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Induction of Special Education Teachers in Self-Contained Classrooms for Students With Autism

Nelly A. Dixon
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Walden University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Nelly A. Dixon

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Walden University
2011

Abstract

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M.A., Walden University, 2005

B.S., Rowan University, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Education

Teacher Leadership

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Abstract

Over the past decade, the number of students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in public schools in a northeastern US state has almost tripled in number. Given a lack of preservice training on autism topics, many beginning special education teachers are ill prepared to meet the challenges of working in classrooms for students with ASD and current induction practices do not specifically support special education teachers. The perceived effectiveness of induction programs for beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD were examined in this phenomonological inquiry grounded in theories of adult learning. Through semi structured interviews that were analyzed using a modified modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, 7 beginning special education teachers in 3 types of public school settings discussed their perceptions regarding induction supports and the challenges they faced. Participants reported mentoring as the most effective induction component. Challenges were related to paraprofessionals, paperwork, student behaviors, and parent communication. The teachers expressed a need for induction activities relevant to the responsibilities of special education teachers and contexually relevant professional development. School districts need to understand challenges faced by beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD and develop induction components that support teachers in the autism field. The social implications for creating relevant induction programs are great; supporting beginning special educators in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD will retain effective teachers and may have a positive influence on student achievement and long term outcomes for students with ASD.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the very special teachers who choose to work with students with autism every day, and the mentors that wholeheartedly support them. Your strength, compassion, patience, and perseverance are the foundation from which our students can build their lives upon. Thank you to my mentor, Karen Howarth, for showing me how important mentors are in paving the path towards effective teaching, and how a positive role model can have such a lasting effect on countless other teachers and students that follow. Much of this work was influenced by you!

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It is impossible to put into words the appreciation and gratitude that I feel for the people and experiences that have brought me to this point in my life. The culmination of a supportive network of family, friends, and colleagues along with the life journey that I have traveled has contributed to the perseverance necessary to reach this milestone. I would like to acknowledge the following people from the bottom of my heart:

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My son, Ryan, thank you for just being you, and for the ***greatest hugs in the world*** when I really needed them! I hope that you might look back on my journey someday and realize that when you put your mind to something, you can accomplish it! You have seen that it isn't always easy, but with hard work and dedication, you can do anything you set your mind to!

My son, Justin, you have taught me more about patience, perseverance and achievement than anyone! You have shown me that it sometimes takes many baby steps

to make giant leaps, but if you keep walking, you will get there! My journey through life with you has shown me how to appreciate the little things in life! Thank you for all that you are, and all that you've helped me to be! You are my *superstar*!

My sister, Nancy, you have always *inspired me* to follow my dreams and work towards the goals that I've wanted to reach. I have always admired your strength and compassion more than you will ever know. Thank you for being there to listen, encourage, and support me when I needed it the most!

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Traditionally, teaching has been a profession of isolation (McCabe, 2008; McGinnis, 1968) and autonomy (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Once hired by a school district, beginning teachers were led to a classroom and left to "sink or swim" on their own as they struggled to survive the first years of teaching (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Lortie, 1975). These forces of survival have been shaped by historical factors dating back to colonial times (Hargreaves, 2000; Lortie, 1975). Hargreaves (2000) explained that once beginning teachers had completed a brief apprenticeship they were isolated in their classrooms without feedback, left to improve only by trial and error (p.156). Throughout the years, as schools began to expand beyond the one room schoolhouse, the idea of teacher isolation and autonomy remained in place. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) described this isolated first year of teaching as a "trial by fire, or boot camp experience" (p. 28). Beginning teachers' ability to survive the first year depends on their capacity to adjust to the challenges they will encounter along the way.

Beginning teachers experience significant challenges as they attempt to adjust to new professional demands and expectations (Babione & Shea, 2005; Bartell, 2005; Billingsley, Carlson & Klein, 2004; Veenman, 1984; Villani, 2009; Whitaker, 2001). Beginning teachers enter the profession with optimism and the anticipation of teaching and making a difference in the lives of their students and professional communities (Billingsley, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). However, beginning teachers often experience a sense of disillusioment and discouragment, resulting in feelings of isolation,

inadequacy, or even burnout during the first few years of teaching (Bartell, 2005; Billingsley, 2004; Gold; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002; Schlichte, Yssel,& Merbler 2005; Veenman, 1984; Whitaker, 2001).

The challenges of beginning teachers usually start when they experience difficulty transferring theory and knowledge from preservice preparation into practical application within the classroom (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Whitaker, 2001). Primary difficulties for first year teachers, including (a) classroom discipline, (b) student motivation, (c) student assessment, (d) dealing with individual differences, and (e) heavy teaching loads with insufficient planning time have been well documented in research literature (Bartell, 2005; Dollase, 1992; Gold, 1996; Veenman, 1984; Whitaker, 2001; Villani, 2009). Beginning teachers who are unwilling or unable to meet these and other challenges experience a feeling of inadequacy often resulting in high levels of attrition (Billingsley et al., 2004; Brownell, Hirsch, & Seo, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, & Yusko, 1999). Research on teacher attrition reveals that 25% of beginning teachers leave the field within the first two years (Gold, 1996; Whitaker, 2001) and at least one third leave within the first 3 to 5 years (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000; Wong, 2004; Wynn, Wilson Carboni, & Patall, 2007). Failure to retain beginning teachers in the field results in a high degree of teacher turnover, potentially impacting the quality of instruction for special education students.

Beginning special education teachers experience more intense challenges as compared to their general education counterparts (Lane & Canosa, 1995; Whitaker, 2000,

2001). While beginning special educators face many of the same challenges as beginning general education teachers, they also deal with complex issues unique to special education (Billingsley et al., 2004; Griffin, Kilgore,Wynn, Otis-Wilborne, Hou, & Garvan, 2009; Whitaker, 2001) that add to the stresses of the first year of teaching (Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn & Kilgore, 2003). These issues are discussed in greater detail in section two. Due to evolving federal mandates by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA] USDOE, 2004) more special education students are being taught in their home school districts in a variety of instructional settings from inclusion settings to self-contained classes (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Williams & Poel, 2006). As a result, teachers of special education students face challenges such as role ambiguity, teaching students with significant cognitive and behavioral difficulties, inadequate instructional and technological resources and materials, and excessive demands regarding special education policies, procedures, and paperwork (Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley et al., 2004; Boyer & Lee, 2001; Griffin et al., 2003; Schlichte et al., 2005; Whitatker, 2001; White & Mason, 2003; White & Mason, 2006). Consequently, attrition rates for beginning special education teachers, particularly those in self-contained settings (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002) are significantly higher than that of their general education counterparts (Griffin et al., 2003; Lane & Canosa, 1995). Beginning special education teachers are approximately two and a half times more likely to leave their positions as compared to beginning general education teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kennedy & Burnstein, 2004; Wynn et al., 2007) with nearly 50% of special educators leaving the field within the first 5 years

(Babione & Shae, 2005; Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley et al., 2004; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Kennedy & Burnstein; Whitaker, 2001). Beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with more significant disabilities such as autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are among the most difficult to retain (Lane & Canosa, 1995; McKleskey et al., 2004; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Boe, Cook, Bobbit, and Weber (1996) reported a 28% attrition rate for first year special education teachers. This high rate of attrition for beginning special educators is a significant contributing factor for the shortage of fully licensed special education teachers in the nation's schools (Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley et al., 2004; Boe, 2006; Brownell, et al., 2004; McKleskey et al., 2004; Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Westling, Herzog, Cooper-Duffy, Prohn, & Ray, 2006; White & Mason, 2006) which comes at a high cost in terms of student achievement (Billingsley, 2004; Brownell et al. 2004; Blanton, Sindelar, & Correa, 2006; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Wong, 2004; Wynn et al.,2007) and district budgets (American Association of State Colleges and Universities [AASCU], 2006; Brownell et al., 2004; Villar & Strong, 2007). As a result, researchers have been investigating the effects that induction support programs have on the attrition and retention rates for beginning teachers (Bartell, 2005; Billingsley, 2004; Billingsley et al., 2004; Boe, 2006; Brownell, et al., 2004; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Dollase, 1992; Gold, 1996; McKleskey et al., 2004; Veenman, 1984; Whitaker, 2001; Wong, 2004; Villani, 2009).

During the past few decades the benefits of teacher collaboration as part of a systematic induction program have been discovered (Bartell, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001,2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kardos, 2002; McCabe, 2008; Sargeant,

2003;Wong, 2003,2004; Wynn et al., 2007). In contrast to the traditional sink-or-swim initiation for beginning teachers, researchers and policy makers now realize that purposeful collegial interactions are crucial to the growth of beginning teachers' professional development (Bartell, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kardos, 2002; McCabe, 2008; Wong, 2004). As a result, the implementation of teacher induction programs has steadily increased across the United States (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Trubowitz, 2004) in an attempt to support beginning teachers. While there is still much work to be done, the growing body of research on induction is confirming the positive effects that induction programs have with regards to supporting and retaining beginning teachers (Amos, 2005; Babione & Shea, 2005; Billingsley, et al., 2004; Council for Exceptional Children,1997; Griffin et al., 2003; Whitaker, 2000; Whitaker, 2010; White & Mason, 2006).

During the 1980s, the process of mentoring, where a more experienced teacher supports a beginning teacher through the initial stages of practice (Wong, 2004), became an increasingly popular development as research focused on the unique needs of beginning teachers. High ranking problems for beginners included discipline in the classroom, student motivation, addressing individual differences among student learning styles, inadequate teaching materials, and dealing with individual student challenges (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Dollase, 1992; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Griffin et. al, 2003; Whitaker, 2000, 2001, 2010; White & Mason, 2006; Veenman, 1984). The initial studies identifying the specific needs of beginning teachers offered policymakers and

education stakeholders the information needed to begin to design effective mentoring programs as a preferred method of induction support (Whitaker, 2000).

The number of states offering induction programs grew from eight states in 1984 to 48 states by 2008 (Hirsch, Rorrer, Sindelair, Dawson, Heretick, & Jai, 2009; Kamman & Long, 2010). However, the implementation and structure of such programs varied significantly (AASCU, 2006; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Although induction programs have become increasingly popular throughout the nation's school districts, they are usually generic in design. Most districts incorporate a one-size-fits-all approach to induction, offering the same support measures to both general and special education teachers (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Trubowitz, 2004; Wong, 2004). Given the unique set of challenges faced by beginning special educators and current attrition data, a one-size-fits-all approach to induction is inadequate to support special education beginners and retain them in the field. (Amos, 2005; Babione & Shae, 2005; Müller & Burdette, 2007; Westling et al., 2006). In addition, methods of induction vary from district to district and the consequential effects on beginning teacher retention and attrition statistics are impacted by each program's method of implementation (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

During the 1998-99 school year, New Jersey's policy of induction implementation was left to the discretion of each school district, and all beginning teachers did not participate in a mentoring program (Liu & Kardos, 2002; Weiss & Weiss, 1999). Requirements for induction differed between general education and special education teachers. Until May of 2006, the New Jersey Department of

Education's (2004) policy on induction for special education teachers merely recommended a mentoring experience but did not make it mandatory. Conversely, general education teachers have been mandated by the state since 1993 to receive mentoring in their first year in order to obtain a standard instructional teaching certificate (B. Zellner, Personal communication, February 13, 2009). Newer policies in New Jersey's Department of Education state that as of January, 2008, all public school districts were required to submit a 3 year mentoring plan designed to support beginning teachers, including those certified in special education (New Jersey Administrative Code, 2008). While this is a measure intended to generically support beginning special educators, further research on induction practices for special educators needs to be examined to effectively support their unique needs.

Grossman and Thompson (2004) offered research data which suggested that school districts should maintain a primary role in addressing the concerns of beginning teachers by providing appropriate opportunities for professional growth. Grossman and Thompson's research supports the idea that the subject matter being taught by beginning teachers is an essential component in how policy and practice influence professional development practices. Beginning teachers' professional paths are dependent upon their initial experiences and what they learn about their students early in their careers (2004). Research on the needs of beginning special educators, explained in detail in section 2, offers insight into the specific responsibilities of special education teachers. Bartell (2005) discussed how beginning teachers learn most effectively while situated in the context of their professional environments. Hence, induction programs need to help

beginning teachers become acclimated to the particular circumstances in which their work is situated (Cherubini, 2007b; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Villani, 2009). By taking situational factors into consideration, districts can develop more intentional support measures which address beginning teachers' concerns (Grossman & Thompson, 2004), particularly for those in special education.

The first studies regarding induction practices specifically for special education teachers surfaced during the 1990's. Griffin et.al (2003) presented a review of the literature which discussed 10 different induction programs for beginning special education teachers in the United States. These studies, published between 1991 and 2001, offered perspectives on effective components of induction for beginning special educators. Further elaboration on key components identified from these studies is explained in section 2. However, there is a limited amount of research that discusses how induction meets the intense challenges faced by beginning teachers of students with significant disabilities, including ASD (Boyer & Lee, 2001; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; McCabe, 2008; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002). Boyer and Lee (2001) investigated the highly supportive professional environment of one successful beginning teacher for students with ASD. In contrast, Gehrke and Murri's (2006) study demonstrated the ineffectiveness that generic induction procedures have for beginning teachers for students with ASD. In a study of eight participants in a variety of classroom settings, the three teachers that did not return to their positions were those in programs for students with ASD (Gehrke & Murri, 2006).

Beginning teachers of students with ASD are presented with unique challenges which require a more intensive approach for induction (Boyer & Lee, 2005; Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, 2001; McCabe, 2008; Organization for Autism Research [OAR], 2004; Scheuermann, Webber, & Boutot, 2003; State of Washington Professional Educator Standards Board [PESB], 2008). ASD are a complex set of disabilities that inhibits one's ability to communicate, socialize, and behave in typically acceptable ways (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000). Most special education teachers have limited experience and understanding about the characteristics and behaviors of children with ASD (McCabe, 2008; Scheuermann et al., 2003). Beginning teachers often have had limited or no training in research-based strategies for instruction or alternative forms of communication systems frequently used with students with ASD (Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, 2001; Foundation for Autism Training and Education [FATE], 2007; McCabe, 2008).

The unique demands of a beginning teacher for students with ASD indicates that induction practices need to address the more particular collection of challenges faced by teachers of students with ASD. The Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism (2001) explained the importance of proper training and support for teachers of students with ASD. The committee suggested,

> Teachers must be familiar with theory and research concerning best
> practices for children with autistic spectrum disorders, including methods
> of applied behavior analysis, naturalistic learning, incidental teaching,

assistive technology, socialization, communication, inclusion, adaptation
of the environment, language interventions, assessment, and the effective
use of data collection systems. Specific problems in generalization and
maintenance of behaviors also affect the need for training in methods of
teaching children with autistic spectrum disorders. The wide range of IQ
scores and verbal skills associated with autistic spectrum disorders, from
profound mental retardation and severe language impairments to superior
intelligence make the need for training of personnel even greater (The
Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, 2001,
p. 187).

By applying what researchers have learned over the past decade about best
practices for induction of special education teachers and taking into consideration the
challenging and unique needs of the increasing number of teachers for students with
ASD, policy makers and district administrators can begin to implement effective support
measures during the induction process. Through this study, the induction experiences of
beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD
and the challenges that they face will determine whether current induction practices are
effective in supporting beginning teachers' contextual needs.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers with little experience or training in ASD are being placed in self-
contained classrooms primarily for students with ASD. The rate of students in New
Jersey ages 6 – 21 classified with ASD in public school has increased from 2,398 in 2001

to 7,504 in 2009 (New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], 2009). In 2007, The

New Jersey Governor's Initiative on Autism awarded grant monies to 38 public school

districts to establish specialized classrooms or expand upon existing programs and

services for students with ASD (NJDOE, 2007). Consequently, many more students with

ASD are being educated within the public school system. According to state trend data,

the percentage of students with ASD receiving education in a public school district has

increased by 21% between 2001 and 2009 (NJDOE, 2009). Many of these school

districts will need to hire beginning special education teachers to take on the

responsibility of teaching students with ASD. Given the constant increase of ASD

diagnoses over the past several years and the rising numbers of students with ASD in the

public school system (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009), the specific role of a

teacher for students with ASD in a public school setting is a more recent critical

development. A generic design offered by current induction programs does not provide

adequate measures of support for beginning special educators, particularly those teachers

in more challenging self-contained classroom settings. It is necessary to provide these

teachers with the appropriate measures of induction support to promote professional

growth, avoid attrition, and have a positive effect on student achievement (Carver &

Feiman-Nemser, 2009; McCabe, 2008; Scheuermann et al., 2003). To adequately

address the growing phenomenon of supporting beginning teachers with the challenges of

working in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD, school districts need to

understand the obstacles faced by these beginning teachers and strive to develop

induction programs that adequately support and retain effective teachers in the autism field.

Nature of the Study

A phenomenological method of inquiry was used in this study to develop an understanding of the common experiences (Creswell, 2007) of beginning special educators in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD. Participant experiences served to inform necessary practices for induction that might effectively support and retain beginning teachers of students with ASD in self-contained classrooms. The objective of the study was to begin to evaluate the "meaningful, concrete relations implicit in the…context of a particular situation" (Moustakas, 1994, p.14) as beginning special education teachers for students with ASD discuss their experiences regarding existing induction practices offered by their districts.

Seven beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD participated in this study. Further elaboration regarding the nature of the participants and the justification for the number of participants will be discussed in section 3. In this study, I explored the beginning teachers' experiences to determine whether current induction practices are perceived as effective; I also identified the key factors in such practices which have the greatest impact on the experience of beginning special educators, and I investigated potentially supportive components that may be missing from district induction programs. Ongoing investigations of the current needs for induction must be performed so that more effective induction programs for beginning

teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD can be established in the future.

   To develop a significant understanding of each teachers' experience of the induction process, the following research questions were used to guide the inquiry.

  1. How do beginning special educators that teach in classrooms primarily for
`   students with ASD perceive the effectiveness of their induction programs?

  2. What components of induction are implemented within the beginning
     teacher's district?

  3. How do/did beginning teachers perceive each component of induction?

  4. How does/has each induction component address beginning teachers'
     individual needs?

  At the beginning of the study, data was collected from each of the three participating districts' human resources department to gather information regarding their induction program procedures and requirements. Data was then collected from participants through semi-structured interviews regarding the primary components of induction programs. Questions explored beginning teachers' experiences and attitudes about (a) the relationship with the mentor, (b) various components of formal support including mentoring and professional development offered by the school district, (c) informal support from colleagues within the school, (d) whether each support measure had an impact on the beginning teacher's perceived effectiveness in the classroom, (e) whether each support measure has an impact on the teacher's emotional well being and related stress levels, and (f) areas of need that may not have been addressed through each

district's program. Additional details regarding specific data collection, including

interview guides and journal guidelines are explained in section 3.

Participants were asked to provide me with a reflective journal kept while

participating in their induction program. Any existing journals were collected at the time

of the interview. Audio-taped semi-structured interviews occurred at the end of the

school year during the month of June.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived

experiences of beginning special education teachers teaching in self-contained

classrooms primarily for students with ASD and to identify components of the induction

experience that contribute to the instructional and emotional support specifically for these

teachers. Given the growing phenomenon of self-contained classrooms for students with

ASD and the increased need for teachers to facilitate these classes (McCabe, 2008;

Scheuermann et al., 2003), special attention needs to be given to the unique emotional

and professional needs of beginning teachers in this field. Special education "is a

challenging field that continues to lack enough qualified teachers to fill the positions

available, so teachers often begin with little or no preparation for this physically

demanding and emotionally draining work" (Bartell, 2005 p. 14). Few teacher

preparation programs are currently training teachers in the specific procedures supported

by research that are most effective to teach students with ASD (FATE, 2007; McCabe,

2008; Scheuermann et al., 2003). As a result, beginning teachers working with limited

knowledge in the autism field who are placed in self-contained classrooms may

experience greater stress as they attempt to learn additional complex theories and strategies that are necessary to teach their students (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002).

The methods of induction and professional development offered to teachers for students with ASD need to begin to reflect the specific challenges faced by these teachers so that they, as well as their students, can reap the benefits of high quality educational experiences. By examining the effectiveness of current induction programs offered to beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD, districts and policy makers can begin the task of formulating components of induction that will support and retain these teachers.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the facets of adult learning theory. Lindeman (1926) affirmed, "In adult education, the curriculum is built around the student's needs and interests. Every adult person finds himself in specific situations with respect to his work" (p.8-9). Creating a program of induction based on adult learning principles is a challenging but essential task to increase the benefits for educators engaged in the mentoring process (English, 1999; McCaughtry, Cotheran, Hodges-Kulinna, Martin & Faust, 2005). An investigation of the literature that follows demonstrates that grounding professional development and mentoring practices in adult learning theories has a postive influence on the experiences of beginning teachers.

A myriad of of adult learning theories exist that may inform best practices in induction; section 2 includes an overview of adult learning principles and how they relate to the professional development of beginning special education teachers. There is

an expressed relationship between experience and knowledge (Dewey, 1929/2008; Foley, 2004). Dewey (1929/2008) explained that the objects in one's everyday surroundings set the stage for inquiry, offering an individual an opportunity to experience the objects and events as they occur and then develop knowledge based on the experience. This notion of incidental or experiential learning posits that experience is a primary component of learning that ties many adult learning theories together (Foley, 2004; Kolb, 1984). Other adult learning theorists use the term "situational learning" (Daniels, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Putnam & Borko, 2000) to describe the process of learning through experience. Borko (2004) discussed how teacher learning occurs in a situational perspective through different facets of practice, including the classroom, the school community, and through formal and informal collegial interactions (p. 4). Putnam and Borko (2000) identified several professional development programs for teachers which utilized a situational learning approach and concluded that the specific teacher learning goals were a factor in the contexts and outcomes of effective professional development. In essence, situational learning theory infers that experience alone shapes new knowledge; learning is not situated in the individual's reflective process of an experience (Fennwick & Tennant, 2004).

It can be argued that as adults learn, they begin to make adjustments in their attitudes and perspectives. Thoughts and ideas are transformed as new knowledge is accommodated. The insights that result can be grounded in the theory of transformative learning (Cranton & King, 2003; Mezirow, 1997/2003). As teachers critically examine their own practices they begin to develop different ways of perceiving what they do,

thereby engaging in a transformative process (Cranton, 1996; Cranton & Wright, 2008). Mezirow (1997/2003), who first developed transformational learning theory, concluded that the act of critical self-reflection is an essential factor which can result in "significant personal transformations" (1997, p. 7). It is this comprehensive framework of adult learning that researchers need to consider when examining best practices for supporting beginning teachers as they develop through their experiences during the first year of teaching.

Current literature on induction stresses the importance of meeting the specific contextual needs of beginning teachers (Billingsley et al., 2004; Boyer & Lee, 2001; Cherubini, 2007a; Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003;Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Griffin et al. 2004; Grossman & Thompson, 2004; Lane & Canosa, 1995;McCabe, 2008; PESB, 2008; Schlichte et al., 2005). Cherubini (2007a) argued that beginning teachers should not merely be subjected to standardized induction practices, but should "be the catalysts of their own professional growth and development…that emanates from their own experiences" (p.2).

Feiman-Nemser (2003) discussed how beginning teachers require a variety of situated conditions to affect change and transformation in their practice. These conditions include (a) considering why new practices are beneficial and valuable, (b) seeing examples of practices under realistic conditions,(c) experiencing practices firsthand, and (d) receiving continuing support to ensure that learned practices become ingrained in their teaching (p. 24). Several studies on induction specifically for beginning special education teachers confirmed the need for individualized induction

practices (Billingsley et al., 2004; Boyer & Lee, 2001; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Griffin et al. 2003; Lane & Canosa, 1995; Schlichte et al., 2005).

Whitaker (2000) engaged in one of the first studies to investigate the specific challenges that beginning special educators face in order to establish a framework of effective mentoring practices explicitly for special education. Whitaker's findings concluded that a mentor should (a) be an experienced special educator teaching a similar population of students, (b) work in the same building, (c) be trained in the role of mentor, and (d) provide emotional and instructional support. These findings begin to address the unique situated contexts that effect the growth and development of beginning special educators.

Through emerging growth and development of beginning teachers' practice, teachers can begin to transform their abilities from novice to professional. Mezirow (1997, 2003) emphasized that transformative learning requires a learner's new information be processed into an existing frame of reference; however, the learner "may have to be helped to transform his or her frame of reference to fully understand the experience" (p.10). Mentors, under the framework suggested by Whitaker (2000), can assist beginning special educators with their process of tranformation. Griffin et al.'s (2003) review of 10 different special education induction programs, including Whitaker's, led the authors to conclude that "induction supports must deal directly with the needs that emerge from the unique contexts in which special educators find themselves in their initial teaching years" (p.31). A more recent study by McCabe (2008) on teacher training for teachers of students with ASD discussed the importance of

continuous on-the-job training and ongoing opportunities for observation, practice, and feedback for beginning teachers (p.105). These studies demonstrate the necessity of inducting beginning teachers in the unique contexts and situations in which they work, and show the importance of utilizing theories from adult learning as a foundation for planning effective induction supports for beginning teachers.

The existing research reveals a positive trend between systematic induction supports and retention rates for all teachers and has begun to examine the effects of specialized induction measures for special educators. However, researchers need additional information to determine the specific components of induction that elicit satisfaction in beginning special educators (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009). Furthermore, theories of adult learning that emphasize experience driven professional development need to be considered (Cranton & King, 2003; English, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Knowles, 1978; Kolb & Kolb, 2009; McCabe 2008; Mezirow, 1997) as key factors in induction program design. As a result, the potential for improvement in many current induction programs may lie in the ability of educational leaders and policymakers to integrate information regarding the clearly defined needs of beginning special education teachers, theories of adult learning, and the existing research data on best practices for teacher induction.

Operational Definitions of Terms

Autism spectrum disorder : A neurobiological developmental disorder that is associated with impairments in language and socialization, as well as rigid routines and

obsessive or unusual behaviors that range in severity from mild to severe (APA, 2000;OAR, 2004).

Autism classroom (or classroom for students with autism): An educational setting primarily consisting of students on the autism spectrum that utilizes specific research-based approaches that have been proven effective for students with ASD, including applied behavior analysis (ABA),verbal behavior (VB), natural environment training (NET), the pivotal response model (PRM) and/or the developmental individual – relationship based intervention (DIR) (Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, 2001).

Induction: "A comprehensive, coherent, and sustained professional development process that is organized by a school district to train, support, and retain new teachers and seamlessly progresses them into a lifelong learning program" (Wong, 2004, p.42).

Mentoring: The process of offering emotional, social, and instructional support by an experienced teacher which fosters a new teacher's ability to adapt and develop personally and professionally (Bartell, 2005). Contrary to it's interchangeable use with induction in much of the literature, mentoring is only one component, albeit a crucial one, of a comprehensive induction program (Wong, 2004).

Effective support: A beginning teacher's perception of effective support through induction will be defined as (a) meeting and addressing emotional concerns resulting from professional stress, (b) addressing and assisting in the acclimation of the social / cultural aspects of the school (c) addressing and meeting the professional /

instructional needs which elicits a sense of satisfaction regarding the functioning of the classroom and student achievement (Gold, 1996; Whitaker, 2001; Wong, 2004; White & Mason, 2006).

Retention: Maintaining a teacher in his/her current professional position within the school (Billingsley, 2004).

Attrition: A teacher who leaves or changes his/her professional role within a school or school district (Billingsley, 2004).

Assumptions

The following assumptions will be applied to the prescribed research.

1. School districts involved in the research provide mentoring and induction services as outlined in district protocols.

2. Participants in the study are in the process of participating or have participated in all aspects of mentoring and induction as outlined by district protocols within the past three years.

3. The self-contained classrooms designed for students with ASD are primarily serving students that have been diagnosed with ASD.

4. Beginning teachers in the study are in their first three years of teaching.

Limitations

The following limitations may affect the results of the prescribed research.

1. Beginning teachers have different preservice experiences which

may or may not contribute to the understanding of teaching a classroom for students with ASD.

2.   Outside influences such as parents and the nature of the surrounding community may account for differences in teacher perceptions.

3.   School cultures and the ability or inability to create professional relationships within each school will differ for each teacher, which may affect the underlying perceptions of the beginning teacher.

4.   Beginning teachers may receive varying levels of administrative or informal collegial support depending upon the number and implementation of ASD classrooms in a district, as administrators and colleagues may have different degrees of understanding regarding the nature of the responsibilities that an ASD classroom poses.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study is limited to beginning special education teachers that are teaching in self-contained classrooms primarily for students with ASD and who have participated in a district induction program within the past 3 years. Teachers selected from three separate school districts in New Jersey that were implementing a research-based program for students with ASD participated in one on one semi-structured interviews.

The primary focus of this study is to understand the experiences of beginning special educators who have been placed in the challenging role of teaching a class for students with ASD and their perceptions of the district's induction program. This study did not take into consideration the perceptions of special educators in other settings, nor did it seek to investigate the experiences of general education teachers. Given the small number of participants, the results of this study can not be generalized to a larger population; however, results can begin to address an area of research that is limited so that further investigation into beginning teacher experiences might be examined.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study to policymakers, researchers, and school districts is timely. The results from this study may assist policymakers and school leaders to attend to the specific needs of beginning special educators that teach some of the most challenging students in the public schools. By examining these needs and implementing measures deemed crucial by the research, beginning teachers can receive the necessary components of support through specialized induction procedures, thereby reducing the attrition rates of beginning special educators and increasing the number of qualified teachers that instruct programs designed to support the increasing population of students with ASD in public schools.

While there is a shortage of special education teachers (McLeskey, Tyler, & Saunders-Flippin, 2004) and the rate of attrition is high (Gold, 1996; McLeskey, et al, 2004; Whitaker, 2000; White & Mason, 2006; Wong, 2004), a thorough

examination of the most effective support measures for the teachers in the special

education field is crucial. Furthermore, the rate of ASD and the resulting

responsibility of public schools to offer appropriate education to these students is

rising at a significant rate. As a result, students who require the greatest level of

educational support may not be receiving the appropriate instructional interventions

due to a lack of experienced and qualified teachers (Committee on Educational

Interventions for Children with Autism, 2001;PESB, 2008).

The social impact that effective teachers can have on students with ASD

is cumulative in nature. A distinct corrolation between teacher effectiveness and

student achievement exists (Blanton, Sindelar, & Correa, 2006; Darling-Hammond &

Sykes, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005; Guarino,

Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Sanders & Rivers,

1996; Strong, 2006; Wenglinsky, 2002; Wong, 2004). However, teachers in self-

contained settings may demonstrate difficulties in providing adequate instruction and

impacting student learning due to the range of student academic and behavioral

abilities (Griffin et al., 2009; Nichols & Sosnosky, 2002). Given the importance of

educational interventions, teachers for students with ASD must develop specific

knowledge and skills to adequately support their students (LeBlanc, Richardson &

Burns, 2009; McCabe, 2008; Scheuermann et al., 2003).   The Committee on

Educational Interventions for Children with Autism reported,

Education…is currently the primary form of treatment in ASD. Education

is defined as the fostering of acquisition of skills or knowledge – including

not only academic learning, but also socialization, adaptive skills,

language and communication, and reeducation of behavior problems – to

assist a child to develop independence and personal responsibility

(Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, 2001,

p.12).

Effectively supporting students with ASD from an early age increases the

likelihood that these students may demonstrate better adult outcomes and become less

dependent on state and local agencies for services (Jacobson, Mulick, & Green, 1998;

Marriage, Wolverton, & Marriage, 2009). The need for induction programs to adequately

support beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD is an

important consideration for education and a contributing factor to positive long term

outcomes for these students.

Summary

Beginning special educators teaching in self-contained classrooms for students

with ASD face extraordinary challenges. Although most districts offer induction

programs for all beginning educators, a generic approach may not provide the unique

supports that teachers for students with ASD require. A phenomenological approach was

used to explore the lived experiences of beginning special education teachers within their

first 3years of teaching, and sought to determine the essential components of induction

that may have a direct impact on the support and retention of teachers in self-contained

classrooms for students with ASD.

Section 2 of this study reviews the literature beginning with an overview of adult learning theory as a conceptual framework. Adult learning theories and professional development practices are reviewed and best practices for professional development in mentoring and induction for beginning educators are discussed. Differences between induction needs for general and special education teachers are reviewed, and implications for support are identified. Section 3 explains the methods used to collect and analyze data. Section 4 outlines the results of the data and discusses participants' perceptions and experiences in depth. Finally, section 5 defines the implications of the study findings and their contribution to social change, as well as ideas for continued investigation in order to further inform the research base.

Section 2: Literature Review

The review of the literature establishes a basis of adult learning theories as they apply to the induction needs of beginning educators, particularly those in the field of special education, through mentoring and professional development. In this literature review, I present a number of adult learning theories and compare the frameworks of each theory. In addition, recent indicators of effective induction practices for all beginning teachers and comparisons between the explicit needs of beginning general and special education teachers are explained. Further, research that demonstrates the unique challenges and specific needs of special educators working with students that have more significant disabilities including ASD are addressed. Finally, literature on special education induction programs with implications and suggestions for specialized induction practices based on adult learning theories are introduced.

Literature for this study was obtained through a variety of sources. The primary contributor of resources is the Walden University Library. I gathered journal articles from a selection of databases, including SAGE, Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, ERIC, and the Teacher Reference Center. In addition, several electronic books were obtained from e-Books. Questia online library offered additional peer-reviewed journal articles and electronic books. Finally, I obtained resources and information on print books and citations through Google and Google Scholar. Keyword search terms used to locate information included: *adult learning theory, experiential learning, transformative learning, situated learning, communities of*

practice, professional development for beginning teachers, mentoring for beginning teachers, induction, induction and special education, teacher attrition, teacher retention, special education teacher attrition, special education teacher retention, induction and student achievement, teacher training autism, and *beginning teacher autism*. I considered the literature search to be saturated upon the continued finding of the same research articles across all resources and databases.

Adult Learning Theories

An Overview

The literature on adult learning theories is diverse (Kang, 2007; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). A number of theories exist that may contribute to teaching practices for adult learners, including experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Putnam & Borko, 2000), and transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997, 2003). Despite the underlying differences in the foundation of each theory, they all share a common thread –the idea that one's experiences play a critical role in the learning process (Dewey, 1916/2009; Knowles, 1978; Kolb, 1984; Lindeman, 1926; Mezirow, 1997, 2003).

It is relevant to investigate how theories of adult learning relate to beginning teachers because research shows that despite the preservice preparation provided by universities, beginning teachers are often unprepared for the reality and responsibilities of teaching (Bartell, 2005; Billingsley, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Scheuermann, Webber, Boutot & Goodwin, 2003). The most effective way that school districts can support beginning teachers is through systematic induction

programs that include professional development guided by the principles and theories of adult learning (Cranton & King, 2003).

The organization of the literature review begins with a description of several different adult learning theories followed by a comprehensive analysis of how each theory relates to the literature on professional development for teachers. Then, I discuss the literature base as it relates to induction and mentoring practices and how these practices address the needs of beginning special education teachers. Finally, I define the relationships between professional development, induction and mentoring, and adult learning theories and discuss how these topics frame the current research study.

Beginnings of Adult Learning Theory

Early literature findings from Lindeman (1926) describe the task of teaching adults, later known as andragogy (Knowles, 1978), as different than that of teaching children. Lindeman (1926) emphasized that traditional teaching formats such as pedagogy place the instructional focus on the teacher and subject matter: When teaching children, a curriculum is established and students are expected to adjust to the material. On the contrary, Lindeman stated that such traditional forms of teaching are not appropriate for adult learners and posited that adult education should be grounded in situational matter rather than subject matter since a learner's experience holds the highest value in adult education (p. 9). The notions expressed by Lindeman and others early in the 20th century gave rise to the unique aspects of adult education and the consequential emergence of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1978).

Experiential Learning Theory

Adult learning theories present the idea that knowledge is obtained through one's interpretation and analysis of personal experience (Dewey, 1916/2009; Knowles, 1978; Kolb, 1984; Lindeman, 1926). Dewey (1916/2009) was formative with his early writings regarding the relationship between experience and learning by describing experience as having both an active and passive component and explained the limited impact that experience alone has on the learning process. Dewey emphasized connections between experiences (active) and the resulting consequences (passive) as necessary means for creating changes in knowing. The consequences from each experience allows one to discover how things are connected (Dewey 1916/2009, p.207). More recent writings on experiential learning justify Dewey's position. Kolb (1984) defined experiential learning as a process of transforming experiences as a result of grasping knowledge (p.41).

Kolb and Kolb (2009) discussed a four part learning cycle model that is the foundation for the theory of experiential learning. These parts are defined as the interrelationships between (a) concrete experience, (b) abstract conceptualization, (c) active experimentation, and (d) reflective observation (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p. 299). This cycle of learning denotes a repetetive process between "experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting…that is responsive to the learning situation" (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194). The authors posited that a learner engaged in this cycle reflects upon lived experiences, then constructs abstract ideas from which to act upon in order to create new experiences. However, Beard and Wilson (2006) argued that the self-directed component of

experiential learning may contribute to learner isolation, which negatively impacts learning. Meittinen (2000) further elaborated by explaining that one's self-directed behaviors or habits are neutral experiences, often absent of reflection and argued that interactions with others about one's experience are necessary to construct higher levels of meaning from the experience.

Baker, Jensen, and Kolb (2005) proposed that one way of effectively engaging in the experiential learning cycle is through conversational learning. Conversational learning is an intentional, collaborative process that helps one to intertwine concrete and abstract knowledge to make new meanings and inform subseqent behaviors (Baker et al., 2005, p.418). Baker et al. further explained that based on one's previous experiences, an individual is influenced by preconcieved assumptions and expectations of an experience, which inevitably shapes one's participation in conversational discourse. Essentially, one's learning is continuously evolving through the learning cycle as a result of engaging in the collaborative process of conversation.

Additional research from Kolb and Kolb (2005) on experiential learning presented the concept of learning space and Lave and Wenger's (1991) situational learning theory. The learning space concept defines one's learning not only in terms of physical space, but as an exchange between a person and the physical, social, emotional, and psychological environment (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Situational Learning Theory

Situational learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which contributed to the framework of Kolb and Kolb's (2005) experiential concept of learning space, is

described as the learner's involvement in social activities in which the participants, environments, and materials are integral contributors to the development of an individual's perspective about an experience (Foley, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Putnam & Borko, 2000). The foundation of situated learning is rooted in the concept of apprenticeship and in the notion of communities of practice, defined as a cultural or social group consisting of "old-timers" and "newcomers" that interact together to promote the transfer of learning and knowledge through practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In contrast to Kolb's (1984) original experiential learning theory, Lave and Wenger postulated that the learning process does not occur in isolation, but requires one's total participation in new activities within a social context so that broader understandings and relationships in meaning about the activity are developed (p.52-53).

Situational learning is built upon the idea that the action of engaging in experience itself is what shapes new knowledge, both in a tacit and explicit sense; consequently, little emphasis is placed on reflection as a means to develop mental meanings about the experience (Wenger, 1998). The absence of reflection in situated learning theory bears a stark contrast to Dewey's (1916/2009) assertion that experience alone limits the learning process. In subsequent literature, Wenger (1998) argued that while engagement is a critical factor for learning and learning occurs within communities of practice, imagination is necessary to broaden its context through examination, reflection, and adaptation. Others argued that since much of the knowledge in communities of practice is distributed in a tacit sense throughout the community, an individual within the group may not be able to express such knowledge as a singular

being (Knight, 2002; Webster-Wright, 2009). These observations regarding the limitations that exist within communities of practice pose a valid argument for the importance of self-knowing and reflection in the learning process.

Transformative Learning Theory

Adult learning involves making adjustments in one's attitudes and perspectives: Thoughts and ideas are transformed as new knowledge is accommodated (Mezirow, 1997). According to Mezirow (1997), adults internalize and characterize their perceptions by frames of reference, defined as a collection of experiences constructed from one's previously established ideals, feelings, and impressions that influence the ways in which experiences are understood (p. 5). Transformative learning is fundamental to adult education, as adult development lies in the ability of one to participate freely in dialogue and to attain a more extensive understanding of a given experience as an avenue to further activity (Choy, 2009; Mezirow, 1997). Similar to experiential conversational learning and situated learning, transformative learning happens when learners engage in communicative learning or discourse within a group: It is an interactive method of learning that utilizes authentic instructional materials and engagement in group deliberation (Mezirow, 1997, p.10). Comparable to the obstacles faced in situated learning, McDonald, Cervo, and Courtenay (1999) cautioned against the possibility of power relationships interrupting the cycle of transformation. Shared frames of reference in a conversational discourse have the potential to inhibit interpretations and limit group perspectives (Horn & Little, 2009). Just as old-timers in a community of practice may

influence norms in traditional practice, heirarchical or cultural influences may impact one's ability to engage in transformative practice.

Under ideal conditions, the transformative learning process becomes more individualized as one engages in the process of self-reflection, reacts to new insights, and critically assesses the outcomes of an experience. Such critical reflection is what essentially causes a transformation of one's frame of reference, resulting in the capacity to create new insights and knowledge (Choy, 2009; Cranton & King, 2003; Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 1997).

Mezirow (1994; Dirkx et al., 2006) asserted that engaging in reflective action requires one to make a decision to overcome self-imposed limits in knowledge, as well as in situational and emotional contexts. The author also stated that critical reflection and transformation in learning can occur outside of a group or social context. In this way, transformation theory differs from situated learning and extends itself beyond the confines of learning as an immediate result of engagement in social action. However, Merriam (2004) criticized Mezirow's theory, stating that critical reflection requires high levels of cognitive functioning often not achieved by many adults. Merriam's claims are substantiated by studies grounded in a variety of models of cognitive development which posit most adults do not achieve the highest levels of cognitive development regardless of the model used (p.63). Mezirow (2004) acknowledged these claims, but emphasized the role of adult education is to help learners acquire the skills necessary to realize the potential for transformation.

Postmodern Approach to Adult Learning

More recently, a postmodern approach to adult learning has risen to the forefront of the literature. Kang (2007) discussed the limitations of relying on any singular learning theory and cautioned against describing learning as "adjective-plus-learning theory" (p.206). Kang further suggested that describing the learning process using a single descriptor (i.e. situated or experiential) excludes the potential for other learning possibilities. Becoming dependent on a single theory of adult learning may limit the essence of what is already known about the learning process (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004; Kang, 2007).

Adults, like children, are not generic beings. Each individual approaches any experience from a variety of perspectives, including (a) one's interpersonal relationships, (b) the culture and organization of one's workplace or community, and (c) familiar social contexts, including historical, political, and economic structures (Foley, 2004). As a result, a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning as implied in any singular theory does not appear to benefit the diversity of adult learners. To fully respect the contextual factors unique to each learner, one may adopt a more ecclectic view towards adult learning recognizing that the variety of theories and insights collectively supplement one's repertiore of educational strategies and interventions (Fenwick & Tennant, 2004, p.71). However, Brookfield (2005) argued against the fragmented postmodern approach to adult learning, stating that individual theories, although constantly refined and modified as a result of discourse, are necessary to help make sense of the environment and engage in purposeful action with predictable outcomes. In

contrast, Edwards and Usher (2001) discussed the nature of a modern society of life long learners that require constant reshaping and renewal of skills embedded in a postmodern approach rather than the reliance on skill mastery and traditional norms. Currently, professional development literature is replete with the notion of teachers becoming life long learners (Bartell, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Villani, 2009; Wong, 2004; Webster-Wright, 2009). Arguably, it is the stakeholders in public school districts who need to look through the multifaceted lense of adult learning theory as a means of professionally developing teachers in a purposeful way based on the ever changing contextual factors that they experience (Leiberman & Mace, 2008).

Adult Learning and Professional Development

Each of the learning theories discussed can make significant contributions to the topic of teacher learning (Borko, 2004; Choy, 2009; Cranton & King, 2003; English, 1999; Knowles, 1978; Loewenburg-Ball & Cohen, 1999; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Trotter, 2006). Researchers agree that professional development resulting in effective teacher learning requires much more than the same pedagogical approach traditionally used to teach young students (Aderinto, 2006; Cranton & King, 2003; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; English, 1999; Lindeman,1926; Trotter, 2006; Webster-Wright, 2009). Teachers are not motivated to produce long term changes in practice based on scripted and often irrelevant workshops given by school districts (Killian, 2002; Lieberman & Mace, 2008; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Feiman-Nemser (2001) concluded that the meshing of theories between adult learning and professional development for teachers has elicited a paradgim shift of best practices for teacher development.

Historically, teachers struggled in isolation behind closed classroom doors and were expected to gain their skills by experiences within their classrooms (Hargreaves, 2000; Lortie, 1975; McCabe, 2008; McGinnis, 1968; NEA, 2008). Professional development was embedded in a behavioral approach, focusing on observable skills and behaviors such as following a set of procedures or demonstrating a particular skill (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Murphy & Calway, 2008; Putnam & Borko, 2000). In essence, professional development opportunities were grounded in pedagogic practices (Aderinto, 2006; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004).

Researchers in the domain of adult learning suggest a framework for professional development that relies on the underpinnings of adult learning theories (Bartell, 2005; Borko, 2004; Choy, 2009; Cranton & King, 2003; English, 1999; Knowles, 1978; Loewenburg-Ball & Cohen, 1999; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Trotter, 2006; Webster-Wright, 2009). Learning experiences need to address the following factors: (a) adults are motivated to learn based on individual needs and experiences (Bartell, 2005; English, 1999; Putnam & Borko; 2000); (b) adults are primarily self-directing, and learn by an androgogical approach (Knowles, 1978; Trotter, 2006) ; and (c) experience is a learner's most valuable resource (Cranton & King, 2003; Dewey, 1916/2009; Knowles, 1978; Lindeman, 1926). Professional development should (a) provide learning opportunities that pertain to individual teacher's needs and professional responsibilities; (b) be on-going, offering follow-up support for integration of learning; and (c) involve learners in the identification and development of relevant learning needs and

instructional processes to be used (Bartell, 2005; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Murphy & Calway, 2008; Webster-Wright, 2009;Wong, 2003, 2004).

Professional Development through Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is an important consideration for effective professional development (Murphy & Calway, 2008; Trotter, 2006). Teachers learn a great deal through their daily experiences in and out of the classroom (Cole & Knowles, 2000). However, these experiences alone do not facilitate a learning process that will lead to growth and improvement in teaching practices; nor will they contribute to the overall improvement of the school community. Limiting the focus to learning by practical teaching experience alone may hinder the full development of knowledge and expertise (Day, 1999). Beard and Wilson (2006) discerned that one must connect with an experience on a deeper level and engage in a reflective process for it to have any relevancy. The authors stated, "Our awareness of (experiences) and our sensitivity to them is dependent on how 'loud' they are, our degree of interest in them, and what other stimulants are competing for our attention" (p.26). James (1890), an early metacogintive researcher suggested that due to a lack of interest, many occurances never enter into one's experience. Essentially, James concluded it is one's interest in an object or action that gives emphasis and perspective to an experience; without interest, experience is merely chaos. These statements offer support for building professional development activities that meet the needs of self-directed, experience-driven learners and address the relevance of experiential learning theory.

Professional Development Through Situated Learning

The literature on teacher learning discusses situated learning and the idea of communities of practice as a means of enhancing professional development (Borko, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Wenger, 1998). However, there appears to be interchangeability within the professional development literature regarding the terms communities of practice, professional learning communities, and teacher learning communities. Printy's (2008) rationale explained that Lave and Wenger's (1991) point of view on communities of practice does not separate purposeful learning activities from the situated learning embedded in a teacher's routine practice. This descrepency may adversely affect the advocacy of the communites of practice approach (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 189). Little's (1999) study compared professional development communities between schools. The study implied distinct differences between schools demonstrating communities of practice and those engaged in professional learning communities. Schools that follow the prescribed definition of communities of practice (Lave &Wenger, 1991) were less effective in promoting teacher learning and positive student outcomes than those engaged in critical, reflective professional learning communities which emphasize teacher collaboration, inquiry and critical reflection of practice to enhance teacher learning and ultimately, student learning (Stoll & Lewis, 2007, p. 2).

Given the often isolated nature of teaching, the literature depicts limitations within traditionally defined communities of practice for teacher learning (Day, 1999; Knight, 2002; Leiberman & Mace, 2008; Printy, 2008; Webster-Wright, 2009). Day

(1999) mentioned that teacher isolation restricts the promotion of collegial cultures; as a result, teacher collaboration is limited to discussions of planning or teaching, rarely at a deeper level for critiquing and examining practice. Knight (2002) expressed concerns that while communities of practice are the most important sites for teacher learning, they may impede the learning process in three distinct ways. First, the tacit knowledge that is distributed across the community may not be generalized between individuals, and no one person can integrate the knowledge of the whole community (Knight, 2002). Second, any new knowledge gained from professional development must compete with the established norms (i.e., rules, conventions, elements) of the community of practice; as a result, the knowledge and long term use of information from any in-service depends on it's acceptance with the community of practice. A diminished degree of acceptance limits the influence of new knowledge on teacher practice (Webster-Wright, 2009).

Likewise, other literature mentions the potential for informal communities of practice to maintain disparaging practices and enable continued predjudice and stereotypical behaviors (Printy, 2008; Wenger, 1998) which inevitably sabotages the efforts of professional development. Given these inconsistencies, the positive nature of communities of practice discussed in the professional development literature seems to refer to more intentional, organized learning communities (Day, 1999; Little, 1999; Printy; Stoll & Lewis, 2007; Wenger; Wynn et al., 2007). As such, the framework of these learning communities may be more appropriately catagorized within the facets of transformational learning.

Professional Development and Tranformation

According to Feiman-Nemser (2001), the term "professional development" has two meanings. The first focuses on the specific learning activities that teachers participate in; the second refers to the actual learning that happens as a result of participation. Essentially, professional development means making transformations in the knowledge and skills of teachers, altering what they are able to accomplish through individual and collegial practices (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p.1038). Transformative learning in professional development addresses the dichotomy between the isolated practice of teachers and their participation in a broader school community; it takes into account the need for collaboration and communicative discourse as a means to transform the knowledge and practice of an individual and the ability of one to critically reflect on his own practices (Choy, 2009; Cranton & King, 2003; Mezirow, 1994, 1997, 2003; Webster-Wright, 2009).

Transformative learning serves as a bridge between one's changing frames of reference and changes in action as a result of critical reflection and discourse (Mezirow, 1997). Beginning teachers often enter their first year of teaching with preconceived frames of reference based on their own traditional educational experiences (Bullough et al., 1992; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Lortie, 1975), which may contribute to the reality shock experienced by many beginning teachers. Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformation may offer insight into this context. Transformation begins when an individual experiences a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1994 p.223), triggering a reflective response. Reflections about the problem's

content or the problem solving process occur most frequently. The more significant reflection that leads to a transformation in one's perspective is achieved through premise reflection, defined as examining the underlying contexts with which one views the problem (Choy, 2009; Cranton & King, 2003; Fenwick & Tennant, 2004; Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow (1997) asserted that this is most effectively accomplished through the social process of discourse, which is essential to validate one's understanding and ability to form conclusions.

Beginning teachers require support to navigate their roles as students and professionals responsible for their own development (Cherubini, 2007*a*). They must also develop frameworks for thinking contextually and reflectively about their growth (Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1992; Cherubini, 2007a; Choy, 2009; Mezirow, 1997). Research shows that one of the most effective ways to support beginning teachers with this transformative process is through the implementation of a systematic professional development program of induction (Bartell, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999; Wong, 2004).

Induction of Beginning Teachers

Recent literature on induction practices demonstrates a positive corrolation between comprehensive, systematic induction and the retention of beginning teachers (Bartell, 2005; Day, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Gold, 1996; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kardos, 2002; McCabe, 2008; Sargeant, 2003;Wong, 2004;Wynn et al., 2007). The notion of teacher retention extends far beyond the concept of merely keeping teachers in their classrooms; limiting teacher turnover has

significant effects that reach into the school community as a whole (AASCU, 2006; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005; Gold, 1996; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Wong, 2004).

High turnover rates in schools adversely affect the morale and cohesion of a school community, create a sense of instability throughout the community (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004), incur high costs for school districts (Villar & Strong, 2007), and impede teacher quality (AASCU, 2006; Fulton et al., 2005; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). However, the most costly result of high turnover is its negative effect on student learning and achievement (AASCU, 2006; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Strong, 2006; Wenglinsky, 2002; Wong, 2004).

Learning to teach is a process of developmental stages (Kardos, 2003) that may take approximately 5 years before teachers begin to develop a sense of mastery (Andrews & Quinn, 2005; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Wong, 2004); as a result, retention of beginning teachers needs to be a primary concern (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Fulton et.al, 2005; Gehrke & Murri. 2006; Kajs, 2002; Wynn et al., 2007). Research demonstrates a relationship between teacher quality and student achievement (Blanton, Sindelar, & Correa, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Fulton et al, 2005; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Strong, 2006; Wenglinsky, 2002; Wong, 2004) and teacher quality for beginning teachers is positively affected by systematic induction practices (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Cherubini, 2007*a*, 2007*b*; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Gold, 1996; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000; Wong, 2004); therefore,

one can postulate a positive corrolation between student achievement and teachers who have successfully completed a sytematic induction program (Fulton et al.2005; Strong, 2006). Strong (2006) reported that due to the complex nature of the investigation no current refereed literature directly relates induction support to student achievement. However, research on the New Teacher Center's (NTC) Induction Model and Educational Testing Services (ETS) Pathwise program is currently underway through the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Services to investigate the components of induction that impact teacher quality, retention, and student achievement (AASCU, 2006).

Purpose of Induction

While the literature identifies systematic induction as an effective way to increase retention rates, the primary purpose of induction is to help beginning teachers reach their full potential as effective teachers by planting the seed of lifelong development and professional growth (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Bartell, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Fulton et al., 2005; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Wong, 2004). Current definitions of induction identify primary goals for providing support and promoting teacher development, including (a) helping beginners through the initial survival stage, usually through mentoring (Bartell, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Kajs, 2002; Wong, 2004), (b) integrating beginners into the school community and culture (Fulton et.al, 2005, Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003; Johnson & Kardos, 2002), and (c) providing continued opportunities for collaboration, sharing, and critical reflection that supports the sustained development of all teachers in the school (Wong, 2004).

Induction Through Collaboration

Beginning teachers benefit from school cultures that offer a high degree of faculty interaction and structured induction programs that are tailored to beginning teachers' specific needs (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Kardos, Moore Johnson, Peske, Kaufman, & Lui, 2001; Trubowitz, 2004). This finding is consistent with adult learning literature which emphasizes learning based on social and communicative discourse and professional development that meets one's individual needs and experiences. A large scale review study discussed by Feiman-Nemser (2003) focused on data collected by the New Teacher Induction Center in Santa Cruz, California, on three very well known and successful induction programs in the country. The results of this study stressed the importance of legitimate collegial collaboration and a supportive school culture. Feiman-Nemser concluded that schools need to actively endorse a culture of collaboration, where all teachers are responsible for induction to prevent beginning teachers from experiencing a sense of isolation with their concerns. A similar induction program analysis by Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2009) on three highly regarded induction programs confirmed these conclusions, but reported that induction programs of high regard are too few in numbers. They explained that induction policies are often limited by different agendas and influences of state, district, and institutional partners.

Cherubini (2007*b*) compared beginning teacher's perceptions of two separate systematic induction programs. While each contained the necessary components of a comprehensive induction program, the underlying purpose of each program differed significantly. One district implemented the program with the primary purpose of

retaining beginning teachers by helping them through the survival stage through generic in-services and "fragmented" support (Cherubini, 2007*b*, p.8). The second district held the philosophy that induction was a vehicle to promote each beginning teacher's development and "continuum of learning" (Cherubini, 2007*b*, p. 9) through self-directed professional development opportunities and a supportive collaborative culture within the school. Results from the qualitative study indicated significant differences in the perceptions of the beginning teachers. Those who were provided generic support felt that the induction practices perpetuated a hierarchical environment and promoted a false sense of concern for the beginning teachers. Conversely, beginning teachers who received induction based on their individual needs felt respected as professionals and welcomed into a community dedicated to professional growth, demonstrating that the induction stakeholders were insightful and reactive to their needs as teachers and learners. As a result, Cherubini (2007*b*) recommended that induction be redefined to include professional development that is "personally relevant" while promoting and validating beginning teachers' sense of equality and leadership throughout the school (p.10). Consequently, these studies emphasized the positive impact of research-based, self-directed professional development opportunities and purposeful collegial collaboration during induction as an essential component of any beginning teacher's transformational process.

Beginning Teacher Development

Researchers have identified key developmental stages that beginning teachers go through during the induction phase of their career (Bartell, 2005; Cheyney, Krajewski

& Combs, 1992; Moir, 1999, Villani, 2009; Whitaker, 2001). Cheyney et al.(1992) identified five microphases of survival that beginning teachers experience as they progress through the first year including (a) ordering materials and utilizing time effectively; (b) timing, planning, and management of curriculum, assessments and behavior; (c) experimentation in programming and instruction; (d) long-range planning; and (e) focus on students' emotional, psychological, and community needs.

Moir (1999) recognized five phases of development which begin prior to beginners starting their first job. Beginning teachers experience the (a) anticipation phase, excited and eager to begin teaching; (b) survival phase as they plan, prepare, organize and establish procedures while becoming acclimated to a new school environment; (c) disillusionment phase, which is often the most challenging to survive as teachers question their abilities and competence; (d) rejuvenation phase, usually occurring after winter break where beginning teachers demonstrate a sense of hope and improved attitude, and; (e) reflection phase, a time of review and analysis of what did and did not work throughout the year and the anticipation of a fresh start for the next year (Villani, 2009).

Elliot (1993) described a set of interactive phases that teachers move through as they progress through their careers. Phase 1 focuses on a beginning teacher's initial process of self evaluation. Phase 2 begins a reflective process. Phase 3 encompasses a teacher's capacity to reflect and evaluate actions and choices and phase 4 elicits a struggle between expertise and intuition. However, any of these developmental stages can occur at different or recurring times during a teacher's career (Elliot, 1993; Moir,

1999; Villani, 2009). Teachers may find themselves cycling through any of the phases depending on changing professional contexts. Most beginning teachers begin in phase 1 where they frequently tend to self-evaluate in attempts to bridge the gap between preservice student and teacher (Moir, 1999). While these development models used to track the phases of teacher growth may demonstrate differences in terminology or timing, they share definite similarities (Elliot, 1993; Moir, 1999; Villani, 2009).

Beginning teachers are initially focused on their own personal survival needs and must eventually evolve through different stages before they are able to focus on the needs of their students (Cheyney et al., 1992; Kajs, 2002; Whitaker, 2001). What this means in terms of beginning teacher induction is that as beginning teachers progress through the initial phases of teacher development, they require intense measures of support to successfully navigate their way through. Also, the phases implicate a need for support based on adult learning theories so that the unique developmental needs of beginning teachers can be addressed based on their individual experiences and contexts. Therefore, it is in the best interest of school districts to offer systematic induction programs based on the unique needs of beginning teachers in order to increase teacher retention rates, improve school communities, and promote student achievement (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Cherubini, 2007b; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Wynn et al., 2007).

Induction in Special Education

Given the significantly higher attrition rates of special education teachers (Babione & Shae, 2005; Billingsley et al., 2004; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Griffin et al., 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kennedy & Burnstein, 2004; Lane & Canosa, 1995;

Whitaker, 2001), and the overall shortages of special education teachers (Boyer &

Gillespie, 2000; Brownell et al., 2004; McLeskey et al., 2004;), the notion of induction

that addresses the specific needs of beginning special education teachers is crucial (Boyer

& Gillespie, 2000; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Griffin et al., 2003).

Needs of Beginning Special Education Teachers

   In a qualitative study utilizing focus groups and interviews, Whitaker (2001)

reported that three of the primary needs of beginning special educators are directly

related to the social and cultural aspects of teaching, including (a) coping with emotional

stress, (b) becoming acclimated to the school culture, and (c) creating positive

relationships with administrators and colleagues. While these primary needs are similar to

those of beginning general education teachers (Amos, 2005; Whitaker, 2001), the specific

challenges faced by beginning special educators are what makes their experience so

difficult (Bartell, 2005; Billingsley, 2004; Boyer & Gillespie, 2000; Griffin et al., 2003;

Westling et al., 2006). Some of the responsibilities encountered by beginning special

educators include (a) understanding regulations and procedures set forth by the

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA 2004); (b) advocating for special education

students within the school culture and in inclusive settings; (c) developing relationships

and working effectively with paraprofessionals; (d) collecting data and documenting

student progress according to individualized education programs [IEPs] (Gehrke &

Murri, 2006), and; (e) managing large caseloads of students with many who may pose

complex behavioral or cognitive challenges (Boyer & Gillespie,2000; Griffin et al.,2003;

Whitaker, 2000). In addition, beginning special educators often feel as though they have

inadequate administrative support (DiPaola et al., 2004; White & Mason, 2006), lack of appropriate professional development opportunities (Griffin et al., 2003) and do not have ample opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships with colleagues (Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Whitaker, 2001; White & Mason, 2006). Considering beginning teachers naturally experience difficulty as they attempt to transfer theoretical knowledge into practice (Bullough et al., 1992; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Whitaker, 2001), this difficult "role negotiotiation" (Bullough et al., 1992), combined with the intense responsibilities of teaching students with disabilities creates a great deal of emotional stress for a beginning special education teacher (Billingsley & McCleskey, 2004; Whitaker, 2001).

Currently, limited research is available regarding how the components of systematic induction programs meet the specific needs of beginning special education teachers (Müller & Burdette, 2007). Griffin et al. (2003) reviewed 11 induction programs designed to meet the specific needs of special educators. In Fairfax County, Virginia, beginning teachers of students with disabilities in elementary settings are assigned a mentor in the field of special education, and may participate in a 17-session induction course to assist with implementing and modifying specially designed curricula and working with students with challenging behaviors (Griffin et al., 2003, p.17) in addition to the regular 17-session induction course designed for all beginning teachers (Griffin et al., 2003; Boyer & Gillespie, 2000). This induction option was designed to meet the needs for beginning teachers working with particular student populations, meeting the contextual needs identified in adult learning and professional development literature

(Griffin et al., 2003). Data showed that 90% of beginning teachers that participate in the induction program remain in the district (Auton, Berry, Mullen & Cochran, 2002).

In California, the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program-Special Education (BTSA-SE), established through a partnership with California State University-Northridge, offers comprehensive mentoring practices and formative assessment measures that have been adapted for special education. Beginning teachers are assigned trained mentors with special education experience to provide individualized emotional and practical support (Griffin et al., 2003). In addition, the assessment process provides beginning teachers with a systematic guide to professional development needs determined through self-reflection and self-assessment activities (Kennedy & Burnstein, 2004). Further, districts planned professional development opportunities based on participant suggestions. The overall participant ratings of the program averaged above 4.0, and the retention rate of teachers who participated in the program was 95% after 3 years (Kennedy & Burnstein, 2004). The findings from these two studies yielded impressive results that have positive implications for the field of teacher induction for special educators; further, they demonstrated the positive effects that programs grounded in best practices of professional development and adult learning have on beginning teachers (Auton et al., 2002; Griffin et al., 2003; Kennedy & Burnstein, 2004).

Griffin et al.'s (2003) comprehensive review also indicated that special educators have similar needs regardless of their geographic regions. Some of these shared needs are (a) the need for emotional support; (b) assistance in special education paperwork and procedures; (c) frequent informal assistance provided by a mentor; and (d)

having a mentor who is also a special education teacher (Boyer & Lee, 2001; Cheyney et al., 1992; Lane & Canosa, 1995; Whitaker, 2000). However, not all studies in Griffin et al's comparison used special educators as participants. Some were teachers in graduate programs, while others were general education teachers or related service providers. Consequently, the generalization of results from these studies to beginning special education teachers is limited.

A large scale study completed by White and Mason (2006) focused primarily on the needs of beginning special education teachers in diverse geographic locations across the United States. The study piloted and evaluated a set of mentoring and induction guidelines established in conjunction with the Council for Exceptional Children [CEC] (White & Mason, 2003). Like Griffin et.al (2003), White and Mason's (2003) Mentoring Induction Guidelines also indicate the measures of support required to address the specific needs of special educators, including the need for assistance with special education paperwork and emotional support. Furthermore, the guidelines recommend the utilization of a self-assessment tool to be completed by beginning teachers on a quarterly basis and suggest comprehensive training for mentors in supportive practices including active listening and conflict resolution (White & Mason, 2003). The data from White and Mason's (2006) completed study indicated that the prescribed guidelines are a valuable asset to school districts and are effective for use with teachers in a variety of instructional settings from self-contained to inclusion classrooms. Given the large scope of the study, generalization of results appears reliable and promising as an authentic and effective means of special education induction support available for immediate use by school

districts (White & Mason, 2003). However, while most of the aforementioned systematic induction programs may have included some beginning special education teachers placed in self-contained settings, the literature does not differentiate retention rates and successful support measures by teacher placement. Given that teacher's placed in self-contained settings for students with significant disabilities have the lowest retention rates of all beginning special educators (Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Lane & Canosa, 1995), further research on retention rates and effects of special education induction for teachers in self-contained settings needs to be investigated.

Special Educators in Self-Contained Settings

Most studies found in the literature failed to specifically address the challenges faced by teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with significant disabilities in a public school system. Special educators who teach students in self-contained classrooms are often responsible for multi-level instruction at a variety of grade levels (Busch, Pederson, Espin & Weissenburger, 2001; Lane & Canosa, 1995; MacDonald & Speece, 2001; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002); as a result, the ambiguity of where to fit in may potentially hinder the availability or effectiveness of built-in collaborative activities for the beginning teacher (Griffin et al., 2003; Gehrke & Murri, 2006). Gehrke and Murri (2006) conducted a mixed-method study of eight beginning special education teachers across a variety of instructional settings. More than half taught in self-contained settings. Three were placed into programs for students with ASD. The findings of Gehrke and Murri's (2006) study showed that all three teachers for students with ASD chose not to return to their positions. Some key challenges reported by the teachers included

difficulty managing paraprofessionals, developing relationships with general education teachers, and being placed in newly implemented educational programs for which the teachers had no prior training. Systematic induction procedures were not evident, reporting the absence of a mentor in one case, and the lack of professional development opportunities specific to the nature of teaching students with ASD in the other two cases. Gehrke & Murri (2006) reported that teachers felt significantly unsupported by their districts. Essentially, districts were unable to define the role of the teacher and provide appropriate materials and resources; programs were hastily created to meet the increased population of students with ASD. Given the rise in classrooms for students with ASD, McCabe (2008) stressed the importance of the need for teachers of students with ASD to have specific skills and knowledge that is pertinent for implementing appropriate interventions and educational programming for their students.

Boyer and Lee's (2001) case study offered insight into one teacher's first year teaching experience for students with ASD. While the expressed obstacles faced by the teacher addressed the intensity of the experience, the teacher's background is not typical of most beginning teachers. In this case study, the teacher came from an extensive background of working with children with disabilities and had previously worked in a classroom for students with ASD as a paraprofessional. Furthermore, her school offered exceptional support measures that, according to the literature, are not commonplace in many districts.

While much of the literature ascertains that lack of administrative support is a common cause of teacher attrition (Billingsley et al., 2004; DiPaola, Michael, Tschannen-

Moran, Megan, Walther-Thomas,& Chriss, 2004; Whitaker, 2001) the teacher in Boyer

and Lee (2001) stated, "I think I had the most supportive principal and assistant

principal…They constantly assured me of their support by telling me how proud they

were of the way that I was taking care of my students…" (p.82). Furthermore, the study

participant discussed other available methods of support including an autism program

specialist and a variety of resources and support networks from special education

administrative staff offices in the district (Boyer & Lee, 2001). Due to the limited scope

of this study, little generalization can be made; however, the study does reflect the

accuracy of other research findings that administrative and collaborative supports are

crucial to the survival and retention of beginning teachers (Billingsley et al., 2004;

DiPaola et al. 2004; Griffin et al., 2003; Gerhke & Murri, 2006; Whitaker, 2001).

       Mastropieri (2001) summarized similar challenges expressed by first year

special education teachers in a variety of resource and self-contained classrooms for

students with emotional disabilities (McDonald & Speece, 2001), learning disabilities

(Busch et al., 2001), and ASD (Boyer & Lee, 2001). Consequently, teachers reported

similar concerns, specifically citing issues with managing paraprofessionals, challenges

with inclusion and general education teachers, and being placed in mismatched

assignments that were not addressed in preservice education (Mastropieri, 2001). As a

result, Mastropieri recommended that additional on-the-job supports should be

implemented to assist beginning teachers with the explicit responsibilities of their

position (p. 72). Gehrke and McCoy (2007) confirmed this notion by stating that

researchers must now investigate beginning special educators' perceptions of what

constitutes effective support given their unique situational contexts (p.32) to inform

stakeholders and improve retention for beginning special educators across all program

settings. Based on these few findings, more research is needed to provide additional

insights into the nature of the challenges facing teachers placed in more challenging

classroom settings and ways in which induction can support them in their endeavors.

Mentoring

Mentoring partnerships have proven to be essential components of an

induction program, important to the survival of beginning teachers (Amos, 2005; Bartell,

2005; Boyer & Gillespie, 2000; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009;Griffin et al., 2003;

Mandel, 2006; McCann & Johannessen, 2008; Whitaker, 2000, 2001; White & Mason,

2006; Wong, 2004; Wynn et al., 2007). Professional interactions provided through

mentoring offer beginning teachers emotional support, ideas and strategies to deal with

the day to day situations that arise as they become acclimated to their professional

responsibilities, and assist beginners in shaping teaching practices to become proficient in

the classroom (Bartell; Gold, 1996; McCann & Johannessen, 2008; Sargeant, 2003;

Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000; Villari, 2009).

To be effective, mentoring needs to be an organized, structured part of

induction (Bartell, 2005, p.72; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Gold, 1996; Jones &

Pauley, 2003). Unfortunately, not all school districts realize the importance of structure

in a mentoring program and fail to implement a program that effectively supports the

beginning teacher (Amos, 2005; Fulton et al., 2005; Gold, 1996; Trubowitz, 2004; Wynn

et al.,2007). A distinct difference exists in the effects of mentoring when participating in

a well designed mentoring program versus merely being assigned a mentor by the building administrator (Trubowitz, 2004; Wong, 2004).

The effectiveness of a mentoring program lies in the ability of the mentor to support a beginning teacher in many different ways (Gold, 1996; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kajs, 2002; Kardos, 2002; Lee et al., 2007; Trubowitz, 2004; Villari, 2009; Whitaker, 2001; White & Mason, 2003; Wong, 2004). Currently, most mentoring programs are designed to assist the beginning teacher through the first year of teaching (Amos, 2005; Andrews & Quinn, 2005; Bartell, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Whitaker, 2000, 2001). Research consistent with beginning teacher development reveals that mentoring programs that endure the first 2 to 3 years of a beginner's career are most effective (AASCU, 2006;Darling-Hammond, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003; Fulton et al., 2005; Gerhke & Murri, 2006; Wong, 2004). Researchers suggests that beginning teachers who feel supported within their school cultures have a higher degree of well-being, which impacts the likelihood of retention (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Lee et al., 2006; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000; Whitaker, 2001; Wynn et al., 2007).

Ingersoll and Smith (2004) reported that regularly scheduled opportunities for collaboration, common planning time, and having a mentor in the same subject area were among the strongest measures of support. Furthermore, mentors need to be given the necessary information and strategies to effectively assist beginning teachers with specific challenges as they develop throughout their first year (Bartell, 2005; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; White & Mason, 2003; Whitaker, 2001; Wong, 2004). Kajs (2002) emphasized the importance of establishing guidelines for mentor selection, and providing

the mentor with professional development that focuses on the stages of teacher

development and adult learning principals. Feiman-Nemser (2003) stressed the

importance of taking mentor training seriously so that induction programs can benefit

from their ability to engage in critical conversations with their mentees. Mentors who

have the ability to engage their mentees in such conversations offer beginning teachers

the framework for reflective practice and problem-solving (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003;

Lee et al., 2006; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000; Villani, 2009). Mentoring needs to

extend beyond concentrating on curriculum and instructional techniques and imposing

traditional norms and ideas; it is more of a process of allowing a beginning teacher to

build upon individual strengths as a means of development (Trubowitz, 2004; Wong,

2004).

Feiman-Nemser and Remillard (1996) discussed the importance of the mentor

to become a key figure in cognitive apprenticeship, modeling and coaching the beginning

teacher through activities that are situated in classroom practice, fading support gradually

to encourage autonomy. Further, English (1999) emphasized that mentoring is ultimately

about encouraging beginning teachers to be self-directed so that they gain the ability to

work independently.

The empowerment of beginning teachers with skills extending beyond the

ability to merely survive the first few years of teaching lies in the hands of educational

stakeholders. Research on mentoring establishes the importance of a well-planned

program to benefit the needs of both mentors and the beginning teachers they serve

(Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Lee et al., 2006; Wynn et.al,

2007; Villani, 2009). Mentoring plays an important role in the support and initial development of a beginning teacher as a crucial part of the induction process and needs to be implemented within a framework of research-based best practices.

Mentoring in Special Education

Mentoring for beginning special education teachers is a critical component of induction to help desperate beginning teachers progress beyond the survival phase (Boyer & Gillespie, 2000; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Griffin et al, 2003, Whitaker, 2001; White & Mason, 2003). Research has shown that beginning special education teachers recognize that mentoring is more effective when one is paired with an experienced special education teacher, primarily because of the unique instructional challenges and responsibilities presented by working with students with disabilities (Amos, 2005; Whitaker, 2000, 2001).

Whitaker (2001) defined the kinds of formal and informal supports that mentors should provide in order to be most helpful in developing the skills and morale of the beginning special education teacher. Some of these supports include (a) checking in with the beginning teacher on at least a weekly basis to answer questions; (b) holding monthly meetings designed to address more in-depth concerns or issues; (c) providing opportunities for school orientation and staff introductions; (d) arranging for classroom observations in both the mentor's and the mentee's classrooms and offering suggestions and feedback accordingly; (e) assisting with special education policies, paperwork, and procedures, and (f) orienting the beginning teacher to instructional materials and

resources (Whitaker, 2001). Whitaker's study gave initial validation to the direct emotional and instructional needs expressed by beginning teachers in special education.

Müller and Burdette (2007) identified programs throughout six states in the United States that have a specialized mentoring component for beginning special educators. However, the implementation, funding, and degree of participation by beginning teachers within these programs appear to have slightly less impact on the effects on teacher retention as compared to the systematic induction programs discussed previously (Griffin et al., 2003; Kennedy & Burnstein, 2004). Arkansas' mentoring program mandates 2 hours of weekly face-to-face meetings plus an additional 2 hours of mentoring time each week for special education teachers. (Griffin et al., 2003) Mentors must attend a 3day ETS Pathwise Mentor Training plus an additional half day to address the specific challenges of beginning special education teachers. Retention rates for this program as of 2007 were 78% for first year teachers (Müller & Burdette, 2007, p.11).

Florida implements a unique mentoring model, called mentoring pods, in several districts across the state. Mentoring pods, consisting of four to nine teachers, meet weekly to develop problem solving skills and become familiar with the school culture as a means to reduce the isolation traditionally felt by beginning teachers (Miller & Burdette, 2007) Mentors are chosen through an intensive process and assigned to mentees in their school building (Miller & Burdette). In addition, pods are provided with research-based literature on a monthly basis to be utilized as part of the professional development process (Miller & Burdette). Districts that implement the mentoring pod

approach demonstrate an 83% retention rate, as compared to 57% retention in other Florida districts (Miller & Burdette, 2007, p. 11).

The success of Florida's mentoring pods demonstrates support for findings reported by Gerston, Deating, Yovanoff, and Harniss (2001) which reported that beginning special educators who participate in district or school based professional communities demonstrate an increased commitment to teaching, resulting in higher rates of retention. Wong (2003) reported on a study by the American Institute for Research, stating that teachers who participate in collaborative groups and networking learn more than with mentoring. Further, the Teacher Support Program, researched by Westling et al. (2006) found that a program for beginning special educators that encompassed collaborative group meetings as a key form of support and professional development elicited positive feedback from voluntary participants. These findings implicate that a one-to-one mentor relationship, while effective to meet the day to day survival needs, may be less adequate in supporting beginning special education teachers than a collaborative group system of support (Westling et al., 2006).

Literature on mentoring for beginning teachers of students with severe disabilities, including ASD is limited (Billingsley & McCleskey, 2004; Lane & Canosa, 1995). While few studies focus on one-on-one mentoring for these beginning teachers (Boyer & Lee, 2001; Lane & Canosa, 1995; MacDonald & Speece, 2001) fewer studies document the effects of collaborative support systems for beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms (Nichols & Sosnosky, 2002; McCabe, 2008). The lack of collegial support, possibly enhanced by the unfamiliarity that general education teachers have of

students with significant disabilities, increases the sense of isolation and role ambiguity felt by the beginning special education teachers (Gersten et al., 2001; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002).

A case study of a first year special education teacher for students with emotional disabilities reported by MacDonald and Speece (2001) discussed the difficulties that the beginning teacher endured as she participated in team meetings. The teacher was caught in the community of newcomer versus old timer (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and often succumbed to the decisions made by more experienced team members regardless of her own opinions. Further, the teacher expressed concern of the absence of a designated mentor, stating that the district mentoring program provided administrators from across the district to serve as mentors for a number of beginning teachers MacDonald & Speece, 2001). While this beginning teacher was able to successfully endure her first year of teaching, the case study reiterates the many challenges and needs for support expressed in the body of literature on beginning special educators (Boyer & Lee, 2001; MacDonald & Speece, 2001; Miller & Burdette, 2007; Whitaker, 2001).

The existing studies place particular emphasis on the need to have mentors that are familiar with the population of students that beginning teachers are responsible for (Lane & Canosa, 1995; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002). Given that university preservice programs cannot adequately prepare beginning teachers for working with such a diversified population of students (Lane & Canosa; Nichols & Sosnowsky; Scheuermann, Webber, Boutot & Goodwin, 2003), it is necessary for school districts to

provide effective professional development through collegial support (Gersten et.al, 2001; McCabe, 2008).

McCabe (2008) discussed a successful teacher training program for beginning teachers at The Autism Institute, a school for students with ASD in China. The program utilized experienced teachers in the field of ASD as mentors, providing both instructional and emotional support, conducting observations, and modeling effective practices that connect theoretical and practical knowledge (McCabe). In addition, beginning teachers' induction programs were structured as internships that gradually evolved throughout the teachers' first year (McCabe). The researcher concluded that this systematic induction process that places a strong emphasis on effective mentoring practices and a highly developed professional learning community had a positive effect on beginning teacher's sense of efficacy. While the results of McCabe's study demonstrated positive outcomes for beginning teachers of students with ASD, it is difficult to generalize these effects for beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms in public schools that may not have a community of teachers familiar with the challenges of teaching students with ASD. However, it is important to note that the program implemented a number of effective research-based practices in adult learning and professional development discussed within this paper, and adds to the literature by connecting best practices and effective support for beginning teachers for students with ASD.

Summary

The examination of the literature on induction in both general and special education has shown many commonalities between the needs and effective support measures for beginning teachers (Bartell, 2005; Boyer & Gillespie, 2000; Gerke & Murri, 2006; Griffin et al., 2003; Veenman, 1984; Whitaker, 2001). Most of the research available on beginning teacher induction programs does not stratify teacher populations between general and special education, but does seem to offer important information regarding the needs of all beginning teachers. The limited research designed around special education offers additional insights regarding the explicit needs of beginning special educators and some induction strategies that may be beneficial to the special educator; however, this literature is less abundant (Billingsley, Carlson & Klein, 2004).

The establishment of effective induction practices is crucial to the survival and retention of beginning special education teachers (Bartell, 2005; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996; Gold, 1996; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kardos, 2002; McCabe, 2008; Sargeant, 2003;Wong, 2004). The stakeholders who assume the responsibility for offering such programs need to consider several notions. First, supportive measures need to be grounded in adult learning theories that respect the unique contextual factors of each learner (Bartell, 2005; Cranton& King, 2003; Trotter, 2006). Induction practices need to offer support through a combination of experiential and situational factors (Feiman-Nemser, 2003), communities of practice (Trubowitz, 2004; Wong, 2004), critical reflection (Mezirow, 1999; Trubowitz, 2004), self-evaluation, and continued opportunities for collegial interactions

and professional development (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; White & Mason, 2003; Wong, 2004) beyond the first year of practice.

Finally, the large body of research on effective mentoring strategies should inform the operational aspects of a newly developing or existing program. Although less research is available regarding the explicit needs of beginning special educators, the information that has been established is supported by existing studies (Auton et al., 2002; Boyer & Lee, 2001; Gehrke & Murri, 2006;Griffin et al., 2004;Mastropieri, 2001;McDonald & Speece, 2001; Whitaker, 2001;White & Mason, 2006). Moreover, the existence of a systematic induction program with relevant and continuous professional development opportunities is crucial. Learning to teach is a multi-year developmental process; therefore, a district's professional development program needs to be sustained, systematic, and directed at the needs of each beginning teacher (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Cherubini, 2007a, 2007b; Fulton et al., 2005; McCabe, 2008;Wong, 2004;Wynn et al., 2007).

While the existing research demonstrates a positive trend between mentoring, systematic induction supports, and retention rates for all teachers and has begun to examine the effects of specialized induction measures for special educators, researchers need additional information to determine the specific components of induction that elicit satisfaction in beginning special educators. The potential for developing or improving teacher mentoring and induction programs is great. Further, the ability to support teachers in the self-contained in classrooms for students with ASD lay in the capacity of researchers, educational leaders, and policymakers to integrate information regarding the

specific needs of beginning special education teachers with the existing research data on adult learning theories, professional development, and beginning teacher induction. By incorporating the best practices into supportive programs, beginning special education teachers can begin their personal and professional transformations and begin to transform the lives of their students, as well.

In section 3, I discuss the research methods used to complete this phenomenological study. In addition, I review the context of the study, explain the procedures used to select participants, discuss the collection and analysis of the qualitative data, define the role of the researcher, and explain how validity was established.

Section 3: Research Methods

The aim of this research study was to determine how beginning special education teachers within their first 3 years of teaching perceive the effectiveness of induction on their experience of teaching in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD. The particular focus of the research was to investigate whether current district induction practices support beginning special education teachers in these classrooms and to determine what components of support may be absent from their induction programs. In order to effectively support beginning special educators in such a specialized setting, investigation of the lived experiences and perceptions of these special education teachers is essential.

A qualitative approach was used to explore the experiences and perceptions of beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD. In the qualitative research tradition, participants' constructions of reality and their interpretations in particular contexts help to inform the researcher of how individuals experience and interrelate with their social environments (Merriam, 2002, p.4). Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) defined a phenomenal experience as one that sheds light on the "life of consciousness" (p. 68) and contributes meaning to the scientific analysis of an experience. Using a phenomenological approach, I investigated the components of standard district induction programs that are perceived as both supportive and unsupportive by the beginning teachers, and attempted to generate alternative or additional components of support that might improve the induction experience for

beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD. Furthermore, in this section I discuss the methodology of the completed study, including guiding research questions, a description of the participants, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Qualitative Tradition

The experiences of beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD are underrepresented in the literature. In order to begin to address this gap, their stories should begin to emerge so that changes in policies can occur. Qualitative research constructs themes and patterns through the "voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, (that) extends the literature or signals a call to action" (Creswell, 2007, p.37). Given the distinct challenges that beginning special educators are facing in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD (Boyer & Lee, 2005; Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, 2001; McCabe, 2008; OAR, 2004; PESB, 2008; Scheuermann, Webber, & Boutot, 2003), investigative research into the nature of school districts' current induction practices is essential to determine whether a call to action for improved induction supports is necessary.

I considered other methods of inquiry, such as case study, narrative, grounded theory, and ethnography. The case study method was deemed inappropriate because of the researcher's desire to examine various districts' induction programs rather than analyze a few teachers' perceptions of one specific

program (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, a narrative approach was not appropriate because I did not seek to tell a story using a chronological account of the experiences of beginning special educators (Creswell). Ethnography was unsuitable because the focus of this study did not seek to determine how the beginning teachers interacted amongst themselves as a culture-sharing group (Creswell). The researcher did consider a grounded theory method of inquiry; however, seeking out or generating a theory is somewhat premature at this point in time considering the lack of existing data. Rather, a phenomenological approach was implemented to generate important baseline information from which future studies may be grounded.

Research Questions

To develop a significant understanding of each teachers' experience of the induction process, the primary research question was how do beginning special educators that teach in classrooms primarily for students with ASD experience and perceive the effectiveness of their district's induction programs?

To further understand the specific experiences and perceptions of the beginning teachers, the following subquestions were addressed.

1. What components of induction are implemented within the district?

2. How do beginning teachers perceive each component of induction?

3. How does each induction component address beginning teachers' individual needs?

4. What components of induction could be added or changed in order to meet the specific needs of a teacher for students with ASD?

Context of the Study

During the past decade, the number of students ages 6 – 21 classified with ASD in the New Jersey public school system has increased (NJDOE, 2009). In 2007 The Governor's Initiative on Autism funded 38 school districts throughout the state to initiate or expand educational services for students with ASD (NJDOE, 2007). The districts that were given funding are public school districts in various regions across the state. According to New Jersey Autism Organization (2009), there are approximately 118 public schools in New Jersey that have programs for students with ASD. However, few teacher-preparation programs are currently training teachers in the specific procedures supported by research that are most effective to teach students with ASD (Foundation for Autism Training and Education, 2007; McCabe, 2008; Scheuermann et al., 2003). As a result of a lack of preparation programs, beginning teachers placed in self-contained classrooms are working with limited knowledge of the research-based strategies and theories used for students with ASD (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002). Given the increase in the number of programs and the population of students with ASD attending public schools in New Jersey coupled with a lack of adequate teacher preparation, it is crucial to ensure that all beginning teachers who are responsible for the education of students with ASD in self-contained programs are effectively supported.

Participants of the study came from three public school district settings in New Jersey. One school district is funded by a state university and serves students ages 3

– 21 with ASD. The second setting was a Special Services Commission for a public school district which educates students ages 3 – 21 with a wide variety of developmental disabilities. The third setting was a regional suburban school district's middle and high school. The various types of public school settings gave me an opportunity to discover whether a difference existed in the supportive nature of the various induction programs offered by each district.

Participants and Sampling

For this research study, criterion sampling was used to obtain participants. In order to investigate the experiences of beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD, participants were required to meet established criteria in order to answer the research questions. The population for this study was seven beginning special education teachers in their first 3 years of teaching who were teaching in a self-contained classroom primarily for students with ASD at the time the study was conducted. Participants were special education teachers in a variety of public school settings in New Jersey and have participated in a school district's induction program within the past 3 years.

The nature of a phenemonological study is to understand meaningful relationships that exist within the data that emerge from the lived experiences of individuals who share a common experience (Moustakis, 1994). Since phenomenological research requires the collection of extensive data to understand the essence of a phenomenon through the participants' lived experiences, the quality of data will influence

the richness of the interpretation (Hatch, 2002). As a result, population samples are typically small, usually between 3 to 10 participants (Creswell, 2007; Dukes, 1984).

In order to gain access to participants, I contacted school districts via e-mail based on the information provided by New Jersey Autism Organization's Directory of New Jersey Schools Serving Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders (NJAutism, 2009) to determine whether any first-year special education teachers were teaching in a self-contained classroom specifically for students with ASD within that district. The initial attempts to locate participants yielded minimal results. Out of 128 requests to become community partners, I obtained three positive responses, 12 negative responses stating that there were no teachers meeting the research criteria, and seven undeliverable emails. Unfortunately, two of the three positive responses were from private school districts which did not meet the research criteria. As a result, I expanded the criteria to include beginning teachers within their first 3 years of experience and distributed revised emails to each school district. For this attempt, 143 e-mails were sent. Fourteen came back undeliverable, six responded stating that they did not meet the research criteria, and one response was positive. Although the participant pool expanded slightly, the few community partners secured were inadequate to reliably inform the research questions; although the partners were public schools, they only served students with special needs. In an attempt to gain access to beginning teachers in a more traditional public school setting, a four question survey approved for distribution by two county superintendents was distributed via e-mail to all special service adminstrators in those counties; the survey was designed to identify the number of beginning teachers in self-contained

classrooms for students with ASD that were currently or had recently completed a district

induction program. A total of 27 surveys were completed. I then contacted the

responders who met the criteria for the study via e-mail thanking them for participating in

the survey and requesting a community partnership. Results from the survey yielded

three additional participants, all in traditional public school settings.

After obtaining community partner agreements from the districts who met the

specified criteria, I personally met with the beginning special education teachers within

these three districts to discuss the details of participation in the study. I informed all

potential participants of the purpose of the study, ensured their confidentiality, and

reviewed all aspects of the consent form. All eight beginning teachers agreed to

participate in the research and signed consent forms; however, prior to the beginning of

the interview process, one participant from a traditional public school setting resigned

from the study, stating time constraints as the rationale.

Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher is a special education teacher who teaches in an

elementary level self-contained classroom primarily for students with ASD. The

classroom is one of four classrooms in a low income school district that utilizes an

applied behavioral analysis (ABA) approach to teaching. The district's ABA program for

students with ASD consists of two preschool classrooms, a kindergarten-first grade

classroom, and a $2^{nd} - 4^{th}$ grade classroom. In addition, I acted as a mentor during the

2006-2007 school year for a first year special eduction teacher in an ABA classroom.

Furthermore, I currently participate in many school leadership activities, including the

School Leadership Committee and the Intervention & Referral Services Team, and have been a cocreator and presenter of training workshops for ABA staff members and related service providers and a co-writer of curriculum with another ABA teacher. I am a certified Teacher of the Handicapped, and have been teaching for 10 years. The last 5 years have been dedicated to the creation and evolution of our district's ABA program for students with ASD. As a teacher in a self-contained classroom for students with ASD, it has been important to maintain objectivity and a personal awareness to potential bias throughout the research process, and to let the participants tell their stories without inadvertantly affecting the collection and analysis of the data.

Data Collection Procedures

At the beginning of the study, I requested a copy of each district's state mandated mentoring plan from each participating district. The mentoring plans outlined each district's program to provide induction support to all beginning teachers. Data from participants was obtained through two semi-structured interviews regarding the primary components of the induction programs. Initial questions explored the beginning teachers' experiences and attitudes about (a) the relationship with the mentor; (b) various components of formal support offered by the school district; (c) informal support within the school; (d) whether each support measure has an impact on the beginning teacher's perceived effectiveness in the classroom; (e) whether each support measure has an impact on the teacher's emotional well being; and (f) areas of need that may not be currently addressed through each district's program. For follow up interviews, I created additional

questions designed to clarify and expand upon information provided during the initial interviews.

Participants were asked to provide mentoring logs and/or journals that were kept throughout the induction process. District mentoring plans were reviewed at the beginning to confirm the use of narrative journals during the induction period. My intentions were to use the journal entries to examine the personal feelings, perceptions, and emotions of participants as they experienced their first year with regards to the induction support received. According to Merriam (2002), reflective journal entries offer greater insight and a more personalized "essence" of each participant's experience. Narrative journals/logs were not used by most participants as a form of induction support despite the fact that they were included in each district's mentoring plan.

Audio-taped semi-structured interviews were completed at the end of the school year in June. Through such conversations with participants, I sought to "achieve richness and depth of understanding" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.13) by asking probing and follow up questions to investigate essential ideas and emerging themes that would contribute to the body of data. Follow up interviews occured two weeks following intial interviews to add clarification and round out gaps within the data.

Data Analysis

I began data analysis by organizing collected data. Documents collected from school district human resource departments regarding induction policies and procedures were analyzed and notes were made regarding the existence or absence of program components, including the requirement to maintain a narrative journal and specific

policies regarding induction for special education teachers. I transcribed audio-taped interviews verbatim into Microsoft One Note and saved as Word documents. Existing journal logs were coded and organized to corroloate with interview transcripts.

Moustakis (1994) discussed a modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method as an effective approach to phenomenological data analysis. Creswell (2007) simplified the approach into distinct steps. To analyze the data from this study, I began by reading and organizing all written data, making marginalized notes and idenfiying prelimary codes within the data. Given my role as the researcher and a special educator in a self-contained classroom, I made every effort to bracket personal experiences through the process of epoche, "looking before judging…clearing a space within ourselves so we can actually see what is before us and in us" (Moustakis,1994, p.60).   Ashworth (1999) posited that the process of bracketing allows the "life-world of the participant to emerge in clarity" (p.708) without the interference of the researcher's presuppositions or subjectivity about the phenomenon under study. Once personal biases were set aside, I began to describe essential participant experiences and develop significant statements which were grouped into meaning units and themes. Based on the major themes that emerged, I then interpreted the data and developed textural and structural descriptions that encompassed the "essence" of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Validity

Since qualitative research is highly interpretive in nature, it is crucial to establish a sense of validity of the study findings (Merriam, 2002). By utilizing several methods to establish validity and reliability in a study, researchers are ensuring that data

is dependable and easily confirmed by multiple methods. Wolcott (1994) suggested that establishing validity in qualitative research may be more appropriately implied as establishing "consistency" (p.355) and credible impressions recognized through careful wording and language that is free of contradiction. While quantitative research is easily proven by statistical data that is not easily open to interpretation, the more creative, interpretive nature of qualitative research lends itself to a greater need to specifically define the ways which data is defined (Wolcott). Incorporating different validation strategies can help qualitative researchers to reach this goal. Miles and Huberman (1984) demonstrated their method of qualitative analysis in a flowchart conceptual model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion verifications. The continuous cycle of data analysis allows patterns, commonalities, and relationships to emerge through the process of data reduction, display, and analysis: The resultant conclusions from the data analysis are verified and validated from within the data (Miles & Huberman). Further, Miles and Huberman (1984) offered a comprehensive set of questions to guide researchers in determining the internal validity of their conclusions, including queries regarding the use of rich descriptions, triangulation of multiple data sources, and informant feedback.

The primary strategy to establish validity in this study was through triangulation using multiple data collection methods, including individual interviews and participant journals. I used multiple methods of data collection to compare emerging themes and establish confidence in the research findings (Hatch, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1984). In addition, I involved all participants in a member checking process. Participants had the opportunity to read and review all interview transcripts and

summaries of the my interpretations of the data. I notated and revised summaries according to participant feedback to ensure that interpretations were constructed in a clear, accurate context.

Summary

Through this qualitative, phenomenological study, I investigated the lived experiences of beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms primarily for students with ASD in a variety of public school settings. Data was collected through the implementation of semi-structured interviews and participant journals. I personally transcribed and analyzed.data: Emergent themes were coded, organized, and interpreted according to Moustakis' (1994) modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. Validity was established through triangulation and member checking procedures.

In section 4, the results of the research are outlined; I discuss participant profiles and explain the induction components and participant perceptions of their induction experiences. Next, I present the challenges that participants endure and their resulting ideas for new induction components and professional development options. Evidence of quality and a section summary is presented at the conclusion of the section.

Section 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate how beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD experienced and perceived their district induction programs. Essentially, I sought to examine the components of current induction practices and whether those components adequately supported beginning teachers in such a specialized setting; moreover, beginning teachers were asked to offer ideas for additional components of induction that would more specifically address the challenges faced by a beginning teacher in a self-contained classroom for students with ASD. Within this section, I present the data based on interviews and journals from participants. The information interpreted from the data regarding its implications on current and future induction practices is addressed in section 5.

Description of the Study Sample

Data were collected from seven beginning special education teachers from three different school districts in New Jersey. Three participants teach in a state university funded school specifically for students with ASD. Two participants teach in classrooms for students with ASD in a public school district's Educational Services Commission that serves only students with disabilities, one participant is a middle school teacher in a regional suburban school district, and one participant is a high school teacher in a regional suburban school district.

Teachers were selected based on the criteria: (a) they were beginning special education teachers in their first 3 years of teaching; (b) their primary classroom

responsibility was in a self-contained classroom serving students with ASD; and (c) they

had participated in a school district's induction program within the past 3 years.

Participants are numbered according to the order in which they were initially interviewed.

Table 1 outlines a description of the participants, followed by a brief summary below.

Table 1.

Description of Participants

Participant	Years Teaching	Age Range	Degree	Prior Experience with Autism
#1	2nd	20-30	Master's in Special Education	Yes
#2	1st	20 – 30	Master's in Special Education	Yes
#3	1st	20-30	Bachelor's in Psychology Pursuing Special Education Certification through alternate route	Yes
#4	1st	45 – 55	Bachelor's in Special Education	Yes
#5	3rd	20 – 30	Bachelor's in Special Education	Yes - Limited
#6	3rd	20 – 30	Bachelor's in Special Education	Yes - Limited
#7	2nd	20 – 30	Master's in Special Education	No

Participant Profiles

Participant characteristics are presented here. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, the particular school setting in which the participant teaches will not be identified as a distinguishing characteristic in the summary.

Participant # 1 is a second year teacher in an elementary setting. She is certified in elementary education and holds a master's degree in special education. She is pursuing her Board Certification Behavior Analyst (BCBA) credentials. Prior to becoming a classroom teacher, the participant worked as a teaching assistant in a classroom for students with ASD for 1 ½ years in her current school district.

Participant #2 is a first year teacher in an elementary setting. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and holds a master's degree in special education. She is pursuing her BCBA credentials. Prior to becoming a classroom teacher, the participant worked as a teaching assistant for 3 years in a classroom for students with ASD in her current school district.

Participant #3 is a first year teacher in an elementary setting. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and is in the process of obtaining her teaching certification through the alternate route. The participant worked as a teaching assistant for two years and as a home based consultant for students with ASD for 1 year prior to becoming a classroom teacher.

Participant #4 is a first year teacher in a middle school classroom for students with ASD. Prior to becoming a teacher, she served as a paraprofessional and substitute teacher in her current school district for 12 years.

Participant #5 is a third year certified special education teacher in a middle school setting. She is reporting on her experiences from her first year of teaching in a middle school classroom and her induction experiences from a different traditional public school district than where she is currently working. Prior to her first year of teaching, the participant had no prior experience working with students with ASD aside from her student teaching experience.

Participant #6 is a certified special education teacher in her third year of teaching. This is her first year in this school district teaching middle school students with ASD. As such, she has participated in her current district's induction program. Prior to her present placement, this participant had limited prior experiences with students with ASD.

Participant #7 is a second year teacher with a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in special education. She teaches several sections in a high school setting with the primary responsibility of teaching self-contained students with ASD. This participant had limited exposure to students with ASD prior to teaching, but her college courses focused on educational strategies for students with severe disabilities, including applied behavior analysis.

Data Analysis and Results

The qualitative data collected during this study was analyzed using a modified Stevick-Collaizzi-Keen method as discussed by Moustakis (1994) and simplified by Creswell (2007). Initially, I listened to the tape recorded interviews in order to make notes regarding participant and researcher demeanor during the interview process. Next,

tape recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim into Microsoft One Note and copied to Microsoft Word. Following the transcription process, I read the transcripts, made marginalized notes and identified preliminary codes that emerged from the data. The preliminary codes were highlighted, grouped, and charted into tables using Microsoft Word. I continued the process of breaking down the data into themes and subthemes, color coding and organizing data into tables, and identifying and highlighting significant statements to support the textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences.

The guiding research question for this study was "how do beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD perceive their experience in their district's induction program?" My analysis of the data demonstrated that while district induction programs do offer certain necessary supports to these beginning teachers, there are similar challenges that most teachers faced which were not addressed through the induction program. Furthermore, the majority of participants across all settings agreed that many of the existing components of the induction process were not supportive to address the specific challenges faced by a teacher in a self-contained classroom for students with ASD. As a result, participants offered relevant ideas for additional or alternate induction components that would support them more effectively given the unique contexts of their responsibilities.

Formal Induction Components

The primary formal induction components discussed were similar in nature across all school settings and were based on data obtained from district mentoring plans

and participant interviews. I identified the key induction components as (a) mentoring; (b) beginning of the year meetings; (c) support meetings throughout the year; (d) administrative supports; and (e) narrative journals. While most of the participants engaged in the majority of the activities mentioned, there were some differences in the organization and implementation of components across the different school settings. Table 2 shows the participants' involvement in each of the areas of formal induction.

Table 2.

Formal Induction Components

Participant	Mentoring	Beginning Year Activities	Yearlong Activities	Administration Support	Journals / Logs
#1	X	X	--	X	--
#2	X	X	--	X	--
#3	X	X	--	X	--
#4	X	X	X	X	X
#5	X	X	X	--	X
#6	--	X	X	X	--
#7	--	X	X	X	--

Note. Participants #6 and #7 were not assigned a formal mentor, but received administrative support from a supervisor that paralleled a mentoring relationship. Yearlong Activities pertains to monthly or quarterly workshops and/or meetings designed for all beginning teachers in the district.

Perceptions of Formal Induction Support

The analysis of the data collected from the participants demonstrated that mentoring was perceived as most supportive during the first year of teaching students with ASD. While not all participants were assigned a formal mentor as part of their induction program, each participant had someone designated as a primary means of support. The participants that engaged in the beginning of the year activities and induction support meetings offered throughout the school year perceived those experiences as less supportive for a variety of reasons. The format of administrative support differed across each setting but was perceived as a positive component by most participants. Finally, while each of the district mentoring plans outlined journals as part of the formal induction process, the majority of participants either did not utilize that form of support or only partially engaged in the process. The following sections describe participants' perceptions regarding their experiences during the formal induction program offered by their school districts.

Mentoring

Participants perceived the mentoring process as the most supportive component of their induction programs. The mentoring process throughout the school districts generally did not include scheduled times set aside for mentors and mentees to collaborate apart from the district meetings; mentoring occurred primarily on an informal basis at the convenience of each teacher. When asked about the level of communication with her mentor, Participant #2 stated,

My coordinator is *always* available for me, so if I have something that's

pressing or I need to get…I tell her immediately, I can go right down to

her office, or she's always popping in and out of our classroom, and

having that support system is fantastic because I feel like I'm always

learning new things, you know? She's giving me information and I just

feel like I have somebody to turn to that I trust.

Participant # 4 explained the basis by which she informally communicated with her

mentor.

She sat there every morning…head would pop in every morning, more in

the beginning. Not so much now, though. "Hi, how ya doing?" You

know, just a hello, a face in the door. "Got anything?" "No, but you know

I'll be in your room if I need something!"…In our environment here, I'm

in the middle of doing something, I'm stuck, I don't have to put it aside. I

can get up, walk out the door, look and see if she's really busy or if she

can answer a quick question, and come back and finish up what I'm doing.

Participant #5 discussed her informal interactions with her mentor. "I would

go down and see her after school, or she would come down, and we had a prep that was

at the same time, so sometimes we would meet then." Likewise, Participant # 1 stated,

"My (mentor) is always there. I can email her or call her anytime that I need."

All of the beginning teachers except for one described having a close and

trusting relationship with their mentors. The mentors were teachers or program

coordinators that had practical experience in similar self-contained classroom settings as

their mentees. Participants reported that mentors were instrumental in providing

instructional and emotional supports during the induction year.

According to participants, mentors were primary facilitators for instructional

support, including assistance in the creation and modifications of individual student

programs, use of assessment instruments, and the implementation of curriculum. Since

many of the participants had limited or no experience teaching students with ASD, and

two of the school settings had only a few classrooms for students with ASD, mentors

were often the only source of information and experience for the beginning teachers in

such a specialized setting. Participant # 5 stated,

> Because our classes were *so* different from the rest of the classes in the
>
> school, it was kind of like the only, not the only person they could have
>
> paired me with, but it was that the classrooms were most alike, so she
>
> knew a lot about what went on…and it wasn't exactly the same as the
>
> other classes, so they set me up with this teacher who was phenomenal!

She continued to express the level of support she felt from the mentoring component.

> The mentoring program, I found to be one of the biggest supports that I,
>
> you know, I mean, like I said, I worked very closely with this teacher. We
>
> did a lot of integrating with the two of our classes, but it was just…nobody
>
> else in the school really understood, because a lot of the classes had their
>
> curriculum and that's what it was. The class that I had, they didn't really
>
> have a straight, like, this is exactly what you need to teach…

Participant #2 described her mentor's support like this:

It's definitely positive support, um, as a pretty new teacher, you know, my

coordinator is the experience in the field. I rely on her a lot. Um, both

instructionally, emotionally…I feel like I go to her, honestly, with

everything. You know, if a student is having trouble on a program, I ask

her to come observe it if I'm unable to think of a modification for it. She's

always there willing to talk to me, willing to help me out…Always makes

me think a step ahead, you know, "What would you do, *(participant),* let's

talk it out."

Two of the participants in the study were not assigned a formal mentor, but did

receive administrative support from their department leader who had previously taught in

a self-contained classroom setting for students with significant disabilities. Their

perceptions of the support they received can be equated to the mentor / mentee

relationship. Participant # 6 reported:

We have a department leader who is fantastic. So I've been able to go to

her. She meets with me every couple of weeks to go over data, to make

sure I'm doing everything I need to be doing. She's very good as far as, "I

need help with this…I need help with this program, can you help

me?"…She's supportive as far as that. She does give me suggestions as far

as programming if I'm not sure if a student is either having trouble and is

not progressing, or is mastered and I do not know where to go, she's

absolutely great with that.

Participant # 7 expressed how her department leader stepped in as an informal mentor, fulfilling the role to effectively support her instructional needs throughout the school year.

In the beginning, I really wasn't provided any curriculum or anything. They kind of just threw you in there and said, "Go with it", and I was completely caught off guard being right out of school. I didn't really know. It was nice to have the openness of doing what I wanted, but I needed some sort of guidance, and since she had the students in middle school…she helped guide me, helped me get some of the programs started, gave me suggestions, and really worked back and forth with the emotional support and academic support that I needed to get through the year.

In contrast to the other beginning teachers, one participant expressed some dissatisfaction regarding the relationship with her mentor. She commented,

From what I understand, my immediate supervisor has said in the past that she is supposed to be my mentor, but what that exactly means has never been really explained to me. I feel like there were some things I was seeking her input about, and…I wouldn't get answers or I wouldn't get the response back, so I feel like even if I did know she was there for support and I was asking her, like I feel like I probably would have asked some of the same questions… I guess that knowing her requirements in that I'd know she'd had to respond back, and rather than just leaving it up in the

air, maybe I would have followed through or followed up about it. But it's

hard to say…I think it's a conflict of personality more than anything.

Despite some of the difficulties experienced by this participant during the first few months of the school year, she discussed some strategies that allowed her to make the time with her mentor more valuable. She revealed that taking a more formalized approach to the mentoring relationship helped her to obtain the support she had been seeking.

What I've also asked my coordinator was to also meet on an

individualistic basis. I sit with her individually, just to make sure that the

time is dedicated specifically for student's programs, so anything I feel

like I'm running into a brick wall with, I'll ask her about it and get some

input or some ideas, and from that point forward, I'll make the revisions

and then try to analyze to make sure it was a successful revision.

In this participant's case, the strain in the mentoring relationship had a direct impact on her emotional well being. When asked about the emotional support she received, Participant # 3 said,

(She) really left me, I felt, to the wolves, like, you really didn't give me

the support, and it's not for a lack on my part for not trying, cause I

remember going down, writing emails, asking these specific questions or

sending a detailed email, not to get a response back, or to get a response

on, you know, one question out of all 10 of them, was extremely

frustrating on my part because I felt like I was trying to make sure I was

on the ball with things and I didn't feel like anything was reciprocated…

Participant # 5 summarized the importance of the mentoring relationship for beginning teacher support.

> I really do believe that as far as mentoring goes, it, the person that they pair you with makes a difference. If they are on top of things and know what they are doing, it makes a *total* difference!

The other participants expressed the benefits of their mentor's emotional support. Participant #5 revealed how important the mentor's emotional support was to her, particularly during the early part of the school year.

> You know we would just sit down and talk. We would try to talk about things not related to work because I would go home every night, I would take lesson plans home, it was like 24/7 I felt like I had to be doing something related to work, so like, to learn when I go home I can do something else, like I don't *have* to sit here and write lesson plans or I don't *have* to write this IEP, like you have to make time for yourself, cause otherwise, its, you're going to be so overwhelmed you're not going to be able to get any work done cause it's you know, we would, you know, try to do stuff outside of work. We built that relationship inside of work and outside of work so it wasn't strictly like, alright, I'm not going associate you with work, cause then it's just…but you know, she would call me at home to make sure I'm alright, that was one of the biggest most helpful things for me was having a mentor that was so supportive.

Participant #6 also described the importance that emotional support had for her during the beginning of her school year.

I only cried once. Um, I really just had to relax and having someone to

talk to that was going through what I was going through that has, is

teaching what I teach, that's not an English teacher, that's not a science

teacher, that gets it really ,really helps…my dept. leader is fantastic. She's

the one that I cried to. She actually came to my room and I just started

sobbing, but ever since then…that was probably early, before the winter

started, and ever since then I kind of force myself to check in…

Participant # 7 recounted her need for emotional support that her informal mentor provided.

Her just being there and helping me work through… and she, knowing

she'd gone through it herself, she would tell me a story about what

happened to her and how she handled it and it helped me problem solve

and work it out, and just being a kind of a helping hand. Dealing with that

stuff, and, I think I remember one time last year, *(dept. head)* was like,

"you need to just take a break. Just walk away, you know?" At that

moment in time…I think that she could tell from where I was that I

…yeah, it's not only school advice, it's someone being there and

understanding that we can't be everything...

The data demonstrates a direct correlation to the existing research literature on mentoring for special education teachers, which implies that mentoring relationships are

at the forefront of successful induction experiences (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kajs, 2002; Kardos, 2002; Lee et al., 2007; Trubowitz, 2004; Villari, 2009; Whitaker, 2001; White & Mason, 2003; Wong, 2004) to support beginning teachers through the instructional and emotional hurdles of the first year.

Beginning of the Year Induction Programs

The beginning teachers expressed varying degrees of satisfaction with the beginning of the year induction supports across all school settings. Participants in the specialized school settings had more positive perceptions than those in a traditional public school. However, the experiences of all teachers in this study implicate the potential need for additional or alternate experiences in order to maximize the professional development during that particular induction experience. Participant # 1 described the organization of her beginning of the year induction process.

We have summer training in August. It used to be broken down into track A, B, and C. That would be A for new staff, B would be for staff that had been there for awhile, and C would be for teachers and coordinators and supervisors. Last year they did it a little different; everyone just went to the same in-service.

Despite the changes in the design of the beginning of the year professional development experience, Participant #1 had a positive outlook on the experience. She noted,

We looked at things like functional behavior assessments, um, PECS, graphing, um, reinforcement, a lot of the things we cover on a daily basis

we covered, you know? Maybe the new way of doing things…which was

really nice, you know, 'cause we got research articles, and things that were

presented at ABA and different types of conferences.

In contrast, Participant #3 perceived the experience differently. She stated,

The material was very generalized. You know, there wasn't much specific

detail, you know? It's just hard because I feel like it would be more

beneficial to have seen more videos or more application of the principles

instead of just talking about theories behind the science of what we do.

The discrepancy between the perceptions of these teachers may be a result of

several factors. One notable difference between the two teachers is that one has

completed her teaching certification, and Participant #3 has not yet obtained her

certificate through the alternate route. This factor may contribute to the need for more

practical applications of the material given the absence of formal teacher training. Other

factors that may contribute to the different perceptions may simply lie in learning style

differences between the two teachers. The final factor may be that the absence of

differentiated professional development and the newly incorporated "one-size-fits-all"

approach was not effective to meet the varying needs of the beginning teachers in this

district.

Similarly, beginning teachers in typical public school settings had similar

perceptions regarding their districts' beginning of the year induction programs.

Beginning teachers unanimously reported that the school districts did not offer any

differentiation for induction based on general versus special education. As a result,

several of the beginning teachers felt that important time was lost while attending

irrelevant professional development components. Participant # 5 expressed how her

district approached the beginning of the year induction program.

> All the new (teachers), well they had a separate one for elementary, cause
>
> there was like 5 or 6 elementary schools…and then they grouped the
>
> middle and high school teachers together…the majority was just stuff as a
>
> whole. It wasn't really, they didn't have anything specifically…there
>
> wasn't any separation between special ed and regular ed. The workshops
>
> were supportive in ways to let us know what was going on around school,
>
> but because our classes were so different, a lot of them, not a lot of them,
>
> but some of them it was stuff that was *totally* irrelevant to my kids.

Participant #6 also described the nature of her beginning of the year summer

induction experience. She explained how the basic routines and expectations for teachers

across the school district were discussed, including lesson plans, district technology, and

differentiated instruction techniques; however, she elaborated on how the specific needs

of teachers in her type of classroom are overlooked as a result of standardizing the

induction process across general and special education teachers.

> We had a whole breakout session on how to write up a discipline form,
>
> and how it was to write it up, who it goes to, and it just totally didn't apply
>
> because my kids are not gonna get sent down to the discipline office and
>
> me have to electronically send a form to follow them. If we have a
>
> situation, I'm coming or a staff member is coming, and we're not *going* to

the discipline office, so…And then there's another section on the grade

book…which does *not* apply to the way my classroom is run with

ABA…That was definitely some time I could have spent somewhere else!

I actually found myself going through…we have the shared drives on the

computer…going through the shared drives and seeing what other people

had in there as far as things I could use to *help myself*. That's what I was

doing during that time!

The nature of these perceptions is not isolated to the context of beginning of

the year induction programs. The beginning teacher participants expressed how these

perceptions are extended to the induction processes that occur throughout the year

because of the lack of consideration to the specific context of their professional

responsibilities.

Ongoing Induction Supports

The nature of ongoing induction via professional development throughout the

school year looked quite different between the various school settings. The spectrum of

support ranged from very few organized professional development workshops to

regularly scheduled participation in monthly support meetings. However, the beginning

teachers who participated in district induction activities and meetings throughout the

school year expressed similar concerns as those regarding the beginning of the year

induction components; the overgeneralization of content and lack of support specific to

the nature of their classroom contexts were inadequate to address the beginning teachers'

concerns. One commonality amongst the beginning teachers is that the majority of them

engaged in independent quests for professional development and research in order to obtain the necessary skills and/or knowledge specific to the contexts of their classrooms; this may be directly related to the lack of relevant content delivered via current induction programs. While teachers may have a personal responsibility to engage in continued professional development, districts have an obligation to ensure that their beginning teachers are supported with the necessary information and skills to teach in their specific contexts (Cherubini, 2007*b*; McCabe, 2008).

The participants who teach in the school district primarily for students with autism reported that they engaged in two different professional development opportunities during the school year, although neither was designed as a specific component of an induction program. Teachers from this setting were provided with crisis prevention training and attended an autism conference as part of their professional development. The perceived support from these development opportunities varied according to the beginning teachers. One participant stated that while they did not have to engage in many mandatory workshops, "Crisis prevention training…we always have a workshop once a year on that, and it's always good to refresh on your skills and it's good to do in a workshop setting." Alternately, another beginning teacher noted,

I think we had gone to a conference back in October, that's typically an

ABA conference…we typically have some sort of in-service training…but

there hasn't really been very much, and I will say that those that I just

mentioned weren't extremely helpful in my present job. It's not like I was

learning things that were going to be applicable to what I am doing.

Participants in the other school districts all participated in systematically designed induction components that spanned throughout the school year. The beginning teachers who participated in the district induction programs held similar perceptions about the benefits and pitfalls of the experiences. Participants stated that the opportunity to have exposure to other district faculty and administration was most beneficial. Given the reported isolated nature of the role of special educator in a self-contained classroom, participants appreciated the opportunity to develop collegial interactions with other teachers in the district, although the interactions were not perceived as supportive from an instructional vantage point. Participant # 5 described the impact of her monthly induction meetings.

> The majority of it was just stuff as a whole. It wasn't really - they didn't
> have anything specifically (for special education). They had little bits and
> pieces about IEPs and stuff like that…they just touched upon it for general
> ed so that they would know where to gain access and what rights they had
> to see the IEPs and…but there wasn't any separation between special ed
> and regular ed….They were supportive in ways to let us know what was
> going on around the school, because our classes were so different, a lot of
> them, not all of them, but some of them it was stuff that was like, totally
> irrelevant to my kids. Like some of them would be about the NJASK
> testing. My kids went through the APA [Alternate Proficiency
> Assessment] process. So like that, so there were some varied throughout
> that had nothing to do, but they were helpful in the sense that if something

was going on in the school or something was coming up, they would sit us

down and go over it.

Overall, the participants felt that the emotional support offered by these

experiences was evident despite the lack of instructional support. Participant # 4 took

part in three induction meetings throughout the school year; the first was held early in the

school year, the second during the winter months, and the final meeting was held in the

late spring. She stated,

It was really nice to know the people in the head office…someone that

you are familiar with in case you do have something going on that you

need to talk to someone about, or even your paperwork…or whatever, so it

was good exposure…It gave me bonding time between my mentor and

myself, and there was another teacher…she went with us from here…but

getting to know them, you get to know people on a different level is nice.

And that gives you a little more comfort level with people when you work

with them.

Participant # 6's district offered monthly induction meetings called Support on

Site (SOS). The meetings were designed to serve dual purposes. During alternate months

beginning teachers would meet with either the curriculum department for formal

presentations on topics like differentiated instruction, or with veteran teachers for

practical presentations on best practices. Participant #6 expressed similar feelings about

the opportunity to interact with colleagues as well as the lack of instructional support for

her specific classroom context.

Neither really applied specifically to what I teach, but…I did like meeting all of the department leaders. I did like meeting all the administrators. That was very good 'cause I, you know, you kind of get segregated in your own little world if you don't know anybody, so it's nice to be thrown in there and introduced to everyone and just be part of the whole, but at the same time, there definitely were bored times that I could have spent doing something else.

Participant #7 had similar perceptions regarding the instructional support of the SOS meetings. When asked about her thoughts regarding the emotional support gleaned from the experience, she stated,

They tried to focus on a topic, but then it would go into question and answer, complaining, or whatever it was, but even if we had a question, no one could really answer it, them cause no one really had the problems we had with our classrooms… It was (emotionally supportive), 'cause it was, I guess we're kind of in our own little circle in special ed, and being more severe, um, or MD classrooms, that even puts us in our special department within special ed…we're very secluded. There's only three classrooms like ours…The only thing that was helpful is that they would listen to us if we had a problem and just wanted to vent about it 'cause we still didn't know a lot of people in the school. They would listen to us and they would try to offer, but they were first year teachers in math or biology…so they didn't really understand where our problems were coming from.

Due to the absence of instructional support for the beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD, many participants engaged in professional development opportunities that were separate from their district's induction program. Most of the participants resorted to personally locating professional development opportunities pertinent to their classroom contexts, engaging in independent research, and seeking out supportive relationships within their departments or schools.

Several beginning teachers reported that their administrators were particularly supportive with locating resources for research or allowing the opportunity to engage in outside professional development opportunities. According to Cherubini (2007*b*), beginning teachers who have the opportunity to design their own professional development opportunities often experience the most positive outcomes from their induction experiences.

The participants who work in the school for students with autism had a unique opportunity to become acclimated to their classroom environments during a transition period from lead instructor to classroom teacher. Since each participant from that setting worked as a paraprofessional in the classroom prior to becoming a classroom teacher, the one month transition period was supported by the district administration, and continued as a "mentoring" relationship throughout the first year of teaching. Overall, participants perceived the relationships with their supervisors as positive, although the lack of professional development seemed to be a concern. One of the participants expressed her frustration about learning a new assessment tool for students in her class. "It was something kind of like, 'here's your workbook and here's the instruction manual. Good

luck!' And on top of everything else you have to do, it was a lot!" Another participant

from that setting stated:

> I definitely did *not* have any information on workshops. I think the only
>
> thing that I sort of got information on was we got to go over APA, which
>
> was helpful at the time. But as far as becoming more comfortable with
>
> being a teacher, or fulfilling your opportunities of classroom management,
>
> all of those types of things, um, none of that was taken into consideration.
>
> It was kind of like "We need to throw you in, we need to get this job done,
>
> and we'll see how it goes and where you need support."

In other settings, participants had less direct contact with administrators, but had

positive perceptions of the interactions that occurred. Participant # 4 stated,

> *(Administrator)* did sit down with me and during the first couple of weeks
>
> and outlined a PIP with me. A professional – PIP - professional
>
> development plan. One of the things he put into it was verbal behavior. He
>
> gave me books to read, and gave me direction to go in…and it got me
>
> going down the road for that and reading those books.

However, when asked about professional development opportunities, the participant

reported that she "had no idea where to go" to find the workshops to meet her particular

needs.

Participant # 7 recalled assistance from her administrator to develop a

professional improvement plan as necessary part of the support process. She mentioned,

"Our PIPs that we developed in the beginning of the year…we – *(Administrator)* being

the head, came in during our training and she helped us write them, and she helped us

find names of workshops and stuff." Consequently, research demonstrates a correlation

between administrative support and positive teacher perceptions, particularly for teachers

of students with significant behavioral or emotional disabilities (Ax, Conderman, &

Stephens, 2001; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Merlick & Meister, 2008).

Narrative Journals

According to the interview data, only two participants engaged in the process

of keeping a journal during the induction process. While each district's mentoring

guidelines listed journals as a component of the induction program for all beginning

teachers, most beginning teachers were either unaware of the component or chose not to

engage in the activity. Out of the two participants who did write journal entries, only one

engaged in the process entirely. The journal was not available for collection or review

because it was returned to the district induction coordinator at the end of the participant's

induction experience in her previous school district. The second participant requested to

opt out of the journal requirement and discontinued the process after 1 month. The

information gleaned from her brief entries noted specific questions for the mentor

regarding paperwork and procedures for beginning of the year preparations.

Overall, most participants did not feel that journals were an important

component to an induction program. Participant #1 did not complete the journal

requirement, stating, "Honestly, I just don't have the time. I have classes…I mean, I think

that my first year has gone pretty well, and I haven't had a journal, so I don't know it if

would make a difference." Likewise, Participant # 2 evoked a similar perception. She expressed,

> I was never asked to (keep a journal). And honestly, I feel like that would be a lot more work for me, being a new, first year teacher and all the work that goes into that, um, yeah, it's something that I never really thought about and I never thought it would benefit me in any way.

Participant #4, who partially engaged in the process, continued the trend by noting,

> That log thing! When I saw that, I like, just *give* me another piece of paper to do…*really*? First off, when I was handed that I thought, "I gotta do that, *plus* read the 500 page book you gave me about ABLLS, and the other book I need to read about this? And that was my impression when I saw that, and it went into a file. My paperwork to me is just really overwhelming. If I have *one* more thing I have to do, it's *not* good for me!"

Only one participant expressed a positive perception about the benefits of the journal component. Although Participant #3 did not maintain a journal, she stated,

> It would be interesting, because I can tell you that I didn't even know that was an option. I was never told, "Maybe you should consider this." There was nothing, so if I did hear it as an option, maybe I would have considered it, or maybe, "This is particularly frustrating, maybe I should write this down…purge myself with that, then sort of move on from that

point forward." But, um, yeah, it wasn't really there or highlighted (as a component).

Unfortunately, the lack of data collected from participant journals failed to address the anticipated personal insights that may have contributed important information regarding the induction process. However, the opinions expressed by participants regarding the overwhelming degree of paperwork and the burdensome nature of the journal offered significant information in itself. Further research to determine the benefits of journaling as a mandatory component of induction for beginning special education teachers may be needed to determine whether such benefits outweigh the effort required to maintain the journal.

Factors Contributing to Beginning Teacher's Stress

To determine possible alternative components of induction that may begin to benefit the beginning special education teachers in classrooms for students with ASD, I examined those factors that contributed to high levels of stress for the participants. By identifying the factors that contribute to significant stress, I sought to identify potential program supports that may reduce or alleviate possible stressors, resulting in more positive perceptions of induction. Consequently, all participants noted similar major contributing factors of stress during their first year of teaching: (a) facilitating and managing paraprofessionals; (b) managing student behaviors; (c) understanding and completing paperwork; and (d) communicating with parents. The concerns identified through this research are similar to those identified in previous studies on special

education teachers (Billingsley, 2010; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Griffin et al., 2009; Mastropieri, 2001).

Paraprofessionals

All of the beginning teachers in this study were responsible for working with paraprofessionals throughout the course of the school day. Participants identified three primary concerns regarding their relationships with paraprofessionals, including supervision, working with experienced paraprofessionals (old vs. new) in the classroom, and giving feedback on instructional and procedural discrepancies. Table 3 elaborates the specific concerns teachers had with working with paraprofessionals

Table 3

Beginning Teacher Concerns Working With Paraprofessionals

Participant	Supervision	Old vs. New	Giving Feedback
#1	I would say some of the challenges would be staff training…it's difficult to have six kids with autism in your classroom and two or three teaching assistants.	It's always hard to go in as a new person, so especially if you have paraprofessionals in that classroom for years coming from a new teacher, a new teacher coming in, it might be difficult for that person.	It's something that's hard to do, especially when you have people that work with you that are the same age, you know, it's difficult to say, "You're not implementing this correctly". Those are things that are hard to say to people.
#2	Working with the support staff, I think it is always pretty challenging!	--	I have trouble delivering feedback to my staff because, you know, sometimes I try to balance it out, the positive and the negative…sometimes negative feedback is not always easy for me to deliver.
#3	This is my first year being a supervisor, so coming in and having to supervise over people…Um was a little uncomfortable. Also, there was new staff there, so a lot of it was getting to know new staff and also provide training…monitoring staff and training them effectively.	It's hard when assistants have been working with students for a long time and then you have this new person come in and almost has that control in the classroom… coming in and taking control of that classroom and making the decisions, I'd say that 's something hard to swallow!	--
#4	Trying to get us all on the same page is a challenge…it's a daily	--	--

challenge! Everybody has a different interpretation of what I write, and they don't seem to understand…

You always have to be aware of what's going on…as the teacher, I have to be aware of where every hand goes on a child's body, or everything that happens!

| #5 | Dealing with the paraprofessionals, that to me was the hardest things I struggled with, because not only are you managing however many students, you have four or five paraprofessionals in the classroom, and it's not just dealing with the kids, it's dealing with adults…It was just very overwhelming! | I didn't know how to approach them about certain things because I was younger than them. So, and they had been in the classroom for several years, so it was a struggle to try to say, "Ok, this is how I want to do things," when they are so used to x, y, and z. | -- |
| #6 | -- | I actually went through some challenges with (paraprofessionals) this year. One of my staff was, um, there last year, so when I came in and was new and she was familiar with the students it was more of a "I know more than you do" type of thing. That was very challenging to overcome. | -- |

| #7 | Probably one of the hardest things…I didn't know how to approach people when they weren't doing what they were supposed to…and showing them correctly multiple times…and I would have to go back and reprimand them and say, "you know, you need to do it this way cause this is the way the program works…when they're twice my age! | My assistants, all of them are older than me, most of them are my parent's or my grandparent's age, so being in control and telling them what to do appropriately and having them listen, that was really hard for me. Trying to figure out how to approach people that way cause especially people that have been there longer than I have been! | -- |

Beginning teachers are most often unprepared to deal with the challenges related to working with paraprofessionals in the classroom setting (Carter, O'Rourke, Sisko, & Pelsue, 2010; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Lovingfoss, Malloy, Harris, & Graham, 2001; Mastropieri, 2001). Carter et al. (2010) explained that paraprofessionals may not have the necessary training to work with students of varying low-incidence disabilities such as autism. The authors stated, "The extent to which these…disability factors are associated with consistent or divergent responsibilities could have clear implications for training, supervision, and evaluation" (p. 346). Most of the participants in this study cited particular challenges with training and evaluating paraprofessionals as part of their responsibilities. Gehrke and Murri (2006) discussed the particular challenges that beginning teachers for students with ASD faced with their paraprofessionals. Beginning teachers did not feel prepared to work effectively with paraprofessionals, claiming that pre-service training did not address the topic. Challenges mentioned included scheduling, giving feedback, and relating to older paraprofessionals effectively; the participants from this current study expressed similar concerns.

Managing Student Behaviors

Managing student behaviors is reported as a particularly challenging area for beginning special educators (Griffin et al., 2003; Griffin, et al., 2009; Whitaker, 2001). The challenges expressed by this study's participants are particularly important due to the increased likelihood for physically aggressive behaviors demonstrated by students with ASD (Cale, Carr, Blakely-Smith, & Owen-DeSchryver, 2009; Harding, 2009; Westling 2010). Although some of the participants received varying degrees of support from behavior support professionals, many

reported feeling inadequately prepared or supported to effectively address student behaviors in their classroom settings. Participant #2 expressed her concerns regarding behavior management.

> Definitely with the behaviors in my classroom I feel like I need a lot of support in that area...there's just so many different things that a new teacher would need to know, like behavior intervention plans, learning about functional communication training, there's so many different levels and behaviorisms…

Likewise, Participant #3 stated,

> Behavior management strategies is *huge*...dealing with behaviors, um…the second you throw in somebody who is highly aggressive and engages in a lot of self injurious behaviors, it can be extremely threatening…when you are learning to become a teacher, they don't teach you how to deal with behaviors. They teach you how to stand up in front of a class and sort of teach and educate that way, but with a student who is having a hard time in the back or is distracting to other students, they don't really explain to you how you should be dealing with them, so I think that should definitely be addressed.

> Consistent with these perceptions is feedback from Participant # 4. She also discussed her lack of training and preparation needed to address the behaviors exhibited by her students with ASD.

> I had a couple students who we actually had to send out of district because of you know, behaviors. We didn't have the resources to deal with them until the end of the year, we had no crisis intervention training or anything, we didn't really know what to do as far as that went.

Participant # 7 expressed her concerns regarding her abilities to handle challenging behaviors in the classroom.

> A lot of the problems that we have in the MD classroom are dealing with behaviors…I didn't know what to do if there was a problem. And if there's a problem with one of the kids physically having a behavior issue, I wasn't' really trained on how to handle each kid specifically.

On a slightly different note, Participant #6 described her biggest challenge of her first year in her classroom for students with ASD, citing aggressive behaviors from students and the resultant implications for other students and staff in the classroom as a considerable stressor. She explained her perception as this:

> I think the most challenging for me this year is I have a student who physically aggressive, and that is definitely hard to keep everyone focused, and understanding that working through the physical aggression is part of the work session, and how do I keep everyone else on task? Or when to know or how to train staff that it's best that everyone else leave? That it's where that fine line is that we should stay and stick it out through the noise or whatever it may be, or that we may need to leave, that we are adding to the problem. So that is definitely the most challenging this year.

The differences in the kinds of school districts that participated in this research demonstrate distinctly different approaches to behavior support. The districts that teach students only with ASD or disabilities demonstrate more consistent support via a behaviorist, while the more traditional public school settings were reported to have less behavioral support in place.

Although all of the participants reported distinct challenges in the area of managing student

behaviors, those with continuous access to a behaviorist felt more adequately prepared to address

behaviors more quickly than those teachers with intermittent or sporadic contact with a

behaviorist. One participant from the district that services only students with ASD stated:

> Support from a behaviorist…we get that right now, and it's something that I
>
> definitely need support with. If a student develops a new behavior and I feel like,
>
> "What do I do here?", and I have that person to turn to, you know, people aren't
>
> always knowledgeable on what to do and you always want to know that you are
>
> making the most ethical decision, so having that person to turn to is a great
>
> support!

Another participant from a district setting servicing only special needs students described

the follow up process involving the behaviorist.

> Behavior supports…we do…the behaviorist is usually involved, and we do then
>
> go over the ABC's of what happened, and sort of review the whole episode and
>
> whether or not the consequence was appropriate, so there is a lot of the feedback
>
> time.

However, participants from traditional public school settings expressed their level of

support from a behaviorist as much less consistent and effective to meet the specific needs of

their classrooms. When asked about her access to behavioral support, one participant explained,

> Yeah, one day a week, but she would come in while I was teaching, um, so she
>
> could observe, which was helpful, but then we never had that time where we
>
> could say, "Hey, this is what's going on" on a regular basis, or if we did have that

time, then she couldn't see what was going on, it was so condensed it was really

hard to try to fit everything in that we needed, cause we had some severe behavior

problems that we had to work on.

Another participant from a similar setting stated:

We had a behaviorist that would come in randomly, and to try to get him there

and try to work with him, it was hard because it was, you know, you were

restricted to certain times when he was there, so that was hard. But I think that's

important because you need those, the support from them, and I know I was not

getting that…I think that is important.

Research literature does not currently offer insight into the effects of having consistent

versus intermittent behavioral supports in place for beginning teachers; however, based on the

insights of the participants within the context of this study, more consistent support from a

behavior specialist in the classroom seems to positively affect the beginning teacher's

perceptions of successfully managing student behaviors. Additional research to determine how

levels of support from a behaviorist can impact a beginning teacher's ability to handle

challenging student behaviors is warranted if schools are going to offer adequate induction

supports for beginning special educators in self-contained settings.

Paperwork

Much of the literature on the challenges faced by beginning special education teachers

touts the amount of paperwork as a primary complaint (Gerhke & Murri, 2006; Griffin et al.,

2003; Whitaker, 2001; White & Mason, 2003). The participants within the context of this study

offered insight into the specific nature of how paperwork contributes to a substantial level of

stress. The challenges with paperwork were divided into three specific areas, including IEPs, data collection and assessments, and individualized student programs that are specific to the type of ABA curricula that most teachers were implementing within their classrooms. Perhaps the most significant stress was the combination of paperwork completion as a whole. Based on participant reports, paperwork responsibilities are defined as "overwhelming."

Participant #1 stated, "I think sometimes it gets to be a little overwhelming…a lot of paperwork!" In addition, Participant #2 added,

I feel like the work can sometimes be overwhelming, you know? You have a whole bunch of things due at one time, and also you should be on the schedule with your students, so a lot of that work will come home with you, and that can be stressful!

Participant # 7 added insight on how the nature of lesson planning in addition to her other responsibilities contributed a substantial amount of stress to her experience as a beginning teacher.

The work, um, being a first year teacher in general and having all of the planning and all of that stuff, and then planning for four different lessons within one period of time cause all the kids are different. That I just wasn't prepared for…the sheer amount of work…I had nine kids on nine different levels in the room! Trying to plan for nine periods a day is *a lot* of stress…

Specifically, participants faced challenges with managing the responsibility of writing IEPs. Many participants felt unprepared to write IEPs, claiming that pre-service training did not adequately focus on this skill. Others were overwhelmed with the responsibility of writing IEPs

for students that they didn't really know, citing lack of informational data to make informed

decisions regarding students' goals and objectives. Participant #4 elaborated on her challenges

with writing IEPs for her students with ASD.

> Oh my gosh! The paperwork? *Overwhelming*! I mean, yes, I have written IEPs
>
> but they were all for students with MD (multiple disabilities). And it's a totally
>
> different way of writing them, and the curriculum base is different than what the
>
> MD teachers go by compared to the Verbal Behavior program and the curriculum
>
> written for the students with autism. It's a whole different system of paperwork,
>
> so that was something I really needed help on! When you have a student with
>
> such splintered skills by age 13, but you don't have the ABLLS testing to support
>
> it to put that all together and define some of those areas that need to be supported
>
> to get very specific goals…is just an overwhelming time! You know, given all
>
> the time in the world, you can do it, but having to do it within a 30 day period
>
> from when you first meet this student, it was just a lot!

Participant #5 stated her insecurities in writing IEPs. She mentioned:

> If you haven't written an IEP your first year teaching, I mean you have no (idea) -
>
> you can go off what other people say, you can go off what the previous one was
>
> and what skills the student has, but as far as sitting down and writing it, I was lost.
>
> That was one of the things they didn't go into much at school!

> Conversely, Participant #7 described how her preservice education prepared her for the

demands of IEP writing. She stated, "I had a whole semester on IEP writing. We had a whole

course on just working on IEP writing…I had a lot of the basics down. That part wasn't really

that stressful for me." Given these examples, it is possible that lacking preservice education for teacher candidates may contribute to significant stress levels during the first year of teaching. As a result, the need for further exploration regarding necessary modifications in induction programs or preservice education may be warranted to address these issues.

In addition, participants had difficulties managing data collection, student assessments, and the correlating individual program implementation for their students. In classrooms for students with ASD, programs that are grounded in ABA require complex systems of assessment, data collection, and program maintenance. Participant # 4 elaborated on this notion when asked about the context in which paperwork posed a challenge.

Um, the volumes required…the data sheets, doing the testing, getting all the materials ready for the testing, then to go…we have a curriculum based on the ABLLS that we use to keep track of skills that are mastered and skills that are going to be worked on, then going through the whole book…it's hundreds of pages long…more than that, I don't know how many hundreds of pages, and to find the right one where these kids are to work on…

Participant #2 expressed similar concerns regarding having to work her way through the manuals in order to complete student assessments correctly. She explained,

I didn't get a formal training on something that we use called the VB-Mapp (assessment). It was something like, "Here's your workbook and here's your instruction manual, good luck!" And on top of everything else you have to do it was a lot, you know? So you had to read the manual and you had to do it with the student, and I just would have liked someone to sit down with me and say "This is

how it works", you know?.. I also need support for program writing…sometimes

when I write a program, a student doesn't do as well as I expect and so I do need

help writing up modifications.

Participant # 3 discussed the different forms of paperwork that she was expected to

maintain as a teacher in an ABA classroom.

I was expected to make sure that I was on top of writing, revising and

implementing new programs for students…Then it was also getting adjusted to

making sure I had clinic notes and preparing clinic notes for when the parents

come in, and making sure that I am up to date on their programs and just making

sure that I can report on them. I feel like I need more support…knowing about

assessments, knowing how to implement them and being familiar with them…

Overall, the participants felt that the degree of paperwork that they were expected to

complete and maintain was an overwhelming prospect. The stress that resulted was directly

impacted by both the amount and the unfamiliarity with the different types of paperwork that

required completion as part of a program for students with ASD. While there is little that can be

done to reduce the amount of paperwork for teachers, providing them with adequate training or

support on paperwork completion seems to be a logical solution to reducing the levels of stress

that these beginning teachers experience throughout their first years.

Challenges with Parents

The beginning teachers in this study expressed challenges that they endured while

dealing with the parents of their students. Participants raised primary concerns about answering

parent questions, appearing knowledgeable to parents despite their inexperience in the

classroom, and meeting the parental demands on instructional issues. According to Melnick and Meister (2008), beginning teachers generally feel inept at dealing with parents and parental concerns as compared to their more experienced counterparts. Participant #7 offered an overview of her feelings regarding the challenge of dealing with parents as a beginning teacher.

> I would say being able to handle parents (is challenging) just because it's not something that you've learned when you're in school or when you're student teaching just because most of the time when I had issues when I was student teaching, the cooperating teacher dealt with the parents.

Alternately, Participant #4 reflected on her perception of being prepared to deal with parents given her prior experiences as a long term substitute and paraprofessional for many years.

> You know, it's funny…I was prepared. I had done IEPs, I had done behavior management, when I did maternity coverage I had parents in my face, but it was different. I walked away. It was like the grandmother syndrome, you know? You walk away from it. The other teacher comes back the next day or the next month or whatever. Now, it's me. The ultimate blame is on me, and re- not blame, responsibility. So it did weight a lot heavier, the reality, when it set in.

Participant #1 discussed here uneasiness with communication with parents during regularly scheduled meetings.

> It gets difficult with the parents sometimes. You know, they have a lot of questions, and sometimes some parents want those questions answered in the moment, and it's not easy to come up with an answer…like when you are in a

(meeting) and the parents are questioning "Why isn't this working?" or "What else can we do?" and you don't have those 'in the moment' answers.

Participant # 3 expressed similar concerns, stating. "(being) comfortable enough to be able to go into a meeting with parents and accurately update them on their student's recent performance, um, that was tough for me"

Several other participants reflected on the challenge of meeting the demands that parents placed on teachers with relation to instructional procedures or materials, and communicating with parents effectively to discuss such matters. Participant # 7 discussed a particularly challenging incidence during her first year.

I remember a parent was, because I was so young and I was brand new, they were really concerned about what I was doing and they requested to come into my classroom every month and watch me teach for an hour every month. And I felt like I was doing something wrong, but obviously they were just concerned for their child. But that was really difficult because they were coming in and when they were there, their child acted differently because his mom was in the room, and it affected not only them, but all the other kids, so I felt they didn't get to see how it really was!

The beginning teachers also discussed additional challenges of communicating with parents on academic and behavioral expectations. Participant # 4 discussed her concerns regarding disagreement with parents on instructional content for her students with severe disabilities.

Some of (the students) need to get into functional work, functional education.

They are not going to learn how to add. They are not going to learn how to read.

It's just not there, so they need to learn how to brush their teeth, how to follow a

bathroom schedule, how to follow an activity schedule to play or do something

for a half hour so their parents have some free time, some down time…And it's

difficult because parents want to hold on to the academics, but there's a point

where you have to say, "It is what it is" and we need to make sure this student can

take care of himself. It's more important that they can hold a fork than cut a piece

of paper.

Similarly, Participant # 6 discussed her concerns regarding the implementation of a

reading program that the parent wanted her child to participate in.

We do the SRA comprehension programs, and I think the hardest for me is I have

one student whose parents really want her on SRA, and SRA is so far above her at

this point. The comprehension isn't something you can, if you're not ready for it,

you're not ready for it, so I think that has been my hardest…for a while we tried it

and tried it to get the data to say, "No". It was just very, very hard for her and for

the staff to keep going through that trial…

This scenario demonstrates the beginning teacher's continued efforts to address the

parent's requests for instructing the student at a level that was inappropriate, causing unnecessary

frustration for both the student and the staff in the classroom. Melnick and Meister (2008)

discussed succinct differences in how beginning teachers and experienced teachers address

parents' concerns when faced with conflict, stating that "as teachers gain more experience in

their classrooms, they become more confident in their judgments and evaluations of their

students" (p.51), and are therefore more at ease when addressing such issues with parents. Given

the reported absence of practical knowledge on how to work with parents from preservice

training coupled with an overall lack of teaching experience, these beginning teachers'

perceptions are important to consider with regards to supporting the challenges that they face.

Beginning Teachers Suggestions for Support and Induction

At the end of each initial interview, I asked participants to offer their personal

suggestions for creating a more supportive induction process for teachers in self-contained

classrooms for students with ASD. After transcribing the initial interviews, I developed a

complete list of supports and induction components that the participants suggested during their

interview conversations. During the follow-up interview, I gave each participant the complete

list of 12 supports and induction components and asked them to choose the options they thought

should be integrated as part of their district's support and induction process. Table 4 shows the

list of suggested components and how each participant felt about the component's induction

value with the exception of one support called "Mandatory Professional Development

Workshops". This induction support, which was divided into eight topics of professional

development, is shown separately in Table 5. Before concluding the interview, participants

explained their rationale for the supports that they felt would truly benefit beginning special

education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD.

Table 4.

Beginning Teacher's Suggested Supports and Induction Components

Participant	Procedure Handbook	Personalized Student Write-ups	Literature on ABA Topics Provided to Teachers	Time to Collaborate With Colleagues	Summer Induction Sections for Special Education	Mentoring / Induction Sections for Special Education	Student Observations Prior to the Start of School Year	Two Year Mentoring Program	Intensive Support from a Behavioral Specialist	Establish a team support network	Develop a Prof. Development Plan for Context Specific Workshops
#1	--	X	--	X	--	--	X	--	X	X	--
#2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	--	X	X	--
#3	X	--	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
#4	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	--	X	X	X
#5	X	X	X	X	X	X	--	--	X	X	X
#6	--	--	--	X	--	X	X	--	X	X	X
#7	X	X	X	X	X	--	X	X	X	X	X

The supportive measures determined by the participants demonstrate a distinct correlation between the challenges they faced and their desire for support in the identified areas. The beginning teachers in this study agreed that the highest levels of support could be found in collaboration with colleagues, behavior specialists, and team members. This result is not surprising, as the literature clearly denotes collaboration as a key determining factor in the emotional and instructional support of beginning teachers (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Kardos, Moore Johnson, Peske, Kaufman, & Lui, 2001; Trubowitz, 2004).

Participants highly agreed upon other supports that offer information in the specific contexts to the area of special education. Most participants agreed that districts should offer some degree of context specific induction for special education teachers that is separate from their general education counterparts. Participants valued the opportunity to become acquainted with their administrators and general education colleagues, stating that the exposure helped to alleviate the feeling of isolation to a degree. However, the beginning teachers also expressed that much of the information presented was irrelevant for the context of their professional responsibilities. Participant # 6 explained her perception on establishing this balance.

> I think it's important not to exclude us completely. We want to kind of form that
> cohort, and get that little team sense that everybody else that comes the same year
> as you, and you want to have that, but you also want to have time that is
> apporopriate to what your're instructing. I think if I was by myself the whole
> time, if I was just with special ed or just with my department leader or just with
> [my colleague], I would have missed that cohort experience that you get with

being a new teacher, getting to meet all the adminstrators…I think there needs to

be a happy medium as far as like, they give us breakfast and lunch…those are the

best times of the day because you're really getting to talk to everybody, who is

new, who has taught somewhere else, who is married…I mean, that's the greatest

part about any induction is meeting the people you're going to work with. If they

could find a way to marry them…to really marry them…not have teachers who

teach kids with ASD on "How to differentiate" or "Intro to IEPs".

In order for beginning teachers to feel supported, it is essential to offer induction

activities that value the context in which they teach (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Cherubini,

2007*b*; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Wynn et al., 2007).

It is interesting to note that five out of the seven participants did not select a 2 year

mentoring program as a needed support. This particular finding seems to contradict research

literature which demonstrates the effectiveness of a 2 or 3 year mentoring program (AASCU,

2006;Darling-Hammond, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003; Fulton et al., 2005; Gerhke &

Murri, 2006; Wong, 2004). However, the research cited did not measure the perceptions of the

participants on mentoring after a 1 year experience, rather it examined the effect that extended

mentoring had on the retention rates and percieved supportive nature of the program at the end of

the mentoring period. Given that context, it is unclear as to whether the actual implementation of

a 2 year mentoring program would have generated alternate perceptions with the participants in

this study.

Overall, the majoritiy of participants deemed almost all of the suggestions for support

as beneficial components for a beginning special education teacher in a self-contained setting. I

frequently encountered comments such as, "Wow, this is a great list! Can I choose all of these?"
It is important to note that while the suggestions came from individual participants during the
interview process, the agreement across participants over a variety of public school settings
denotes the relevance of the nature of the supports and suggested components. As a result,
school districts need to pay attention to the expressed needs of their beginning special education
teachers in order to support the nature of their responsibilities in the appropriate context.

At the conclusion of the follow up interviews, I asked participants to add any
additional ideas or information that might inform the research study. I did not present these last
minute ideas to all study participants because all participants would not have the opportunity to
comment on them as part of the initial set of supports. However, the suggestion that participants
discussed are valid possibilities that deserve mention within the context of this study. Participant
#6 offered the following proposal:

> I would think that time to…actually go in and visit classrooms that are considered
> best practice classrooms, and a variety of them…would be great! Because I think
> a lot of times new teachers come in or even starting a new program [think], "Well,
> that's great, I'm really excited, but what should it look like?" It's different seeing
> it in real life than reading it. And let's be honest, we have *lots* of stuff to read! So
> actually go in and see a classroom of real live, breathing people is very valuable!

Two other participants elaborated on the notion of collaboration with colleagues. When
Participant # 4 initially discussed the need to collaborate with colleagues, she intended on the
collaboration with other special education colleagues across grade levels as a means to
understand the curriculum and program structure of classrooms from which students were

coming from and programs that students would be moving on to. This understanding would

promote a smoother transition for students and the ability for the teachers to understand how to

provide their students with consistent and relevant instruction. However, Participant # 7

explained the benefits of collaborating with her general education colleagues, as well. She

discussed how such opportunities would address some challenges she faced during her first year.

> [I would add]…working with regular education teachers to help them understand
>
> the behavior aspect of the kids and what to do with them if they have behavior
>
> issues, and academic stuff and helping them figure it out. Because last year, I was
>
> at the point where I was making not only my lessons, but lessons for them to do in
>
> the class because the teacher didn't understand what adapting or modifying the
>
> lesson was…A lot of the kids go into their specials, and their teachers have no
>
> idea what to do with them, and neither one of us have time to discuss it, so having
>
> time with them would be my suggestion…especially as a new teacher, not
>
> knowing the other teachers, so I think that would help out a lot!

Participant # 5 had similar ideas to collaborate with her regular education counterparts as

a means to improve the inclusive opportunities for her students. She discussed the notion of

having time to sit down and go talk to the other teachers, and you know, even if the kids aren't

on grade level, what are you doing with your kids that maybe I can bring into the classroom, or

maybe even to collaborate and bring the kids into the regular classroom and include them a little

bit more.

Essentially, participants had little more than this to add to the initial list of suggested

supports. I concluded that based on interview data the true nature of the challenges experienced

by the participants and the subsequent generation of supportive components appeared to be a

relevant and comprehensive list.

Table 5.

Professional Development Workshops for Induction

Participant	Behavior Management Strategies	Assessments	IEP Writing and Data Systems	Special Curricular Materials or Programs	Data Collection Procedures	Crisis Prevention Training	Working With Paraprofessionals
#1	X	X	--	X	X	X	X
#2	X	X	--	--	--	X	X
#3	--	X	X	X	--	X	X
#4	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
#5	X	X	X	--	X	X	X
#6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
#7	--	X	X	--	X	X	X

Professional Development Workshops

Participants expressed a particular interest in the incorporation of context specific professional development workshops as part of a supportive induction program. I compiled the list of suggested workshops based upon the explicit challenges faced by the participants during their first year of teaching in a self-contained classroom for students with ASD. It is evident that participants particularly favored the idea of developing their knowledge of working with paraprofessionals, understanding and administering assessments, and becoming proficient in dealing with student behaviors through crisis prevention training. However, it is equally as clear that the majority of the participants demonstrated an interest across all professional development topics. Minor discrepancies emerged in the areas of IEP writing, data collection procedures, and special curricular materials and programs. Participant #2 rationalized her decision not to choose IEP writing, stating, "I don't necessarily think there needs to be a workshop for that, I'm going to cross that out because that's something that you can learn from your supervisor (mentor)." Additional rationale to determine why participants did not choose particular components is not abundant because the purpose of this study sought to identify the components that would be perceived as beneficial for participants. Therefore, I did not probe into null rationale regarding the proposed supports. However, rationale for the promotion of such professional development can be strongly grounded in the reported experiences and expressed perceptions of the participants throughout this study.

Self Initiative

I discovered one final emerging theme during the process of data analysis. Many of the beginning teachers discussed the importance of developing a sense of self initiative as a means to obtain the necessary emotional and instructional supports needed to meet the demands of their professional responsibilities. The development of this frame of mind may be directly related to the stages of teacher development discussed in section 2. Initially, the beginning teachers discussed their sense of discontent and emotional stress that caused them to reportedly feel overwhelmed. Participants suggested a disconnect between their preservice teacher preparation and the realities of their newly acquired professional responsibilities. Throughout the interview process, several of the participants expressed how preservice education did not prepare them to meet certain demands. However, the beginning teachers eventually developed a sense of self initiative that enabled them to identify and utilize available resources that assisted them with meeting the challenges they faced.

Throughout the interview process, several participants expressed the idea that their college experiences were lacking in certain respects to prepare them for the realities of teaching in a self-contained classroom for students with ASD. One beginning teacher in a school for students with significant special needs suggested, "As far as education, the bachelor's level does not really prepare you for a school like this, I don't feel." Likewise, participant #4, coming from a traditional public school perspective stated, "I think it was, you know, my first year teaching…and it's a totally different story once you get in the

classroom and you're actually experiencing it…" This well documented phenomenon of "reality shock" (Veenman,1984) or the experience of a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 1994 p.223), coupled with a significant lack of professional development support in the most challenging aspects of their responsibilities left many of the participants to fend for themselves in obtaining knowledge in both instructional and behavioral aspects of their classrooms.

As a result of feeling unprepared, the beginning teachers discussed the independent research they had to complete in order to become proficient in topics specific to applied behavior analysis. When I asked about how the beginning teacher learned about ABA, Participant #6 reported,

Well, at first I was thrown into it, but then I researched it. It was one of those 'I wish I would've learned this in college' but didn't. So it was all on my own, professional reading on my own…So as far as the principles of ABA and all that stuff, I really taught that to myself. I did that research on my own…doing the research online, and to figure out what ABA classrooms really do look like, and what's the best way to do it? How should they look? How *shouldn't* they look? How's the right way to keep data? What do you *do* with the data after you get it? After it sits in a binder, what do you *do*?

Participant # 3 reiterated the challenges she faced and the isolation that she felt as a beginning teacher when it came to meeting expectations.

The only thing that I really got in general in the beginning of the school

year was a list of expectations, and I was told I needed to fulfill them, but

nobody pointed me in the right direction on how to go about doing that. So

I basically had to teach myself. I feel like everything was thrown

together…my training was a little overlooked…I think I became more

comfortable once I started to get a little bit more organized in the sense

that I was able to fulfill my expectations at a reasonable rate for me…it

just got to the point where I started making sure that it was a lot of endless

nights where I would go home and I would do a lot of paperwork, things

like that just to get myself back to the bar that I needed to be at…so with

that being said, I feel like I got more comfortable with the position and the

job expectations once I sat down and figured them out for myself.

The research literature states that beginning teachers are reluctant to express

their need for help from others for fear of being considered ineffective or unable to meet

expectations (Billingsley, 2010; Feiman-Nemser,2001; Whitaker, 2000). This notion was

evident within the context of this study, as well. Participant # 7 expressed her rationale

for not asking for help early on during her first year.

At first, I tried to do everything myself. I was afraid they would think I

couldn't handle it, so I kept it to myself. And I think one day, I finally had

a breakdown, and they found out what was going on and they said, "Come

to us, you know, that is what we are here for". But I didn't because I was

afraid because there wasn't anyone there who had offered to help. So

finally, eventually, I had the other teachers and the other staff and the

director helping me figure things out because it was overwhelming!

Participant #5 offered her input regarding the importance of asking for help. "If I

had to give anybody advice, it would be not to be afraid to go ask for help, because if you

don't go ask for that help, you're not going to survive!"

The idea that asking for help is crucial to the emotional survival of the first

year of teaching was prevalent across almost all beginning teachers. While all

participants may not have expressed the transition point in their first year where the

realization that seeking assistance was necessary, each beginning teacher discussed a

variety of experiences in which they actively sought out the assistance of other more

experienced colleagues, whether a mentor, a supervisor, or other teachers as a means to

solve a problem or learn something new. Participant # 6 realized her need for assistance

and actively sought out the support of her school's Child Study Team (CST).

She [dept. leader] actually came to my room and I just started sobbing, but

ever since then, that was probably early, before winter started, and ever

since then, I kind of force myself to check in with the CST every day.

Even if my case manager is not there, I'll check in with somebody else

and say. "Hi, how are you doing?" They'll ask you back and then you can

really have that, "I have these concerns, what should I do?"…I just can't

get over how much more relaxed I felt after…when I finally realized I had

to go there every day…not only is it therapeutic, but just the support that

they have. They will do anything for you. And I wouldn't have known if I

didn't ask!

While self initiative is not a component that can be systematically designed

into an induction program, the idea that beginning teachers should experience a

collaborative environment embedded within their induction program seems necessary to

promote a level of comfort and openness needed for self initiation to occur. It may not be

realistic to design an induction program to meet every specific context faced by every

special education teacher within a school district; however, ensuring that beginning

teachers are engaged in collegial relationships that elicit feelings of emotional support

may, at the very least, encourage these beginners to seek out the assistance they need for

the elements that formal induction may not be able to address.

Evidence of Quality

Multiple data sources contributed to the evidence reported in this study. Semi

structured interviews and follow-up interviews were transcribed and reviewed, and

mentoring plans provided by participating school districts were analyzed for the design

and implementation of induction practices. Furthermore, member checking procedures

were put into place to confirm the accuracy of the data. Copies of transcripts of the initial

and follow up interviews were provided to participants for review prior to the data

analysis procedures to ensure that transcriptions and the information expressed by the

participants were accurate and acceptable. Furthermore, participants received copies of

the completed report for review, revision and final approval. Potential researcher bias, as

discussed in section 2, was constantly addressed and monitored throughout the data

collection and analysis procedures. Statements obtained by participants that the researcher felt may have been subjected to bias were removed from the data set. Sample research questions and interview transcripts are contained in Appendix A.

Summary

In this section, methods of data collection and subsequent analysis were described. Participant profiles were discussed. I utilized a modified Stevick-Collaizzi-Keen method as discussed by Moustakis (1994) and simplified by Creswell (2007). I then identified emergent themes and significant statements, coding and organizing themes and subsequent subthemes into tables. Textural and structural descriptions of the data in were created in order to discuss the proposed research question, "how do beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD experience their district's induction program?" Data obtained through initial and follow up interviews identified induction supports as mentoring, beginning of the year activities, yearlong activities, and journals. Perceptions regarding the perceived challenges faced by beginning teachers that emerged were (a) dealing with paraprofessionals; (b) completing and maintaining paperwork; (c) managing students' physically aggressive behaviors; and (d) dealing with parents. Likewise, participants strongly agreed upon potential components and supportive measures that may benefit beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD, including the development of collaborative relationships among colleagues, the incorporation of specialized sections for special education teachers during summer and yearlong induction activities, and professional development workshops. In section 5, I address an interpretation of the

research findings, implications for social change, recommendations for further action,

and researcher reflections.

Section 5: Interpretations, Implications and Reflections

I approached this qualitative study by utilizing a phenomenological approach to determine whether current induction practices are sufficient to meet the explicit challenges faced by beginning special education teachers in self-contained classroom for students with ASD. Given the steady increase of students with ASD in public school settings (NJDOE, 2007*b*), it is crucial to ensure that the teachers responsible for implementing effective instructional programming for students with ASD are supported emotionally and instructionally. Current preservice teacher training programs do not prepare beginning special education teachers to perform the responsibilities and meet the demands of the specialized and intensive programs designed for students with ASD (Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, 2001; FATE, 2007; McCabe, 2008). As such, current experiences of beginning special educators for students with ASD must be examined to determine whether current induction procedures are effective to meet their unique needs. School districts need to provide these beginning special education teachers with specific induction components that promote professional growth, avoid attrition, and have a positive effect on student achievement (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; McCabe, 2008; Scheuermann et al., 2003).

Participants engaged in semi structured initial and follow up interviews and shared their insights regarding experiences and perceptions about (a) their relationship with their mentors; (b) various components of formal support offered by the school district; (c) informal supports available within the school; (d) the impact of the support on

the beginning teacher's perceived effectiveness in the classroom; (e) the impact of the support on the teacher's emotional well being; (f) challenges that the beginning teachers faced that may not have been addressed through the district's induction program; and (g) how those challenges can be adressed through induction.

Based on the findings of the study, I concluded that current district induction programs do offer certain supportive components, such as mentoring. However, there are a myriad of challenges that beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD face that are not adequately addressed to meet the contextual needs of the teachers. The primary challenges identified by the study participants included managing paraprofessionals, dealing with students' physically agresseive behaviors, understanding and completing paperwork, and dealing effectively with parents. Based on these primary challenges, participants generated a list of potential supports and induction components that are perceived to offer emotional and instructional assistance that are unique to the responsibilities and expectations that lie with teaching in a self-contained classroom for students with ASD. These supportive components include time to develop collaborative relationships among colleagues, the incorporation of specialized sections for special education teachers during summer and yearlong induction activities, and opportunities to attend professional development workshops that address the context specific needs that these beginning teachers face.

Interpretation of Findings

Through this phenomenological study the experiences of beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD and the

perceptions regarding the supportive nature of their school district's induction program were examined. Participants offered relevant insights into the challenges that they faced and offered suggestions for creating more context specific opportunities that will offer more meaningful support through induction.

After I analyzed the data obtained from district induction handbooks, participant interviews, and limited data from participant journal entries, the information was organized based on emergent themes and significant supporting statements that answered the overarching question, "how do beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD experience their district's induction program?" and presiding subquestions regarding (a) beginning teachers' relationships with their mentors; (b) various components of formal support offered by the school district; (c) the impact of the support on the beginning teacher's perceived effectiveness in the classroom; (d) the impact of the support on the teacher's emotional well being; (e) challenges that the beginning teachers faced that may not have been addressed through thier district's induction program; and (f) how those challenges can be addressed through induction.

Formal Induction Supports

The design of the induction supports was similar across the different public school settings. According to participant feedback and district mentoring plans, the primary components of induction included mentoring, beginning of the school year induction activities, yearlong induction activities, administrative supports, and narrative journals. Interpretations of the data will be organized accordingly.

Mentoring

Mentoring relationships are the most effecitive components of an induction program and are crucial to the survival of beginning teachers (Amos, 2005; Bartell, 2005; Boyer & Gillespie, 2000; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009;Griffin et al., 2003; Mandel, 2006; McCann & Johannessen, 2008; Whitaker, 2000, 2001; White & Mason, 2006; Wong, 2004; Wynn et al., 2007).   The perceptions of the participants of this study support the research literature. Five out of seven participants had formal mentors, and two participants received support from an administrator which directly paralleled a mentor/mentee relationship.   Ingersoll and Smith (2004) reported that regularly scheduled opportunities for collaboration, common planning time, and having a mentor in the same subject area were among the strongest measures of support. Mentoring beginning special education teachers is more effective when one is paired with an experienced special education teacher, primarily because of the unique instructional challenges and responsibilities presented by working with students with disabilities (Amos, 2005; Whitaker, 2000, 2001).

Feedback on mentoring was positive from all but one participant.   This participant cited a personality conflict as a rationale for feeling unsupported by her mentor. However, she also reported that she was initially unaware of the mentoring partnership and the contexts of how a mentoring relationship should work.   To be effective in supporting the beginning teacher, mentoring needs to be an organized, structured part of induction (Bartell, 2005, p.72; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Gold, 1996; Jones & Pauley, 2003). Based on the feedback from this participant, her first year

experience was not initially organized and structured, eliciting stressful and challenging

occasions as a result. She did, however, express improved relationships and a comfort

level with her mentor as she became more at ease with the expectations of the position.

The participant stated, "More recently since I've become comfortable, I feel like the

communication between all of our team members, so, my immediate supervisor, speech

therapist, has improved." Given this scenario, it is essential to take the various stages of

teacher development and mentor training into consideration when implementing a

mentoring program so that each individual has a clear understanding of the purpose and

expectations of a mentoring partnership.

Consequently, participants in this study reported that mentors were all either

currently or had recently been in similar classroom settings, so they were able to

understand the overall challenges that participants encountered during their first years of

teaching. However, most participants expressed that mentor meetings occurred

informally and were often unscheduled, occurring on an "as-needed" basis rather than

through regularly scheduled meetings. The beginning teachers in this study discussed the

supportive nature of their mentoring partnerships, explaining that their mentors were

supportive in a variety of contexts; mentors offered emotional support, assistance with

writing IEPs, and curriculum support.

Beginning of the Year Induction

The beginning teachers in this study offered various degrees of satisfaction

with their initial induction activities preceding the start of the school year. Feedback

from the participants demonstrated a higher level of dissatisfaction from beginning

teachers in a traditional public school setting than those in the more specialized setting. This may be directly attributed to the fact that beginning of the year activities in the specialized public school settings were related to the field of special education and working with students with ASD. Participants in the traditional public school setting expressed feelings of irrelevance with much of their beginning of the year activities because the content was generalized. The traditional public school districts did not take the alternative contexts of special education into consideration aside from explaining the general importance of following an IEP; moreover, this information was intended for general education teachers that may encounter special education students in their classes as part of an inclusion program. Beginning teachers benefit from school cultures that are tailored to their specific needs (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Kardos, et al., 2001; Trubowitz, 2004). Traditional public school districts need to value the needs of beginning special education teachers and take into account relevant professional development activities that will support the contexts in which they teach.

It is important to note that even in the specialized setting, beginning teachers expressed some levels of dissatisfaction with beginning of the year professional development activities. Each of the participants reported a desire for more individualized training based on levels of experience. Participants talked about previous years when they participated as paraprofessionals that beginning of the year activities were organized by job position and experience. One beginning teacher discussed her desire for more practical applications for working with her students with ASD rather than extensive theoretical information. Beginning teachers have difficulty transferring theoretical

knowledge into practice as they transition from preservice education into the realities of the classroom (Bullough et al., 1992; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Whitaker, 2001). As such, meeting the needs of the beginning teachers by providing them with more practical knowledge may help to bridge the gap during this transition.

Induction Activities Throughout the School Year

There were distinct differences between the different public school settings and the organization of their induction activities that occurred throughout the school year. The setting for students with ASD did not offer beginning teachers specific induction activities. Participants discussed their experiences with a few school-wide professional development opportunities, including crisis prevention training and attendance at a conference sponsored by NJAutism. Although there seemed to be more professional development content specific to teaching students with ASD, one beginning teacher in this setting noted her desire to have more opportunities for interaction with her colleagues. She noted,

> If we had new people, it might be nice to have some sort of event …to
>
> increase the support…it would be nice to have some sort of social activity
>
> to bring everyone together. Even if that means at an in-service, because
>
> typically our in-services are just more so about training topics, it also
>
> makes sense to me to put time aside on one of those days for you sort of as
>
> a group or maybe you have to work as a team to accomplish some sort of
>
> goal, so you have to establish that teamwork and collaboration, you know?

The other beginning teachers engaged in a variety of organized induction activities aside from mentoring that were held throughout the course of the school year. Perceptions of these ongoing activities were similar to those regarding induction activities held at the beginning of the year. Participants expressed mixed feelings towards the induction activities. The most valued component of the organized induction meetings was the ability to meet and interact with colleagues and district personnel. Particpants suggested that the emotional support gleaned from the overall experience was postive, even if other teachers did not necessarily understand the challenges that the beginning teachers in self-contained settings were facing. The content and discussions designed to support teachers in instructional and systematic procedures was often irrelevant and meaningless for the context of the participants' professional responsibilities. Even when participants had opportunities to discuss their unique challenges, other colleagues were unable to generate solutions because of the distinct nature of their self-contained classrooms.

Feiman-Nemser (2003) stressed the importance of legitimate collegial collaboration and a supportive school culture. Beginning teachers benefit from school cultures that offer faculty interaction and structured induction programs that are tailored to beginning teachers' specific needs (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Kardos, et al., 2001; Trubowitz, 2004). Given this information, I posit that it may not be sufficient to organize collaboration without the incorporation of meaningful and relevant informational content. Likewise, the opposite may be just as true; relevant professional development content without the opportunity for meaningful colleagial

interaction may be equally unsupportive as beginning teachers attempt to transform into knowledgable and experienced teaching professionals. School districts need to be cognizant of these issues when organizing and implementing induction programs for beginning teachers, particularly for those in contexts that reach beyond the general education classroom settings.

Narrative Journals

Each of the school district's Three Year Mentoring Plan listed a narrative journal recommendation as part of the induction process. Five out of seven beginning teachers in this study did not engage in reflection through a narrative log. In fact, this option was not formally presented to the beginning teachers as an option during their induction experiences. Four out of five of the participants concluded that the use of a narrative journal would not have benefitted them during their induction process, citing that the amount of paperwork was overwhelming and having to complete journal entries may have been burdensome. One participant who began the narrative journal log as part of her induction experience ceased to continue with it after the first month. She asked her adminstrator for permission to opt out of the journaling component because of the overwhelming nature of her paperwork. The information obtained from her brief entries noted specific questions for the mentor regarding paperwork and procedures for beginning of the year preparations. One participant engaged in the journaling process in its entirety; however, I was unable to gain access to the data because it was submitted to the beginning teacher's former school district at the conclusion of the previous school year.

Unfortunately, narrative journals provided minimal data to inform this study. Although narrative journaling is included in each of the district's mentoring plans, there seems to be little value placed on its effectiveness as an integral part of induction. School districts are not implementing the activity, and beginning teachers do not appear to have the time to engage in what seems to be an "optional" process. Further research may be necessary to determine the benefits of journaling as a mandatory component of induction for beginning special education teachers to determine whether the benefits outweigh the burden of time necessary to complete them.

Summary

Beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD have the most positive perceptions about the mentoring component of their induction programs. Overall, participants were paired with mentors that had explicit knowledge with the type of classroom and classification of students as their mentees. As a result, most participants felt supported both emotionally and instructionally as they maneuvered through their first year of teaching students with ASD. Other forms of induction were perceived as less effective. While beginning of the year and ongoing induction activities offered some degree of emotional support and gave teachers insights into the organizational structure and expectations of the school district as a whole, participants did not perceive the experiences as beneficial to meet the instructional and behavioral demands of their classrooms. Participants did, however, appreciate the opportunities to get to know other teachers and district administrators, thereby minimizing potential

feelings of isolation that special education teachers in self-contained classrooms commonly feel.

The least favorably perceived induction component was the use of narrative journals, although the true nature of the benefits of this component cannot be accurately determined within the context of this study. Since the majority of participants did not engage in the journaling process, most could only hypothesize on the level of support offered by this component. Participants generally felt that journaling would have been a burden given the extensive amount of paperwork that beginning teachers had to complete as part of their professional responsibilities. Perceptions may have been different if participants had engaged in the journaling process as a mandatory component of induction. Further examination of the usefulness of reflective journaling may be warranted in future research.

Factors Contributing to Teacher Stress

Beginning teachers faced a variety of issues that posed significant challenges and contributed to considerable feelings of stress throughout their first year in a self-contained classroom for students with ASD. The participants consistently identified four factors that posed challenges for them: Working with paraprofessionals, understanding and completing paperwork, managing student's physically aggressive behaviors, and communicating with parents. These factors identified by the participants in this study are consistent with many of the challenges faced by beginning special education teachers within the research literature (Billingsley, 2010; Griffin et al., 2009; Mastropieri, 2001; Melnick & Meister, 2008). Given that induction components did not reportedly address

the expressed challenges, participants often engaged in independent research and sought out support themselves in order to meet the demands and expectations they faced. The consistencies with the existing research regarding these challenges imply that stakeholders and school district need to consider planning induction activities that will adequately address these challenges.

Managing Paraprofessionals

Participants all cited working with paraprofessionals as the primary challenge of their beginning year of teaching. Many of the participants reported working with several paraprofessionals throughout the day, and cited challenges such as training, supervision, offering constructive feedback, and developing relations particularly with older paraprofessionals who may have had prior experience with the students. Working in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD holds specific challenges including having to deal with difficult behaviors and implementing specialized educational programs. Given that many of the beginning teachers had minimal training in handling these challenges themselves, the pressure of acting as a role model and trainer for paraprofessionals created additional stress. None of the beginning teachers from this study received training or information on how to develop effective relationships or facilitate the effective use of paraprofessionals, yet almost half of the training that paraprofessionals obtain is "on-the-job" training provided by the classroom teacher (Carter et.al, 2009 p.350). Beginning teachers often felt as if they were in a supervisory position over the paraprofessionals and expressed their discomfort with that notion. Harding's (2009) research confirmed that supervising paraprofessionals can be time

consuming and "special educators have little interest in being a supervisor of these assistants as they consider them to be peers" (p. 97). Consequently, induction practices need to include specific training on preparing beginning teachers to effectively work with paraprofessionals for the benefit of the students.

Dealing with Student Behaviors

Individuals with ASD are often likely to engage in physically aggressive, self-injurious, or noncompliant behaviors (Sheuermann et al. 2003; Harding, 2009; Westling, 2010). Teachers of students with ASD need to be prepared to effectively deal with these behaviors. The beginning teachers in this study discussed how student behaviors often posed a challenge, particularly when behavior support professionals were unavailable and preservice and professional development did not address management strategies related to the behavioral concerns specific to students with ASD. While some differences in perception existed between the teachers in the specialized public school districts and the traditional public schools, most of the beginning teachers cited student behavioral concerns as a challenge. The participants in specialized school districts had more access to behavioral support professionals because behaviorists were a part of the school district's full time staff. Nonetheless, beginning teachers described how they often felt inadequate when having to remediate or address student behaviors. The beginning teachers in the traditional public school settings faced more intense difficulties. Behavior support professionals were only available on an intermittent basis, reportedly only once a week. Furthermore, scheduling often posed a problem which impeded the beginning teacher's opportunity to discuss behavioral strategies with the specialist during their

visits. Teachers claimed that they were most often teaching lessons and working with students during behaviorist visits. Time with the behaviorist was not always available to discuss student behaviors and behavioral strategies. Despite the intermittent presence of a behavior specialist, beginning teachers did not perceive them as particularly supportive to meet the behavioral demands presented by their students with ASD. Several teachers reported that a more consistent presence of the behavior specialist from the very beginning of the school year would improve the effectiveness of behavioral support.

In addition, the beginning teachers expressed the need for professional development in utilizing effective behavioral supports for their students during induction, stating that bi-weekly help from a behavior support professional from the beginning of the school year could be effective in helping them to meet the behavioral needs of their students. The participants did not have training in crisis prevention techniques that prove effective in deescalating aggressive or noncompliant behaviors. Consequently, explicit instruction in research based behavioral strategies such as positive behavior supports, crisis prevention, and functional behavior analysis will help beginning teachers to effectively meet the behavior challenges often demonstrated by students with ASD. If the population of students with ASD in the public school systems continues on its current trend, teachers need to be adequately trained to address the aggressive, self-injurious, and noncompliant behaviors that are often exhibited by students with ASD in order to maintain a safe and productive educational environment for students and teachers alike.

Paperwork

Beginning teachers expressed that the amount of paperwork was an overwhelming challenge during their first year. The majority of participants described their most significant stressor in paperwork was the completion of IEPs. The beginning teachers discussed the absence of adequate IEP training in their preservice programs. While mentors reportedly helped participants to navigate the completion of IEPs, there was an expressed desire to obtain additional training on IEP writing. Participant # 7 had specific and extensive preservice training on IEP writing; consequently, she stated that she felt adequately prepared to write her students' IEPs.

Additionally, participants cited data collection, assessment procedures, and maintaining curriculum programs for students with ASD as a challenging responsibility which was a contributing factor to stress during their first year. Teachers for students with ASD in self-contained classrooms often implement individualized, research-based instructional and behavioral programs that require extensive data collection and ongoing assessments. Added to the expectations of providing students with instruction in grade level content areas with extensive modifications and often less than adequate curricular materials, the overwhelming responsibility of updating and maintaining paperwork has proven to be a daunting task for many of the beginning teachers in this study.

Participants in this study expressed a succinct need for professional development in the area of paperwork completion. One participant stated, "That's something I didn't get enough exposure to at first." Another remarked, "I think that would be a great idea as having just a general workshop just to sort of outline the

different assessment tools…and how to go about implementing them." Beginning

teachers' feelings of inadequacy and stress over the amount and variety of paperwork are

well supported in the research literature (Griffin et al., 2003; Melnick & Meister, 2008;

Whitaker, 2001, 2010; White & Mason, 2003, 2006). Given the consistent nature of how

paperwork poses a high level of frustration and stress for beginning special educators

compounded by the amount of paperwork required to run an effective autism program,

preparation measures need to be taken to acclimate these teachers to the demands and

expectations they are required to meet. Although preservice programs may be able to

provide some remedy, school districts may need to bear the ultimate responsibility for

adequately preparing beginning teachers in specific paperwork responsibilities through

explicit professional development opportunities.

Parent Challenges

Working collaboratively with parents is a well documented concern that faces

beginning teachers (Billingsley, 2010; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Griffin et al., 2009;

Mastropieri, 2001; Melnick & Meister, 2008). The participants in this study expressed

this concern as well, citing particular challenges with answering questions about their

students' academic programs and behaviors, appearing knowledgeable despite their

inexperience, and meeting the academic expectations that parents have for their children.

Preservice education does not prepare teachers adequately to communicate with parents

(D'Anelio, 2008). Participant # 7 said "…dealing with parents on a daily basis, writing

in journals, or dealing with them with emails and things…that wasn't something I was

really prepared for…what's appropriate or what's not appropriate and what legally you

have to do…" As teachers become more experienced, they develop varied and effective

communication strategies when dealing with conflict or student progress (Melnick &

Meister, 2008). Communication with parents is an important component of a child's

educational experience and is ingrained into the IDEA and other federal laws related to

the education of students with special needs (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson

& Beegle, 2004). Furthermore, research-based interventions for students with ASD are

most effective when delivered across educational and home settings; relationships

between parents and teachers that are collaborative are critical for the development of

effective educational programs for these students (Ruble & Ashoomoff, 2010). Given the

importance of parent – teacher communication, particularly for students with ASD,

coupled with the lack of preservice preparation in this domain, district induction

programs need to address this deficit in beginning teacher's repertoire of skills related to

communicative efforts with parents. Supporting beginning special education teachers

with the strategies to develop collaborative relationships with parents will help to

promote educational progress for the students with ASD.

Beginning Teacher's Induction Suggestions

Participants from this study contributed their suggestions for induction

components and supports that would address many of the challenges that they faced as

beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD. Their

suggestions directly correlate to the areas that they found to be difficult to navigate

during their induction programs. Beginning teachers' recommendations directly related

to collaboration and context specific professional development opportunities as a means to support them both emotionally and instructionally.

Beginning teachers are most supported through colleagial interactions and structured induction programs that are customized to meet the teachers' specific needs (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Kardos et al., 2001; Trubowitz, 2004). While this may be easily accomplished for beginning teachers in general education settings, the same can not be said for teachers who are expected to meet the diverse and challenging needs of students in self-contained classrooms. The participants in this study reported that the time spent with colleagues during induction activities had some benefit. They perceived the opportunity of meeting administrators and other colleagues as positive to reduce the feelings of isolation they sometimes experienced. However, participants often felt as though the topics of discussion were irrelevant and did not offer information that they needed to meet their job expectations. Participant #5 said:

> My problem with the district wide thing is although they give you information about the whole entire district, I think the special ed is more in need of its own little induction thing because there were more important things we needed to focus on…"

Furthermore, while their beginning general education counterparts were perceived as supportive during induction meetings, they did not understand the challenges facing the participants and were unable to offer advice or engage in problem-solving discussions because of the unfamiliarity with the nature of the self-contained

special education classrooms and students with ASD. As a result, many participants expressed the importance of having a separate component of induction specific to special education, both during the summer induction process and activities held throughout the school year.

Participants also generated other ideas that could offer practical, context specific support through collaboration. Several beginning teachers perceived the opportunity of meeting with other district special education teachers could offer relevant information and support. Discussing curriculum and program details with colleagues that teach a grade level below or above the participant's grade level could offer relevant information about instructional goals and provide emotional support by interacting with colleagues that face similar challenges as special education teachers. Additionally, beginning teachers expressed an interest in the opportunity to look at other school district's successful programs for students with ASD in order to further understand the nature of a self-contained classroom for students with autism. Beginning teachers for students with ASD need to develop skills and an understanding of how to implement effective interventions and faciltiate instructional programming for their students (McCabe, 2008). One participant expressed the importance of collaborating with others who have knowledge of teaching students with ASD. "As far as any classroom concerns or professional concerns or programs or how to do things, I wouldn't go to anybody who doesn't have an ASD class because they just don't know. They just don't get it!"

Participants also expressed a desire to have an opportunity to collaborate more with team members, behavior specialists, and colleagues from their schools. Wong

(2004) reflected on the importance of providing opportunites for collaboration and sharing that will support the beginning teacher. Beginning teachers need to create positive relationships and become acclimated to the school culture during their first year (Whitaker, 2001). The participants of the current study discussed the importance of developing relationships with their general education colleagues in order to promote more effective instruction for their students, and to extend the general educators knowledge and perceptions of students with ASD in their classrooms. Participant # 7 reflected on that notion. " A lot of kids go into their specials, and their teachers have *no idea* what to do with them, and neither of us have time to discuss it…" She also mentioned that collaborating on instructional content would be beneficial. "I had no curriculum when I got hired. I was teaching science off of whatever I found, so taking time to work with them would help benefit the curriculum aspect…that's a major thing!" Griffin et al. (2009) found that beginning teachers who teach in special education classrooms that are "removed from regular education classrooms" (p.55) have a more difficult time with communicating and collaborating with their colleagues. Collaboration is an essential component for supporting beginning teachers and the understanding that collaboration for special education teachers in self-contained classrooms is perceived as a difficult process. This establishes the need for stakeholders in school districts to assist beginning teachers with the collaborative and communicative relationships that will offer the necessary supports throughout their initial teaching experiences.

In addition to the need for collaboration with colleagues and other special education professionals, the beginning teachers from this study established and reflected

on a collection of professional development topics as additional components for induction. The topics primarily addressed the challenges expressed by the beginning teachers, inlcuding managing paraprofessionals, completing and understanding paperwork, and managing student behaviors. These notions directly coincide with the conceptual framework of delivering professional development utilizing the underpinnings of adult learning theories. Since adults are most motivated to learn based on their individual needs (Bartell, 2005; English, 1999; Putnam & Borko, 2000), and learn their most valuable lessons through experience and discourse (Cranton & King, 2003), professional development opportunities need to take these ideas into consideration. Educational researchers discuss how professional development must tap into the individual teachers' needs and professional responsibilities and involve them in identifying and developing ongoing supports based on those needs (Bartell, 2005; Murphy & Calway, 2008; Webster-Wright, 2009; Wong, 2003, 2004). The existing studies that focus on the needs of beginning special educators, particularly those for students with significant disabilities such as autism report on the challenges facing these teachers (Boyer & Lee, 2001; Busch et al., 2001; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Mastropieri, 2001; McDonald & Speece, 2001) as similar to the challenges reported by this study's participants, including managing paraprofessionals, paperwork, and feeling unprepared by preservice education to handle the nature of the responsibilities. School administrators need to take the consistencies demonstrated in the research into consideration when planning induction activities for beginning special education teachers

in their districts. Professional development opportunities need to be aligned with the challenges that beginning teachers face as established in the literature.

As a direct result of induction programs failing to meet the needs of these beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms, participants had to engage in significant independent research to learn the strategies necessary for implementing instructional programs for their students with ASD. Participants discussed having to independently read, research and learn about techniques in ABA, assessments, and curricular materials. Often, the beginning teachers reported being hesitant to ask for help for fear of being deemed incompetent. However, as they began to evolve through the stages of teacher development (Bartell, 2005; Cheyney et al., 1992; Moir, 1999, Villani, 2009; Whitaker, 2001), many of the participants began to seek out assistance from supervisors and colleagues after reaching a substantial level of emotional stress. Beginning teachers expressed that they wished they would have felt comfortable asking for help earlier, and participant # 5 explicitly noted, "…you can't be afraid, because once I realized that you have to go ask for help, it just made things so much easier!"

The implications from this study indicate that beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD are faced with many of the same challenges as beginning special education teachers overall. However, these challenges may be more compounded given the complexity of the educational programs specifically for students with ASD. While many special education teachers may work with one or two paraprofessionals, teachers in programs for students with ASD often work with more. One participant in this study reported working with six or seven paraprofessionals

throughout the day. Moreover, the paperwork may be considerably more extensive as students each have individualized programs that are often taught in a one to one setting. Many of the teachers write monthly reports and prepare for progress meetings with parents on a regular basis. Finally, many of the students with ASD frequently exhibit levels of physically aggressive, self-injurious, or self-stimulating behaviors that are extremely difficult to manage.

Within the context of this study, school districts did not implement induction practices that participants perceived as overwhelmingly positive. All of the participants expressed that the mentoring component was the most supportive. However, the vast majority of participants indicated that many of the other induction activities seemed irrelevant. As such, stakeholders might examine and act upon the research to determine how the perceptions of the participants can yield practical solutions towards the challenges they face as beginning special education teachers. Incorporating time for collaborative opportunities and context specific professional development options for beginning teacher induction practices that is grounded in the current research may be successful in ensuring that beginning special educator's needs are met, stress levels are reduced, and retention is increased. Furthermore, meeting the needs of beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD will have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the teacher, resulting in greater student achievement for the students that they serve.

Implications for Social Change

Students with ASD are much more prevalent in New Jersey's public school systems and in our communities. Individuals diagnosed with ASD who are provided with an intensive, research based educational program from an early age demonstrate better outcomes (Corsello, 2005), and greater potential to become more independent as adults and less reliant on state and local agencies for services (Jacobson et al., 1998; Marriage et al., 2009). The primary form of effective treatment for ASD stems from research based educational programs that promote skills in language, socialization, behavior, and academics (Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, 2001). Successful treatment for students with ASD relies on the classroom teacher to have the necessary skills and knowledge to implement effective instructional programming (LeBlanc, Richardson & Burns, 2009; McCabe, 2008; Scheuermann et al., 2003). Since preservice education does not offer beginning teachers the necessary knowledge base to facilitate such a program for students with ASD (Foundation for Autism Training and Education, 2007; McCabe, 2008; Scheuermann et al., 2003), the school district has an innate responsibility to ensure that beginning special education teachers are provided the essential trainings that they need to adequately support their students. Researchers imply a direct corrolation between teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Blanton, et al., 2006; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Fulton et al., 2005; Guarino et al., 2006; Rowan et al., 2002; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Strong, 2006; Wenglinsky, 2002; Wong, 2004). Stakeholders who organize and implement induction programs for beginning teachers need to take each teacher's context into consideration. While it may be unrealistic to create separate induction programs for every teacher,

components of induction must be individualized and flexible to meet the contextual needs of the beginning teacher. In order to positively impact students with ASD, school districts need to provide their beginning special education teachers with effective and relevant induction supports. Districts need to consider supporting teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD in meeting the challenges of working with and training paraprofessionals, communicating with parents, collaborating with colleagues, and managing their essential paperwork. Then teachers will be more inclined and prepared to implement the instructional and behavioral strategies that can foster student growth and acheivement which may ultimately impact students' lives.

Recommendations for Further Action

Providing beginning teachers with the supports they need to implement effective educational programs for students with ASD is a crucial stepping stone in a positive direction. There are several measures that school districts can take to begin supporting their beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD that are grounded in the challenges that teachers face during their induction year. The implementation of a comprehensive induction program has many benefits, including higher retention rates (Bartell, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kardos, 2002; McCabe, 2008; Sargeant, 2003; Wong, 2004; Wynn et al., 2007) improved teacher quality (AASCU, 2006; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Cherubini, 2007*a*, 2007*b*; Fulton et al., 2005; Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000), and greater student achievement (AASCU, 2006; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Strong, 2006; Wenglinsky, 2002; Wong, 2004). By grounding induction practices in the research

that discusses the specific needs of beginning teachers, stakeholders can have a positive effect on the first year experiences of beginning teachers for students with ASD and in turn, directly affect the educational experiences and outcomes of their students.

Beginning teachers come into the teaching profession unprepared to meet the expectations of the classroom (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Whitaker, 2001), and beginning special education teachers enter the classroom with additional complex issues to contend with (Billingsley et al., 2004; Griffin et al., 2009; Whitaker, 2001). Special education teachers for students with significant disabilities who teach in self-contained classrooms demonstrate the highest rates of attrition (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002) because of the inability to work through the "reality shock" (Veenman, 1984) of meeting diverse academic and behavioral needs of their students. For beginning teachers for students with ASD, many of the skills and applications that need to be implemented within the classroom are not taught in preservice education (FATE, 2007; McCabe, 2008; Scheuermann et al., 2003). As a result, school districts need to address the concerns and provide opportunities for systematic induction that will inherently support their professional development needs.

Initially, stakeholders may consider implementing separate sections of induction during the summer and throughout the school year. Participants in this study expressed a degree of dissatisfaction with the organization of group induction activities implemented during these times. Creating opportunities for collaboration between beginning special educators and addressing content and procedures that are exclusive to special education during group induction activities can increase the benefit and value of

the induction experience for beginning teachers. Induction is most effective when it

directly addresses the emerging needs of the beginning teacher based on their unique

experiences (Griffin et al., 2003). Increasing the opportunities for beginning special

education teachers to engage in group activities and learning experiences with other

special educators can have a positive effect on a teacher's ability to deal with stress and

perform professional responsibilities. These group activities may be opportunities for the

district to provide information regarding the expectations and procedures for completing

paperwork such as IEPs or assessments, dealing with student behaviors, or providing

training in crisis prevention techniques. Additional time might be used to simply discuss

experiences and challenges that arise in the classroom. Conversational discourse with

colleagues gives beginning special education teachers the opportunity to make

connections between theoretical knowledge and practical applications as a way to learn

from their unique experiences (Baker et al., 2005) and gives beginners an opportunity to

reflect on those experiences as a means to transform their knowledge and abilities to

effectively meet the needs of their students (Choy, 2009; Dirkx et al, 2006; Mezirow,

1994; Webster-Wright, 2009).

Beginning teachers for students with ASD are responsible for delivering

instruction and managing a classroom which may appear much different than other self-

contained classrooms because classrooms for students with ASD often utilize specific

research based models as a framework for their instruction (Committee on Educational

Interventions for Children with Autism, 2001; McCabe, 2008). Participants from this

study reported on their perceived feeling of isolation with regards to others understanding

the nature of their responsiblities in their classrooms. As such, beginning teachers in classrooms for students with ASD may require additional professional development opportunities than group induction activities can provide. Beginning teachers are most supported when induction includes opportunities for collaboration and "self-directed professional development opportunities" based on individual teacher needs (Cherubini, 2007*b*). School administrators need to provide information and access to professional development opportunities that are contextually specific to classrooms for students with ASD, including working with paraprofessionals, implementing effective behavioral strategies, and covering instructional strategies embedded in applied behavior analysis or other research based methodology used in the classroom.

Beginning special education teachers need to perceive that they are supported and encouraged to seek out assistance or information when met with challenges they feel unable to navigate independently. Developing a culture of collaboration and giving beginning special education teachers a sense of support and value for the challenging responsibilities they face can promote and validate the beginner's sense of equality and purpose, thereby having a positive impact on the perceived effectiveness that they have for the students in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD. Public school district administrators can have a direct impact on ensuring that the induction practices are effectively designed and implemented to address the needs of all beginning teachers in their districts. Taking into consideration the specific nature of the beginning teachers' professional duties and the district's expectations for fulfilling those duties must be considered if teachers are to be supported effectively. Results from this research study

may be disseminated to county superintendents, district superintendants, and public

school adminstrators as a foundation for revising district induction practices for

beginning special education teachers. Furthermore, results from this study may be

submitted for publication in educational journals and presented at conferences where

such information may be available for professionals in the field of special education and

autism studies that may have a direct impact on how beginning teachers for students with

ASD are supported. Finally, the information from this study may benefit universities that

offer preservice education to those interested in becoming special education teachers for

students with ASD. By acknowledging the deficits in preservice education, universities

may integrate relevant coursework options that will address the needs expressed by the

beginning teachers' in the existing research. Disseminating the research results to those

stakeholders that have a direct impact on the education and professional development of

beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD

can help to ensure a competent, effective body of teaching professionals that have a

positive effect on the eduction of students with ASD.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Further Study**</div>

While this research study began to answer some of the questions related to the

perceptions of induction supports for beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms for

students with autism, it has only begun to discover how school districts can specifically

support their beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms. Due to the small number

of participants, the results from this study cannot be generalized to a larger population.

However, it is important to note that many of the challenges reported by the beginning

teachers in this study clearly correlate with those challenges expressed in the existing literature (Boyer & Gillespie, 2000; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Griffin et al., 2003; Whitaker, 2000).

Still, few studies exist that investigate how induction for teachers of students with significant disabilities in self-contained classrooms (Müller & Burdette, 2007) supports their needs and how current induction practices affect the retention rates of such teachers (Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Lane & Canosa, 1995). Gehrke and McCoy (2007) urged researchers to investigate what beginning special educators perceive as effective support given the context of their situations. This study has begun that process by investigating the explicit situational contexts and resulting needs of beginning teachers for students in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD.

While the current research offers limited insight into the perceptions of some beginning teachers, the increase in students with ASD in the public school system establishes the importance of investigating ways in which school districts can support their beginning teachers who work with some of our public school's most challenging students.

One particular question that arose from this study was whether the use of narrative journals is an effective component of the induction process. Most of the participants in this study did not participate in the journaling process even though the journals were identified as being a component in each district's induction plan. When asked about the narrative journal's potential for support, most of the participants perceived the idea as more of a nuisance than a support. I was unable to locate literature

discussing the potential for narrative journals as supportive component of induction. Consequently, given that narrative journals are listed as part of district induction procedures but not adequately monitored from a district standpoint, research may be needed to determine the true nature of support offered by the implementation of narrative journals as a source of induction support.

Another question which arose from the study is how preservice education may be able to meet the needs of preservice teachers more effectively. A number of participants discussed how they felt unprepared to meet the demands of their classrooms because preservice education did not offer the necessary coursework or experiences from which to draw from. One participant expressed how her preservice education prepared her well for IEP writing; as a result, she was the only participant not to identify IEP writing as a significant challenge. Investigating how preservice education influences the perceived effectiveness of beginning teachers in special education, particularly those that teach students with moderate to severe disabilities can contribute vital information to ensure that beginning special education teachers are better prepared to meet the challenges they will face in the classroom.

Overall, the study implicates the need for further research to determine whether the recommendations for changes in induction would ultimately increase the perceived effectiveness of the induction process. Research supports many of the challenges expressed by participants, however, little investigation is evident on whether implementing the identified supportive measures has proven effective. By creating opportunities for beginning teachers to design context specific professional development

itineraries or offering induction options that address special educators' contextual needs, researchers can identify whether such interventions are truly effective in supporting the needs of the beginning teachers. As a result, further study needs to be done on whether the suggested supports inherently make an impact on beginning teacher's perceptions on the effectiveness of the induction process.

Researcher Reflections

As a teacher in a self-contained classroom for students with autism in a public school, I entered this research study with several preconceived notions about the perceptions of beginning teachers in similar environments. Throughout the interview and data analysis process, it was essential for me to maintain objectivity and proactively address potential biases that might occur. I was cognizant of how potential bias could affect the interview and data analysis processes, and continually made every effort to put bias aside. During the interview process, I had to maintain awareness of my body language and facial expressions when listening to and responding to participants, being careful not to influence or elicit information based on my personal biases. When reviewing the interview recordings and transcripts, I made notations of instances that I felt may have been affected by my own personal bias and eliminated such comments from the data set.

Interviewing the participants gave me an opportunity to evaluate ways in which different types of public schools support their beginning teachers in self-contained classrooms. What I found to be most interesting was that the beginning teachers in public school settings for students with disabilities had similar concerns as those in traditional

public school settings. I expected the teachers in the school for students with ASD to express higher levels of satisfaction with their induction programs. I was surprised to uncover that induction procedures appeared to be somewhat unstructured when compared to the district's Three Year Mentoring Plan. The overall perception of induction and suggestions for additional support paralleled the perceptions of the other study participants in traditional public school settings.

The notions expressed by the participants in traditional public school settings did not surprise me. Personal bias aside, I was interested to hear about the participants' specific challenges and rationale behind their perceptions. Learning about their personal experiences, frustrations and emotional journeys throughout their induction year offered additional perspectives that I hadn't previously considered, and their enthusiasm regarding the implementation of new induction supports was exciting. When participants expressed excitement about the list of suggested induction supports that I created based on their feedback, I felt that the significance of this research study had been confirmed. The idea of creating induction supports that will meet the needs of beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD is an important consideration if public schools are increasingly responsible for the education of these students. As such, I feel a responsibility to address the needs expressed by the participants by intitiating change in the induction supports offered by school districts. Perhaps by initiating changes in how induction supports are implemented for beginning special education teachers, I can have an impact on the perceptions that beginning

teachers have on their overall effectiveness in the classroom for students with ASD and the resultant achievements these students make.

Conclusion

The process of transitioning beginning teachers from preservice students to professional educators has long been a topic of investigation by researchers (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Hargreaves, 2000; Ingersoll & Smith; 2004; Lortie, 1975). Bringing beginning teachers out of the isolation and "trial by fire" experiences of the first year (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004 p.28) through systematic mentoring and induction programs has proven effective to address several, although not all, of the challenges that beginning teachers face (Babione & Shea, 2005; Bartell, 2005; Billingsley et al., 2004; Veenman, 1984; Villani, 2009; Whitaker, 2001). In spite of increased induction efforts over the past few decades, beginning special education teachers have been seemingly left behind until much more recently (Griffin et al., 2009). The examination of the needs of beginning special education teachers has been underrepresented in the literature, and research outlining the challenges faced by teachers in self-contained classrooms is even less (Boyer & Lee, 2001; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; McCabe, 2008; Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002). In order to have a positive effect on the achievement of students with special needs, it is important to address the needs and challenges faced by beginning special education teachers through effective induction practices.

The number of students with ASD in public schools has risen dramatically over the past decade (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009). The resultant

increase of teachers responsible for implementing the research based educational programs required for these students is apparent. Consequently, school districts need to take into account the specific contextual needs expressed by these teachers when offering support through induction.

Teacher's initial classroom experiences have a direct impact on their effectiveness in teaching practices and student achievment (Billingsley, 2010; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Strong, 2006). Achievement for students with ASD relies on the teacher's ability to understand the theoretical and practical applications of research based educational programs that are proven effective to meet the needs of learners with ASD (The Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism, 2001). Since preservice education does not adequately address these issues, beginning teachers for students with ASD are often at a loss when trying to manage challenges of working with paraprofessionals, completeing paperwork, and managing student behaviors. Consequently, school districts need to fill in gaps in order to prepare beginning teachers for the expectations regarding their professional responsibilities.

Induction practices that incorporate high levels of collaboration are most effective for beginning teachers (Cherubini 2007b; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Westling, 2006; Wong, 2004).   Beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD can transform their abilities to create enriching and supportive environments for their students with adequate support. Induction programs that systematically and relevantly assist beginners through the survival stage, integrate them into the school community, and provide opportunities for collaboration and professional

development can help to ensure greater teacher effectiveness and student acheivement. Notbohm (2005), the mother of a child with ASD eloquently describes her perspective of being a child with ASD. These words not only represent the ultimate importance of effectively teaching students with ASD, but expresses the emotional journey of the beginning special education teacher, as well.

> All that I might become won't happen without you as my foundation…be
>
> my advocate, be my friend, and we'll see just how far I can go…without
>
> your support my chances of successful, self-reliant adulthood are slim.
>
> With your support and guidance, the possibilities are broader than you
>
> might think. I promise you – I am worth it (p.xxxi).

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Appendix A: Community Partner Invitation Letter

Dear

   I am a doctoral student in Walden University's Ed.D - Teacher Leadership program, and I am currently preparing to obtain participants for my research study that is scheduled to begin in March. The title of my study is *The Induction Experiences of Beginning Special Education Teachers in Self-Contained Classrooms*.

   My purpose in contacting you is to identify schools that have self-contained classrooms for students with low-incidence disabilities currently being taught by a beginning teacher who is participating or has recently participated in your district's induction program.

    If your school currently meets these criteria, I would appreciate your willingness to become a Community Partner in my research. Upon your approval, I would contact the teachers to see if they would be interested in participating in my research study. Please be advised that all research participants and Community Partners would remain completely confidential and have the option of withdrawing from the research study at any time.

   If you have any questions or would prefer to meet in person prior to agreeing to become a Community Partner, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would appreciate the opportunity to share my research with you.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter!

Sincerely,

Nelly A. Dixon, M.Ed.
Walden University

Appendix B: Community Partner Letter of Permission

Community Research Partner Name
Contact Information

March 29, 2010

Dear Ms. Dixon,

   Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Induction Experiences of Beginning Special Education Teachers in Self-Contained Classrooms for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders* within the <u>Insert Name of Community Partner</u>. As part of this study, I authorize you to collect information regarding our facility's induction procedures, interview teachers who agree to participate in the study, and collect or copy written journal logs from participants. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate in Research

Study Title: The Induction Experiences of Beginning Teachers in Self-Contained Classrooms for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Dear ___,

My name is Nelly A. Dixon. I am a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D Teacher Leadership Program through Walden University. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of Educational Doctoral Degree, and I would like to invite you to participate. I am studying the induction experiences of beginning special education teachers in classrooms for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for two interviews, an initial interview and a follow up interview. In particular, you will be asked questions about your personal induction experiences. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place, and should last about 45 – 60 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. I will be the only person who will listen to the tapes in order to analyze and transcribe their content. They will then be destroyed. During the interviews, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to.

 Although you probably won't benefit directly from participating in this study, we hope that other beginning special education teachers for students with ASD will benefit by as school districts learn about the unique needs of teachers for students with ASD.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the discretion of the researcher. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. Taking part in the study is your

decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also withdraw from the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please *s*ign the attached consent form and return it to me via email. I look forward to the possibility of working with you.

Sincerely,

Nelly A. Dixon, M.Ed.
Walden University

Appendix D: Consent to Participate in Research

You are invited to take part in a research study that examines the induction experiences

of beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with Autism

Spectrum Disorders (ASD). You were chosen for the study because you are a beginning teacher

in a self-contained classroom for students with ASD, and you are currently or have recently

participated in a district induction program. This form is part of a process called "informed

consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Nelly A. Dixon who is a doctoral student at
Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to explore beginning teachers' perceptions of their induction
experiences. Teachers of students with ASD have different roles and responsibilities in order to
support student learning. This study will explore how induction supports beginning special
education teachers to meet the needs of their students with ASD in a self-contained classroom
setting.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in two audio recorded personal interviews (an initial and a follow up).
  Interviews will be approximately 60 minutes long. Interviews will occur within a two
  week time frame.
- Submit a copy of narrative journal logs that you may have maintained as part of your
  school district's requirements for your induction program.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision
of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at your school district will treat you
differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still
change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any
time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
There is minimal risk related to the participation of this research study. One potential risk is a
possible temporary heightened level of stress or anxiety associated with the interview process.
Benefits of this study include the satisfaction of contributing to the scarce body of research on

induction for beginning special education teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation given to participants for participating in the study. Participants are encouraged to participate to contribute to the body of research on induction practices which has the potential to improve induction practices for teachers in self-contained classrooms for students with ASD. To alleviate the possibility of coercion, the researcher will not offer compensation for teacher participation.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via telephone or by email. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

_____

Participant's Written or Electronic* Signature

_____

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature

_____

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Research Question:

How do beginning special educators that teach in classrooms primarily for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) feel about the effectiveness of their induction experiences?

Interview Guide:

1. Tell me a little bit of background about yourself and why you chose to enter the

    field of special education.

    a. (Possible Follow up – Explain the kinds of experiences you may have had

        with individuals with autism or other disabilities prior to becoming a

        teacher.)

2.   Tell me about your induction program that your district offers you as a beginning

    special education teacher?

    a. (Follow up – Describe any induction components that are specific to

        teaching students with autism)

3. Which components of your induction do you find to be supportive to address the

    challenges that you face as a beginning special education teacher for students with

    ASD?

    a. (Possible Follow up - Explain how you feel each component supported

        you either emotionally or practically.)

4. Can you describe any components of your induction you felt did not support the

    challenges that you face as a beginning special education teacher for students with

    ASD?

a. (Possible Follow up- Please offer some examples or reasons why you felt those components were not supportive?)

5. What alternative or additional forms of support do you think might increase the effectiveness of an induction program for you as a beginning special education teacher for students with ASD?

   a. Follow up - How might this (or these) alternate form(s) of support help you to (teach, manage students, plan, alleviate stress, etc.) more effectively?

6. Is there anything else you would like to add or comment about regarding your induction experience and how it contributed to your work as a beginning teacher for students with ASD?

Appendix F: Example of Follow Up Interview Questions

1. You talked about directors and veteran teachers both leading meetings for new teachers as part of the induction process. You said "it's very different the way the directors and veteran teachers run theirs." Tell me how they were different in terms of how they supported you as a new teacher.

2. Referring to our discussion about training on Gradebook. How do you do your grades or report on student performance? How did you learn these procedures?

3. You talked about doing APA assessments for your students. What kind of training were you given to help you understand the assessment process?

4. You mentioned that dealing with classroom staff was a challenge for you this year. Is there anything the mentoring / induction process could have provided to prepare you for that responsibility more effectively?

5. Tell me about how you were prepared to deal with students that exhibited physically aggressive behaviors. How could this have been done more effectively?

6. You talked about the importance of relevant PD during our first interview, specifically about sexuality, and Peter Gerhardt. You mentioned that you had to seek out some PD opportunities for yourself. How might the district support teachers more effectively in the sense of meeting the teachers specific PD needs?

Appendix G: Example of Interview Transcription

Participant A:

I: Ok, um, what have you found to be the most challenging in with doing what you're doing in your classroom this year, either….we'll just a broad statement. Tell me what you think has been the most challenging.

S: I think the most challenging for me this year is I have a student who is physically aggressive, and that is definitely hard to keep everyone focused, and understanding that working through the physical aggression is part of the work session, and how do I keep everyone else on task, or when to know or how to train staff that its best that everyone else leave, that its where that fine line is that we should stay and stick it out through the noise or whatever it may be, or that we may need to leave, that we are adding to the problem. So that is definitely the most challenging this year.

I: So, and how about programming wise. What do you find to be most challenging…instructionally.

S: Um, I have, well everybody's on a different level. We do the SRA comprehension programs, and I think the hardest for me is I have one student whose parents really want him on SRA, and SRA is so far above her at this point. The comprehension isn't something that you can, if your not ready for it then you're not ready for it, so I think that has been my hardest, is for awhile we tried it and we trialed it to get the data to say no, it's not…past the placement test, we just kept trying and it was very very hard for her and hard for us as staff to keep it going through that trial.

I: Right…now how about, cause you mentioned data…

S: mmm hmm…

I: So, you collect, I'm assuming you collect a lot of data and things…did you have experience with collecting a lot of data before, or is it something you got thrown into and had to learn how to do, or…

S: It was something I, again, one of those things I just acquired from that one period a day, and then doing the research online, and to figure out what ABA classrooms really do look like and what's the best way to do it? how should they look, how shouldn't they look, How's the right way to keep data, what do you DO with the data after you get it? After it sits in a binder, what do you do? So…

I: Ok, so that was basically all self driven?

S: Yep.

I: Self driven stuff…well that's good b/c a lot of people wouldn't do it…

S: wouldn't do it! Well, I want to know why I am doing things…

I: Well, sure!

S: I'm not gonna just do it b/c I have to. I want to know why, I want to know what to do with it?

I: Yeah, well, that's what it is all about. Um, are there any other components, that may not necessarily be related to induction, but are there any other components that are in place to help support you in any way with the students aside from the SOS and your dept. chair. Do you have a behaviorist that comes in, or…

S: Yes, we do have a behaviorist. She consults every Friday. She's in my room She's very good. She'll come into my room and observe, and then she'll also meet up with me later one on one during either my prep or at the end of the day so that we can discuss what she saw or any of my concerns. She's very approachable, to where if it's a day that she's not in district, or just not in my building, I can get a hold of her if I really needed to.

I: and was that set up based on what the district thought you might need, or was that something that was requested?

S: Well the district hired the behaviorist, but that was something she and I kind of did. She was coming in to observe, cause like I said, I have a student with some significant challenges in my room. But as far as me meeting with her one on one, was kind of me showing up every Friday, and it's just become habit now. This is what we need, and this is how…I have to…I can't just have you come and me not be able to pick your brain…

Participant B:

I: (8:55) So, aside from the staff members, are there any parts of teaching the students that you have found to be challenging?

L: They're all so individual, they all have challenges themselves, so…like are we saying Program-wise, or…

I: Well, anything. Anything that you find to be challenging that might require to you ask for or seek out support, you know, like behaviorally, or just the fact that the kids are so different and you have to differentiate for all different kids, so you know, what parts of teaching in that classroom really cause you to say, oh, I'm not sure…I could use some support.

L: Definitely with the behaviors in my classroom I feel like I need A LOT of support in that area. It's something I will always want to grow on, you know, I'm trying to learn taking my BCBA courses, it's something I'd like to excel in eventually. And, but, behavior intervention plans, I need help, um, running them for functional communication training, teaching them how to ask appropriately for something that they need rather than engaging in a behavior. Definitely the behavioral aspect, I always need support and um, for program writing, I feel like I have a handle on that, but definitely sometimes when I write a program, a student doesn't do as well as I expect, and so I do need help writing up modifications for a certain program…and...

I: So, oh, I'm sorry…going back to that, you had said that in the beginning that month that you were with the other teacher, um, that they went over program writing and stuff. Do you think that was really helpful in helping you to get a good, um, knack of writing the programs…

L: yeah, absolutely, yes…

I: Ok…

L: Definitely. And, um, let's see…I think, um, (hesitation) I mean, I'm always looking to learn, so it's… I always rely a lot on my lead instructor. We always brain storm together, its great having that co-teaching, even though I'm the teacher, you know, I'll call her over, we'll look at something together, make modifications based on both of our input…

I: Ok, that's good, that's good to have that…that support.

L: It's excellent to have that, yes.

I: And, she's here all the time that you can call her whenever…

L: She's right in the classroom right next to me, yeah,

I: Oh, she's in the classroom all day, Oh ok…even better…

L: Yes, all day, yes…that's my lead instructor. My coordinator's not…

I: Oh, ok...

L: She coordinates two classrooms, so it's myself and the classroom right next to me. So she's not always around, but she's easy to get in touch with, you know, she's just downstairs.

I: So, the lead instructor is, is that also a teacher, or is she one of you para…paras that sort of, the top para.

L: Yes, exactly…

I: Um ok, can you talk about any parts of the process that you feel might not have been particularly supportive for you to help you with your classroom?

L: Yeah, um… (hesitate) It's funny because I feel like I'm constantly getting support, so it's hard for me to talk about things that I am not getting support in, b/c I feel like if I'm not getting the support, I have the person where I can go to and I can say, "I feel like I need this…" and she would give it to me, you know, immediately. It would, so, I really feel like, I have constant supervision, I have constant support, and I always have that person I can go to, you know?

Curriculum Vitae

Nelly A. Dixon

Profile:
> Special education teacher with experience teaching students of diverse disabilities, ranging from mildly learning disabled to severely impaired. Previous experiences include teaching middle school students in inclusive classrooms and establishing an elementary level program for students with autism. Professional experiences also include creating and presenting a variety of workshops for school staff and parents on topics of autism and behavior intervention and mentoring beginning teachers.

Education:

September 2007 – present	*Currently working towards Ed.D in Teacher Leadership*, Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota. *Anticipated completion date February, 2011.*
May 2005	*Masters of Education (M.Ed) in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment*, Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota. *GPA 4.0*
May 2001	*Bachelors in Arts (BA) – Teacher of the Handicapped,* Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey. *Summa Cum Laude.*
May 1996	*Associates in Arts (AA) – Liberal Arts and Sciences,* Camden County College, Blackwood, New Jersey. *Permanent President's List.*

Employment:

2005 – Present   Special Education Teacher

- Developed elementary level program for Kindergarten – third grade students with autism, focusing on use of Applied Behavior Analysis and Verbal Behavior.

- Collaborated with colleagues and administrators to improve ABA programming for students.

- Created and presented a variety of in-services and trainings for new ABA teachers, paraprofessionals and related service providers.

- Created and presented training workshops for parents.

- Collaborated with regular education colleagues to extend and improve inclusive opportunities and experiences for students with autism and related disabilities.

- Mentored a beginning special education teacher in the ABA program.

- Participation in school and district committees including School Leadership Committee, I&RST Committee, Curriculum and Instruction Committee, and Special Education Awareness Committee.

- Maintained collaborative efforts with high school We Help You (WHY) club to establish a student mentoring partnership for students in the ABA classroom setting.

- Continuous participation in professional development opportunities.

2001 – 2005   Special Education Teacher,

- Collaborated and co-taught with grade level colleagues as 8th grade inclusion teacher in all academic subject areas.

- Planned and implemented multi sensory instruction for all students in an inclusive classroom.

- Administered standardized assessments to special education students.

- Mentored beginning special education teachers.

- Case managed special education students, which involved maintaining communication between special educators, regular educators, therapists, counselors, child study team members, and parents.

- Co-advisor of Future Teachers of America club.

- Volunteer speaker/co-coordinator of Autism Awareness Month activities for SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions)