

**RETENTION OF NOVICE SPECIAL EDUCATORS EMPLOYED BY AN
INTERLOCAL**

A Dissertation by

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DEDICATION

To my wife Shelmarie and our children, Skyler and Ashli, and my parents, Marvin and Jackie Miner

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the United States, a framework exists in which special education teachers are employed in a dual organizational structure of special and general education. The composition of this framework is twofold, comprised of a special education interlocal or cooperative, and a public school district. Teachers working in this dual organizational structure face challenges that are unfamiliar to their peers who work for a single organization.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the retention of novice special education teachers employed in a dual organizational structure comprised of a special education interlocal and its member school districts. Social Exchange Theory was used as an analytical lens to support and inform this study. Study participants included 9 novice special education teachers, 4 veteran special education teachers, and 8 interlocal and school district administrators. The setting was a small urban interlocal located in a Great Plains state.

My research showed that special education teachers working in a dual organizational structure of an interlocal and a local school district experienced unique circumstances that added to the many challenges already faced by novices entering the field. Teachers weighed the pros and cons of these circumstances when making decisions to stay or leave their positions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
CHAPTER 1	1
Recruiting and Retaining Special Education Teachers	1
Needs of Novice Special Education Teachers	2
The Organizational Context of Special Education Teachers	3
Research Problem	5
Social Exchange Theory	6
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions.....	9
CHAPTER 2	11
Literature Review.....	11
Organizational Factors.....	12
Organizational Socialization.....	14
Administrative Support.....	16
Employee Decision-Making and Influence over Policy	17
Role Conflict, Ambiguity, and Overload.....	18
Secondary Organizational Factors	18
Compensation.	19
Caseload.....	19
Paperwork demands.....	19
Inadequate resources.....	20
Affective Reactions to Work	21
Stress	21
Efficacy	22
Teacher Demoralization.....	22
Special Education Teacher Characteristics and Personal Factors.....	23
Age.....	24
Gender.....	24
Race.....	24
Personal Factors	25
Teacher Qualifications	25
Student Characteristics.....	26
Student Discipline, Motivation Problems, and Lack of Progress	26
CHAPTER 3	28
Research Design and Methodology	28
Research Site and Participants	28
Sampling Technique	29

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Chapter	Page
Data Collection	30
Individual Interviews	31
Documents and Artifacts.....	32
Data Analysis and Interpretation	33
Research Quality.....	33
Triangulation.....	34
Member Checking.....	34
Peer Debriefing.....	35
Ethical Considerations	35
Researcher Positionality.....	36
 CHAPTER 4	 38
Findings.....	38
Expectations and Organizational Belonging.....	38
Dual Organizational Training	42
Managing Adults.....	42
Physical Resources.....	45
Human Resources	47
Organizational Proximity.....	49
Low-Incidence Disabilities within Multiple Organizations.....	51
Organizational Satisfaction and Retention.....	53
 CHAPTER 5	 56
Conclusions and Implications	56
The Existence of Unique Circumstances	57
Organizational Belonging	57
Physical Resources.....	58
Organizational Proximity.....	59
Unprepared for Managing Adults	59
The Role of Unique Circumstances to Satisfaction and Retention.....	60
Factors Contributing to Teacher Satisfaction	62
Human Resources	62
Dual Organizational Advantages	63
Implications.....	64
A Need to Improve Teacher Training.....	64
Further Research Needed.....	65
 REFERENCES	 66

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Chapter	Page
APPENDICES	77
A. Interview Consent Form.....	78
B. Novice Teacher Interview Protocol.....	81
C. Veteran Teacher Interview Protocol	83
D. Administrator Interview Protocol	84

CHAPTER 1

Recruiting and Retaining Special Education Teachers

Historically, recruiting and retaining special education teachers has been especially challenging for school administrators since the shortage of these teachers is among the highest in the field (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003, 2004; McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004; Nance & Calabrese, 2009; Payne, 2005; Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). No region of the U.S. is unaffected by the chronic need to recruit and retain special education teachers. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), 51% of school districts reported difficulty attracting highly qualified special education teachers. In addition, 49 states reported a shortage of special education teachers or related service personnel for 2013-2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Researchers link the teacher shortage in special education to many factors. These factors range from societal views of teaching, such as a lack of prestige associated with the teaching profession, to opportunities outside teaching including child rearing and better paying jobs (Billingsley, 1993). One school related factor that has become more prominent in recent years is the increasing number of children identified with an exceptionality coupled with a decline in the number of teacher candidates graduating with a degree in special education. This problem is exacerbated by the large number of teachers who do not assume teaching positions after graduation and an attrition rate significantly higher than for general education teachers (Billingsley, 1993; Grissmer & Kirby, 1987). Decisions made by teachers to remain in their teaching positions (retention), to transfer to another position (transfer), or to leave the profession for other reasons (exit attrition) are the major reasons teacher shortages occur (Boe, 1990). But

regardless of the reason, recruiting qualified special education teachers and retaining them beyond their first year of employment remains a dual concern for school administrators.

In the Teacher Mobility and Attrition Report for 2012-2013, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2014) reported that slightly over 17% of teachers in special education were either classified as teachers who had moved to a different school (movers) or as leaving the profession altogether (leavers). This attrition percentage accounts for over 73,000 special education teachers. For this study, attrition referred to teachers who do not return to the same position from the previous year, teachers transferring to other special education positions or other teaching fields, and teachers exiting the profession altogether (Billingsley, 1993). Although special education teachers move or leave for a variety of reasons that are not entirely within control of the school, at the individual building level, school administrators committed to raising retention rates face the challenge of creating organizational environments sensitive to the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers.

Needs of Novice Special Education Teachers

In many ways, the personal and professional needs of novice general education teachers and special education teachers are similar. For instance, research indicates that both groups consistently need pedagogical support with classroom management, acquisition of information about the school system, and emotional support (Gordon, 1991). In this study, I focused on novice special education teachers because the usual array of problems encountered by an experienced teacher can be overwhelming for a novice teacher new to the profession. The usual challenges encountered by any beginning general education teacher notwithstanding, special education teachers have particular needs and responsibilities unique to their field (Boyer & Gillespie, 2000). Not only do these responsibilities add another layer of stress to the working

conditions of novice special education teachers, but inadequate knowledge about the legal and technical components of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and inexperience developing modifications and accommodations for exceptional children may indirectly contribute to low levels of retention. Other responsibilities encompass the supervision and development of relationships with paraprofessionals, training in and use of assistive technology, and apprising themselves of complex medical procedures. Furthermore, novice special educators may need assistance in securing materials and resources for students at various academic and grade levels in multiple content areas. Additional areas of weakness that may need to be addressed if retention rates are to improve include opportunities to collaborate with general educators, observation of students in the general education setting, obtaining information related specifically to special education policies, specialized professional development relating to curricula content, and opportunities related to state standards and high-stakes testing. Professional development may also be beneficial as it relates to inclusion, organizing and managing teaching environments containing students with a broad range of abilities and extreme behaviors, and creating schedules for students as well as paraprofessionals and other support staff (Gehrke & McCoy, 2012).

The Organizational Context of Special Education Teachers

In several states in the U.S., a situation exists where special education teachers work within dual organizational structures of general education and special education. This situation adds another layer of complexity to the support they need to help them survive the critical early phase of their careers. Employment in organizations other than school districts, such as interlocals or cooperatives, comprises a large number of novice special education teachers. In some states, these organizations operate in conjunction with local education agencies (LEAs) to

provide special education services and teachers to area school districts. In one Great Plains state alone, 139 out of 286 school districts provide special education services via 18 interlocals.

Interlocals form whenever the boards of education of two or more school districts enter into a cooperative agreement and jointly provide services such as special education, as authorized or required by state law. An interlocal establishes a board of directors consisting of a board member from each of the school districts in party to the agreement and the board then assumes responsible for attracting and employing the teachers needed to service each district within their jurisdiction (Organizations Power and Finances of Boards of Education, 1975).

In the same Great Plains state previously mentioned, 22 cooperatives serve 108 school districts. The composition of the governing body serves as the main difference between the two organizations. Cooperatives differ from interlocals because they do not form a separate board of directors. Instead, any school district that is a party to the agreement may be designated as the sponsoring district, utilizing its existing board of education (Special Education, 1974).

The organizational structure consisting of interlocals and cooperatives is not unique to the Great Plains states. A national survey of state directors of special education revealed a variety of Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) with structures similar to those of the interlocals and cooperatives mentioned in this paper. Of the 41 state directors responding to the survey, only seven reported not having some type of ESA that provided special education services. Nineteen states indicated having cooperatives formed by school districts and 13 states had ESAs formed by the state as an agency or network of service agencies. Six states indicated having formal intermediate school districts (interlocals) and another four states indicated ESAs of a different structure than what was listed on the survey. Some states had more than one type of ESA to support special education (Ahearn, 2006).

The distinctive features of these organizations complicate the work lives of novice special education teachers since they are expected to understand, and are held accountable for, the special policies and procedures by which these entities are governed. For example, teachers working for an interlocal or a cooperative require support from the interlocal or cooperative and then an added level of support is required when they assume assignments within a member school district. Coordination of these entities can obscure the provision of a comprehensive retention program leading to a more generalized approach for addressing the needs of novice special education teachers.

Research Problem

It is important to retain qualified special education teachers to assist with the identification of students needing services and to provide identified students with specialized instruction designed to meet their unique needs. Retention is a significant issue because high rates of special education teacher turnover create personnel shortages that impede the ability of identified students to reach their full academic potential (Dolton & Newson, 2003; National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services, 2014; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Shortages of highly qualified special education teachers further hinder the work of school districts in satisfying recent legislative mandates aimed at preparing all students to be college and career ready (National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services, 2014).

Both interlocal and school district administrators endeavor to address the unique needs of novice special education teachers to improve their professional experiences, the first step in raising retention rates. However, despite such efforts, an unacceptably large number of special education teachers continue to move to new positions or leave the profession. This is

troublesome for administrators concerned with providing a consistently high-quality education to special education students.

The retention of special education teachers is difficult enough regardless of the setting in which they work. For instance, retention may be further complicated when one educational organization employs a special education teacher to work in an ancillary educational organization, such as an interlocal and a school district. This dual-employment situation is likely to create an additional layer of stress, contributing to the list of already challenging needs of novice special education teachers. Understanding better the multiple needs encountered by novice special education teachers working within a dual organizational structure encompassing both special and general education, interlocal and school district administrators may be able to design comprehensive programs that will create less chaotic work environments for novice special education teachers and eventually, increased retention.

Social Exchange Theory

A theoretical framework serves as the fundamental structure containing a system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories to support and inform research (Maxwell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). I have chosen Social Exchange Theory (SET) as an analytical lens to provide a structural framework to support and inform this study. Social Exchange Theory suggests that social behavior is the product of a mutually rewarding exchange process in which two or more individuals frequently weigh the potential costs and returns of a social relationship to determine if the relationship is worth entering or continuing (Blau, 1964; Ribarsky, 2013; Sabatelli, 1988; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The rules and norms of exchange, resources exchanged, and relationships that emerge as a result of exchange constitute the foundational elements of Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). With the goal of

minimizing costs and maximizing returns, exchange theory examines social interaction to differentiate how each participant's past and expected rewards reciprocally influence their choices and behavior (Blau, 1964; Weiss & Stevens, 1993). When individuals assess the costs and returns of social exchange experiences, the outcome is continuation or withdrawal from the activity.

The development of a novice teacher into a qualified veteran teacher is an accomplishment that typically occurs over an extended period as trusting relationships develop among members of the organization. For relationships to evolve into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments, the involved parties must accept and follow certain rules of exchange. According to Emerson (1976), rules and norms of exchange are formed from a situation that develops among or is adopted by the participants in the exchange relationship, serving as guidelines for the exchange process. Researchers have conceptualized the social exchange process in two main ways. The first examines the exchange more globally by looking at the relationship between the employee and the organization. The second examines a more focused, dyadic relationship between subordinates and their supervisors (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996). When exchanges effected by the organization and its supervisors communicate positive regard for the employee, feelings of obligation are created in the employee to reciprocate in kind (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Shore & Wayne, 1993). Applying this conceptualization of SET to this study will help explain why novice special education teachers choose to stay or leave positions. As novice special education teachers assess the exchanges encountered within a dual organizational structure of special education and general education, they must contemplate the cost and returns of remaining in the relationship. Just as positive exchanges from the organizations and immediate supervisors increase the likelihood that novice special education

teachers will stay in their positions, negative exchanges increase the likelihood that novice special education teachers will leave.

When choosing the profession, teachers ultimately assess and compare the benefits of teaching that include such things as compensation, vacation time, working conditions, and the personal satisfaction of helping students with other professional options available to them. Once a decision is made to enter the field, teachers begin to experience first-hand the benefits and drawbacks of teaching and continue to weigh their level of satisfaction against their other professional options (Hughes, 2012). Weiss and Stevens (1993) expanded Social Exchange Theory to include two levels of satisfaction. The first level of satisfaction is the Comparison Level (CL) where a member of the exchange evaluates the costs and returns of the relationship according to individual needs or expectations (Sabatelli, 1988; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The second level of satisfaction is the Comparison Level for Alternatives (CLalt). The CLalt level of satisfaction is the lowest level considered acceptable to remain in a relationship in lieu of existing alternatives. For this study, alternatives to special education teaching positions include positions in general education or a profession outside the field of education. When deciding to remain in a relationship created by working within a dual organizational structure of general and special education, a novice special education teacher assesses the costs and returns of his or her involvement in each respective organization and develops a level of satisfaction (CL). The novice special education teacher also contemplates the costs and returns of alternatives and develops a perception of the level of satisfaction (CLalt) for each alternative. The novice special education teacher then uses these evaluations to decide whether to stay in or exit the relationship (Sabatelli, 1988; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Weiss & Stevens, 1993).

Social Exchange Theory informed this study by illuminating the organizational complexity novice special education teachers experience as they work in a dual organizational structure comprising both general and special education. For the purpose of this study, I used Social Exchange Theory to examine and compare the perceptions of novice special education teachers concerning their levels of satisfaction with their current occupation position and their anticipated satisfaction levels for alternative occupation positions. A key outcome of this analysis is to provide insight into the unique needs encountered by novice special education teachers working in a dual organizational structure. Fulfilling these needs may require technical and normative changes to the organizational structure itself. The perceptions of novice special education teachers may also raise awareness of the ability of each organization to meet the personal and professional needs of their employees, knowledge that might lead to a better understanding of why these teachers chose to stay in or leave the profession.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Within the Great Plains state chosen for this study, nearly 50% of school districts provide special education services utilizing a special education interlocal or cooperative. This service delivery arrangement creates a unique situation for special education teachers who work within a dual organizational structure of special education and general education. The purpose of this study was to examine the retention of novice special education teachers, with three or less years of experience, employed by a special education interlocal in a Great Plains state. For the purpose of this study, I refer to this interlocal as the Aspire Special Education Interlocal, a pseudonym. Although employed by the interlocal, these teachers work in and provide services to districts that are members of the interlocal. My hope was that by studying the retention of novice special education teachers, this research will inform school district and interlocal administrators and

policy makers about the unique personal and professional needs associated with being a special education teacher working in a dual organization structure of special education and general education. A key presumption was that satisfying the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers will translate into improved retention. To address this inquiry, the following questions focus and guide the study:

1. How do novice special education teachers describe their personal and professional needs working within a dual organizational structure of an interlocal and a public school district?
2. How do veteran special education teachers describe the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers within a dual organizational structure of an interlocal and a public school district?
3. How do interlocal administrators describe the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers within a dual organizational structure of an interlocal and a public school district?
4. How do school district administrators describe the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers within a dual organizational structure of an interlocal and a public school district?

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

A literature review provides important information in a qualitative study. Besides providing a theoretical and empirical foundation for the problem to be investigated, the process of a literature review can contribute to framing the problem and addressing the research questions guiding the study (Merriam, 2009). Current research illuminates the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers with the assumption they enter single organizational entities such as public school districts. However, little empirical research discusses the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers challenged with simultaneously managing and enduring multiple organizational structures of special education and general education. Dual organizational structures of special education and general education are prevalent throughout the nation (Ahearn, 2006). An example of such a structure is when a novice special education teacher employed by an interlocal or cooperative is assigned to work in a member school district. I speculate the challenges associated with working in dual organizational structures of special education and general education further complicates the already difficult position of being a new teacher and further impacts the decision of these teachers to stay, move, or leave the profession. The existence and potential impact of dual organizations on novice special education teachers along with the lack of empirical literature investigating these structures support the necessity of this study.

The available literature examining the difficulties novice special and general education teacher's encounter within a single educational organization can serve as a foundation and help frame the research questions of this study. For the purpose of this literature review, I have

divided the existing literature into four strands. I will discuss each strand as it affects the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers and their decisions to stay, move, or leave. The first strand examines teacher retention as a function of satisfaction with the culture of the school organization. I refer to this strand as organizational factors. The second strand of research, affective reactions to work, describes the intrinsic rewards sought by novice special education teachers and the symptoms that are likely to develop when these rewards fail to align with their personal and professional needs. The third strand focuses on individual teacher characteristics and personal factors that relate to the attrition of special education teachers. The final strand discusses student characteristics and factors that influence the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers.

Organizational Factors

Although individual factors play an important role in retention under certain circumstances, teacher satisfaction with the organization and the culture of the organization appears to be the larger influence. There exists a significant positive relationship between organizational factors and employee satisfaction that contributes to retention (Billingsley, 2004; Chang & Lee, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001a; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). To understand better teacher satisfaction and retention problems, it is necessary to take a closer look at organizational factors. Examining and understanding organizational factors is especially important for educators concerned with meeting the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers working within dual organizational structures of special education and general education. For the purposes of this research project, one such structural arrangement includes a special education interlocal employing a teacher to work in a member school district.

Novice special education teachers are believed to be rational beings who enter unfamiliar organizational settings with certain expectations about their job (Quaglia, 1991). If these expectations are satisfied, teachers are likely to stay in their positions. If reality fails to meet their expectations or their personal and professional needs, novice special education teachers may voluntarily move or leave their new positions. For novice special education teachers, organizational factors that support their personal and professional needs can lead to increased satisfaction. An increase in satisfaction decreases the likelihood of teachers leaving or transferring positions. Satisfying the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers working in two distinct organizations is more complicated than it is for teachers who work for a single organization. The failure of one and especially both organizations to support the personal and professional needs of teachers in these settings may magnify the symptoms that contribute to dissatisfaction. As teachers experience a decrease in satisfaction with one or both organizations, they begin to weigh the options of staying, transferring, or leaving their positions. Applying this premise to my study, I hope to learn whether the satisfaction level of participants is affected by trying to manage and meet expectations from two distinct and separate organizations.

In addition to the impact of organizational factors on satisfaction and retention of novice special education teachers, examining organizational factors is also important because of links to performance and effectiveness of the organization. Numerous organizational conditions are influential in the overall performance of the organization and the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers. These conditions include organizational socialization, level of administrative support (especially for new employees), the degree of employee decision-making input or influence over policies, and role conflict, ambiguity, and overload. Existing, but

less influential factors include compensation, caseload, and paperwork demands (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll, 2001a; Rosenberg, Griffin, Kilgore, & Carpenter, 1997).

Organizational Socialization

Novice special education teachers face the challenge of finding their place in a school community as they transition from teacher preparation programs to their first year as a practicing professional. Teacher socialization refers to how teachers assume their place in a new culture of practicing teachers, how they enter the culture of their new school, and where they develop their personalities and gain a sense of identity (Pugach, 1992; Quaglia, 1991). Organizational socialization of beginning teachers has been noted as a critical phase in teacher retention (Quaglia, 1991). Organizational socialization is especially important for novice special education teachers working in a dual organizational structure of special education and general education. This situation exists for many novice special education teachers hired by special education interlocals, cooperatives, or similar entities. These novice teachers not only encounter the challenge of socialization into a special education entity but socialization into a general education entity. It is possible that the challenges associated with socialization into dual organizations further complicate the entry of novice special education teachers into the profession.

In addition to the induction year, prior personal and pre-professional experiences also influence teacher socialization into the workplace. Factors contributing to socialization include personal beliefs, prior experience, the nature and philosophy of teacher education, and the workplace itself (Pugach, 1992; Zeichner & Gore, 1989). Because school culture influences teacher attitudes and behaviors, socialization is a continuing interaction between the individual,

the organization, and the environment. This triadic relationship does not end with the first year of teaching but is ongoing throughout their professional careers (Etzioni, 1961; Hoy, 1968; Lacey, 2012; Pugach, 1992; Quaglia, 1991).

Unlike most general education teachers, special education teachers have not spent their formative years as a K-12 student in special education classrooms. This lack of prior experience interacting and socializing with identified students skews the perception of novice teachers, providing them a picture of teaching that is incomplete. This incomplete experience does little to prepare novice special education teachers for working with identified students. Special education teachers may have had personal experiences with identified students but these experiences do not serve as an observational apprenticeship for future work as a special education teacher. A special challenge for novice special education teachers is that of dual socialization. Special education teachers are subject to two workplace cultures that include one at the district level and one at the individual school level (Pugach, 1992). These dual workplace cultures contribute to the socialization challenges of special education teachers. Special education teachers are required to have a variety of different tasks and skills that produce unique factors in the socialization and sensemaking process for novices entering the profession (Quaglia, 1991). These unique factors can come in the form of individual inputs and organizational inputs.

Socialization of novice special education teachers can be problematic when the beliefs of the teacher and their actual experiences conflict with each other. Individual inputs can cause stress for special education teachers that may affect their decision to stay or leave their positions. Stress producing inputs for novice special education teachers can occur if organizational factors compel them to compromise their professional beliefs or philosophical orientation. Stress can

also occur when teachers discover their pre-training has not prepared them for the extraordinary pressures of the job or the amount of time and energy required to fulfill the job are well beyond what they expected (Quaglia, 1991).

Differences between the beliefs or expectations of novice special education teachers concerning organizational inputs and their actual experiences once in the organization can make the socialization and sensemaking process difficult (Quaglia, 1991). Many special education teachers believe they will work in a school environment that is abounding with supportive supervision, space, resources, and full cooperation and collaboration with general education teachers. However, once in their positions, many special education teachers discover their reality does not meet with their expectations. Disconnection between expectations and reality create stress for novice special education teachers.

Administrative Support

The role of the administrator is an important consideration when discussing teacher satisfaction and retention. Many researches cite administrative actions as having an enormous impact on the decision of a teacher to stay, move, or leave the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001a; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Teachers express a desire to work in schools granting them greater levels of autonomy with clearly communicated expectations and high levels of administrative support (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Gersten et al., 2001; Hughes, 2012; Singh & Billingsley, 1996). The power and influence possessed by an administrator and the level of support they provide to novice teachers is a significant organizational factor when analyzing retention (Wynn, Carboni, & Patall, 2007).

Chester and Beaudin (1996) found increases in self-efficacy and commitment to school goals when administrators frequently observed newly hired teachers and provided feedback that

validated and improved instructional practice. Administrative support is important not only at the building level but also at the district level. Research conducted by Billingsley and Cross (1991, 1992); Morvant and Gersten (1995) noted that distance and lack of support from the central office administration were more common reasons for lack of satisfaction and attrition than lack of support from building administrators. Many novice special education teachers working for an interlocal are assigned to a member school district that is not in close proximity to the interlocal. A lack of proximity to administrative support from the interlocal will likely affect the satisfaction of teachers working in these organizations in a negative manner. Helping administrators understand the magnitude of their effect on novice teachers and guiding them in building positive working relationships and empowering teachers has the potential to positively impact the retention of this group of educators (Hughes, 2012).

Employee Decision-Making and Influence over Policy

The ability of teachers to influence and shape school, state, or federally mandated policies and procedures are factors that contribute to attrition. Teachers who view their school as supportive and are provided opportunities to participate in decision-making are more likely to remain in teaching (Fall & Billingsley, 2011). A considerable amount of evidence exists indicating that the opportunity for involvement in school-based decision-making not only influences job satisfaction but also commitment to the school (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Gersten, 1995). When teachers are denied a role in shaping school policy, they are five times more likely to leave the profession than those with greater decision-making autonomy (Liu, 2007). According to Ingersoll (2001a), a lack of influence over decision making serves as an underlying factor in teacher migration.

Role Conflict, Ambiguity, and Overload

Role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload are factors germane to the satisfaction and retention of special education teachers (Bensky et al., 1980; Coates & Thoresen, 1976; Crane & Iwanicki, 1986; Fimian, 1984; Gersten, 1995; Lawrenson & McKinnon, 1982; Rosenberg et al., 1997). Role conflict (or dissonance) may occur when information available to the special education teacher about his or her role is present but conflicting. Role ambiguity may occur when the special education teacher is provided with insufficient information to adequately perform their professional responsibilities (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). For novice special education teachers employed by a special education interlocal but working in a member school district, incompatible demands or expectations coming from two or more supervisors may lead to role conflict (Fimian & Blanton, 1986).

Teachers of students with disabilities frequently report that they experience stress and dissatisfaction as a result of role overload (Rosenberg et al., 1997; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Role overload can result from teachers feeling overwhelmed and unable to manage changes taking place in their work. Role overload is a more likely outcome when there are increases to caseload size and complexity, demands to collaborate with general education teachers, paperwork responsibilities, and lack of adequate resources (Gersten, 1995; Rosenberg et al., 1997).

Secondary Organizational Factors

Secondary organizational factors also influence the level of satisfaction of both novice and veteran teachers. These organizational factors are pertinent to this study although found to be less influential in the decisions of special and general education teachers to stay, transfer, or

leave their positions. These factors include teacher compensation, caseload, paperwork demands, and inadequate resources.

Compensation. The level at which employees are compensated is a primary motivation for most any job and is not unique to teaching. Salary serves as an incentive, and dissatisfaction with salary is frequently cited as a reason why teachers leave the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001a; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). According to Miller, Brownell, and Smith (1999) and Singer (1992), special education teachers are more likely to stay in higher paying jobs than lower paying jobs. School transfer and attrition of special education teachers have been shown to reduce significantly as salary levels increase (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997). Many times, added demands on special education teachers are not met with added compensation which contribute to teachers leaving (Hughes, 2012).

Caseload. Although studies have been conducted connecting caseload to student achievement, the research on caseload and its connection to attrition of general education teachers and special education teachers is limited in empirical research. However, its role in retention of special education teachers has taken a significant interest by researchers and professionals in the education system. Large caseloads prevent special education teachers from completing other duties. This obstacle leads many novice special education teachers to dissatisfaction and attrition from the profession (Billingsley, 1993; Miller et al., 1999; Sack, 1998).

Paperwork demands. Extensive paperwork demands is another organizational factor that contributes to the dissatisfaction and attrition of special education teachers (Billingsley, 1993, 2004; Brownell, Hirsch, & Seo, 2004). Special education paperwork has a reputation as

both a reason to leave special education and as a reason not to enter the field in the first place. Paperwork often reduces the amount of time teachers get to spend with identified students, thus limiting teacher opportunities to experience the intrinsic rewards they were expecting upon entering the field (Billingsley & Cross, 1991). The absence of intrinsic rewards result in dissatisfaction, absenteeism, and a desire to transfer or leave the profession (Rosenholtz, 1989). Paperwork for special education teachers includes IEPs (Individual Education Plans), behavior logs and FBAs (Functional Behavioral Assessments), report cards, and progress reports. In special education, teacher workload frequently increases but rarely decreases. An increase in workload or caseload generally equates to an increase in paperwork (Russ, Chiang, Rylance, & Bongers, 2001). According to Carlson, Chen, Schroll, and Klein (2002), special educators spend an average of five hours per week completing forms or doing other administrative paperwork, a time commitment that interferes with their job of teaching. In contrast, general education teachers are less likely to identify paperwork as interfering with their teaching responsibilities.

Inadequate resources. Special education teachers manage students with a wide range of physical, emotional, and academic needs. To meet these needs, a variety of resources are required (Miller et al., 1999). When resources are difficult to obtain or unavailable, teachers experience frustration, overload, stress, and dissatisfaction with the organization (Billingsley, Pyecha, Smith-Davis, Murray, & Hendricks, 1995; Griffin et al., 2009; Miller et al., 1999). Teachers cite support from a mentor, paraprofessional, and through collaborative opportunities as important in meeting their personal needs while enhancing job satisfaction and promoting professionalism (Billingsley et al., 1995; Rosenberg et al., 1997).

Affective Reactions to Work

Many special education teachers enter the field expecting to experience the intrinsic rewards that come from working with identified students. Excessive and prolonged negative organizational factors can reduce teacher effectiveness and limit their opportunities for the positive intrinsic rewards they hope to experience (Billingsley et al., 1995). When undesirable organizational factors exist, novice special education teachers are likely to experience one or more affective reactions to work, or symptoms of dissatisfaction. Affective reactions can manifest as stress, a weakened sense of efficacy, and demoralization (Billingsley, 2004; Gersten, 1995; Rosenberg et al., 1997; Santoro, 2011). Affective reactions to work caused by organizational factors lead teachers to weigh the costs of leaving against remaining in their positions.

Stress

Stress is frequently cited as a factor in the decision of a special education teacher to stay in or leave their position. Miller et al. (1999) found stress to be a powerful predictor of special education teacher attrition and other researchers concur that stress and intent to leave are strongly correlated (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Gersten et al., 2001; Morvant & Gersten, 1995; Singh & Billingsley, 1996). Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) defined occupational stress as the effect of task demands encountered by teachers in the performance of their professional roles and responsibilities. Frequent and intense stress are precursors to attributional, behavioral, physiological, and psychological responses that over time can influence the commitment of a teacher to remain in the classroom (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

According to Morvant and Gersten (1995), over 80% of special education teachers experience high levels of daily or weekly stress and express an intention to leave. The stress

they experience comes from students with a wide range of needs and abilities operating in tandem with conflicting bureaucratic requirements, expectations, goals, and directives. It is reasonable to expect that conflicting requirements and expectations are more likely to occur and result in higher levels of stress for teachers working within dual organizations of special and general education. Chronic stress experienced by special education teachers can lead to burnout, which includes exhaustion, feelings of helplessness, less job satisfaction and commitment, and depersonalization (Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Gersten et al., 2001; Maslach, 1982; Singh & Billingsley, 1996). Stress and burnout are a combined set of factors that directly influence attrition of special education teachers (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

Efficacy

Efficacy refers to a teachers' belief that they can make a difference in the lives of their students (Billingsley, 1993). Presenting as an affective reaction to work, efficacy can influence the decision of a teacher to stay or leave. When classrooms contain special education students with severe and diverse needs, a teacher's sense of efficacy can be affected (Brownell & Smith, 1993). Special education teachers who exhibit high personal and teaching efficacy produce greater academic gains than teachers with lower levels of efficacy (Allinder, 1995). A teacher's sense of efficacy is a personal characteristic situated within the organization in which they work. Teachers recognize working conditions as contributing to their level of efficacy and the primary consideration of teachers to stay or leave is whether they can be effective with their students (S. M. Johnson and Birkeland (2003).

Teacher Demoralization

Many individuals gravitate to teaching despite the low status and pay of the profession because they seek opportunities to do good work and desire intrinsic rewards inherent to the

profession. Teaching is an intellectual practice embedded with moral implications. When educators believe that what they are doing is right and just for their students, the profession, and themselves, the moral rewards of teaching are present and accessible. Unlike instances of burnout attributed to characteristics of the individual teacher, demoralization provides a new perspective on retention that focuses more on professional conditions. In other words, teacher attrition is analyzed from the perspective of whether or not teachers find moral value in the work they perform. When teachers have the opportunity to engage in work with ethical value, they remain attracted to the profession and sustain their positions even though they are provided modest material rewards (Santoro, 2011). Demoralization occurs when teachers can no longer access the moral and ethical value in their work. An example of this occurs when high-stakes testing and accountability prevent teachers from accessing the moral rewards of the profession. Demoralization can also occur when teachers, required by mandates, lose the ability to be creative with their teaching and have to implement scripted programs. As the morally attractive features of teaching diminish, teachers leave the profession (Schneider, 2012).

Special Education Teacher Characteristics and Personal Factors

I include teacher characteristics and personal factors in this review because they also contribute to the attrition of special education teachers. However, these influences pale in comparison to the combined effects of organizational factors. Teacher characteristics include age, gender, and race while personal factors include elements indirectly related to work (Billingsley, 2004). Researchers view teacher qualifications as teacher characteristics with direct links to attrition.

Age

Along with salary, the literature consistently cites age as the only characteristic linked to the attrition of special education teachers (Billingsley, 2004; Boe et al., 1997). Younger special education teachers are more likely to leave and do so at a rate that is twice that of their mature counterparts (Boe & Bobbitt, 1997; Singer, 1992). In addition, Miller et al. (1999) found younger special education teachers were more likely to transfer when compared with more experienced mature teachers.

Gender

There is only a weak relationship in the literature between gender and attrition of special education teachers. In a national study conducted by Boe et al. (1997), the demographic variable of gender did not appear to be connected with turnover of special education teachers. Furthermore, knowledge about gender and special education teacher turnover is inconsistent. For example, Morvant and Gersten (1995) indicated in a study of urban special education teachers that male teachers are more likely to express an intention to leave than females. Yet in another study, Singer (1992) reported that young female special education teachers left at a higher rate than males but returned at the same rate as males. These inconsistencies warrant more research on the connection or the lack of connection between gender and attrition of special education teachers.

Race

In a national study of special education teachers, attrition differences were not present among teachers of different races (Boe et al., 1997). This was also noted by Rosenberg et al. (1997) who indicated that the data on the impact of race on the careers of special education teachers was inconsistent. In regard to special education teachers' intention to leave compared to

those who actually leave, Cross and Billingsley (1994) noted that nonwhite teachers were more likely to express an intention to leave. Actual attrition data gathered from two states reported the career paths of African-American special educators were parallel to those of their white counterparts (Singer, 1992).

Personal Factors

Personal reasons also influence the decision of special education teachers to stay in or leave their positions. Personal factors include variables outside the organization that may directly or indirectly influence career decisions such as personal priorities and life circumstances (Billingsley, 2004). Personal factors impacting the decision of special education teachers to stay or leave include finances, perceived opportunities both in and outside of the profession, and retirement. Additional personal factors include having close friendships at work, personal health issues or the health of a family member, marriage and remarriage, pregnancy and child rearing, and personal beliefs that fail to align with those of the position or organization (Billingsley, 1993, 2004; Morvant & Gersten, 1995).

Teacher Qualifications

A relationship between teacher certification and a higher risk of attrition of special education teachers is evident in the literature (Billingsley, 2004). In a national study, the certification status of teachers was associated with the decision of a teacher to change schools or to leave the profession. As conveyed in the *Mobility and Attrition Report* completed by the National Center for Education Statistics, attrition of teachers is of national concern since 3.3 million teachers served students in public and private schools in 2012-2013. Of those teachers, over 140,000 had not earned full certification. The report also noted that nearly 8% of fully certified general education teachers left the teaching profession and almost 6% lacking full

certification returned. The rate of movement for special education teachers was slightly higher with over 17% moving positions or leaving the profession (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). Teachers given teaching assignments to which they were fully certified in comparison to teachers who were placed in positions in which they were only partially certified were more likely to remain in the same school as opposed to moving or leaving (Boe et al., 1997). In a study involving over 1,000 special educators, the attrition rate was found to be higher for uncertified teachers than for those who were certified (Miller et al., 1999).

Student Characteristics

Student characteristics are included in this review because they attribute to the satisfaction and retention of novice teachers. However, as in the case of teacher characteristics and personal factors, student characteristics are less influential than organizational factors when novice teachers decide to stay or leave their positions. Student characteristics cited in the literature include student behavior or discipline, problems with motivation, and lack of academic progress.

Student Discipline, Motivation Problems, and Lack of Progress

Managing student discipline problems and finding ways to motivate students to interact positively and take ownership of their learning are common reasons attributed to the attrition of teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001a; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Wynn et al., 2007). Student factors related to discipline such as physical and verbal abuse create stress for special education teachers. Another student factor concerns the slow or lack of progress made by special education students (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; A. Johnson, Gold, & Vickers, 1982). This type of stress can lower the self-esteem of the teacher and lead to burnout (Weiskopf, 1980). Many educators enter the teaching profession because they enjoy working with young people

and believe they can make a difference in their lives. Student discipline and lack of motivation or academic progress can lead a teacher to question their choice to become a teacher that can lead, in turn, to exit from the profession (Hughes, 2012). Greater teacher retention is realized when schools emphasize student success and have higher perceived levels of student motivation and discipline (Swars, Meyers, Mays, & Lack, 2009).

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

Using a qualitative case study research method, I examined and gained detailed information regarding the specific experiences of novice special education teachers employed by the Aspire Special Education Interlocal, a bounded system. The Aspire Special Education Interlocal is a bounded system because it is a single special education organization providing services to member school districts (Merriam, 2009). Like all qualitative research, case studies are inductive in nature and richly descriptive, containing detailed descriptions so the reader can experience the setting of the study and assess the evidence upon which the researcher bases his analysis (Merriam, 2009). This qualitative research study began with a theoretical framework of Social Exchange Theory. Because this theory suggests that social behavior is the result of exchanges between two or more parties, it was important that the collection and analysis of data derived from participants involved in the exchanges. This study emphasized the perceptions of novice special education teachers, veteran special education teachers, and interlocal and member district administrators concerning the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers working within a dual organization structure and how these needs influenced retention.

Research Site and Participants

I conducted this study on site at the Aspire Special Education Interlocal and in member school districts within a Great Plains state. The Aspire Special Education Interlocal is one of 18 interlocals in this Great Plains State that provides special education teachers, support staff, and services to area school districts, also referred to as member districts. The Aspire Special

Education Interlocal consists of 13 member public school districts. In aggregate, the Aspire Special Education Interlocal employs approximately 628 individuals including teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and other support personnel who provide services for approximately 2,364 students identified with special needs.

Sampling Technique

Purposeful sampling was used for this study because it is a strategy where the setting, persons, or events are deliberately chosen for the important information they provide that cannot be obtained from other choices (Maxwell, 1998). The logic and power of purposeful sampling includes selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry (Patton, 2015). Therefore, a sample is selected from which the most information can be learned about the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2009). I chose the Aspire Special Education Interlocal because it is typical of the other interlocals in the state and was in close proximity to my location. The 13 local school districts served by this interlocal provided me with a large participant pool. Participants selected for this study included novice elementary, middle, and secondary special education teachers within their first three years of teaching, veteran special education teachers, and interlocal and member district administrators.

I first gathered information from the Aspire Special Education Interlocal to identify potential novice special education teachers within their first 3 years of teaching and the veteran special education teachers who served as their mentors. I then determined which member districts the teachers were assigned to and how many of the 13 districts were represented. Based upon this information, I selected participants to represent as many of the member districts as possible. I included 9 novice special education teachers with 3 or less years of experience currently employed by the Interlocal. Ten novice teachers were available, but one declined to

participate in the study due to health reasons. Four veteran special education teachers who served as mentors agreed to participate in the study.

I selected eight administrators from the interlocal and member districts who served as direct and indirect supervisors for the novice special education teachers. Generally, direct supervisors were administrators serving as building principals or assistant principals working in the member districts who have daily contact with the teachers. Assistant directors working for the interlocal frequently serve in this same capacity but do not have direct daily contact with the teachers. For this study, an administrator playing an indirect role in supervising the novice teacher was the director of the interlocal. I selected administrators working with novice special education teachers within the organizational structures of general education or special education, whether direct or indirect, for their potential to influence the experiences of novice teachers working within this dual organizational structure. I included eight interlocal and member school district administrators in the sample.

Data Collection

To address the research questions guiding this study, I used multiple methods of data collection. According to Merriam (2009), when determining which data collection methods to use, it is necessary to understand the theoretical perspective of the researcher, the problem and purpose of the study, and the selection of the sample. To gain insight into the perceptions of participants regarding their personal and professional needs and their level of satisfaction with the organizations that employ them, data collected from this study came from individual interviews and document analysis.

I developed semi-structured interview protocols and obtained written consent from all study participants prior to entering the field. Consent provided participants with the option to

skip questions and discontinue the interview at any time. I digitally recorded individual interviews and transcribed them for accuracy. Field notes were used to provide context and clarification (Creswell, 2009). I removed names and other identifying characteristics from all digital records, transcripts, and documents. These items are secured in a safe location and will be stored for a period of not less than five years. I explained the rights of anonymity and confidentiality to participants prior to the start of each interview.

Individual Interviews

In qualitative research, interviews are probably the most common form of data collection. Interviews allowed me to gain a better understanding of how the participants interpret the world and was a primary strategy for capturing the deep meaning of experiences directly from participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). I chose individual over focus group discussions due to limitations inherent in the use of focus groups. In a focus group, the number of questions the researcher can ask is restricted as respondents typically add to the responses of each other, which in turn extends the overall length of the interview. In addition, some respondents may be disinclined to speak up to avoid negative reactions if their perspective is in the minority. When using focus groups, confidentiality is limited to the group, not the individual (Patton, 2015).

I conducted individual interviews in a setting familiar to the subject using a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews allowed for the use of open-ended questions and encouraged the sharing of new ideas, enabling respondents to describe their world and experiences in subjective (i.e., personally meaningful) ways (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews provided opportunities to probe for clarification by adding unscripted questions as needed. “Probing can come in the form of asking for more

details, for clarification, for examples (Merriam, 2009, p. 101).” Interview questions were developed to gain insight and perspective from the view of the participants consisting of a combination of experience and behavior questions, opinion and values questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, and background/demographic questions. Individual interviews with novice special education teachers and administrators were approximately 30 to 60 minutes in length.

Documents and Artifacts

In qualitative research, document analysis is a potentially valuable data source because documents can enhance understanding of the beliefs and values of the participants and the organization being studied (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). For this study, documents and artifacts pertaining to the procedures, personnel, and policies of the Aspire Special Education Interlocal and member districts informed this study. Documents and artifacts included a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material pertinent to the study at hand (Merriam, 2009). The following documents are relevant to this study and available from the Aspire Special Education Interlocal and member school districts: documents concerning mentoring, personnel documents, documents available on interlocal and school websites, and resource documents. These documents constituted a particularly rich source of information that informed the context of the participant responses to the questions posed in this research study (Patton, 2015). As a pre-interview strategy, the process of analyzing documents and artifacts will stimulate potential inquiry for interviews. As a post-interview reflection, I compared the results of my document analysis with data from individual interviews to confirm or disconfirm data gathered from participants. All identifying information was removed from documents to ensure confidentiality.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In order for me to make sense of the data I collected, it was necessary to organize, analyze, and interpret the data. Qualitative data analysis is an interactive process involving continual reflection to simplify, bring order, structure, and make sense out of a mass of collected data (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2015). Once the data was collected, I developed a manageable classification or coding scheme, and unitized the data, which entails breaking it down into smaller, meaningful categories and themes. Coding involves recognizing an identifier or primary patterns in the data and assigning a designation to the data to make retrieval easier (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). As I identified useful data, I developed codes coming directly from me and based upon direct words from the participants (in vivo codes) or a concept from the literature (a priori codes). For this study, I analyzed the core content from individual interview transcripts and documents to determine what was significant. As I coded the data, constant analysis led me to identification of categories, or themes (Merriam, 2009). This process continued until no new categories or themes emerged. I then entered the data into an Excel spreadsheet to make organizing and sorting more manageable. To determine findings, I identified relationships among the codes and categories. Analysis of the findings occurred under the lens of Social Exchange Theory and information gained from the literature review. By analyzing data in this way, I generated conclusions, discussion, and possible implications of the data.

Research Quality

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of data collection (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, to safeguard research quality, I employed various methods to improve the

credibility and trustworthiness of the study. For this study, the methods I included were triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.

Triangulation

Triangulation refers to obtaining data from multiple sources, through multiple methods, and using multiple perspectives to compare and contrast results and confirm emerging findings (Lapan et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). For this study, data included interviews with 9 novice special education teachers, 4 veteran special education teachers, and 8 interlocal and member district administrators. Furthermore, documents pertinent to the study were gathered and analyzed. I compared and contrasted the data from multiple sources to understand and substantiate the findings.

Member Checking

Member checking denotes sharing data and interpretations with participants and can improve validity and reliability of a study. Member checking provides participants with the opportunity to review data collected during the study and provide feedback, adding to the accuracy of the data and my interpretations (Maxwell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Therefore, each participant in this study was given the opportunity to review interview transcripts and comment on or clarify any misinterpretations. To accomplish this, I emailed transcripts of recorded interviews to each participant. A restatement of the purpose of the study will preface the email with instructions for the participants to check for misinterpretations, add additional commentary, and make any changes to the transcript before returning the edited copy to me. Possible issues can arise using the member checking process. The process may lead to confusion instead of confirmation as participants may change their minds about an issue. Furthermore, a respondent may disagree with my interpretation or deny or forget what they said, leaving the question of

whose interpretation should stand (Angen, 2000; Morse, 1994). Although these issues are possible, it was my belief the positive outcomes from member checking outweighed the potential negatives providing credibility to the research. Member checking also occurred during the interview process by asking clarifying questions to give participants the opportunity further elaborate or better explain their perspectives.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing enhanced the accuracy and validity of my study. Peer debriefing involved selecting colleagues external to my study, both with and without prior experience with my topic, to review and ask questions about my study (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). I asked these individuals to examine regularly my methodology, transcripts, documents, recorded interviews, findings, and conclusions. This process allowed the colleagues examining my study to detect issues with my research such as overemphasized and underemphasized points, vague descriptions, general data errors, and biases or assumptions. This process added to my own awareness and views of the data, improving the validity of my study.

Ethical Considerations

Participants wishing to be a part of the study provided written consent per IRB (Internal Review Board) requirements to acknowledge their understanding of the nature of the study. I reviewed with participants the meaning and implications of consent as part of the interviewing process, with an emphasis placed on anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants. All data and any keys or other identifying information will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the research study per IRB procedures at Wichita State University.

Researcher Positionality

My position as researcher also influences the quality and integrity of this study. The need to elaborate on biases, dispositions, and assumptions provide the reader with an understanding of the values and expectations that may influence the questions I ask in the interviews, how I code the raw data, my analysis and interpretation of findings, and the conclusions and implications of the study (Maxwell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Therefore, it is important for me to reveal any biases, dispositions, and assumptions I bring to this study as well as my plan for controlling for them.

My experiences working in the public school system for over 20 years influence my position. I have served as a teacher, an assistant principal, building principal, and now a superintendent. As an administrator, I have worked directly and indirectly with novice general and special education teachers and administrators. I have observed novice special education teachers struggle in their new positions and believe these struggles may be related to a lack of resources and support emanating from a dual organizational structure that are needed to meet the unique needs of this group of teachers. In terms of perspective, it is important to note I am employed as a superintendent of one of the member districts served by the interlocal in this study. To eliminate any conflict of interest posed by my connection to the interlocal and ensure impartial participation and responses, I did not select participants who worked in my district or had prior personal connections to me.

In order to strengthen the integrity of this study, I engaged in triangulated reflexive inquiry (Patton, 2015). Reflexivity involves the researcher identifying his role in, and impact on, the research through deep, critical reflection (Lapan et al., 2011). Triangulated reflexive inquiry involves three sets of questions that challenge the researcher to act as a learner. The first set of

questions is self-reflective and may include, “What do I know and how do I know what I know?,” “What shapes my perspective and has shaped my perspective?,” and “What is my perception of those studied?” The second set of questions is about the participants in the study: “How do the participants know what they know?,” “What has shaped their view of their reality?,” and “How do they perceive me, the researcher, and why?” Lastly, questions are included about the reflexivity of the audience: “How do others make sense of my findings?,” “What perspectives can they bring to my findings?,” and “How do we perceive each other and how do these perceptions affect what I report?” I constantly used the process of triangulated reflexive inquiry to reflect upon and identify my own personal beliefs and biases as a researcher.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The following chapter presents reoccurring themes present in the data collected from nine novice special education teachers within their first three years of teaching, four veteran special education teachers, and eight administrators who work within a dual organizational structure comprised of a special education interlocal and a public school district. The findings derive from the perceptions of participants concerning their personal and professional needs while working within a dual organizational structure of an interlocal and a public school district. The findings focus on organizational belonging, prior expectations and training, physical resources, human resources, organizational proximity, multiple organizations, dual organizational advantages, managing adults, organizational satisfaction, and the effects of a dual organizational structure on retention. To protect the confidentiality of participants in unique roles, I refer to school-building principals and interlocal administrators as administrators.

Expectations and Organizational Belonging

When I asked novice special education teachers if they had prior expectations about working in a dual organizational structure of an interlocal and a local school district, most responded, “No.” One novice commented, “I really didn't have an idea of what I was getting into. I just kind of figured it out along the way.” She explained the dual organizational structure was like having two sets of parents. “If mom doesn't know, ask dad and maybe dad will know. It's been trial and error.” According to another novice, working in a dual organizational structure was not even a “blip on my radar.” Some novice teachers had worked as special education paraprofessionals for the interlocal prior to becoming a special education teacher.

They disclosed that even though this provided some insight into what it would be like to work as a teacher in the dual organizational structure, they still had many questions. Another novice teacher expressed that her previous experiences in a neighboring state gave her a good idea of what it would be like to work in a dual organizational structure. The lack of expectations of what it would be like to work in a dual organizational structure of an interlocal and a local school district led participants to express a reoccurring sentiment of, “Who do I belong to?” Novice special education teachers, veteran special education teachers, and administrators indicated that belonging to one organization and working in another organization created confusion and distinctive circumstances for novice special education teachers. One veteran special education teacher’s perception of what it was like to work in the dual organizational structure described it as, “I feel it’s kind of, at times, praying to two Gods.” Another veteran special education teacher expressed confusion when she commented,

There are things that come along that can create a little bit of confusion. Like sometimes emails will go out that if you’re a [district] employee, do I pay attention to that or do I not pay attention to that?

Novice special education teachers also expressed confusion about belonging. According to one novice special education teacher, “At first, it was kind of confusing because you didn’t know exactly who to go to get what information”. A different novice special education teacher gave a similar response when she stated, “It was kind of confusing at first. You’re not sure exactly who your ‘real boss’ is.” This theme of confusion continued when another novice special education teacher expressed a similar feeling:

It’s kind of complicated sometimes because you’re kind of torn between who you’re supposed to go to. Do I go to my principal here? Do I go to my admin at the interlocal?

You know, who is it writing this note or who is signing that?

This same participant expressed a feeling of not belonging, observing that interlocal and district teachers are not treated equitably or given equal considerations. For example, she commented, “If there are any job openings that come open, district employees can automatically apply for it whereas an interlocal employee cannot.” She also indicated that pay for interlocal teachers was less than for district teachers.

When I asked administrators what they thought it was like for novice special education teachers to be employed by the interlocal yet work in a local school district, their responses were similar to those given by novice and veteran special education teachers. One administrator commented,

To begin with, I think it can be a little overwhelming because you’re trying to follow the organizational standards of two different groups. There are always meetings there, meetings here, kids here, responsibilities there. Just to balance all those can be pretty complicated.

Another administrator remarked, “There are some things we’ve had to struggle with because she kind of has two bosses.” This same administrator commented that he and the novice special education teacher have joked about playing the two sides against each other. “There have been times when [the novice teacher] and I have joked, ‘Ok, mom, dad said this,’ so what do you say?” Another administrator expressed feelings of how the dual structure placed interlocal teachers in a difficult position where they contemplated loyalty to one organization over the other. He reported, “I think initially it’s hard for them [novice special education teachers] to know partially who they answer to, where their loyalty lies, and whether things are going good or going bad. ‘Who am I supposed to report to?’”

According to a couple of administrators, each district had its own culture and adapting to and fitting into that culture when a teacher did not work for the district was a challenge for novice special education teachers. One administrator indicated that a situation could exist in which things were going well in the dual organizational structure and consequently, the interlocal novice teacher would be embraced and accepted into the culture of the school district. However, if things were not going well, the teacher may be seen as an outsider, contributing to any discord already present. This administrator commented, “I think it’s just how you get yourself to acclimate to that culture. New teachers are trying to figure out how to make that fit.” Another administrator spoke about culture and being part of an organization you do not belong to. He explained, “You have responsibilities and day-to-day relationships, professional relationships, parent student relationships, but you’re somewhat insulated and removed from that because you’re really not a part of that organization.” This same administrator further clarified by explaining how teachers of the interlocal go to both organizational entities for different reasons. Citing mentoring as an example, he explained an arrangement that required teachers to go back and forth between organizations sometimes prevented a teacher from becoming “fully immersed” into the climate and culture of both organizations. The administrator explained, “Sometimes there can be a little bit of detachment and maybe not always acceptance...because people know that you’re employed by somebody else.”

When I asked participants which organization was more important to them personally and professionally, the majority of teachers reported having a stronger sense of belonging to the district. When asked by outsiders where they worked, teachers would typically respond by naming the school district. According to one novice special education teacher, “Personally, since I coach here, I am really dedicated to the school. We work for the interlocal but that’s your

school too...I feel like personally, I work with those people every day.” Asked if she felt part of the school, this teacher responded, “Absolutely.”

Dual Organizational Training

Novice teachers shared that they received some training and preparation for working in a dual organizational structure during the pre-school in-service provided by the interlocal. One novice teacher stated that the in-service “kind of helps you learn the path you’re going down and allows you to get certain questions answered.” Another novice suggested the in-service does provide some “insight those first couple days your there.” However, novice teachers shared that the training was generally limited to housekeeping items and learning about how to use email, write IEPs, grading, etc., and not specifically focused on what it would be like to work in a dual organizational structure of special and general education. One novice indicated she did not receive any “specific training” to prepare her for working in the dual organizational structure. She explained, “I think it’s [learning how to work in the dual structure] just by trial and error that you kind of figure it out. There wasn't a manual or any direct training.” An area of particular concern to all participant groups was that of managing adults.

Managing Adults

Although not a personal or professional need unique to novice teachers or to teachers working in a dual organizational structure, the topic of managing adults was a consistent theme shared by participants. The teachers revealed they had little if any expectation before taking the position they would be managing and supervising paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals are usually non-certified aides hired by the interlocal to assist the classroom teacher in providing services to identified students. Depending on the program and the number of students, each

teacher in the interlocal I studied supervised anywhere from 1-13 paraprofessionals on a daily basis.

Several novice special education teachers expressed their frustrations and challenges associated with the supervision of paraprofessionals. I asked teachers if managing and supervising paraprofessionals added an additional layer of stress to their jobs. One novice stated, “Of course it does. I feel like I’m better at sharing my knowledge than delegating responsibility.” According to another, “It can be tough. I have eight paras who are a variety of ages. Right now, it feels like it’s the battle of the ages. I have older paras and I have younger paras. I thought I was prepared.” Some teachers said that neither the school nor the interlocal did an adequate job of preparing them for supervising paraprofessionals. “Not at all, actually,” is how one novice described the amount of preparation she received. Another novice teacher affirmed this lack when she described the amount of preparation she had received:

Not a whole lot. That’s probably been the biggest challenge being the supervisor of adults, because I just want to get along. I just want everybody to get along and having to boss adults, I’m not real good at that.

She said that overall, managing paraprofessionals had gone well but it was a learning experience for her. Another teacher indicated she had seven students and one adult for each student. She commented, “I have had to adjust to working with as many adults as children and that’s definitely something they don’t teach you in college.”

Veteran special education teachers also addressed the challenges of managing and supervising paraprofessionals. Explained one veteran teacher who supervised 13 paraprofessionals in a low incidence program:

The kids are easy. It's keeping the para educators on track and making sure they're operating under the system we have in place. There's not a lot of training out there for a lot of the hiccups that are going to come along, the drama.

This teacher mentioned having no idea when he started that he would one day be supervising paraprofessionals. "Somehow, someday, we need to do a better job of addressing that, preparing our novice teachers for surprises along the way that you're just not trained for." He described how novice special education teachers found themselves managing paraprofessionals who were older than they were or who had been in their positions for many years:

You're a kid that's 25 years old. Heck, we have 55 and 60-year-old paras that have been here for 30 years. You're going to have to make a tough decision sometimes when you see something that is not appropriate and you're going to have to address that and give them ways to communicate that are effective without blowing up or mishandling it.

This teacher suggested that both organizations, as well as teacher preparation courses, could do a better job of preparing novice special education teachers for their future supervisory roles.

Administrators also discussed the struggle for novice special education teachers in managing adults. One administrator commented, "We have had examples of teachers flaming out due to para management." Concerning the predicament for novice special education teachers in supervising adults, he explained, "What amplifies that quandary is that the paraprofessionals are non-skilled labor, and I say that respectfully. They're hourly non-skilled labor so their vision is much different, their mission is different." He explained that teachers were certified professionals and as such, they stayed until a job was completed and went the extra mile, if necessary. Paraprofessionals, on the other hand, were hourly employees. When their shift

ended, they left. He wondered, “Why would they stay without compensation for overtime?” This situation was a frequent source of frustration for novice special education teachers.

Another administrator discussed how the disgruntlement of managing paraprofessionals prompted some novice special education teachers to resign their positions. He remarked, “I just had two teachers that we hired in the last two years leave. One left specifically because of the paperwork and the conflict or the discomfort with managing paras.” Another administrator also remarked on the struggles and dissatisfaction experienced by novice special education teachers as they attempted to fit into their role of managing adults with conflicting personalities. “It’s tough because, you know...knowing how to work with lots of different personalities is something I do not believe they have training in and I think it is a struggle. I think it’s a frustration for them.” One administrator summed up the dynamics associated with managing adults this way: “Aside from everything else, the added responsibilities of other adults is huge. If you are a first or second year special education teacher, and you’ve got that responsibility added on and no support, that can be devastating.”

Physical Resources

I asked participants if a situation ever arose that led to confusion about which organization was going to provide physical resources, such as technology. One novice special education teacher responded, “Yes, when I first came on, supplies were a big thing.” She explained she needed ink for her printer and when she asked the interlocal, they told her it was the responsibility of the district. When she asked the district, they told her it was the responsibility of the interlocal. Unsure who to turn to next, the teacher decided to take her computer to the computer lab and use the printer available there. This created an inconvenience for the teacher and left the issue unresolved.

One administrator also expressed confusion about knowing which organization provided certain resources. She described a scenario where the teacher would go back and forth with the administration of each organization to determine if she could request certain resources and who would provide them. An example of this occurred when one novice teacher requested technology resources. When the teacher made her request, her administrator asked if the interlocal intended to provide any funds to purchase the technology. At this point, the teacher began a back and forth conversation with both entities. The administrator described this as being “extremely tough” on the teacher. The administrator commented,

Instead of just one person to go to and get your answers, there’s someone else to get answers from, and then to relay that exactly back to me without misinterpreting any verbiage. It gets tough, and sometimes it’s a vicious circle.

Another administrator spoke about the challenge posed by the chain of command. He explained how the interlocal and the district needed to work hand in hand with one another to address this. He commented,

Our chain of command always starts with the building principal. If that issue isn’t resolved, or the questions are not answered, or the teacher didn’t get the support they thought they needed, then it goes to the area director or county director or whatever and works up the chain from there.

The responses indicating confusion about which organization was responsible for providing physical resources was not what I expected to hear. They came as a surprise since my document analysis revealed that an organizational manual was included on the interlocal web site that answered these questions in addition to many others. None of the participants seemed aware of the manual as a resource for answering their questions.

In lieu of this organizational manual, participants found other ways to get their questions answered. One novice special education teacher mentioned her occasional frustration about whom to go to for help but was grateful when she learned that everybody was there to help. She commented, “Sometimes you might be frustrated and you're not really sure who to go to, but if you just keep asking, there's somebody.” She went on to say, “I kind of feel like I have the best of both worlds...I have all of these [district] resources and I have all the interlocal resources.” Asked if confusion existed concerning which organization provided what, an administrator responded, “Not at all.” When he talked about professional development and which organization was financially responsible for registration, travel, substitute teachers, etc., this administrator stated, “We've never had that issue. If the interlocal says, ‘No, we're not paying for that,’ and I really thought it was worth his [the novice sped teacher] time and energy to go, I'd find a way for him to go.” Participants also mentioned sharing costs of physical resources and having access to the specialized expertise provided by the interlocal as advantages of the dual organizational structure.

Human Resources

Findings showed that novice special education teachers viewed their colleagues as valuable resources. Human resources included other special education teachers working in the same district or throughout the interlocal, mentors assigned to novice special education teachers, building and interlocal administrators, and coordinators and office support staff provided by the interlocal. The overall theme concerning people as resources was one of appreciation and satisfaction.

One veteran special education teacher spoke about how novice teachers benefited when other special education teachers worked in the same building or even the same district. When

this occurred, the novice had someone accessible to go to for advice or information. This teacher commented, “If that person is the only special education teacher in that building, I think that presents a little more of a challenge.” Another veteran special education teacher indicated it was “very helpful” if the interlocal assigned a novice teacher a mentor located in the same district. This sentiment was repeated by a novice teacher who felt “lucky” that her mentor was someone within the district. According to this teacher, some of her peers had mentors who worked in schools an hour away, making them less accessible.

Novice teachers consistently commented on the value and satisfaction they felt for their mentors. When asked if her mentor was an asset to her, one novice teacher stated, “Absolutely...I’m not sure I would have been able to do my job successfully without that.” Another novice teacher echoed those sentiments saying, “It’s been great...any time I have questions or concerns about anything, I just call her or shoot her an email and she gets right back to me. She’s been a very valuable resource.” When the interlocal provided a mentor, they strived to match the novice teacher with a veteran teacher in the same district. If that were not possible, a mentor in a similar size district was selected. Other factors considered when matching a novice to a mentor included caseload (the number of students served by the teacher), make-up of the district (rural, urban, size), and teacher assignment. Teacher assignment included the grade level of the students and the category of student exceptionality.

Regarding the human resources in both organizations, one novice special education teacher spoke appreciatively of how the district she worked in helped with day-to-day support. When special circumstances arose, such as needing guidance on an Individual Education Plan (IEP), she received support from the interlocal. One novice teacher spoke of the value of having multiple resources available to her since she belonged to both organizations. She described how

being part of the interlocal was a “definite” advantage because if you worked only for the school district, especially a small rural school district, human resources directly related to special education could be limited. Belonging to both organizations greatly increased access to materials and people. When a novice special education teacher spoke about being a member of the interlocal and attending meetings at the interlocal, she stated, “We go to those early childhood meetings and there’s hundreds of years of experience in the room. I just say, ‘Help me,’ and I get all that experience those people have.” Several other teachers expressed this sentiment. They commented, “You have two people on your side, you’re not on your own.” and “I think the biggest advantage is that you’ve got different people to pull ideas from.” In appreciating having access to an unusually large number of co-workers, one novice stated,

Getting to know people from the area and seeing them around and the comradery of talking with them and bouncing ideas off them. I wouldn’t have known them if I had just been an employee here [the district] and not there [the interlocal] as well.

Several novice special education teachers mentioned utilizing their building administrators as resources who could assist in finding solutions to personal and professional needs. One novice teacher stated, “Our principal is also a very good person to see if you have a problem, just to listen, and to want to find a solution.” Another novice special education teacher referred to her principal and assistant principal in a similar vein: “They both have been really good about coming to me with questions, or ‘You’ve done this, we like that,’ or ‘Maybe you could change this a little bit,’ but always said in a nice way.”

Organizational Proximity

A challenge associated with working in a dual organizational structure of a special education interlocal and a public school was the geographical distance between organizations.

The distance separating the interlocal and the local school district was unique to special education teachers hired into a dual organizational structure. The distance between the two organizations in this study ranged anywhere from 5 minutes to an hour away. Although participants viewed human resources as both assets and challenges, the distance separating the two organizations created an additional condition to navigate for novice special education teachers working in a dual organizational environment of special and general education.

Some novice special education teachers in the dual organization structure expressed frustration at the distance between the district in which they worked and the interlocal offices. Shared one, “The most frustrating part is any meetings, or anything I have to go to, I have to drive an hour, which means an hour away from my class.” This teacher said the distance was not as significant an issue for teachers working in districts in closer proximity to the interlocal. These teachers were fortunate because they “only have to leave their class an hour...and I have to for 3 hours, so I have to take a whole afternoon.” Another novice teacher shared this perception when she stated, “What is difficult is that we’ll have interlocal meetings during the day so you have to leave the school to go to those interlocal meetings.” The arrangement “makes it difficult because we do it about once a month, so you miss an afternoon with your kids.”

Administrators also spoke of the hardships when special education teachers were needed on site at the interlocal. According to one administrator, there had to be a plan in place for covering the teacher’s classes when he or she attended interlocal meetings. Coverage was occasionally managed in house while at other times it required paying a substitute teacher. When a substitute was required, there was often confusion about which organization was responsible for providing the substitute. This situation became further complicated if the teacher was shared with other buildings in the district. Commented one administrator, “By the time he

gets done up there [meaning the interlocal], school was already out here and he's got coaching responsibilities. Distance does make a little bit of a difference, sure."

Low-Incidence Disabilities within Multiple Organizations

A multiple organizational structure was especially trying for teachers assigned to low-incidence positions. Low-incidence disabilities occur less frequently in the general population than other disabilities. These disabilities include vision and hearing impairments, other health impairments, severe and multiple disabilities, and autism. Low-incidence programs provided by the interlocal were housed in one school district and each member district sent their qualifying students to the host district. This arrangement required special education teachers to communicate and organize with multiple districts. At my research site, this could involve as many as 13 districts.

One novice special education teacher spoke about the challenges she encountered with scheduling, communicating, and reconciling different calendars among sending districts. When scheduling a meeting for her students, she disclosed, "You don't always know what another school's schedule may look like or another administrator's schedule may look like." She explained how some districts might be out of school on days that did not match the calendar of the host district. This made it difficult to get required individuals such as administrators, school psychologists, and parents to attend IEP meetings. For instance, she described having to schedule an IEP meeting with a sending school that had class the whole week of a holiday while her district attended for only a few days. She explained, "Our district had opposite winter breaks or maybe they had an extended Thanksgiving break and we had an IEP right during then, so we actually had to move [the date]." Although most novice special education teachers discussed the

challenges of working with multiple organizations in low-incidence programs, one novice teacher stood out because she did not feel it was a challenge. She commented,

I don't feel like it is. We have a list in our room and like I said, you know you have your chain of command. First, you have your building principal here. You just have to remember whom the student belongs to, but our building principal here is first and she does a great job.

Administrators also recognized the trials faced by novice special education teachers when working with low incidence disabilities with multiple organizations. One administrator spoke of the dilemma low incidence special education teachers encountered when trying to communicate with multiple organizations:

Challenges...especially for my low incidence teacher, is really keeping up with all the communication. If there's a [sending district] student in her program and there are issues and concerns, she not only has to contact me and someone from the interlocal, she has to contact that principal.

This administrator mentioned how communicating and arranging transportation could also be a frustration. He commented, "If there's a transportation issue, we have to work that out through [the sending] school district, through our school district, and through the interlocal." Another administrator also mentioned the complication when communicating with multiple organizations: "It's easy to maybe not be as an effective communicator because you have to communicate with [District A] and communicate with [District B] and communicate to [District C]."

Organizational Satisfaction and Retention

I asked novice special education teachers to describe their current level of satisfaction with the dual organizational structure. All participants provided insights into whether or not the struggles and unique circumstances attributable to the dual organizational structure played a role in their decisions to stay in or leave their current positions. The overwhelming response was one of satisfaction. Comments from novice special education teachers included, "I'd say it's pretty good; I think they do well," and "I'm very satisfied." Despite feeling perplexed at times, one teacher observed, "I've been more than satisfied." Another novice commented, "I'm completely satisfied. Absolutely, I feel very blessed to have this position, blessed to be at this school." Understanding how difficult it could be for any organization to prepare a novice teacher for their first year in the position, one teacher stated, "I'm very satisfied. I've learned a lot. There's no way any program or any school can ever prepare you for your first year, and the second year was smoother. I'm very satisfied." Describing her level of satisfaction, one novice teacher remarked, "Very high. I'm very happy with how things are going. Right now, I couldn't be happier. I'm glad I get to come back." Said another, "I'm very satisfied. I don't know that I would say I'm 100% satisfied, but it's definitely in the upper 90's."

Novice and veteran teachers shared the unique circumstances they experienced in the dual organizational structure played a role in their decisions to stay or leave, but were generally not a deciding factor. Veteran special education teachers were unable to recall novice special education teachers specifically contributing the special circumstances of working in a dual organizational structure as reasons for leaving. However, several thought the unique circumstances were likely to influence a teacher's decision to stay or leave. One veteran teacher cited a specific example: "It can; it's a consideration. I know one [teacher] that started with me

who ended up going.” Another veteran special education teacher who also served as a mentor for novice teachers stated, “We see it...the young teachers that realize it’s not for me. There are so many moving parts that it’s hard to keep up with it if you’re not on top of it.” This teacher explained the importance of keeping communication open between building and interlocal administration. He had observed teachers struggle with this and the problems it created for both organizations. He explained how building administrators could be “blindsided” when teachers went directly to interlocal administrators instead of going to them first. This teacher saw this as an example of ineffective communication and a failure to work as a team.

The responses of novice teachers to this concern did not markedly differ from those of veteran teachers. In general, they said the challenges and conflicts were not sufficient motivation to make them leave their positions. “No, absolutely not,” remarked one novice special education teacher. Another indicated the challenges played only a minor role in her decision to stay: “Yeah, well they do affect it. I plan on staying. I’m not going anywhere. You have to take everything into consideration when you’re in a position.” Noting that nothing significant had occurred to make her want to leave, one teacher joked and said the weather would be more of a determinant for her. Other novice teachers repeated they were “not going anywhere.” They exclaimed, “No, not at all,” “I love what I do,” and “I’m happy right here. It’s great administration, great support, and great people I work with.”

Administrators expressed various perspectives regarding the impact on teacher retention of working in a dual organizational structure. For example, one administrator still early in his career had limited experience because he had only worked with a single novice special education teacher. When asked if novice special education teachers gave the unique circumstances created by the dual organizational structure as a reason for leaving their positions, he stated, “None that I

have worked with.” Another administrator with experience working with a novice special education teacher echoed the same response but commented he could see it as a reason for motivating teachers to leave their positions. A couple of administrators spoke about how gratifying it was to work with the interlocal and how well the two organizations collaborated. These administrators did not see teachers leaving as a direct result of obstacles associated with the dual organizational structure. “The interlocal has been very good to work with,” one said. “They try not to put [teachers] in a tough situation.” Said the other, “We all work really hard together to make it work. So I wouldn’t say it would be a reason for leaving.” A different administrator replied that he had teachers mention the unique challenges as reasons for leaving their positions. From his perspective, it was all about the level of support teachers received from each organization:

What I hear from teachers that leave is they feel it’s about support. And that can run the gamut from caseload to, ‘I felt like you as a building administrator didn’t support me in this spot,’ or ‘The interlocal didn’t support me,’ or ‘Nobody coached me up or taught me or trained me.’

Another administrator spoke about novice special education teachers leaving their positions because of the arduousness associated with managing paraprofessionals, not because of the dual organization structure.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of my study was to examine the retention of novice special education teachers employed in a dual organizational structure comprised of a special education interlocal and its member school districts. This study focused on the perceptions of novice special education teachers within their first three years, veteran special education teachers, and administrators. A potential outcome of this study was to provide insight into the unique needs encountered by novice special education teachers working in dual organizational structures and determine if these needs influenced their decisions to remain in or leave their positions. There is a significant positive relationship between organizational factors and employee satisfaction that contributes to retention (Billingsley, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001b; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). My conclusions for this study are a result of analyzing the findings by looking for associations between the experiences of participants and the theoretical framework provided by Social Exchange Theory. By applying this theory, I have examined and compared the perceptions of novice special education teachers concerning their levels of satisfaction with their current positions and their willingness to stay or leave their positions. My conclusions are supported by the empirical research provided in the literature review of this study and from the findings described in Chapter 4. My conclusions focus on three areas originating from the findings:

- the existence of unique circumstances;
- the role of unique circumstances to satisfaction and retention; and
- factors contributing to teacher satisfaction.

The Existence of Unique Circumstances

The research questions for this study asked participants to describe their personal and professional needs working in a dual organizational structure of an interlocal and a public school district. Prior research has found organizational factors to play a significant role in employee satisfaction and retention (Billingsley, 2004; Chang & Lee, 2007; Ingersoll, 2001a; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). The findings in this study are consistent with the research to the extent that organizational factors within the interlocal and its member school districts presented unique circumstances affecting the level of satisfaction expressed by novice special education teachers. Novice special education teachers disclosed varying amounts of confusion, frustration, and stress regarding organizational belonging, physical resources, organizational proximity, and the management of adults in the classroom. My findings suggest these unique circumstances add to the personal and professional needs already present for novice teachers and teachers consider these circumstances when deciding to stay in or leave their positions.

Organizational Belonging

Teacher socialization refers to how teachers assume their place in a new culture, develop their personalities, and gain a sense of identity and belonging (Pugach, 1992; Quaglia, 1991). As reflected in the findings, I concluded that novice teachers working in a dual organizational structure of special and general education experienced confusion in terms of organizational belonging. As explained in Social Exchange Theory, individuals weigh the potential costs and returns of a social relationship to determine if the relationship is worth continuing (Blau, 1964; Ribarsky, 2013; Sabatelli, 1988; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Novice special education teachers excogitate the need to belong and identify with one or both organizations--important factors that contribute to their level of satisfaction. All participant groups expressed a level of uncertainty in

terms of which organization interlocal teachers primarily identified with and how they fit into the unique cultures of both organizations. Novice interlocal teachers communicated turmoil about whom their “real” boss was, a form of cognitive dissonance that sometimes left them feeling torn between going to the building principal or the interlocal administrator for advice, answers to questions, or for physical resources. In addition to feelings of disconnectedness, teachers also discussed receiving different treatment than their general education peers for things such as consideration for district positions and comparable pay. Disorientation stemming from dislocation within the dual organizational structure placed teachers in a position of developing stronger loyalty for one organization than the other, a conflict whose dissonance created a subtle crisis of identity that complicated their entry into the profession. This crisis of identity was further complicated for teachers working in low-incidence special education programs. These teachers found themselves within a system of multiple organizations, a situation that generated feelings of role overload and consequently led to stress and dissatisfaction among some.

Physical Resources

Some participants expressed confusion in terms of which organization, the school district or the interlocal, had the responsibility for allocation of physical resources. For instance, there was considerable ambiguity about which entity provided items such as technology or who paid for professional development. Although the interlocal provided an organizational manual that ostensibly provided answers to many of these policy uncertainties, these areas remained unclear for some teachers and administrators. When questions arose concerning the allocation of resources or when resources were difficult to obtain, teachers experienced frustration, overload, stress, and dissatisfaction with both organizations (Billingsley et al., 1995; Griffin et al., 2009; Miller et al., 1999). These factors contributed to role conflict and role ambiguity and were

deliberated by novice special education teachers in such a way that they played a role in their decisions to stay in or leave their positions (Fimian & Blanton, 1986; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

Organizational Proximity

The physical distance separating the interlocal and member districts created situations that occasionally caused teachers to miss instructional time with students. This mostly occurred when meetings or professional development opportunities required teachers to be on site at the interlocal during school hours when students were in session. Teachers appreciated the time spent with their colleagues at the interlocal but expressed dissatisfaction with missing valuable time with their students. Participants also shared that the distance between organizations sometimes created barriers in attaining needed support in a timely manner. Email and phone conversations were helpful in cases that did not require immediate attention. However, if a situation needed to be resolved in person, the time it took for interlocal administrators to arrive at the school site or the time it took a teacher to arrive at the interlocal resulted in a slow response time that could lead to resentment and stress for the teacher. Organizational proximity was a seemingly uncontrollable factor unique to working in a dual organizational structure that affected the satisfaction level of teachers within the organization (Billingsley & Cross, 1991, 1992; Morvant & Gersten, 1995).

Unprepared for Managing Adults

Novice teachers generally enter unfamiliar organizational settings with certain expectations about their job (Quaglia, 1991). Once they enter and the realities of the job fail to meet their expectations or they are unprepared for what they encounter, retention may be adversely affected. One such reality that novice teachers contend with was the challenges

associated with managing adults in their classrooms. This unexpected and often unwelcomed factor added to their personal and professional needs while working in the dual organizational structure. Although not unique to teachers working in a dual organizational structure, managing adults was generally a problematic responsibility for novice teachers that was expressed by all participant groups in this study. Novice teachers were overwhelmed and experienced stress when they discovered that their pre-training had not prepared them for the extraordinary pressures of supervising paraprofessionals or the time and energy required to do so (Quaglia, 1991). Participants noted they did not receive any relevant training in their preparatory programs in college. Furthermore, although interlocal and school administrators provided advice and guidance when teachers asked for it, study participants indicated that administrators provided little or no training about managing adults during pre-school professional development opportunities. The lack of sufficient information and training kept teachers from adequately performing their professional responsibilities and manifested itself as role ambiguity and role overload, factors leading to dissatisfaction that negatively affected the retention of special education teachers (Gersten, 1995; Rosenberg et al., 1997; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

The Role of Unique Circumstances to Satisfaction and Retention

As described in the Social Exchange Theory framework, study participants weighed the potential costs and returns of the social relationships created within both organizations to determine if the relationships were professionally fulfilling and worth continuing. Novice special education teachers expressed concern and annoyance with certain circumstances unique to their positions in the dual organizational structure. As discussed in detail previously in this chapter, several unique circumstances contributed to the indignation of novice teachers. Trying to establish which organization they belonged while undergoing the process of fitting in and

developing their personal identities within both organizations, took time and frequently led to frustration. Participants were often overwhelmed with feelings of confusion and establishing their place in each organization was a difficult exercise in trial and error. Novice teachers struggled with not always knowing which organization provided physical resources. Going back and forth between organizations to secure important material resources was vividly described by some as being trapped within a “vicious circle.”

The physical distance between organizations was also a factor for novice teachers when attending to some business matter at the interlocal caused them to miss valuable class time with their students. Additionally, supervising and managing paraprofessionals was a challenge for which most participants were unprepared. This unanticipated responsibility added a great deal of work related stress, a strong factor of frustration leaving some teachers contemplating whether to stay or leave their positions. Furthermore, teachers working in low-incidence positions faced the challenge of communicating and organizing with all stakeholders within multiple districts. In some cases, the teachers in this study served as many as 13 districts. Participants shared the extent to which these circumstances played a role in their decisions to remain in or leave their positions. Overall, the attitude of participants with the dual-organizational arrangement was one of acceptance and satisfaction, although some participants dissented more vigorously than did others. The interlocal and member districts in this study were not oblivious to the needs of their special education teachers or the discord that surfaced and strove to provide organizational environments of support and acceptance. These sentiments suggest that by themselves, the presence of unique circumstances do not necessarily play a significant enough role for teachers working in an interlocal to leave their positions.

Factors Contributing to Teacher Satisfaction

Social Exchange Theory explains that when exchanges affected by the organization show positive regard for the employee, feelings of obligation and satisfaction are created in the employee to reciprocate in kind (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Shore & Wayne, 1993). The findings from this study reflect this aspect of Social Exchange Theory and lead me to conclude that on balance, factors affected by the dual organizational structure of the interlocal and its member school districts contribute to the overall satisfaction of teachers. These factors constitute the Comparison Level (CL) of satisfaction presented by (Weiss & Stevens, 1993) in which teachers, according to their individual needs, evaluated the cost and returns of their relationship with each organization. The factors in this personal evaluation played a direct role in the willingness of teachers to remain in their positions. A key factor consistently cited by participants involved the availability of human resources.

Human Resources

Social Exchange Theory allows for a comprehensive look at the relationship between the employee and the organization but also investigates the relationship between the employee and their immediate supervisors. Based on the study findings, novice special education teachers generally found sufficient appreciation and satisfaction in the human resources available to them within the dual organizational structure. Teachers consistently conveyed gratitude and contentment for the professional support and mentoring provided by their building principals. The relationships established between principals and teachers created an atmosphere in which novice teachers felt comfortable in seeking support and advice. Social Exchange Theory explains how these positive exchanges increase the likelihood of retention. However, if the exchanges are largely negative, then the likelihood of novice special education teachers leaving

their positions is increased. Teacher participants were grateful with the level of support received from interlocal administrators and frequently mentioned their ready accessibility and how they were easy to approach. I conclude that the relationships established between district and interlocal administrators and their teachers are important and unquestionably affect teacher satisfaction within the dual organizational structure. When administrators provided support and communicated positive regard for teachers, the teachers expressed feelings of satisfaction that led them to reciprocate in by remaining in their positions (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Shore & Wayne, 1993). Prior research supports this conclusion and shows the level of support provided by an administrator to a novice teacher is significant when analyzing factors that increase retention (Wynn et al., 2007).

Administrators were not the only human resources novice teachers found valuable. The mentoring program provided by the interlocal was a dominant factor expressed by participants that contributed to their overall levels of satisfaction. As discussed in previous research, mentors are important in meeting the personal needs of teachers and enhancing their job satisfaction (Billingsley et al., 1995; Rosenberg et al., 1997). All novice teachers expressed a large degree of satisfaction with the mentoring program and the mentor assigned to them. In sum, the quality of the social exchange experienced by the mentor and the mentee was mutually rewarding for both parties. This relationship played a compelling role in the retention of novice special education teachers working in the dual organizational structure of the Aspire Special Education Interlocal and its member school districts.

Dual Organizational Advantages

Participants viewed some aspects of the dual organizational structure as containing advantages that were absent for teachers working in a single organizational structure. In spite of

occasional confusion about responsiveness and timeliness, one advantage was the additional capacity that came from having human, physical, and monetary resources from two or more entities available to the teacher at all times. Another important advantage observed by participants was the ability of school districts with limited resources to provide programs and services for students that otherwise would not have been available if member districts did not pool their resources. In analyzing the findings, I found that teachers made fond reference to these advantages, leading me to conclude the presence of a positive connection between the advantages and the overall teacher satisfaction with the dual organizational structure.

Implications

My findings and conclusions support my theory that working in a dual organizational structure comprised of an interlocal and its member districts presents unique circumstances for novice special education teachers. These unique circumstances add to the personal and professional needs of this group of teachers. In this section, I offer the following suggestions to policy makers, interlocal and public school administrators, and researchers.

A Need to Improve Teacher Training

This study highlighted a professional need of special education teachers with respect to managing adults. Teachers in this study were unprepared for the responsibility of managing and supervising paraprofessionals. The lack of training in this area added to the frustration and stress levels of teachers and was a major consideration in the decision of teachers to stay in or leave their positions. I offer two recommendations to improve this situation. First, teacher preparation programs should make prospective special education teachers aware of this reality well before they accept a teaching position. Furthermore, this awareness should be paired with a course on managing and supervising classroom subordinates so that teacher candidates will be better

prepared for a successful transition when they finally assume positions in the field. Second, administrators from special education interlocals and cooperatives as well as school district administration should set aside time during preschool in-service to add a level of training and support at the local level. I also recommended that frequent observation and follow up occur during the first two years of a teacher's tenure. It would be an unfortunate loss to allow the positive impact of mentoring to dissipate so I stress the importance of expanding mentoring programs to provide novice teachers with a general education mentor within their assigned building, in addition to the special education mentor provided by the interlocal. Continued mentor support can be invaluable to the novice teacher and improve the retention of teachers working in a dual organizational structure.

Further Research Needed

This study brought to light how teachers working in a dual organizational structure consisting of an interlocal and a local school district experienced circumstances unique to this arrangement. These unique circumstances add to the personal and professional needs of teachers and should not be neglected or minimized. Although the overall sentiment of teachers in the organizations represented in this study was one of satisfaction, teachers in similar dual organizational structures may experience higher levels of dissatisfaction or be exposed to additional circumstances unique to the organizations that employ them. Ongoing research should be expanded to include other interlocals, cooperatives, or similar special education service agencies throughout the U.S. in order to provide a clearer picture of the overall impact these organizations play on the retention of novice special education teachers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Consent Form



Purpose: You are invited to participate in a research study about retention of novice special education teachers working in a dual organization structure of general and special education. I hope to learn about the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers working in a dual organizational structure of general and special education, and how this structure affects their retention.

Participant Selection: You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you meet one of the following criteria:

1. You are a novice special education teacher, within your first three years of teaching, working in a dual organizational structure of general and special education, or
2. You are a veteran special education teacher supervising or mentoring a novice special education teacher in a dual organizational structure or general and special education, or
3. You are an interlocal or school district administrator who directly or indirectly supervises a novice special education teacher working in a dual organizational structure of general and special education.

Approximately 18 novice and veteran special education teacher participants will be invited to join the study along with approximately 7 administrators.

Explanation of Procedures: If you decide to participate, your involvement will consist of one individual interview that will take approximately 45-60 minutes. With your permission, I will digitally audio record and take notes during the interview. Because I am interested in learning about the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers working in a dual organizational structure of general and special education and how that affects their retention, I will ask questions that will focus on this purpose. An example of the kind of question I will use is, “To what extent does each organization--the interlocal and your local school--help meet the personal and professional needs as a novice special education teacher?”

APPENDIX A (continued)

Discomfort/Risks: I will keep all responses confidential and there are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable with a question, you may skip it.

Benefits: This research will potentially inform school district and interlocal administrators and policy makers about the unique personal and professional needs associated with being a special education teacher working in a dual organization structure of special education and general education. A key presumption is that satisfying the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers will translate into improved retention.

Confidentiality: Every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, in order to make sure the study is done properly and safely there may be circumstances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving the research team permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board;
- SEK Interlocal, USD 246, USD 250, USD 404, USD 506, & USD 508;

The researchers may publish the results of the study. If they do, they will only discuss group results. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation about the study.

Audio recordings will be stored on the co-investigators personal computer and kept in a locked and secure location for five years. .

Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University and/or SEK Interlocal or any of their member school districts. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contact: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact Brad Miner by phone at 620-249-9960 or by email at drminer2b@gmail.com. You may also contact Dr. Eric Freeman by phone at 316-978-5696 or by email at eric.freeman@wichita.edu. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above,
- You are aware that this is a research study,
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction, and

APPENDIX A (continued)

- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject _____ Date

Printed Name of Witness

Witness Signature _____ Date

APPENDIX B

Novice Teacher Interview Protocol

Novice Special Education Teacher Protocol Questions

1. Tell me your name and position and how long you have been a special education teacher.
2. Explain how you became a special education teacher.
 - a. What certification path did you take to become a special education teacher?
 - b. Was being a special education teacher your first choice?
 - c. Why did you want to become a special education teacher?
3. What is it like to be hired and employed by one organization--the interlocal, yet work in another organization--your school?
 - a. Did you receive training or preparation that specifically addressed what it would be like to work for two different organizations?
4. Before you took this teaching job, did you have any expectations for what working in a dual organizational structure would be like?
5. To what extent does each organization--the interlocal and your local school--help meet your personal and professional needs as a novice special education teacher?
 - a. Which organization—the interlocal or your local school—is more important to you personally and professionally?
 - b. How would you describe your current satisfaction level with the arrangement?

APPENDIX B (continued)

6. Are there advantages to working in a dual organizational structure?
 7. Have you experienced any special challenges or conflicts from working in this dual organizational structure?
 - a. Do these challenges or conflicts affect your decision to remain in your current position?
 8. What kinds of changes in the relationship between the two organizations would increase the likelihood of you remaining in your current position?
- What else do I need to know about working in a dual organizational structure?

APPENDIX C

Veteran Teacher Interview Protocol

Veteran Special Education Teacher Protocol Questions

1. Tell me your name and position and how long you have you been a special education teacher.
2. In what capacity do you work with novice special education teachers?
3. Describe what it is like for you now to be employed by one organization--the interlocal but work in another organization—a local school?
4. When you were first employed by the interlocal, was it difficult adjusting to working in a dual organizational structure?
5. In what ways does each organization—the interlocal and the local school—strive to meet the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers?
6. Are you aware of the dual organizational structure creating challenges or conflicts for novice special education teachers?
7. Have you known novice special education teachers whose decisions to remain in their current positions were influenced by these challenges or conflicts?
8. What kind of changes in the relationship between the two organizations might increase the likelihood of special education teachers remaining in their current positions?

What else do I need to know about novice special education teachers working in a dual organizational structure?

APPENDIX D

Administrator Interview Protocol

Administrator Protocol Questions

1. Tell me your name and position and how long you have been an administrator?
2. Describe the nature of your work with novice special education teachers.
3. What do you think it is like for a novice special education teacher to be employed by one organization--an interlocal, but work in another organization--a local school?
4. In what ways do the interlocal and the local school concern themselves with meeting the personal and professional needs of novice special education teachers?
5. Do you know of challenges or conflicts experienced by novice special education teachers that are a direct result of working in this dual organizational structure?
6. How likely is it for novice special education teachers to speak to you about these challenges or conflicts?
7. Have any novice special education teachers given these challenges or conflicts as reasons for leaving their current position?
8. Can you think of changes in the relationship between the two organizations that would make it more likely for novice special education teachers to remain in their positions?

What else do I need to know about what it is like for novice special education teachers to work in a dual organizational structure?