

Resilience Theory: Risk and Protective Factors for Novice Special Education Teachers

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Abstract

This study describes experiences of novice special education teachers in rural areas in Hawaii through a lens of resiliency theory. Two types of support – administrative and collegial – were examined in terms of being risk or protective processes. A case study design was used to give voice to five participants who expressed their satisfaction and concerns about support from administrators, interactions, expectations, recognition, teaching assignments, meetings and time. The study also examined support from general and special education colleagues, school staff, and outside service providers. Research findings may be of value to local, district, and state administrators and university personnel who wrestle with the issues of recruitment, preparation, and retention of special education teachers.

Resilience Theory: Risk and Protective Factors for Novice Special Education Teachers

Retention of special education teachers in public schools is an issue that requires the attention of all who are concerned with the quality of education for students with special needs. Studies by state, federal, and independent agencies found critical shortages of special education personnel, especially in rural areas and inner cities (Ludlow, 2003; Sack, 1999). The Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education (COPSSE) expressed critical concern for the high attrition rate in special education and “the potential for inadequate services to children and youth with disabilities by beginning teachers who struggle in adverse situations” (Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, & Kilgore, 2003, p. 3).

Cegelka (2004) stated, “Shortages of special education teachers lead to increased case loads for existing teachers, which in turn lead to reduced quality of services, decreased teacher satisfaction, and increased teacher attrition” (p. 3). Without clear understanding of retention/attrition issues, “states may attract teachers to special education only to lose them after a few years” (Brownell, Smith, McNellis, & Lenk., 1995, p. 84).

Researchers have investigated a wide range of factors that impact special educators’ decisions to stay or leave the field of special education (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al., 1997; Singer, 1992). More recently researchers have turned their attention to focusing on the issues of working conditions, job satisfaction, commitment, role dissonance, and job design (Eichinger, 2000; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Holdman & Harris, 2003; Stempien & Loeb,

2002; Whitaker, 2000a, 2000b). Gersten et al. (2001) suggested that understanding conditions of the work environment that lead to increased job satisfaction and commitment may hold promise for the retention of special educators. To examine conditions of the work environment, we turned to resiliency theory and “the belief in the ability of every person to overcome adversity if important protective factors are present in the person’s life” (Krovetz, 1999, p. ix).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine factors from resiliency theory (RT) that influenced the professional lives of several novice special education teachers on Hawaii’s rural neighbor islands. Specifically, we chose to focus on two types of support – administrative and collegial – that served as risk or protective processes for these novice special education teachers.

Resiliency research has clearly shown that fostering resilience, i.e., promoting human development, is a process and not a program. In fact, Rutter (1987) encouraged the use of the term *protective processes* which captures the dynamic nature of resilience instead of focusing on broadly defined *protective factors*. Richardson, Neiger, Jenson, and Kumpfer (1990) defined resiliency as “the process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills” (p. 34). Brodtkin and Coleman (1996) defined resilience as “the ability to develop coping strategies despite adverse conditions, positive responses to negative circumstances, and a protective shield from continuous stressful surroundings” (p. 28).

Researchers have used RT to describe individuals who have overcome great odds in their lives. Werner (1995) categorized resilient individuals into those who demonstrated “good developmental outcomes despite high risk status, sustained competence under stress, and recovery from trauma” (p. 81). We suggest that the first years of a special educator’s career often include high risk settings coupled with extraordinary stress and in some cases trauma. This parallel provides an opportunity to investigate protective processes, which if present, could positively affect novice special educators’ decisions to remain in the field and provide useful guidelines for teacher retention in special education. Educators recognize “the need for schools to be resiliency-fostering institutions for all who work and learn in them” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 2). Schools need to provide the protective factors necessary for teachers, especially novice teachers, to develop the capacity to successfully deal with stress, adversity, work load, and relationships that are part of the everyday experience of teachers.

Method

Participants

There were 10 participants in this study, 5 primary participants, and 5 nominated individuals. The 5 primary participants were special education teachers employed by the Hawaii Department of Education on neighbor islands (Hawaii, Kauai, Lanai, Maui, Molokai.) These islands are considered “rural” in contrast to Oahu where the majority of Hawaii’s population resides. The remaining 5 participants were individuals nominated by each of the primary participants to help further clarify, corroborate, or present alternative explanations to the information they provided. Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of the primary and nominated participants.

The five primary participants were selected from 10 individuals who were previously enrolled in a Bachelor of Education program at the University of Hawaii in a dual preparation (general and special education) program. Eight of the 10 members were contacted by telephone (2 had moved out of state) and asked a few questions about their current teaching positions to determine if they were appropriate candidates for this study. Only five of the eight were still teaching in special education positions, and all agreed to participate.

Table 1. Primary and Nominated Participants

Participant					Employed by HIDEOE		
Primary	Nominated	Race	Relationship	Marital status	Yes/No	SPED teacher	Years as teacher (SPED/Gen. Ed.)
Carla	--	Caucasian	Friend; former teacher's aide	Unmarried with family	Yes	Yes	3 / 0
--	Nan	Caucasian		Married with family	No	No	0 / 0
Jen	--	Caucasian	Fellow teacher; friend	Married with family	Yes	Yes	3 / 0
--	Lori	Caucasian		Married with family	Yes	Yes	5 / 2
Kanani	--	Asian/Hawaiian	Relative; teacher; friend	Married with family	Yes	Yes	3 / 0
--	Justine	Asian/Hawaiian		Married with family	Yes	No	0 / 14
Makala	--	Asian/Hawaiian	Fellow teacher; friend	Married with family	Yes	Yes	3 / 0
--	Paula	Caucasian		Married	Yes	Former	3 / 11

Rose	--	Asian		Married with family	Yes	Yes	3 / 0
			Relative				
			;				
--	Anne	Asian	teacher;	Married with family	Yes	No	0 / 24
			friend				

Note: All participants were female.

State Licensure: 3 licensed, 2 not licensed (needed to complete required Praxis exams)

Relatives Who Were Teachers: 5 had at least one relative who was a teacher.

All five were nontraditional students; four of five were married with children and jobs, or had already raised their families. Their ages ranged from 28 to 60 years of age. All potential participants were “local” in the sense they had connections in their communities on the neighbor islands and had lived in Hawaii for 15 years or more. Four of the five had previous experience working for HIDOE in a variety of capacities including educational assistants, part-time teachers, specialists, substitute teachers, home hospital, and staff. All five worked in a cross section of schools on the neighbor islands during their preparation program. All schools in which the participants taught had a mix of predominately low- to middle-income students from racially mixed communities. Three participants taught primarily in mild/moderate resource rooms, and two taught in self-contained special education classrooms (one severe and one mild/moderate).

The literature has suggested high attrition rates for special education teachers within the first 3 to 5 years of employment (Brownell & Smith, 1992; NCTAF, 2003a; Singer, 1993; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). The participants in this study had all completed their third year of employment as special education teachers and therefore could provide valuable insights into the issue of retention.

Data Collection

The primary data sources for this study were initial and follow-up interviews with primary participants and interviews with individuals nominated by them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted, two with each of the five primary participants and one with each of the nominated participants. All interviews were conducted during a 10-month period. Secondary sources of data included relevant documents and reports.

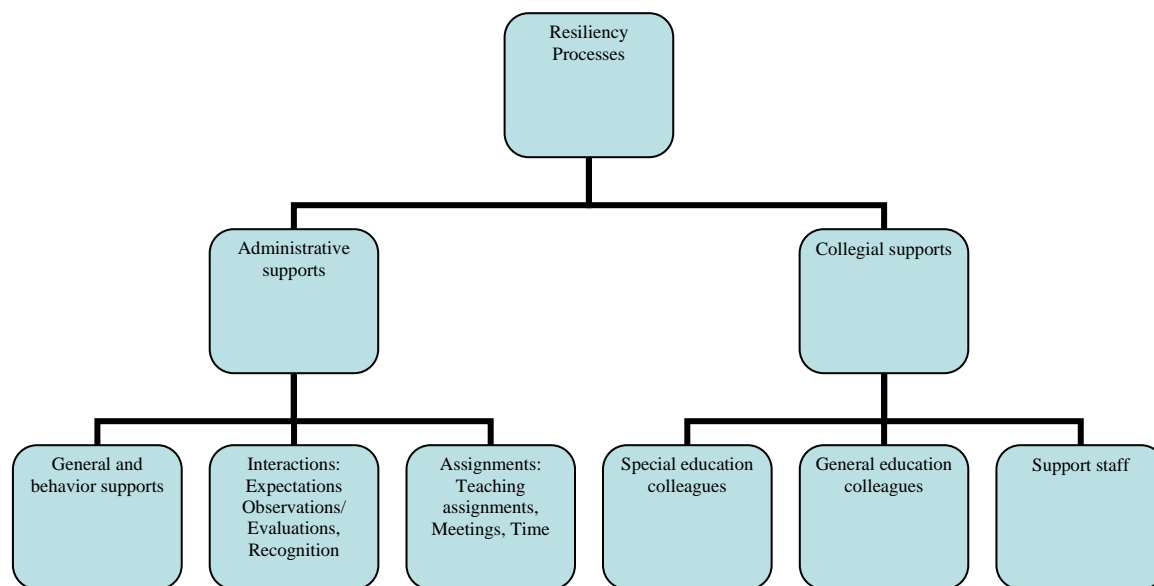
Interviews were conducted by the first author in private locations away from their schools. All participant interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Initial interviews were analyzed before follow-up interviews were conducted. Member checks were conducted in the second interview with each participant to confirm accuracy of transcriptions and allow for corrections and clarifications as needed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The second interview also allowed us to explore more deeply areas of particular interest revealed in the initial interview. Data from the follow-up interviews were then analyzed to further inform and clarify the results. The first author took notes as he interviewed each participant (Patton, 2002).

After the participant left the interview site, he read through the hand-written notes and formulated thoughts on various aspects of the interview. He then recorded his impressions, insights, observations, and thoughts on further lines of questioning. The same procedures were followed with interviews with the nominated individuals.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began by reviewing written and recorded interview notes. Open coding (Creswell, 2003) was used to “uncover, name, and develop concepts” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102) contained in the data. Data were examined for patterns, themes, and concepts that enabled responses to be coded into specific categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The two main categories were administrative and collegial supports. (See Figure 1.) These categories enabled us to identify issues of importance to the primary participants and further differentiate them by dividing them into subcategories, “explaining the when, where, why, how, and so on of a category that are likely to exist” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 114).

Figure 1. Categories, Subcategories and Themes



Under administrative support, the following three subcategories were identified: (a) general support, (b) interactions, and (c) assignments. (See Table 2.) Under collegial support the following three subcategories were identified: (a) special education colleagues, (b) general education colleagues, and (c) support staff. (See Table 3.)

Axial coding was then used to arrange the data by the generated codes/categories, and find relationships between the codes to form general themes. Finally, selective coding was used to identify text that particularly illustrated the themes.

Results

These results describe the ways in which administrative and collegial support served as risk or protective processes for these novice special education teachers as they moved through their first 3 years of teaching.

Administration/Support

The first subcategory, administration/support, included two themes – general support and support from administration when it came to student behavioral issues.

General support. Three of the primary participants were still at the first school in which they were hired (Kanani, Rose, and Carla). Two of the participants changed schools after their first year of employment (Jen and Makala). Therefore, the latter two participants had the perspective to compare and contrast different administration styles and support. Kanani and Jen generally felt supported by their administrators, although Jen did not feel the same about the administrator at her second school. Kanani described her principal as approachable. She stated:

I love my administrator; she's consistent in what she does for the most part. It's been a good experience overall . . . I felt supported by her. I could go in and talk to her really easy. . . . I don't always agree with her, but for the most part, I hear what she's saying and I try to take into account what she says.

The other participants did not view their administrators as providing direction and guidance. Jen's experiences with the administration at her second school were not as accommodating or supportive as in her first school. Jen addressed the frustration she felt when asking for help and guidance but feeling she was not heard:

Nobody was curious, like with all my questions and inquiry about what we were supposed to be doing you know. I surely tried to come about it in a professional way, but it was brand new. . . . I was asking, 'what do you want me to do as a SPED teacher?' . . . I'm just surprised that no one even came and said can I help you. . . I mean . . . no one comes in to look at any of my things.

Lori, a fellow special education teacher at Jen's school, and the person Jen nominated for this study (refer to Table 1), also spoke about Jen's difficulties in getting answers or support from the administration.

Makala had a friendly relationship with her administrator but it was not a supportive one in a professional sense. Paula, a general education teacher nominated by Makala (refer to Table 1), confirmed Makala's remarks. Paula explained when Makala needed information about special education records and other questions, "nobody walked her through it," she was on her own.

Carla had a good relationship with the principal at her school. She thought her principal's experience in the classroom made the principal a better administrator: However, even with this good relationship, Carla found her first year extremely challenging as she explained that she did not have guidance or support:

I didn't feel very strongly supported at the beginning, when I went in . . . I felt like I was just thrown in, in a sink or swim situation, and the only support was negative criticism. That's the way I felt. I mean, no one ever said, "Oh yeah, no actually, you should be doing it this way, it'll work out better this way. Let me show you how to do this," and so I just was kind of flying by the seat of my pants.

Support with behavior issues. Classroom management and behavior issues are foremost in the minds of novice special education teachers (Gehrke & Murri, 2006). Three of the participants felt supported by their administrators with student behavioral issues. The other two participants felt they were "on their own."

Rose was quick to praise her administration for their efforts in supporting her when she had serious behavioral issues with students. Carla was also very appreciative of her administration's support. Carla stated:

I think they do an excellent job. If I have a behavioral problem, it's taken care of immediately, either by the principal or the vice-principal, and if it's an ongoing behavioral problem, the child is immediately processed and put in with the school-based behavioral counselor.

Jen's experience was nearly the opposite of Rose, Kanani, and Carla. Her frustration and confusion were evident in her remarks as she explained:

At the school this past 2 years . . . you're on your own. We don't have a written procedure book. The procedures are always changing. . . If I had a problem in my classroom, you know, did I send them to the VP [vice-principal], did I send them to the principal, could I even send them? I really get the impression, you know, you need to deal with it on your own.

Makala had given up on expecting support from her administration for behavioral issues. She explained that if she called, there was no response. She stated, "I just take care of everything... on my own."

Administration/Interactions

The second subcategory, interactions with administrators, contained three themes -- expectations, observations/evaluations, and recognition. Administrators who can articulate clear expectations for performance and provide needed information to new teachers may be more successful at retaining these teachers. High expectations, a key element in resiliency theory, can help motivate novice special education teachers to perform at a level that is professionally satisfying (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Expectations. Rose was not able to recall a time when specific expectations were presented to her as a new special education teacher. Carla related that expectations were never expressed to her verbally or in written form. Jen also had difficulty remembering anything specific regarding expectations. Kanani and Makala both reported that the only expectations were discussed in the interview. Kanani said:

There was no formal introduction up front . . . other than my initial interview with the administrator when I was hired. . . At that interview she said, you know, this is what you might

be teaching, and these are some of the expectations, but then after that it was like okay, here you are, you're hired, and then this is what you're teaching, and then [you were] left on your own.

Observations. Support from an administrator can manifest in many forms. None, however, may be more important than the direct observation and feedback of novice teachers' teaching. Observations present a unique opportunity for new hires and administrators to interact in a nurturing professional environment. This can be an opportunity for both to better understand each other and build a supportive relationship. Participants spoke of two types of observations, the unannounced walk-in and the formal evaluation for probationary teachers. Rose, Jen and Makala reported getting no feedback from formal or informal observations. With respect to the informal observations Rose explained:

It's usually unannounced. They [administrators] just pretty much come in and observe what you're doing at that particular time. . . I think [the administrator] came into our class once this year, and it was just like an in and out thing and then nothing was said after that.

Carla's experience was more positive. Her administrator observed her teaching more often and gave some verbal feedback. The feedback Kanani was given was the most supportive. She explained:

At the end of the year, I did have the [formal] evaluation and that was very good. Because our administrator actually sits down with us for an hour, and because we lead the evaluation, we bring up the things that we want to talk about, the things that we felt we did good, the things that we need to work on. And because it's self-directed it's really good. [The administrator] was very good about pointing out things...and then at the end of that process we set goals for the next year. And I liked that, because I'm kind of a goal-driven person, so it gives me some ideas of areas that I need to work on.

Recognition. Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, and Benard (2001) discussed the importance of "recognizing competencies" of individuals to bolster self-esteem and resiliency. Henderson and Milstein (2003) wrote about the importance of recognizing outstanding contributions of individuals as well as sending "frequent reality-based messages of appreciation" in order to encourage and reinforce job satisfaction and resiliency. Novice special education teachers in this study discussed the recognition they received from their administration as it pertained to their work in their respective schools.

Rose was candid about not receiving recognition from her administration. Anne, her nominated individual, did not know of any time when the administration at Rose's school had recognized Rose's work in any way. Anne heard positive comments about Rose's teaching from others at the school but nothing from administration. Makala believed her administrator recognized her abilities and praised her in order to get her to do things the principal would rather not do herself. Makala explained:

About 2 weeks ago, [the principal] and I sat at a table and my complaint was about the service people coming in and not fulfilling their service times. . . I want you to talk to them and tell them that they need to fulfill their time. And [the principal's] thing to me was . . . "No, you're doing

such a good [job], you can talk to them. They all think you're doing such a great job." . . . I was mad.

Carla believed she was recognized by her administrator but it was never spoken directly to her. Carla explained:

I've had a few IEPs, and it was surprising to me to hear [my administrator] say "Preferential seating is not necessary in [Carla's] classroom, it's small and she's standing on top of each child at all times." I was kind of surprised because I never knew that [my administrator] would catch any style of my teaching, because observations are very brief. But that's how I hear it. . . . [The administrator] never would come up to me and say, I like what you're doing here.

Kanani's experience once again differed greatly from that of Rose, Jen, Makala, and Carla. Kanani shared the following:

We have school academic plans now...So, we do this lesson plan and turn it in and [the principal] gave me some positive feedback. "Wow, this is really great, look what your kids did!" It made me feel really good because these were my special education students, but you know [the principal] thought their work was comparable to what was going on in regular education. So, that made me feel really good, and I went back and told my kids that. . . .So, I shared what I had done [with gen ed. colleagues] and they were like wow, your kids did this? And they were really impressed because they were saying this is special ed. work? I'm going, yeah this is special ed. . . . it made me feel really good.

Justine confirmed how Kanani's administrator recognized her by encouraging her to take leadership roles at the school, by giving her a room that was considered a "pretty prime classroom," and by letting her know how committed they were to keeping Kanani on the faculty. All these factors contributed to Kanani's satisfaction with her job.

Administration: Assignments. The third subcategory, assignments, contained three themes -- teaching assignments, meetings, and time. The participants in this study experienced a variety of teaching assignments. In some cases, they were moved from placements where they felt effective and supported to other schools where they did not. They had no say in their reassignment because they were novice teachers without tenure.

Teaching assignments. Rose was assigned to a co-teaching position when initially hired because of room availability. She stated that she "really clicked" with this teacher. Anne, Rose's nominated individual explained that the co-teaching situation was ideal for Rose as a novice teacher. Anne said, "The teacher that she was teamed with in the same room was an experienced teacher . . . and that was her support."

Jen lost her first-year position, which had been a positive experience for her, because the "child count" did not justify her position at the school. Jen did not find the same supportive atmosphere at her second school which was particularly frustrating because she had been happy and successful at her first school. Like Jen, Makala was not able to retain her initial teaching position and moved to another school her second year. She also did not experience the same kind of

support she had enjoyed at her first school. Both Jen and Makala had tried to transfer back to their first schools and found out they were “*stuck.*” Makala believed her teaching assignment actually was hiding a much broader role than she had expected. She stated:

It's been very challenging, many times frustrating. . . . I thought we were supposed to be teachers but we're not . . . Sometimes I feel like I'm maybe the administrator. . . . I'm their parent, I'm their counselor, I'm everything. So, I think when I look at the overall picture, you know, it's been a real tough journey... it has never gotten easy. . . . I think when I first went out into the [special education] field, what I liked about it was I was in a resource room, so there was another teacher working with me, and because she had many years in teaching, she could help me to be guided in the right directions. She foresaw problems . . . she would give me a warning, you know, but then allow me to still have that opportunity to try it out. I think if she wasn't there, a lot of times I would run into, you know, a lot of problems. . . . The second year, when I had to go solo, there were a lot of things I had to figure out on my own.

Meetings. School meetings were found to be a topic of some frustration, as indicated by a participant in Gehrke and Murri's (2006) study: “A lot of the information didn't pertain to us [special education teachers]” (p. 185). Similar frustrations were mentioned by the primary participants in this investigation.

Jen, Makala, and Carla had questions about the value of meetings and the way the meetings were conducted at their schools. Carla described the meetings as follows:

Usually there's a speaker, and the speaker will come and talk about various school-related programs, and usually all the special ed. teachers roll their eyes because it never has anything to do with special ed.

Rose was forthright in her opinion of some of the meetings she was required to attend. She remarked:

Sometimes I think it's kind of a waste of time for us to be there, [we] special ed. teachers, because I mean . . . it pretty much doesn't have anything to do with us most of the time . . . but I think overall, it's a good thing for us to go to just so we know what's going on in the school level.

Kanani expressed frustration with her special education department meetings that didn't address issues that were of substance and importance to the students they served. She stated:

In our department meetings... we never discuss what we're teaching. We never have those really good, deep conversations about what our kids are learning and how they're learning and how we assess them, because we're talking about. . . (what) they want us to do this month, and this is our report of how many IEPs haven't been marked complete!

Another issue was Kanani's frustration of not being included in content-area meetings that would have value to her. Kanani explained:

Okay, the problem with special education is, because we have our own department . . . sometimes we weren't included on those content area meetings. . . sometimes there's not a lot of good coordination between . . . general ed. [and the] special ed. department.

Time. All participants spoke of not having enough time to do all the tasks that were expected of them as special education professionals. Rose explained that during her first 2 years as a novice special education teacher she took a great deal of work home each day because she did not have the time to get it done at school. Kanani explained the result of all the demands on her time as a novice special educator in this statement:

The consequence of [lack of time] is I don't feel like I'm as good a teacher as I could be because sometimes I'm just doing my lessons on the fly! Because I didn't have as much time to put into lesson planning as I would want.

Jen also expressed her frustration with lack of preparation time to adequately plan for her lessons. She stated:

No, I mean [prep time is] not designated [at] an exact time. Like sometimes on Wednesdays, we get done at 1:15, and our meetings are at 2:00. So, officially, they say, that's your prep time. Well, you have meetings in there. That's when we have a grade-level meeting, [or] a committee meeting, [or] we're holding IEPs.

Makala gave a specific example of how her time is being taken up with nonteaching-related requests from her own school office. She explained:

Throughout the day, I say there's 10 times that I would have to cut [my teaching] short or not pay attention to it. . . . A good example was today, the office called me up. They wanted me to call the parents up because one of my students didn't have lunch money. I said why don't you guys call them? No, we're not gonna call them because the parent doesn't like us. . . I wish I could say, 'Hey, listen, can you just take care of all these little things, the side things that interrupt us, just so I can teach?' I've yet to see a whole day where I just teach without any interruptions [laughs].

The participants in this study all stressed the importance of administrative support and leadership during their first 3 years as novice special education teachers. Table 2 provides a summary of their responses.

Table 2. Administrative Support, Interactions and Assignments

Participant	Support: in general and support for behavior issues	Interactions: Expectations, evaluations, recognition	Assignments: Teaching assignments, meetings, time
Carla	Supportive with behavior issues	No expectations verbally or in writing; No observations and	Questioned value of meetings, lack of relevance to SPED; not enough time to

		feedback positive; implied not explicit recognition	do all that is expected of her
Jen	Didn't feel supported	No expectations given; no feedback provided following observations; no recognition	Had to move from initial successful & supported placement to non-supported placement in different school; meetings lacked value and relevance for SPED; lack of preparation time was frustrating
Kanani	Felt supported	Expectations stated in interview only; observations and feedback positive; much recognition	Meetings lacked deep discussion about what was taught and student learning; SPED not included in content area meetings; teaching "on the fly" because of lack of planning time, consequently not as good a teacher as she could be
Makala	Friendly but not supported. On her own with behavior issues.	Expectations stated in interview only; no feedback provided following observations; recognition but with an agenda	Moved from initial successful & supported placement to non-supported placement in different school; meetings lacked value and relevance for SPED; not enough time and too many interruptions while teaching
Rose	Supportive with behavior issues	No expectations provided; no feedback provided following observations; no recognition	Co-teaching 1 st year successful; meetings lacked value and relevance for SPED but good in a general sense; not enough time, took

			work home at night
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Colleagues/Staff

Novice special education teachers reported the importance of relationships with their professional colleagues, both in special education and general education, as being risk or protective influences and contributing to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their careers (Kilgore & Griffin, 1998; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). Kanani remarked that her relationships with her colleagues were of “*major importance because that’s the only thing that got me through my first year. It still gets me through!*”

Special education colleagues. Rose related the importance of her relationships with fellow special education teachers with respect to asking them about where to get certain things and asking questions about IEP meetings. Kanani also experienced positive support from her fellow special education teachers. She explained:

They were very supportive you know, [they] gave me lots of materials because I was new. I didn’t have anything. . . I had no resource materials. . . One of the special education teachers is the one that [supervised]...my student teaching... she’s always very willing to give me anything that she has so it’s been supportive.

Jen also expressed a similar experience with special education colleagues at the second school in which she taught. She explained:

I think right now I have a wonderful team that I work with. I feel that the support is there, I mean, within your department there’s always more support, if you find a good colleague that you’re working with because they’re all on the same page.

General education colleagues. Interactions with general education colleagues were seen by all participants as somewhat more challenging than their professional relationships with fellow special education teachers. Rose said: “*I don’t really interact with any general ed. teachers too much. . . . But overall my experience with the general ed. teachers was all positive.*” Anne explained that Rose was a “*team player*” and “*she’s always . . . in contact with other teachers. . .*”

Kanani, who had work experience at her school prior to being hired as a full-time special education teacher, stated:

I already knew the school culture, so I had the advantage. But what has been helpful is where my particular classroom is. I have regular ed. teachers around me, and I love those teachers because they are a very positive support for me. If I have questions, I can go to them, they come to me, and we take care of each other.

Justine also mentioned the advantage Kanani had because she previously worked in the schools: “*I think what helped for her was . . . her first full-time job was in a school where everybody knew her and she knew everyone . . . so they were very familiar with her.*”

Jen reported a different experience with general education teachers. She stated:

There is a line when you're trying to talk to a general ed. teacher about modifications and all that, and all they say is, "Well, I have a huge group . . . I'm not doing that!" But in general, I have a very good relationship with the grade level that I support. They're supportive and encouraging to me as well as I am, you know, helping them as much as possible.

Makala described a different type of interaction with general education teachers in her school:

The general ed. teachers, a lot of them always ask me a lot of questions about special ed. . . . They'll ask me a lot of legal questions. . . . Nothing really to do with general ed. you know, more of special ed., how to do the paperwork.

Carla succinctly summed up the relationship she had with general education teachers at her school by stating, *"No support, we only meet at IEP meetings. They call when children have pull outs. They do provide end-of-the-year assessments."*

Participants were asked if there was any formal system in place at their school to bring special education and general education teachers together. One common theme was lunch. Both Kanani and Carla's administrators told them to eat lunch with the general education teachers. Kanani's administrator suggested it and Carla's required it. Makala mentioned the only time she could think of when she interacted with general education teachers was at lunch but there was nothing productive about it from her point of view. However, both Kanani and Carla expressed the belief that the informal contact at lunch between themselves and the general education teachers at their school was a good thing.

Rose, Kanani, and Jen mentioned teaming with general education teachers at faculty meetings. Rose did not find this grouping procedure particularly helpful to her, but she did not dismiss it either. Kanani indicated that the teaming they did do was useful for certain school wide committees but, *"as far as working with other teachers . . . we don't do a lot of teaming. We don't have time to sit and talk about what we're doing in each other's classrooms and really work together."* Jen contributed that at her school various attempts were made to have teachers *"team up"* to focus on various issues facing the school. She indicated the teams did not *"live up to what it was supposed to be, whatsoever. Most of my colleagues can't stand [the teaming]."*

Support staff. Support staff provides important risk or protective factors for novice special educators new to the routines, requirements, and daily operations of a school. Generally, the participants in this study found support staff to be very helpful and accommodating. Rose commented on her district support person; Rose stated, *"I knew I could always call on her, and she was always a great help."*

Kanani contributed a specific example of a support person who made a big difference in her first year as a special educator. She explained:

One of the EAs [educational assistants] . . . works to input IEP information for any of the special ed. teachers That first year, she helped with a lot of the academic progress reports. . . . It made it easier instead of us having to personally track down all their teachers. . . .

In addition to the above example, Kanani emphasized the importance of taking advantage of various specialists who could assist with materials and information. She explained:

I would advise you to seek out resource people in the district or the state to come in. . . . This year I've had another person come in from the state, in the area of reading, which has been a really good help. So, he's come in and observed. He's actually given me resource materials for free! [laughs]

Makala shared an example of a speech teacher who helped her out soon after she arrived at her new position at her second school. She had an IEP meeting that afternoon and the speech teacher told her she would help her get it together and assisted her to meet the deadline.

Not all the experiences with support personnel were as helpful as those mentioned above. Jen had challenges with some of the educational assistants she worked with at her new school during her second year as a special education teacher. The conflicts Jen had to face were not part of what she imagined to be her job description. She stated:

I always try to get along and be very respectful to everybody, every job position is important at our school. . . . This school year I was very much challenged working with . . . EAs [educational assistants]. It was really unfortunate, and it was very discouraging personally for me. I was put in the position of being, you know, the supervisor. . . . I have to do a whole evaluation that they're told [determines if they] get their job back. Maybe they've been there for years and years and years, and you're this new teacher, and they don't care if you're a teacher or what you are. . . . They're gonna do what they want to do, and you're supposed to tell them their job and be sure that they're on time, and report if they're not, and fill out these forms. . . . I was actually called into the principal's office during my instructional time for my students to discuss an issue with an EA . . . I could have walked out that day easily! That was so unprofessional, so inappropriate.

Makala discussed a situation in which specialists were not fulfilling their service time for students with special needs but they were filling out paper work as if they had. Makala stated:

This is [their] service time, according to the IEP. They're supposed to service a child. . . . They are the expert. They went to school for this. They need to work with this child for this amount of time. . . . It's almost where service providers want to come in as consultants, and that's putting more strain on the special ed. teacher. . . . [laughs] I should've gone and become a therapist you know, had I known I was gonna be doing this all day.

Table 3 summarizes participants' collegial support. All participants agreed that the support they received from colleagues was integral to their success during their first 3 years as novice special education teachers.

Table 3. Collegial Relationships

	Special Education Colleagues	General Education Colleagues	Support Staff
Carla	Felt supported	No support; only meet at IEP meetings; they do provide end-of-year assessments	Felt supported
Jen	Wonderful team; felt supported	In general good relationship; many times not willing to implement modifications she suggested saying they had too many students to do it	Had a difficult time with EA's. Felt she was put in the role of "supervisor" over people who had been there for years and she was a new teacher.
Kanani	Great support; got her through her 1 st year; gave her materials	Had worked previously at this school and felt that gave her an advantage; gen ed teachers were located next to her room and helped with questions and support	Very helpful; gave examples of EA's who input IEP information and academic progress reports, also state resource person who helped with reading; had problems getting support to cover her room when she had to conduct assessments
Makala	Felt supported	Gen ed teachers asked her lots of questions about legal issues and paperwork	Gave example of a speech teacher who helped her initially with IEPs; problems with specialists not providing the service time to students as required in their IEPs
Rose	Helped with where to get things and questions about IEP meetings	Didn't interact with gen ed teachers too much; generally positive when she did	Felt she could call on them and they were a great help

Discussion

Summary

Gehrke and Murri (2006) reported that special education teachers “who leave or express an intention to leave their classrooms cite consistent factors within their workplace that create frustration and dissatisfaction and influence their career decisions” (p. 180). Teachers in various studies listed areas such as resources and materials, behavior management, teaching environment, emotional support, support from building and district administrators, collaboration and consultation with general education teachers and service providers, paperwork, knowledge of general education curriculum, and time management (Brownell, Smith, McNellis, & Miller, 1997; Gehrke & Murri, 2006; Gersten et al., 2001). Special education teachers in the present study expressed similar concerns as they attempted to balance the many facets of their workplace job requirements to meet the needs of students, parents, colleagues, and administrators.

Administrative Support. The participants in this study all indicated the importance of administrative support and leadership. Although individual experiences with administrators varied, certain themes remained consistent across interviews. The participants wanted clear expectations from administrators as to their role and responsibilities within the school community. All five of the primary participants expressed that they were not given expectations as to the purpose and quality of their work. For some there were no expectations at all, and for others expectations were minimal. According to Brock and Grady (1997), “Beginning teachers view the administrator as the most significant person in the school... Beginning teachers desperately want to know the principal’s expectations for the school and for their teaching” (p. 13).

High expectations are an important element in the resiliency literature (Benard, 1993, 1996, 1997; Brown et al., 2001; Krovetz, 1999). Administrators can support resilience in their teachers by articulating and maintaining high professional expectations for them. Participants wanted and appreciated administrators who were approachable and found time, however briefly, to connect with them and listen to their concerns. Three of the five participants gave high marks to their administrators for the support they provided when there were cases of extreme behavior with students. All three believed they were heard when these situations developed and that they were supported by prompt and appropriate action. Two others reported the exact opposite. One participant explained that she had tried on several occasions to get clarity with her administrators as to policy for dealing with behavior issues, and was frustrated by the lack of policy and the confusion that it caused. Another participant simply stated she had given up trying to communicate with her administrator on the issue of student behavior.

With one exception, participants reported that observations of their teaching conducted by administrators were not meaningful experiences for them. Observations were rare and brief with little or no follow up. All agreed that more observations of their teaching, done by their administrators in a thoughtful way, would be a good experience. One of the participants felt she did receive quality observations with constructive feedback and her relationship with her administrator was rated highly. Four of the five participants revealed that their administrators did not recognize their work directly, either verbally or in writing. Only one participant reported a clear connection with her administrator who recognized her efforts and encouraged her to do more as a member of the school community.

Johnson (2004) reported schools that support teachers are effective in making success not only possible but also likely. Such schools have present, active, and responsive administrations who develop personal relations with their new staff, assign them an appropriate set of courses, and arrange for them to receive constructive feedback about their teaching. Experienced colleagues in the school are available so that new teachers can observe and consult with them in an ongoing way. (p. 91)

Principals, both public and nonpublic, have reported a variety of methods they found effective when assisting beginning teachers, including: (a) visiting classrooms, (b) providing feedback, (c) providing mentors, (d) formative and summative evaluation, (e) an open door policy, (f) instructing novice teachers in reflective teaching methods, (g) providing instruction in the school's classroom management program before school started, and (h) providing opportunities for novice teachers to observe veteran teachers (Brock & Grady, 1997). Also, Darling-Hammond, in her address to the first Teacher Quality symposium in Honolulu, told the educators in attendance, "If we put our best teachers in schools where teaching and learning are not nurtured, even our best teachers cannot succeed" (NCTAF: Hawaii Policy Group, 2001, p. 26). Clearly, four of the five participants in this study indicated they had not received the type of support Darling-Hammond and the Principals cited above viewed as essential.

All participants wanted meetings that were more purposeful and focused in a way that would enhance their ability to be better teachers. One participant saw improvement in the quality and effectiveness of staff meetings at her school but the rest believed that most meetings were unproductive for them and did not support them to become better teachers. When planning meetings, "principals should coordinate the efforts of all personnel and provide a strong united program" (Brock & Grady, 1997, p. 40). One participant saw value in any meeting that helped to better inform her about what was going on at her school. However, she and others stated that most of the meetings they were required to attend were a "waste of time" and a source of frustration. One participant explained, not too long ago, a typical meeting at her school would have been a "gripe session" by disgruntled teachers. She reported this was no longer the case and that meetings now were more substantive; however, she was still frustrated the inability of teachers, in her opinion, to discuss matters of importance to the education of their students. Two participants reported their administrators were trying to incorporate new ways of conducting meetings. One saw the administrative changes as effective, whereas the other stated teachers came away confused as to what the point of the meeting had been and with a feeling that very little had been accomplished.

Finally, the participants reported lack of time was a major factor in their inability to meet the demands of their job. Many discussed taking their work home with them and working on nights and weekends to stay current with the requirements of their teaching positions. They all believed the system was not designed to provide teachers with the time they needed to complete the many tasks required of them each day. They did not feel supported with even basic preparation time that was scheduled on a consistent basis. NCTAF on a national level recommended 10 hours per week as a minimum amount of time for collegial work and learning (NCTAF: Hawaii Policy Group, 2001). The participants in this study experienced nothing like that and even fell short of their allocated 40-minute daily preparation time. Some reported not even having their own lunch period away from their students. Teachers need time to network and plan. The importance of

collaboration to accomplish mutual goals requires time and commitment (Friend & Cook, 2003). “True collaboration exists only on teams when all members feel their contributions are valued and the goal is clear, where they share decision making, and where they sense they are respected” (Friend & Bursuck, 2006, p. 75).

Collegial Support. Collegial support was very important to the participants in this study; all five mentioned support from their special education colleagues as an important factor in their ability to do their jobs and learn the ropes. Special education colleagues were characterized as being very helpful with information and materials. One participant mentioned that the difference she observed between veteran and novice special education teachers at her school was that the newer teachers were more open and willing to deal with changes, and constantly evolving requirements and expectations placed on teachers in today’s schools. This participant stated, in some cases, veteran teachers just refused to do things that were asked of them by their administrator, choosing instead to “wait out” the new policies based on their past experiences of seeing policies come and go. Generally, however, all five participants relied to some degree on the support they received from fellow special educators.

Participants reported a more mixed view of support when working with general education teachers. Two participants mentioned previous work experience in schools that helped them develop positive working relationships with general education teachers. Two participants expressed they occasionally had general education teachers complain to them about having special education students in their classrooms and their frustration at having to make accommodations and/or modifications in order to meet the IEP goals of a particular student. One participant mentioned she felt “displaced” from general education teachers, and explained she believed there would always be a riff between special education teachers and general education teachers based on the same concerns mentioned above. Two other participants simply stated they had very little contact with general education teachers other than the most basic of interactions.

Two participants mentioned attempts were being made at their schools to have teachers interact more and team together. One participant saw it as a positive indicator of change at her school to a more collaborative environment. The other believed it to be very ineffective and not worth the time and effort as currently practiced. The other three participants reported there was not any specific attempt to coordinate opportunities for general education and special education teachers at their schools to work together or build relationships.

Special education support services were sources of both support and frustration as perceived by participants in this study. Two participants described good relationships with various support staff personnel, providing examples of working effectively with educational assistants, and giving high marks for this support. Two other participants praised their colleagues who served as student services coordinators and grade-level chairs. Three participants had specific, ongoing conflicts with service coordinators, service providers, and educational assistants; all believed the quality of their teaching was affected to some degree because of these ongoing problems. It was particularly frustrating to one participant who had known highly cooperative and supportive relationships with educational assistants at her first school only to find this experience reversed at her second school.

Limitations

The findings should not be generalized beyond the particular individuals in this study. The participants all worked for HIDOE on neighbor islands and did not represent special education teachers on Oahu, Hawaii's metropolitan center, or on the U. S. mainland. Each participant came from her own unique cultural and community background and may not share common values and traditions. The self-report nature of the individual interviews may also be considered a limitation. On-site observations of participants on the islands where they resided, in their schools, classrooms, or homes were not conducted in order to ensure confidentiality.

Future Research

The results of this study suggest areas for future research that would benefit all stakeholders concerned with the retention of highly qualified special education teachers. Future research on the relationship between novice special education teachers and their administrators could help us better understand the interactions that promote constructive professional relationships. Researchers should investigate professional development opportunities for special education teachers that are of consistent high quality, meet the expressed needs of special education teachers, and are delivered in a way that allows for teachers to participate without undo disruption to their teaching responsibilities. Studies that examine the efficacy of high-quality mentoring programs at the local and district level would be useful for administrators seeking to create a supportive school environment for novice special educators. Answers to these and other related research questions should further knowledge and enable educators to make informed program and policy decisions designed to retain novice special education teachers.

Implications and Recommendations

This study has important implications for the retention of novice special education teachers. The results of this study suggest that administrators who recognize their teachers even in small ways, who make themselves available, and encourage leadership in their teachers, have more satisfied teachers on their faculty. The data suggest the least satisfied teachers had administrators who were not perceived by these teachers as forthcoming, knowledgeable, available, and supportive; they did not provide the kinds of supports found to be so important in the resiliency literature. These administrators were not perceived to be leaders who had clear agendas, expectations, and boundaries; all key elements of Henderson and Milstein's (2003) resiliency model. Several factors surface consistently as key protective factors that support success throughout the resilience literature. Caring and support, high expectations, and meaningful participation are mentioned in multiple studies as the basis for supporting resilience (Benard, 1997; Benard, 1996; Benard, 1993; Brown, et al., 2001; Krovetz, 1999).

This study enabled the voices of five novice special education teachers on Hawaii's neighbor islands to be heard candidly and openly. Their experiences, insights, and frustrations over the course of their first 3 years as novice special educators provided an invaluable look into a world that has to be experienced to be truly appreciated. Resiliency theory depicts nearly all people with a self-righting mechanism that will come into play when basic supports are present (Brown et al., 2001). Education professionals would be negligent if we do not provide the supports that, in many instances, do not require large amounts of money or complex programs. Rather,

necessary supports may simply require a bit of recognition for a job well done, an honest expression of appreciation from time to time, and an open door where questions can be asked and answered without fear of intimidation. This can be an immediate starting place, upon which can be built the positive relationships that caring and civility naturally create. From there, all can work together to brainstorm ideas and plan ways to solve the issues brought to light in this study. The women and men who have chosen to teach children are owed this. Their work is challenging enough when supports/protections are in place. All teachers—including novice special educators—deserve the profession's respect, appreciation, and every possible support and protection. This is essential if schools hope to retain these teachers in their chosen fields and thus ensure for all children the opportunity to receive the excellent education they deserve.

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