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**WILL THEY STAY?**

**FACTORS THAT PROMOTE THE RETENTION OF  
NOVICE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS  
ON HAWAII'S NEIGHBOR ISLANDS**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE  
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5012

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## **DEDICATION**

**To Audrey and Tom Godfrey, loving parents who were the embodiment of resiliency.**

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There are a number of individuals who through their constant support and encouragement have enabled me to do this important work. My committee chair, Dr. Rhonda Black, first and foremost inspired and gently prodded in a fashion that kept the project on track. Without her there would be no study. Dr. Black's insights, questions, and guidance were invaluable and helped the project to stay the course. Committee members Dr. Paul Deering, Dr. Patricia Edelen-Smith, Dr. Cecily Ornelles, and Dr. Lois Yamauchi were always available, interested, inquisitive, and willing to hammer out a framework upon which this study could stand. Their help and support cannot be acknowledged enough. I was the beneficiary of their collective commitment and wisdom. I thank them all and extend them my deepest appreciation.

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## ABSTRACT

This study focused on issues of teacher retention and attrition in Hawaii's public schools. Specifically, it addressed the experiences of novice special education teachers on Hawaii's neighbor islands (Hawaii, Kauai, Lanai, Maui, Molokai). These islands are considered "rural" in contrast to Oahu where the majority of Hawaii's population resides in Honolulu. The primary goal of this research study was to investigate the relationship between the level of support experienced by these teachers and their intent to stay in the field of special education. Teacher shortages in special education are a reoccurring theme for the Hawaii Department of Education. Better understanding of the supports present and not present for novice special education teachers may help initiate workable solutions that enhance retention. Two questions guided this study: (a) In what ways have professional factors such as community support, institutional support, and pre-service preparation influenced novice special education teachers' decisions to remain in the field of special education? and (b) In what ways have personal factors such as intrapersonal variables, personal background, and family support influenced novice special education teachers' decisions to remain in the field of special education? A case study design was used in conjunction with resiliency theory to give voice to novice special education teachers on Hawaii's neighbor islands.

Findings of the study indicated commitment to teach and the desire to succeed with students were primary reasons why participants chose to become special educators. Participants expressed their satisfaction with and concerns about a myriad of issues that included administrative support, collegial support, working conditions, professional

**development, mentoring, induction, resources, and relations with students, parents, and support staff. Research findings may be of value to local, district, and state administrators and university personnel as they wrestle with the issues of recruitment, preparation, and retention of special education teachers.**

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Rationale

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). Despite state improvement grants and extensive funding of personnel preparation programs the situation has not markedly improved (Ludlow, 2003). 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).

The U. S. Department of Education (USDOE) (1999a) reported vacancies of over 4,000 special education jobs with 28,000 special education teachers not being fully certified, during the 1995-1996 school year. By the 2000-2001 school year USDOE (2003) reported the number of teachers filling special education positions without appropriate certification had risen to 47,532, nearly 11.5% of all teachers. As a result, over 600,000 students with special needs were being taught by special education teachers who were not fully qualified (Hardman & West, 2003). Fideler, Foster, and Schwartz (2000) stated that shortages of special education teachers had been reported in 98% of the school districts in the United States. Shortages of special education teachers were

reported in Hawaii (Di, Hasegawa, Nakaoka, & Zhang, 2007). One of the highest priorities for school districts in the nation is to increase the number of special education teachers in their schools (Kozleski, Mainzer, Deshler, Coleman, & Rodriguez-Walling, 2000).

Cox (2001) explained, "Over the next five years school administrators will be confronted with mass teacher retirements, high attrition rates for special education teachers, increased identification of students with behavior problems (E/BD), and complex compliance problems" (p. 72). As E/BD identification numbers rise, researchers reported the highest attrition rates among special educators in the E/BD field (George, George, Gersten, & Grosenick, 1995; M. D. Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999; Sack, 1999; Singer, 1993). The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) predicted over 200,000 special education teachers would be needed to fill vacancies by 2005 (Kozleski et al., 2000). The *Twenty-First Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act* (USDOE, 1999b) reported an anticipated need to hire more than 2 million teachers over the next decade.

Employment of special education teachers is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through 2014. Although student enrollments are expected to grow only slowly, additional positions for these workers will be created by continued increases in the number of special education students needing services, by legislation emphasizing training and employment for individuals with disabilities, and by educational reforms requiring higher standards for graduation. In addition to job openings resulting from growth, a large number of openings will result from the need to replace special education

teachers who switch to teaching general education, change careers altogether, or retire. At the same time, many school districts report difficulty finding sufficient numbers of qualified teachers. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006)

These constant shortages are challenging for school systems trying to cope with the thousands of openings that occur each year. Hawaii like many states continues to face teacher shortages, especially in the subject areas of science, math, and special education due to low salaries and increasing numbers of retirees (Di et al., 2007). It was recently reported that nearly 2,900 public school teachers in Hawaii, or about 22% of the state's 13,000 teachers, were not qualified under the No Child Left Behind law, which mandated that all teachers be "highly qualified" by the 2005-2006 school year. Neither Hawaii nor any other state met that goal (Da Silva, 2008).

Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, and Weber (1997) reported three major concerns created by the lack of qualified special education teachers: (a) the cost burden and time-consuming nature of recruitment and placement of special education teachers, (b) the lack of teaching experience new hires bring to their classrooms, and (c) the disruption of instructional programs as a result of assimilating new teachers into established school staffs. By not retaining the special educators currently on the job, public schools experience additional strain. 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). Billingsley (1993) argued, "Policymakers need knowledge about retention/attrition in order to understand the factors contributing to career decisions and to develop appropriate policies for increasing the retention of special educators" (p. 137).

Attrition is a significant factor that contributes to teacher shortages (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, & Terhanian, 1998; Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, & Weber, 1995). Retention of special educators is of major importance to solving this problem (Billingsley, 1993; USDOE, 2003). Brownell, Smith, McNellis, and Lenk (1995), citing the Educational Testing Service, argued that those administering teacher preparation programs are implementing changes to improve training without adequate data to understand how these changes affect teachers later in their careers. Without clear understanding of retention/attrition issues, “states may attract teachers to special education only to lose them after a few years” (Brownell et al., 1995, p. 84).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), most recently reauthorized in 2004, has committed our nation to providing children with disabilities a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. In order to achieve this goal and provide the variety of diverse services needed by students with disabilities, public education in the United States must look to highly qualified and committed teachers to carry the load.

#### Background

Researchers have investigated a wide range of factors that impact special educators’ decisions to stay or leave the field of special education. Singer (1992), in her 13-year longitudinal study of over 6,000 newly hired special educators in Michigan and North Carolina, focused on demographic variables such as ethnicity, gender, age, degrees attained, and type of certification. Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al. (1997) conducted similar demographic research. More recently researchers have turned their attention to focusing on the issues of working conditions, job satisfaction, commitment, role

dissonance, and job design (Brownell et al., 1995; Brownell, Smith, McEllis, & Miller, 1997; Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Eichinger, 2000; George et al., 1995; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Holdman & Harris, 2003; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998; Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross, 1994; M. D. Miller et al., 1999; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Westling & Whitten, 1996; Whitaker, 2000a, 2000b). Gersten et al. (2001) suggested it is understanding conditions of the work environment that lead to increased job satisfaction and commitment, rather than gathering facts associated with job longevity, that may hold greater promise for the retention of special educators.

#### Statement of the Problem

Several trends indicate problems ahead for school systems seeking to employ special educators. Boe, Cook, Kaufman, and Danielson (1996) reported (a) high attrition rates for special education teachers, (b) increasing numbers of special education teachers transferring to general education jobs, and (c) growing numbers of special education jobs while the number of licensed special educators graduating from teacher preparation programs decreases. Carlson, Brauen, Klein, Schroll, and Willig (2002) reported that 29% of special education teachers in their first 3 years of teaching are not certified in their main assignment. Teachers without full certification are more likely to leave teaching than those who are fully certified (Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000). Maintaining high quality programs in special education depends on retaining experienced professionals who are committed to the field (Brownell & Smith, 1992; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 2003a).

## Theoretical Framework

Resiliency theory is the lens through which I investigated novice special education teachers' intent to remain in the field of special education. The modern concept of resilience as explained by Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, and Benard (2001) is "the concept of a general self-righting mechanism, available to nearly all people who are provided with sufficient support" (p. 15). 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). Wolin and Wolin (1993) defined resiliency as the "capacity to bounce back, to withstand hardship, and to repair yourself" (p. 5). Brodkin 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). Henderson and Milstein (2003) adapted the following definition from the work of Rirkin and Hoopman (1991), stating:

Resilience can be defined as the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress or simply to the stress that is inherent in today's world. (p. 7)

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.

Krovetz (1999) explained resiliency theory as “the belief in the ability of every person to overcome adversity if important protective factors are present in the person’s life” (p. ix). These factors may include family, community, collegial support, expectations, and purposeful support. Family includes those who immediately surround a person and have influence over their decisions and goals (mother, father, husband, wife, extended family). A teacher’s community includes students, students’ parents, administrators, staff, and fellow educators. More than just getting along well, collegial support encompasses “the ways people support each other to be more effective professionals” (Krovetz, 1999, p. 137). Purposeful support is evident when high expectations are coupled with resources to accomplish priorities and school personnel are accountable for decisions that affect their school.

I suggest that the supports, or protective factors, posited by resiliency theory as they relate to child development can also be applied to novice special education teachers. “Because almost all of the resiliency research to date has focused on children and adolescents, an understanding of how adults exposed to both personal and work-related stress bounce back is just emerging” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 5). This emerging research suggests that the process of resiliency building found in children and adolescents is similar for adults (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). This parallel provides an opportunity to investigate protective factors that, if present, could positively affect novice special educators’ decisions to remain in the field and provide useful guidelines for teacher retention in special education.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine factors from resiliency theory in the lives of several novice special education teachers on Hawaii's neighbor islands and how the presence or absence of these factors and others may influence their decisions to remain in the field. The study is based on the assumption that community, institutional, and pre-service supports provided to novice special educators along with the influence of personal variables contribute to their retention. As a special education teacher in the public schools for 16 years, I believe that the ways in which our newly hired special educators are supported when they enter our profession have a profound impact on the longevity of their careers in special education. Brodkin and Coleman (1996) reported:

Researchers who have studied resilient children have identified two categories of factors that contribute to the making of their protective shield. One category is . . . *environmental* (social and physical factors such as parents, other family members, community support, and positive school experiences), and the other is *individual* (including self-confidence, self-discipline, and a strong sense of personal control). (p. 28)

The research questions for this study were framed around these factors. By doing so, this research may help us better understand how novice special education teachers' needs parallel the needs of others investigated in the resiliency literature.

### Research Questions

1. In what ways have professional factors such as community support, institutional support, and pre-service preparation influenced novice special education teachers' decisions to remain in the field of special education?

2. In what ways have personal factors such as intrapersonal variables, personal background, and family support influenced novice special education teachers' decisions to remain in the field of special education?

### **Significance of the Study**

Understanding why special educators are staying in classrooms is essential if policymakers are to take effective steps to counteract the problem of attrition. Investigations into the effects of teacher preparation programs, working conditions, teacher demographics, and district and state policies are necessary if retention efforts at local and state levels are to be successful (Brownell & Smith, 1992). "Across the state, almost one-third of teachers leave the profession after only three years, and half exit after five. . . . Teachers are overwhelmed by the expectations and scope of their job" (Hawaii State Teachers Association, 2005). In an attempt to meet the need for special education teachers, the Hawaii Department of Education (HDOE) recruits nationally in designated cities such as New York, Albany, Chicago, Portland, Los Angles, San Diego, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Pittsburg (HDOE, 2004). HDOE recruits approximately 1,600 new teachers from within and outside Hawaii each year ("Hawaii's Public Schools, 2007-2008"). To help alleviate the shortage of special education teachers, it is urgent that research efforts focus on a variety of factors that contribute to the retention of our nation's special educators. I believe understanding why special educators choose to stay in the field may be an important step in retention of novice special educators on Hawaii's neighbor islands.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the extent to which research has expanded our understanding of support factors that contribute to the retention of special education teachers. Retention of special educators is currently a critical issue throughout the public school system in the United States. Effective supports for novice special educators that can be identified will assist policymakers and administrators seeking proactive approaches to the issues of retention and attrition. In-depth understanding and responsive action taken to address working conditions that lead to increased job satisfaction and higher commitment may be keys to retaining special education teachers.

#### Resiliency Theory

Special education teachers' attrition rates are higher than those of their general education counterparts (M. D. Miller et al., 1999). They may be at greater risk for attrition because of unique aspects of their jobs not experienced by their peers in general education. Considerations such as isolation, stress, paperwork, lack of resources, inadequate administrative support, working conditions, additional certifications, and poorly conceived professional development make support factors, or protective factors in the language of resiliency theory, extremely important (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998). Researchers have used resiliency theory to describe youths who have overcome great odds in their lives. Werner (1995) discussed three kinds

of phenomena researchers have described that relate to resiliency: “good developmental outcomes despite high risk status, sustained competence under stress, and recovery from trauma” (p. 81). I 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. Werner (1994) explained that researchers have examined “protective factors or mechanisms that moderate a youngster’s reaction to a stress situation or chronic adversity so that adaptation is more successful than would be the case if the protective factor(s) were not present” (p. 131). Perhaps protective factors, if present for novice special education teachers, would lead to more successful adaptation to the teaching environment and to greater job satisfaction.

Resiliency theory has been used to help focus the movement toward school reform:

Resiliency theory serves as a lens to guide school redesign. Look critically at school practices—How does this practice demonstrate caring for every student? How does this practice demonstrate high expectations for every student and support students’ efforts to meet these expectations? How does this practice demonstrate valuing student participation? (Krovetz, 1999, p. x)

I suggest that these very questions, so critical for the well being of students, could also be critical for the well being of novice special education teachers. Krovetz (1999) explained, “My vision for the community I want to live and work in is based on resiliency theory (RT)—the belief in the ability of every person to overcome adversity if important protective factors are present in that person’s life” (p. ix). A resilience approach is one that addresses needs for belonging, autonomy, and respect. Resilience

education recognizes competencies, talents, goals, achievements, interests, and strengths as it “prepares young people to work on weaker areas of their development while supporting a positive sense of self” (Brown et al., 2001, p. ix).

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, 1993, 1997; Brown et al., 2001; Krovetz, 1999). Noonan (1999) listed an additional three protective factors, which included prosocial bonding, clear and consistent boundaries, and life-skills training. Rutter (1987) described four “protective processes” that initiate change including those that reduce risk impact, reduce the possibility of negative chain reactions, promote self-esteem and self-efficacy, and promote opportunities.

Fostering resilience is a process and not a program. The aim is not to determine broadly defined resilience factors, but rather to find the development and contextual mechanisms involved in protective processes. “Resiliency research thus promises to move the prevention, education, and youth development fields beyond their focus on program and what we do, to an emphasis on process and how we do what we do” (Benard, 1996, p. 4).

Within this context, researchers have discussed the importance of nurturing connectedness. Benard (1996) explained the idea of connectedness as the transformation of our families, schools, and communities into places of belonging where there are opportunities for meaningful involvement as well as respectful and caring relationships. Benard (1996) suggested supporting our own resilience first. Building community and a

sense of belonging for youth must begin with doing the same for educators. The protective factors of being connected to others, having respectful relationships, and opportunities to make decisions are important to all of us. Without these, we cannot create them for youth.

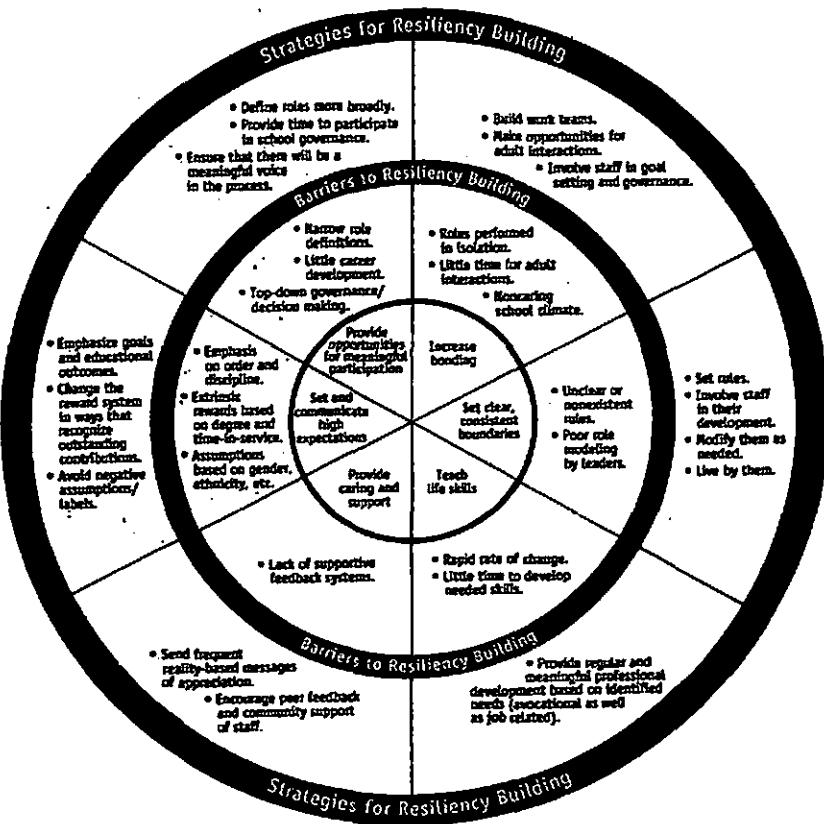
Patterson, Collins, and Abbott (2004) reported on 16 urban general education teachers and the strategies they used to build their personal resilience. Patterson et al. found four key factors that contributed to the resilience of these teachers: (a) they act from a set of values that inform their professional decisions, (b) they require professional development and will look outside of the school system to find it, (c) they mentor other teachers, and (d) they try to maintain their focus on students and learning.

Although the research of Patterson et al. (2004) was conducted with general education teachers in urban settings, I believe it offers insights into the factors all teachers require if they are to become successful and effective educators. Novice special education teachers, new to a school and working with challenging students in stressful situations, could benefit greatly from resilience research applied to their needs. How are they supported to build their personal resilience? If these front line novice special educators are not the recipients of the protective factors discussed in the literature, it is my belief they are at greater risk for attrition.

Ultimately, resiliency research provides a mandate for social change—it is a clarion call for creating relationships and opportunities . . . changing the status quo in our society means changing paradigms, both personally and professionally, from risk to resilience, from control to participation, from problem-solving to positive development, from Eurocentrism to multi-culturalism, from seeing youth

as problems to seeing them as resources, from institution-building to community-building. (Benard, 1996, p.5)

Figure 1 focuses on the protective factors/strategies (outer ring) that, if present, may mitigate some of the barriers to teacher retention (middle ring) discussed in the literature. The core of Figure 1 represents six themes that have consistently emerged from resiliency research “showing how schools as well as families and communities can provide both the environmental protective factors and the conditions that foster individual protective factors” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 11).



*Figure 1. Resiliency wheel—Fostering educator resiliency: What schools can do.*

From *Resiliency in Schools: Making it Happen for Students and Educators*, p. 65, by N. Henderson and M. M. Milstein, copyright 2003 by Corwin Press.

Rutter's work, as reported by Brown et al. (2001), was important for at least two reasons. First, Rutter (1987) wanted to develop the idea of resilience as a useful way of promoting well-being rather than focusing on perceived deficiencies in at-risk populations. Second, Rutter provided support for specific protective factors that promote resilience in children. By the mid-1980s Rutter considered protective factors as essential for development.

Rutter's research helped establish the modern concept of resilience as a frame for working with children facing adversity. "The concept of a general self-righting mechanism, available to nearly all people who are provided with sufficient support, was emerging" (Brown et al., 2001, p. 15). To a large part, this emergence could be traced to the equally important work of Werner (1989).

Werner's research, starting in the mid-1950s and continuing into the new millennium, was described by Brown et al. (2001) as "not only an important line of resilience research, but one of the most valuable social science studies ever conducted" (p. 15). Brown et al. explained that Werner's research provided researchers with "key predictive evidence of the relationship between extreme high-risk environments and future psychological adaptation" (2001, p. 15). In addition, Werner's work examined factors that explained why some adolescents who overcame great odds were resilient.

Over time some infants in the Kauai study, who had grown into young adults, although exposed to the same adversities as other children, had become "competent and autonomous" individuals. To help explain this phenomenon, Werner (1989) described three protective factors as follows:

1. Dispositional attributes of the individual, such as activity level and sociability, at least average intelligence, competence in communication skills (language, reading) and an internal locus of control
2. Affectional ties within the family that provide emotional support in times of stress, whether from the parent, sibling, spouse, or mate
3. External support systems, whether in school, at work, or church, that reward the individual's competencies and determination and that provide a belief system by which to live. (p. 80)

Key to these concepts is the idea of "connectedness." Werner's (1989) work emphasized the connections between children and family and "extrafamilial adults" as well as the support of a larger community. "Werner's nearly 40-year research journey shows that being emotionally connected with adults and people in communities is a significant part of what allows 70% of young people in even the worst conditions to thrive despite adversity" (Brown et al., 2001, p. 16).

Resilience research offers educators opportunities to examine important lessons that can be applied to their work with young people. These lessons include: (a) research that supports the use of a resilience perspective when working with youth, (b) the idea that most individuals have self-righting mechanisms, (c) strong evidence that positive life outcomes emerge when a focus on development rather than punishment is used, and (d) if those in the worst conditions can survive and thrive when given basic supports then outcomes for youth can be enriched if protective factors are provided (Brown et al., 2001). Multiple lines of research serve to strengthen this view.

Research from educational, physiological, social psychological, and developmental perspectives have supported the direct application of a resilience approach to education (Brown et al., 2001). “Each of these traditions contributes evidence to support essential assumptions of resilience education . . . [and] to guide both principles of action and strategies or interventions necessary to develop resilience in each school, classroom, and young person” (Brown et al., 2001, p. 19). Supporting resilience education means creating schools that are caring with purposeful supports, maintain high expectations for students and staff, and offer opportunities for meaningful participation (Krovetz, 1999). Research reveals there are schools that foster resilient communities for students and adults while maintaining high academic standards (Krovetz, 1999). Brown et al. (2001) concluded, “Resilience approaches can be applied to any educational setting and it is highly likely that benefits will accrue” (p. 18). Are “resilience approaches” being applied to support novice special educators once they begin their professional careers?

#### **Entry-Level Teaching Support**

The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2004) reported that in many cases novice teachers leave the supportive process of working in teams (cohorts) during their university experience to what the NCTAF terms a “lone wolf” approach when they enter their first “real world” classroom. Rather than receiving the continuum of support novice teachers have become accustomed to, “new teacher support at the district level is too often unconnected to the training and resources of the higher education institution where the candidate was prepared” (NCTAF, 2004, p. 8). NCTAF also found little feedback between local school districts and teacher preparation programs as to the problems and challenges encountered by novice teachers recently graduated

from these programs. The report also cited difficulties with mentoring programs, including the problems of “good matches” and the confounding with evaluation, which often made these programs lacking in the very assistive qualities they hoped to provide (NCTAF, 2004).

NCTAF (2004) made several recommendations for new clinical experience models that would support novice teachers. These recommendations included: (a) training that would continue for the first 2 years of teaching, which would require a partnership between districts and universities; (b) funding models whose data support their effectiveness to build consensus between districts and universities over issues such as partnerships, funding, and governance; (c) encouraging the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) to support mentored residency for novice teachers, which would require a gradual assignment of classroom responsibilities leading to full responsibility for a classroom over a specified time period; (d) aligning of district induction programs with university clinical programs; (e) examining of other profession’s staged inductions and how they are funded; (f) publishing the cost of current policies that have failed students and novice teachers as compared with other industries that have demonstrated success in recruiting and preparing new employees; and (g) encouraging the involvement of university, school district, and community leaders to find effective ways to support novice teachers in our school systems.

In its 2003b report, *No Dream Denied*, NCTAF reported the teacher retention issue had become a national crisis: “Almost a third of all new teachers leave the classroom after only three years, and close to 50% leave after their fifth year” (p. 1). Chief among the reasons for the attrition of so many teachers from the classroom were

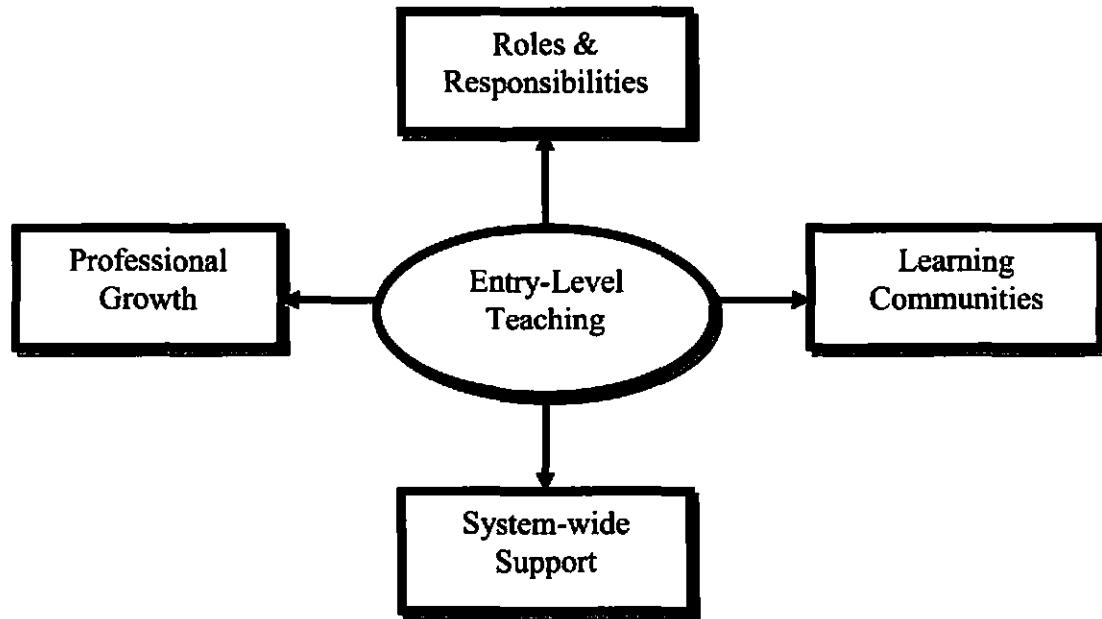
poor working conditions (NCTAF, 2003a). “Achieving the vision of quality teaching in all schools begins with devising strategies for creating the conditions for an optimal entry into the teaching profession” (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 3). The vision, as the report viewed it, would eliminate the traditional system of entry characterized by teacher isolation “to a transformed system in which all entering teachers experience the kind of support from a professional community that will move them towards accomplished teaching” (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 3). Novice teachers would experience a professional learning community from the beginning of their careers in which relationships with colleagues were emphasized along with professional growth and “the expectation that all members of the community share responsibility for each other’s success and for the success of all students” (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 3). Ellen Moir, quoted in NCTAF (2003a), astutely took the issue of retention one step further when she stated, “I worry about the teachers we’re losing physically as well as the teachers we are losing spiritually, mentally, and emotionally” (pp. 3-4). This reference to attrition of a different nature underscores the importance of changes in our schools to more positive professional environments. All teachers, novices and those with varying degrees of experience, as well as the students benefit from these changes

The NCTAF (2003a) report on the first 3 years of teaching posed the question, “What, then, are the elements or components necessary to move from traditional entry level teaching into a model that embraces new teachers into a culture of support?” (p. 4). In order to investigate this question, NCTAF participants considered the following core questions:

1. What would our schools look like if they were welcoming and nurturing professional environments for new teachers?

2. What would the work of novice teachers look like?
3. What roles would others have to play in order to enable those teachers to do that work?
4. How does changing the work of novice teachers change the rest of the community in which those teachers work?
5. What actions must be taken to achieve that vision? (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 4)

A model was developed during this NCTAF (2003a) conference that addressed the varying needs of novice teachers and very much looked like support systems reported by resilience researchers. At the center of this model was entry-level teaching. In each of four directions were the areas of roles and responsibilities, learning communities, professional growth, and system-wide support (NCTAF) (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2. Model for new teachers entering a community of supports in schools.*

From *The First Three Years of Teaching*, p. 6, by National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, copyright 2003 by Author.

In the first area of support, roles and responsibilities, the model emphasized moving away from teaching assignments that required novice teachers to immediately assume the same responsibilities and teaching load of veteran teachers during their first 1 to 3 years of teaching (NCTAF, 2003a). Their nonteaching time would be “spent in observation, working alongside more experienced teachers, and working in instructional teams with their colleagues” (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 7). Novice teachers would be valued for their knowledge and expected to contribute and share their knowledge with others, not be merely the recipients of information from their more experienced colleagues. Support and recognition would be two key components of resilience education apparent in this part of the model.

Learning communities were also seen as an important element for the support of novice teachers. At the center of these learning communities were “teacher teams” designed to foster “the development of healthy, trusting, relationships” (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 8). These teacher teams embody the collegial support systems, mentioned in resiliency literature, in which experienced teachers support novice teachers to be more effective professionals (Krovetz, 1999, p. 137). Members of teams would include experienced and novice teachers working together to provide opportunities for planning, consulting, discussing concerns about students and lessons, and mentoring. The NCTAF (2003a) report stated:

An entry-level teacher would be paired with a more experienced teacher from the same discipline or grade level who would serve as a mentor. This would be a deeper relationship than the buddy system that is now used by many schools. Mentoring would be done with purpose and with the expectation that both the

mentor and the novice would grow together in their understandings of teaching through the mentoring relationship. (p. 8)

The mentor in this case may represent the one important other often referred to in the resilience literature: the one individual, mentioned so often, who made all the difference and provided the relationship and support that enabled a young person to be successful and thrive.

Professional growth was the third area of emphasis by the NCTAF summit. Their report described professional growth as “the professional growth experiences and opportunities that would most effectively advance the entry-level teacher into accomplished teaching” (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 9). Resiliency theory literature uses the term *purposeful support* (Krovetz, 1999). Purposeful support is successful when resources are coupled with high expectations to accomplish priorities, and school personnel are accountable for decisions that affect their school (Krovetz, 1999). In addition to practicum and student teaching experiences in university preparation programs, NCTAF recommended that novice teachers work in teams with experienced teachers to observe their expertise, reflect on their own practice and their more experienced colleagues practice, and gather important knowledge on professional practice they are not ready to do alone. The summit stressed the benefits of novice teachers connecting with many master teachers. Ed Liu, research assistant for Project on the Next Generation of Teachers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, described this support as an induction program that provides a “system or web of interlocking support” (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 10). One of the key goals of professional growth or purposeful support would be to help novice teachers feel confident about their ability to teach successfully. The summit

reported that this sense of efficaciousness on the part of novice teachers was “crucial . . . to hooking new teachers into the profession over the long term” (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 10).

System-wide support was the fourth important area mentioned by the NCTAF National Summit on the First Three Years of Teaching. “System wide support includes support from higher education, superintendent/school board, principal, school culture/organization, teaching staff, and technology” (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 10). This support overlaps with the concept of a teacher’s community reported by Krovetz (1999) in the resiliency theory literature, which includes students, students’ parents, administrators, staff, and fellow educators. To improve retention, NCTAF suggested that new teachers should understand from their first job interview that they are joining a community. These prospective hires should know that the community made up of teachers, parents, administrators, community leaders, school boards, university personnel and others are interested in them and committed to supporting them in a variety of ways (initial living arrangements, get-to-know-your-community events, introductory phone calls, networks of entry-level teachers). The message is that “everyone who plays a role in introducing teachers into the profession must understand the importance of this process and feel a sense of responsibility for ensuring a safe and effective transition for these new teachers” (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 11). Professional learning communities are viewed as essential for the improvement of novice teachers’ work lives, and “improving the work life of novice teachers is an essential aspect of building a professional learning community” (NCTAF, 2003a, p. 14).

## Two Lines of Research on Retention

### *Demographics*

Boe et al. (1998) analyzed data from a national perspective to determine the certification status of special education teachers and general education teachers working in public schools during 1990-1991. The authors found the chronic shortage of certified special education teachers was attributable to the small supply of certified special education teachers entering the school systems and the high turnover of continuing special educators that resulted in the hiring of transitional teachers, many of whom were not certified in special education. Transfer of special educators to general education has been documented as one source of this turnover (Billingsley & Cross, 1991). Gersten et al. (2001) suggested job design modification as a possible solution. Boe, Bobbitt, and Cook (1997) explained, from a very different perspective, that making it easier for teachers to move between special education and general education might offer special educators a temporary break from the demands of special education.

Boe et al. (1997) found several differences between special education teachers and general education teachers. The authors suggested this information could help explain attrition and retention issues currently facing general and special education. The authors reported the following information from their investigation of the 1987-1988 school year based on surveys administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES): (a) more special educators than general educators left their public school assignments, (b) more special educators than general educators transferred to a different school, (c) more special educators left public school teaching, (d) special educators were more mobile than general educators, (e) the higher mobility of special educators than

general educators among schools paralleled the higher rate of attrition from public schools of special educators than general educators, (f) teachers who migrated to out of state schools moved considerable distances as opposed to districts that might lie across a state border from a teacher's workplace, (g) the primary activity of leavers in their first year out of teaching was in various positions in education, and (h) two thirds of leavers indicated they might return to teaching at sometime. Boe et al. suggested the movement of special educators out of public education or within education but in a different capacity are in part responsible for the shortages of special education teachers on a national level. The authors concluded that even if successful efforts were made to implement attrition reduction strategies it would not be enough to stabilize the teaching force in special education. They suggested policymakers in special education look to two sources that have the potential to provide additional qualified special education teachers: (a) teacher preparation programs and (b) the reserve pool of former teachers (Boe et al., 1997; see also M. D. Miller et al., 1999).

In another study, Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al. (1997) further investigated demographic variables that may reveal a relationship between teacher characteristics and attrition/retention issues. Additional investigation of data derived from the same survey examined above focused on the wide variety of teacher, school, and district characteristics that may be associated with attrition and retention of special educators and general educators in public school systems. These authors reported the following information based on their study of 1987-1988 surveys administered by the NCES using national probability samples: (a) teachers who transfer by choice go to smaller school districts and reassignees are sent to larger school districts, (b) higher attrition percentages

occurred at younger and older ages, (c) teachers with a child under the age of six were much more likely to leave, (d) the number of dependent children was associated with teachers' decisions to change school or leave teaching, (e) evidence of a relationship between marital status change and teacher attrition, (f) teachers who were fully certified in their main teaching assignment were more likely to stay in the same school rather than moving or leaving, (g) teacher turnover (moving or leaving) was highest for teachers whose most recent degree had been earned during the prior 2 years, (h) teachers who were employed full time were less likely to move to another school or leave teaching, (i) elementary teachers moved to a different school at a higher rate than secondary teachers (not statistically significant for special educators), and (j) both school transfer and attrition declined systematically and substantially with increased salary levels. The authors explained that although no single predictor variable could be shown to improve teacher retention dramatically, combinations of variables showed potential to improve retention. For example, based on these findings, it would be best to hire 35- to 55-year-old experienced teachers with no dependent children under the age of 6, who are fully certified for a full-time teaching assignment.

#### *Job Satisfaction*

In an attempt to go beyond demographic variables such as age, gender, degrees attained, and certification, researchers have:

focused more on an in-depth understanding of aspects of the working conditions of special educators that lead to increased job satisfaction and a higher commitment to the field of special education, as opposed to merely attempting to ascertain factors associated with job longevity. (Gersten et al., 2001, p. 550)

Researchers have used the technique of path analysis to investigate and evaluate relationships among variables such as collegial and administrative support, job satisfaction, stress, commitment, and prior preparation (Gersten et al., 2001). Gersten et al. asked specific questions regarding special education job design borrowed from the field of occupational research. In order to better understand special educators' frustrations with their jobs, Gersten et al. (2001) asked: "Does the job, with all it entails, make sense? Is it feasible? Is it one that well-trained, interested, special education professionals can manage in order to accomplish their major objective, enhancing students' academic, social, and vocational competence?" (p. 551). As the authors attempted to answer these questions they did so with a focus on alterable aspects of working conditions that building principals, districts, and others might use to modify special educators' jobs in an effort to increase retention.

In order to facilitate discussion of job satisfaction and the alterable aspects of working conditions that influence the retention/attrition of special educators, I have selected seven variables consistently reported by authors in this review. Variables to further guide discussion include principal support, collegial support, working conditions, professional development opportunities, locus of control, induction programs, and teacher preparation programs.

### *Principal Support*

Many of the studies that focused on working conditions consistently found the role of the principal as having a strong relationship to teachers' job satisfaction (Billingsley et al., 2004; Boe et al., 1997; Brownell et al., 1995; Brownell et al., 1997; Cross & Billingsley, 1994; George et al., 1995; Gersten et al., 2001; Holdman & Harris,

2003; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998; Littrell et al., 1994; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Westling & Whitten, 1996). Brownell et al. (1995), in a series of interviews with both *stayers* (i.e., special educators with 5 or more continuous years of district service) and *leavers* (i.e., special educators who had left the special education classroom), found among leavers a clear sense of frustration with perceived lack of administrative support. Results of their study revealed that only stayers described building administrators as collaborators. Principal support was reported by Cross and Billingsley (1994) to have significant influence on job satisfaction, stress, commitment, and role dissonance, each a powerful variable that may contribute to a teacher's decision to stay or leave the special education classroom. George et al. (1995) also found that when teachers believed principal support was adequate or more than adequate there was a greater likelihood they would stay. Principals were also viewed as supportive when they provided "relevant professional development opportunities" for special educators at their school (Gersten et al., 2001, p. 560). Littrell et al. (1994) looked specifically at the effects of principal support on special and general educators. These authors found principal support was important to teachers. Principals who provided emotional and informational support were also building a sense of school commitment and belonging (Littrell et al., 1994).

George et al. (1995) found teacher dissatisfaction with principal support often was concerned with the type and quality of supervisory feedback. Teachers felt principals had little knowledge of their methods and goals and gave infrequent, general, and unhelpful feedback (George et al., 1995). Westling and Whitten (1996) reported similar findings in their interviews with rural special education teachers. Kilgore and Griffin (1998) found

special educators “perceived their administrators as uninterested in the education of students with disabilities” (p. 167). Brownell et al. (1997) suggested educational leadership programs and district in-service programs be developed to sensitize principals to the unique needs of special educators, including knowledge of behavioral and instructional challenges and strategies. Such programs would enable principals to better understand and assist special education teachers, a need also addressed by Billingsley et al. (2004).

Principals wield power over special education teachers and influence job satisfaction, role problems, stress, and commitment (Cross & Billingsley, 1994). Singh and Billingsley (1996) found principal support to be the strongest influence on job satisfaction among special educators. Similarly, Littrell et al. (1994) reported teachers who received high levels of emotional support from their principals (appreciation, trust, open communication) were more satisfied with their jobs than those who did not receive similar support. Additional recommendations from the literature to help principals use their influence effectively included (a) provide support utilizing acknowledgement, feedback, shared decision making, and collaborative problem solving (Cross & Billingsley, 1994; George et al., 1995; Gersten et al., 2001; Singh & Billingsley, 1996); (b) develop induction programs (Holdman & Harris, 2003); (c) create an atmosphere of optimism and camaraderie not competition and confrontation, a “we” approach instead of a hierarchical one (Littrell et al., 1994); (d) conduct self-examinations and needs assessments (Littrell et al., 1994; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Westling & Whitten, 1996); (e) clarify teachers roles, reduce bureaucratic requirements, reduce stress, supply needed resources and information (Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Singh & Billingsley, 1996); and

(f) provide more time for preparing individualized education programs (IEPs), control the number of contact hours, and maintain a low student to teacher ratio (Stempien & Loeb, 2002).

Cross and Billingsley (1994) added a note of caution explaining that special education was only one aspect of principals' many responsibilities, and that others such as teachers and office staff must also become involved. This finding coincided with Gersten et al. (2001) who found it more useful to conceptualize building support as the "cumulative impact of the building principal, assistant principal, and fellow teachers at the school than to separately examine support from the building principal" (p. 563).

#### *Collegial Support*

Relationships with other special education teachers, teaching assistants, and general education teachers were also important indicators of intent to stay or leave (M. D. Miller et al., 1999). Teachers who remained on the job perceived support they received from other special educators and teaching assistants as significantly more adequate than teachers who left (George et al., 1995). Interestingly, both groups expressed the perception of low levels of support from general education teachers (Brownell et al., 1997; George et al., 1995). Gersten et al. (2001) examined the perceptions of building-level support as a combination of principal and fellow teacher support. The authors felt this approach represented "a more contemporary conception than the earlier focus on the building principal only" (Gersten et al., 2001, p. 557). In alignment with M. D. Miller et al. (1999), Gersten et al. (2001) found a positive relationship between collegial support and special education teacher retention. The authors reported special educators most

appreciated administrators and colleagues showing an understanding of their role whether they provided material resources or not.

The ability to engage in meaningful conversations with staff and administrators about their jobs helped to reduce stress and role dissonance (Littrell et al., 1994). M. D. Miller et al. (1999) reported that teachers who perceived a positive school climate built on a collaborative culture of collegial interaction indicated this collaboration strongly contributed to their decision to remain in special education. In addition, Stempien and Loeb (2002) found that interacting with colleagues and fostering collegial relationships were important factors in the possible retention of special education teachers. Westling and Whitten (1996) reported special education teachers who expressed an intention to leave teaching in the next few years expressed frustration over the lack of “recognition, understanding, acceptance or support from their general education colleagues” (p. 330).

Kilgore and Griffin (1998) received disturbing responses when asking about principal and collegial relationships. While conducting ethnographic interviews with four novice special education teachers in their first and second year of service, the authors found that the teachers indicated little if any support from administration, and isolation from their general education colleagues.

### *Working Conditions*

Working conditions, in addition to concerns already discussed regarding principal and collegial relationships, include job design, role dissonance, school environment, stress, paperwork, and high caseloads among others (Billingsley et al., 2004; Cross & Billingsley, 1994). “Job design is a contemporary concept that has seldom been applied to special education teaching but that appears to have high utility . . . [for] understanding

teacher retention and job satisfaction" (Gersten et al., 2001, p. 562). Job design can be defined as the degree to which the successful completion of tasks and responsibilities are supported by the processes and structures established for doing the job (Gersten et al., 2001). Jobs with poor designs lead to frustration and stress that have been shown to be major components of attrition (Brownell & Smith, 1992; Pullis, 1992). Stress and role dissonance are directly related to poor job design (Gersten et al., 2001). Stress results when teachers' expectations regarding their jobs conflict with actual job requirements and may negatively influence teachers' intent to stay in special education (Gersten et al., 2001; Singh & Billingsley, 1996).

Cross and Billingsley (1994) found work related variables to have significant influence on job satisfaction and commitment. Billingsley et al. (2004) found that ratings for overall school climate as reported by early career special education teachers were fairly high. However, paperwork, discipline, workload manageability, diverse student learning needs, lack of personnel, shortage of material resources, fit of teaching assignment with certification, and meetings were still reported as important issues that can lead to role overload if not effectively dealt with in the school environment (Billingsley et al., 2004; Brownell et al., 1995; Brownell et al., 1997; Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Gersten et al., 2001; M. D. Miller et al., 1999; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Westling & Whitten, 1996).

Researchers reported lack of permanent classrooms and safety issues (i.e., dangerous students) as additional concerns of special education teachers (Brownell et al., 1997). George et al. (1995), unlike other studies, did not find caseload to have a strong influence on teachers' intent to leave, but the authors did find student attitude (acting out,

aggressive, uncooperative, disruptive) rated as an “extreme obstacle to program functioning” by twice as many potential leavers as stayers (p. 231). Isolation and self-contained settings were also reported as influencing special educators’ decisions not to remain in the field (Kilgore & Griffin, 1998). In addition, Stempien and Loeb (2002) cited the work challenges presented to inexperienced special educators in the form of “students with multiple disabilities, varied etiologies, inconsistent symptomology, and poor prognoses for substantial progress” along with available records that are “inaccurate or at least incomplete” as sources of frustration (p. 264).

### *Professional Development*

Professional development is the opportunity special educators are given to grow and advance professionally (Gersten et al., 2001). Several studies in this review agreed teachers’ perceptions of effective and relevant professional development opportunities correlate positively with retention (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997; Brownell et al., 1997; Gersten et al., 2001; M. D. Miller et al., 1999; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Professional development opportunities play a “critical role in explaining commitment to remain in special education teaching . . . [and] suggest it is important that special education teachers feel that, regardless of their years of experience, they continue to learn on the job” (Gersten et al., 2001, p. 560).

Nearly one third of special educators interviewed, however, expressed dissatisfaction with the quality and relevance of professional development opportunities available to them (Brownell et al., 1995). Teachers criticized programs as being too general and not very helpful. Educators also expressed practical reasons for the ineffectiveness of the programs such as (a) poor timing during the school year (e.g., a

behavior workshop in February), (b) lack of reimbursement for expenses, and (c) out-of-town locations (Brownell et al., 1995).

The presentation of a professional development program to reduce stress was seen as an appropriate way to enhance special educators coping skills (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997; Singh & Billingsley, 1996). Boe et al. (1998) suggested professional development programs especially for transitional teachers as a promising approach to reducing the shortages of certified special educators. They explained this type of program would target at-risk transitional teachers, those who may wish to transfer to special education or new teachers wanting to stay in special education. Stempien and Loeb (2002) reported professional development activities could improve retention of special educators by challenging routines, encouraging experimentation, and involving teachers in planning professional development programs. Gersten et al. (2001) concurred explaining the importance of having teacher input into professional development activities. In addition, Gersten et al. reported the desire of special educators to have more opportunities to observe and learn from each other. Gersten et al. made recommendations for professional development activities that increased communication between special education teachers in or across districts as a valuable asset school districts could use to attract and retain special education teachers.

#### *Locus of Control*

Research suggests that self-efficacy and autonomy are critical for special educators (Brownell et al., 1995; Brownell et al., 1997; Eichinger, 2000; Gersten et al., 2001; M. D. Miller et al., 1999; Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Westling & Whitten, 1996). Several studies reported that teachers who had left special education felt powerless to

deal with inadequate resources and support when they were in the classroom (Billingsley et al., 2004; Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997; Brownell et al., 1997; Holdman & Harris, 2003; Singh & Billingsley, 1996). These former special educators indicated more personal control over their teaching situations would be an important factor if they were to return to special education. Brownell et al. (1995) found special education teachers “angry about their lack of influence in scheduling and placement decisions, particularly because they felt they were in the best position to make important decisions about student needs” (p. 100). In addition, Brownell et al. (1997) explained that many emergency-certified teachers, some with general education certification, committed and capable of teaching special education, felt frustrated by state certification requirements. Many found they were either unable to commit the time to traditional certification programs or they could not afford the expense (Brownell et al., 1997). This inability to control their own career path was frustrating for these teachers and led to their decision to leave the field (Brownell et al., 1997).

Stempien and Loeb (2002) explained that teachers need flexibility, choices, and opportunities for growth. Teachers need to be involved in decisions and planning for professional development activities. Gersten et al. (2001) reported it was important to involve special education teachers in decision-making. Stempien and Loeb (2002) suggested special education teachers should be given necessary background information on their students with realistic expectations for their learning that would allow teachers to refocus on students' abilities and create a greater sense of self-efficacy for teachers. Brownell et al. (1997) discussed the need to involve special educators in the development

of their students' class schedules to better coordinate their work with general education teachers and special service providers.

Studies suggested designing individualized or "customized" retention strategies to meet the needs of special education teachers (Billingsley et al., 2004; Brownell et al., 1995; Brownell et al., 1997; M. D. Miller et al., 1999; Rosenberg, Griffin, Kilgore, & Carpenter, 1997; Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Westling & Whitten, 1996). In addition, distance education classes, alternative certification programs, and supplemental funding of the cost of obtaining special education certification were all mentioned as possible alternatives to encourage emergency-certified teachers to pursue licensing requirements (Billingsley et al., 2004; Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al., 1997; Brownell et al., 1997). Stress and collaboration training were also suggested as effective ways of improving special education teachers' abilities to cope with their teaching realities (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; M. D. Miller et al., 1999; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Salary was mentioned in several studies as an important factor that could influence teachers' intent and ability to remain in the field (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997; Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener, et al., 1997; Boe et al., 1998; Brownell et al., 1997; Holdman & Harris, 2003).

### *Induction Programs*

Induction programs are designed to alleviate some of the frustration and provide supports for dealing with the unique challenges of special education (Billingsley et al., 2004; Holdman & Harris, 2003). Billingsley et al. (2004) recommended that school districts "provide systematic and responsive induction programs for all beginning special educators" (p. 345). Induction support should consist of a flexible program that provides

support, contacts, information, observations, professional development activities, and mentoring, which are responsive to the needs of novice teachers (Billingsley et al., 2004).

Among the various components of an induction program, mentoring was mentioned as a potentially effective program by several studies in this review (Billingsley et al., 2004; Gersten et al., 2001; Holdman & Harris, 2003; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Whitaker, 2000a). In 1989, The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) developed standards of professional practice for first-year special educators that included a minimum 1-year mentorship experience (Whitaker, 2000a). The CEC (1998), as quoted in Whitaker (2000a), identified the following purposes of a special education mentorship program: “(1) to facilitate the application of knowledge and skills, (2) to convey advanced knowledge and skills, (3) to assist timely acculturation to the school climate, (4) to reduce stress and enhance job satisfaction, and (5) to support professional induction” (p. 547). Although mentoring may provide needed support for retention efforts involving special education teachers, Whitaker reported that little research has been done regarding special education mentoring programs.

Holdman and Harris (2003) evaluated the mentoring component of a rural regional induction program and, although the sample of special education teachers who started the program was small ( $n = 7$ ), six were still teaching 4 years later, and five were still in special education. Teachers who participated expressed the belief that the program was helpful and beneficial (Holdman & Harris, 2003).

Whitaker (2000a) investigated a mentoring program involving 156 first-year special educators in South Carolina. Whitaker (2000a) found, as did Holdman and Harris (2003), that the matching of the mentor teacher and the beginning special educator was

critical. Mentors in both studies were found to be most effective when they were special education teachers in similar roles and grade levels (Holdman & Harris, 2003; Whitaker, 2000a). Whitaker as well as Holdman and Harris found emotional support was perceived by beginning teachers to be a very important element of the mentoring relationship. Whitaker (2000a) reported “a statistically significant relationship between the perceived overall effectiveness of the mentoring and the first-year special education teacher’s plans to remain in special education” (p. 563). The author explained that although the effect size was small, given the critical need for special education teachers, any positive indicator influencing retention might be important.

Billingsley et al. (2004) found that 61% of beginning teachers had the opportunity to participate in a formal mentoring program. However, one third of the teachers who participated did not report the mentoring helpful. Contrary to Whitaker (2000a), Billingsley et al. (2004) reported no significant correlation between formal mentoring and intention to remain in special education.

### *Teacher Preparation Programs*

Pre-service field experience was rated positively by some special education teachers but pre-service course work often was not (Brownell et al., 1995). Both stayers and leavers felt course work was unrealistic and had little relevance to their teaching positions (Brownell et al., 1995). Pre-service special education programs have been criticized for not adequately preparing special educators to teach in content areas (Kilgore & Griffin, 1998). Billingsley and Tomchin (1992, as cited in Kilgore & Griffin, 1998) indicated that problems experienced by first-year special education teachers were due to some degree to inadequate preparation.

Several authors reported recommendations to improve special education teacher preparation programs. Stempien and Loeb (2002) agreed with Ax, Conderman, and Stephens (2001) that pre-service teacher preparation programs are a key to retention efforts involving novice special education teachers. Stempien and Loeb (2002) discussed the need for pre-service teacher preparation programs to prepare future special education teachers for the pressures they will encounter on the job. The authors suggested teaching specific techniques that will ease the transition into the school environment: (a) listening, observing, establishing functional relationships; (b) networking with other special education teachers; and (c) reading curriculum guides to gain knowledge of general education curriculum. M. D. Miller et al. (1999) suggested teacher preparation programs teach stress management and collaboration skills such as those taught by Cooley and Yovanoff (1996). Cooley and Yovanoff taught both stress management skills and collaboration skills to special education teachers under experimental conditions and found treatment groups outperformed control groups on measures of commitment, burnout, and job satisfaction.

#### *Summary of Demographics and Job Satisfaction*

Researchers have investigated a myriad of factors that may contribute to a novice special educator's decision to stay or leave the field of special education. Although some factors are specific in nature (e.g., working conditions, teaching assignments, induction programs, pre-service requirements, and personal characteristics such as gender, age, education), many others are relationship dependent (e.g., administration support, collegial relationships, mentoring programs) and more difficult to circumscribe. Supports, or protective factors in the language of resiliency theory, may be a very important link that

bridges the gap between job satisfaction and attrition for many novice special educators. It is imperative that programs and policies be established to open the door for dialogue, support, and recognition among all members of the school culture to improve job satisfaction and retention.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

The purpose of this study was to describe and document factors that have promoted the retention of novice special education teachers on Hawaii's neighbor islands and how these factors may have influenced their decisions to remain in the field. This case study was based on the assumption that the supports provided to novice special educators contributed to their retention. The study included an exploration of institutional, collegial, pre-service, school, community, and family supports, along with intrapersonal variables that may enhance the retention of novice special education teachers. Data collection for the study began in the spring of 2007.

#### Qualitative Method

The study utilized qualitative methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect information from participants. In-depth interviews starting with semi-structured questions and concluding with unstructured follow-up questions were conducted. Open-ended questions allowed participants to expand on their answers. Follow-up questions were designed to explore additional information and insights (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) reported the personal interview to be the most effective tool to engage the cooperation of participants. In addition, I investigated documents and reports that were evidence of programs, policies, resources, recommendations, and supports that affected the resiliency of novice special education teachers.

## Participants

There were 10 participants in this study. Five of the participants in the study 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 in Honolulu. These five participants are also referred to as the “primary participants.” The remaining five participants were individuals nominated by each of the primary participants. The purpose of these nominated individuals was to help further clarify, corroborate, or present alternative explanations to the information supplied by the primary participants in this study. Table 1 presents the primary and nominated participants.

The five primary participants selected for this study were chosen from 10 individuals who were previously enrolled in a Bachelor of Education program at the University of Hawaii in a dual preparation, distance-learning program. Successful completion of the dual preparation program resulted in their becoming eligible for licensure in both elementary education and special education by the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board (HTSB). All participants were offered and had accepted financial assistance to complete the program in the form of stipends and tuition waivers in return for a commitment to teach special education in Hawaii for 3 years after graduation. This support money was provided by funds allocated by the state legislature as a result of a lawsuit in which the state was found to be providing inadequate services for students qualified to receive special education (Creamer, 2005). If the recipients of these stipends did not meet the 3-year special education employment requirement, they were obligated to repay the money.

Table 1.

*Primary and Nominated Participants*

Participant					Employed by HIDOE			
Primary	Nomi-nated	Race	Rela-tionship	Marital status	Graduate of UHM statewide dual-prep. cohort	Yes/ No	SPED teacher	Years as teacher (SPED/ Gen. Ed.)
Carla	--	Cau-casian	Friend; former teacher's aide	Unmar-ried with family	Yes	Yes	Yes	3 / 0
	--	Nan		Married with family	No	No	No	0 / 0
Jen	--	Cau-casian	Fellow teacher; friend	Married with family	Yes	Yes	Yes	3 / 0
	--	Lori		Married with family	No	Yes	Yes	5 / 2
Kanani	--	Asian/ Hawaiian	Relative; teacher; friend	Married with family	Yes	Yes	Yes	3 / 0
	--	Justine		Married with family	No	Yes	No	0 / 14
Makala	--	Asian/ Hawaiian	Fellow teacher; friend	Married with family	Yes	Yes	Yes	3 / 0
	--	Paula		Married	No	Yes	Former	3 / 11
Rose	--	Asian	Relative; teacher; friend	Married with family	Yes	Yes	Yes	3 / 0
	--	Anne		Married with family	No	Yes	No	0 / 24

*Note:* All participants are female.

These participants offered information-rich cases to provide in-depth understanding of issues central to this research (Patton, 2002). 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 with HIDOE on neighbor islands and therefore could provide valuable insights into the issue of retention, which is critical to Hawaii's public school system. "There is a serious shortage of special education teachers in this state [Hawaii] and it is not going away" (A. Jenkins, personal communication, February 1, 2007). Information about their individual backgrounds and experience is reported as an important aspect of the unique perspectives each brought to the issues that emerged from this study. These are their voices. This was their opportunity to reflect and take the time to think deeply about the implications of their experience for themselves, their students, their communities, and those who will follow in their footsteps, the new crop of special education teachers that start each school year across Hawaii and the nation.

I attempted to contact each of the 10 former members of a statewide Bachelor of Education dual preparation cohort. I asked the eight I successfully contacted to participate in a brief telephone survey (see Appendix A) to determine if they were appropriate candidates for this study. Results of the phone survey appear in Table 2.

All 10 members of this cohort were female, reflecting the large majority of females in the program. This demographic was consistent with the fact that nearly three out of four public school teachers are female and fewer than 15% are male in elementary schools (Latham, 1999; Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Whitaker, 2000a). At the time of their

Table 2.

*Results of Telephone Survey*

Former cohort members	Con-tacted? Y / N	Teach-ing SPED current-ly? Y / N	How satis-fied with current position? --	Do you have resources and support to be suc-cessful? --	Did your initial expecta-tions match reality? --	How certain are you that you will be teaching SPED in:		
						5 years	10 years	15 years
Carrie	N	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Carla	Y	Y	Some-what satisfied	Agree	Undecided	Likely	Not likely	Not likely
Dawn (Florida)	N	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Jen	Y	Y	Dissatis-fied	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unde-cided	Unde-cided	Unde-cided
Kanani	Y	Y	Some-what satisfied	Agree	Agree	High-ly likely	Likely	Unde-cided
Kathy	Y	N	--	--	--	--	--	--
Makala	Y	Y	Very satisfied	Agree	Strongly agree	Likely	Unde-cided	Not likely
Megan (Texas)	Y	N	--	--	--	--	--	--
Rose	Y	Y	Very satisfied	Agree	Agree	High-ly likely	Highly likely	High-ly likely
Sandra	Y	N	--	--	--	--	--	--

participation in the dual preparation program, these participants were known as nontraditional students. They were nontraditional because they were older; the majority was married with children and jobs, or had already raised their families. They were interested in returning to school to become teachers. 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. Therefore, they did not have to make adjustments to a new community while at the same time beginning their professional teaching career. All potential participants worked in the community in a variety of jobs including the school system prior to enrolling in the dual preparation program.

Each of the five primary participants had been employed as full-time special education teachers with the Hawaii Department of Education (see Appendix B for primary participant demographics). 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. All of the islands where the participants taught were considered rural. Rural areas are cited as areas in need of qualified special education teachers not only in Hawaii but nationally (Di et al., 2007; Ludlow, 2003; Sack, 1999). Some taught in small rural schools while others were employed in much more heavily populated schools. All schools in which the participants taught were a mix of predominately low- to middle-income students from racially mixed communities. All five taught primarily in self-contained classrooms.

### *Rose*

Rose was a graduate from a local high school on the island where she taught. She received her baccalaureate degree from the University of Hawaii in liberal studies. Prior to entering the dual preparation program at the University of Hawaii she was employed in various support positions at public schools on her home island. Rose was of Asian

descent. She was married and had children. Three members of her family were teachers. Rose nominated Anne, a teacher and relative, to be interviewed for this study.

*Kanani*

Kanani attended high school on the mainland but returned to the Hawaiian Islands to live and raise a family. Kanani received her baccalaureate in education from the University of Hawaii. Prior to entering the dual preparation program she was employed as a part-time teacher with HIDOE. Kanani was of Hawaiian, Chinese, and Caucasian descent. She was married and had children. Kanani had an extended family member who was a teacher. Kanani nominated Justine, a former teacher, close friend, and relative to be interviewed for this study.

*Jen*

Jen was a graduate of a local high school on the island where she taught. She received her baccalaureate degree in education of the University of Hawaii. Jen did not have prior experience in the public schools prior to initial employment on her home island. She was Caucasian. Jen was married and had children. A member of Jen's extended family was a teacher. Lori was nominated by Jen to be interviewed for this study. Lori was a fellow special education teacher at Jen's school.

*Makala*

Makala was a graduate of a local high school on the island where she lived and taught. She was a graduate of the University of Hawaii with a baccalaureate degree in education. Makala worked as an educational assistant in the public schools prior to her participation in the dual preparation program and subsequent employment as a special education teacher on her home island. Makala was part Hawaiian. She was married and

had children. Three members of her family were also teachers. Paula, a general education teacher, was nominated by Makala to be interviewed for this study.

### *Carla*

Carla was a graduate of a mainland high school. She moved to Hawaii many years ago and worked at various jobs in the community. Carla worked as a long-term substitute and as a part-time teacher for HIDOE prior to graduating from the University of Hawaii statewide dual preparation program and being employed as a full-time special education teacher on her local island. Carla was Caucasian and a single mother. She was a long-time resident of the island on which she taught. Carla had a family member who was also a teacher. Carla chose to nominate Nan, her close friend for many years and herself a former teacher's aide.

### **Procedures**

#### *Data Collection*

The primary data sources for this study were initial and follow-up interviews with primary participants and interviews with individuals nominated by the primary participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1997). Fifteen semi-structured interviews, two with each of the five primary participants and one with each of the nominated participants, were conducted. All interviews were conducted in a 10-month period from March 2007 through December 2007. An additional source of data was participants' reflections on interview transcriptions from a 2005 pilot study. The pilot study was conducted with these participants prior to obtaining their first full-time positions as special education teachers with HIDOE. A third data source was the evaluation of relevant documents and reports.

Personal interviews assist in the building of rapport between the participants in the study and the researcher conducting the interviews (Merriam, 1997). Trust among all parties concerned is essential when collecting data on an individual's perceptions and beliefs. This process requires accurate and honest reporting of events and circumstances by both participants and researcher. Personal interviews allow for clarification of responses and additional questioning, which help establish accuracy in reported findings. Carter (1993) reported that teacher stories acquired through interviews offer meanings to events and communicate a clear sense of experience. Witherell and Noddings (1991) concurred when they explained that professional practice can be informed by new insights, judgments, and meanings derived from personal narratives.

#### *Data Collection Techniques*

This study used the data collected from individual interviews and evaluation of relevant documents and reports to answer the research questions. Questioning techniques included open-ended and probing questions, techniques common to the social sciences (Bogden & Biklen, 2003). Interview questions were developed within the framework of an interview guide (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) defined the interview guide as “lists (of) questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview . . . [and are] prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (p. 343). I had the flexibility to ask questions in particular areas and follow an interesting line of inquiry spontaneously “but with the focus on a particular subject that had been predetermined” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The interview guide enabled me to make efficient use of a limited time frame. “The guide helped make interviewing a

number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored" (Patton, 2002, p. 343).

The issues I investigated in this study were framed by the research questions:

1. In what ways have professional factors such as community support, institutional support, and pre-service preparation influenced novice special education teachers' decisions to remain in the field of special education?
2. In what ways have personal factors such as intrapersonal variables, personal background, and family support influenced novice special education teachers' decisions to remain in the field of special education?

The interview guide (see Appendix C) included the questions that specifically aligned with issues raised through the research questions. The intent of the guide was to make data collection somewhat systematic for each participant and ensure comprehensiveness (Patton, 2002). In addition, the interview guide provided me the flexibility to pursue a conversational and situational style with the participants (Patton, 2002). All questions were not appropriate for all participants and I selected those questions relevant to particular individuals (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). As the interviewer, I had the option of using those questions that addressed related issues specific to the participants' responses:

While interviewers may develop preset interviewing guides to which they will refer when the timing is right, interviewers' initial basic work in this approach to interviewing is to listen actively and to move the interview forward as much as possible by building on what the participant has begun to share. (Seidman, 2006, p. 81)

In order to promote understanding and confidence, the purpose of the study was explained to all participants, and they were asked to read and sign either Consent Form A or B (see Appendix D), which addressed procedures for maintaining confidentiality and the potential risks that might occur as a result of their participation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Form A was for primary participants to sign and Form B was for those nominated by the primary participants to sign. Participants were asked to fill out a background information sheet. The names of participants do not appear on any of the data. Numbers were assigned to all tapes and transcripts. Pseudonyms were used for all participants' names. Participants' residence was not linked to any particular neighbor island. The study makes no reference to particular schools or uses any school names. The study makes no specific reference to any program or activity that could be directly linked to the participants.

I was aware of participants' demeanor, attitude, emotional state, and body language throughout the interview process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). If at any time the participants' behavior indicated they were uncomfortable or ill at ease with particular question or the content of the our discussions, I immediately gave them the opportunity to stop and take a break, move on to another question, conclude the interview for that day, or withdraw from the project at any time.

In order to maintain confidentiality, interviews were conducted in private locations negotiated by both the participants and the researcher away from their school grounds and activities. All participant interviews were audio taped. All recordings were transcribed. Each participant was interviewed individually for about 1.5 hours at a site mutually agreed upon. All initial interviews were conducted before any follow-up

interviews were conducted. I analyzed data from interviews as they were conducted and this helped to guide further data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

I analyzed the data and went back to participants with preliminary findings. Member checks were conducted with each of the participants to confirm accuracy of transcriptions and allow for corrections and clarifications as needed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Participants were given the choice of having a "hard copy" of their interview sent to them for their personal review or they could receive an attachment of their interview via e-mail. After participants reviewed their transcripts they contacted me to either approve the final version of their interview or make additions or deletions before their final approval.

A follow-up interview was conducted with each primary participant that was also audio taped. A similar procedure was followed to conduct member checks of the second interview. The second interview allowed me to explore more deeply areas of particular interest revealed in the initial interview. I then analyzed data from the follow-up interviews to further inform and clarify the results. I took notes as I interviewed each participant to help direct further questions in the interview and also serve as a guide for the writing up of notes and reflections after the interview had taken place (Patton, 2002). After the participant left the interview site, I read through all my hand-written notes and formulated my thoughts on various aspects of the interview. I then recorded my impressions, insights, observations, and thoughts on further lines of questioning by speaking into the digital and audio recorders I used for the interview. In this manner, I recorded my impressions for future reference.

Interview data that were previously gathered from a pilot study prior to the participants' first employment as special education teachers were also examined to contribute additional insights into their experiences. I shared the transcripts with each of those who were interviewed and asked them to reflect on their previous expectations as they compared to the realities of their first 2 to 3 years of teaching.

In addition to the two individual interviews (initial and follow-up) with the primary participants and their reflections on their pre-service pilot interviews, the primary participants were asked to nominate one individual (professional colleague, friend, relative, or other) that I would interview. The only criteria were that the people being nominated have knowledge of the primary participant's efforts in their pre-service program as well as their recent professional life as a special educator with HIDOE. The purpose of these interviews was to further clarify, corroborate, or present rival explanations to the data previously collected (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These interviews were also audio taped and transcribed. Participants were asked to read the transcript of their interview, add or delete information, and conduct member checks for accuracy (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

#### *Data Analysis*

Qualitative interviewing provides a framework for participants to express in their own words their experiences and understandings as they relate to the study being conducted (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Patton, 2002). "The purpose of qualitative interviewing is to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn *their* terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of *their* individual perceptions and experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 348). Patton explained that the categories

or phrases used by the participants should never be predetermined or supplied by the interviewer. “Qualitative inquiry—strategically, philosophically, and therefore, methodologically—aims to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data. It follows that questions should be asked in a truly open-ended fashion so people can respond in their own words” (Patton, 2002, p. 353). Wolcott (1994) discussed the importance of analyzing people’s responses by “identifying critical elements and wringing plausible interpretations from them” (p. 366). My analysis of the data from this study attempted to gain insight through these plausible interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

I began data analysis by reviewing written and recorded interview notes. I reviewed transcripts, both written and audio, took notes, wrote memos, and reflected deeply on the interviews conducted with the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Patton, 2002). In order to avoid forming premature conclusions, I was aware of the emergent nature of qualitative research and “the power of field-based analytical insights” (Patton, 2002, p. 436). It was these insights that afforded me the opportunity to explore more thoroughly concepts that arose from the interviews. I reflected on and questioned the data as I collected it thereby allowing me to not only seek confirming evidence but also to explore alternative explanations or rival conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

I used open coding (Creswell, 2003) to “uncover, name, and develop concepts” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102) contained in the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explained:

During open coding, data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. Events, happenings, objects, and actions/interactions that are found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped under more abstract concepts termed “categories.”

Closely examining data for both differences and similarities allows for fine discrimination and differentiation among categories. In later analytic steps, such as axial and selective coding, data are reassembled through statements about the nature of relationships among the various categories and their subcategories. (pp. 102-103)

Data were examined for patterns, themes, and concepts that enabled responses to be coded in specific categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) explained the process of data reduction as “the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions” (p. 10). I examined the data for patterns that led me to plausible “whys” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). “Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69).

“Grouping concepts into categories is important because it enables the analyst to reduce the number of units with which he or she is working. In addition, categories have analytic power because they have the potential to explain and predict” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 113). Categories enabled me 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). “Data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that ‘final’ conclusions can be drawn and verified” (Miles & Huberman, 1998, p. 11).

Coding was performed by hand. I used a combination of color coding items on the actual transcripts, noting themes by line locations, and then “cutting and pasting” pieces of the transcripts into designated computer folders by categories and themes. I made a master list of each of the three categories under Professional Factors and the three categories under Personal Factors as they appeared in the research questions. In this master list I noted where each participant spoke on a particular subcategory under each category with page number(s) and line numbers. I examined these for patterns and themes within and across individual interviews to facilitate accurate reporting of the data. Results were organized into readable narrative descriptions based on the categories, subcategories, and themes that emerged from the data (Patton, 2002). All tapes, transcripts, and background sheets were coded and kept in a locked file in the primary investigator’s office for the duration of the research study and will be destroyed at its conclusion.

#### Ensuring Quality and Credibility

The ability to generalize findings from qualitative inquiry to a broader population is sometimes seen as a limitation of qualitative research methods (Merriam, 1997). However, I suggest viewing external validity in the same vein as reported by Walker (1980) and Wilson (1979). Generalizability in their analyses is seen as the extent to which a study’s findings apply to other situations, and it is left to the reader to determine

what they can apply to their own personal situation (Walker, 1980; Wilson, 1979). “This is a common practice in law and medicine, where the applicability of one case to another is determined by the practitioner” (Merriam, 1997, p. 177). Kennedy (1979) added to this view by stating that generalizing from qualitative studies should be left to those “who wish to apply the findings to their own situations” (p. 672). Eisner (1981, as quoted in Merriam, 1997) explained, “The general definitely resides in the particular. And what one learns from a particular situation is indeed transferable to situations subsequently encountered. This is, in fact, how people cope with the world every day” (p. 176). I believe this study can find practical application to a broader audience when considered in this perspective.

Miles and Huberman (1984) emphasized the importance of developing “a set of valid and verifiable methods for capturing . . . social relationships and their causes” (p. 20). Kirk and Miller (1986, as quoted in Patton, 2002), defined *validity* as “the degree to which the finding is interpreted in a correct way” (p. 94). Creswell (2003) explained that there are terms within the qualitative literature that equate with validity. Creswell listed these terms as *trustworthiness*, *authenticity*, and *credibility*. I attempted to ensure credibility by following a rigorous regimen when conducting my data collection and analysis. I have described the research process I implemented in detail. I have been transparent in describing my own background and potential bias as it pertained to this study (Patton, 2002).

I attempted to maintain the credibility of this study by gathering data from a variety of sources. These sources enabled me to test the data for plausibility and confirmability, or validity, as reported by Miles and Huberman (1994). Patton (2002)

explained that a combination of approaches including interviewing, observation, and document analysis are important criteria for fieldwork. This strategy provided “diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon . . . [and] adding to credibility by strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn” (Patton, 2002, p. 556). The purpose of using this strategy was to provide cross-data consistency checks (Patton, 2002).

In this study, interviewing was the primary component. All participants in the study were interviewed before any follow-up interviews were conducted. I conducted an immediate post interview review after each interview. The purpose of this procedure and review was to record details, reflect on the quality of questions, review topics, consider key issues, and make notes while the interview is still fresh in my mind (Patton, 2002). This is a “time of quality control to guarantee that the data obtained will be useful, reliable, and authentic. . . . This is the beginning of analysis, because, while the situation and data are fresh, insights can emerge that might otherwise have been lost ” (Patton, 2002, p. 384). Reflection and analysis of each interview helped inform future inquiry as salient issues emerged from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

All interviews (primary participants, nominated individuals, and pre-service interviews) were transcribed. Participants each had the opportunity to review the transcript(s) of their interview(s) and make corrections and additional comments to further clarify their responses (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). These reviews or “member checks” helped maximize the accuracy of the information collected and minimize bias (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004; Patton, 2002). A second round of interviews with primary participants was conducted after the first round was completed and analyzed

using the same procedures outlined above. This additional interview enabled me to focus more in-depth on areas of specific interest.

Observation, the second of the three strategies reported by Patton (2002), was problematic for this study. If I were to observe participants in their classrooms and schools, it would be impossible for me to maintain confidentiality. I would be required to register at the office of each participant's school for every observation session I conducted. Because the nature of the information generated in the interviews could be, in some cases, critical of administration, staff, colleagues, or parents, it was imperative that participants remained unidentified by name, school, or community.

Given the impracticality of observations, I conducted an additional series of five interviews with individuals nominated by the primary participants (one each). The interview with each nominated individual enabled me to further clarify the information gleaned from my two previous interviews with each primary participant. These interviews helped me look for rival explanations and alternative themes to the conclusions emerging from the initial interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Yin (1999) reported, "Analysis of rival explanations in case studies constitutes a form of rigor in qualitative analysis parallel to the rigor of experimental designs aimed at eliminating rival explanations" (as quoted by Patton, 2002, pp. 553-554). Triangulation of qualitative data sources includes "comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view, for example, . . . views expressed by people outside the program" (Patton, 2002, p. 559). I investigated these alternative voices by interviewing those nominated by the primary participants in this study. It should be noted that because the primary participants chose the nominated individuals they were likely to be individuals

sympathetic to the primary participants' views. Given that caveat, the nominated individuals contributed valuable corroborative information and insights.

The third strategy suggested by Patton (2002), document analysis, was also utilized in this study. As Patton (2002) reported, triangulation of qualitative data also means "checking interviews against program documents and other written evidence that can corroborate what interview respondents report" (p. 559). "The review of documents is an unobtrusive method, one rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 85). I gathered documents and reports that I believed might reflect on the issue of retention and attrition for special education teachers on Hawaii's neighbor islands. Documents I examined included: (a) *2005-2008 Department of Education Strategic Plan* (HDOE, 2005); (b) *Professional Evaluation Program for Teachers, PEP-T, Manual for Evaluators and Participants* (2005); (c) *The Magic Weavers-Securing the Future for Hawaii's Children* (NCTAF: Hawaii Policy Group, 2001); (d) the Felix Consent Decree (2004); (e) The Hawaii Content and Performance Standards (wall poster, n.d.); (f) General Learner Outcomes (GLO) Grades K-12, (HDOE, n.d.); and (g) various pamphlets and newsletters such as the "CSSS School" (the newsletter of the Comprehensive Student Support System), announcements for professional development activities, and individual school data reports on annual yearly progress (AYP). These written materials helped me better understand the professional world in which the primary participants in this study worked each day (Creswell, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I conducted content analysis of these materials to enhance understanding of the important issues in this study. "Content analysis entails the systematic examination of forms of communication to document

patterns objectively. . . . The raw material of content analysis may be any form of communication, usually written materials" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 85). Content analysis of relevant documents offered additional information concerning the retention of special education teachers on Hawaii's neighbor islands. I read each of the above documents. I highlighted useful information and used Post-It™ notes to flag particular themes that matched with issues of interest that emerged from the interviews. I then used this information by referring to it where appropriate along with participants' comments in the final chapter of this study. I also used the materials to generate interview questions that enabled me to probe further with participants on topics of interest contained in the written materials.

### Limitations

I was the primary researcher for this study. I was responsible for all data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations require that I fully disclose my relationship with the participants in this study. I knew the primary participants on a professional basis for 4 years. The participants were members of a University of Hawaii statewide dual-preparation cohort on the neighbor islands. I supervised their pre-service field experiences and student teaching. I also was an instructor for one of their courses. I was in a position of power with these individuals until their graduation from the program. I had on occasion communicated with them after their graduation either in an advisory role or on a personal basis. My interest in the issues of retention and attrition as they applied to novice special educators was a point of mutual interest between us. Our past history together afforded us a unique opportunity to investigate factors that may impact these teachers' decisions to remain in or leave the field of special education. The relationships I

developed with these teachers based on mutual respect and trust enabled us to candidly examine and clarify the support factors, or lack thereof, these teachers experienced every day under very stressful conditions. My intent was to learn from their experiences and suggest recommendations that could positively impact the retention of novice special educators in Hawaii and the nation.

The findings should not be generalized beyond the scope of this study. The participants in this study all worked for HIDOE on neighbor islands in the Hawaiian chain and did not represent special education teachers on Oahu, Hawaii's metropolitan center, or on the 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. In their place I conducted interviews with individuals the primary participants nominated. It should be noted that these nominated individuals were colleagues, relatives, and friends of the primary participants and not likely to be critical of them. The only "requirement" was that they knew them well throughout the time that the primary participants were going through their first 3 years of teaching. My previous relationship with the primary participants could have inhibited responses concerning the pre-service program. However, as evidence to the contrary, one participant was critical of the lack of training she received for "working with staff members," "dealing with parents," and "behavior management strategies" when in fact she had been a student in a course I taught that focused on one of those topics in detail.

### Trustworthiness of the Researcher

“For better or worse, the trustworthiness of the data is tied directly to the trustworthiness of the person who collects and analyzes the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 570). My experience as a special education teacher in public and private schools at all levels (elementary, secondary, college) over the past 23 years has given me insight into the issues central to this study. I have taught on the U.S. mainland and in Hawaii. I have had the unique opportunity for the past 7 years to work on all of the Hawaiian Islands in the capacity of a field supervisor and teacher for students attending the University of Hawaii’s College of Education and seeking certification in special education. This experience has given me the opportunity to work with many special education teachers throughout the state. I have also had the opportunity to see graduates from our special education program become employed with HIDOE. I have an understanding of the issues confronting the various groups in this study including students, special education teachers, HIDOE, and the University of Hawaii. I believe it is important, however, to acknowledge that my experience both as a public school special educator and a supervisor and instructor with the primary participants in this study could influence my understanding and interpretation of the data.

I care deeply about the quality of education students with disabilities receive. I also care deeply about the quality of the work environment our special education teachers experience each day, which directly impacts the students they serve. My intent is not to pursue a personal and predetermined agenda. My goal is to better understand the complex issues that influence the decisions of our novice special educators whether to stay or leave the profession. I believe by listening to the voices of novice special education

teachers on Hawaii's neighbor islands we can begin to understand the areas that need to be addressed in order to help stabilize and retain our special education teaching force. This is a high priority for our state and the lives of those students with special needs who depend on the highly qualified special educators who teach them each day.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the voices of participants in this study and represents the results and findings of this project. Excerpts from interviews conducted with the 10 participants revealed important insights into the professional and personal lives of the novice special education teachers who opened their hearts and minds to this investigator over the course of a 10-month period in 2007. Pseudonyms are used for all participants. This study documented the novice special education teachers' experiences, perceptions, challenges, assumptions, and beliefs as they moved through and beyond their first 3 years as special education teachers in the Hawaii Department of Education on the neighbor islands.

#### **Professional Factors: Community, Institutional, Pre-Service**

This section of Chapter 4 reports on the findings for the first research question, which asked: In what ways have professional factors such as community support, institutional support, and pre-service preparation influenced novice special education teachers' decisions to remain in the field of special education?

#### *Professional Factors: Community*

Krovetz's (1999) definition of a teacher's community included administrators, fellow educators, students, students' parents, and staff. Participants in this study discussed their experiences with the individuals mentioned in Krovetz's definition. All "community" members played important supportive roles in the professional lives of the participants that were both helpful at times and a source of dissatisfaction and frustration

at other times. Table 3 compiles the results of specific rating-scale questions that were asked of primary participants periodically throughout the interview process. This table

Table 3.

*Compiled Rating Scale Questions and Responses*

Rose	Kanani	Jen	Makala	Carla	Average
On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate administrative support provided to you as a novice special education teacher? (1. poor; 2. below average; 3. average; 4. good; 5. excellent)					
4	4	1	2	2	2.6
On a scale of 1-5 where would you place the importance of collegial support for novice special education teachers? (1. not important; 2. somewhat important; 3. important; 4. very important; 5. of major importance)					
5	5	5	5	4	4.8
On a scale of 1-5 how important would you rate staff/teacher relations for a novice special education teacher? (1. not important; 2. somewhat important; 3. important; 4. very important; 5. of major importance)					
4	5	4	5	3	4.2
On a scale of 1-5 where would you place the importance of success with students for novice special education teachers? (1. not important; 2. somewhat important; 3. important; 4. very important; 5. of major importance)					
3	3	5	5	4	4.0
On a scale of 1-5 how important would you rate parent teacher relations for a novice special education teacher? (1. not important; 2. somewhat important; 3. important; 4. very important; 5. of major importance)					
5	4	5	5	4	4.6
On a scale of 1-5 how important would you rate family support for a novice special education teacher? (1. not important; 2. somewhat important; 3. important; 4. very important; 5. of major importance)					
5	3	4	5	4	4.2
On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate your pre-service program at the University of Hawaii? (1. poor; 2. below average; 3. average; 4. good; 5. excellent)					
4	4	3	5	4	4.0

illustrates their views on several of the topics discussed in this chapter including the importance of administrative support, collegial support, staff/teacher relations, success with students, parent/teacher relations, family support, and quality of their pre-service program.

The areas in which support was rated the highest were collegial support (4.8) and support from students' parents (4.6). Both were viewed as important factors that impacted novice teachers in a positive way. Support from staff (4.2) and personal families (4.2) received similar ratings, as did success with students (4.0) and their pre-service program (4.0). Administrative support (2.6) was rated the lowest of all by comparison.

#### *Administration/Support*

Three of the primary participants in this study remained at the first school in which they were hired. Two of the participants changed schools after their first year of employment with HIDOE. Therefore, the latter two participants had the perspective to compare and contrast different administration styles and support whereas the other three participants knew primarily the school in which they had worked since their initial employment.

Kanani, who had taught in one school since her initial hiring and had been employed there previously in support positions, 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 am very comfortable going into my administrator's office and talking to her . . . we get along well, I'm comfortable with that . . . so if there's something that comes up or I want some advice, or I need to sound

something out with her, I'll find the time to go in and do that, and . . . you know, 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.

Kanani's positive relationship with her administrator was confirmed by Justine, the individual Kanani nominated to be interviewed for this study (refer to Table 1). Justine, a former part-time teacher, stated: “[Kanani] had support from the principal. . . . [The principal] encouraged her to come to the school as a SPED teacher, because they needed SPED teachers!” She explained Kanani could “talk to her principal” and that the principal was open to her comments.

Jen had experience in two schools over the course of her first 3 full years of teaching special education. Her experiences at her first school were similar with Kanani's. Jen explained:

Every school has strengths and weaknesses. My administrator in my first school had strengths and weaknesses, absolutely. She had a great strength of being so personable, and so understanding, and such a good listener, and someone to support you, and someone to encourage you, . . . someone you knew you could go to, or e-mail and ask questions . . . You [could] walk into her office anytime, even with her busy schedule, you know, make the appointment, have a seat on her couch, talk story, it was so important as a new teacher.

Jen lost her position due to projections of need based on “student counts” for the following year and the fact that, being a novice teacher, she did not have tenure. Unfortunately, Jen's experiences with the administration at her second school were not as accommodating or supportive. Jen stated:

At this new school that I've been at for the past 2 years, I really feel that administration is displaced from our department. . . . At one point, last year, they taught us how to write a prior written notice appropriately, and that was the first time and only connection I ever had with my administrator. . . . I never heard or got any feedback.

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 was really struggling with my scheduling, because how was I to fit all this in and still have this wide range of levels? It was just a really intense first semester this year, where I thought that it was worse than my first year of teaching. I thought, boy, did I ever go to school? Do I know what I'm doing. I'm just surprised that no one even came and said can I help you? . . . I know in any other job, in huge corporations and important jobs like [that], you know, they're training you. Someone's there to train you, someone's there to watch you, you're reporting things, 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 at the school over the last 2 years. Lori explained that Jen was a very dedicated teacher who wanted to do the best for her students. However, when she found herself struggling with

curriculum and other issues, Jen was not able to get answers or support from her administration.

Makala explained she had a friendly relationship with her administrator but that it was not a supportive one in a professional sense. She discussed the following issues:

I think that a lot of the problem was that I was taking on so much roles that I think the administrator became so comfortable with me doing everything, and felt safe, and didn't even bother to like always step inside of my classroom to check on me, you know to see how I was doing . . . I think there should be something within the principal's contract, that for a teacher who's been there 5 years [or less] . . . you know, every quarter, you come and you observe them and you see what they're doing, you know . . . don't let them be by themselves alone out there, you know, if you think they're doing fine. [crying softly] . . . And that's what I've learned . . . as a new teacher, that when you go out there you stand alone. . . . Somewhere, like I said, special ed. teachers, I think we're really . . . being abused, left and right, you know, and when we're crying out and we're telling administration pay attention to this, look at what's happening . . . I don't know . . . I think because they feel like they're the boss of us . . . they're just telling us deal with it, you know.

Paula, the individual nominated by Makala (refer to Table 1), confirmed Makala's remarks concerning lack of support by her administrator. Paula, a general education teacher at Makala's school, stated: "I believe [Makala] needed more support from the principal." She expressed, from her point of view, "[Makala] has really good work ethics. Right now, in administration, and in SPED, excluding [Makala], work ethics are not

really great!" She explained that when Makala needed information about special education records and other questions, "nobody walked her through it," she was on her own. Paula stated that Makala said she would like "more communication, support, [and] things done in a timely manner" by her administrator.

Rose knew several administrators in the system because she worked at schools in the past as an educational assistant and a part-time teacher. Still, her relationship with administration at her school was guarded. Rose explained:

[I would] like having an open door where we can come in anytime to talk . . . without being pestering . . . without being a nuisance, without being there all the time. You know . . . just being a little more relaxed. . . . You know, don't have the kind of attitude, I mean, if you're going to be mad, then try not to show it on your face. You know, try and kind of like, I mean, it's hard to keep it in, but to me, that's not being very professional around your staff when you're walking down the sidewalk and you look like you're all pissed off, or coming into a meeting and you're all mad.

Anne, a teacher with HIDOE and a relative of Rose, was nominated by Rose to participate in this study (refer to Table 1). Anne stated, "You know the support from administration that first year, I'm not sure how strong it was." She explained she thought one of Rose's biggest challenges was that she did not receive "the support that she wanted to see from administration." Anne continued:

I think the first year, was her hardest year, and she did mention to me a lot of times about school level people not giving support. . . . She did bring a lot of concerns to me about support, not getting support, especially with too many

students. . . . There was not as much support as I thought that they should have given first year teachers, especially in special education.

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: "The principal in our school taught for many years and [is] very helpful as well. [The principal] has very strong ideas about how [the principal] wants things done, and in a way that's good." However, even with this good relationship, Carla found her first year extremely challenging as she explained:

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. I don't feel like the first year I had much support at all. . . . I didn't feel very supported.

*Expectations.* Novice teachers need to know what their administrators expect of them. 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). Administrators who can articulate clear expectations for performance and provide needed information to new teachers may be more successful at retaining these teachers.

Rose was not able to recall a time when specific expectations were presented to her concerning her job as a new special education teacher. Jen also had difficulty

remembering anything specific regarding expectations of her as a special education teacher: “The list of expectations for my specific SPED department, I don’t recall, besides in our handbook . . . that’s horrible, but I really don’t recall anything.” She did remember her administrator addressing the “whole group” (faculty and staff) and outlining the school goals, stating the school motto, and emphasizing that they were expected to reach the standards. Nothing was said or directed to her personally.

When asked a similar question, Kanani and Makala both reported that the only expectations were discussed in the interview. Kanani said:

There was no formal introduction or thing up front . . . other than my initial interview with the administrator when I was hired, and that was a good interview. 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.

Makala remembered a resource teacher who covered basic expectations with her but not her administrator. Paula concurred with Makala saying, “Nobody really walked her through it. Nobody sat her down and said this is . . . what’s expected. She’s pretty much . . . had to do things on her own.”

Carla related that expectations were never expressed to her verbally or in written form. For her, expectations were more those you had for yourself. Carla stated:

I know that they always want data and the expectations become clear as you’re doing something, and usually you shouldn’t do it that way. It’s more of a correction than an expectation. It’s like . . . there’s nothing stated, not to me. You

have to do this . . . but if you don't do it, then you know . . . you should've done that.

*Behavior.* Classroom management and behavior issues have been foremost in the minds of novice special education teachers for years (Gehrke & Murri, 2006). The way a school administration supports novice special education teachers with student behavioral issues may be one of the keys to promoting retention among novice special educators.

Rose was quick to praise her administration for their efforts in supporting her when she had serious behavioral issues with students. Rose reported:

Oh, they're [administration] pretty on top of it. They pretty much know more or less who the behavior kids are and they'll support you really well with that. . . .

Like for instance, my first year of teaching . . . my class was made up of nine boys and one girl, and there were about four or five kids in there who [had behavior problems]. . . . [W]henever I asked for help, or needed something to be done, or . . . when it got to really extreme cases they were always there to help with that situation. . . . It's good that we have our behavioral counselor on board at our school, so he was there also to help with the situation, you know, working with the administrator and with me to come up with . . . a plan. So, there was always a plan in place.

Kanani, similar to Rose, was very appreciative of the support she received from her administration when dealing with extreme behavior issues. Kanani elaborated:

You know, I like our administrator because . . . [the administrator's] quite strict in dealing with our students. . . . I think sometimes [the administrator's] hands are tied a little bit though . . . especially with our special ed. students, we have kids

who don't quite understand the consequences of their behavior, or maybe they do understand the consequences, but they do things that are completely inappropriate, and sometimes dangerous to other students, or harmful to other students. . . . It's like, they need something a little bit more intensive. But it's hard to find that for them.

Jen's experience was nearly the complete opposite of Rose and Kanani. 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. We have no support from our counselor at our grade level. . . . I never understood the procedures or knew the procedures. 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 was even more extreme in her response than Jen. Makala had given up totally on expecting support from her administration for behavioral issues with students. When asked how her principal supported her in dealing with student behavior issues she explained:

[The principal] doesn't. I do everything on my own. I do everything on my own. I even deal with parents when [they] come and harass me [laughs]. . . . And you know what? I'm gonna be honest with you. I wouldn't call [the principal] for anything, because there's no quick response, you know, yeah, I just take care of everything, all matters on my own.

Carla's experience was more in line with that of Rose and Kanani. Carla was very supportive of her administration's support in relation to student behavior issues. Carla stated:

I think it's fabulous. 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, SBBC. . . [I]t's wonderful, it's . . . successful, especially with the children that have behavioral issues. So there's lots of . . . services that are immediately put into place for behavioral problems.

Nan, Carla's closest friend for many years and a former preschool aide (refer to Table 1), expressed that Carla was satisfied with the support she received from administration regarding behavior issues: "I think she's totally supported because they know what she's dealing with." Nan explained that the administration gave Carla students who were not able to be successful in other classrooms.

*Meetings.* School meetings were found to be a topic of some frustration, as indicated in the following comment from 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.

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. . . . But for the most part . . . special ed. is a unique situation.

For Kanani, it was definitely more of a mixed bag. She found certain aspects of their meetings useful and far superior to meetings she previously attended when she was a part-time teacher in the schools. Kanani explained:

If you had been at a staff meeting . . . , say 5 years ago, you would have heard a big gripe session, everybody wah wah wah wah. Everything was centered on, well, the problems that the teachers were experiencing as opposed to how are our kids doing, what are they learning? [This] school has made a lot of strides in the last 5 years, where now the conversations are becoming more [about] the data. We're becoming a more data-driven school. We're in the beginning process of looking at what the kids are actually doing, and trying to figure out what is really the best thing for *all* our kids, and so it's starting to happen now at our school. It's gotten a lot better than it was. . . . [Teachers] do have input. . . . [The principal] lets people know, you have a say in this decision. . . . [The principal] getting better at that. . . . I think in the state in general its top down, but I think we're beginning to look at how to make it a little bit more, not necessarily top down, not fully bottom up, but maybe more a partnership.

On the other hand, Kanani expressed frustration with the lack of meetings that really addressed issues that were of substance and importance to the students they served. She stated:

I think another thing that would be very helpful for novice teachers, is if departments could get themselves together, and kind of decide what is it that we want our kids to know. I know in our own school, in our department meetings for special education, we never discuss our kids. 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, okay, well . . . these are the things that they want us to do this month, and this is our report of how many IEPs haven't been marked complete! We're talking about things that have nothing to do with teaching in our department meetings. . . . So, I get real frustrated with that, because, I mean, yeah, those things are important, but in reality I think teaching our kids is the most important thing. I wish we had . . . more . . . time to just sit and have those good conversations, and then make a department plan.

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. So I know, like for example, language arts had one of those training days, and even though I teach language arts, I wasn't notified about that particular training until about 2 days before the training actually took place. By then it was too late for me to get a sub and lesson plans. . . . So sometimes there's not a lot of good coordination between . . . general ed. [and the] special ed. department.

Jen also had questions trying to understand the value of meetings and the way the meetings were conducted at her school. She explained:

There is a new procedure at our staff meetings that [the administrator] never told us what it is. We're all trying to figure it out. [The administrator] sort of wants to do how we've been taught as a teacher, do some hands on, get up, go work in groups, walk around, get opinions from others, do these hands on activities, and it's an absolute waste of time, really. Before we know it, it starts at 2, its 2:45, and we've maybe gone over one topic, which wasn't even thorough, because we were playing some activity the whole time. That has been the recent staff meetings and, in reflection, all the teachers are like, what was that? And the thing that we remember is there was one teacher who was totally complaining about all the standards being put up on the wall as wallpaper. . . . We feel like, you know, we're doing all this stuff because we're going toward restructuring.

Lori, Jen's colleague, stated:

[Meetings], they're a waste of time cause it always pertains to budgeting or stuff that regular ed. teachers are wrapped up in where SPED is always different or we're left out or no one ever tells us what we're supposed to be doing [they're] just a waste of time.

As a nontenured teacher, Jen attended meetings presumably to inform her and other novice teachers of HIDOE policies and so forth. She came away from these meetings feeling confused and insulted. Jen explained it this way:

There are nontenured teacher meetings that we can go to. They are to tell you how the rehiring process takes place, but I attended the first meeting the first year, and

they pretty much just told you how small [you were] and how you were nothing, after you just went through school for 6 years. You know, I really have no desire to go back. There's another one which was . . . voluntary, but to me, there's nothing, no more information there than you could get from e-mailing or asking, you know . . . the secretary in the office! [laughs]

Makala expressed similar frustrations as Rose and Jen when required to attend meetings that have little value to her or are what she considers totally irrelevant. Makala stated:

If you came to the meeting, you would see the principal . . . telling us what we needed to do as far as . . . restructuring. Most of the talk now is under restructuring and making the annual yearly progress on the Hawaii State Assessments . . . and that seemed to be the full focus from last year to this year. When I go to the meetings, there isn't anything directed for me. I just sit there . . . it doesn't have anything to do with special education. . . . Then [the consultant] comes in. They've taken over our restructuring. . . . They'll have some kind of activity for us to do, mostly just writing, preparing us for the Hawaii State Assessment, you know, showing us and guiding us through different activities that we need to make sure the children are doing. . . . I asked them if I can be excused so I can go to talk to the district people about a lot of questions that I have, but because it's a mandatory teacher's meeting I have to spend my time there.

Paula supported Makala's concerns about the usefulness of some of the meetings she and Makala were required to attend:

My personal opinion is a lot of the meetings are . . . a waste of time. . . . I've told this to the principal a number of times. Let us work one time, but let us think about what we're gonna do, what's the objective, and let's work smart. A lot of times we have repetition, repeats of certain topics, or whatever it may be. A lot of other teachers feel the same way, that the meetings are not productive . . . it's more a formality to say that we've done it rather than it really being pertinent for us to do. It's something that the [HI]DOE said we have to do, so we have to do it. Carla experienced similar frustrations as Rose, Jen, and Makala. She described the meetings at her school as follows:

Our staff meetings are once a month. . . . We sit in the cafeteria and we are kind of briefed about the upcoming events and how things are going to work, and then 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.

*Observations.* Supports related specifically to special education, both system and emotional, are identified as important considerations for novice special education teachers (Billingsley et al., 2004; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998; Whitaker, 2003). The connection between the administration and novice special education teachers can manifest in many forms. None however may be more important than the direct observation of novice teachers doing the job they were hired to do by their administrators. 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.

Observations emerged as an important theme from the interviews conducted for this study.

Rose, when asked about her experiences with observations as a novice special education teacher, made the following comments:

It's usually unannounced. They [administrators] just pretty much come in and observe what you're doing at that particular time, unless of course you want them to see like a specific teaching activity going on, then you would have to notify them as to what time to come, but more or less . . . it's unannounced. I think [the administrator] goes in and does it maybe twice a year, maybe three times, depending. . . [The administrator stays] 15 minutes at the most, sometimes it's just kind of like a couple of minutes . . . Sometimes [there's verbal follow-up], but like for us, [the administrator] doesn't, . . . hasn't. 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. . . I don't like [the administrator] coming into my class to see what I'm doing, it just makes me uncomfortable . . . because any time [the administrator] comes in, it's like, oh, did I do something wrong? You know . . . if it's more often that [the administrator] comes in during the year, then yeah, I wouldn't be as uncomfortable. But it's like, [the administrator will] come in one time and that's it, and then won't show up again . . . I think [if the administrator came in more regularly] . . . then [the administrator] could see what it's like in a special ed. class, because I think as of right now, [the administrator] has no clue. . . What gets me really mad is when they tell you . . . they want you at this meeting because . . . they want us to be . . . getting our scores aligned. . . Well, I

haven't seen anybody come into my classroom to say, hey look, this is what we're doing, do you think it would be a benefit to your class that we do this with your class too? There hasn't been any, nothing, since I started teaching. Nobody has come in and said, oh, let me help you with this, or let me help you with that.

Kanani also spoke of how observations were conducted in her classroom and her desire that there be more observations throughout the year. Kanani explained:

There are two kinds of visits. There's just the walk-in, and a walk-in is just unannounced, come through, and the administrator will come in just very briefly, knock on the door, come in, just kind of maybe sit on the side for a minute or two, just observe what's happening and then walk out. And the other observation is when we have scheduled administration to come in because of PEP-T, and we want them to observe us, and in that case, I have to give the administrator a lesson plan in advance, and they look at that, and then they come in and sit in, and they watch, and then later on we sit down and talk a little bit about what happened. . . . I haven't really noticed anything for me [regarding follow-up to a walk-in visit], but I know they're really strict now on having the standards posted on the walls and those kinds of things. So, I think if administration walks in and they don't really see anything, or they don't really notice that the kids can really say what standard they're working on and stuff, I think they do maybe talk to you.

Kanani discussed the PEP-T process that all probationary teachers in HIDOE go through until they are tenured. She explained:

At the end of the year, I did have the PEP-T evaluation and that was very good. Because our administrator actually sits down with us for an hour, and because we

lead the PEP-T, 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, you know, self-directed it's really good. [The administrator] was very good about pointing out things . . . noticed, and then at the end of that process we set goals for things 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. So, it was a very positive meeting and because I wasn't tenured I had to do that every year. . . . If I could do that every year, I would be happy. I think that would be a very positive thing, to sit down with my administrator, and evaluate my year.

Kanani would like more observations but, as she explained, it may not be possible for the administration to do more than they were already doing. Kanani stated:

[Observations are] not often enough, in my experience. I think administration is so overwhelmed with all the things that they have to do, that it's difficult for them to come walk through. . . . I might see them twice a year. But I know they want to do more.

Jen had the following comments about her experience with administration observations. Her experience with the PEP-T was not a positive one like Kanani's. Jen reported:

Nobody's visited my classroom this year. Last year, [my administrator] came in once or twice because I have PEP-T. . . . I'm still a probationary teacher . . . I need to be observed and I need to have a specific theme that I'm working on in my classroom, that I'm concentrating on. So, they'll come and observe. So, [the administrator] came in last year, and what does it look like? [The administrator

will] sit to the side and just observe what my students are doing and what I'm doing and . . . doesn't really give any feedback. [The administrator] walks out, and I never hear anything after that.

Lori, Jen's special education co-worker, had experiences similar to Jen's. During Lori's first year at the school she said her principal observed her once for PEP-T. Lori said, "I dropped off my PEP-T report at the principal's office and never heard anything back." Lori stated she was not observed her second year at all. She turned in her report to the principal and again heard nothing back. Her third year she was observed once for 5 minutes by someone she did not know sent by the principal. Once again she heard nothing back. Lori confirmed that Jen had similar experiences at their school. Lori added, "The principal was as overwhelmed as the teachers."

Makala, similar to all three of the previous primary participants' experiences, found very little quality time if any spent in observations with administrators or follow-up conferences. Makala stated:

My administrator only comes for IEP meetings when I hold them in my classroom. . . . That's the only time. Everybody avoids my classroom, because when they come in my classroom, it's busy, and it's a different classroom. . . . I mean, I wish somebody would come in. I'm always inviting, that's why I have an open door policy. . . . But I'm being honest when I say, my administrator, you can ask my EAs [educational assistants] you know, they don't come.

Carla had a little different experience than the others. Her administrator observed more often and gave some verbal feedback. Like Kanani, she did not expect much feedback because she knew that her administrator was very busy. Carla commented:

The administrator that visits my classroom is greeted; [the] visitations are quick, because [the administrator's] always on the move. Sometimes [the administrator will] sit for a few minutes, but most of the time . . . stands, and then . . . walks through, walks on. And it's interesting . . . it gets back that [the administrator] actually saw something happen, and it comes back, and usually very favorable. [The administrator] does give positive feedback . . . to me, and I guess to everybody . . . just verbal [not written].

Carla, who was also a nontenured teacher, participated in the PEP-T program for probationary teachers. She explained:

Actually the only thing that . . . I think I get observed for [is] that thing called PEP-T, and I don't know what that stands for, but possibly [the principal] speaks to me about what [the principal] observes for that. I think that's the only time that [the principal] talks about it one on one. The other times I've heard [the principal] speak about . . . observations would be in an IEP meeting and [the principal is] speaking to a parent about what I do in the classroom, but it's never really directly to me. [The principal does it] to put the parents at ease, it's always positive. [The principal will] walk through [my room], maybe once a month.

*Recognition.* Brown et al. (2001) reported on 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 did not receive recognition from her administration and she was quite candid about it. Rose stated:

Not for me, but for other teachers. Because you know, [the principal] does give acknowledgments, you know, like if the teachers are doing a good job, [the principal will] say it at staff meetings, or . . . put it in our e-mails, you know, throughout the school so that everybody will see it. So, [the principal] does [but] not for me, because I haven't done anything wonderful yet [laughs].

In terms of follow-up to a room visit, Rose stated:

No, there isn't . . . not for me anyway. I don't know if it's for other teachers . . . I don't know. No. Not for me. I think maybe because it's special ed. I don't know, but I don't know why that should be different. We're all the same people, you know, I mean. It's like, we're there to do a job for the kids.

Anne did not know of any time when the administration at Rose's school had recognized Rose's work in any way. She commented, "No, not to my knowledge." Anne heard positive comments about Rose's teaching from others at the school but nothing from administration.

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

In our particular school, because you know, we have the school academic plans now, and in our academic plan, one of the things that we ask teachers to do was to do writing across the curriculum. So, every quarter we turn in a lesson plan to

administration that focuses on how we incorporate writing, in particular constructor responses, in our classrooms. 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. And then I actually used that, because we're up for accreditation this year, and I'm one of the focus group leaders, and so there were some teachers who were still unclear about what they were supposed to do for these writing across the curriculum lesson plans, so, I shared what I had done, 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.

When Kanani was asked how often she would get positive feedback from her administration she replied:

You know what, because I go in and sit in with my administrator quite a lot and talk . . . I get quite a bit of feedback . . . that's positive. But then you know, one of the things [I was asked] to do was to become more involved in the school, because remember the first year I said that I stayed in my room during lunch, and I didn't talk to anybody because I was so overwhelmed with the paperwork, and so [my administrator] says, you need to interact with your colleagues, and . . . I understand that you're busy, but it's important to build partnerships with your colleagues. So, I took that to heart, and came out my second year, and actually

started eating lunch with people. And then at the end of the second year, [my administrator] says okay, the next thing that you need to do is get more involved in the school . . . and then I was nominated to be on the school community council. And so I accepted the nomination and so I sit on that council as a teacher rep. and I'm involved now on a school-wide basis with things, you know. I sit in a lot of meetings with [my administrator], and [my administrator] tries to be very positive, and you know [is] always thankful to the people that are working [together], and so, you know, I can say I feel very comfortable working with [my administrator].

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

Jen's experience with her first school administrator was more in line with Kanani's experience, but her experience in the second school in which she taught stood in contrast to both. Jen shared:

My prior principal, I did have that contact with her. . . . I go back to that first year, she did come in and observe, very briefly. Our school was so small that I feel like she knew me. She sat in all my IEP meetings, she had done all of those things and she was very well, you know, encouraging. [She] let me know things that I could work on, [she] was very clear. This new school for the past 2 years, I really have had no such conversation with my administrator, about anything besides at the

beginning of this year when [we met] in regards to aides, and [the administrator] told me that they really have no answers, and to just try my best. . . . I did just sit in at my first meeting ever with [my administrator]. . . . I had done an agenda. . . . [The administrator] told me, oh, this was very nice, this agenda, it was nice and clear to have everything right here. So, that's [the only] response that I ever remember from [my administrator].

Lori said if Jen received any recognition for her work at the school, to her knowledge, it was "not much."

Makala believed her administrator recognized her abilities in order to serve the administrator's personal agenda. From Makala's point of view, the principal 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 the table and my complaint was . . . about the service people coming in and their not fulfilling their service times. I said, you know, they can turn around and document everything . . . but they're not working with the child. So, . . . I'm tired of this run-in with them. I said you need to tell them. . . . 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 you know you have such a nice way of talking to people without hurting any feelings, and you know everybody likes you. Everybody says good things about you. And I was looking at [the principal], going, now you're being passive about this whole thing, no, I still want you to, I don't care. I don't care if they hate me, you know [laughs] but you still need to talk to them. That was [the principal's] last thing to me. "No, you're doing

such a good [job], you can talk to them. They all think you're doing such a great job. And you know what? I'm not worried about you." So, those were [the principal's] words to me, and I was mad. . . . I took on so many hats that I forgot to be a teacher, too, and just teach, and focus on teaching, you know. . . . So, yeah, you know, my principal will say good, but does [my principal] mean it? I don't know.

Paula confirmed the lack of recognition Makala received at her school. Paula stated:

You know she has not been recognized. If anything, she's forgotten, which is really sad. . . . I have never been a witness of a pat on the back. Anything in front of us, even at our faculty meetings, our principal has never said anything. I've heard [the principal] recognize other teachers, but I have never once heard [the principal] recognize Makala, which is really sad because she really does work really hard.

Carla believed she was recognized by her administrator but was clear about the fact that it was never spoken directly to her. When asked how she was recognized by her administrator Carla explained:

Well, it's taken place recently, in the last week, because 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," which is what I do. . . . I was kind of surprised because I never knew that [my administrator] would catch any style of my teaching, because [the administrator's] 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

or here. I only have heard it in the IEP [meetings] when [the administrator's] speaking to the parents.

Nan, Carla's friend, brought up an interesting perspective on the issue of recognition for Carla by her administrator. Perhaps because there is so little recognition of Carla's efforts Nan explained, “[Carla] actually thinks sometimes she's gonna get fired because she's forgotten to do a report. . . . I think she always wonders if maybe she's doing something wrong.”

*Teaching assignment.* Gehrke and Murri (2006) discussed the importance of job design or program design to novice special education teachers. Some participants in Gehrke and Murri's study were actively seeking teaching positions with other populations of students with special needs. These novice special education teachers felt they were not prepared to teach the students that had been assigned to them. The participants in this study experienced a variety of teaching assignments.

Rose had been assigned to a co-teaching position at her school. She explained how this came about:

Last year . . . because of room availability, our principal asked if I would be willing to co-teach with another teacher. And I said, okay, that would be fine with me. And so we were both . . . in one class, and we just did our class as one big class, with the two teachers in there. . . . Yeah . . . we really clicked. We got along really well, because we were on the same levels, because she came from [a similar] program . . . so we worked really well together.

Anne mentioned that Rose was very happy with her co-teaching situation during

her first year as a special education teacher. Anne said, "The teacher that she was teamed with in the same room was an experienced teacher . . . and that was her support." When asked if that co-teaching team continued the next year, Rose commented:

No. . . . I'm sad. No, it didn't. . . . Because she didn't get her license . . . sooner than this other teacher on our staff, she got bumped. So now she's at a different school. . . . But I am co-teaching with another teacher, and it's working out okay . . . it was a lot harder getting used to her style of teaching,

Rose explained that this new co-teaching partner did not seek out the position she was now assigned to: "No, she was just kind of put there because the other one had to leave, and . . . so it was kind of like a switching around kind of thing." Rose also related that, because of anticipated changes next year, this new teacher would move on to another position and Rose would not be co-teaching.

Kanani reflected on her first year teaching assignment:

I liked the subject matter I was teaching, and at the school that I'm at, each teacher usually teaches in one broad area, but then you have several teachers that kind of have to pick up, based on whatever classes the kids are supposed to have according to their IEPs. . . . So it was really difficult, but at the same time, too, it was interesting to me . . . you know, it was exciting to me. . . . I didn't get bored having to teach the same thing all day long over and over.

When asked about particular challenges her first year as a special education teacher, Kanani replied:

I know it was having so many preps. . . . It was doing the three different preps, and what took up the most time, which I didn't like, was I spent more time on

paperwork for my IEP meetings, than I did on my lesson plans. It seemed like that took up more of my time than actually prepping for my classes, and as a teacher I felt that the bulk of my time should have been teaching my students, and it really wasn't . . . the bulk of it was dealing with the IEP meetings.

Jen lost her first-year position, which had been a positive experience for her, because the "child count" indicated the number of students projected for the next year did not justify her position at the school. After considering a move to Oahu where she hoped to continue her education, Jen and her husband decided to remain on island. She applied for other jobs and eventually received an offer from another school on the island. At her second school, Jen did not find the same supportive atmosphere she had experienced at the first school in which she had been employed. Jen's perception of the support at her second school made teaching there challenging and unsatisfactory, although her teaching assignment was appropriate based on her preparation and experience. Sometime later the job at her first school was reinstated but, as she explained, "I'm already placed. I'm not tenured. I have no rights to move around, to go back." The situation from her point of view was particularly frustrating because she had been happy and successful at her first school but could not get back there even when they had the position available due to her inability to transfer within the HIDOE system. Her former school was never able to find a full-time hire and had to resort to a long-term substitute. Jen elaborated on the situation:

No, due to my tenure, I had no status, you know, I had no rights to go ahead and transfer. I'm stuck where I am, as far as what I understand. So my plan, to be completely truthful, was [to] quit the [HI]DOE, and then I'm sure if I reapplied

they'd take me, because they have no one. Nobody wants my job, or there is no one to replace us.

Makala believed her teaching assignment actually was hiding a much broader role than she had expected. She stated:

Mmm, it's been very challenging, many times frustrating. . . . I thought we were supposed to be teachers but we're not, we're functioning as teachers. Sometimes I feel like I'm maybe the administrator, I'm the student service coordinator, 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 and situation and whatever you want to call it, but it has never gotten easy, and like I said, a teacher wears many hats today. It's not your so-called teacher anymore. I think when they gave that title to us, there was something hiding behind it [laughs], I know there were a lot of things hiding.

Makala's first year as a special education teacher was spent in a different school than her second year. Like Jen, she found her first school to be more supportive. Makala explained:

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. So, I think the first year was good because, like I said, working in a resource room, you

needed two teachers, because you were servicing three different levels, but again, I guess [my co-teacher] was the best thing for me, you know, coming out of . . . school and helping to guide me. . . . The second year, when I had to go solo, there were a lot of things I had to figure out on my own. Everything from, again, when children are first qualified for special education, setting up meetings, talking with the parents, coordinating meetings, talking with teachers in the general ed., working with educational assistants . . . I think a special ed. teacher needs a secretary [laughs].

Like Jen, Makala was not able to retain her initial teaching position and moved to another school her second year. She did not experience the same kind of support she had enjoyed at her first school. Like Jen, when she tried to transfer back to her first school she found out she was “stuck” and not allowed to move. “They told me . . . it’s either I come back or be without a job.” Her frustration was apparent as she explained:

To be honest with you, I’m not gonna work for the [HI]DOE anymore. I’m probably gonna try private school. But that’s what I mean about new teachers . . . sometimes they set you up and you just gotta flow with it, you know, under their commands.

Carla found her initial teaching assignment to be very challenging from the beginning. Carla declared:

I find the experience overwhelming and tiring, and I find that my workload is enormous. I feel like I have an equivalent of 40 kids in the 10 that I have, and I think 10 is too big of a workload for one person. I don’t have aids. . . . I think that the success of the outcomes of the teaching that I do is good, but for the most part

I just feel like it is way too much time spent working, and then weekends I spend all my time trying to regain my energy for the next work week. I'm talking to you at a time that is the end of the school year. I've just gotten three new students and I'm just overwhelmed, and this is probably the most overwhelming time of the year, and was the same last year as well.

Nan discussed visiting Carla's room and seeing first hand the challenges Carla faced every day:

I saw some pretty uncontrollable kids that she could pretty much calm down. . . . I have to tell you I could never do that ever, ever. I think sometimes she wonders if she can you know, it's quite a challenge I mean for anybody!

*Time.* Time was an important consideration for participants in this study mainly because there was never enough of it. 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. Rose stated:

At first I brought home a lot of stuff to do, work and things like that at night—which I don't do now. . . . The first 2 years are kind of stressing; kind of stressful in away because everything is brand new and for me it did take me at least 2 years to kind of learn the whole system of how to work it and fit this and that in and all that kind of stuff so it is like working smarter.

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 time. . . . I don't think I'm as good a teacher as I could be, because I don't have as much time to put into lesson planning as I would want. Because as much as I love my job, I do have a personal life. [laughs] I get to school at a quarter to 7, and I leave at 4:30. Once I leave, I try not to take work home with me but sometimes I do.

Jen summed up her experience over the course of her first 3 years in the following comments:

Our job is never done. I take it home. Just for example, in a school day, I don't have time to do my grades, I don't have time to write an IEP, I don't have time to call parents on the side, you know, hold meetings within 7:45 to 2:45, you don't do all that. You don't even have prep time. Those are held up by all these nonproductive staff meetings, nothing that's gonna help us get through the next day or the next week or year, and so, no, that's not keeping me in teaching.

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, that's when we have a committee meeting, that's when I mean, we're holding IEPs.

Lori talked about the amount of work that Jen took home with her at night. She stated:

She really cares for the students and really wants to get them to improve but yet with the demands of No Child Left Behind and all the things that we are required to do now, she feels like we just can't . . . [there's] no time, there's just no time to do anything.

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 my child, 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. Well, I'm sorry, I'm teaching. [laughs] You guys need to deal with it. . . . I wish I could pass it off to a secretary or an EA [educational assistant] in my classroom and 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 and without any interruptions [laughs].

Carla shared the concerns of both Jen and Makala as she discussed the problem of lack of adequate time to do her job. Carla stated:

Well, I feel like . . . the only thing I dislike is always feeling I will never be able to complete the work I have to do. I feel like there's a huge lack of time. That's probably my biggest complaint. I don't like the fact with the deadlines; it is one deadline after another.

Nan echoed this sentiment when she said, “[Carla] said there’s always something, there’s always a form to be filled out!”

*Summary of administration influence and impact.* The participants in this study all indicated the importance of administrative support and leadership during their first 3 years as novice special education teachers on Hawaii’s neighbor islands. Although individual experiences with administrators varied, certain themes remained consistent across interviews.

Novice special education teachers wanted clear expectations from administrators as to their role and responsibilities within the school community. Participants wanted and appreciated administrators who were approachable and found time, however briefly, to connect with them and listen to their concerns. 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. The participants did not believe they were given direction and support in this area.

All participants wanted meetings that were more purposeful and focused in a way that would enhance their ability to be better teachers. Many participants suggested alternatives to meetings where they felt their presence as special educators was not required. 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.

Four of the five participants revealed that their administrators did not recognize their work directly, either verbally or in writing. Some discussed indirect recognition on

certain occasions. 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.

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 for novice teachers, many of whom wanted constructive insights into their initial teaching efforts. Four of five did not feel supported in a meaningful way with the quality of the observation process by their administrators. One of the participants felt she did receive quality observations with constructive feedback and her relationship with her administrator was rated highly.

All expressed some trepidation with their teaching assignments and the support they received from administration to address adequately their needs as novice teachers and the needs of their students. Support to deal with student behavior issues by administrators was reported as strong by three participants and inadequate by the other two.

Finally, lack of time was also reported by the participants to be 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.

*Colleagues/Staff*

Novice special education teachers reported the importance of relationships with their colleagues, both special education and general education, as influencing their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their careers (Kilgore & Griffin, 1998; M. D. Miller et al., 1999) (refer to Table 3). Participants in this study also commented on their professional relationships with colleagues in their workplace and the importance of these relationships. 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!” Jen echoed those sentiments, saying collegial relationships played a “huge role that was my support. That was a number 10!”

*Special education colleagues.* Rose related the importance of her relationships with fellow special education teachers as follows:

Oh, yeah. They played a big role. You know, just asking them questions about where to get certain things, asking them questions about doing an IEP meeting, going through ISPED, you know the data base for special ed., . . . asking them about how they do their meetings . . . because you know, you just get there, and okay, now you got to do an IEP meeting. We learned this in college, but here’s the actual thing. . . . They really helped a lot. . . . One of the SPED teachers I worked with was actually my mentor teacher [for her University of Hawaii pre-service program] you know. That’s where I did my special ed. student teaching, in her class.

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 was coming in new and it was kind of hard coming in new, because I had no resource materials. . . . I just love where I'm at and as far as the special education department, I've been really lucky in that I get along with everybody. I've gotten a lot of resources from teachers. One of the special education teachers is the one that I did my field work with, and my student teaching, and because I did my student teaching with her, I know what she has, and she's always very willing to give me anything that she has so it's been really supportive.

Jen had the somewhat different perspective because she worked in two different schools during her first 2 years of teaching special education. She stated:

My first year [was] a team effort, someone to just ask questions you know? Yeah, team, people working together. People [were] willing to share ideas. People [were] willing to take questions, and work with you [to] try to find answers. That was all at the first school though.

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.” Rose went on to explain the relationship in her school between special education teachers and general education teachers:

I think at our school . . . we’re pretty much a good mix, we’ll just go with [it]. I know our second- and third-grade special ed. teacher has a really good relationship with the regular ed. third-grade teacher, so she kind of hangs out with them, you know, and does that kind of stuff. So, we’re not like . . . in some schools there are all those cliques and stuff like that. At our school it’s not so much like that. I think everybody pretty much interacts with everybody.

Anne explained that Rose was a “team player” and “she’s always . . . in contact with other teachers as to any type of problems that she has and she’ll go along with what decisions are [made].”

Kanani, who like Rose had work experience at her school prior to being hired there as a special education teacher, gave a specific example of the cooperation she received from a general education teacher. Kanani explained:

[For] the science class, I had absolutely nothing, so I went to the regular ed. science department head, and she gave me some resource possibilities. . . . I also got a regular education textbook from the regular ed. science department head that I could read through. So, I kind of knew what the kids were supposed to know,

and then I would just kind of hand type up things for them to use. . . . So, I had gotten that lead-in from the regular ed. department.

Kanani elaborated on the role previous experience in the schools played in helping her to make a smooth transition to her full-time special education teaching position. She 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. We check on each other. . . . I get the same support from everybody, but I do know sometimes the general education teachers are a little bit put out in having to deal with the special ed. students. They feel like why is this kid in my classroom. Sometimes, every once in a while they know that if they're having problems with a particular student, and they know that's a child that I'm responsible for, they'll come to me [and say] "Well . . . why don't you get that child out of my class?"

[laughs] But for the most part it's been very positive.

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. They knew who she was."

Jen reported a slightly different experience with general education teachers from Rose and Kanani. Jen stated, "I feel displaced from the homeroom teachers . . . we just deal with a whole different setting." She continued:

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. As far as the only other person in special ed. that works with me, I don't think she really knows too much about special ed. She's really still brand new, you know, and I think she's getting out of special ed. This is gonna be her last year, you know. I think she's gone through the burnout and it's not for her. . . . Nobody really supports me as far as the general or special ed. It's just, you know if anything, the only kind of support I'm gonna get is through friends who are at the district office.

Paula explained that there were some general education teachers at Makala's school who were "more open and more sharing, and there's others that are not, who are a little insecure." She related how Makala tried to build a relationship with the general education teacher closest to her room but "she wasn't that supportive. She's pretty much I'm gonna do this because I have this planned and you don't fit into that."

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

*Working together.* Participants’ answers varied when 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. Carla called it “a formal command in an informal setting” and she thought it was a “brilliant idea.”

Rose, Kanani, and Jen mentioned teaming with general education teachers at faculty meetings. Rose did not find this grouping procedure particularly helpful to her, although 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.” Kanani mentioned that her school was looking at different collaboration models they wanted to implement next year that would “allow teachers to be able to sit down and talk to each other, in a more formal way.” Jen contributed that at her school various attempts were made to have teachers “team up” to focus on various issues facing the school. They were teamed according to

grade levels with both general education and special education teachers participating on a team. Jen's assessment to the teams' effectiveness was not favorable. 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]." One byproduct of these team meetings was the following comment made by Jen:

Those meetings reflect everything that I've said about, you know, tenured teachers and us, and not wanting to change, and they're gonna do what they've been doing this whole time. It was an eye opener to realize, you know, that I've been stressing and wondering why I'm supposed to be doing all these things, and those people just said, "Well, we're not doing it!" I really feel that none of [the teaming] is productive. We really walk out of there feeling like, you know, we just never ever do enough.

*Support staff.* Support staff is also very important to the novice special educator 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 (refer to Table 3). Rose commented on her district support person; Rose stated, "I knew I could always call on her, and she was always a great help." Anne confirmed that support: "I guess her other support would be a resource teacher that was assigned to her school. The SPED resource teacher would periodically come by to check on them."

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

I think I was really lucky . . . one of the EAs [educational assistants] . . . works to input IEP information for any of the special ed. teachers that desire to use her.

That first year, she helped with a lot of the academic progress reports so that they could keep track for us of how our kids were doing. . . . It made it easier instead of us having to personally track down all their teachers. . . . The reason why I learned to use ISPED so well is because I had the help of this person. I would never have learned to use ISPED if I didn't have this person to help me.

In addition to the above example, Kanani emphasized the importance of taking advantage of various specialists who could assist you 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] So, I would say find somebody outside who can come in, because there are specialists out there if you know where to find them. And the other thing I would probably say is make good friends with the office people and the custodian. [laughs] Make good friends with those people who are gonna be there to support you because that makes all the difference in the world. . . . You need to create those working relationships with people. And the other thing is probably don't make too many waves at first. Just kind of sit back, listen, watch, see how everything goes . . . kind of figure out what's going on before you actually say anything.

Jen had a particularly positive experience with support personnel at her first school. She elaborated:

My first year was great. I worked at a very much smaller school. The staff worked together closely. The teachers were still very different in style, but there was one particular teacher, which happened to be my GLC [grade-level chair] that year, [and we] just worked together very well. . . . So, I just felt like I had so much support. My SSC [student services coordinator], who deals with the IEPs, etc., really helped me through the process of just the IEP itself.

Jen continued to explain how effective and supportive her first school had been:

I think the biggest [factor] was having that support team; it was huge. . . . I mean, I had so much to learn within that first year when you walk in, it's all yours; you're on your own. You're no longer a student, you're a professional, and you're a teacher. You're on your own, but I could ask her anything. . . . So, that support in itself, like when something wasn't working, I could go to her and she's like, well, try this, you know, try that, do this. Again, the biggest part was the IEP process, having that support. Our SSC [student services coordinator] clerk was amazing. And I also had an EA [educational assistant] that . . . had been there so long, trained on IEPs, so she walked me through it, you know, held my hand when I marked it complete and [laughs] . . . it was really just the support, and just great personalities, very close knit.

Makala shared an example of a speech teacher who helped her out when Makala was told by her student services coordinator soon after she arrived at her new position at her second school that she had an IEP meeting that afternoon. The speech teacher told her she would help her get it together and assisted her to meet the deadline. Other than that example, Makala could not think of additional ways that support staff had helped her. She

stated, "To this day, I say that everything I know, I've learned about, is because I taught myself how to do it. . . . That day [IEP meeting] was an eye opener and that's when I realized that everything I'm gonna do is gonna be on my own."

Carla, like Jen, praised her student services coordinator, the student services coordinator's secretary, and her grade-level coordinator. When asked who she would tell a new teacher to seek out if they needed assistance at her school she replied:

I would say, talk to the secretary in the SSC [student services coordinator] office. She's extremely knowledgeable and helpful. . . . Also, talk to the student services coordinator herself. She's a huge support, and she'll help in anyway she can. The grade-level chair for special education is extremely helpful [too].

It is important to relate that although Carla reported these very positive relationships with various staff members, she also shared that these connections were not made during her first year at the school. Rather, they were made the second year she taught at the school

Not all the experiences of the participants in this study with support personnel were as helpful as those mentioned above. Kanani, while explaining the positive advantages of having an educational assistant designated to help with the ISPED process, also had this caution:

There are some weaknesses in the support system. . . . I know of instances in other schools where people don't have [support to do IEPs] and so they have to call in subs to take over their classes so they can input their data or they're putting in so many hours over and above what they need to. So, that's definitely a weakness.

Kanani gave a specific example of a situation she was currently dealing with at her school in which support personnel were not in her estimation doing their job:

The things that really irritate me in my particular school are when people who are supposed to do certain jobs don't do their job, and then we end up having to pick up the slack, that irritates me. . . . In the past, the SSC [student services coordinator] did the observations with specific learning-disabled kids. They [the students] need to have a classroom observation done for their reevaluations, okay? The problem is if they are in a regular ed. class, then we're supposed to observe them in the regular ed. class. But because we're teaching, we either have to get coverage for someone to watch our class so that we can go observe the student, okay, and sometimes that has been difficult. In the past, the SSC [student services coordinator] actually did the observations, but now we're supposed to do the observations. Well, that's fine, except, you know, I shouldn't have to be scrambling desperately trying to find somebody to cover my class. . . . So, I've ended up farming my kids out to other teachers. . . . So, there doesn't seem to be really any clear procedures in place for things that need to be done.

When the administrator told Kanani to ask the student services coordinator to sit in her classroom while Kanani conducted the observation, Kanani did just that but the student services coordinator said, "I can't do that!" Kanani explained, "Well, I know that the administration has talked to them about what they're supposed to do, but you know, sometimes they just don't do what they're supposed to do."

Jen, after a positive first year at another school, 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. Again, reflecting upon this school year I was very much challenged working with . . . EAs [educational assistants]. In other words, it was really unfortunate, and it was very discouraging personally for me, because I've always worked well with a lot of people. Again, I'm a team player. 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. So, the biggest challenge would be working with the paraprofessionals. . . . 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 [educational assistant], and that just, I mean, I could have walked out that day easily! That was so unprofessional, so inappropriate.

Jen replied when asked if this situation would affect whether she would remain in special education:

It affects my decision to continue at the school that I'm at. . . . I pray next year that I won't be put in the position to work with those same people again. I don't think it is gonna take me away from my job.

Makala had difficulties with specialists who she felt were not adequately doing their jobs. She 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. I don't care if they have this little trick now that service people put in under their goals attached to the special education teacher. They are the expert. They went to school for this. They need to work with this child for this amount of time. Each time we're finding now that 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 said, I should've gone and become a therapist you know, had I known I was gonna be doing this all day or maybe even a nurse!

### *Students*

Success with students is consistently mentioned by special education teachers as one of the primary reasons they remain in the field (Benjamin, 2005; K. J. Miller, Menlove, Perez-Turner, Sena, & Urquhart, 2004). The participants in this study also reflected that view (refer to Table 3).

Rose related that she had a difficult first year. She explained:

Overall, my first year, I didn't think I was very effective at all, to be honest. You know, I tried my best, and sometimes I would just be banging my head against the wall, but I think, more or less, I [had] an effect on them, I hope, you know in a positive way. But I think you know now I've learned from all [those] experiences, and I think I've made gains.

Anne explained that Rose was quite satisfied that she was able to help her students meet challenges and make gains, "whether it's very little or very big, . . . she makes a

difference in their lives." Anne encouraged Rose after a rough first year to stay in special education because it "is very rewarding, and I think she can see that now. But you know, anywhere you teach, teaching is very rewarding."

Kanani summed up her beliefs in the following statement, "If I feel like I'm not doing my job. If I feel like I'm not making an impact on the kids, then there would really be no point to my being there." Justine agreed with Kanani's statement but added an interesting comment. She did not think Kanani would leave teaching if she was not successful with her students. Justine said, "I don't think she would look for other work. I think she'd look for other answers!"

Jen was very happy to talk about her students and their work. Jen related:

This is the fun stuff. I strive for a wonderful relationship with my students. I really try to gain their respect and their trust and gain a relationship with them, because if I don't have that, I'm not gonna get much else out of them. . . . I'm very big just on teaching them respect, teaching them...to reach for the stars, and that they can do anything that they want to do if they work hard for it, that they try their best. . . . My relationship is very important . . . with my students and parents.

Jen addressed some of the frustrations she had recently dealt with after transferring to a different school her second year in teaching. She continued:

I'm really hard on myself, and again, I've had a really hard year. So, I think it's a big part [success with students]. Besides the not being supported and being at a school that I don't care for, I think the expectation that I have for myself in my own classroom when I shut my doors is really high. I feel, sometimes, yeah, that I

don't want to continue because I feel like I'm not doing the best job that I could be doing.

Jen found balancing the requirements of the system with her own teaching philosophy difficult at times. She further explained:

It's a reflection upon where we're going academically with No Child Left Behind. As a special education teacher, I wanted to be able to really, you know, touch these children's lives and to let them know that they can be successful in their own abilities, and to encourage them. I think that was one of my biggest goals, to let them know that they can be successful, and we're not letting them know that now. We're just testing and testing and testing and testing them, and no matter how much I succeed with them . . . from where they were in the beginning of the year, to the end of the year . . . they're still a U [unsatisfactory]. They're still well below average, and they always will be, you know, in some sense. For some of them, with their disabilities, they're not gonna reach grade level standards. So, they will never be and then they're forced to take all these tests. I've been telling them you're doing such a great job, you're [making] great improvements, you're coming so far, you know, you're such a hard worker, and they're gonna sit and take this test, and feel like the dumbest person ever, because they can't even read this whole story! . . . I tell them, just try your best. This test means nothing. It doesn't tell you who you are as a person, it doesn't tell you how far you've come and how hard you've worked. It's just some piece of paper, and I just want you to try your best. And if I know that you're trying your best, you know, then we have a big old pizza party and we celebrate their best efforts and we move on. But like

I said, I read a report . . . in [an] NEA article that this teacher had worked so hard with this student, like all year long, and then she took this test and she went back and told the teacher, “You lied to me. You told me that I was smart, and I came so far, and then . . . you lied to me. I took this test and I didn’t know anything.” So, that’s why I want to continue, because it’s not fair. It’s really frustrating to see the students having to deal with that. . . . I mean, just to get them through these tests, it’s taken away from so much real instructional time. . . . Some teachers don’t even teach the materials and still give the kids the test. And I’m like, okay, I’m going to try to at least give them some kind of hope and experience, before . . . taking this test.

When her students do not do well on “the test,” Jen feels pressure from the whole school as she explained:

Well, we’re told that we’re failing our school. Our department is failing our school. It’s because of the SPED students. So you better teach your kids. You’re not teaching them. You’re not doing your job, and you’re failing our school. . . . Well, it was said in a staff meeting that it was our . . . kids, the . . . underprivileged. . . . ones that get a low or free lunch. It’s that group, that subgroup, and those are 90% of our kids. . . . That’s what the general ed. teachers think, you know, gosh, we’re doing our job, it’s the SPED kids you know! . . . I told them straight out I could have a magic wand and there’s no way . . . that I’m going to make these kids pass this test. . . . Because, you know, there’s so much more involved. I mean, they know the skill if I break it down and do all this hands

on and do differentiated instruction. But you give them a paper and pencil test . . . there's no way, it's impossible.

Makala believed that success with students was of "major importance." She stated:

I always say think about where the child is at, you know, think about where a person is at in their life. And if you wanted to make it work or for them to be successful, you just need to gear it to them. And then you'll feel good as a person, an effective person, you know. . . . I like to think I'm successful. I make an impact with my kids.

Paula saw the need that Makala felt to succeed. She knew that Makala enjoyed "seeing that spark in a kid's eye, you know, enjoyed watching that parent go, 'Oh man, this is great, this is fantastic!'"

Carla also expressed the belief that success with her students was an important element contributing to her job satisfaction. Carla shared:

I liked seeing success, and I liked the fact that I actually teach a child that seemed to have no learning skills whatsoever how to read. I liked the success of teaching, having success. . . . The success was important, fulfilling. . . . I think that I've been very effective with my students. I've seen their growth, and I can see that two of my students will be exited by next year. To me that's just the ultimate goal.

Carla added that she believed success with students was "the carrot that keeps everybody going." Nan believed it was an important carrot for Carla as well when she stated, "[Carla] will often say . . . that she was so happy that certain things students actually can do, even if it's just to be able to sit still for 5 minutes!"

*Academic success.* Rose spoke of the academic gains some of her students had made. She stated:

Oh, my one student, he's made so much gains and he just started in August. And the goals that I wrote for him were you know pretty much basic. . . . All of his goals in his IEP, he's pretty much mastered it. So, coming from a background that he's come from . . . he's made so much gains since August. . . . And then the other boy, yup, he's really academically, he's [snaps fingers] right on it, but processing skills of how to do things are not very good right now, so we're . . . working on that. . . . that really makes me happy!

Kanani also expressed the excitement and fulfillment that came with seeing the academic success of one of her students. Kanani explained:

I had this little boy. . . . I had him last year for reading. . . . He couldn't read, I mean, really couldn't read. I'd say kindergarten level. I have him again this year for reading, and that's one of the reasons I called the specialist to come in and work with me because this boy . . . can't read! So, he's actually gotten to where he's reading now, he's decoding better, . . . he's getting his sight word vocabulary up. He can actually read passages now, you know, first-grade level, very low, but at least he's reading, and I'm just so happy with him. . . . I'll have him for reading next year, so I'm really looking forward to working with him again next year because it's starting to finally click with him. He's in a group with boys that are higher than him, so they're in a different reading program, but he likes to read with them! . . . It's starting to make sense to him, because he's starting to recognize words that he wouldn't have been exposed to otherwise. So I'm just

very pleased, and he notices himself. I go, can you tell you're reading better, he goes, yeah! I'm going, that's wonderful!

When asked if she believed she was being successful academically in general with her students, Kanani replied:

I think so, yeah, [but] not as much as I want to be. Since this is only my third year, I'm starting to get it. It's taken me this long to get it. So, I think you know, every year it's gonna get better and better and better!

Jen expressed a certain amount of frustration when discussing the academic success of her students. She explained:

I work very hard in teaching them their individual needs and meeting their goals and objectives on their IEP and meeting their grade-level standards. . . . This year, it's just a hard year. This year I have just been really trying to stay above water...I was just given general ed. books [and] general ed. programs, you know. [I was] told to teach them, then told to modify them, then . . . sat in some little short training that didn't help me at all. . . . I've been told that I don't give enough credit to myself, but I hope they learn something.

Lori also mentioned that Jen was having particular difficulties with teaching the general education curriculum to her students with special needs. Lori explained that Jen had asked administration for help and guidance but had received none. Lori commented that this frustrated Jen because she saw the problem affecting her ability to have academic success with her students.

Makala spoke of some of the academic successes she had experienced with her students. She stated, “It’s rewarding. You know that’s what makes the job every day like, yeah! [laughs]”

Carla found academic success with her students to be the one “good thing” she could report. She explained:

Probably the only good thing about this time of the year [end of school year] is that they’ve all pretty much learned how to read, and they can spell the spelling words. It’s just through lots of work, work, work; lots of drills [and] lots of games. So, [to] describe my academic successes, most of them have come out head and shoulders above where they were when they walked in the classroom the first day.

Nan related that Carla said that her “main goal is that she has those kids learn how to read!”

*Social success.* Social success for students with special needs was also a theme that emerged often in the interviews. Participants saw social success of their students as equally important to their academic success. Rose gave an example of one of her student’s social gains:

Oh, . . . one girl I have who academically is not doing [so well], oh yeah, she’s a social butterfly now compared to last year when she used to cry a lot. She has come so far socially; I mean she’ll tell you stories about her family. . . . Socially she’s doing really good. And actually all of them, socially, are doing good. But she’s the one that’s come a long ways.

The importance of appropriate social skills for students was very evident in the comments made by Kanani. She stated, if students do not know basic social skills, “then my role becomes not so much teaching them, and helping them to meet their goals as it becomes behavior management. And behavior management is fine, but then it makes me feel like a babysitter.” Kanani later continued her thoughts about social and behavioral issues. She commented:

I do have a couple of students this year that I really think need to be somewhere else. I don’t think they’re going to get the social skills down, and I think the impact they have on the other students is so negative. I realistically don’t think there’s anything we can do for them in the regular public school setting. . . . There’s nowhere for them to go. . . . We have one girl that just came back, who had been out for quite some time, because . . . [her] behavior was very inappropriate. And I hate to say it, but she just came back last week [and] all hells broke loose in school since she’s been back. It’s been terrible. I mean, we’ve got teachers with their cars with dents in them in the parking lot. And I’m not saying that it was this particular student, but it’s just been crazy since this particular student came back. . . . There was a big scene in the hallway, because [a] teacher came to talk to her while she was in my class and it’s like . . . she’s out there screaming obscenities at this other teacher, and I’m going how is this benefiting anybody? It’s not!

Kanani also spoke of the difficulties of trying to teach in a classroom where students do not have the social skills they need to interact appropriately or work independently. She stated:

I have one class with 14 students. . . . So, I'm supposed to be meeting the standards for three different subjects, with students who really cannot work independently . . . and yet I'm expected to teach these 14 kids three different subjects all at the same time. It's not going to happen. You know, I mean, you'd have to be a miracle worker to be able to do that. So, [with] this particular class I'm having a hard time. [The class] was maintaining pretty well, when I had 12 students, and the 13<sup>th</sup> one came in, and it was like the straw that broke the camel's back. When that 13<sup>th</sup> student came in, it so changed the dynamics of the class, that . . . instead of teaching, it's almost babysitting. It's become more behavior management. And then this other student came in, the 14<sup>th</sup> student, who is the one that was throwing the pencils at the teacher, and kicking him with the water, breaking all the rules left and right here. . . . I think what bothers me . . . because of their disabilities we accept certain behaviors from some students that we don't from other students. I'm kind of having a struggle with that, because I think, okay, we need to give them certain accommodations because of their disabilities, but where do we draw the line? You know, when do we say enough is enough?

Jen described how she structured her classroom activities to model the appropriate social skills she believes all students will need to be successful in the real world. She stated:

I think I'm really successful in that. . . . I'm really huge on respect. I think that . . . we've lost that with this generation of kids, and I just absolutely expect it in my classroom. I expect the respect. I expect them to understand it. I relate it to the real world. I try to, you know, have them grasp . . . that they are learning all these

skills for a reason, and for real life situations. How important it is to be kind and understanding and respectful. I developed a class model that I borrowed and built upon, and it's all about respecting one another in the classroom. We don't laugh at each other. We understand that we all learn in different ways, we're all individuals. No one ever learns in the same way. . . I want them to become individuals who are confident in themselves, who understand that in society there will be all these different people and we need to respect every single one of them. Makala helps students build social skills by creating a classroom environment that is consistent and predictable. She explained:

When my kids come in class, the first thing they do is they look to me as home base. And I think when I say home base, being an effective teacher is being there every day for them, yeah? Being consistent in my ways, as well as making sure my staff is the same way. As far as with the behavior and consistency, routine schedules, being consistent with that and not throwing them into different situations or new things you know. Doing it first and then walking side by side with them and doing it with them, that makes them feel safe. I think that's the success of the classroom.

Carla spoke of the value of students being part of a larger social group to develop appropriate social skills. She explained:

When I walked in, there were three kids, I had only three kids for math . . . and they couldn't get along. One was a scratcher and a pincher and a biter, and one boy was a crier, and the other little girl's language was so awful. They would just . . . move as a group, and they'd go to recess together and fight and bicker and

come back and tell me about all their fights and everything. Then pretty soon, more kids would come in and it just took that little tight group and it just diluted it to perfection. . . So, that was a social success, actually. But socially, they have grown, and I believe it was because they got away from that tight little group, and the kids coming in, the kids that came in have added to the group. So, I will say that all of the kids in there I think have developed socially because they were able to find friends within the classroom. . . So, we played, we did social stories, we did play acting, we did puppet shows and now we don't have to do that anymore.

It's all okay now.

#### *Parents*

All participants in this study indicated that they believed the relations they had with the parents of their students were very important (refer to Table 3). Rose stated she had good relationships with the parents with whom she worked. She gauged this success by the level of cooperation she received from parents on everyday matters such as her "nightly book pass" program, getting papers signed, or responding to a need for supplies at school. She also indicated she could call parents if necessary and they would respond to her.

Kanani also reported that her relationships with the parents of her students were generally good. She commented:

For the most part, I get along pretty well with parents. I try to contact parents. I shouldn't always contact them just when the children are naughty, but that's what it's become. I do send . . . deficiency reports every mid-quarter, but if the kid's doing really good I try to send out positive ones. As far as the IEPs and stuff, I try

to let parents know a month in advance, so they have plenty of time to get back to me. . . . Usually for a lot of my parents, I have their numbers right in my cell phone, so it's easy for me to just contact them when I need to. For my variance kids, the ones that I'm the care coordinator for, I really try to develop a good relationship with them because they know the kids better than I do. So, if I'm really stuck with a kid I'll call the parent and say, "You know what? This is going on, any suggestions what can I do?" I do have a couple of parents that are not very receptive, and in that case, it's like, well, okay. [laughs]

Kanani continued:

I've been really lucky, because I know in our [system] there are several high-profile cases where . . . they've gone to court and the parents aren't satisfied. So, I've been [knocks wood] very lucky. I haven't had any of those cases. I mean, we've got two teachers that are exhausted. You know, they spend hours and hours on just one student that's not even at our school. They have to go to Oahu and do observations, and then they have to, you know, it's like the lawyers are constantly [calling] it's crazy. Meetings go on for 2 or 3 hours at a time, and it's insane. . . . If I had one of those high profile cases that might be enough to make me say forget this [laughs] only because I see how it impacts some of the other teachers.

Kanani made the observation that if a teacher was "the kind of person that doesn't quite know how to get along with parents, it could be really difficult." She commented, "It could blow up in your face if you don't have good rapport with people!"

Jen explained that her relationships with parents were one area where she received positive recognition for her work as a special education teacher. She shared:

I surely feel that that's strength. I usually don't pat myself on the back, but I work very hard to have wonderful relationship with my parents. I had that opportunity [because] I have a smaller group. I can have one on one. We're required, obviously, to have an annual individual education plan meeting. And so we have better contact with our parents. I know it would be so challenging if I was a general education teacher with the amount of students [they have]. But I'm one to call my parents personally when my students had a challenged day. . . . I really strive hard to have a great relationship with them. I have an open door policy you know. I always encourage them to call me. I've got a communication log in my homework folder. I've got a homework log that they're signing nightly, you know, just too really have them involved as much as possible in their child's academics.

When asked how parents had specifically supported her Jen replied:

Encouraging me, you know. I think those moments that someone tells you what a great job [you do], and how happy they are that their child is in your class and how blessed they feel to have had their child be in your classroom. I have had a lot of great experiences. I mean, even this year, with [a former] student where the mother was asking the current teacher to find out what I did because what they were doing wasn't working. And you know, those moments help me continue on.

Jen made the observation that she received more positive recognition from parents than she did from her administrators. She commented:

Absolutely, absolutely and that's who matters. I mean, my husband always has to remind me that what it comes down to [is] you're working for those parents.

You're teaching their children, and if your parents are happy who cares about anything else?

Makala's experience with parents was more of a mixed bag. She had some very trying moments reflected in an example she shared. Makala stated, "I do everything on my own. I even deal with parents when [they] come and harass me [laughs]." She explained:

There was an incident that happened. This father didn't want to pick up his child, she was sick. . . . He came back to my class and started yelling at my EA [educational assistant] and said, "You guys are bad teachers. You don't know how to teach!" . . . I heard all this commotion going on. . . . This person is yelling at my EA [educational assistant]. So I said . . . "Sir, you can't do that. She was coughing, you know she's sick." [He says] "What do you know? What kind of special ed. teacher are you? You don't know anything about special ed. you're a junk teacher!" Oh my gosh, he started to go off on me. It turned into harassment. . . . I mean it got so bad I had to file a police report, because he threatened us, I mean, oh my gosh. Well, that evening, I started to question myself. Was I a bad teacher? . . . I didn't wanna go to work the next day. But then I told myself, am I gonna let this person come to the classroom, yell at me, tell me I'm a horrible teacher . . . you know this is not about my teaching. . . . I talked to the family and everything. Now it's you know, "Oh, we're so sorry."

Makala explained that this incident with a member of one of her student's extended family was not typical. She continued:

You know that's one thing I tell parents that when it comes to education that's one thing we always need to do is keep open communication. I'm not perfect. . . . If there's something, tell me. I can change. If there's something I believe in, and you disagree with, fine. But let me have that moment, because I'm gonna let you have a lot of moments as well. Just be respectful. And then too I said, if it doesn't make sense we can research it, you know. But as far as the relationship and everything, I talk to all my parents.

Makala explained that she has been challenged by her multiple roles of being a teacher for HIDOE and also wanting to be an advocate for her students and parents.

Makala stated:

[Parents] support me, but they're scared, up to a certain point because they don't know the unknown. . . . But one of the things I always tell them [is] you can know the system too. You can do the same thing. You can get more of the service that is rightfully due to your child. This is all you need to do. They're scared, and I think a lot of it has to be of their level of understanding, because even in the meetings, you know they tell me what they wanna say, so I help them write it down, and I tell them okay you say it. They won't say it. They're scared. . . . So, it's really hard . . . the parents don't wanna make waves.

Paula expressed her belief that Makala was excellent at working with the parents of her students:

[Makala] knows how to work with the parents because she is a part of the community. She knows how to talk to the local people. . . . Very few parents have ever clashed with [Makala]. . . . She works with them, she makes sure she calls

them, informs them [of their rights]. She will take the parents rights, break it down, and discuss with them exactly what it is. . . . She's very thorough. She touches on each point of the IEP, whereas in the past I've seen our administration and other people involved not do that, they don't.

Carla explained that her relationship with parents was not predictable. She commented:

Well, it varies. I've got one child that I have no relationship with the parents. The child never does homework and never puts his books in his reading log, yet he's my best student. I have another one I've got a great relationship with; I can call her any time. . . . I feel like there's respect that goes both ways to the parents, and I believe that I'm respected on the level of being a teacher, but I don't see them a lot. I don't hear from them a lot. . . . Our relationship is fine, but they don't communicate. They're not communicating with me. I'm communicating with them.

When asked how parents had supported or not supported her, Carla gave the following examples:

Well, the one parent that's very supportive, I write notes home and say can you work with her flash cards and ask her to work with the child with the addition packs and she will take care of that, she will do that. . . . She needs to know how many spelling words he missed every week, and so they're supporting me in that [but] I really don't think there's much parental support.

Carla attributes that lack of support to economics and culture. She does not think the school was that important to some parents: "Also, I think that maybe there's a disconnect

with school. They think that school is there to do for them, and that it's not really their job to do for school." Carla expressed the belief that parents listened when she called, and they tried to accommodate her wishes:

I guess the fact is, even though they're not calling me, I think that I see support. Actually, even the fact of inactivity on the parents' part makes me want to continue special ed. just because maybe I can help this child where the parent couldn't help.

Nan explained that Carla had mentioned to her that some parents can be "very demanding." Nan gave an example of a family Carla had spoken about that said, "It's their right and you have to do this, you have to do that." Nan mentioned Carla was not sad when they moved.

#### *Summary of Colleagues/Staff, Students, and Parents*

The participants all agreed that the support they received from their colleagues was integral to their success during their first 3 years as novice special education teachers on Hawaii's neighbor islands. Although individual experiences with special education and general education colleagues varied, certain themes emerged from the interviews.

Participants needed and appreciated the support they consistently found from their fellow special educators. Two of the participants had done their special education student teaching in the school in which they were employed, and they saw this connection as an advantage.

All reported that their relations with general education teachers were not as supportive as those with fellow special educators. Their range of satisfaction ran from very high as in the case with Kanani, who received substantial support from general

education teachers as well as having her room situated among a group of general education rooms, to that of Carla who reported minimal support and connection between her and her general education colleagues. Jen used the term “displaced” to describe her relationship to general education colleagues. Makala explained that other than occasional questions about special education legal issues and paperwork, she had little meaningful interaction with general education teachers at her school. Both Rose and Kanani reported that prior employment in the schools before being hired as special educators was an advantage because they already knew the school culture.

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.

All five participants gave examples of staff that had provided much-needed support at various times during their first years in teaching. Rose and Kanani mentioned district support personnel. Kanani and Jen each reported that an educational assistant had been instrumental in helping them write and input their IEPs into ISPED. Jen and Carla both spoke highly of their student services coordinator and grade-level chair colleagues. Makala mentioned a speech teacher who early on had helped her through an unexpected IEP meeting.

These affirmative examples of quality support were tempered with others that were shared by the participants. Kanani related an example of a student services coordinator not doing his/her job, which in turn affected her workload in an unproductive way. Jen discussed her frustration at having to supervise educational assistants who were uncooperative and unresponsive to her. Makala gave an example of specialists who she believed were making extra work for her because they were acting more as consultants rather than doing the actual work they were hired to do.

All participants reported that success with their students was a very meaningful experience for them. Rose reported she struggled her first year but still felt she had been effective with her students both academically and socially. Kanani stated that success with students was the reason she stays in special education. However, she did relate her frustrations when dealing with the lack of social skills some of her students demonstrated, which negatively affected her classroom and the school as a whole. She used the term “babysitter” to describe the inappropriate role she believed she had to play with these students. Jen described success with her students as “the fun stuff” but also expressed her feelings of inadequacy and not knowing enough to be as effective as she wanted to be both academically and socially. Jen and Kanani expressed frustration with what they saw as unrealistic expectations placed on them and their students due to testing requirements and overcrowding. Makala and Carla, although challenged, both believed that success with students was of paramount importance and one of the key rewards of being a special education teacher.

Finally, all participants expressed generally positive relationships with the parents of their students. Jen’s experience was particularly supportive. It provided her with the

recognition and support she didn't receive from anywhere else. Rose also reported mostly positive relations with parents. Kanani, Makala, and Carla all gave examples of supportive and nonsupportive behaviors of their parents. All participants agreed that relations with parents were very important to them and something that they tried hard to cultivate in a positive manner. Participants reported that parental support to deal with student academic progress and behavior issues was strong by some parents and inadequate by others.

#### *Professional Factors: Institutional*

Institutional factors such as paperwork, resources, funding, mentoring, salary, and professional development have long been concerns of special education teachers (Billingsley et al., 2004; Brownell et al., 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Gersten et al., 2001; Kilgore & Griffin, 1998; Westling & Whitten, 1996; Whitaker, 2000a, 2000b). The participants in this study also expressed these concerns.

#### *Paperwork*

Rose indicated that initially it was very difficult for her to "figure out the whole IEP system." She explained:

It was pretty much a learning experience the first year, not knowing exactly what I was getting myself into at that time and I think after that first year, I think I learned a whole lot, like doing the IEPs, where to go to get help, just how to do a lot of stuff.

In addition to writing the actual IEP document Rose had to learn how to input the IEP on the ISPED system, a computer program and electronic database that HIDOE was using at the time: "With ISPED you kind of were thrown in there and then you just learned it on

your own." Rose reported that HIDOE had developed a new system (i.e., ECSSS) that "will be a whole different thing, but I think it's gonna be a lot easier." Rose was hopeful that she would receive adequate training on the new system: "They say that if you can navigate through ISPED this will be so much easier." Anne explained that Rose "never expressed any hardship in doing the IEPs. She was okay with it. . . . She never complained about having to do IEPs . . . she never complained about the paperwork."

Kanani expressed similar concerns to Rose when discussing paperwork. She explained:

It was a little hard . . . because I was just so busy, and trying to learn how to do the paperwork, trying to figure out how to do ISPED, and just basically trying to figure out how I was going to teach the curriculum. So, it was really difficult.

Kanani continued to describe the challenges of her first year:

For my first year, it's hard to say, I know it was having so many preps. . . . [I] was doing three different preps, and what took up the most time, which I didn't like, was I spent more time on paperwork for my IEP meetings, than I did on my lesson plans. It seemed like that took up more of my time than actually prepping for my classes, and as a teacher I felt that the bulk of my time should have been teaching my students, and it really wasn't . . . the bulk of it was dealing with the IEP meetings.

Kanani also discussed some of the weaknesses she had observed in the system as a novice special education teacher. One of these weaknesses she described was the excessive paperwork. Kanani explained:

It's the paperwork stuff and it seems like we get more and more and more paperwork that we have to follow. We're getting more procedural guidelines that we have to check and follow, and you know, they're requiring [us] to document more and more things now. So, I don't know, the paperwork seems more and more and more instead of less and less and less, and that's kind of [laughs] that's a lot of paperwork!

Kanani summed up her views on paperwork requirements during her first year as a novice special education teacher when she stated, "I stayed in my room . . . and I didn't talk to anybody because I was so overwhelmed with the paperwork!" Justine supported Kanani's statement about paperwork when she said, "Well, [Kanani] is anal about paperwork. She's really good with stuff like that. It's tedious, she does say it's tedious [and] time consuming. . . . It takes up time that she'd much rather use doing something else."

Lori explained that Jen needed help with the technology she needed to use to write her IEPs. HIDOE was switching from one system (ISPED) to a new system (ECSSS). Lori stated, "The ECSSS training was absolutely terrible." Lori explained that "everyone" was asking for support: "That's a big one; the state itself needs support in that area."

Makala spoke of not having the time to do her paperwork during her school day. She explained:

It's just so hard because it takes away from teaching. You know, my whole day is just strictly doing everything for the child. By the time I get home that's when I

can sit down and do my paperwork that needs to be done, which is important, but then I also have a family at home.

Makala's beliefs were evident when she stated: "Like I said, the only part that you get burnt out on is the paperwork and all the other multi-tasks that come on. But if they allowed special ed. teachers just to teach you know, it's a wonderful job!" Paula reiterated Makala's thoughts about paperwork when she stated, "She's never grumbled as far as the amount of paperwork that she has had to do, for her it's no biggie. The one thing . . . she's not happy with is it seems like there's not enough time [to do it]."

Carla expressed frustration with the amount of paperwork that was required by her job. Nan, her best friend, verified this frustration in Carla when Nan stated:

She talks about all the forms she has to fill out all the time . . . I just know she says the paperwork is enormous . . . I know she goes to work a lot on weekends just to get some of that done . . . She'll say, you know, I've gotta go in and get caught up on my paperwork.

#### *Resources*

Rose reported that when she arrived in her classroom to begin her initial special education teaching assignment she was given no materials. She commented, "I didn't get anything. Like I said before, I had to pretty much come up with my own kind of curriculum in my class. Yeah, they didn't really provide me with anything." Rose continued, "It would have been nice to have walked in knowing what kind of curriculum to teach . . . the basic kind of things. . . . I wish they had given us different resources to go with the IEP, like to know exactly what to do."

When asked if she believed she had an adequately equipped classroom, Rose responded with the following example:

No, because where my other friend is right now, the co-teacher that I taught with, [she's at] a school that just was built [a few] years ago, so when she walked into her classroom she had everything. . . . You open up her closet, and there's like rows and rows of manipulative things in there, all kinds of stuff in there, just fully stocked. . . . They just opened up about 3 or 4 years ago, so the teachers at that time, they . . . could just spend whatever they wanted on anything in there and [they] pretty much left everything for her coming in. Like for me, I had nothing.

Rose explained that she “inherited” her room from a previous teacher, and that teacher took whatever she had in the classroom that was hers with her. She left some materials but it was very sparse. Rose explained that the previous teacher had spent a lot of her own personal money on materials and took them with her when she left. As far as Rose knew, the previous teacher took the materials with her because she hoped to continue at a similar grade level in another school.

This practice of buying materials for a room void of resources was something Rose had continued herself faced with the alternative of not having anything for her students. Rose stated, “My first year I did spend a lot of my own personal money. I would probably say like three to four hundred dollars of my own.” She said she felt she had to get the classroom organized with basic supplies. Then she explained, “When the kids started coming in, I sent home a list of school supplies . . . so that I could beef up *my* supplies in my class. That’s the way I got most of [the supplies] for that year.” She commented that she knew she would not be reimbursed for the money that she spent.

Rose rectified the supplies situation in her room by her third year and had only spent about \$50 that year; Rose believed that her students were not able to benefit academically as much as other students in well-stocked classrooms during that first year: "That's before I got smart and started using the special ed. funds." Rose explained that roughly \$1,600 is made available to each special education teacher by HIDOE each year to buy supplies and materials for their room and students. She explained that the money can disappear quickly if items such as a reading program, for instance, needed to be purchased because of the extreme cost of books and other related materials. Anne verified that Rose spent her own money on her classroom. "Yes, I'm sure she has, yes she spends a lot. I'm not sure how much, but she does spend a lot buying things for her students."

Kanani had a similar experience to Rose. Kanani stated:

You know, when I first started, that was probably the hardest thing, because . . . I was the new one, I was the pickup person, which was picking up all the odd classes that were leftover. There was virtually nothing in my classroom when I came in, so I was having to scramble, not only to look at what I wanted to teach my kids, but what I was going to use to teach my kids.

Similar to Rose, Kanani explained, "We were allotted like \$1,500 to spend any way we wanted to." She cautioned however:

But that includes textbooks and equipment. . . . So, we all got about \$1,500. Because I was a brand new teacher, I had absolutely nothing, but I had that chunk of money. So I used it to buy textbooks . . . which of course took up all my money because you know, \$70 apiece, that doesn't go very far.

Kanani explained if she did not already know teachers at the school because of her prior affiliation, she believed it would have been very difficult to be successful with the teaching load that was assigned to her. Kanani explained that another teacher coming in might not have the personal resources that she had available. Justine, when asked if Kanani ever spent any of her own money on her classroom, replied: "Are you kidding? All the time!"

Jen also related similar challenges she encountered as a novice special education teacher. Jen stated:

It's vague, but overall, if I was asked, I'd really say you're on your own. I mean, you're just in this classroom, it's your own office, and you're put in there . . . where you don't even have materials sometimes. You walk in and you bring your own materials. At my new school you're not given anything unless you ask questions. I ask questions. I, thank God, went to another teacher and asked, "What are you using?" . . . I asked what have your kids been doing? What are their levels, you know. They said, "Oh, I have this, you can use this program, this is what I have, here, borrow this." . . . We don't get our money until October. So, it's not like you can walk in and order a whole bunch of stuff. [laughs] I mean, you're on your own with what you have until that happens. . . . You're given a book, you know, vaguely told this and that, but you're pretty much on your own to learn and ask questions.

When asked if she spent any of her own money for materials for her classroom and students, Jen replied, "Absolutely!" She stated:

My first year, I spent a lot. . . . Everything for the classroom. I spent a lot just because it was easier. And again, we weren't given money, like I needed to get my classroom up and started! I think the GLC [grade-level chair] was nice, and I remember her saying, I can give you this money and we went ahead and did an order for books. But in the sense of decorating my classroom, having everything for those kids to walk in, I got everything on my own. Last year I spent a lot. . . . I mean easily \$500 plus.

Makala had similar experiences to those expressed by the other primary participants. She said:

The only resource that I get is every special ed. teacher is given \$1,600 a year, and we can go ahead and spend it any way we want to. The majority of my money is spent on [supplies] because some of my families are so poor that it's hard for them to provide it, and rather than always, you know, chasing after them on the phone, getting into fights with them, it's just easier for me to spend my funding on supplies. . . . I try to refer some families [to] Queen Liliuokalani Children's Center. I had called them because one family was really struggling. I had asked them if they had any extra school supplies because, you know, the dad just told me, he cannot afford to buy school supplies. So, they said, sure, come down, and I got to pick up for the whole family, not just the child that was in my class, but for like eight children.

When asked if she had spent her own personal funds for her classroom, Makala replied: "Oh yeah! [laughs] I think this year; I think I spent like about \$1,000. We just did

our taxes, so about a thousand." She volunteered that she had spent similar amounts in the past:

Oh yeah, it's easy. I spend between \$600 and \$1,000. The first year was about a little bit over a thousand because my husband screamed. But then, that's when I really got carried away, and then I said okay, I'm not gonna spend, and then it went down to \$600 and then this year it was \$1,000.

Paula explained that Makala had to buy a lot of her own supplies for her classroom. Paula said that there were those in the school who thought special education had too much money and they wanted to use some of the \$1,600 Makala received for her classroom. Paula supported Makala and said, "I've actually said, you know what? They have lots of needs, equipment costs a lot of money."

Carla expressed a different view on the subject of resources provided to her by the school. Carla explained:

When I inherited the room, I inherited quite a few of the books . . . so I haven't had to purchase any of them. . . . The special ed. teachers have a budget of \$1,600 per year, and all of that money can go and buy additional resources. . . . I feel there's a wealth of resources provided for us, between the money that we are able to spend, and what's already there.

Carla also spent several hundred dollars of her own personal money much like the others had done. She explained:

Not on books so much, but I just always was kind of buying things. I've backed off on that considerably . . . but I spent a pretty decent amount of money the first

year and a half. . . I'd say in that period of time probably \$600 . . . and it was money well spent.

### *Induction*

Strong induction support that is specific to the needs of novice special education teachers is cited as an important factor for the retention of beginning teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Gehrke & Murri, 2006).

When asked if she had participated in any kind of formal induction program for newly hired teachers at her school Rose responded, "Not really, no." The only induction example that she could think of was a binder that her grade-level chair had made for new teachers. Rose explained:

Last year, for the new incoming special ed. teachers, she [grade-level chair] made this binder of things that they should know. Like for instance, the substitute telephone list, you know. Just different kinds of things about special ed., you know. She had this whole binder ready for them, which I thought was awesome, because I never had that when I came in to teaching. Nobody gave me anything, it was kind of you learn on you own, kind of thing.

Rose continued, "[I think] she just assumed that I knew what I was doing, or I knew where to get things." Rose believed the binder was useful and she thought it was a good thing, but it was basically provided by the grade-level chair who took it upon herself to do it. It was not a school policy and it was not a HIDOE policy in general. As Rose explained, it just happened that this person was motivated enough to do it, so she did it.

Kanani responded "No" when asked if she had taken part in a formal induction program at her school. She did mention that although it was not the case when she

started, new teachers were now meeting at the beginning of the year with administration to "cover routine procedures that new people might not know." As she explained, "So, that's been instituted in our school now, in house, but when I started they didn't really."

Jen was placed in her second school position without an interview. She knew that the principal had been given her name but nobody called her. She stated:

I had to go by the school twice to say, "Am I even on your list, can I have keys to my room?" They asked me, "Do you have an appointment to see the principal?" [laughs] It was a whole different experience, due to, you know, again maybe the size and just the way the school was run.

Jen did recall that at both schools in which she taught they did have a packet they provided. When asked if there was a formal system in place for novice special education teachers in which various school procedures and routines were reviewed Jen explained:

Yes and no, mostly no. But yes, like every year, both schools go through the whole hand packet, you know. They go through the rules. . . . They give you the packet that you can read if you have time of school procedures and rules, and you sort of learn as you go. . . . It's vague . . . I'd really say you're on your own.

Makala stated, "No, there wasn't . . . there was no induction, the communication was horrible," when she was asked if she participated in a formal induction program at her school. Carla responded that she came too late to take part in any induction program at her school. She was hired after school had started. She said she believed her school had some kind of induction program but they did not offer it to her at the beginning of her second year even though she had not be able to go through the program the year before.

### *Mentoring*

Rose was aware that there was someone who could potentially work with her as a mentor; however, Rose elected not to pursue the possibility. She explained:

There was this one lady who used to come around, she was like a, what do they call them, those mentor teachers for newly hired teachers, but I never really called her. Only because, like I said before, I've been in the schools for a long time . . . so I think it was a lot easier for me to just get in there, and ask if I needed help.

Rose described what she understood about the mentoring program:

I'm not too sure how she was assigned to me. . . . The first contact I had with her was through [e-mail] . . . she introduced herself [and] asked if there were any questions or any needs that I needed answered. . . . I think I met with her one time, or she wanted to come out and meet with me, so it was one time. We met, and then after that, nothing, because I didn't feel that I needed to have any more support from her.

Rose explained that the one time she met the mentor it was just an introductory meeting. Rose did not know if this person had teaching experience and in particular special education experience with students similar to hers.

Kanani spoke of a similar scenario, but Kanani wanted the mentoring option and decided to try it. She stated:

I did have, I don't know if it was the district or the state, a person who came in as a mentor, and it was something completely optional, you didn't have to have this. But I had gotten an e-mail if I wanted this, and I said yes, I did. . . . She came in and she would observe me and then make comments and then ask me what I

needed, what I wanted. She would give me ideas for resources, or where I could get resources. She was not special ed., she was just general. Anybody that was new could request her services. I don't even know what her position was. I just know it was some kind of a mentoring program that they had. She was a really good help for me because she would actually come in and watch me and then give me feedback. And I liked that.

Kanani went on to explain that her school had also begun an in-house mentoring program. She related:

Okay, they have now instituted in our school an in-school mentoring program, which is optional. If you're new, they will team you up with a teacher that's been there for a while who has volunteered to take on this role. The goal is to meet with the new teachers at least twice a quarter, and to be there if they need help. . . . But when I started, they didn't really.

Kanani described the key elements of the mentoring program she participated in, starting with the fact that it was voluntary and they met quarterly. She stated:

She would come to my classroom and observe what I was doing for a class period, and I always would have her come before my lunch. Then after she observed me, we'd eat lunch together, and that way she could tell me what she saw. I could ask her questions. I could pick her brain about things that I wanted help with, and then she would send me resources. It might have been a book. She sent me a book that I could read to help give me some ideas about things that I had questions about, different types of worksheets, and different types of strategies that I could use. And then we would keep e-mail contact.

Kanani explained that her mentor had not been a special education teacher, but Kanani believed she was very helpful and she “enjoyed having her come in.”

Kanani described the “in-house” mentoring program that had been started at her school:

They weren’t given extra time to meet with each other. It was something they had to arrange on their own. So, generally for the ones who really took advantage of it, I know they would plan during their lunchtimes. There were some people that would just kind of do it on the fly. There were some that just maybe met the first time, and then maybe didn’t meet at all, so [there] weren’t really any formal guidelines that were in place. It was just okay; this is a person that’s there to help you. But I know the school is discussing tightening that up, and making some type of checklist things that they want to try to put into place so that it’s consistent across the board.

Kanani also explained how mentors were assigned. She said:

It was strictly whoever volunteered to do this. . . . I think they tried to put them either if you were in the same department, so you know, a science teacher would mentor a science teacher, a math teacher would mentor a math teacher. They tried to do them by department, whatever department you were in.

Jen was not aware there was any type of mentor support available during her first year of teaching. She commented:

Nobody walked into my classroom. I literally asked for a mentor teacher this year. I’ve never had a mentor teacher since I started the program. I never knew it existed until last year, my second year of teaching. Some other teachers who’ve

taught for, you know 10 plus years, moving to the state of Hawaii had mentor teachers! I said, "Hey, why does she have one and I don't have one?" Now I have heard that the program's not very strong, and probably wouldn't be very helpful, but I've asked for all these things. No administrator, no one has walked into my classroom. Nobody has really come back to me. I've followed up, saying, "Have you heard anything?"

Jen continued:

This year [her third] was such a challenging year. Walking in [they're] telling us we needed to teach gen. ed. [curriculum]. I mean, it was pretty crazy at the beginning of the year. I had a very challenging group of students with a variety of issues. I requested a mentor because I got a name of a specific mentor that had been helping another teacher. She said, "No, this is only for first-year teachers, and I told her, "Well, I never had one!" [laughs]

Jen voiced her frustration as she was not able to get the kind of mentoring assistance she asked for:

I know [the mentor] had some little mentor teacher meetings with the teachers . . . and that was just absolutely, you know, no help. They just walked through the report card procedure and stuff that they could read on their own, and they knew already. No hands on. Nobody coming into your classroom [and] answering questions. . . . How do you want us to do it? Can you come in and show me? Literally, and nobody responded. They're not gonna come in and show you, they just talk. They just talk and talk and talk, and I was asking, what do you want me to do as a SPED teacher?

Makala reported she also had been approached by someone from the district about mentoring support. She explained the situation in this way:

The first year, what happened was, they had somebody . . . but the frustrating part is . . . she didn't know too much about special education. I don't think any of them really knew about special education. . . . They would come in the classroom, "Hi, how are you doing? We're going to have this workshop." But it was very general, you know, in and out. It wasn't like on a consistent [basis]. I mean, it's a program out there. I know they're trying to help, you know. . . . I didn't really make a connection to it. It didn't really have meaning to it. It was just somebody who oversaw the first year, had workshops and that was it. [laughs]

Carla explained she did not receive any mentoring assistance for another reason:

[A mentor was] not assigned to me, no. I never had a mentor assigned to me and that was because I arrived late. There was a new teacher that I also shared a classroom with this last year, or the last 2 years, and she had a mentor. I thought wow, that's really great. But it was never offered to me, and I was not aware of it until much later.

#### *Salary*

Rose explained that salary was not a determining factor in her decision to remain in special education. "To me, [salary] doesn't matter. I like where I'm at. I mean, had I had a totally not so good experience that would be a whole different story. I don't think I would be teaching special ed. right now." Rose stated that she thought about not returning after her first year but decided to try it one more year. Her next class was "totally different, no behavior problems whatsoever." The contrast enabled her to reevaluate and

continue in the field. Anne supported Rose's statement that salary did not matter to her. Anne said that salary was not a primary motivator for Rose. When asked directly, Anne said, "No, no, I don't think salary is, no."

Kanani also discussed the issue of salary. She described it this way:

Money has never really been my motivating factor. [laughs] Maybe it should be. I don't think I make enough money. But you know what, I like my job, and that's the most important thing. . . I would like more money, I think it would be much easier for me to survive . . . I don't have a lot, but I have what I need. Plus my husband works! [laughs] But it takes two.

Justine remarked, when asked if Kanani expressed dissatisfaction with her teaching salary, "[laughs] I don't know that she has, no, she hasn't really said anything. . . It's just one of those things you accept. That's what comes with the job."

Jen stated:

None of us teachers got into this for money or because it was like the greatest profession in the world in the sense of the work we do outside of teaching each child. We're in it just to teach each child but with all the other responsibilities that we have, it's not worth it anymore. It's not you know! My first semester, I hated coming to school every morning, and it was so sad because I wanted to do teaching my entire life!

Jen continued, explaining that salary was not a determining factor in her decision to continue in special education.

Absolutely not, I mean I know [in] 20 more years, I might make some . . . money. You know, we have wonderful breaks, and everyone always says that you know.

You get a break every so and so, well, we need the break. And it's not like its nonworking. I mean, we get paid for 7 hours [a day], and, you know, there was a report that came out [that said] we work an average of 15 [see Creamer, 2007]! Makala discussed the issue of salary from her particular point of view. She explained:

You know, oh my gosh, teaching is really not about the money. [laughs] It's definitely not about the money. . . . You can't be in education for the money, I mean that's crazy. . . . I wouldn't even say for the vacation. . . . I've got to look at it as the challenge, you know. I'm going in there for the challenge.

Paula stated that Makala had never expressed dissatisfaction with her salary to her: "She's never talked about her salary . . . whether it's enough or not enough; she's never expressed either way."

Carla's response to the issue of salary was different from the other participants. She said the following when asked if salary was a determining factor in whether she would stay or leave the profession:

It's a big one. Well, the amazing thing is, I guess it was just in the paper that you could be a manager at McDonald's and make the same amount of money as a teacher, \$35,000 a year! Plus, you know, then you have to look at student loans. You're not in it for the money; we're not in it for the money. But honestly, if I didn't have an excellent setup in my home, I rent I don't own a home, if my costs were any higher than they are I couldn't survive as a single person on that wage.

Carla stated she did not know what was going to keep her teaching special needs children but, as far as salary was concerned, she was very emphatic: "I need more money." Carla

was clear as to need for more compensation but she evidently did not share that with her best friend. Nan stated, "I don't think she's unsatisfied with her salary. Everybody would like to make more money, but I don't think she's, you know, she's not complaining about not making enough money."

*Professional Development*

Rose mentioned that she had not seen a lot of professional development opportunities for special education. She said that when classes were offered the office staff would put pamphlets out on the counter for teachers to pick up: "There's some like technology ones but not necessarily like special education things." Anne explained from her experience she agreed with Rose's assessment of the lack of support and professional development. Anne stated:

I feel like the [HI]DOE with novice teachers, especially in special education you know, they need to beef up their support system for these novice teachers, especially in special education. . . . I think they need a lot of in-servicing, a lot of professional development, workshops, especially on how to write an IEP, how to conduct an IEP, how to deal with these parents, curriculum also and knowing and understanding IDEA, and I mean, the rules and regs [regulations] of special education per se. But basically I think it's just that they need more training time, once they get in . . . I think now they're beginning to do a lot better but I think more training [is needed]. It shouldn't be on the job training. You shouldn't . . . have to learn it while you're working.

Kanani gave some specific examples of professional development training she received:

The school had purchased all the textbooks for the kids, and all the workbooks, and the teacher's guides up front. The [teachers] that were going to teach reading, whether you were regular education or special education, the school provided 2 days' training, which they paid stipends for before school started. Like about 2 weeks before school started. So, I had two reading classes that year, which I did receive training for up front, because anybody teaching reading that year received the training. So that was really helpful.

Kanani explained there were problems at times coordinating opportunities for professional development between general education departments and special education teachers. She pointed to an example mentioned earlier of not being notified until about 2 days before a training session took place. She was not able to get a substitute and lesson plans together on such short notice. Kanani believed at times there existed a lack of coordination between content area general education and the special education department, which interfered with professional development activities. Justine mentioned that she thought Kanani would like to go to many professional development programs that were off island but that it was not practical for her to go. Justine commented, "Just being gone for that length of time is hard for almost any teacher to give up." Justine stated, "[Kanani] would have appreciated a course given here that she could go to after school. We don't have a lot of opportunity for that here."

Jen reported that her school did not offer a great deal of professional development activities for teachers. She stated:

At my school, we do not do very much professional development as a school at all. I actually asked this year, you know. Do you ever as a school . . . want to try

out . . . some kind of training with this whole testing and standard based stuff? . . .

Now, independently, I can take my personal days for professional development and choose like a course that's being offered, and get a sub, and make lesson plans, et cetera. My first year I went to a conference in Oahu that was somewhat okay, but really with my situation, and my young children, I don't know how to do that on top of everything else. As much as I want to learn that's why I can't go out on my own and try to be taking a class on top of all of our responsibilities.

Makala spoke of the lack of high-quality professional development available to her. She also mentioned it was difficult for her to participate sometimes. Paula explained Makala's situation has she saw it:

I don't see any opportunities being afforded to [Makala] . . . pretty much, she hustles. She looks for workshops to go to, to broaden her horizons. . . . I know one example where she got a memo, and it was for a workshop. In fact, on two occasions, the principal forbade her from going, said no, you have to stay over here . . . I believe she couldn't find a sub or something to that effect, but it was something that was really important that she needed to go to, and the principal just threw a ruckus. [The principal] didn't want [Makala] to go to it. So, pretty much [Makala's] the one. She hustles. She goes out, she looks for them.

Carla mentioned taking a professional development class from a mentor that worked with another teacher at her school. She found the professional development opportunity informative and helpful. Nan explained that Carla was not always satisfied with professional development activities in which she participated:

She does do workshops. She'll say, "Oh, there's no school tomorrow, but I'm going to a workshop." . . . Sometimes she's said, "I don't know why I went, you know," she said, "I could have gone to sleep." So, I can't tell you which one that was, or how often she goes to them. I will say that sometimes she thinks they're a waste of time.

### *Standards*

Rose spoke of the standards and the effect they had on her view of utilizing her dual certification to become a general education teacher. She stated:

To me, it could go either way. I like special ed. and my 3 years is up now, [to repay] my stipends and everything, and I'm going to stay in special ed. . . . I like special ed. because now with regular ed. you've got all of this other stuff that you gotta do. . . . There are all these standards that you gotta follow, you know, everything is about tests scores and the new report cards and all that stuff. I don't know if I could do that and have 20-something kids in your class. I prefer special ed. I mean, even though there's a lot more, I like the small class sizes.

Kanani saw standards as a positive element for clearly defining what students need to know. She explained:

I think departments need to get themselves together. You know, I think the state needs to get itself together. I like the standards. I know a lot of people don't like the standards and the benchmarks, but I like them, because now it's very clear. This is what our kids need to know. There it is, black and white. And for the most part, I'm very happy with what they say the kids should know. I see no problem with that. If everybody says we agree on this [then] let's all put our efforts

together to teach the kids these things. If we're all working together to teach the kids the same things, then eventually they're gonna get it.

Jen reported that her school expects teachers to meet standards and to hang copies of the standards on their walls along with other materials such as general learner objective/outcomes. She explained that how to meet the standards had become an issue between general education teachers and special education teachers as well as between veteran teachers and new teachers:

There's gonna always be a divider between gen. ed. and special ed. and there will always be one. But there is a huge line in this new school that I'm at . . . between the veteran teachers and the newer teachers. We're willing . . . to try new things, we're willing to be taught by anybody who wants to teach us, or walk us through stuff, we're willing to communicate, we're willing to work as a team, we're willing to, I mean, we're the ones asking questions, we wanna know why, we wanna understand everything about No Child Left Behind and how it's impacting our special education student. The veteran teachers are like, don't ruffle feathers, don't ask questions, just listen to what they say and go and do whatever you do in your classroom, [that] is my opinion. I think a lot of them are great teachers, but they're surely not willing to change. I think they've just been in it for so many years that they're numb towards administration and how the school is run. They're not someone to fight or ask questions. . . . They probably do for their students in their little classroom, but they're not about to fight for them outside of their classroom.

Jen explained the frustration she felt when being responsible for meeting standards required by NCLB that did not take into account the economic conditions of the community her school served. She said, "As far as I know we're still responsible for all the expectations of No Child Left Behind no matter what our economic [demographics]."

Makala spoke of the constant attention at her school's faculty meetings to standards, annual yearly progress, and the Hawaii State Assessments. She believed this had become the main focus and purpose for these meetings. Test results and restructuring were basically the only topics for consideration during their meetings.

*Summary of Paperwork, Resources, Induction, Mentoring, Salary, Professional Development, and Standards*

All participants expressed their frustration with the amount of paperwork they were responsible for as special education teachers. Many explained that paperwork took away time that could be better used in lesson preparation and instruction. Lack of support in terms of scheduling adequate time for teachers to complete their many tasks and quality technology training were two issues participants discussed.

Only one participant reported that she believed she had adequate resources in her room when she started teaching. She explained that her room was fully stocked with supplies and the curriculum she needed to work with her students. The other four participants had a much different reality. They did not believe they were adequately supported with the resources necessary to do their jobs. They reported minimal or no materials present when they arrived at their new positions. All reported spending their own money to bridge the gap and support their students' learning. They experienced stress trying to obtain materials on their own. Money that was allocated by HIDOE for

their classes was not available until October. Although it was helpful, it was inadequate to finance the needs of a classroom with no materials. These novice teachers found themselves scrambling for resources at a time when they were already nervous and overwhelmed with the new responsibilities they had taken on as a novice special education teacher. The inequities present in the system, where some classrooms were well supplied with resources and others had virtually nothing, were a source of frustration for many participants in this study.

Induction programs as reported by participants were very minimal or nonexistent. Participants often described feeling they were on their own to figure things out. Only one participant reported that her school was beginning to implement a better induction program to better meet the needs of novice teachers.

Mentoring opportunities were present for some of the participants. Others either had no mentoring programs available or were not adequately informed about the existence of such programs. Some participants received an e-mail that asked if they were interested in a mentoring program but they were unsure as to what was available, what the qualifications of potential mentors were, and who administered the program. Only two schools of the five in which the participants taught offered in-house mentoring programs. In one of these schools, the participant who wanted and asked for mentoring support explained she was not informed that there was a mentoring program in her school. Due to this lack of communication and confusion as to what type of mentoring was available, only one of the five participants in this study had a mentor teacher officially assigned to her as a novice teacher. Four of the five participants wanted a

mentor but they found either there was no mentor support program or, if there was, it was not presented to them in a way that was informative and inviting.

Salary was not seen as a determining factor in whether or not four of the five participants in this study would remain in special education. None thought their salary was as high as they would like it to be. One expressed the fear that she would not be able to continue in the profession because of the salary. This individual was the only person who was single among the participants and did not have the support of a two-salary household.

All participants in the study viewed professional development opportunities as limited. Some mentioned that they had participated in useful professional development activities but not many. All wished there were more opportunities for professional development on the island where they worked. They explained how difficult it was to leave the island for professional development when they had children at home and other responsibilities. Kanani spoke of the lack of communication that sometimes occurred between general education departments and special education departments in the same school when disseminating information about professional development activities. All wanted more high-quality professional development opportunities delivered in a way that supported them to participate locally when possible.

Standards were viewed as appropriate and needed by some but there were real concerns as to how to teach standards based curriculum to students with special needs. Some participants wanted assistance and direction from their administrators and others as they tried to teach to standards they believed could not be attained. This assistance was not forth coming to those who asked for it. One participant mentioned the riff she saw

develop between general education teachers and their special education counterparts over standards. She had the impression that the general education teachers believed it was the students with special needs that had caused their school to fail to meet AYP. Teaching to the standards and subsequently to the test that measures those standards was a source of stress and frustration for some of the participants in this study.

*Professional Factors: Pre-Service*

Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with their pre-service teacher education program at the University of Hawaii (refer to Table 3). All were given an opportunity to express their beliefs as to the strengths and weaknesses of the program and offer recommendations for improvements. Particular areas of concern emerged from the interviews including how well the program prepared these novice teachers for the realities of teaching, supervision of educational assistants, behavior management, academic success, families, and pre-service mentors.

*Realities*

Rose believed the pre-service program did not prepare her for the reality she faced as a novice special education teacher. However, she explained she did not think it was the fault of the program. She stated:

I mean, you really had to just get in there and do it. Because nothing you can teach or whatever, or tell you, you know, is gonna prepare you for what really actually happens in the classroom, or in the field. . . I mean, I guess you could simulate it, but not until you get out there and get into the classroom, do you really, really know what goes on. I mean, yeah, you reflect back to your classes, and say, oh yeah, that's what they said. This is what's happening now. You know,

sometimes you can do that...But I think the real life experiences, yeah, you just get them when you're out there in the real setting.

Kanani believed the pre-service program was successful in some ways but not in others. She explained:

It prepared me for being in the classroom. It didn't [prepare] me for all the paperwork. But I don't think that's anything that you could actually learn; you know what I'm saying, because that's something that just happens with the job. I had heard about the paperwork, but I didn't realize how much time it would take. And it's not just the paperwork, it's prepping you for the IEPs, doing all the assessments for the IEPs, and then writing up all the IEPs, and meetings you know, it takes up so much more time than I had thought it would.

Kanani continued to discuss how her pre-service program prepared her for the realities of the teaching profession:

I think sometimes though, in the classes it's like in theory, things should work, but in actuality, it doesn't always work. . . . I think sometimes, some of the instructors seemed a little bit unrealistic. I guess it's like when was the last time you were teaching? I don't know, some things seemed a little bit unrealistic.

Justine said, "I think [the University of Hawaii pre-service program] helped [Kanani] in a way to understand the different types of students that might come to her and maybe provide a way to deal with some of those things, especially in special ed."

Jen commented that she thought her pre-service program was strong because as a student she was in real classrooms "from day 1" doing her field work. She also explained that she did not believe she was well prepared to deal with the requirements of teaching

students with special needs the standardized curriculum used by her general education colleagues.

Makala also discussed the differences between “school” and the actual classroom environment. She said:

I think when I look from the start to now, everything that we're taught in school was totally different being out in the field. In the field, I thought we were supposed to be teachers but we're not, we're functioning as teachers. Sometimes I feel like I'm maybe the administrator, I'm the student service coordinator, 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 and situation . . . has never gotten easy.

Carla also believed the reality of teaching special education was not evident in her pre-service program. She commented, “I think that the realities far outweighed what we were experiencing in pre-service.” When asked how long it took her to realize the difference she replied, “Quite soon after, [laughs] yeah, like within the first month!”

#### *Staff*

Rose could not recall any course or field work that specifically prepared her to work with members of a school’s staff. She mentioned that she thought it would be a useful addition to the pre-service program.

Kanani recalled some preparation for working with staff in the pre-service program but she expressed her doubts about its effectiveness short of personal experience. She explained:

I know we had a couple of classes on working with paraprofessionals, and so we were given the know-how. But in reality, it doesn't really kick in until you're actually doing it. I mean, that's socialization skills [and] I think by the time you're an adult, it's hard to learn socialization skills.

As mentioned earlier, Jen had a particularly difficult time "supervising" educational assistants. She explained that she was given the responsibility of doing employment evaluations of educational assistants when she did not believe she had the necessary experience to do so. She expressed frustration with the process and her administration. She did not see this responsibility as part of her job description. Lori agreed with Jen when she said, "They definitely don't teach you how to work with adults when you're going through a [pre-service program]. . . . There's not really anything to help you with the paraprofessionals, the EAs [educational assistants]."

Carla stated that she was "not prepared" by her pre-service teacher education program to work with staff at a school.

#### *Behavior*

Rose discussed how the pre-service preparation program prepared her to deal with behavior management issues in her classroom. She stated:

It didn't! [laughs] I don't think there was enough about you know [different] types of situations. . . . Maybe [they could] have more classes, or just have a class on [behavior management]. Because, I can't remember if they even had just a class on behavioral management. I know they had classroom management, but I don't think they had anything like specific for behaviors.

Kanani reflected on pre-service preparation and behavior management issues in the classroom. She elaborated:

First of all, I guess I need to say . . . sometimes you can learn to be good at managing behavior, but sometimes it's almost instinctual. You know, either you've got it or you don't. You can learn skills to help you get it, but I think some people have it already, maybe because they're moms, I don't know. But I do know in some of the classes that we had, you know, learning to gather data and use that data to help [develop] behavior modification plans was really helpful. Because especially a lot of my variance kids, you know, they do have behavior plans and having to sit down and look at the data, and look at what they're doing, and analyze what they're doing, and why they're doing it, and all those functional behavioral assessments, you know, working on those, I mean, that was a good thing to know because it's stuff that we use. . . . I guess we learned a lot of strategies too, you know, in some of the classes. But I think watching people in the process, you know when we did our fieldwork, being able to watch teachers and how they handled things was probably one of the biggest things for me, to actually see people in action, and how *they* handled things. That was probably one of the most helpful things.

Jen explained that the strength of the pre-service program for behavior management issues was the dual preparation she received. Jen stated:

[I] pulled and picked different ideas from all the different classroom settings that I saw. What was great was that I was dual-certified so I pulled from gen. ed. and special education. The strength was the modeling of my mentors. We talked about

it in class, we read a book about it, um, I think it mainly came from who I am as a person, too. Just setting goals and I'm very strict in my classroom. [I] have really high expectations so I think it's a combination of all of those . . . I think it's a huge strength. I always wanted to teach special education but it gave me the experience in the gen. ed. classroom. It gave me the eyes of the gen. ed. teacher and the experiences they have and the number of children they have. I wish that gen. ed. teachers could do the same things as we [do] because there's still that fine line with some. Just understanding where each is coming from and what is on our plate.

Carla explained, because of an unsatisfactory experience in her student teaching placement, she actually learned more about behavior issues in her fieldwork practicum placements prior to student teaching. She explained:

In the practicum I learned some great things. I don't remember any in my student teaching. I learned a great deal in practicum [for behavior]. . . . I really don't think that it's easy to prepare anyone for behavior in a course without maybe with a lot of visuals, with a lot of movies, or something. It's hard to actually know what you're getting into by reading books or listening to lecture. . . . I think that really you just have to get in there and experience it to really get the feel, and to know what to do.

#### *Academics*

Rose discussed whether she was prepared by the pre-service program to meet the academic needs of students: "I would say yes, only because I'm teaching [elementary]

school. Now, had I taught anything higher I would probably have to say maybe." She explained why she did not feel prepared to teach older students:

I think because of where I came from, my background, I've worked only with [elementary children]. . . . The placement of my student teaching and/or observation and participation, wasn't higher than third grade so I kind of did it more at the lower elementary. So, I would say that if I had to teach [higher grades] I would really have a hard time with that.

Rose thought her pre-service program should have required more variety in field placements and student teaching. Rose explained:

I think so, yeah, for me, yeah. More variety would be better...I think there should have been like . . . the elementary part, and maybe go into an intermediate, and then maybe go into a high school, just so that you kind of know what's going on up there. I mean, if I had to go to a high school, oh my gosh, I wouldn't know where to begin. I wouldn't know what to do.

Kanani believed the pre-service program did prepare her for the academic issues she faced as a novice special education teacher. She stated:

I think so. I think one of the things that I really liked about the program that we had was the focus on standards. I think that gave us a jump start because a lot of the old timers who were in the schools you know, they were used to the flavor of the month kind of a thing, "Oh yeah, we're going to do [it]," and so, when the standards came out, a lot of them were like, "That's gonna be gone" so they really didn't take it seriously. But because it was so drilled into us, what are the standards, you need to use them . . . it really prepared me for that.

Jen reflected on how prepared she was to meet the academic needs of her students by her pre-service program:

I feel that we were prepared as much as we can. I do feel like once you're in the classroom, it's a whole different ball game. Now that I sit in the classroom [with] every new student and every year, I want to go back to school everyday feeling that I long to learn so much more. . . . So now, knowing what I know [I'd like] to take a specific course on that. . . . But overall, it just comes down to us as the care coordinator and just things that are very unknown to me that I'm clueless about, that I just continue to learn everyday. So to answer the question, I think it prepared us as much as it could, I wouldn't have known the questions or things to ask at the time because I didn't have the experience.

Carla explained that she believed she would be able to be successful with the academic expectations of her job because of her field placements not because of her unsatisfactory student teaching assignment. She added that she believed she received some good preparation for teaching academics to students with special needs in her course work but added, "I think that nothing can prepare you for what you actually have to do, for the enormity of it all!"

#### *Families*

Rose indicated that the pre-service preparation program had not adequately prepared her to work with the parents and families of her students. She stated, "Not too much. I mean, I think there was like a class or two on that, but nothing really sticks out. But I think it's very important, you know, to learn how to work with parents." Rose

explained that she thought there should be more emphasis on providing teacher candidates more background in dealing effectively with parents:

Yeah. Like just to know how to work with them, or give them, you know, different scenarios, or whatever because nowadays there's a lot of kids who come from foster families, who have foster parents, who go and see their parents on the weekends. You know, all these kinds of different things go on nowadays that I think it's important.

Kanani remembered a specific class that she thought was particularly helpful for her to better understand her role in working with parents and families. She explained:

You know, we did have some really good classes. I can't think of the name of the class now where we looked at creating different kinds of family maps and looking at family dynamics and relationships, those were good. We got lots of good information on that and also looked at different types of families, different issues that families face, making us aware I think of things that we might not normally think of [given] how I lived my life as opposed to how somebody else lives their lives

Jen also highly rated the course her cohort had taken on families and communities. Jen explained, "We had a really wonderful class that I remember. . . . [The class] was about community building, parent relationships, etc. It was a great class and again there was a class provided and I thought it was good."

Carla gave a couple of examples of interactions she had with parents during her pre-service preparation program. She reported:

I was able to sit in on one IEP and that was the only time I was in the same room with the parent of a student. Other than that, I never heard anything about parents.

. . . Oh, actually I did [an IEP meeting] with the practicum, too. I don't know if that was a fake one. I can barely remember that one. I think it was. I think we did two. I did two and they were both good.

Carla explained she didn't recall any class where they learned about families or parents but added, "Oh, I probably did but I don't remember it now. [I] probably had one."

#### *Pre-Service Mentor*

The role of the pre-service student teaching mentor emerged from the interviews of several of the participants. Rose explained that she was hired in the same school where she had done her student teaching. Because of her student teaching placement she had a valuable professional and personal relationship already established at the school when she started teaching. Rose felt she could approach her former mentor for advice, materials and support because of the positive bond formed during her student teaching placement.

Rose explained:

She was really good. In fact, she's still at the school that I'm at right now. She was very knowledgeable about the whole special ed. process. She was good about giving me a folder full of information on all kinds of stuff, like how to access ISPED, which was the . . . computer program to put in the IEP's. . . . She talked about working with the EAs [educational assistants] and how you need to tell them what you want them to do specifically. . . . What I liked about her was that she was so calm with her kids. Not once did I hear her yell, you know, she really knew how to work well with those kids.

Jen explained that she was still in contact with the teacher that served as her mentor when she did her student teaching in her pre-service program. Jen described calling and e-mailing her for professional advice. Jen said she asked “individual specific questions about students or goals.” She related calling her at home at night just “to get through my year.” She further explained, “At my new school, because nobody knew at my school . . . the few people I asked and put out an e-mail to [didn’t] respond or no one knew, so I just went to people that I knew, knew.”

Makala explained that she also had an on-going relationship with her student teaching mentor. Although she was at another school, like Jen, she was comfortable calling her for support and advice if needed.

Carla had a different experience. She explained that her student teaching mentor teacher “was so busy out of the room . . . running after school programs that she was not able to take time to contribute anything [to Carla’s student teaching experience].” Carla related, “When I would ask her a question she would say, ‘Just do what you think you should do.’ It was not hands on.” Carla did report, however, that she had an excellent experience in her field placement. She explained:

I had a great gal. . . . She was just alive, and good, and did everything she could to help me. She sat me down; I took pages and books full of notes. She demonstrated great ways to take care of things. She had some very challenging children in her classroom. . . . I just thought she was marvelous, and I learned a lot from her!

#### *Summary of Pre-Service*

None of the participants believed that their pre-service program prepared them for the realities of being a special education teacher. Many mentioned the paperwork, dealing

with staff and parents, and the lack of time as issues they thought could not be duplicated in the classroom. Some indicated they believed no pre-service program could prepare a teacher for situations only on the job experience could teach them. One participant pointed out that actually teaching was a small part of her job. The reality for her was that she had to wear “many hats” and had many responsibilities she never envisioned for herself during her pre-service program.

Only one of the participants recalled having coursework in the pre-service program that focused on working with staff. Three of the others could not remember such training but expressed their view that such preparation would be useful. These participants indicated they wished they had had such training.

One participant reported that she believed the pre-service program taught her useful skills for monitoring behavior using data to determine why a student was behaving a certain way and then using data to determine if behavior interventions were working or not. She credited her fieldwork and student-teaching experiences as the best teacher for behavior management. Another participant could not recall specific coursework on behavior issues but she did recall being taught about “classroom management.” A third participant explained she thought it would be very difficult to teach about behavioral issues in a classroom. She believed only real-life experience could prepare someone for these situations. She stated that pre-service fieldwork was the best approach short of having your own classroom.

One participant explained that the emphasis on the “standards” during her pre-service program had really helped her with the academic aspects of her job. Another participant believed she was limited in her ability to teach academics at any level above

the lower elementary grades because she only did fieldwork and her student teaching in the lower grades. She stated she thought the pre-service program would be stronger if teacher candidates were required to have field experience in elementary and secondary schools. Some expressed their satisfaction with their coursework and their field placements for providing them with the ability to teach academics to students with special needs. Some, however, cautioned about the enormity of the job and how difficult it was to prepare novice teachers to meet the demands of academic instruction for students with special needs.

Two participants described a course they took in their pre-service programs that was beneficial to them on the subject of working with parents and families. They believed the course was very important and had helped them to be more understanding of family dynamics and the unique family challenges many students with special needs face. Two other participants recalled a class period or two devoted to working with parents. Both thought there should be more coursework in this area. One participant recalled attending one or two IEP meetings at which parents were present, but that was the extent of her interaction with parents of students with special needs during her pre-service program.

An interesting theme emerged among four of the five participants that had to do with their relationship with the mentor teacher that had been assigned to them for their student teaching placement. Four of the five participants reported that even after 3 full years of teaching they still maintained a close supportive relationship with their former mentor. In many cases, they spoke together regularly. These former mentors were often

the preferred source for information that participants depended on for answers to their questions and concerns.

#### **Personal Factors: Intrapersonal, Personal Background, Family**

This section of Chapter 4 reports on the findings for the second research question, which asked: In what ways have personal factors such as intrapersonal variables, personal background, and family support influenced novice special education teachers' decisions to remain in the field of special education?

##### *Personal Factors: Intrapersonal Variables*

###### *Initiative*

Rose mentioned on several occasions that she liked to do things on her own: "I'm not the kind of person to go and ask for help. I kind of just do my own thing." She explained that she sees her personal style as a limitation on her ability to obtain the kind of support she sometimes needs: "Part of it is my fault, too, because . . . I don't go out and ask and speak up, which maybe I should start doing. But you know that's just my personality. I'm not like that." Rose further stated:

I don't want to cause any kind of waves or anything like that in the whole system because I like where I am. I like the job that I do, and I want to keep it as long as possible...But inside, I'm just like boiling you know, that's not right. . . . That's kind of a bad trait in me. [laughs]

Rose went on to explain why the initial co-teaching assignment during her first year as a special education teacher had been so important to her:

That's why I liked having that other teacher that I worked with. Because she was a lot more outspoken than I was, and so she would go and do all that, you know.

Not so much demanding of things, but she was the person who would be much more outspoken. So, that's why I liked that she was there.

Anne laughed and said:

[Rose] is not like me. I will fight, I will ask. [Rose] is kind of laid back. . . . She can work well, she can cooperate. She'll share her views if she has to but most of the time she'll just, you know, go with the flow.

Although Rose did not express the desire to be a teacher until after she received her first bachelor's degree in another field, she stated, "I love teaching . . . it's a pretty positive experience." Rose explained that she thought longevity in the field would come if you "love what you do." She continued:

When I first started teaching, I was like, "Okay, I think I'm going to be in here for maybe 5 years—tops." But you know, now I'm going into my fourth year already and I'm like, "Yeah, you know, I can see myself going into this a lot longer than the 5 years that I said I would." . . . I see myself doing it longer because I like what I do. I enjoy working with the kids. I like seeing the growth that they've made for the [time] they've been with me. At times of course, it's very challenging . . . and then you see the growth, and you see them enjoying school. That's my reward. Even though . . . I want to pull my hair out and scream at the top of my lungs. But when I see them getting into the routine at school, or even participating at circle, or even coming to circle time, even playing with the other kids, that's my reward.

Kanani explained how the excitement of starting her career fit her personality. She stated, "It was interesting to me, you know, it was exciting to me, because it was

something new and I've always liked doing new things." Kanani saw herself as someone willing to reach out to others and ask for help. She expressed how important it was to develop relationships with resource personnel, specialists, office staff, administration, parents and colleagues: "The reality is my support group is staff members, and you have to build up the relationships. I mean that is the key to it, it's just having good relationships because you're going to find what you need in those good relationships." Kanani saw herself as a self-starter willing to go out and seek new solutions and information as a collaborator. She stated, "I think it's easier to have two people working together rather than one person work alone." She continued:

You have to be flexible, you need to care about the kids, that's one of the most important things because when you care about them then you do what is right for them. You need to be able to be a team player with the other staff members. You need to be confident. You need some self-confidence to keep yourself in line but you also need to be able to take criticism and understand that others are just wanting to help.

Justine agreed with Kanani's assessment of herself:

Nothing is really ever a problem for [Kanani]. You know, she's dealt a hand; she just deals with it. Certain things might be a challenge, but it's a challenge until she finds a solution for it or something she can live with. See the thing about [Kanani] is, in this type of position now, she's got a lot going for her. The fact [is] she knows the culture of the kids, where they're coming from, and she's been there long enough that she knows older brothers and sisters. So, it's not hard for her to walk into a counselor's office and say, you know what's happening with

this guy, these kids? Or to talk to the principal and say, you know, why did this kid get suspended?

Kanani always wanted to be a teacher for as long as she could remember: "I think I knew as a kid. You know you play school [and] I liked playing the teacher!" Justine echoed that sentiment when she said, "[Kanani's] always wanted to work with kids, and she's always wanted to work with kids who didn't understand the system."

Jen stated she wanted to be a teacher her entire life. She saw herself as the type of person who asked a lot of questions because she genuinely wanted to understand how she could be a better teacher: "I always try to get along and be very respectful to everybody. Every job position is important at our school." She elaborated:

I'm a person to ask questions. I knew there wasn't the support there. . . . I'm told, don't ruffle feathers. Why are you asking all these questions? It's almost looked down upon that I'm inquiring when I'm completely open. I don't act like I know everything and why are you doing this. I try to come at it in a very professional way. I'm still learning you know to word it right and go through the right channels . . . but I ask these questions, and I expect some kind of answer.

Jen expressed that she gets frustrated and impatient because she wants to look at what others have done successfully and use that information to improve the way her school functions. Jen continued:

My biggest problem . . . is . . . why are we reinventing the wheel, over and over again? . . . Many schools on Oahu are already, you know, doing [inclusion] or their SPED departments have been doing all of this. Schools on the mainland have

been doing it for years. Why are we reinventing the wheel? Why can't we take what they have learned and what they have done and try it?

Makala, similar to Jen, saw herself as one who gets the help she needs because she is willing to initiate the process. Makala stated:

The only support system I had . . . is the support that I get from calling, and I have to initiate it. Calling my colleagues who I went to college [with] and through teachers I have worked with in the past as an educational assistant.

Makala gave an example of a time she had gone to the teachers' union to seek advice and get answers. She spoke about having a "conscience" and wanting administration to hold her to the highest standards by observing her regularly to be aware of what she is doing with her students. She believed she had to "protect herself" from a capricious system that removed her from a school in which she was successful her first year to a different school her second year that was an extremely challenging situation for her. Makala stated:

Well, you know, this is from the beginning to now. Each time I feel like my fighting spirit is being lost, because . . . everything I stood for before I came into teaching . . . it's like . . . I'm losing that. And you know, when they say, "Oh, yeah teachers, they don't care" I can see why. It's not them; they did care.

Somewhere along the line, somebody did something to them. But what happens is when I see they're not being provided for; I fight [for] them.

Paula also saw Makala as "a team player . . . she's one of those I totally like . . . I wish we had more like [Makala] at school because teaching becomes fun!"

### *Stress*

All participants in this study cited some degree of stress they experienced as a result of their special education teaching positions. They handled it in a variety of ways over the course of their first 3 years as special educators.

Rose spoke of the stress she felt because she brought so much schoolwork home with her at night. She explained that it got better when she learned the “system” and how to work with it. She explained:

The first 2 years were kind of stressing; kind of stressful in a way because everything was brand new and for me it did take me at least 2 years to kind of learn the whole system of how to work it. . . Well, now at least I have a program that I've come up with myself that I've been using for the past 3 years now. . . . It's getting better every year. Every year I add on to it...what I'm going to teach, [and] how I'm going to do it.

Rose explained it was stressful when she took her first position and there were few resources available to her. She stated, “Nothing. There was nothing. I mean, I had to come up with my whole [program].” Rose developed her program over time while at the same time experiencing the stress that comes with teaching very challenging students. She mentioned at times feeling like she wanted to pull her hair out and scream at the top of her lungs. Rose explained how she dealt with those feelings. She said:

Well I just go to the side and just kind of breathe through it and say that it'll be okay and then kind of come back again. I just take a deep breath, it's kind of just like a split second thought about that, and then it's like, okay, let's just redirect my thoughts.

Anne commented, “[Rose] is gonna have to learn to not get too stressed, not getting stressed out and not overdoing herself . . . taking care of her health.”

Rose explained how the classroom “followed” her home in the evenings and the toll it took on her own family:

My poor kids, [chuckles] I tell you. . . . [people] always tell me, “Oh God, I don’t know how you can be a special ed. teacher. I don’t know how you do it.” I say, “Well, by the time I go home, I have no more patience already and my poor kids.” I feel bad for them because at school you got to be so, like, calm and you got to have all this patience that by the time I get home, I just don’t have any. I’ve used it up. But you know I’m kind of working on that whole thing. I [have] to work on it a little more, like, take a deep breath, and say you know, I’m going home and it’s a whole different thing.

Anne added, “I always told people that [Rose] . . . went home and had her own little [class] with her children, but she did very well, I mean you know, going home and facing those [kids], it was like school all over.” Rose commented it was like her job never ended; it just switched places.

Kanani spoke about the pressures of paperwork, IEPs, parents, behavioral issues, and lack of time that all contribute to the stress a teacher copes with every day. Kanani had a unique suggestion for dealing with the stress that she found worked for her. She explained:

I go to the counselors on campus who service our children. Those are the behavior counselors. I’m very good friends with them. Even now if I have something I need to deal with I will have lunch with one of the counselors.

Kanani explained her need for counseling did not necessarily have to derive from an issue with or about one of her students:

No, it can be about my own personal problems. I built up a really good relationship with the counselors. We have wonderful counselors. We are friends basically, but I feel very comfortable. For example, just recently there was an incident that happened . . . that really impacted me. It just devastated me, to the point where I was thinking about it when driving to school and I was crying. . . . So, the first thing I did when I pulled in the parking lot [I saw] a counselor pulling in and I told her that I needed to talk to her and I needed some grief counseling. She said come on let's go talk and she just took me in, talked about it, worked through it, cried in her office and [I] was set for the day. . . . This is strictly something that I've done on my own. I don't think they would encourage us to do so because they're busy. . . . I trust this person and this person is my friend so I felt completely comfortable, [but] I'm not going to make friends with a counselor just for that reason.

Kanani had the following insight and advice for novice special education teachers dealing with stress:

For the first year I did not get a lot of sleep, because I was staying up so late. I know that it was not good for me health wise. And I think for a novice teacher, they need to understand that they can't do it all either. . . . [The way to] deal with the stress would be to find people who can help you. I guess the bottom line would be, you need to find people who can help you because you can't do it all alone.

Jen explained how difficult and stressful it had been for her during her first 2 years. Jen said:

In general, these last 2 years have been challenging. Of course my personal life has been changing throughout, and this last year has been the most challenging, [I] just [don't] know if I want to continue next year due to No Child Left Behind, our school going into restructuring, and really just no support.

Jen, like Makala, mentioned the stress of being nontenured. She, too, was concerned about her contract but found there was not enough time with her personal life and professional life to deal with it. She explained the best she could do was to “try to get to work and do a good job teaching, and that’s about it.” Jen also mentioned she felt “overwhelmed” by the continuing issues of trying to teach to general education standards, scheduling, educational assistants, and finding time for professional development. Jen explained she felt pressure from many sources including pressure from herself, administration, other teachers, and the community. Jen’s one constant approach to dealing with her stress was prayer.

Makala found the only way she could deal adequately with the constant stress of her job as a special educator was to see a therapist. She explained:

A lot of the support really [laughs] basically comes from, a therapist. I swear . . . it just happened this year. I was so stressed out. . . . I went to my doctor. Nobody knew what was wrong. They finally figured it out. It was stress. They wanted to give me medication to relax me. I didn’t want to. . . . They said if you’re not gonna take the medication you’re gonna kill yourself because your blood pressure’s too high. I said, “I don’t care, I can do it, I exercise and everything,”

and one of the requirements from my doctor . . . [was] that I talk to a psychotherapist who counsels educators and walks them through different breathing methods, how to let go of stress. So, that way I won't . . . kill myself. [laughs] To me, that helps, because if not, we're out there by ourselves. Nobody's gonna help us, you know, and we keep everything bottled up inside, and it's not good. I've learned that. It's not good ([laughs]).

Makala explained that this support was something she sought out on her own. It was not support provided by HIDOE. She commented:

Oh, yeah, strictly private. . . . So, part of the agreement was if I don't take the medication, then I have to go through counseling. But I sought this all out by myself. No, the [H]DOE did not help me. You know, I have another colleague in the same school who had taken off and she's on heavy medication because of the same kind of stress, but she's been teaching 15 years! . . . It's heavy duty stuff.  
[laughs]

Paula also spoke about the stress Makala struggled with during the first year that they taught together. Paula related:

I believe it was last year; she wasn't doing too good with the stress. There was a lot of things going on, to the point where she was just . . . on the verge of tears, just ready to just cry. I know sometimes when she's been stressed really bad, she's gotten really ill. . . . So, you know, I told her, if you have those days when you just have to call in sick, just do it! You know, just take a day off, or whatever. She's gotten ill. I think for her to make sense of things, or to feel better she's called me at home. We've sat, we've talked, we've gone out to dinner sometimes,

and she needs that sounding board. I'm there to help and listen, and that has helped her, I know. Every friend needs somebody to vent to, to get it out of their system. I would say, that's been key for her, venting, talking to a good friend, taking that one day off, having that alone time, seeing her own family. . . for the last 2 years, I would say, [Makala's] health was not that great. The stress level was very, very high, really high.

Carla at the time of her interview mentioned that it was probably a "nasty time" to be interviewing her. It had been a particularly "hectic week" and Carla in her words was feeling "overwhelmed." She said overall the "pressure" of constant "deadlines" was something that she did not like. She explained that at this time of year at her school "everyone is overwhelmed and overloaded, you see people just walking around with stress." Carla mentioned trying to get rest on weekends as a strategy for trying to deal with her stress. Nan explained that Carla deals with stress in other ways. She stated:

[Carla] walks every day; she goes for at least an hour walk at least 5 days a week.

She says she has to do that. She usually goes for a swim, I'd say 5 days a week, just get in the water, you know. I would say walking, and being outside and swimming are what keeps her going, clears her head. . . . [With] what she deals with every day at that school, I would say that she deals with her stress very well.

#### *Summary Intrapersonal Variables*

Three of the participants saw themselves as outgoing individuals, willing to ask questions and seek out support when necessary. These qualities appeared to work well for one teacher but seemed to work against two others who perceived themselves as being viewed by administrators at their school as difficult to work with. All mentioned their

love of teaching and seeing their students succeed as a primary motivator for remaining in special education. Three expressed that they had always wanted to become a teacher and achieving that goal had been a dream come true. All thought of themselves as a team player. One participant explained she was not outgoing at all and preferred to do things on her own. She did not want to make waves because she wanted to keep her job. She explained that her first year she co-taught with another teacher who was much more outspoken. She liked that arrangement because she had a voice through her co-teacher she otherwise wouldn't have had given her quiet personality. Her concern about losing her job was also mentioned by another participant who believed without tenure she needed to be careful about what she questioned and challenged at her school, although it was her nature to do so.

All participants commented on the stress they had to deal with as a novice special education teacher. All found their own unique ways of doing the best they could to cope with the feeling of being “overwhelmed” by their many responsibilities. None reported any support from HIDOE or pre-service preparation for dealing with job related stress. Techniques for handling the stress included such things as breathing exercises, extra rest on weekends, walking, swimming, seeing a student counselor at school on the side, hiring a therapist, and simply praying.

#### *Personal Factors: Personal Background*

Rose, Kanani, Makala, and Carla all worked for HIDOE in a variety of capacities in the years prior to completing their certificate program at the University of Hawaii and becoming licensed special education teachers with the state of Hawaii. All four believed

this experience was an advantage to them when they started their careers as special educators.

Rose had been a part-time teacher and an educational assistant prior to becoming a special education teacher. All of these positions were on the same island where she took her first job as a special educator. Rose said:

It was a unique situation, me coming in to the school system, because I already knew the schools. I could see if I went to somewhere else, I would be like a total wreck. I think not knowing anybody there or how to ask, because I'm such not the outgoing type of person where I could just go up and [ask someone] unless I really need the help.

Kanani had similar experience. She explained:

I worked in the schools for years in part-time positions. I knew all the routine kinds of things already, so I kind of had an advantage. . . . I knew the schools, I knew the kids, the population, the community. So, even though I was a new teacher, I wasn't a new teacher in some ways. I didn't have to learn the school culture. I already knew the school culture.

Justine explained that Kanani had worked in the schools prior to being hired as a special education teacher. Justine saw this prior experience and familiarity as a real advantage for Kanani. Kanani continued:

I taught as a part-time teacher where you did not need to be certified and I loved doing that. But what led me to the college of education was [I noticed] . . . there were a lot of Hawaiian children in special education classes. I am not an activist or maybe I am but that kind of bothered me and I thought wow I want to be

teaching them. . . . I loved being at the school, I might as well get paid more and get all the benefits if I'm going to be here. . . . I must say that it was looking at the Hawaiian kids, just the larger numbers that really was the deciding factor to go into special ed.

Makala worked as an educational assistant in a special education classroom and Carla as a substitute and part-time teacher for HIDOE but neither worked at the school in which they were later employed. Jen did not have prior teaching or work experience in the school system.

Makala was encouraged to pursue her degree and become a teacher by the special education teacher she worked with. Makala reported that she still has a supportive relationship with that teacher. Paula mentioned when Makala was an educational assistant: "Her supervisor made a comment to her saying, 'If you wanna change things, you need to go back to school and get your education' and that was a thing that just stuck in her. She went right back to school and . . . she's triple certified!"

#### *Summary Personal Background*

Four participants reported prior work experience in the school system. All four believed their previous experience gave them an advantage when they began teaching full time. They mentioned knowing the school system, the community, and in some cases their colleagues made their transition to teaching special education more manageable.

#### *Personal Factors: Family*

The importance of family as a support system for the participants in this study was evident in their comments (refer to Table 3). Many needed family support during the

time they were completing their pre-service program as well as during their first 3 years as novice special educators.

Rose's relative was a teacher and administrator in HIDOE for many years. Rose stated:

My auntie was a teacher for over 20 years. As I was growing up, I never really thought of myself as becoming a teacher. It wasn't until I went to college the first time [that] I really made up my mind to become a teacher. I think my auntie was pretty happy about that although she never really said anything to me about it. But I think, you know, she was happy that there was somebody in the family that was carrying on what she loved to do.

Rose acknowledged that her auntie had served as a model for her eventual decision to become a teacher. Rose stated:

Yeah, in some ways [she was a model] because like I said, when I was growing up I never really wanted to be a teacher. But you know, I saw her go to her class because she taught at the same school that I went to . . . for elementary. I would see her and things like that. So, it was in the back of mind the whole time.

Rose expressed how much she needed family support when she was going through her teacher preparation program at the University of Hawaii. She elaborated:

[During] the 2 years that I was going through the program I had my two kids. And yeah, it was quite a challenge for me, as well as my husband and my mom because you know, I needed baby sitters to take care of them during the week and when I went to school, trying to do all the homework and stuff. But it all worked out. I look back on it now and I just go, "How did I ever do that?" But I guess as

you're going through it, you know, you kind of just go with it. It kind of works out.

Anne commented:

I think when [Rose] finally started school, she needed a lot of family support because here she was with a young child, and going through the program, she had her second one, so she got a lot of support from initially her husband, who really took care of the children when she went to school on weekends.

Rose mentioned her husband always supported her. "No, he never lost faith. He always encouraged me. He was always there to support, yeah." She considered her mother and her husband to be her primary supporters. Rose explained that for all his support her husband did not understand the unique demands being a teacher and a mother placed upon her on a daily basis. Rose commented:

He doesn't get it. He doesn't understand it at all. And you know, I've tried to explain it to him. And I always tell him, "You know what, you go to work, you don't have any kids that you got to work with, and you work with adults all day. And then you come home and have your kids." And me, I work with kids all day long, then I come home [and] I have my kids to tend to. And when you have a day off, you have a day off. When I have a day off, I don't have a day off because on the weekend, I have the kids. But you know, I tell him that, but I don't think he gets it. So I keep telling him, you gotta come with me to work one day and then you'll see what I do and then maybe you'll understand what happens.

Rose credited her family for always being there in a quiet way to support her to become a teacher. Rose said, "Well for me, it was kind of a long journey. And they [the

family] . . . were just there encouraging me and I never really gave up on becoming a teacher. So they were pretty much there all the time." Rose explained, "If I needed them, I could always rely on them, but they never really like gave encouraging kind of things. I kind of just like did it myself."

Anne commented:

I know there were times in [Rose's] first year of teaching, she did tell me a few times or maybe more than a few times this is not for me. I'm not teaching anymore. I can't take this, it's too much work. But I said, "No, hang in there." I used to just tell her stay in special education . . . special education is really rewarding, 'cause you'll see a lot of growth in those children. . . . I think the support that I gave her was probably just counseling her, I think, giving her advice and recommendations when she was at a stage of being . . . frustrated at what was not happening at the school, the support that she was not receiving there. I guess that would be . . . just helping her along and just advising her along the way, you know, what you should do, what you should not do.

Kanani described a very similar family support system. She explained:

I needed the support because I still had children, and they were teenagers so I needed support to make sure that I would have time to be out of the house. I definitely needed to have my husband on board.

She also credited her mom and dad for being there to help out, too. Justine verified this support when she stated:

[It] would have been hard for [Kanani] to care for [her children] on her own, so her biggest support there at home was having her parents with her. Mom took care

of . . . the children when she wasn't there. Basically, they picked up the slack for her all the time. So, if she had meetings to go to, which the school had once a week, they're there to pick up the children [and] drop them off. They were there to do that for them.

Kanani's grandmother was a role model similar to Rose's auntie. Kanani said, "I think maybe grandmother [influenced me], because she would just talk about [teaching]. I know it was important to her and she was a good role model." Justine also mentioned, "Our grandmother was a teacher." Justine thought it was a "natural flow of things" that Kanani became a teacher.

Kanani stated that her family gave her two important things that enabled her to accomplish her goal of becoming a teacher. She explained:

[They] provided me with the time and the space. You know not hassling me, especially my husband. He recognized that it was something positive for me, and so he supported me by taking care of the house, taking care of the kids when I needed to be out of the home. That was every weekend for 3 years practically!

The family, the kids were really good about it.

Kanani also mentioned that her friends supported and encouraged her. She believed people saw the value in what she was trying to do even if they could not understand, "Why would anybody want to do that? But then they would say if anybody could do it would be you."

Kanani discussed two challenges that were difficult for her and her family during the time she was in school: "I guess the finances were somewhat of a challenge, but not too bad. I know it was hard on my husband." Kanani explained that if it was not for the

stipend support for the program she did not think she would have done it. “[The stipend] made it easier to make that decision.” Also, Kanani discussed the pressures making the commitment to the program placed on her marriage. She stated:

I think that it was stressful in [the] marriage, you know. Typically people go to college right out of high school and you know they’re not in a committed relationship at that moment. So, there’s less time. I had a family, a household; I was working and then having to fit this in on top so I was up late a lot. That was kind of hard on him because I would be up until 12:00 or 1:00 at night working on papers, or reading.

Kanani continued:

I guess it’s because I would spend so much time writing papers and doing assignments I really did not have a lot of time for a relationship. It made it hard because it did take time, and he also had the burden [of] having to take over a lot of house hold types of things.

Once Kanani started teaching, many of the same pressures she and her family experienced when Kanani was in her pre-service program were also present when she took her first teaching position. Kanani explained:

I know from my first year it was still again a lot of late nights because of lesson planning. I was kind of starting from scratch. So, I think that family members need to recognize that if you’re a new teacher, you need some time, some time to yourself.

Kanani tried to think of a way she could have prepared her family and husband to better understand the commitment that has to be made in order to become a teacher.

Kanani suggested a “family conference, [laughs] have a family conference prior to [the program] because it really is a commitment!” Kanani recalled the admission interview she went through conducted by the special education department. She mentioned in retrospect that maybe something was missing in that interview. She explained, “Let me backtrack a little bit. When I went to the interview, the interview was more about my personal commitment, it never really brought up anything about anybody else but me.” Kanani suggested they include something to do with the commitment those around her would have to make in order for her to be successful.

Jen was not influenced by her family to become a teacher and there were no members of her family who were teachers. She explained, “My parents supported me in anything that I wanted to do. And I always wanted to go into SPED from really, high school. So they supported me in that, my whole family and my husband.” Jen stated that her parents encouraged her and told her she would be a good teacher. They also provided her with financial support. Like Rose, Jen had a child during her pre-service program. Jen was going through pregnancy, trying to go to school, trying to meet all her obligations as a mother, wife, and student. Jen stated, “I just did it [took] my mom’s best advice: You just do it. I did, I just did it, I don’t know how but we just did it.” Jen explained that her husband provided support. She said, “Yes, he was so much help; he was very supportive and gave great ideas.”

Jen stated that she needed to learn how to leave her job at school. Like Rose and Kanani, it was difficult for her husband to understand her situation as teacher and mother. She explained:

I think it's huge; I've got to learn to [have] less stress at work, to not bring it home. But that's just a personal thing that I need to have a transitional period from school to home. Especially being a teacher and working with children all day. You then go home [to your own kids]. So sometimes I have a hard time transitioning to that. I think about getting another job . . . I do feel that I wish my husband would understand what we do. When [I] try to explain that I can't just be out sick—I have to write a four-page lesson plan, so [we need] more . . . understanding. . . . Our job is just more special.

Makala also had the support of her mother, siblings, and husband. She had children at home who needed to be supervised while she was going through her pre-service program and then her novice teaching years. Three of her siblings were teachers. Her husband as mentioned by others previously was supportive but did not always understand the unique pressures of her job and how they affected her life at home. He was supportive of her in her efforts to get the help she needed in order to achieve better balance in her life and the skills to deal with the stress of her job. Paula confirmed the support Makala received from her family. Paula stated:

I know she has a sister that's a teacher, and she's bounced ideas off from her as well, her sisters have given her advice. They've told her when she's getting maybe a bit stressed, come back home. . . . Hawaiian people, we have that belief [if] you start to feel like you're disconnected, you go back home to recharge your energy, you know, that battery and that's what she's done. . . . I remember she mentioned this to me one time. She said that she can't vent too much to her husband, because her husband's personality is the type where, okay if you're not

happy then quit, cause sometimes men are like that . . . she's trying to teach her husband that sometimes when I say something and I'm upset, it doesn't mean that I want to quit, it just means I need to vent. So I remember her telling me that's why I have you [Paula], so that I can vent to you. So I'm like, that's okay, just call me when you need me.

Paula continued:

I've only heard her say good things about her dad and her mom. Her mom is really supportive of her. You know, whatever she needs, or whatever it may be. I don't recall her talking that much about education with her mom, but I know she's said that her mom has helped in the [HI]DOE trying to help in her community.

Carla did not have the advantage of having parents or extended family on her island. She was a long-term resident, however, and had a network of friends she was close to in the community that she had developed over the years. She had one particular friend she had known for many years who was like family to her. Carla felt included as a family member with her friend's extended family on the island. Carla was a single mother of a grown child. Her sister was a teacher but she lived on the mainland. Carla found support in her "adopted" family on island.

Nan explained how much she and her family thought of Carla. She said, "As far as getting support from people like my family, she got nothing but support." She mentioned friends in the community who provided inexpensive housing for Carla while she was completing her pre-service program. Their support continued when Carla became a teacher. Nan related that, much like Paula's relationship with Makala, "[Carla] can call and complain to me all she wants . . . I'm a sounding board [for her]."

### *Summary of Family*

Family support was very important to all participants in this study. Because many had children, they explained the support of parents and husbands was essential in order for them to have completed their pre-service program and meet their responsibilities as novice special education teachers. Four of the five had husbands who had been supportive of their pre-service work and their early teaching careers. All four discussed the pressures their profession placed on their husbands and families. All were trying to do a better job of managing stress and responsibilities so that they could have a more contented home life after school hours. The fifth participant, who was not married, reported very close relationships with friends who had become like family to her and provided her with the support often associated with strong family relations.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to enhance understanding of the professional and personal factors that affect novice special educators' intentions to remain in the field of special education. Retention of special education teachers is a high priority for school districts throughout the United States. The state of Hawaii is no exception. Recruiting, educating, and retaining highly qualified special education teachers in Hawaii has been a priority of the University of Hawaii's College of Education and the Hawaii Department of Education for many years. This need is even more pronounced on the state's neighbor islands that include Hawaii (aka Big Island), Kauai, Lanai, Maui, and Molokai (Di et al., 2007).

The participants' words in this study provided the opportunity for greater understanding of the unique and challenging circumstances experienced by these novice special education teachers as they prepared for and then began their initial employment as special educators on Hawaii's neighbor islands. This study adds to the literature on retention and attrition issues for special educators in Hawaii and the nation. What we learn from their experiences may reinforce what we already know as well as provide us with informative insights into promising new ways to support and retain special education teachers.

This study enhances understanding of novice special educators' struggles and triumphs as they negotiated their first 3 years of teaching special needs students. The

participants provided clarity and focus on areas unique to their experience and thereby provided insightful recognition of issues that need to be addressed by local school administrators, district and state personnel, and university officials. The study revealed the strong commitment each of the participants demonstrated to their students' success. This success was the "reward" that kept them going and provided the motivation to improve their skills through further education, professional development, and experience. The presence of support factors, or protective factors in the words of resiliency theory (Krovetz, 1999), was an important element in the satisfaction that these teachers expressed about their jobs and their intention to remain in the profession.

The study was designed to enable novice special educators to reflect upon and explain in their own words their experiences as new teachers with HIDOE. The professional and personal factors that affected their views were filtered through the lens of resiliency theory. The research questions of this study focused on two areas: (a) professional factors that included community, institutional support, and pre-service preparation, and (b) personal factors that included intrapersonal characteristics, personal background, and family. Participants' experiences, insights, beliefs, and perceptions guided this research and contributed to the emergent themes reflected in the most salient issues of this study.

### Discussion

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). They listed areas such as resources and materials, behavior management,

parents, teaching environment, emotional support, students, information, individualizing instruction, inclusion, collaboration and consultation with general education teachers and service providers, paperwork, knowledge of general education curriculum, and time management (Gehrke & Murri, 2006). The level of support from building and district administrators was another issue commonly reported in the literature (Brownell et al., 1997; Gersten et al., 2001). Excessive paperwork, caseloads, and multiple roles special education teachers must play in the workplace were also cited as sources of dissatisfaction and frustration (Billingsley, 2004; Westling & Whitten, 1996). Special education teachers in this 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.

The study findings indicate that a number of professional and personal factors affect job satisfaction and retention issues for novice special educators on Hawaii's neighbor islands. The importance of these factors is reflected in the themes that emerged from the data and revealed the issues expressed by the participants in this study. These factors might best be considered using Henderson and Milstein's (2003) model of resiliency-building capacity for educators presented earlier (refer to Figure 1). Their model, at its core, provided six themes that have consistently emerged from resiliency research "showing how schools as well as families and communities can provide both the environmental protective factors and the conditions that foster individual protective factors" (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 11). The six themes included:

1. Provide caring and support,
2. Set and communicate high expectations,

3. Set clear consistent boundaries,
4. Increase bonding,
5. Provide opportunities for meaningful participation, and
6. Teach life skills.

These themes are used to guide discussion of the information shared by the participants in this study.

*Provide Caring and Support*

Teachers often receive their most important reward, the satisfaction they feel from doing something meaningful for others, intrinsically and without fanfare. Henderson and Milstein (2003) cautioned, however, against administrators and colleagues assuming that novice teachers know they are doing a good job: “They need to get feedback, from supervisors and peers, that communicates that they are doing their jobs well—or they may interpret the silence as an indicator of failure” (p. 42).

Supervisors and peers are part of a teacher’s community. Krovetz (1999), in his resiliency research, defined a teacher’s community as administrators, fellow educators, staff, students, and students’ parents. Each of these groups, discussed at length by the participants in this study, was an important element that contributed to the job satisfaction or dissatisfaction of these novice teachers.

Support and caring, two key concepts in the resiliency literature, are even more critical for novice special education teachers when considering that the largest number of HIDOE vacancies occur in the area of special education (NCTAF: Hawaii Policy Group, 2001). The report issued by the NCTAF: Hawaii Policy Group (2001) cautioned, “Reforms such as student and teacher performance standards cannot succeed if teachers

are not supported with necessary resources-training, materials, and environments that encourage good teaching" (p. 7).

#### *Administration/Support*

*Overall administrative support.* The study findings indicate a discrepancy between the five primary participants and satisfactory, supportive experiences with their schools' administrations. Two participants were pleased with the support they received from their administrators; however, for one of these participants, this satisfaction lasted only during her first year of teaching. Both acknowledged their administrators were always available and had an "open door" policy. They believed they were recognized as important members of the school community. Examples were given of instances when administrators recognized their work and praised their efforts. One of these participants spoke of ways her administrator encouraged her to take leadership roles in the school and community, helped her to expand connections with colleagues and staff, and provided feedback that was clear and meaningful. The second participant, unable for staffing reasons to return to the school where she had experienced initial support, did not find the support from administration she needed at her second school. Consequently, the participant who remained in her school during the first 3 years of teaching special education viewed the relationship she attained with administration positively in her decision to continue as a special education teacher whereas, because her move to a second school had not gone well, the other participant was giving serious consideration to leaving the field of special education.

Including the participant spoken of above who transferred from a school where she felt administrative support to a new school where she felt little if any, four of the five

participants in this study did not believe their administrators were a source of support. These participants described minimal examples of recognition, appreciation, and open communication with their administrators. Three could think of little or no direct recognition they had received from administrators during their first years as special educators. Some described administrators as hard to read and, in one case, a participant preferred if possible to avoid administrators. Lack of support from administration was a recurring theme for some of these participants. One participant, reporting minimal contact with her administrator, believed the cause was how busy her administrator was always.

The experiences summarized above of the five novice teacher participants are consistent with literature outlining supportive administrative practices. Research studies have reported on the central role principals play in shaping how, and how well, schools accomplish their mission of providing quality education for students and supportive working conditions for teachers (Murphy, 2002). 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 viewed as essential.

*Observation and feedback.* All five participants discussed ways in which they were observed by their administrators and given feedback on their teaching. Several participants explained the difference between a general observation by their administrator and the Professional Evaluation Program for Teachers observations they were required to do as probationary faculty, meaning they did not have tenure. General observations, explained by the participants, were rare and not viewed as supportive or useful. In two cases they occurred one to three times per year, or not at all as in the case of two others. Another participant explained she might get a least a "walk through" once a month.

The PEP-T was explained as a more formal procedure in which a probationary teacher wrote a lesson plan and conducted the lesson while being observed by a principal or vice principal. All participants remembered to various degrees participating in a PEP-T evaluation as a probationary teacher. Four of five participants did not recall the experience as a useful support during their first years in classroom practice. Only one

participant expressed belief that the PEP-T observation and follow-up conference were helpful, and hoped this type of observation and interaction would continue regularly even after she was tenured. She explained that tenured teachers were not observed on a yearly basis, but rather they were observed on a rotating basis determined by their social security number every 5 years. One participant admitted observations made her “uncomfortable” and, whenever administrators came around, she worried that she had done something wrong. She expressed belief that if administrators came around more often it could be a positive thing for her and her students, and could ease the “uncomfortable” feeling she did not enjoy. Three participants stated either they had not had any observations in the current year, or if they had, the observations were very brief, a few minutes at best, with no follow up at all. One participant explained the only time her administrator came to her room was for IEP meetings. Two participants did not have PEP-T observations and follow-up conferences; instead, they turned in “the paperwork” but never heard anything back. Another participant, who had the PEP-T evaluation, did not view it as helpful or meaningful to her.

These findings are particularly interesting given the explanation of the PEP-T process by Hamamoto, Superintendent of Schools, in the PEP-T manual:

The Professional Evaluation Program for Teachers (PEP-T) is the Department's means to effectively assess teacher performance and to assure the public that students in the public schools are served by professionals who meet state teacher standards. The PEP-T is an essential component in the Department's overall accountability system which focuses and commits all staff to the goal of improving student learning and success . . . I ask that you implement the PEP-T in

the spirit of accountability and a professionalism that is best characterized by a teacher's unrelenting commitment to continuous improvement of every student's achievement. (*Professional Evaluation Program for Teachers*, 2005, p. i)

The high expectations evident in this statement are worthy of a better effort by some administrators who fall short of its intent as expressed by many participants in this study.

*Student behavior.* 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 not just her but to her colleagues as well. Another participant simply stated she had given up trying to communicate with her administrator on the issue of student behavior; when behavior cases arose, she did whatever she believed she had to do without going to her administrator.

#### *Colleagues/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 a difference she observed between veteran special education teachers at her school and novice special education teachers. She believed 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 had 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 rift 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.

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. This participant did not believe she was adequately supported by her administration in this regard or prepared by her pre-service program for this role; indeed, she felt discouraged and frustrated to be placed in a supervisory position without administrative support.

Participants reported on the strengths and weaknesses of the support and professional relationships they had with colleagues, staff, and support personnel. While some of these relationships bode well for the future of our schools, others fall short of the high professional standards that should be present in the school environment. The *2005-2008 DOE Strategic Plan* (HIDOE, 2005a) addressed the need for all students and *staff* to “exemplify the General Learner Outcomes” (p. 18). It is the intent of the strategic plan that all individuals in the schools meet these GLOs by 2015. The implication is that if all members of the school community work with these goals in mind that many of the frustrations expressed by participants previously could be ameliorated. The six GLOs include: (a) self-directed learner, (b) community contributor, (c) complex thinker, (d) quality producer, (e) effective communicator, and (f) effective and ethical user of technology (“Hawaii Content and Performance Standards III,” n.d.; HIDOE, n.d.). Given the important role education serves in the state and the urgency to improve its quality, expressed by many, the importance of implementing these GLOs cannot be underestimated if the school system hopes to retain teachers; specifically, novice special education teachers.

### *Parents/Support*

This study indicates that the five participants, generally, believed they were supported to some level by the parents of their students. Each gave examples of supportive interactions they had with parents. One participant expressed her relationships with parents were highly supportive and a source of satisfaction to her. Others described parental support as adequate, or in some cases disinterested and uninvolved. Only one participant gave an example of inappropriate behavior that she felt was abusive. This example pointed out the fine line teachers walk each day between their own professional belief about what is right for a student and the rights of parents to be the final arbiter of their child's education.

The *2005-2008 DOE Strategic Plan* (HIDOE, 2005a) addressed the need to educate and involve parents in standards based education. The plan encouraged parent assistance in helping students meet standards and increasing the involvement of parents with their child's school through "parent/community conferences, forums, meetings, and/or workshops on standards based education" (HIDOE, 2005a, p. 6). The challenges of achieving these goals are evident in the comments of participants in this study as they relate to the sometimes demanding or, on the other hand, disinterested attitudes of parents. Given these challenges, family-centered practices that encourage family input and respect family perspectives may be an important factor in achieving positive outcomes for students (Friend & Bursuck, 2006).

### *Resources/Support*

Four of the five participants reported inadequate to nonexistent resources in the classes they were assigned to teach as novice special educators. This lack of support was

frustrating for these novice teachers. It is interesting to note three participants reported in the telephone survey (refer to Table 2) they “agreed” they had the resources to be successful when later interview comments did not bear this out. This discrepancy may be explained by the fact that when interviewed they were thinking of their current situation 3 years into their careers and not their first year in the classroom. It could also have to do with the general nature of the questions over the phone in contrast to the serious reflection given to these topics in the interviews.

Four participants reported there were no resources or minimal resources in their classrooms and that they created much of their own curriculum during their first year teaching special education. One participant explained she had inherited a room from a teacher who left and took most of the materials with her because she had purchased them with her own money and needed them in her new position. She believed this inequity in resources her first year had an adverse affect on her students’ learning and consequently her perception of how successful she was with her students. Another participant explained that being the “new” teacher in the department, she was given the “left over lines” after the current teachers had scheduled their classes. So, she found herself with three classes to teach and little or nothing as far as resources with which to teach them. Naturally, there was a certain amount of pressure and stress associated with starting a school year off as a novice teacher and having to scramble for materials to even get started. All wanted more support from HIDOE but short of that they simply used their own personal funds to cover costs to set up their classrooms. One teacher reported that her classroom had all the necessary resources, materials, and supplies for her to teach effectively. Unfortunately, that was not the case with the other four participants.

Novice teachers, in this study, reported they were often faced with inadequate or nonexistent materials as they began their first year in the classroom on Hawaii's neighbor islands. This unacceptable reality was briefly addressed in the *2005-2008 DOE Strategic Plan* (HIDOE, 2005a) that stated by 2015 all employees will have "the basic tools and training to do their job effectively" (p. 21). The factors of time and urgency compel us to move as quickly as possible to eliminate such inequities in the system that directly affects student opportunities and outcomes. If special education teachers had been given the "tools and training" necessary to do their job effectively, perhaps the Felix case and subsequent Felix Consent Decree that cost Hawaii "more than a billion dollars" could have been avoided ("Felix Consent Decree," 1994; Ramanathan, 2003).

The importance of resource support for novice teachers is well documented. School administrators need to ensure that new teachers are given the tools and resources necessary to do their job (Billingsley, 2005; Brock & Grady, 1997; Jensen, 1987; Johnson, 2004). Schools should provide sufficient supplies, equipment, and resources so that novice teachers "can do their job without having to forage for basic resources or fund them from their own pocket" (Johnson, 2004, p. 91).

#### *Induction/Support*

All participants reported that they received minimal to no induction support as new teachers at their schools. One participant explained this had changed recently at her school and now new teachers were meeting with administration at the beginning of the year to go over "routine procedures." Another participant described any induction she received as being "vague" and that it left her feeling like she was really on her own to figure it out.

The NCTAF: Hawaii Policy Group (2001) reported:

Despite the fact that within three years after being hired, over half of Hawaii's new teachers, primarily "new hires from the mainland," leave the public school system, Hawaii, unlike most of her NCTAF partner states, has no formal induction or mentoring program to support and assist new teachers. (p. 14)

The *2005-2008 DOE Strategic Plan* (HDOE, 2005a) appeared to address the same issue years later when they stated that by 2015 HDOE will, "Expand professional development to include induction, mentorships, apprenticeships, internships, coaching, etc." (p. 21). The importance of high-quality induction programs is evident in the following statement by Johnson (2007):

A carefully tailored, comprehensive induction program is essential if new teachers are to teach their classes successfully, work interdependently with their colleagues, and meet a shared commitment to school wide learning. Without school-based induction, how would new teachers know what the school expects of them and how they can best do their jobs? (p. 194).

#### *Salary/Support*

Salary was an issue for all five primary participants but not a determining factor for most as to whether or not they would continue in the field of special education. Four of the participants said it did not matter as long as the job was manageable and they were satisfied with their work. Although not motivated by salary, all indicated that it would be much easier for their families if teacher salaries were higher. One participant was emphatic that a higher salary was very important to her and was a factor in her ability to remain a special education teacher. It should be noted that each of the four participants

who downplayed the importance of salary in their teaching career had a husband who was also working and contributing to the family finances. The one teacher who expressed the most dissatisfaction with her salary had concerns about her ability to make ends meet in Hawaii. She was single and her teaching position was her only source of income. Although salary is often marginalized in discussions about why teachers teach, it should not be discounted. Salary can become a “disincentive or barrier for those who otherwise might be attracted to teaching. The costs of entering and remaining in teaching are quite high and often discouraging” (Johnson, 2004, p. 50).

#### *Family/Support*

Family support was an important factor mentioned by participants in this study. Of the five primary participants, four had husbands, parents, and extended family living on the island where they taught. All discussed the importance of family support as they went through their pre-service preparation program at UHM and their first 3 years as novice special educators.

Four participants credited parents and husbands to varying degrees for providing the support they needed as pre-service students and then as novice teachers. They explained, having children, they could not have made the commitment to teaching without family support. Some hoped their husbands would be able to better understand in the future how the unique aspects of their jobs coupled with their responsibilities for their own families when they came home from school could be overwhelming at times, and placed stress on relationships with their own children. One participant appreciated her family for giving her the time and space she absolutely had to have in order to complete her pre-service program and later to meet the responsibilities of her new teaching job; she

also shared that the path to becoming a teacher had been difficult on her marriage both financially and personally.

“The family is . . . a complex and interactive social system in which all members’ needs and experiences affect the others” (Friend & Cook, 2007, p. 335). When one family member “readjusts” their role, as in the case of the participants in this study who became special education teachers, then others in the family may experience confusion and stress as a result (Friend & Cook, 2007). Support at home for novice special education teachers may well be as important as it is at school.

#### *Set and Communicate High Expectations*

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. Novice teachers look to their principals for guidance and expectations (Johnson, 2004). Brock and Grady (1997) reported the following expectations held by principals for new teachers: “(a) a professional attitude, (b) adequate knowledge of subject areas, (c) good classroom management, and (d) effective communication skills” (p. 25). The experiences of the primary participants in this study indicate that these types of expectations or any others were not often provided to the novice teachers.

One participant could not recall any time when she had been told specifically what was expected of her as a teacher and colleague at her school. Two other participants stated they had an initial interview that was very general with their administrators. They discussed in one case what the participant “might” be teaching. Ultimately, both participants felt their meetings indicated, “You’re hired and on your own.” One

participant related she was given a handbook and attended a meeting for the whole school wherein school goals were reviewed, the school motto recited, and the importance of meeting “standards” discussed; nothing was ever addressed to her personally or specifically about her responsibilities or teaching assignment. Another participant, echoing a similar theme, stated expectations were never expressed to her verbally or in writing; she believed she received more “correction than an expectation” as she found out for herself what she needed to do.

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). The comments of participants in this study reflect the desire to be told expectations and given the individual supports to meet them.

#### *Set Clear, Consistent Boundaries*

Noonan (1999) discussed the importance of clear and consistent boundaries as another protective factor that supported resilience in individuals. Administrators who provide clear and consistent boundaries for their teachers and staff may find that those working under their leadership are more satisfied with their jobs and better able to thrive in the workplace. “They (administrators) organize time and space so that teachers are well connected with regular opportunities to exchange ideas and information” (Johnson, 2004, p. 91).

Participants in this study explained that there were minimal expectations presented to them as first-year teachers by their administrators. Three of the participants had particular concerns with the way in which their administrators dealt with personnel

issues that directly affected their ability to do their jobs to the high level they expected of themselves. One participant believed that her administrator did not set clear boundaries for school personnel and was frustrated by the refusal of a colleague to coordinate student observations with her; two others, equally frustrated by the lack of clear policies and boundaries set by their administrators, described themselves as persons who asked a lot of questions. These two participants were unhappy with the inability of their administrators to provide guidance and spell out exactly the schools' policies and how they should proceed when faced with specific issues. Two participants did not express dissatisfaction with the way in which their administrators set boundaries. One saw her administrator as very strong and authoritarian, however, and she admitted being intimidated by her administrator because she did not see herself as an assertive person; she felt her administrator was unapproachable. The other participant believed her administrator was a strong leader who had the respect of the teachers at her school.

On both the issues of "high expectations" and "setting clear and consistent boundaries," leadership skills among some of the participants' administrators were found to be lacking. These leadership skills have been reported in the literature as being very important to the success of novice teachers (Brock & Grady, 1997; Johnson, 2004; Murphy, 2002). This skill gap was addressed in the NCTAF: Hawaii Policy Group (2001) report, which recommended that HIDOE "provide school-level administrators with in-service training in leadership development and other professional development knowledge and skills to lead standards-based schools and to support the professional growth, development and empowerment of teachers" (p. 31). The experiences of the participants in this study suggest that continued leadership preparation be conducted with

school administrators. The *2005-2008 DOE Strategic Plan* (HIDOE, 2005a) discussed the role of the school administrator as instructional leader in standards-based education and proposed to support and train administrators through “such avenues as Pathways to Leadership and the Hawaii Principals Academy” (p. 19). The results of this study indicate additional skills training is warranted for working specifically with novice special education teachers.

#### *Increase Bonding*

Four of the five participants in this study expressed some sense of feeling isolated as novice special education teachers. All participants reported positive supportive experiences with fellow special educators at their schools, and also mixed experiences with their general education colleagues.

#### *Teaming*

Two participants maintained generally good working relationships with both special education and general education teachers at their schools, explaining their familiarity with the teachers and staff at schools in their communities because of previous employment with HIDOE was a big advantage to them. Two participants indicated that there were occasional professional riffs between them and general education teachers over working with students with special needs; one of these participants commenting that, as colleagues, they never really had the time to discuss and work through many of these differences. Three participants explained they felt “displaced” from the general education teachers at their schools because of lack of support, minimal contact, and lack of cooperation between general education and special education teachers.

Lunch was a common theme mentioned most often as the time when special education and general education teachers interacted. One participant stated her administrator recommended that she eat lunch with her colleagues in order to build relationships with them, while another explained her administrator “required” it. Both followed their administrators’ advice and reported this subsequent interaction helped them to build relationships. Another participant reported eating lunch with general education colleagues but she did not see it as useful in building stronger relationships with them.

The study participants reported teaming with general education teachers at faculty meetings as another way of attempting to build relationships among teachers. Most did not find this helpful, however; rather, they believed their time could have been spent more productively with fellow special educators rather than being placed with a group of general education teachers who were discussing problems unique to their grades and not related to them. One participant found the mixed groupings “somewhat useful” at times, but explained there was not a lot of teaming done because they did not have the time. This participant mentioned that her school was looking at collaboration models to improve communication among teachers and departments in the future.

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). The teaming and collaboration experienced by the participants in this study fell short of these benchmarks. All five participants in this study would welcome greater opportunities for true collaboration.

### *Mentoring*

An array of experiences with mentoring opportunities, reported by participants in this study, is evident. Two participants explained that a mentoring program was offered to them but they turned it down, stating they were contacted initially by e-mail and asked if they wanted to participate and, later, a person came by their rooms and they met briefly. Both said they never knew these persons’ professional backgrounds, and had no further contact; both also explained they knew very little about how the mentoring program worked even after receiving the e-mail and meeting with the individual in their classroom. Another participant, characterizing herself as someone who sought out support wherever she could find it, reported being contacted about a mentoring program by e-mail, accepting the offer, and believing the resultant mentoring had been helpful to her, even though her mentor was not a special education teacher and that she and her mentor were only able to meet for a short time during lunch breaks for debriefings. This participant also shared that her school had started an in-house mentoring program during her first teaching year, which she did not participate in, because none of the special education teachers had volunteered to be mentors in that program. This participant thought that the mentoring program at her school needed to address the fact that they had

no special education expertise, no time set aside to meet, and no formal guidelines to give continuity to the program; all of these factors, she felt, needed to be present if the mentoring program was to be effective for novice special education teachers. Two other participants, reportedly wanting and asking for mentoring support, never received it; these participants stated mentoring support was not offered to them. One of these participants felt isolated and on her own as a result, whereas the other participant accepted the reality but never understood why she was not offered a mentor.

One interesting theme that emerged from the interviews was the participants' close and continued relationships with the mentor teachers who had been assigned to them when they did their special education student teaching. Four of the five participants reported that they still conferred with their former student teaching mentors. Three still worked closely with them unofficially and on a regular basis. Participants included these former mentors as very important people in their support system as novice teachers.

Mentoring offers the possibility of a highly supportive relationship for novice special education teachers; it potentially offers a chance for a novice teacher to bond with an experienced colleague who could help the novice teacher navigate the first years of teaching. "Mentoring supports the teacher through the first years of teaching. Mentors have been described as guides, models, listeners, observers, and sources of practical suggestions . . . teachers perceive mentors as confidants and consultants who give suggestions . . . and offer moral support" (Billingsley, 2005, p. 79). Rowley (1999) emphasized the importance of having experienced special educators with the same population of students at a similar school level to serve as mentors for novice special education teachers. Mentoring was recognized as an important goal in the 2005-2008

*DOE Strategic Plan* (HIDOE, 2005a). It should be emphasized that implementation of a mentoring program should be based on the literature, which clearly spells out guidelines for effective mentoring programs, and not thrown together as a quick-fix “buddy” system (Billingsley, 2005).

#### *Collegiality*

Participants believed that working effectively with staff members at their schools was an important function of their jobs. All reported having to work with educational assistants, specialists, and support personnel. Their ability to work effectively and build positive relationships with these co-workers was seen as important.

Three participants explained they thought it would be useful to be prepared in their pre-service program to work more effectively with staff. One participant did not recall any emphasis in this area. Another participant spoke of some examples of preparation for working with staff in the UHM program, but she expressed her doubts about its effectiveness. She believed that, short of personal experience, a course could not really be effective in this area. One participant, who had very difficult relations with educational assistants, shared she did not feel prepared or experienced enough to deal with the situation in which she found herself. She would have welcomed more preparation during her pre-service program in how to work effectively with educational assistants. All five participants indicated to some level that they saw a need for more preparation in working with staff and attaining better understanding regarding how to build positive working relationships as key aspects of working collaboratively (Friend & Cook, 2007).

### *Provide Opportunities for Meaningful Participation*

Meetings held regularly that include faculty and or staff could be a vehicle to provide opportunities for meaningful participation for all involved. When planning meetings “principals should coordinate the efforts of all personnel and provide a strong united program” (Brock & Grady, 1997, p. 40). Participants in this study shared their thoughts about the effectiveness of meetings they were required to attend at their schools.

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 in this study explained that most of the meetings they were required to attend were a “waste of time” and did not “have anything to do with us [special education teachers] most of the time.” This was a source of frustration for all participants as novice special education teachers. 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 by special education department meetings and the inability of teachers, in her opinion, to discuss matters of importance to the education of their students. Rather, in her view, meetings were dominated by talk to how many IEPs had been completed and other such administrative tasks. This participant further explained, “[We] never discuss [the] kids. We never discuss what we’re teaching.” She hoped progress could be made in this regard to improve services to students and make faculty believe their input during meetings was important and meaningful.

Two participants reported their administrators as 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. This latter participant also attended a nontenured teachers' meeting conducted by HIDOE in order to gather helpful information important to novice teachers, and reported she came away from the meeting confused and insulted, explaining she had been made to feel as a new teacher "small" and as if "[we] were nothing." Rather than feeling empowered and supported as a novice teacher, this participant believed the opposite had taken place in this meeting.

### *Teach Life Skills*

#### *Professional Development*

One of the primary considerations of teaching life skills as it pertains to educators and resilience is the concept of providing meaningful professional development in an ever-changing professional landscape where new skills and techniques are constantly required (Billingsley, 2005). One clear measurement of success in this area would simply be if professional development and support services provided by school administrators and district officials were meeting the expressed needs of teachers.

All participants explained there were not many opportunities for professional development activities in special education that they were aware of as teachers with HIDOE. Some mentioned that pamphlets for professional development programs were placed on the counters in the office for interested teachers to pick up. One participant gave an example of professional development training that took place prior to the introduction of a new reading program at her school. She found this training to be very useful and she wished there were more of these opportunities, especially for novice teachers. She cited the lack of coordination between general education departments and special education

departments as a contributing factor that explained why she was sometimes not notified about professional development activities. Another participant said she approached administrators at her school about receiving professional development learning opportunities on specific topics but there was never any interest by administration. This participant also explained how difficult it was to take days for professional development due to the fact she had to arrange for a substitute teacher and also to prepare lesson plans for those days. She discussed how difficult it was to travel for professional development opportunities, explaining because she had children and responsibilities at home it was difficult to fly to another island and be away from home in order to attend workshops. She wished her school or the schools on her island could together sponsor more professional development opportunities relevant to the needs of teachers and easier for teachers to attend.

Improvements have been made in providing time and organizational changes that have allowed schools to implement community based management and flexibility in scheduling. The concept of school-community based management (SCBM) has allowed schools to use their inter-sessions for school-wide professional development (NCTAF: Hawaii Policy Group, 2001). The issue may now be to take advantage of these changes and improve the quality, relevance, and accessibility of professional development as expressed by the participants in this study. High quality professional development improves teaching by providing collaborative and ongoing opportunities for professional growth and renewal (Billingsley, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 1997).

### *Stress Management*

Another important area of concern for special education teachers was stress management. Over the course of their first 3 years as special education teachers all participants reported dealing with stress to various degrees. None of the participants related having been trained in how to deal with stress that is a part of every teacher's job and even more so for special educators some would argue. Neither their pre-service preparation program nor their employer, HIDOE, provided any support for dealing with the stress they found inherent in their teaching positions. Stress is an important topic that needs to be addressed directly with novice teachers by emphasizing health maintenance, leisure time, relaxation, social activities, exercise, adequate rest, and a life outside of school as ways of managing stress and promoting wellness (Brock & Grady, 1997; Jensen, 1987).

Four participants explained the stress they felt the first years they taught was caused in part by the lack of materials and curriculum in their classrooms. Stress was also caused by an acute lack of time to do all their work, which was the reason they took so much work home with them during their first 2 years as a teachers. In addition, they faced the stress of very challenging students and student behaviors each day.

When one participant became overly stressed, she would go to the side of the classroom, breathe through it, and redirect her thoughts. She revealed, however, that she would many times take this stress home with her and, as a result, she did not have the same patience with her own children that she displayed at school as a professional. She was concerned and vowed to address this issue and do a better job of leaving school stress at school for her children's sake. Another participant used prayer to deal with the

stress she experienced with her job. She listed teaching general education standards to special needs students, scheduling, working with educational assistants, and trying to find time for professional development as primary stressors in her professional life. She mentioned at one point that all of this pressure was making her consider whether she would return to teach the next year. Another participant said at one point during an interview that it was probably a bad time to be interviewing her because she was feeling overwhelmed at school with the constant pressure of deadlines that never ended. She described everyone at the end of the year as “overwhelmed and overloaded and just walking around with stress.” The one thing she said she tried to do to offset the stress was to try and get enough rest on the weekends to get the energy to make it through the next week. The two other participants found help with counseling. One met with a counselor at her school rather than take her stress home with her, explaining this was not official school policy but rather a makeshift solution she used in her own particular situation; the other explained candidly she went to a therapist on her own initiative and not part of a HIDOE program to deal with the stress she experienced as a novice special education teacher, and credited her therapist for giving her the insight and skills to deal more effectively with stress and bring some balance into her professional life.

#### Implications and Recommendations

This study has important implications for the retention of novice special education teachers and the implementation of policies, programs, and guidelines that address issues that were raised in this report. Participants spoke extensively about their own experiences as novice special educators on Hawaii’s neighbor islands and how these experiences had affected their ability to do their jobs and their attitudes about remaining in the field of

special education. The participants' voices serve to notify all who have a stake in the well being of Hawaii's youth that they need to pay attention to the information these participants provided and the implications of this information for the future success of Hawaii's public school system and the education of students with special needs.

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. Kanani was consistently more satisfied with her teaching position and school than the other participants in this study. A closer look at the data indicates that the relationship of Kanani and her administrator was one of mutual respect and open communication. Her administrator was always available to her (however briefly), encouraged and directed Kanani to become a leader at the school, recognized Kanani's accomplishments verbally, and thanked her and other staff members regularly for their contributions to the school. Kanani did not believe her administrator was without flaws but she felt she could talk honestly and openly with her administrator and present other points of view without fear of negative consequences or bad feelings.

The data suggest the least satisfied teachers, Jen and Makala, 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 did not take the time to listen to and encourage these novice special education teachers. 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. They were perceived as not supporting their teachers when requested to so.

Rose and Carla expressed respect for their administrators but were not recognized by their administrators in any important way. Rose was intimidated by her administrators and tried to avoid them as much as possible. Carla stated she really liked her principal but, because the principal was so busy, there was no time to really connect with the principal on a meaningful level. Carla stated she understood and accepted this situation.

HDOE should better prepare its administrators to address the concerns expressed by the special education teachers in this study. One administrator described by a primary participant in this study clearly performed in a manner that was conducive to building trust and establishing a supportive relationship that was mutually beneficial. HDOE should support such management techniques and address management styles that are not conducive to delivering the support novice special educators asked for and needed. Kurtz (1983, as quoted in Johnson, 2004) suggested the following factors present in administrators' decisions or actions often led to failure: "(a) improper teaching assignment, (b) a classroom isolated from the mainstream of the school, (c) inadequate resources and facilities, (d) not understanding expectations, and (e) inadequate supervision" (p. 27). These deficiencies were apparent to varying degrees with some administrators discussed in this study: Where management styles did not (a) support successful transition to teaching for the novice special educators who participated in this study and (b) incorporate techniques to support resilience for some of the participants in this study. HDOE should consider developing programs for administrators, or refining current programs such as Pathways to Leadership and the Hawaii Principals Academy

(HIDOE, 2005b) that enable administrators to learn useful strategies, techniques, and personal skills that could enhance their ability to work more productively with novice teachers and thereby become a reason novice teachers want to remain in the field of special education instead of leave it. Kanani's administrator, probably just as busy as Carla's, was able to connect with her teachers in a meaningful and supportive way that was appreciated by her faculty and staff. Brock and Grady (1997) suggested that principals: "(a) articulate their expectations to beginners, (b) create a plan and schedule a time to help beginning teachers, (c) work with novice teachers in creating and implementing realistic goals, and (d) model collaborative working behaviors for new teachers" (p. 30). Administrators should use their influence to ensure that novice teachers believe they are important and appreciated.

Participants discussed their experiences with various mentoring opportunities they participated in or were aware of as novice special educators. Some had the opportunity to participate in a district level program. Others also had an in-house program at their individual school. Still others did not participate in any kind of mentoring program as novice special educators. All participants had a mentor teacher assigned to them during the student-teaching portion of their pre-service program.

The district's mentoring program on one of the neighbor islands was viewed as very helpful by a participant in this study who participated in the program; to others who chose not to participate it was inadequately explained and promoted. It was a voluntary program. It was introduced to teachers via an e-mail notice. In some cases the mentor made a visit to the novice teacher's room but did not share their teaching background. Participants explained they found later that the mentor who was made available to them

was not a special education teacher, which they thought was important (Holdman & Harris, 2003; Whitaker, 2000a).

Only two schools where participants in this study taught had in-house mentoring programs. In one, none of the mentors were special education teachers. The participant in this study who taught at that school chose not to participate for that reason. Schools need to provide special-education-specific mentors (Holdman & Harris, 2003; Whitaker, 2003). In the second, the participant in this study was not aware of a mentoring program in her school until someone at the district level told her to ask for a mentor at her school because there was not a mentor at the district level. This was how she became aware that there was a mentoring program in her own school.

Four of five participants in this study maintained a close supportive relationship with the mentor who had been assigned to them when they were student teaching in their pre-service program. These pre-service mentors were seen as a very important element of their support system as they moved through their first 3 years of teaching special education.

Mentoring programs that are conducted properly have been shown to be highly supportive for novice special education teachers (Colbert & Wolf, 1992; Whitaker, 2000a, 2000b). Brock and Grady (2004) reported principals listed “mentoring” as one of the most important supports they could provide to assist beginning teachers. HIDOE should continue to support any mentoring programs it has at the district level and also to encourage quality programs at individual schools. Two factors should be stressed. First, the mentoring programs should be designed in a way that takes into account the mentoring literature, which is quite explicit in relating what works in an effective

mentoring program. Second, HIDOE should address the way the program is marketed to novice special educators. It is apparent from the comments of participants that what mentoring was available to them was presented inadequately in the form of e-mails and/or brief visits to their classroom. In other cases, teachers in this study were unaware that there was a mentoring program available to them at all. HIDOE needs to conduct high-quality, evidence-based mentoring programs that are promoted and supported throughout the school system and feature special education teachers as mentors for novice special educators (Billingsley, 2005; Billingsley et al., 2004; Whitaker, 2000a).

Stress, both related to work and personal, was a topic discussed by all participants in this study. All participants were aware of it and all dealt with it in their own way. The findings in this study suggest a need to find better ways to support novice special education teachers and provide them with appropriate strategies to deal with and/or avoid the effects of stress. Within this small group of teachers, very serious stress-related problems were discussed. Each participant tried their own methods of dealing with the stress and pressure of their teaching positions. All indicated they had no preparation in their pre-service program or HIDOE for dealing with the stress that was a part of their job. Two of the participants sought counseling, one from counselors who worked with students at her school and one from an outside therapist. Others turned to prayer, breathing exercises, or rest as ways of coping with the stress they all experienced on a regular basis. Some reported less stress as they moved further into their careers. However, they all reported stress during the first years of their employment, the time when novice teachers are most vulnerable to leaving the profession. These findings clearly indicate a need for heightened awareness by administrators and school officials as

to the seriousness of this issue and the development of strategies to creatively address this problem (Brock & Grady, 1997; Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Gersten et al., 2001; M. D. Miller et al., 1999; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Teacher support groups for emotional support and physical exercise, active workshops that focus on personal skills to handle stress, and family activities should be supported by schools interested in making teachers' physical and mental health a priority.

Participants all expressed that success with students was very important to them and without this success many indicated they would consider leaving the classroom for other pursuits. Given the need for special educators in Hawaii's schools, it seems important that novice special educators are given the types of supports from their first day that will help them be successful with their students and thereby increase the likelihood that they will be satisfied with their work and remain in the field of special education.

Adequate resources, materials, curriculum, mentoring programs, and opportunities for relevant professional development would all provide the support necessary to enable novice teachers to achieve success with students they deem so important. These types of supports would equate to the protective factors in the resiliency literature that enable individuals to overcome difficult circumstances. Unfortunately, as evident in the results of this study, many of these key support factors are not sufficiently present in the experience of these novice special educators: Four of five participants reported lack of materials and in some cases no materials or curriculum for them to work with as first-year teachers.

HIDOE must ensure that novice special education teachers do not begin their initial teaching assignment with minimal or nonexistent materials, curricula, and other

needs essential to quality instruction. Too often novice teachers report deficiencies that inhibit their ability to deliver high quality instruction to their students (Billingsley, 2005; Maroney, 2000). This situation is a source of frustration and stress for novice special education teachers and directly affects their ability to be successful with students, and is one of the key factors that can affect teacher retention. HIDOE should consider some type of quality control program that monitors the positions novice special educators will be taking at the beginning of each school year and makes sure that materials and curriculum are present in those classrooms from day 1 of the school year. HIDOE should also consider an accounting procedure that would allow novice teachers to spend money allocated for their classrooms prior to the opening of school or soon thereafter so that when school opens resources are present and classes can be productive immediately. HIDOE should consider increasing community partnerships with companies and organizations that may donate equipment, money, volunteer hours, and resources like the Queen Liliuokalani Children's Center mentioned by one participant in this study. Finding new and unique opportunities for school/community partnerships should be in the forefront of HIDOE planning.

Four of the participants had prior experience working in various capacities for HIDOE in the schools on their islands. Two of these participants explained how they thought this connection was a great advantage to them when they started their first year as a special education teacher. They explained they were familiar with the school culture, parents, administration, and the community. Both of these teachers indicated generally positive experiences during their initial teaching years and stated they planned to remain in special education for the long term. Two others who had no prior experience or

minimal experience in the schools indicated they had more problems adapting to the demands of their jobs and integrating with colleagues and administration. The data suggest there was an advantage for the novice teacher who had worked in the system in some capacity prior to becoming a full time special education teacher. Those who had worked in a school and were encouraged to become teachers in a kind of "grow your own" program offered a good alternative for recruiting future special educators (*Enlarging the Pool*, 2003). This does not mean that they did not face the same challenges and frustrations as all the participants but rather they expressed greater contentment with their jobs and less frustration than those without prior experience in the schools.

HIDOE and UHM should look to recruit potential special education teachers from the ranks of those already employed in HIDOE. Both HIDOE and UHM should consider increased efforts to identify, recruit, and support quality individuals already familiar with the schools and communities where special education teachers are needed. Partnering with civic-minded service organizations to provide scholarships for those wanting to become teachers, such as the Rotary scholarship program on Kauai, may be additional ways that HIDOE and UHM could increase the number of special education teacher candidates on the neighbor islands.

Two participants in this study who had positive experiences during their first year of teaching for HIDOE were transferred to other schools their second year. It is unfortunate these transfers did not work out well and the teachers experienced frustration and isolation at their new schools. HIDOE should consider examining ways that support novice teachers to stay in schools where they have built a positive foundation during their

initial year of teaching. This would also reflect the expressed goal to “increase the number of teachers in the same school for five or more years” recommended in the *2005-2008 DOE Strategic Plan* (HIDOE, 2005a, p. 14).

Family support was an important factor mentioned often in this study that enabled the participants to successfully complete their pre-service program and also make it through their first 3 years as special education teachers. Four of the five participants had children at home while they completed their pre-service program and began their teaching career. All four mentioned the support they received from their parents, especially their mothers, as essential to their success. This support reflects the importance of a consistently supportive person reported in the resiliency literature (Brodkin & Coleman, 1996). All four reported support from their husbands. All explained that they had two incomes that enabled them to make ends meet for their families. Carla, who was not married and did not have immediate family living on her island, expressed the most concern about her salary. She explained she was just getting by on her salary and that something as basic as a change in her rent might cause her to be unable to continue teaching.

Often, the financial and personal realities of teachers who are recruited from the mainland resemble Carla’s situation more than the other participants. New teachers recruited from the mainland may not have family support, links to and understanding of the community, opportunities for appropriate housing, cultural awareness, and adequate income to support a lifestyle they may have been accustomed to on the mainland. This situation is even more critical on the neighbor islands with the cost of living factored in (NCTAF: Hawaii Policy Group, 2001). One example of a community addressing similar

issues is that of Greenwich, United Kingdom, where the school system attracts new teachers by providing information and alternatives for housing, child care, professional development, and “work-life balance” (Greenwich Council, n.d.). In light of teacher shortages, school systems should be open and innovative in their approach to meeting the unique needs of the teachers they hope to recruit and retain.

Therefore, it is even more important that “home-grown” novice special educators who have the advantages of family, housing, and cultural awareness be supported in ways that enable them to be successful and satisfied in their jobs. If the school system cannot retain individuals who have so many basic supports already present in their lives, supports so important in the resiliency literature, how can it hope to recruit and retain teachers who lack many if not all of these basic supports?

To meet an acute need for special education teachers, Hawaii must continue to recruit and retain qualified individuals already members of neighbor island communities. By recruiting and supporting these non-traditional students already established and living in the community, HIDOE would benefit from a larger pool of special education teacher candidates. This practice may also have implications for other rural areas facing similar shortages of special education teachers in the United States.

Four participants rated their pre-service program at UHM as good or excellent (refer to Table 3). They believed it met their needs and they were grateful it was available to them on the neighbor islands. Five primary participants spoke of the importance of the stipend that enabled them to participate in the pre-service program. This financial support, or protective factor in resiliency language, made it much more possible for them

to complete the program and become a teacher in their community. For all participants, becoming a teacher had been their goal for many years.

Participants offered general suggestions for ways to improve the pre-service program for special education teachers at UHM; the most common are now mentioned. Participants related they would like the content of courses to be more relevant to actual practice in the field; they wanted more hands-on materials and strategies they could use in their classrooms with students. The largest perceived deficiency may have been that the pre-service program did not prepare these novice teachers for the realities of the profession, although some participants doubted whether any program could prepare a student for the realities of teaching. "Realities" that were mentioned included the amount of paperwork, lack of time to do all that was required of them, initiating and conducting IEP meetings, interacting with parents, and balancing their personal and professional lives. Some participants suggested needs of training for the supervisory role in which they unexpectedly found themselves with their educational assistants. Others mentioned needing training in learning techniques and strategies for how to deal with the stress that is often present in the lives of novice special education teachers. Participants expressed a need for instruction in how to teach standards-based curriculum to students with special needs; they wanted more guidance in adapting materials, differentiating instruction, NCLB, and dealing with the reality of their students' deficits in light of state-mandated achievement tests.

The UHM College of Education's special education program needs to listen to students' concerns and adapt coursework to address the expressed needs of teacher candidates. The pre-service program, at the same time, must retain its high quality. The

program must emphasize the essence and core of course work necessary for its students' knowledge base in order to meet the highest professional standards. The special education teacher preparation program must attempt to balance the needs of all who have a vested interest in it. The UHM College of Education's special education pre-service program must also be supported to meet its goal of providing Hawaii with highly qualified special education teachers. I believe the UHM College of Education should continue to network and collaborate even more closely with HIDOE to develop a seamless stream of support from pre-service through at least the first 2 years of a novice special educator's career in Hawaii. The demand for highly qualified special educators continues to grow and the UHM College of Education's special education program must be flexible, creative, and resourceful in its efforts to meet that demand and enhance retention.

#### 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 on Hawaii's neighbor islands. 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. Relationships that lead to job satisfaction and longevity in the field of special education are of utmost importance when considered in light of current attrition statistics. 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 on the neighbor islands without

undo disruption to their personal lives and teaching responsibilities. Continued efforts need to be made to find more effective ways for novice special educators to meet the demands of paperwork and at the same time fulfill their primary mission of providing high-quality instruction for their special needs students. Future research on the potential positive outcomes for novice special education teachers of thoughtful and well-defined induction programs should be conducted. 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. Researchers should examine how special education pre-service teacher preparation programs could be improved to bridge the gap from the college classroom to the real world classroom. Researchers need to investigate how pre-service programs in conjunction with HIDOE could better prepare and equip their graduates to successfully adjust to the sometimes harsh realities of the teaching profession from a novice teacher's very first day on the job. 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.

### Conclusion

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. These individuals did an excellent job of revealing to those who may not know and clarifying for those who do have experience in this field, how wonderful and frustrating,

exhilarating and heartbreaking, being a special education teacher can be. Their reflections shine a light on those things that are working well and at the same time focus attention on issues that need to be addressed immediately to improve the professional experience of special education teachers and the academic and social experiences of students with special needs.

This study may help policy makers at HIDOE and program developers at the UHM College of Education special education program to better understand what novice special educators are experiencing daily on their jobs and how to create appropriate professional development and teacher preparation courses that better meet the needs of pre-service teachers and novice special educators. It is imperative that all education professionals listen to the voices of novice teachers to hear their concerns and respond to their needs. By supporting novice teachers, education professionals ensure a higher quality of education for students, who indeed are the future of our communities.

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 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.

**APPENDIX A**  
**TELEPHONE SURVEY**

**Selection Criteria for Participants:**  
**All Former Members of a UHM Statewide Cohort in Dual Preparation**

1. Are you currently teaching special education for HIDOE on a neighbor island?

Yes                  No

2. How satisfied are you with your special education teaching position?

- a. very satisfied
- b. somewhat satisfied
- c. undecided
- d. dissatisfied
- e. very dissatisfied
- f. N/A

3. Do you believe you have the resources and support to be a successful special education teacher in your current job?

- a. strongly agree
- b. agree
- c. undecided
- d. disagree
- e. strongly disagree
- f. N/A

4. Did your initial expectations of being a special education teacher closely match the realities of your current special education position?

- a. strongly agree
- b. agree
- c. undecided
- d. disagree
- e. strongly disagree
- f. N/A

5. How certain are you that you will be a special education teacher in 5...10...or 15 years?

5 years	10 years	15 years
1. highly likely	1.	1.
2. likely	2.	2.
3. undecided	3.	3.
4. not likely	4.	4.
5. will not be	5.	5.
6. N/A	6.	6.

NOTES:

## APPENDIX B

### PRIMARY PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender: 5 females, 0 males

Ethnicity: Japanese, Hawaiian/Chinese/Caucasian, Caucasian, Part Hawaiian, Caucasian

Age Range: 28–60

Marital Status: 4 married, 1 unmarried

Children: 5 had children.

Teaching Experience: 5 had completed 3 full years of teaching special education for HIDOE on Hawaii's neighbor islands.

Previous Experience: Prior employment with HIDOE 4 yes 1 no

Degrees: 5 primary participants held a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. All were dual certified in special education and general education.

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

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

Professional Organizations: 5 belonged to the Hawaii State Teachers Association and the National Education Association.

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### **Institutional Supports**

##### *General Supports*

1. Based on the last 2 to 3 years as a special education teacher with HIDOE, tell me what the experience was like for you?
2. What were some of the things you really liked about your first years as special education teacher? What about some of the things you disliked?
3. Please talk about the support system you received as a novice special educator in HIDOE.
  - a. Which of these supports made your transition to the classroom easier to manage?
  - b. Based on your experience, what would you say were the strengths of the support system provided to you as a novice special education teacher?
  - c. What were its weaknesses?
4. Suppose I was a novice special education teacher who just came into your school, and I asked you what types of support are available to me to help me succeed. What would you tell me?

##### *Induction/Mentoring*

5. Did you take part in a formal induction program at your school, and if so, what was your experience with this program like?
  - a. If you had a mentor, could you briefly describe what that looked like? (I will look for: How was the mentor assigned to you? How often did you meet? What type of support did the mentor specifically provide you? Was the mentor's job similar to your own? Did you share a common planning time?)

##### *Administration*

6. Tell me about expectations conveyed to you regarding your job performance by your administration.
7. How does your administration support you when dealing with student behavior issues?
8. Suppose I was present at a staff meeting, what would I see going on? Take me there.
9. What does it look like when an administrator visits your classroom?

10. When an administrator specifically recognizes your work, tell me how that takes place.

*Resources*

11. Tell me about resources that were provided to you to support you in doing your job?
12. How is salary a determining factor in your decision to remain in special education?
13. On a scale of 1–5 how would you rate the support provided to you as a novice special education teacher? (1. poor; 2. below average; 3. average; 4. good; 5 excellent)

**Collegial Support**

*Colleagues*

1. Describe how colleague(s), if any, played a role in your “learning the ropes” as a novice special education teacher?
2. In what ways did you feel supported by your colleagues on your first job as a special educator?
3. What differences, if any, did you experience between support from general education teachers and special education teachers at your school?
4. If there was any type of formal structure that enabled you to interact professionally with general education teachers in your building, tell me how that worked for you.
5. What suggestions would you have to improve how teachers support each other and in particular novice special education teachers?
6. Have the actions of fellow teachers (supportive or non-supportive) influenced your current attitude about whether or not you intend to remain a special education teacher?
7. On a scale of 1–5 where would you place the importance of collegial support for novice special education teachers? (1. not important; 2. somewhat important; 3. important; 4. very important; 5. of major importance)

*Staff*

8. Tell me about your relationship with the staff at your school?
9. How will the interactions you have had with staff in your career influence your decision whether to remain in the field of special education?
10. On a scale of 1–5 how important would you rate staff/teacher relations for a novice special education teacher? (1. not important; 2. somewhat important; 3. important; 4. very important; 5. of major importance)

## School/Community Support

### *Students*

1. Describe for me your relationship with your students?
2. Tell me about the academic success of your students? Social success of your students?
3. In what ways are you able to be successful in developing social competence with your students?
4. Explain how you are able to manage student behavior effectively?
5. Explain to me how effective you feel you have been with your students at this point in your career?
6. Discuss how your perception of success with students may influence your long-term decision to remain a special educator?
7. On a scale of 1–5 where would you place the importance of success with students for novice special education teachers? (1. not important; 2. somewhat important; 3. important; 4. very important; 5. of major importance)

### *Parents*

8. Describe your relationships with parents?
9. How have parents supported, or not supported you? In what ways?
10. Do you believe you are effective in your relationships with parents?
11. How will the interactions you have had with parents in your career influence your decision to remain in the field of special education?
12. On a scale of 1–5 how important would you rate parent teacher relations for a novice special education teacher? (1. not important; 2. somewhat important; 3. important; 4. very important; 5. of major importance)

### Pre-Service Support

1. Tell me about your pre-service teaching preparation program.
2. In your opinion, were you prepared by your pre-service program to meet the academic needs of your students? Please explain.
3. How did your pre-service preparation program prepare you to deal with behavior management issues in your classroom?
4. In what ways were you prepared in your pre-service preparation program to work with the staff?
5. In what ways were you prepared in your pre-service preparation program to work with families and parents?
6. How did your pre-service program prepare you for the realities of the teaching profession?

### **Family Support**

1. In what ways did your family play a role in your decision to become a teacher?
2. Are any members of your family teachers? siblings? parents?
3. How did your family help support you to become a teacher?
4. Tell me how a person(s) among your family and friends who has supported you to become a special education teacher?
5. What challenges, if any, were difficult for you and your family to overcome on your path to becoming a special education teacher?
6. In your opinion, what types of support do novice special education teachers need from their families?
7. On a scale of 1–5 how important would you rate family support for a novice special education teacher? (1. not important; 2. somewhat important; 3. important; 4. very important; 5. of major importance)

### **Intrapersonal/Self-Efficacy**

1. I'm interested in learning about you as a person and your choice of becoming a special education teacher. What is it about you—your situation, your personality, your desires—what is it about you that you think led you to become a special education teacher?
2. From your experience as a special education teacher, in what ways are you able to be effective with your students?
3. How are you able to be effective as a member of the teaching staff at your school?
4. How are you able to make a difference in the administration of your school?
5. Explain to me how you are able to have a voice in important decisions that are made at your school?
6. Do you believe you are included as a valued member of your school community by your administration? What leads you to this belief?
7. What important characteristics or abilities, in your opinion, does a special education teacher need to be successful at the job?
8. How, if at all, have you been changed by your experiences as a special education teacher?

### **Recommendations**

1. Based on your experiences as a novice special education teacher, what recommendations would you make to enhance the retention rates of special education teachers?
2. What do you think are the most influential factors that promote longevity in the field of special education?
3. If you became an administrator later in your career, what would you do in an attempt to retain the special educators at your school?
4. In your opinion, what would an effective induction program look like?

5. How can novice special educators contribute to their own retention in the field of special education?

**APPENDIX D**  
**CONSENT FORMS**

**Consent Form (A)**

**Agreement to Participate in  
Special Education Teacher Retention Study**

Thomas Benjamin  
Primary Investigator  
808-984-3526

My name is Thomas Benjamin and I am conducting a research project as a component of a dissertation for a doctoral degree. The purpose of the study is to examine factors that have promoted or worked against the retention of novice special education teachers in Hawaii and how these factors may influence their decisions to remain in the field. You are being asked to participate because you are a new special education teacher (beginning your third year) with HIDOE.

Your participation in this study will consist of filling out a form on background information and participating in individual interviews. Completion of the form containing background data should take no more than five minutes. The initial individual interview will last about one and one half hours. A follow-up interview will last about one hour. Interviews will be audio taped for the purpose of transcription. You will be asked to review all transcripts in which you participated for accuracy and make clarifications and additional comments. The time you spend reviewing a transcript should not exceed thirty minutes for either of the individual interviews. Data from the interviews will be summarized into broad categories. When I report my findings, I will make no reference to particular schools, programs, or activities that could be directly linked to your identity.

In addition, I will ask you to nominate an individual of your choosing that I will interview. The purpose of this interview will be to clarify information from a different point of view as it relates to data from your previous interviews.

I believe there is little or no risk to participating in this research study.

Participating in this research may be of no direct benefit to you. However, potential benefits of the project include increased awareness on the part of all principal players in our public education system of the important factors that promote novice special educators well being, job satisfaction, and longevity in the field. This awareness may result in policy changes that will improve induction and support strategies for future

novice special education teachers and by extension improve school climate for teachers, administrators, and staff.

Research data will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. Agencies with research oversight, such as the University of Hawaii Committee on Human Studies, have the authority to review research data. All research records will be stored in a locked file in my office for the duration of the research study. Audio tapes and all other research records will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time during the study.

You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records.

If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact me at 808-984-3526 and/or [tbenjami@hawaii.edu](mailto:tbenjami@hawaii.edu). You may also contact my University of Hawaii Faculty Doctoral Program Advisor, Dr. Rhonda Black, at 808-956-2367 and/or [rblack@hawaii.edu](mailto:rblack@hawaii.edu).

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Hawaii Committee on Human Studies at 808-956-5007.

**Participant:**

I have read and understand the above information, and agree to participate in this research project.

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Name (printed)

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Signature

---

Date

Consent Form (B)

Agreement to Participate in  
Special Education Teacher Retention Study

Thomas Benjamin  
Primary Investigator  
808-984-3526

My name is Thomas Benjamin and I am conducting a research project as a component of a dissertation for a doctoral degree. The purpose of the study is to examine factors that have promoted the retention of novice special education teachers in Hawaii and how these factors may influence their decisions to remain in the field. You are being asked to participate because you have been nominated by a participant in my study as someone they believe can help clarify information and bring additional insight to this study.

Your participation in this study will consist of filling out a form on background information and participating in an individual interview. Completion of the form containing background data should take no more than five minutes. The interview will last about one to one and a half hours. The interview will be audio taped for the purpose of transcription. You will be asked to review all transcripts in which you participated for accuracy and make clarifications and additional comments. The time you spend reviewing a transcript should not exceed thirty minutes. Data from the interviews will be summarized into broad categories. When I report my findings, I will make no reference to particular schools, programs, activities, or relationships that could be directly linked to your identity.

I believe there is little or no risk to participating in this research study.

Participating in this research may be of no direct benefit to you. However, potential benefits of the project include increased awareness on the part of all principal players in our public education system of the important factors that promote novice special educators well being, job satisfaction, and longevity in the field. This awareness may result in policy changes that will improve induction and support strategies for future novice special education teachers and by extension improve school climate for teachers, administrators, and staff.

Research data will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. Agencies with research oversight, such as the University of Hawaii Committee on Human Studies, have the authority to review research data. All research records will be stored in a locked file in my office for the duration of the research study. Audio tapes and all other research records will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time during the study.

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If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact me at 808-984-3526 and/or [tbenjami@hawaii.edu](mailto:tbenjami@hawaii.edu). You may also contact my University of Hawaii Faculty Doctoral Program Advisor, Dr. Rhonda Black, at 808-956-2367 and/or [rblack@hawaii.edu](mailto:rblack@hawaii.edu).

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Hawaii Committee on Human Studies at 808-956-5007.

**Participant:**

I have read and understand the above information, and agree to participate in this research project.

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Name (printed)

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Signature

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Date

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