this summer is supposed to help prepare a teacher for this position.

Hans describes his induction experiences into the field of special education as "varied.", and he is quick to state that the county he works in has been of "little help" to him in terms of "preparation, induction, and training" for his current job. He vehemently states, "My county has done nothing to help me in my current job. Teachers and administration in my school have helped me." Furthermore, he states, "They have given me advice and helped me organize what I need to do to perform my job effectively."

When he was initially hired to teach special education at nearby middle school, he recalled, “We had a two or three day workshop. It was for all the special teachers in the county. We had a big notebook and it was all overwhelming, and I didn’t know about a lot of this.” According to Hans, feeling “overwhelmed” was a common occurrence for him in these first few years of teaching. “That workshop was 7 to 8 hours with a lunch break!” he humorously quips. “Of course if they tried to tell you everything, it would just go in one ear and out the other because it is so much information.”

For financial reasons, Hans was not required to do his student teaching. The middle school principal helped him get a provisional certificate in mental retardation because he did not do his student teaching. Hans sounded appreciative when he explained, “I started out in an interrelated teaching position, and, come to find out, you couldn’t teach out of field on provisional.” His school had to make some changes with the schedule, and he went into a self-contained classroom. “They were able to pull a few students and create that class for me,” he added. Hans must have impressed Dr. Simon, because she went “out on a limb” to keep him in a teaching position. The confidence that Hans’ principal had in his teaching abilities may have been a positive influence in keeping him in the teaching field.

As Hans frequently noted throughout all three interviews, consistent contact with people in the local schools where he taught, became his “lifeline.” He saw this type of support as a positive and effective part of his induction into teaching special education. From the very beginning of his teaching career, Hans had found “comfort, support, and encouragement” from the teachers and administrators he worked with on a daily basis. Collaboration with others has helped Hans survive his first few years of teaching:

At the middle school, the head of our special education department helped me out more than I could ever thank her for. Here at the high school, in the RVI position, I have received advice and help from the old RVI coordinator, Ben Edder. He has helped me with a lot of different scenarios. I also receive advice from other coordinators in my county.

Hans' advice for prospective special education teachers further emphasized the importance he placed on working with and observing experienced teachers. He suggests, "Observe various teaching positions. Go and observe some teachers that are known to have great classroom management and have the chance to discuss some ideas with him or her." Hans plans to continue to use other professionals to help him navigate the special education maze. When asked what he thought he needed to be better prepared, he replied, "Now all I have to do is finish out my year and maybe continue to collaborate and discuss issues with other coordinators. This is what has worked the best for me so far since I have been in RVI."

Hans has attended several staff development sessions since he began teaching, only one of which he really recalls. It was about "change and how to deal with it." He joked about the irony of this in his current situation, saying, "They were a little late on that one! My middle name is 'change'!" The session emphasized "dealing with situations and responding to them in a certain way."

The researcher was curious about whether or not the unique requirements of the RVI position were a function of Hans' perceived lack of induction training from his county. When asked if he thought the specificity of his job, being only one of four RVI coordinators in the county, Hans thought carefully before he answered:

I think that it is just one of those things where you get into the position and learn as you go. Before you start your year in RVI, as a new coordinator, you are supposed to go to a workshop for about two weeks during the summer for training. I could not do mine because I was in my masters. So I am doing mine this summer. This is part of the endorsement you receive through a college, Georgia Central University, as well as the

year internship. This is what prepares you for the job. But as far as the county doing anything, no, they have not.

Hans provided insight regarding areas in which the county could improve its induction program for beginning special education teachers. He mentioned, "I think if they just describe what a special ed teacher needs to be aware of, and hit the highlights of what they will be doing throughout the year, that will be fine." His additional thoughts were, "I would say that they could have explained the process and procedures of handling a caseload, keeping it up to date, and the correct forms to use." He had one further concern, above all others, which he repeated: "I think one of the things that was hardest to deal with was what curriculum to use. The academics were too high for them and their levels were so low." He summarizes with this thought, "I was lost, and I did not know what to teach them or where to start."

Hans was candid about the problematic issues that he had encountered since he began his career in special education. "Knowing what to teach" has already been discussed as a major issue for Hans. Classroom management is another major issue that Hans perceived as problematic in his classroom teaching when he points out, "Anything from having enough quality assignments to when to allow restroom breaks is all about management." Hans further talks about his organization in his first years in the classroom, and he shared, "The one thing that I really had trouble with is getting things set up, what to teach in my self-contained classroom." Fortunately, for Hans, "Discipline was not much of a problem."

Hans' concern about his colleagues' opinion of him is a deterrent, at times, to his effectiveness and success with his special education students. He still feels insecure about his job in general. He gives these details:

There are several problematic issues I have had to deal with. One is the fact that I wonder if the vocational teachers feel I do a good job or if I am doing what I am supposed to. I also worry a lot that my colleagues think I don't know what I am

doing. I fumble a lot, and they seem to be supportive, but sometimes I am not sure about how they feel or if I am helping them work with these kids. I really do not worry about this much anymore because I know that I am doing my job and doing the best that I can. If they don't like it, they know they can come and talk to me.

Hans addresses an emotional issue and admits an insecurity that most beginning teachers avoid dealing with in the first years of their careers.

Hans' concern for his students' welfare is evident when he comments, "Another issue is that I have had trouble with is getting some certain students to actually just do their work." Hans frequently works with students whose motivation is "less than desired." He finds unmotivated students frustrating and Hans feels inadequate in meeting their needs. Hans has no delusions about the realities of his classroom or the nature of his students. He seems to be getting a clear picture of what he is dealing with in terms of student motivation and willingness to learn. While he exhibits compassion for his students, Hans also shows a keen awareness of his students' foibles that do not seem to be function of their disability. Unlike most beginning special educators, Hans is able to separate his students' incapacities from their unwillingness to complete tasks they find undesirable. He states, "The reason that they do not want to do their work is because they just do not want to do it. They do not care." Hans further notes:

Dealing with the mental aspect of still being patient and having enough of me to keep trying and working with these types of kids. Most of the kids I work with are not motivated at all and if they would do their part, I would probably not have to help them near as much. I want to just not even mess with them. I am only one person but I have to keep a good check on these RVI students spread all over these vocational classes. I also am not knowledgeable in these areas, and so, how am I supposed to help them unless it is reading a test or helping them with a worksheet ? That is what I feel is the hardest.

It seems that Hans' reality-based perceptions will work in his favor as he continues to overcome the initial difficulties every beginning special education teacher must face.

It was interesting to hear Hans' ideas about his perception of his success and effectiveness with students in the classroom. He is realistic about it, again unsure of himself in

this area as well. He is not willing to commit to a definite answer when he says, “I have been in a different position every year, so, it is hard to gauge how well I really am doing.” Hans’ introspective nature helps him reflect on his personality as he feels it relates to his success with students and general classroom management: “I am the type of person that is always looking to improve myself and perform my job more efficiently, so I think I will continue to learn and improve myself as the years go by.” Hans’ willingness to make improvements and adjustments within himself to improve his teaching is a quality not often realized by many beginning teachers until several years into their careers. Hans appears to be ahead of the game, and adds, “Another thing about being successful is getting organized. I’m pretty organized.”

Hans also discussed his students’ success as it related to his success. He, like the rest of the participants, viewed student success as the determining factor in his own success and effectiveness. He explains, “sometimes things get so crazy, it is hard to see the gains that my students are making. It ‘s good to sit down sometimes and look where they started with me and where they are now.” He describes how he does this:

The students get excited when they get to something new in their classes and move on from something they mastered. They must feel like I was some help to them, because they’ll say, “Thanks, Mr. Franz. I couldn’t get it without you help.” It’s funny. Sometimes I’m too wrapped up to see that they have accomplished something. I’m too busy worrying about what we didn’t get right.

Hans shows a level of self-awareness that is not often seen with beginning teachers. His concerns for student improvement are rooted in his desire to be the best he can be, for the student’ sake. He reflects, “I know that I am better at dealing with students and helping them to understand what and why they need to do these things.” When asked about successes he has experienced thus far in his special education teaching career, he responds, “Discipline has been fairly easy for me. When I started, I felt I had to really discipline the kids. I would be harder on

them than I am now. I was less tolerant then.” Hans knew that most of his colleagues struggled with discipline issues in the classroom. Hans eventually committed to one firm answer to the success question: “I am successful and effective with students in the classroom in terms of discipline issues.

Common Themes

The nine interviews conducted with the three beginning special education teachers in a rural high school yielded three common themes: (1) Support at the local school level includes mentoring, administrative intervention, and help from experienced special education teachers. Ongoing staff development at the county and local school levels is essential for beginning special education teachers’ success in the classroom, (2) Teachers with one to four years experience in the special education field perceive themselves adequately prepared for, and fairly effective and successful with the students in their classroom, (3) Beginning special education teachers have individual and varied perspectives on the problematic issues they encounter in their first few years of teaching.

The beginning special education teachers had a desire to remain in the special education teaching field. They offered advice they would give prospective special education teachers. The varied perspectives that the three teachers had were quite remarkable, given the current stresses they were under with each of them having four or less years experience. These teachers: (1) enjoy their current jobs overall and find their work meaningful and rewarding, (2) are motivated to do their jobs well because they can see their students’ successes, (3) plan to continue teaching in special education for the duration of their career, (4) would urge prospective teachers of special education to become knowledgeable of the aspects of the work of special

education either through experience or research, and (5) advise them to go into the special education field because they want to, not because they have to.

These three beginning teachers remained positive about their work, despite sometimes experiencing unfavorable circumstances. Beginning teachers in general sometimes are not able to see the positive aspects of their jobs in the first few years because they are overwhelmed with the difficulties of the job. Often, when they are able to reflect on the positive aspects of teaching special education, they see these aspects through “tinted lenses.” Beginning teachers’ insecurities about their effectiveness in their new positions hinder their visions of their successes with students, though these successes may be minor. Beginning teachers in general are often too hard on themselves. For beginning special education teachers, colored views of their lack of success is what can determine whether or not they remain in the field.

All three of the participants in this study had access to county induction procedures for new teachers. Given their varying years of experience in the field, the type of induction programs provided them differed based on the county induction plans for the year in which they began their special education teaching assignment. All three teachers attended the general orientation for all beginning teachers, which the county has not altered in the last five years. All three teachers were given mentoring and administrative support throughout their first year of teaching. Though one of the three teachers served as a long-term sub prior to employment as a teacher, and one worked as a paraprofessional prior to her teaching, none of the three teachers participated in a formalized, traditional student teaching program prior to their being placed in their current job. The three participants in this study basically received “on-the-job” training for their current positions. They came to the teaching arena with varying backgrounds and experiences in educational settings, but all were put in the position of “learning as they went.”

Teaching special education was a secondary career choice for all three participants in this study.

The common themes and prevalent perspectives that emerged are presented in Table 4.5.

Common Themes	Prevalent Perspectives
Support at the local school level includes mentoring, administrative intervention, and help from experienced special education teachers. Ongoing staff development at the county and local school levels is essential for beginning special education teachers' success in the classroom.	The three beginning special education teachers in this study experienced high levels of support within their local school. Ongoing staff development is helpful for beginning special education teachers when entering the classroom, according to the participants in this study.
Teachers with one to four years experience in special education are fairly effective and successful with the students in their classroom.	The three participants in this study perceived themselves as successful and effective in the classroom with their students
Beginning special education teachers have individual and varied perspectives on the problematic issues they encounter in their first few years of teaching.	Problematic issues experienced by the three beginning special education teachers in this study were individualized and varied. Discipline, paperwork, lack of self-confidence, lack of time for specialized programming, and students low motivational levels were all cited as issues that interfered with participating teachers' success.

Table 4.5 Common Themes and Prevalent Perspectives.

Cross Case Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of three beginning special education teachers with four or less years experience regarding their preparation and induction experiences. This research was conducted to answer the following questions:

- (1) How effective and successful do new teachers (specifically those who teach special education) believe they are with students in the classroom?
- (2) How adequately do new special education teachers believe they were

- prepared to be effective in the classroom?
- (3) What are the most problematic issues that present themselves in the first three years of special education teaching as perceived by the teachers themselves?
- (4) What induction methods are being used and what are the perceived effects on beginning special education teachers?

The data collected during the three interviews with the beginning teachers will be reviewed across the cases, for each research question.

Research Question 1

The first overall research question sought to uncover the perspectives of each of the three beginning special education teachers regarding their success and effectiveness with students in the classroom. From the three cases studied, all of the beginning teachers felt that they had achieved success and effectiveness at some level with the students in their classroom. Table 4.6 lists the theme, the experiences of the participants related to the theme and their corresponding codes, and summarizes the participants' perspectives of these procedures/experiences related to the theme.

Theme	Procedures/ Experiences	Perspectives
Teachers with one to four years experience in special education field perceive themselves adequately prepared for, and fairly effective and successful with the students in their classroom,	--students are making gains, progress, and are successful (GS)(PS)(SS) --students are learning independence and life skills (IND) (LC) --few discipline problems (DIS) --making a difference (MAD) --enjoyment/love of job (ENJ)	The three beginning special education teachers in this study perceived themselves as successful and effective in the classroom with their students.

Table 4.6. Beginning Special Education Teachers' Perspectives of their Success and Effectiveness

All of the participants in the study perceived themselves as successful in some way with the students in their classrooms. Both Hans and Donald were less sure of their success than Suzi. Donald had a “wait and see” attitude. While he thought he was successful, Donald had trouble telling the researcher why he thought he was. Donald summarizes his perspectives when he said, “I hope I’m successful, I don’t really know.” Hans also expressed the same “wait and see” attitude when he stated:

That is a hard question for me because I have been in a different position each year. I think that comfort and confidence comes along with time in certain position and being that I have been in different positions, I feel I have some to go before I reach that full comfort and confident level.

Both Donald and Hans show a certain hesitancy and lack of confidence in themselves that is typical of many beginning teachers. Suzi, probably because she had been a paraprofessional for seven years prior to beginning her teaching career, seems to be somewhat overconfident in her responses to this question. Suzi said, “My work as a parapro made things a little easier for me. I knew a lot of things that other beginning teachers did not because I had been in the classroom so long before I started.” She further commented, “I feel like the kids have benefited from my having had the prior experience. I was able to set them up for success, which has made me successful as a teacher.”

All three of the participants saw their students’ progress as a measure of their own success. Hans saw his personal qualities as part of his success, which set him apart from the other participants. Suzi frequently cites examples of her students’ success when she talks about whether or not she thinks she is successful. For example, Suzi shared, “I have traveled into the community with the students and feel that many have made great progress.” Donald also emphasizes that his success is measured by his students success when he comments, “I care about the kids, and I guess when they are doing well, then I feel like I am doing well.” Hans’

insight into making his own success is demonstrated when he reflects, “The thing about RVI that I do not like is being spread so thin over many teachers and classes, and I am supposed to be responsible for them being successful.” When asked what would make him feel more successful and effective, Hans shows unusual insight in his own strengths and weaknesses as they relate to his effectiveness and success. Hans willingly admits, “I think that I work better in a collaborative situation with one teacher where I can be with those students everyday.”

All three participants see “teaching kids what they need for the future” as an effective method in the classroom. They show pride in their inclusion of transition skills in their programs. Helping the students develop skills for success in the future is highly valued by all three beginning special education teachers, and they feel this contributes to their success. Hans describes his program in detail. Everything he teaches his students is directly related to them getting a job after high school. Hans gives a detailed description:

What I do, is go into different vocational classes and help with different special ed students that need the help and the extra support in those classes. You know, in vocational classes you’ve got shop, auto mechanics, homemaking, and construction. I think that there are nine different ones we have. I try to set a schedule according to them, to try and help them with whatever they need. I have a work program during lunch time and I have seven students right now. I teach them people skills, money skills, and social skills. I’ve got a couple of students who work in the kitchen. They clean the dishes and put them up. I teach them safety issues. I’ve got a guy that does the trash and box recycling. I also have a guy that goes out and helps the custodians. I assist them to make sure that they do it the right way and I help them if they don’t. I also give them their space and let them learn on their own too. I also have to leave and go to some of the vocational classes and I leave them like a boss would and they get a 10 min. break every day unless they do something to lose it. There is one kid that I am teaching how to tell time and try to go by his watch. He can’t even tell time right now.

Suzi calls her program “life skills oriented” and boasts that she takes her students “into the community to work to learn vocational skills.” Donald’s ideas about what his students learn is simple in that he wants his students to see the “big picture” and “succeed academically and throughout life.”

Hans sees discipline as a strength for him and as one of his successes since he started teaching special education. He views discipline differently than the rest of the beginning teachers when he explains, “I was fortunate to have good kids. Discipline was not that much of a problem.” He continues, “You know, little things would come up, but nothing serious.” Suzi states about her success in discipline, “I have worked with discipline problems and feel that I have been successful in turning them around.” Donald sees discipline as a function of the type of students he works with, and he sometimes feels “defeated” with discipline issues. As a result, Donald feels this makes him less effective and successful. However, Donald does describe having some success in the discipline area by saying, “The students know I want them to succeed.”

Suazi and Donald characterize their success by the “love” of their job, their “enjoyment” in teaching the students, and by seeing their job as “meaningful and rewarding.” Hans sees these emotional aspects of his success in a different way, “I find comfort and confidence in being able to help my students reach their potential. It just a good feeling for me when I know they understand why learning is important.”

Though each beginning teacher looked at the same types of successes through different windows, the final view is the same. The three beginning special education teachers at VHS have been able to take some positive things from their experiences in the first few years of their teaching. It is this ability to “look for the good,” that may keep them in a special education classroom.

Research Questions 2 and 4

The second overall research question was intended to uncover if college preparation programs are effective in preparing beginning special education teachers for the classroom, and

what, if any, induction procedures are being used at the system and local school levels, and how those induction experience might affect beginning special education teachers. Research question 2, regarding college preparation, will be addressed at the end of the cross-case analysis. Table 4.7 lists the theme, the programs in place in the county, and the perspectives of the three beginning special education teachers regarding the procedures and the theme.

Theme	Procedures/ Experiences	Perspectives
Support at the local school level includes mentoring, administrative intervention, and help from experienced special education teachers. Ongoing staff development at the county and local school levels is essential for beginning special education teachers' success in the classroom.	Each beginning special education teacher is assigned a mentor in their first year in the classroom, is given administrative support, and is encouraged to collaborate with experienced teachers in their field. (MT)(AS)(CO) The county has a staff development program in place that is ongoing and has specific sessions for special education teachers. (OSD)(RC)	These three beginning special education teachers experienced high levels of support within their local school. Ongoing staff development was helpful for the three participating special education teachers when entering the classroom.

Table 4.7. Induction at the System and Local School Level

A county induction program for beginning special education teachers is available for new teachers entering the system. It is unfortunate that only two of the three participants were able to attend this induction program. The three teachers in this study have relied on their mentors and other experienced teachers to help them through their initial time in the classroom. For Hans, these fringe benefits were a necessity, while Suzi and Donald viewed them as a luxury. Both Donald and Suzi claimed that they were prepared before they entered the classroom. When asked if he felt prepared to do his job before he started working, Donald explains:

Yes, I think I was ready. I started my graduate program in January of 2003 and I have been a full-time substitute for the entire 2003-04 school year and I got to see a lot of kids in a lot of different settings.

Suzi had a mentor her first year, but stated that she felt prepared before she started teaching, and, she reported, “Yes, I feel that Peach prepared me well for the job I am currently doing.” She also is quick to point out, “I feel that the parapro experience made me prepared to handle the job I have now.” Hans, on the other hand, truly valued his mentor and felt “lucky” to have her and others because he “did not feel prepared at all for any of the teaching jobs” he has had. These two induction methods, mentoring and working with experienced teachers, were, for all practical purposes, Hans’ tools to build on his lacking skills. When asked whether he felt prepared to do his current job, Hans elaborates:

No. I am learning on the job, and sometimes my lack of background shows through. Before you start your year in RVI, as a new coordinator, you are supposed to go to a workshop for about two weeks during the summer for training, I could not do mine because I was in my Master’s. So I am doing mine this summer. This is part of the endorsement you receive, as well as your internship. This is what prepares you for the job.

The special education department head at VHS was mentioned in two of the participants’ responses as “helpful” in their transitions into their current job. Both Hans and Donald had mentors that were department heads in their respective schools where they spent their first few months, and again, one must wonder if this did not represent an undue advantage for them over other beginning special educators in their building. Donald emphasizes that his mentor was also the department head, and “she always has an answer” for him. Hans agrees, “My department head at my old school was my mentor and she has helped me more than I could thank her for.” Suzi mentions having a mentor who was helpful to her in her first year, but states that two of the teachers she works with now, one of whom is the department head, have been the most help to her, overall.

The help of other teachers within their school seems to be perceived by two of the participants as part of a meaningful induction plan for beginning special education teachers. Hans mentions, several times, the invaluable help he has received from the former RVI coordinator at VHS. Donald also indicated his colleagues have always been there for him. Suzi was able to share a classroom with an experienced special education teacher her first year at VHS, which she describes as making her “transition easier.”

Staff development also plays an important role in determining the quality of system and local school induction programs. Each of the three participants talks specifically about staff development programs they attended that they found “meaningful” and “worthwhile”. The idea of staff development being an “ongoing process” seems important to Donald. Hans claims, “We have staff development every year. I can remember some, but not all of it,” but he also reported attending staff development “when it is required” of him. Suzi emphasizes that she takes advantage of staff development “whenever it is offered.” Whether it is because it is required, or it is ongoing, or it is desirable, staff development is perceived as vital to success and effectiveness in the classroom according to the three beginning special education teachers who participated in this study.

All three participants clearly agree that the single most effective induction experience that they participated in was being mentored and being able to get help from an experienced special education teacher. Hans is the only participant who seemed to think that observations of special education teachers prior to starting teaching would be a valuable induction exercise, whereas, Suzi suggests that prospective special education teachers receive their induction through working in a classroom prior to college.

Research Question 3

The third research question was designed to explore the three beginning teachers' perceptions regarding problematic issues that they experienced in their first few years of teaching. Table 4.8 lists the theme, the three teachers' problematic experiences, and their perspectives regarding these experiences and related to the theme.

Theme	Procedures/ Experiences	Perspectives
Beginning special education teachers have individual and varied perspectives on the problematic issues they encounter in their first few years of teaching.	--- discipline problems (DIS) --- the all-inclusive aspect of the job (AI) --- paperwork (PW) --- procedural guidelines (PRO)	Problematic issues experienced by the three beginning special education teachers in this study were individualized and varied. Discipline, paperwork, lack of self-confidence, lack of time for specialized programming, and students low motivational levels were all cited as issues that interfered with the participants' success.

Table 4.8. Problematic Issues for Beginning Special Education Teachers

Discipline is cited by all three teachers as a possible deterrent in their doing their job effectively in their first few years in the profession. Suzi and Donald both said that discipline issues come up on a daily basis and that these issues take up valuable instructional time. Hans describes a different type of discipline problem when he reports, "Most of the kids I work with are not motivated at all, and if they would do their part, I would probably not have to help them near as much."

Time is of the essence. This statement summarizes the perceptions of the three beginning special education teachers at VHS when they were asked about issues that they had encountered that they considered problematic. There is just not enough time to do all that is necessary to be effective and successful in the classroom. Donald points out that teaching special education is an

“all-inclusive” job that “covers a lot of territory.” Hans emphasizes this concept: “I am only one person,” [sigh]. When asked if he would have taken the job if he knew what he knows now, Hans responds:

To answer your question, I would say, ‘I would have given it a try.’ I would not have known this back then, but looking at all the tasks and responsibilities, it seems like a tremendous amount of work going into it.

Suzi’s concerns in this area point to meeting students needs. Because there are so many other tasks that must be taken care of, she lacks enough time to work with students individually when they need it.

Paperwork and following procedural guidelines are never-ending tasks for all special education teachers. For the beginning special education teacher, trying to keep up with these tasks, while adjusting to the classroom, can be a monstrous task. Learning how and what to teach in the first few years of teaching special education sometimes has to take a back seat to the required IEPs, lesson plans, behavior management plans, and various forms that have to be completed to meet federal and state guidelines. On top of this, most new special education teachers lack the organizational skills to keep with the “classroom stuff.” College and induction programs sometimes overlook working with beginning teachers on basic forms and procedures. These teachers are put at a disadvantage from the start. Hans has much to say about this, and he suggests:

Whether the teacher is given a fake student or attends a real IEP meeting at a local school, one or the other should be provided to learn what all is involved and what issues are dealt with in an IEP. Of course, I know that each county has different forms of IEP papers, but you could work with the local school systems’ forms and just adapt or adjust from there.

Suzi further elaborates when she says, “It is difficult to have enough time in the day.”

Donald also has concerns in this area when he mentions legal issues. Procedural guidelines need

to be clarified for beginning special education teachers. Donald notes, “With the advent of LRE, there is a lot of very important information that all teachers need to know,” and he reports that he just does not have a “grasp” on the legal issues and special education.

Caveat

College programs and their relationship to beginning special education teachers’ level of preparation was an important topic of concern for the researcher in this study. Examples of questions the researcher asked to probe this area were:

1. What is your educational background?
2. What college preparation did you receive for a join in the education field?
3. Did your college courses give you a good background in terms of preparation for the classroom? Describe.
4. Are there areas that you feel your college courses missed? Explain
5. Specifically describe what, in your college coursework, was helpful in your
6. preparation for the special education field

All of the participants in this study gave sufficient answers to the above questions, as previously described, in both the individual case analyses, and in the cross-case analyses. When the researcher did a more in-depth analysis of this data, an interesting phenomenon occurred which was cause for skepticism in what the participants reported.

When asked about their preparation for the classroom prior to entering the teaching field, two of the three participants both stated that they perceived themselves as well prepared by their college programs to meet the expectations of their new special education teaching positions. A careful review of relevant artifacts (e.g. self-reported biographies, school records) indicated that all three of these beginning teachers had been hired for their position without full certification or

completing a college teaching preparation program. While Hans stated that he knew he was “out of his league” from the beginning, and he was charting “unfamiliar territory,” both Suzi and Donald repeatedly emphasized that they felt well prepared to teach special education students. Both Suzi and Donald had been full-time substitutes the year prior to being hired as teachers, but the fact of the matter is, they had not completed a formal college preparation program for a teaching position until after they had been placed in the classroom.

What can be deduced from this data? First, none of the participants had any formal college level “hands-on” training in teaching special education. The participants did not engage in the traditional coursework that deals with special education students, their needs, or the unique characteristics of these children who they were entrusted to teach. Given the fact that Hans taught students in RVI, Donald taught students with behavior disorders, and Suzi taught mildly intellectually disabled students, it is no wonder that discipline issues were exacerbated. Although each of the participants reported that they were mentored, they each reported being overwhelmed by not only the students and their exceptionalities, but also by the inability to know how to complete required paperwork and the legal issues surrounding their work with these students. The participants were especially anxious about their lack of knowledge of the legal issues in special education, a point that was repeatedly made throughout the interview with each.

Second, although this data do not yield a composite picture of special education preparation, the data do speak to a bigger issue — namely, under-qualified teachers are being placed in classrooms that serve the most vulnerable students in the school — children with exceptionalities. Perhaps this phenomenon of under-qualified teachers serving the most vulnerable students is a sign of the times, or as indicated by Whitworth (2000), nationwide, the shortage of special education teachers is expected to grow, fueled by expanding demand and

high teacher attrition rates. As a result, provisional certification in special education is being granted to out-of-field or ill-prepared teachers so that legally mandated slots can be filled at the local school level. This provisional certification has become a point of contention for administrators trying to fully staff their special education programs. Principals are dealing with special education teachers who have little to no experience in the subject area they are teaching. Alternatively certified teachers struggle as they try to deal with insufficient resources and materials, training needs, and relationships with mentors and principals.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

An examination of three rural high school special education teachers is provided in this study. These teachers had from one to four years of teaching experience in various fields of special education. This study was conducted to respond to the following questions:

1. How effective and successful do new teachers (specifically those who teach special education) believe they are with students in the classroom?
2. How adequately do new special education teachers believe they were prepared to be effective in the classroom?
3. What are the most problematic issues that present themselves in the first three years of special education teaching as perceived by the teachers themselves?
4. What induction methods are being used and what are the perceived effects on beginning special education teachers?

In this chapter, a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, and implications for further research will be presented.

Summary of the Study

The researcher used a case study design in examining the perspectives of three high school beginning special education teachers regarding their preparation and induction experiences. Over a six month period, nine semi-structured, open-ended, and face-to-face interviews were conducted. The researcher noted the following perspectives:

- (1) Beginning special education teachers experience high levels of support within their local school. Ongoing staff development is helpful for beginning special education teachers when entering the classroom.
- (2) Beginning special education teachers perceive themselves as successful and effective in the classroom with their students.
- (3) Problematic issues experienced by beginning special education teachers are individualized and varied. Discipline, paperwork, lack of self-confidence, lack of time for specialized programming, and students low motivational levels are all cited as issues that interfere with beginning special education teachers' success.

Research Design

Three semi-structured interviews with each of the three beginning special education teachers, as well as collection of relevant artifacts from the study site were involved in data collection. Questions from a pre-determined interview protocol were used to guide the interviews (see Appendix A). The constant comparative approach of analysis was used to analyze the data after the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

The theoretical framework for this study was symbolic interactionism. This field of thought is characterized by meaning and perspective. "Meanings" are specific for each individual and are derived from his/her perspective of any given situation or concept. Based on perspectives, an observer attaches meanings and words to things in order to have them make sense (Blumer, 1969). The components of symbolic interactionism were used by the examiner to uncover the perspectives of beginning special education teachers regarding their preparation and induction experiences. The researcher examined the self-reported level of college preparedness for the classroom of the three rural high school teachers. The researcher also examined the

perspectives of these teachers in terms of their experiences with beginning teacher induction at the local school and system levels.

Chapter 4 analyzes and discusses findings at two levels: from within each case and then as a case across case examination to note the similarities and the differences across the cases from across cases. Three themes emerged from the within case analysis, and three prevalent perspectives emerged from the cross-case analysis. The following discussion was based on the findings from the cross-case analysis, and implications with regard to future research were determined.

Discussion

Chapter 4 included a discussion of the two levels of findings, individual case findings, and across case themes and perspectives. This section examines the major findings within the context of the literature reported in Chapter 2. The researcher cautions the reader that the findings of this study are limited to three case studies within one rural high school in northeast Georgia where the participants worked. It would not be appropriate to generalize these findings or make broad assumptions to be applied across populations outside of this study. Only the three beginning special education teachers interviewed for this research should be considered when exploring and analyzing the results of this research. Each of the following sections includes a perspective, discussion, and the relationship of the perspective to the literature.

Perspective 1: Beginning special education teachers experience high levels of support within their local school. Ongoing staff development is helpful for beginning special education teachers when entering the classroom.

The three beginning special education teachers at Valhalla High School that were interviewed for this study all felt supported at the local school level in their first few years of

teaching. Mentoring, help from experienced special education teachers, and administrative support were all mentioned when the three teachers were asked about what induction methods were most helpful to them.

Mentoring

The perspectives of three beginning teachers at Valhalla High School, regarding their induction experiences at the local school level, seem to lend further support to the existing literature in the area of general induction of beginning teachers. Huling-Austin (1986) found mentoring to be effective and instrumental in easing the entry of beginning teachers into the field. Odello & Ferraro (1992) also advocated mentoring for use as a strong component of teacher induction programs. Experienced special education teachers were shown to be a valuable resource to the three participants in the study. They were able to share ideas and problems with the experienced teachers to better prepare themselves for their classrooms on a daily basis. Eves (2001) supports mentoring by pointing out that beginning teachers have a better chance of staying in the profession and an increased support network when mentors are available in the workplace.

Because of the recent push for more collaborative and inclusionary settings for all special education students, the idea of beginning teachers having access to experienced teachers becomes even more important. Only limited instruction is being provided for beginning special education teachers for their work in inclusion and collaborative settings (Reed & Monda-Amaya, 1995). Beginning teachers should be encouraged to develop the appropriate interpersonal skills to deal with experienced teachers to provide optimal services for special education students across all levels. Collaborative support models where teachers can gain insight from successful

teachers in the field minimize beginning teachers' concerns with organization, time, and special education issues.

Staff Development

The participants in the study all reported attending staff development on a regular basis. It would seem that the system and local school detailed in this study provided ample opportunity for all teachers to expand their knowledge and skills through continuing education, inservice, and formal staff development courses. The current literature on staff development shows that special education teachers must have skills and knowledge that are derived from practices that have been determined through research and experience to be successful (Orkwis, Decarme, & Glover, 2000). Staff development, when based on individualized teacher needs and on the demands of their teaching situation, has proven an effective method in easing the beginning special education teachers transition into the classroom (Rosenberg, Griffin, & Kilgore, 1997).

Perspective 2: Beginning special education teachers perceive themselves as successful and effective in the classroom with their students.

Each of the three beginning special education teachers interviewed for this study perceived themselves as having had some success and effectiveness with students in their classrooms since they began teaching. Success had individual meanings for each teacher, and each teacher saw effectiveness with students through their own paradigm. These three teachers measured their success by the success of their students. One of the participants was able to look into his own personality for evidence of his success. The three teachers feelings of effectiveness and success were manifested in different ways.

Relating Teacher Success to Student Success

Both Donald and Suzi see their success and effectiveness in their classrooms solely as a function of their students' progress across different learning settings. Both of them saw student progression in the classroom behaviorally and academically, and in life-skills oriented activities. Recent literature suggests that assessment issues and the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind* Act will further force special education teachers to examine their students success when deciding the level of success and effectiveness in their teaching skills. Stronger accountability for teachers based on student results, and emphasis on teaching methods that are proven to work are major components of current school reform efforts (NCES, 2002). The issue of student success has become a hot topic of interest when examining teacher accountability. Special education teachers may find themselves basing their success on their students test scores for both standardized tests, and alternative assessments (Whitaker, 2001).

Measuring Teacher Success on a Personal Level

Hans' introspective nature lends itself to his ability to analyze his strengths and weaknesses to assess his level of success and effectiveness. He sees his success as a process that will get better as he moves further into his teaching career. Literature in this area points to the idea that beginning teachers should be objective when looking at themselves as teachers. Freytag (2001) emphasizes the beginning teacher's need to be patient with himself or herself, seeing mistakes as learning experiences.

Perspective 3: *Problematic issues experienced by beginning special education teachers are individualized and varied. Discipline, paperwork, lack of self-confidence, lack of time for specialized programming, and students low motivational levels are all cited as issues that interfere with beginning special education teachers' success.*

Discipline

All three participants in the study cited discipline as a part of their job responsibilities that interferes, at times, with their effectiveness on the classroom. Suzi and Hans both feel, that though they encounter discipline problems on a daily basis, they have put plans in place that they feel are effective in reducing the amount of instructional time they spend on discipline. Donald, on the other hand, is unsure of himself when it comes to discipline, even though he works with only behavior-disordered students. Donald's lack of preparation in behavior management skills makes him a poor match for the requirements of his current job.

The literature speaks to the issue of teachers' lacking the proper training to meet the demand of specialized special education positions and to beginning teachers' lack of skills in the discipline of students in the classroom. A 1997 Congressional report showed that 20% of middle and high school administrators saw the IDEA discipline procedures as burdensome and time-consuming (Fine, 2001). Gable (2000) points out that many of the specific behavioral needs that these teachers (like Donald) face are so unique in nature that intensive research on the part of beginning teacher must be done in order for these special education students to benefit from special education services.

Paperwork and Lack of Time

Each of the teachers interviewed for this research found paperwork to be a major issue in their ability to be successful in their jobs. Suzi and Hans both struggle with time management in trying to "juggle different hats" as every special education teacher must do because of the complexity of the job. Donald sees his job as "all-inclusive", and knows he must cover a lot of territory. These findings are consistent with the available literature as it relates to problematic issues for beginning special education teachers. Many special education teachers leave the

profession in the first few years of teaching because they simply cannot stay afloat (Fredericks, 2001). College teaching programs and local school system induction programs lack concentration in this area (Conderman & Stephens, 2000) Kleinart (2000) advocates for an assessment system that creates as little additional paperwork for teachers as possible.

Lack of Self Confidence

It seems that two of the beginning special education teachers involved in the study are unable to perform their duties at an optimal level because they lack the self-confidence to take chances and risk failure as special education teachers are known to do. Hans and Donald both express insecurities about the quality of their teaching. Chesley, Wood, and Zepeda (1997) suggest that the unique needs of alternatively certified teachers (like Hans and Donald) merit a customized induction program. These beginning teachers struggle as they deal with insufficient resources and materials, training needs, and relationships with mentors and principals.

Low Motivation Levels of Students

Donald and Hans both express frustration about working with students who do not seem to care whether or not they learn. Hans especially feels that he lacks the skills necessary to implement programs for these students, which will “get them working” and help them make progress. Literature in this area notes that the additional pressure of the beginning special education teacher to serve also as “behavior specialist” can be overwhelming and discouraging (Wigle and Wilcox, 1998).

Issues Related to the Caveat

All three of the beginning special education teachers interviewed in this study worked under a provisional basis the first year they taught. None of the three participants chose education as their first career. None of these teachers were formally prepared for a job in

education when they began teaching. How can this happen? How can schools allow underqualified individuals to be responsible for the future outcomes of students who require specialized services? There are several reasons that administrators across the state have to struggle each year to fill special education positions. These reasons include:

1. There is a severe shortage of qualified special education services across the state.

Many counties across the state have to start out each school year without teachers to fill special education positions in their school. (Office of Special Education Programs, 1998).

2. The attrition rate for special education teachers is high due to the difficult and time consuming aspects of the job (Salzer, 2002).

3. It is easy to get job teaching these days. Programs like TAPP and Georgia Responds (2001) have allowed administrators to grant provisional licensure to anyone with a college degree regardless of the type. This results in the employment of underqualified and sometimes unmotivated teachers to work with special education students (Gold, 1999).

4. Teachers who are working on degrees are being allowed to enter the classroom without practicum or student teaching experiences because trained teachers are not available and are in high demand (Annual Report to Congress, 1991).

Allowing poorly qualified and unprepared teachers into our special education classrooms has jeopardized the quality of special education programs. One would hate to think that the doctor doing surgery on their child was working under a provisional license because he didn't do his internship in the operating room. What would we think about him doing "on the job" training? It seems almost criminal that it is acceptable to entrust our "most" challenging students to

individuals who have been taught the “least” about how to be effective in the classroom. It should be noted, however, that the three beginning teachers in this study were exceptionally motivated to work with their special education students to achieve the best outcome possible. Hans, Suzi, and Donald should all be commended for their hard work and dedication to their profession despite their obvious deficiency in formal preparation.

Implications

Implications at the System Level

While the system cited in this study provides a beginning teacher orientation that even has specialized portions for special educators, more work is needed in the area of induction as it relates to actual classroom scenarios. The local system must look at creative ways to ease the transition of beginning special education teachers into the classroom, especially for those teachers who are provisionally certified that often have had no previous experience with special education students. Additionally, teachers who are placed in “non-traditional” roles (such as RVI) appear to need more specialized induction by others who are familiar with their job specifications.

Implication at the Local School Level

It was evident that the three teachers who participated in this study had a high level of confidence in the abilities of their mentors, and colleagues to guide them through the trials and tribulations of their first years of teaching. The three teachers experiences and discussions with these individuals were, at times, all they had to rely on when problems arose. The local school should continue to encourage beginning special education teachers to work closely with mentors and colleagues as they navigate through rough territory. The school might also provide beginning special education teachers opportunities to observe their colleagues classroom teaching and

provide scheduled time to share thoughts and ideas. By capitalizing on a system of support that obviously works well within this school, administrators increase the beginning special education chances for success in the classroom and probability of their remaining in the field.

Implications for Institutions that Prepare Special Education Teachers

Perhaps college programs should ensure that emphasis is placed on classroom management and organization, as well as due process, procedural, and legal issues. The three beginning special education teachers in this study, while stating that they felt their college programs had adequately prepared them for the classroom, are obviously struggling with these issues.

Implications for Future Research

Further research in this area might include examining how these beginning special education teachers are perceived by others in terms of their preparation for, success in, and effectiveness in the classroom. It would be interesting to see just how valid these teachers' perspectives of themselves are. Questions might include: Are special education teachers with one to four years experience effective and successful with students in the classroom? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? What are the most problematic issues that you see them dealing with? Answering these questions will help beginning special education teachers see how others perceive their preparedness. By knowing what others perceive as their strengths and weaknesses, perhaps these teachers can alter their behaviors to increase their probability for success in the field. Faulty sampling selection led the researcher to teachers who were not trained or educated in formal preparation for special education prior to their beginning teaching. Future studies should include and examine the perspectives of special education teachers who were

trained to discover if they feel that college teaching programs are an effective method for special education teacher preparation.

Concluding Thoughts

This study provided an in-depth examination of the perspectives of three beginning special education teachers regarding their preparation and induction experiences. These perspectives have been influenced by these teachers perceived level of preparation for the rigors of the classroom as a result of college programs and induction procedures at the local school and system levels. How to best prepare new special education teachers to be effective in the classroom and help students succeed has been, and is, a salient topic of interest to both colleges and school systems.

Special education students' achievement has been linked to the quality of the special education teachers who teach them. Improving induction and preparation experiences for teachers entering the field of special education might be thought of as an investment in the future functionality of these students in society. By reducing stress, improving these teachers' chances for success in the field, and consequently reducing the attrition rate, perhaps the services we provide our special education students can be enhanced rather than simply maintained. In an ideal world, better teaching as a result of better preparation should yield higher levels of achievement for students in all levels of special education.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain your job responsibilities.
2. Describe your classroom experiences so far.
3. Do you feel you have been successful in managing your classroom? Explain any difficulties you might be experiencing.
4. How were you initiated or inducted into your current job?
5. What did your county do to help you with your new job?
6. Did you feel you were prepared to do your job before you started working?
7. Did your college courses give you a good background in terms of preparation for the classroom? Explain.
8. Are there areas that you feel your college courses missed? Explain.
9. Are there areas you feel your county could have done a better job of preparing you for before you started your first year there? Describe.
10. What do you need now to feel better prepared and to get the knowledge necessary to do this job?
11. If you know what you know now, would you have taken the job? Explain.
12. Are you doing things now that are not in your job description? What?
13. What advice would you give to prospective special education teachers in school regarding preparing for and finding a job?
14. Describe the most problematic issues in of your job and give explanations of why they have been so difficult for you.

APPENDIX B

EXPLANATION OF CODES

ACC.....	Access to Info
AI.....	All- Inclusive
BD.....	Behavior Disordered
BS.....	Bachelor of Science
CE.....	Classroom Experience
CG.....	Completed—Grades
DIS.....	Discipline
ENJ.....	Enjoy Job
ET.....	Easy Transition
FE.....	Field Experience
FTS.....	Full-Time Substitute
GS.....	Gains
HK.....	Help Kids
IND.....	Independence
INT.....	Internship
LA.....	Law--Legality
LC.....	Life- Centered
LV.....	Love of Job
MAD.....	Making a Difference
MP.....	Maximum Performance
MT.....	Mentoring
MID.....	Mildly Intellectually Disabled
MST.....	Masters Degree
OSD.....	Ongoing Staff Development
PBE.....	Previous Business Experience
PPF.....	Paraprofessional
PROV.....	Provisional Certification
PS.....	Progress
PW.....	Paperwork
PRO.....	Procedures
PROF.....	Professors
RC.....	Returning to College
RWD.....	Rewarding
SC.....	Self-Contained
SHC.....	Shared Classroom
SF.....	Staying in Field
SS.....	Success
ST.....	Student Teaching

APPENDIX B
EXPLANATION OF CODES
(cont'd)

T-4.....	T-4 Certificate
VR.....	Vocational Rehabilitation
WP.....	Well- Prepared

APPENDIX C
MATRIX OF RUDIMENTARY CODES

CODES	Donald	Suzi	Hans
ACC	X		X
AI	X	X	X
BD	X		
BS	X	X	X
CE	X	X	
CG	X		
DIS	X	X	X
ENJ	X	X	
ET		X	
FE	X	X	X
FTS	X	X	X
GS	X	X	X
HK	X	X	X
IND	X	X	X
INT		X	X
LA	X		X
LC	X	X	X
LV	X	X	
MAD	X	X	X
MP	X		
MT	X	X	X
MID		X	X
MST	X	X	X
OSD	X	X	X
PBE	X	X	X
PPF		X	
PROV	X	X	X
PS	X	X	X
PW	X	X	X
PRO	X	X	X
PROF	X		X
RC	X	X	X
RWD	X	X	
SC	X	X	X
SHC		X	X

(table continues)

APPENDIX C
MATRIX OF RUDIMENTARY CODES
(cont'd)

SF	X	X	X
SS	X	X	X
ST	X		
T-4		X	X
VR		X	X
WP	X	X	