

2010

# Phenomenological study of special education teachers using an emergency license

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**Phenomenological study of special education teachers using an emergency license**

by

**Sue Alborn-Yilek**

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2010

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## DEDICATION

To My Husband Michael Yilek,  
Who makes all my dreams possible

To My Children Ashley and Jordan Alborn,  
Who have inspired me since the days they were born

To My Brothers Roger and William Brackey,  
Who gave me confidence to believe in myself

To My Parents Harley and Vera Brackey,  
Who loved me unconditionally and sacrificed much  
So that I might have the education of which they only dreamed

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## ABSTRACT

The shortage of special education teachers is critical. One means used to increase the supply of available teachers is to issue an emergency license to teachers not fully certified in special education. This is a phenomenological study of four general education teachers practicing special education using an emergency license. Their experience is characterized around four themes—diminished control over their lives, teaching, but on the “outside,” supportive relationships, and becoming “new” and or renewed. Universal themes of lived space, lived time, and lived human relationships provide the lens through which their experiences are interpreted.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*“Our challenge is not to educate the children we used to have or want to have, but to educate the children who come to the schoolhouse door.” -- H. G. Wells*

### Background

Wells’ quote reminds teachers of their responsibility to teach ALL children, including those deemed difficult to reach. Since Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) in 1975, students with a broad range of disabilities have “come to the schoolhouse door,” and public school districts have been required to provide them an appropriate educational program. Today, these children number almost seven million and they make up approximately 14% of the total number of students enrolled in public schools -- pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Legal mandates in EHA, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), require that schools provide specially trained teachers with the “skills and knowledge” to help them “improve (their) academic achievement and functional performance” (IDEA 601c.6); yet, currently, there is a shortage of teachers with such qualifications.

Thornton, Peltier, and Medina (2007) describe the shortage of special education teachers as a “national epidemic” affecting all regions of the United States. This shortage of special education teachers occurs amid an increased growth rate of children with disabilities. According to the United States Department of Education (2009), the overall number of children ages 3-21 served special education services ages grew 55% from 1977 to 2007,

while the total number of children grew by only 8%. Children receiving special education services made up 8% of the total number of children enrolled in public schools in 1977, but today this group comprises almost 14% of the overall population. In 1999, 12,241 special education teaching positions were left vacant or filled by substitutes because fully certified special education teachers could not be found. Of the special education teachers employed, 8% were not fully certified for their positions (USDE, 2009).

Schools, unable to recruit fully certified special education teachers, hire teachers lacking special education credentials who are willing to seek an emergency license. Teachers accept these positions because they want a job. Because they are just learning themselves, teachers sometimes struggle to provide effective instruction. “Whereas typically achieving students can make up for lost time, learn well independently, and make up for mistakes made by educators, special education students cannot” (Vaughn & Dammann, 2001, p. 27 as cited in Jones, 2009). Hiring teachers not fully certified for special education teaching is one means of addressing the teacher shortage, but providing quality instruction increases in difficulty when unqualified teachers are in charge of special education classrooms (Nichols, Bicard, Bicard & Casey, 2008). Teachers are key to student achievement (Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Beginning special education teachers encounter many problems in their first year of teaching (Billingsley, 2004; Whitaker, 2003). Griffin et al (2009) characterize beginning special educators’ teaching experience as one of lacking resources, finding time to complete their duties, developing instructional routines, interacting with general and special educators, and developing relationships with administration. These problems can be exacerbated when



beginning special education teachers lack teaching credentials to serve children with special needs and many end up leaving the classroom altogether or transferring to another teaching position.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are many problems addressed in this study. First, there is a need to understand the experience of beginning special education teachers using an emergency license. How would they describe their day-to-day experience of teaching in an area they are still learning themselves, their interactions with others, and to whom would they turn for support? Second, there is a need to understand how and to what extent they are supported throughout the emergency license phase. Third, there is a need to understand their projected career goals upon obtaining fully certified special education teaching status. Will they stay in special education, transfer to a general education teaching position, or leave education altogether? What factors influence their thinking?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of four special education teachers using an emergency license. The primary question for this study is “What is the meaning of teaching special education using an emergency license?” Secondary research questions for the topic include the following:

- How do teachers experience their early years as beginning special education teachers using an emergency license?
- How are teachers supported during their emergency licensure period?

- How do teachers expect their teaching roles to change when they obtain fully certified special education teaching status?

### **Significance of the Study**

Exploring this topic is significant for two reasons. First, effective teachers are key to providing instruction that results in student achievement gains. It is important to understand the day-to-day practices of beginning special education teachers using an emergency license and the challenges they encounter to provide meaningful and appropriate instruction. This understanding can illuminate building administrators, curriculum coordinators, and special education directors on how to support these individuals and what professional development opportunities would be beneficial to help teachers gain knowledge and skills to effectively teach children with a disability. Likewise, teacher educators at the university could use this understanding to help inform decision-making related to curricular and instructional practices in the special education preparation program. Second, there is currently a national shortage of special education teachers. Recruitment and retention of special education teachers are crucial to curbing this shortage. An understanding of the experiences of beginning special education teachers using an emergency license may lend insight to all who are in a position to support these teachers during the emergency licensure period – their own family members, local districts, teacher educators, regional educational support agencies, national and state special education teacher associations, state departments of education, and state and federal policymakers. Understanding their struggles and limitations during this time will assist those who care about these teachers to determine how to provide assistance while they are teaching and attending graduate school. A successful emergency license experience may result in

teachers continuing in their current special education positions and serving as a model to others contemplating teaching special education using an emergency license. In turn, this may result in more effective special education teaching.

### **Delimitations**

Due to the broad topic of understanding the experience of special education teaching using an emergency license and the limited existing research, it was necessary to focus this study. The delimitations of this study included the environment in which it was conducted. This phenomenological study involved participants who attend the same special education teacher preparation program. This was necessary due to a desire to include participants completing an add-on special education certification program as graduate students as opposed to individuals completing pre-service bachelor's program leading to licensure as a special education teacher. The study was further narrowed to include only participants teaching in rural schools. This limitation was critical due to the desire to study teachers situated in comparable educational settings.

### **Theoretical Perspective and Research Strategy**

A qualitative approach to this study of special education teachers using an emergency license allows for interactions with teachers in their own environment. Through this interaction, reflection, and an awareness of the researcher's background and how it shapes the study, an interpretation of the meaning of these experiences is achieved (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Qualitative methods are generally supported by the constructivist paradigm that "portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing"

(Glesne, 1999, p. 5). A constructivist epistemology is consistent with the belief that knowledge is found within the individual and viewing the study from this perspective allows the researcher to gain an understanding of the meaning of special education teaching using an emergency license through the eyes of those experiencing the phenomenon (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

This is a basic interpretive qualitative study. This researcher serves as primary investigator in this study as well as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Considerable time was spent by this researcher with teachers currently practicing special education using an emergency license to create rich descriptions of their experiences (Merriam, 1998). Knowledge comes from human interaction, the voices of both participants and researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Crotty, 1998).

The research strategy employed is that of phenomenology. Phenomenology is both the “description of the lived-through quality of lived experience and the description of meaning of the expressions of lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 25). The goal of this study is to describe in detail the “everyday and ordinary occurrences” (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006, p. 49) of the lived experiences of four special education teachers during the time they were practicing special education using an emergency license and interpret the meaning of these experiences.

## Summary

Almost seven million children with disabilities are enrolled in public schools today. Their disabilities present obstacles to learning and specially trained teachers are required to assist them. Currently, there is a severe shortage of special education teachers to provide these services. As a result, school districts turn to teachers who are not fully certified to provide special education services.

Beginning special education teachers struggle in the early years of their career. Not only do they lack teaching experience, but they also struggle with discovering resources, finding time to complete their duties, developing routines, interacting with other teachers and establishing a relationship with administrators. These problems are exacerbated when beginning special education teachers are practicing with an emergency license. Their experience is one of full-time teaching and attending university classes to learn how to teach special education. It is important to understand their experiences for two primary reasons—to ensure that students with a disability receive effective instruction and to ensure these teachers have a successful experience teaching using an emergency license.

This is a basic interpretive qualitative study layered with the traditions of phenomenology. The goal of this study is to describe in detail the lived experiences of four special education teachers during the time they were practicing special education using an emergency license and interpret the meaning of these experiences.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Beginning special education teachers struggle in the early years of their careers. Their problems can be exacerbated when they lack the teaching credentials to serve children with special needs. An abundance of literature exists on the topic of special education; however, little has been researched or written about the experience of teaching special education without having completed a teacher preparation program in special education. Thus, the purpose of this review of literature is to contextualize special education teaching using an emergency license. Four areas are explored: 1) legal issues related to special education, 2) shortage of special education teachers, 3) recruitment and retention, and the 4) beginning special education teachers' experiences. These four areas provide the framework for this chapter.

### Special Education Legal Issues

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) (P.L. 94-142) of 1975 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (P. L. 101-476) define special education as specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of students with a disability. To be eligible for special education, children must be evaluated as having an IDEA disability and a determination made that the disability necessitates "special education." The general language of the law defines a disability as mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific

learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services to meet their unique needs. IDEA regulations (1999) state the disability “must adversely affect educational performance” to be eligible for special education services. Students become eligible for IDEA Part B services beginning at age three and end when they graduate from high school or no longer require special education services. Students who have not received a regular high school diploma remain eligible for special education through age 21.

IDEA has been reauthorized several times, each time providing clarification or extending services and/or protections (United States Department of Education, *A 25-Year History of the IDEA*, 2004). In 1983, the law was extended to include parent training and information centers at the state level. In 1986, students and parents’ rights were made clear, and early intervention programs for infants and education services for pre-school children were added. Transition services from high school to postsecondary life were included with the 1990 reauthorization and, in 1997, the amendment called for regular education teachers to participate in planning and developing the individualized education plan (IEP) and for students with disabilities to be included in state and district-wide assessments. No Child Left Behind Act (2001) calls for all students, including those with a disability, to be proficient in math and reading by 2014. Additional accountability at the state and local levels and a requirement that school districts provide interventions to keep students out of special education emerged with the 2004 reauthorization.

The intent of EHA was “to assure the free appropriate public education of all handicapped children.” According to the United States Department of Education (*A 25-Year History of the IDEA*, 2004), prior to 1975, almost 200,000 students with a mental disability

lived in state institutions where they were merely accommodated rather than educated and rehabilitated, and more than one million children with a disability were entirely or partially excluded from the public school system. With the passage of EHA, educational opportunities became available and, today, almost seven million children with a disability attend neighborhood schools in general education classrooms with children without a disability. They comprise 14% of the total number of students in public schools pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (United States Department of Education, 2009). Unlike older adults who grew up prior to special education legislation, today many children with a disability graduate from high school, attend college, and secure employment. This progress may be credited to many, but teachers have been key (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Special education teachers provide “uniquely designed” instruction in a variety of settings, and the quality of special education services depends upon the abilities, qualifications and competencies of special education teachers (Council for Exceptional Children, 2003).

The percentage of children with a disability is growing at a faster rate than that of children without a disability. According to the United States Department of Education (2009), the overall number of children ages 3-21 being served special education services grew 55% from 1977 to 2007, while the total number of children grew by only 8%. This rising number of students with a disability requiring special education services has resulted in a shortage of available teachers who are able, qualified, and competent to serve them.

### **Shortage of Special Education Teachers**

The shortage of teachers in special education has been called severe and chronic (McLeskey, Tyler & Flippin, 2004), a national epidemic affecting all regions of the United



States (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007), a persistent concern (Katsiyannis, Zhang & Conroy 2003), and a “daunting challenge” that has “plagued special education for two decades” (Brownell, Sindelar, Bishop, Langley, & Seo, 2002, p. 1). Special education teacher shortages are reported in 98% of the nation’s school districts, special education is the area with the greatest shortage of teachers in the 200 largest cities in the United States, and during the 2000-2001 school year, approximately 11.4%, or 47,532 special education teachers lacked certification (McLeskey et al, 2004). More recent data indicate that only 86% of the teachers are prepared for their special education teaching positions and some students in special education programs have never been taught by a fully certified teacher (Nichols, Bicard, Bicard & Casey, 2008). Each year, the United States Department of Education spends an estimated \$90 million to increase the number of available special education teachers to serve our children with disabilities (Brownell, Hirsch, & Seo 2004). Worse yet, there is no sign it is beginning to dissipate.

The need for special education teachers is expected to increase by 15% from 2006-2016 to accommodate the increasing number of students who are or will become eligible for special education services (United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008-2009). Several factors are given for the increasing number of students, including improvements that enable earlier diagnoses of learning disabilities, medical advances that allow children to survive serious accidents or illnesses but who are left with impairments that require special education accommodations, legislation that emphasizes training and employment for individuals with a disability, educational reforms requiring higher graduation standards, growth in percentage of foreign-born special education students, and

more parents expected to seek services for their children with a disability. The shortage of special education teachers is attributed to a demand greater than the supply, new legislative requirements, and attrition. What contributes most to the availability of special education teachers is debated in the literature.

### *Supply and demand*

Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008) investigated claims that teacher turnover was the predominant source of special education teacher shortages. Teacher turnover means the loss of a teacher as a result of attrition, teacher area transfer or school migration. These researchers analyzed Schools and Staffing Survey data from 1990-1991, 1993-1994 and 1999-2000 and its companion Teacher Follow-Up Surveys from 1991-1992, 1994-1995, and 2000-2001. They concluded that excessive turnover is not the primary source of teacher shortages. Although turnover related to attrition, teaching area transfer and school migration contributed to an annual turnover rate of about 25% by 2000-2001, this percentage was lower than in other occupations. “The most promising approach to reduce teacher shortages is to increase the supply of qualified teachers” (p. 25).

Katsiyannis, Zhang and Conroy (2003) looked specifically at the availability of special education teachers from 1991-2001, using data available from the annual reports to Congress on the implementation of IDEA. These reports revealed a nationwide shortage of teachers qualified to teach across all disability categories, but a decline in magnitude of the shortage over the years. The average percentage of teacher shortage in 1988-1989 was 8.78% and, by 1997– 1998, this figure had decreased to 1.36%. Although the shortage percentages have declined, there has been an increase in the use of teachers who are not fully certified. In

1993-1994, 94% of special education teachers were fully certified (Katsiyannis, Zhang & Conroy, 2003). By 2000, this percentage had dropped to about 89% (Boe, 2006). According to the CEC (2003), over 600,000 students receive their special education services from individuals who are not even minimally qualified under licensing standards to practice special education. Yet, their individual differences make learning a true challenge and they are more dependent than most on qualified teachers to assist them. A well-prepared teacher has more influence on a child's learning than any other factor under school control (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

The decline in percentage of unfilled special education positions can be attributed to a number of factors, including an increase in the use of an alternative route to licensure and/or emergency licensure in special education, the trend toward inclusion, and the shift toward non-categorical certifications (Katsiyannis, Zhang & Conroy, 2003). Alternative certification refers to several paths to licensure, including emergency certification and specialized programs for individuals with bachelor's degree in other area. As more individuals complete alternative certification in special education, there may be more special education teachers available. In 1983, eight states said they had alternative certification, but by 2002, 45 states reported some type of alternative program exists (Katsiyannis et al, 2003). According to the National Center for Education Information (2002), of the 225,000 beginning special education teachers hired during 2000, 2001, and 2002, 75,000 said they had completed an alternative certification program.

Katsiyannis, Zhang, and Conroy (2003) continue the use of inclusion practices, meaning more students are educated in the least restrictive environment, possibly means larger teaching loads for general education teachers and less of a need for certified special

education teachers. Moreover, students with an emotional behavioral disability are more likely to receive services in separate settings, such as special classes, residential facilities, or home-hospital settings, and these settings make greater use of non-certified teachers. There has also been a shift toward non-categorical and multi-categorical teacher certifications. The use of non-categorical certification may decrease the need for teachers licensed in specific disability areas such as learning disabilities, emotional behavioral disabilities, and cognitive disabilities. In addition, many states offer multi-categorical certification specialized by age/grade level as opposed to specific disability area. Having available both non-categorical and multi-categorical options provides states with additional means of addressing the special education teacher shortage.

### *Legislation*

Several legislative changes, particularly with the 1997 and 2004 amendments to IDEA and the implementation of NCLB in 2002, have negatively impacted the availability of special educators. IDEA amendments increased the number of students eligible to receive special education services and extended the range of services available. In addition, new NCLB guidelines require all teachers, including special educators, be licensed in all areas they provide instruction. Also, these guidelines require all children, including the almost seven million children with a disability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009) be proficient as measured by their state assessments by the 2013-2014 school year.

Additionally, because of their special education population, many schools fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and, as more schools fail, educators come under pressure that may result in their request to transfer to regular education positions or their decision to leave the profession (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina 2007).

### *Attrition*

Unlike teaching area transfer or school migration, attrition means teachers have left the profession altogether. Attrition is noted as a significant factor that contributes to teacher demand (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook & Barkanic, 1998). During the 1990's, attrition rates rose among special educators from 5 to 8% (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008). Several reasons include teachers' qualifications, salaries, working conditions (job assignments, class load, stress, paperwork, school climate), lack of support from colleagues and administrators, low student motivation, discipline problems, and lack of student progress (Thornton, Peltier & Medina, 2007; Billingsley, 2004).

Several studies have investigated the relationship between these variables and attrition among special education teachers. Key findings are presented. Miller, Brownell, and Smith (1999) reported a higher level of attrition among uncertified teachers as opposed to certified teachers in a study of more than 1,000 special education teachers in Florida. Those using an emergency license were considered at high risk of leaving and, particularly, in need of support. Boe, Barkanic, and Leow (1999) reported those educators who view school climate positively are more likely to stay than those with a less positive view. Also, teachers are more likely to leave when they do not experience support from their administrators. Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff and Harniss (2001) found that a higher level of support was characterized as meaning more professional development opportunities. Teachers appreciate being supported emotionally by having others take an interest in their work and communicating openly with them. Emotional support, together with physical support efforts such as providing plentiful materials and space in which to work, correlate with job

satisfaction and school commitment (Littrell, Billingsley & Cross, 1994). An induction and mentoring program was found to correlate with job satisfaction, according to Whitaker (2000). Teachers who were provided an opportunity to grow professionally expressed greater job satisfaction, according to Gersten et al (2001). The extent of stress on the job correlates with attrition (Gersten et al, 2001; Miller et al, 1999) and a high level of commitment to the profession and/or the school district contributed to teachers' intentions to stay in their special education positions (Miller et al, 1999). Reducing attrition is necessary if teacher shortage is to be alleviated (McLeskey, Tyler & Flippin, 2004)

### **Recruitment and Retention of Special Education Teachers**

Currently, special education teacher education programs do not graduate enough teachers to meet the needs of the K-12 system (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). Teacher educators encounter difficulties recruiting the best pre-service students (Cooley, Bicard, Bicard, & Casey, 2008). Pre-service students cite many reasons for not considering special education teaching as a career, such as lack of respect students have for teachers, discouragement from others, low status of teachers, low salaries, and physical condition of schools. The researchers recommended such strategies as encouraging Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) to recruit new faculty members with experience in ethnic diversity, supporting these new faculty members once they are secured, and providing loan-forgiveness programs for students who choose to go into special education teacher education.

School districts, especially rural schools, also experience difficulties recruiting special education teachers. They often recruit teachers who have completed alternative certification programs, such as Troops to Teachers or cultivate their own teachers by

providing scholarships and funding for local graduates, arranging district-paid tuition, or seeking private/state/federal grants (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). In addition, they recommend that districts be proactive in marketing their open positions by establishing relationships with placement offices at institutes of higher education, attending job fairs, and developing web-based marketing materials.

Another problem is attracting a more diverse teaching force in special education. Approximately 40% of the students identified with a disability are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; yet, only 14% of their teachers are from similar backgrounds (United States Department of Education, 2000). The situation exists for reasons related to college attendance barriers they experience as a result of poor K-12 educational opportunities as well as the lure of professional opportunities outside of education that have better salary and working conditions (McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004).

Teacher turnover in public schools is costly and significantly contributes to the shortage of qualified teachers in both special and general education. Retention rates among special education teachers are substantially lower than rates of general education teachers and, according to Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008), up to 25% of the special education teachers leave their positions annually. One of the best ways to address the special education teacher shortage is to retain those who are hired (Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007).

“Beginning teachers are most vulnerable to attrition and should be the target of any major retention effort” (Brownell, Hirsch, & Seo, 2004, p. 57). They recommend a high quality induction program with clear goals, opportunities to work with mentors, professional development aligned with program goals, and fiscal support. Administrative support has

particularly been shown to be critical to teacher retention (Billingsley, 2004). Boe, Barkanic, and Leow (1999) reported that teachers who stayed in their positions were almost four times more likely to strongly perceive they had the support of their administrators.

Addressing recruitment and retention issues related to special education teachers is complex. Historically, efforts by federal and state governments, local districts and professional organizations like the Council for Exceptional Children have not been able to remedy the shortage of special education teachers (Brownell, Hirsch, & Seo, 2004). The approach has been too “piecemeal,” they say, and the next round of effort will need to be one of systemic reform. Brownell, et al point to Connecticut as an example of a state which has taken a more proactive approach. Connecticut has eliminated its teacher shortage problem by implementing such reform measures as providing school funding equity across poor and wealthy districts, setting high standards for teacher preparation programs and aligning them with district’s practices, requiring a teacher induction program, providing scholarships to high school graduates within the state to attend in-state teacher education programs, and facilitating ongoing professional development (Wilson, Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2001). Brownell et al (2004) continue that, in addition, states should continue increasing alternative certification route availability and develop a comprehensive personnel database that tracks teachers from preparation route entry to completion. This will allow researchers and policymakers to determine the effectiveness of recruitment and retention strategies currently employed.

### **Beginning Special Education Teacher Experience**



Teachers who are well prepared have a greater influence on student achievement than student background factors, such as poverty, language background and minority status (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Yet, many beginning special educators and especially those not fully certified have problems with pedagogy, managing time, and dealing with issues related to special education. In addition to engaging in curriculum planning, special educators have responsibilities related to working with children with disabilities—paperwork, accommodations, developing individualized education plans and collaborating with teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992). Three studies that focus on the experience of beginning special educators are presented.

In a study by Gehrke and McCoy (2007), 10 beginning special educators shared their experiences. Differences were noted between the experiences of those who planned to stay and those who planned to leave their teaching positions. Those who planned to stay characterized experiences of collegial support, assignment of a mentor, broad network of support across the work setting, availability of teaching materials, access to professional development related to managing classroom behavior, release time to observe veteran teachers and structured opportunities to meet with other beginning teachers. Those who planned to leave characterized their experience much differently. They received little, if any, support and the support they received was solicited from the Internet, former college personnel and even spouses. They had difficulty finding appropriate teaching materials and determining what to teach and how to align it with general education academic standards.

Another study explored the problems and the accomplishments of beginning special education teachers (Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, Hou, & Garvan, 2009). Findings

from this study of 596 first year special educators reveal the influence of classroom and school context factors on their new teaching experiences. The curriculum was revealed as a problem as did the lack of teaching materials. Teachers who identified communication and collaboration as an accomplishment were more likely teaching near general education classrooms or in integrated general education classrooms; hence, they interacted more frequently with general education teachers. Thus, both the location and frequency of interactions with general education colleagues were important school context factors. Teachers who ranked communication and collaboration as a problem also gave lower ratings to their relationships with their principals and with general and special education colleagues. Special education teachers who reported time as a top classroom problem generally had positive relationships with their principals. Support from principals, however, did not offset the lack of time they perceived.

Jones (2009) studied 10 beginning special educators to determine their perceptions of research, in general, as well as their use of evidence-based practices. Findings revealed that beginning teachers in the study did not perceive they had enough knowledge or background to implement research-based practices or the ability to understand results of published findings. Likewise, they did not know where to seek research-based information and would often turn to colleagues for information, advice, and support. What they shared was “comfortable for use,” but not research-based. Finally, there was a perception among participants their becoming a teacher was sufficient for instructing students.

Of first time special education teachers hired in 1999-2001, only 46% were extensively prepared to teach special education (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008). The others

were either prepared in general education or inadequately prepared. Feng and Sass (2009 in Sindelar, Brownell, & Billingsley, 2010) analyzed Florida Data Warehouse data and found extensive preparation in special education was associated with improved achievement for children with disabilities. They were able to link student achievement gains to individual teachers and to teachers' years of experience, certification status and the nature and extent of their preparation. Moreover, when compared to general education teachers without special education certification, general education teachers with such certification produced greater achievement gains for children with disabilities in both reading and math. In recruiting teachers, it is important to consider not only supply and demand but also teacher certification and teacher quality (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

### **Summary**

Almost seven million children with a disability participate today in public school special education programs. To be successful, they require specially- designed instruction in a variety of settings. The quality of special education services depends upon the abilities, qualifications and competencies of the special education teachers. Yet, many of these teachers lack the background experience and qualifications to provide such instruction. A severe shortage of special education teachers currently exists. Because of this shortage, school districts are unable to recruit fully certified teachers and many hire teachers who lack special education qualifications to fill their open positions.

The shortage of special education teachers is severe and, considering the rising number of children with a disability is expected to continue. Several factors contribute to the shortage, including supply and demand, new legislation, and attrition. Studies have shown

that teacher turnover is comparable to turnover in other vocations so a major focus has been on increasing the supply of new special education teachers. Special education teacher educators report difficulties in recruiting pre-service teachers into special education, especially culturally and linguistically diverse individuals desperately needed to serve the rising number of students with similar backgrounds. These recruitment difficulties are caused by increased legislative pressure ensure students with a disability are proficient, as measured by state assessments, as well as perceived negative aspects of the job--poor salaries and working conditions, lack of support from colleagues and administrators, low student motivation, discipline problems, and lack of student progress.

The supply of new teachers completing pre-service special education preparation programs is insufficient to meet the demand. Therefore, states have turned to other means to increase supply. State policies allow teachers licensed in other areas, as well as individuals with a bachelor's degree but no teaching credentials, to earn special education certification through alternative routes shorter in length than traditional certification routes. This policy has increased the number of available special education teachers but not all available teachers have the qualifications to provide the specially designed instruction required by students with a disability.

Studies have shown that teachers who are well prepared have a greater influence on student achievement; yet, many beginning special educators, especially those not fully certified, struggle with pedagogy, managing time, and dealing with issues related to special education. Because they lack qualifications for special education teaching, their experience is sometimes characterized as feeling isolated, lacking support, and having difficulty

developing a curriculum and aligning it with general education academic standards. In such instances, students fail to achieve academic gains. Therefore, many of these teachers leave the profession.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

Well-prepared teachers have a greater influence on student achievement than teachers who are less prepared (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Yet, currently there exists a critical shortage of well-prepared special education teachers and local districts must sometimes hire special education teachers who are not prepared to teach special education. The use of special education teachers using an emergency license is one means allowed by states to increase its supply of special education teachers.

Emergency licensed teachers fill many of the open positions in special education, but often they lack the knowledge and skills to provide the specially- designed instruction required by children with a disability. “Whereas typically achieving students can make up for lost time, learn well independently, and make up for mistakes made by educators, special education students cannot” (Vaughn and Dammann, 2001, p. 27 as cited in Jones, 2009). An understanding of this experience from the perspective of those experiencing it may lend insight to local districts, institutes of higher education, state departments of education, and state and local governments responsible for increasing the supply of available special education teachers as well as developing appropriate practices to recruit and retain qualified special education teachers.

### **Qualitative Approach and Epistemology**

The purpose of the current qualitative study is to understand the meaning (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006) of special education teaching using an emergency license from the perspective of four teachers currently practicing special education using an emergency

license in four separate rural public schools in the Midwest. Unlike quantitative research that seeks to structure and control the research environment as much as possible, this research took place in the natural setting of teachers' classrooms (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Qualitative researchers "simply plunk themselves down where it's happening and try to figure out how and why" (McEwan & McEwan, 2003, p. 78).

Qualitative methods are generally supported by a world glimpse that views reality as "socially constructed, complex, and ever changing" (Glesne, 1999, p. 5). This constructivist epistemology is consistent with the belief that knowledge is found within the individual (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006). This researcher served as primary investigator in the current study as well as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Considerable time was spent with participants to create rich descriptions of their experiences (Merriam, 1998) and to gain knowledge and understanding through human interaction--the voices of both participants and researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Crotty, 1998).

The primary research question developed for this study is as follows: "What is the meaning of teaching special education using an emergency license?" Secondary research questions for the topic include the following:

- How do teachers experience their early years as beginning special education teachers using an emergency license?
- How are teachers supported during their emergency licensure period?
- How do teachers expect their teaching roles to change when they obtain fully certified special education teaching status?

## Methodological Approach

The methodology that guided this study and provided specific procedural direction (Creswell, 2009) is phenomenology. Phenomenology is both a description of the “lived-through quality of lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 25) as well as a description of the meaning of the expressions in the lived experience. Phenomenological researchers observe, interact, describe, and interpret, all in an effort to uncover the “essence of (an) experience” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 47). To conduct a phenomenology is “to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal” (p. 18).

Phenomenological researchers engage in four major processes throughout an investigation: Epoche, Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation, and Synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche is a Greek word meaning “to stay away from or abstain” (p. 85). In an attempt to derive new knowledge, the researcher begins the investigation by reflecting upon and then setting aside any prejudgments, biases or preconceived notions around the research topic. Epoche does not “deny the reality of everything, does not doubt everything—only the natural attitude, the biases of everyday knowledge, as a basis for truth and reality” (p. 85).

Several steps are involved in Phenomenological Reduction. The researcher begins by focusing, or “bracketing,” the research topic and setting aside everything else. Then, she considers every verbatim expression from the data in relationship to the research topic, capturing each “horizon” of the experience and discarding those unrelated to the research



topic. The “horizons” are then organized into themes and, for each theme, a series of phrases, or meaning units, are developed to further corroborate the theme. These meaning units are sometimes called “invariant constituents. The themes and invariant constituents are used to create a “textural description” of the experience for each participant. This task requires the researcher to “look and describe, look again and describe, look again and describe” using textural language descriptions that present “varying intensities, ranges of shapes, sizes and special qualities; time references; and colors all within an experiential context” (p. 91). This phase is also called “transcendental phenomenological reduction--“transcendental” because it “uncovers the ego for which everything has meaning,” “phenomenological” because the world is transformed into “mere phenomena,” and “reduction” because the process “leads us back to our own experience of the way things are” (Schmitt, 1968, p. 30, in Moustakas, 1994).

The next step of the research process is Imaginative Variation. The task during this process is to “seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98) and arrive at descriptions that account for how the experience came to be what it is. While engaging in this process, the researcher imagines universal structural themes--time, space, materiality, causality, and relationship to self and to others--as possible factors that account for what is being experienced and provides a “structural description” for each participant.

Finally, the researcher integrates the “textural descriptions” and “structural descriptions” into a unified statement of the essences of the phenomenon as a whole.

According to Moustakas (1994), essences are never “totally exhausted.” The synthesis

simply “represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon” (p. 100).

### **This Study**

#### *Reflexivity and positionality*

This researcher has experience in recruiting and retaining, as well as preparation of special education teachers using an emergency license; hence, certain feelings and beliefs have developed around this experience. To clarify the bias brought to this study, this researcher engaged in reflexivity and developed a Positionality Statement clarifying these biases.

#### *Participants*

This current qualitative investigation included four beginning special educators, each with less than three full years of formal special education teaching experience, serving students with a disability in one state in the rural Midwest. Using data from a local university that provides special education certification programming, all special educators meeting the aforementioned criteria were contacted by e-mail, followed by telephone calls, to their respective places of employment.

#### *Participant selection*

Originally, the names of 10 teachers participating in a special education certification program at a local university composed the list of potential participants. A demographic questionnaire confirmed the appropriateness of six participants with regard to their employment as special education teachers, emergency certification in special education, and

participation in a special education certification program. The researcher purposefully selected (Creswell, 2009) four participants, who taught at differing levels (middle or high school) across a range of districts. “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Interviews, observations, and document reviews were then used to elicit information from the participants regarding their special education teaching using an emergency license experience.

#### *Interview protocol*

A semi-structured interview protocol was used with all participants to elicit information on the beginning special education teachers’ entry into the profession, day-to-day experience of teaching special education, and their intent upon completion of special education certification. The phenomenological interview process focused on the meaning of events within their experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and was guided by the research questions. “One needs to be oriented to one’s question or notion in such a strong manner that one does not get easily carried away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere” (van Manen, 1990, p. 67). To solicit “rich and honest” responses, interviews began with a social conversation to set the interviewee at ease and continued with requests for participants to be descriptive and elaborate on their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Three individual interviews over one month, lasting approximately 90 minutes each required participants to think of specific instances, situations, persons, and events that were a part of their experiences. The first interview focused on details relating to their current special education teaching experiences, the second on experiences that led up to their entry into special education, and the third on expectations they had for themselves for the future. As suggested by Creswell (2009), interview questions were piloted prior to the study to check for clarity

and to ensure they would solicit information in response to the research questions. All interviews were digitally recorded to capture the essence of the data and to provide an accurate detailed account of the interview process. Following the interviews, a transcription of the process was made and a copy sent to each respective teacher to check for accuracy and validate the interview process.

#### *Classroom observations*

Each participant was observed on two occasions during the 2009 fall semester in their special education classrooms with each observation lasting between two and three hours. An additional observation of three of the participants was made—the fourth participant was not enrolled during the semester--in the classroom of one of the graduate courses leading to certification to record the nature of the curriculum and the activities and interactions around the curriculum. During the observation process, this researcher gathered data detailing “recurring patterns of behavior and relationships” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 107) between participants and their students and between participants and their colleagues or graduate student classmates. No predetermined categories or checklists were used; however, the second classroom observation served to check whether preliminary themes identified after the first observation made sense (Marshall & Rossman 1999). Observation data were used to validate interview transcript data.

#### *Document reviews*

Curriculum documents within the special education certification program were reviewed. These documents oriented the researcher to the conceptual framework of the certification program as well as the specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions beginning

special education teachers were expected to acquire upon successful completion of the program. Document summary data were used to validate interview transcript data.

### *Research journal*

To assist with reflections through the research process, this researcher maintained a reflexive journal (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). The journal served as a tool to chronicle information about the human instrument (this researcher) as well as to record rationale for methodological decisions.

### *Data organization and analysis*

Upon obtaining interview transcriptions, observation field notes, and document summaries, phenomenological methods and procedures were used to organize and analyze the data. Using verbatim expressions from the transcripts, this researcher “horizontalized” the data around special education teaching using an emergency license. The process initially involved a recording of every expression related to special education teaching using an emergency license and a treatment of each expression as having equal value to understanding this experience. Later, this researcher reduced the data by eliminating all expressions that appeared irrelevant or repetitive, leaving only the “horizons” of the experience. Horizons were then thematically clustered and used to create a textural description of special education teaching using an emergency license from the perspective of each individual participant. This researcher then reflected on such universal structural themes, as time, space, materiality, causality, and relationship to self and to others to determine how special education teaching on an emergency license came to be and created a structural description of the experience for each individual participant. Both the individual and the textural descriptions were shared with participants to check for accuracy and validate the interpreted data. Finally, the

individual and structural descriptions were integrated into a synthesis of meanings and essences of the experiences of special education teaching using an emergency license, representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

### *Ethical issues*

All researchers must be sensitive to ethical issues and committed to doing what is right (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990 in Jones, Torres, & Arminio 2006). Prior to beginning this study, this researcher sought IRB approval to ensure protection for participants. To uphold the principles of confidentiality and privacy, prior to this study, this researcher provided participants with a full explanation of the purpose of the study and a description of how they would be asked to participate. All participants signed informal consents. In addition, building administrators, who supervise, as well as adult students and parents of minor students enrolled in observed classrooms, signed informed consents. Teacher participants were given pseudonyms.

### *Quality criteria*

Qualitative research that is “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290) is deemed trustworthy. To be deemed trustworthy, studies must be valid and reliable. This researcher sought qualitative validity by engaging in researcher reflexivity, providing thick description, checking accuracy of findings with participants, triangulating data from multiple sources to justify themes, and using peers to debrief and review the final report (Creswell, 2009). Also, this researcher sought qualitative reliability by engaging in processes and implementing procedures consistent with the phenomenological research approach. Findings are not intended to generalize to all special education teachers using an emergency

license but, instead, to describe the experiences of particular special education teachers using an emergency license.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH RESULTS**

This is a phenomenological study exploring the experiences of four teachers practicing special education using an emergency license. This chapter will reveal this researcher's biases and include the results of data collection and analysis. Specific sections organize this chapter--Positionality statement, Participants, Themes, Textural descriptions, Structural descriptions, and Synthesis.

### **Positionality Statement**

This researcher has experience in recruiting and retaining, as well as preparation of special education teachers using an emergency license and certain feelings and beliefs have developed around this experience. To clarify any bias brought to this study, this researcher engaged in reflexivity and developed a Positionality Statement to clarify these biases.

For the past five years, the primary investigator of this study has administered and taught in the special education certification program attended by participants in this study. Previous to this, this researcher spent 14 years as a building principal and, when unable to recruit fully certified special education teachers, hired teachers using an emergency license to fill open positions in the building.

The topic addressed by this research study is of interest for two reasons. First, there is interest in the quality of special education services being provided children with a disability. Highly qualified teachers more positively impact student achievement than less qualified teachers do. As teacher educator, the researcher has attempted to provide training that will result in fully certified special education certification status and, as building principal,



professional development to support the development of emergency licensed teachers into effective teachers. Observations have been made not only of the beginning special education teachers' difficulties but also the difficulties encountered by students with a disability when specially designed instruction is not provided. Being on an emergency license places multiple demands on teachers while they engage in full-time teaching and certification coursework. Moreover, students who require effective instruction, sometimes, fail in the absence of fully certified teachers. Yet, there currently exists no method for determining the effectiveness of teachers who complete the certification program at the university where the researcher is employed.

Second, there is interest in issues related to recruitment and retention of special education teachers in light of the severe shortage of such teachers. As a university administrator of a special education certification program, the researcher collaborates with state agencies and local school districts to recruit both pre-service teachers and already licensed teachers into special education. There is a shortage of teachers entering special education. This shortage impacts local school district administrators who must resort to hiring special education teachers on an emergency license. The certification program is designed to serve up to 24 students, yet, the average enrollment is around 10 students and not all of these students complete the certification program once they enroll. Currently, there is no system in place to assess pre-service teachers and teachers employed in general education to determine what factors contribute to their decision not to enter special education. Having access to this information would assist this researcher in developing policies and practices to encourage individuals to pursue special education teaching.

In addition, as teacher educator in the same certification program and former building principal, there is interest in tracking employed special education teachers. Currently, no system is in place to monitor students from certification program entry through employment and thereafter nor is there a system in place to assess employed teachers to determine what factors contribute to their intent to stay in special education, migrate to general education, or leave the profession altogether. Having access to this information could impact decision-making by this researcher and her colleagues in relation to the curriculum, instruction, advising, and program completion follow-up offered at the site of the certification program attended by participants in this study.

### **Participants**

Originally, the names of 10 teachers participating in a special education certification program at a local university composed the list of potential participants. A demographic questionnaire (see Table 1) confirmed the appropriateness of six participants with regard to their employment as special education teachers, emergency certification in special education, and participation in a special education certification program. The researcher purposefully selected four participants who taught at differing levels (middle or high school) across a range of districts on the basis that they could provide detailed information related to the research questions. All four teachers agreed to participate and, to protect their privacy, all were given fictitious names—Beth, Kyle, Justin, and Carrie.

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Questionnaire**

	Beth	Kyle	Justin	Carrie
Role	High School Special Education Teacher	High School Special Education Teacher	Middle and High School Special Education Teacher	Middle School Special Education Teacher
Certification	Emergency License  Position/Level: 73 EARLY ADOLESCENCE to ADOLESCENCE (age 10-21)  Subject: 811 LEARNING DISABILITIES	Emergency License  Position/Level: 73 EARLY ADOLESCENCE to ADOLESCENCE (age 10-21)  Subject: 801 CROSS-CATEGORICAL SPECIAL EDUCATION	Emergency License  Position/Level: 73 EARLY ADOLESCENCE to ADOLESCENCE (age 10-21)  Subject: 801 CROSS-CATEGORICAL SPECIAL EDUCATION	Emergency License  Position/Level: 72 MIDDLE CHILDHOOD to EARLY ADOLESCENCE (age 6-13)  Subject: 801 CROSS-CATEGORICAL SPECIAL EDUCATION
Involvement in Certification Program	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

### Themes

The phenomenological procedures selected for data analysis and identification of themes characterizing this phenomenon of teaching special education using an emergency license are a modification of the van Kaam seven-stage method of data analysis (1959, 1966, as cited in Moustakas, 1994). Using the transcriptions from the interviews of research participant, the researcher began by listing all expressions related to special education teaching on an emergency license and considered them as having equal value in coming to understand the experience. The data was reduced through “horizontalization.” During this phase, all repetitive or overlapping expressions were eliminated, leaving only the horizons of

the experience. The horizons were then clustered into themes and meaning units of the expressions were created.

Four distinct themes and their meaning units, sometimes called “invariant constituents,” emerged from analysis of the data collected through this study (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Themes and Invariant Constituents**

Theme	Invariant Constituents
Diminished Control Over One’s Life	Loss of direction Loss of time for self Loss of independence
Teaching, but on the “Outside”	Opportunity to work Being unfamiliar with special education Feelings about the experience
Supportive Relationships	Encourage from school Encouragement from family Encouragement from university Self-support
Becoming “New” and/or Renewed	Becoming fully certified Re-gaining control Self-discoveries

The four themes represent the thoughts and feelings shared by participants during the emergency licensure period. Expressions shared are associated with losing control over their lives. Special education was not what they wanted to teach but this area did provide them opportunity to work. Special education was unfamiliar to them and caused feelings of fear

and uncertainty as they struggled with making decisions about what and how to teach. Moreover, teaching on an emergency license placed great demands on their time. They were full-time teachers and part-time graduate students learning how to teach special education. The special education certification classes required them to commute to a nearby campus various evenings during the fall and spring terms and days during the summer. Time for themselves, their families, and friends was scarce and they became dependent on others for survival and development. The stress created by feelings of loss gradually dissipated over time. Key individuals supported them in various ways--welcoming them to their new teaching positions; showing them how to teach, motivate and inspire students with disabilities; and assuming child care and/or home maintenance tasks. With their support and the experience they gained over time, participants in this study became more familiar with and less stressed about special education teaching. They looked forward to completing the certification requirements and shared thoughts and feelings about self-discoveries they made during the emergency licensure period.

### **Textural Descriptions**

The themes and invariant constituents were then used to create a textural description of the experience for each participant. The textural description describes the experience using verbatim expressions from the transcripts. An individual textural description is provided for each participant followed by a composite textural description depicting the experience of the group as a whole.

*Beth*

Diminished control over one's life

The experience of teaching special education on an emergency license for Beth is one of attempting to regain control over and purpose in her life. She experienced a sense of loss when, because of budget cuts, she was “laid off” from two (different school) districts where she had taught social studies, the academic content area she “loved” and for which she was certified to teach. Jobs were hard to come by in her area. “I probably couldn’t even get a factory job or anything cuz there (were) no jobs.” Unable to move “for a variety of reasons,” she accepted substitute teaching jobs to help support her family, which also included a husband and young son. The year she subbed was “really rough,” both financially and emotionally. “We never suffered with regard to not having enough to eat,” but the family didn’t live “extravagantly” either. They were “eligible” for government assistance programs but pride prevented them from participating. A brother-in-law helped with some of the utility bills. The year was a “low point” in her life. During substitute teaching, she felt “insecure” and that her job was “meaningless.” Even the satisfaction of substitute teaching in her area of social studies was diminished by the fact that there were “lesson plans laid out,” and she couldn’t really get “creative.” “Teachers would have me pop in a movie . . . and I felt like a glorified babysitter.” “I was at a place in my life and my career where . . . I should be moving up (but) . . . was starting all over.” On days when she did not have a substitute teaching job, she would “watch the school bus drive by in the morning” and, sometimes, “cry.”

#### Teaching, but on the “outside”

Wanting desperately to secure a full-time teaching job, Beth applied for and obtained a special education teaching position “58 minutes away,” within the goal she had set for herself to keep the job under an hour. Fewer than ten people applied for this position, which for social studies “doesn’t happen.” Instead, schools receive “hundreds of applications.”

Getting licensed in special education would require “going to school at night” and be “expensive,” but, at least, she “would have a job.”

She felt more “secure” having a teaching position because she would have health insurance for the family and would be able to pay for life insurance, something she now needed due to the sudden and unexpected death of her husband. But the fact that she was working on an emergency license was “always looming” over her, and she “worried” about another budget cut and “being able to keep” her job.

Time became a major concern. The job was “overwhelming” as she struggled to keep up with the “paperwork for the IEPs and the three-year evaluations,” not knowing “exactly what need(ed) to be sent to parents and at what time.” She was spending “so much time learning . . . and not enough on developing lesson plans.”

She had eighteen students on her caseload, a caseload similar to that of her special education teaching peers who were already licensed. She had a responsibility to notify (parents and other teachers) who was having problems, what (assignments) were missing and to “figure out” what she could do to help the kids.

Classroom management became an issue. “I very quickly learned I (couldn’t) teach the same way I used to teach due to the number of disruptions.” “Trying to keep the kids on task . . . listening to instructions (and) not playing with their cell phones (and) ipods was a daily struggle.” The “reading outside of class,” “lecture,” “mock trials,” and “simulations” that had been a part of her social studies teaching experience in the past now had to be “scripted.” She was learning that teaching special education meant that “work is done in class” and “left in their room,” lest it get misplaced. She experienced her new teaching assignment as “more difficult” and realized that teaching social studies had been a “piece of

cake” and that she had been “spoiled rotten” teaching students who were “there” and “wanted to learn.”

### Supportive relationships

Dependence on others revealed itself. She talked to the other special education teachers, tried to find information online, and had a “number of conversations with people in the (certification) program about . . . classroom management strategies, resources that they use, etc.”

She found solace in the support she received from those relationships. “Everyone came forward to offer assistance with anything.” The district provided a formal mentor who was “helpful,” the principal was “very present,” and one of the university professors made an impacting impression. “I’m there with you, I feel bad about the situation, but we’re gonna do something about it.”

### Becoming “new” and/or renewed

In the second year of experiencing special education teaching on an emergency license, Beth experienced a “changing” of her perception of special education. She was “more sympathetic” or “empathetic” and was growing disgruntled with labeling children as “special ed.” She described a parent-teacher conference setting in her school. Teachers were at tables on which sat big posters intended to provide direction to parents looking for a particular teacher or content area. “And the special ed label, I just did not like that.”

She became more “comfortable” as she learned more strategies for dealing with classroom management issues, strategies for teaching material. Despite the fact that she often had a classroom “full of reluctant learners” and would still struggle with finding ways to



keep students “interested” and “motivated,” she experienced a feeling of “confidence,” and described herself as “excited and eager to go in the morning.”

Yet, deep down in the recesses of her mind, something was just not right. She felt “fortunate” to have a job, a job she had grown to “love,” but her future as a special education teacher appeared in doubt. She missed the “rigor” of teaching AP classes, the “intellectually stimulating” conversations with “college-bound kids.” She felt “great hope” for the future of kids “in the AP classes.” Being appreciative of the opportunity to work and completing the special education certification program would not be enough to satisfy that internal longing to recover what she had lost. When a social studies position opens up in her area, she “would apply for it, yes.”

*Kyle*

#### Diminished control over one’s life

Kyle’s schedule as a special education teacher on an emergency license was demanding. In addition to teaching, he is a husband, a father, and a volleyball coach, all roles with which he had “experience” or “training.” The new job, however, required “all this extra stuff” to be able to keep the job, and he needed to seek an emergency license. The emergency license was experienced as “burdensome,” and time immediately became a concern “I was taking two classes at (the university), coaching and teaching in two different worlds.” He struggled to find time to attend to the homework required of him by the university professors. There were days when he would “take that prep hour” and do his homework. Time with his family was diminished. “They (his family members) did not like

me because they hadn't seen me for awhile." There were days when all he had time for was to "tuck (his children) in and get them up."

### Teaching, but on the "outside"

At 35, and having concluded a ten-year stint as a "stay-at-home" dad while his wife established her career, Kyle secured the job that had eluded him for many years. Though he would have preferred to be teaching environmental science or biology, areas for which he was certified, he was unable to find a job. To "finally" get a full-time job, he accepted a position teaching one-half time special education and one-half time biology. He had no formal training in special education but looked forward to working "one-on-one" with students in the district where his family lived and where he had "subbed" for six years.

Providing special education services is experienced as "challenging." "Just keeping track of all the different students, all the things that (were) going on" was difficult. One of his students had autism. "He does not like the word 'work' or 'homework' and trying to get him to start . . . we gotta make him think it's his idea." Another student placed in Kyle's classroom had experienced a mental breakdown and had suicidal tendencies "because of algebra."

Kyle saw himself as a cheerleader for his students. "I'm always the glass is half full, very optimistic and willing to put my faith into the kids. He encouraged them, "Yeah, you can do this." Kyle identified with the "struggling reader" because he "understands" them. "My parents were happy I got C's." He desired to help his struggling students. "If I see a kid that really needs some help, I'll just drop everything and give some attention right then and there." He motivated them when they were up against obstacles. "We can work with this . . .

we'll get by it . . . we'll figure how to do it.” He gave them positive reinforcement. “I very rarely get negative towards them.” That was one thing he did not think they needed.

Kyle had much to learn about special education legal issues and he was “nervous.” He questioned whether he would ever be able to “identify the things” needed in an IEP and how to “modify tests and assignments.” He experienced a lack of cooperation from general education teachers who did not “modify” their own tests or assignments and expected him to provide the modifications. “I must “quote, unquote, (be) the expert on the history, on the algebra.”

Being on an emergency license had a “temporary feel” for Kyle but that feeling was made easier by his familiarity with the teachers from having substitute taught in that district. The teacher knew him. “Out of a 190-day contract . . . I was subbing 120 days.” He had previously established relationships with the teachers, and they trusted him. When substitute teaching, Kyle would find notes from the teachers. “Alright, this is what we’re doing, if it’s you (Kyle) subbing, you know what to do.” “I kinda became the preferred sub.”

### Supportive relationships

Teaching special education on an emergency license for Kyle was one of overcoming demands through a positive worldview. In reflecting on the experience, Kyle said, “Sometimes in life there’s going to be a period (when) things are gonna suck.” “You just gotta buckle down and do it if this is something you want.” He used his experience as a graduate student as a model for his students. “Haven’t you gone through enough school?” they asked him. He responded, “That’s part of life. I’m still learning.” “Later on in life, you’ll be continuously learning and going back to school,” too.

He used humor to handle the “chaos” in his classroom and would “joke around and tell all the other teachers my adult ADHD is becoming very well compensated” and that “having a degree and knowing how to radio collar animals with drugs or without drugs,” referring to his background in science, “qualifies me to teach anybody, especially high school kids.”

Family members filled the void created by his absence from the home. His wife came home a little earlier from work, and his “huge family in town” supported him. “We all kinda just chipped in and helped each other out.”

Kyle’s colleagues sought him out and he them. They knew he “was learning” and would “actually . . . reach out a little bit more and help me.” “I asked my colleagues questions about things, trying to understand the true aspects of the students’ disabilities.” The administration would “sit and talk.”

Participating in the certification coursework helped Kyle. The professors “opened my eyes a lot” and made him feel “welcome.” They gave the program a “real personal feel.”

Teaching special education took on meaning. “Trial and error” teaching and “on the fly, in the trenches” learning. He was developing “a bag of tricks” to use whenever he needed to.

### Becoming “new” and/or renewed

Now in the second year of the three-year emergency license period, he was “starting to be able to read the kids a little bit better,” and learning “how to (use) different angles of attack to try and get a student to understand.” He was coming to understand that teaching students with disabilities was similar to teaching students without disabilities. “Teaching these resource room kids . . . is no different than teaching AP kids . . . they’re both looking

for the answers . . . (and) want you to give them the answers . . . I could do that . . . but I would not be teaching the kids' life skills.”

*Justin*

### Diminished control over one's life

Justin was unable to find a job in his chosen field. At 26, he was a recent college graduate and licensed to teach social studies -- one of the teaching areas that was “really swamped” and for which there was little market demand. A job teaching special education at his alma mater “came up at the very last minute” and, though he is not certified, he accepted because he wanted a job. “Ooo, this is gonna be a good one . . . I know all these kids and this is my hometown.” He considered the impact of being on an emergency license and sensed that it would not be a problem. “I don't think anybody's looking at me saying ‘oh, he's not going to do as good . . . because he's on an emergency license.’ ”

The job itself consisted of managing the caseload for twelve students with a disability, a caseload similar in size to one assigned a fully certified special education teacher.

### Teaching, but on the outside

The thought of teaching on an emergency license created emotion for Justin. “Basically, it was just ‘wow . . . I'll have a total lack of experience.’ ” The reality of not knowing what to do set in. “Oh, my God, what am I gonna do?” “I don't know what kind of curriculum to follow. I don't know how to use any of these programs on the computer.” But, despite his “fears,” he was happy because he had a job.

He concerned himself with others' perceptions of him as a teacher, especially in his hometown "I don't want anyone to feel that I'm incompetent whatsoever in any facet of my life." He worried that some students would not take him seriously. "Sometimes, students couldn't see the fine line." But, the staff viewed him as a "complete equal."

He helped students with "homework," "listened" to their problems, and taught them how to stay "on task." He taught math, English, history and reading in a special education classroom and co-taught with another teacher in a general education classroom "to support his students in the mainstream."

A particular student who came in with a "rap sheet a mile long" tested Justin. The student "bickered with others," would want to "wear his hat, had straight F's, and wouldn't show up for school." Justin collaborated with the school psychologist and the guidance counselor to come up with a "plan." The parents were not "involved" in the student's life. "Needless to say," the plan did not work.

In the beginning, he Justin felt "inadequate" and called his experience a "crash course in getting to know the IEPs," becoming familiar with "liability issues," and learning the "ethics standards." He concerned himself with learning the legal issues. "I wanna be real sure I know all my protections and what I can do in a situation if it gets ugly."

He noted differences between special education and general education, especially regarding student behavior and teaching strategies. "How can you not remember to bring your supplies to class?" "Why can't you just play the game like everyone else?" He tried to lecture but discovered that did not work very well because the students' attention span was "not gonna be there."

Supportive relationships

Justin reminisced about accepting this position. “I would not have applied for a special ed position if it (were) not in my hometown.” Though he was unfamiliar with special education teaching, he was familiar with the “people in the school.” “I know all the staff” and “probably all of them have a favorable impression of me.” He had been the trap drummer in high school, worked at the local grocery store for eight years, and his family lived here. Many of the students were individuals with whom he had had contact in the past. “You’re the guy that my older brother hung out with.”

He valued the support from others. The staff was “very helpful,” especially a school psychologist and special education teacher who spent “five hours with me . . . on a day they didn’t have to come in.” They showed him examples of IEPs, demonstrated the IEP software and answered questions he had. “Right away I was really comfortable and any troubles I would have, it would be no problem to just run (to them) or shoot them an e-mail.”

Justin was “close” to his family and living near them was important to him. “If I didn’t have family here, I’d be gone in a second.”

He “learned so much” from the university program, how to give the “Woodcock Johnson” and stated that he now understood “where all this (was) coming from.”

#### Becoming “new” and/or renewed

A year into teaching special education changed Justin. He used to be the “guy . . . walking up and down the aisle . . . (with his) face in (students’) eyes” to ensure they were “listening.” Now, Justin sits “right down there” beside the students to keep them focused. He used to be “authoritarian” but now expresses that this method “hurt” feelings and “made some students cry.” The “Love and Logic” training “works better with special ed” He

projected that in the future he will “rely on love and logic with regular education” students as well.

Justin is becoming confident. He feels “better” about the job he is doing. “It’s been a 180 degree swing into the level of comfort.” Students identify with him and parents request that he “spend more time” with their children. He hopes for employment in his hometown into the future. Security, not teaching special education, is his “number one priority.” He would prefer to be teaching social studies “because I like history.” But, teaching special education “will do.”

*Carrie*

#### Diminished control over one’s life

A trained elementary teacher who really wanted “to do kindergarten,” Carrie was unable to find a teaching position because her family would “move, move, move” due to her husband’s job and she would be “unpacking” when school districts were hiring and then she couldn’t find a job teaching elementary students.

For two years she substitute taught, on many occasions in “LD” or “EBD” rooms. She knew something about special education, having minored in “inclusion” as an undergraduate student but, nevertheless, encountered some trying situations while substitute teaching. “One of the kids got sent to jail.” Some students could not “speak” because of their “disability.” Others were violent and would “bite, hit, kick.” Despite the challenges, “I figured it out and they ended up actually requesting me quite a bit.”

Carrie learned of the special education teaching position in a nearby community from a teacher in the district. Though she was not certified, she “wanted a job.” She was “so



nervous” because she needed an “emergency license.” The job came up fast, “one week before school was to start.” Carrie struggled to prepare herself and her classroom for the first day of school. In addition to tasks normally associated with being a new teacher in a new school, she inherited a “disaster.” The district had made the decision to swap her special education classroom with an eighth grade classroom the year before; yet, none of the moving had occurred. She became responsible for “sorting through piles” of teaching materials and moving furniture to her new room.

“Panic” overwhelmed her. “I had a week to get the room ready . . . figure out . . . what place the kids (had) been left at in the different programs” . . . and read through the different books.” She concerned herself with getting to know the parents of her students. “I tried to call as many parents as I could” because there “wasn’t time to send out a letter.”

Paperwork consumed her time. She served as case manager for 16 students with a disability. “I’m responsible for all their IEPs (and) any evaluations.” The “paperwork” was “overwhelming.”

During the emergency license phase for Carrie time with her husband and two young children has been a major concern. The demands of the teaching position, as well as the certification coursework required her to drive every other week to the university two hours one way and she found this experience “just exhausting.” In addition to the homework requirement at the university, she was “still a teacher” and had “lesson plans,” “IEP paperwork,” “all those papers to check,” and “all the kids to follow up on.”

Carrie “found” time for her family “for the health of (her) marriage” and so that her children would not feel “neglected.”

Teaching, but on the outside

The students on her caseload presented significant challenges. “I was very scared” in the beginning. Students “kicked” her, and many could not “control themselves” and were “rude.” She concerned herself with legal and social welfare issues. One student “banged her head down” on a table, landing on and sending “flying across the room” a pair of scissors, which came “within an inch” of hitting a paraprofessional working in the room. Another student experienced an unstable home life. She had gone from living with mom “who doesn’t care” to living with grandma who did, and Carrie was learning how to work with social service agencies involved in the case.

Establishing trusting relationships with older, more experienced staff was experienced as worrisome. She wanted to “advocate” for her students and felt “responsible” for informing general education teachers how to support her students with a disability. “I’m supposed to impress upon these people how important it is to modify or provide accommodations;” yet, she felt “meek” about this role because many of these teachers had been there “for twenty, thirty years,” and thought they knew “exactly what should be done.” She questioned her ability to provide leadership in special education. “You know, it was my first official job. I wasn’t highly qualified and didn’t have the experience or the background” that they did.

She wanted students to know she was “there” for them. Her experience taught her how to “highlight textbooks,” modify a “grading scale” and when to provide a “magnifier,” “preferential seating,” “note taker,” or “test reader” for students.

### Supportive relationships

She experienced the support of others during the emergency license period. In the beginning, a district “mentor” answered questions about “anything I was confused about,” “brought me into the lunch group,” (and) “made me feel comfortable.” A school psychologist

“ran a couple of meetings so that I could see how it went.” A district-sponsored professional development program taught her “how to de-escalate” a student. She expressed relief in having a paraprofessional assigned to her classroom seventy-five percent of the time. She “definitely lessens my stress” by “listening to me when I need to vent” and helping with the “planning, instruction, and checking of papers.” “I trust her wholeheartedly.”

The university program was experienced as a “tremendous help,” teaching her “things she could actually put into practice.” Before taking classes, she knew about individualized education plans for students but she did not know “how serious it was if she didn’t follow them.” The program helped her realize that “every kid is different with extra special needs.” Teacher educators at the university encouraged her, “You can do this.”

Family members understood demands placed on her time. Her husband “listened,” “watched the boys,” and motivated her to get her work done. On one occasion when she had procrastinated about an assignment due in one of her university classes, “he basically locked me in our office (he didn’t lock me in) but every time I came out, I just wanted to see the kids or go to the bathroom . . . it was like ‘get back in your cave.’” Her husband hired her sister to clean their house. Parents, siblings and grandparents all got “involved” in caring for the children so she did not have to take them to classes with her.

#### Becoming “new” and/or renewed

The experience of teaching special education on an emergency license for Carrie has been a re-mapping of career goals. Now in her third and final year on an emergency license, Carrie looks forward to completing the emergency license requirements in order to “get all my preps back” and be able to “actually focus on school.” Becoming fully certified means that Carrie’s students, colleagues and family will benefit. For her students, she will be “more

accessible” and “more prepared for lessons.” Her family will not feel like “I’m pushing them away.” “Colleagues won’t have to listen to me complain” and conversations “won’t be so rushed.”

Teaching special education has become “fun” for Carrie and she has developed relationships with her students. “I’m gonna cry at the eighth grade promotion ceremony.”

Carrie sees herself as a “different teacher and person,” more “confident,” and no longer “intimidated” by more experienced teachers.” “I look back at the little memo I had given (more experienced teachers) in my first year that said, ‘here are some guidelines that you can follow if you want,’ and now I’m like . . . (you) don’t have a choice.” She is “more comfortable” in her special education teacher role because she has “more tools” to handle the different behaviors. “I plan on staying here until I get burned out.”

The experience of teaching special education on an emergency license has taught her that she is “way more organized” than she ever realized. She previously thought of herself as one who “hated change” but now “I know now I can roll with it and adapt to anything whether it be school, home, family, or friends.” She has no regret accepting this special education teaching position. “It has made me a better person both in the school community and in my personal life. I’m very proud of myself” The experience has strengthened her relationship with others. “My parents are extremely proud” and “my family is important to me.”

#### *Composite Textural Description*

Teaching special education was not an original goal. All participants were licensed in other areas – elementary education, social studies and science – and they sought jobs in these

areas. Three of the participants were looking for their first job in teaching, one had taught for ten years but was laid off by two previous districts during an economic downturn. Unable to find jobs in their licensed areas, all participants turned to substitute teaching as a temporary solution to subsidize themselves and/or their family and to gain some sense of self-worth teaching albeit it on a temporary basis.

Substitute teaching allowed them to teach although not on a permanent basis. This was a tenuous time for them, not having a permanent income to support themselves and/or their families and not feeling the sense of worth that comes with performing a task that would bring them fulfillment. One participant experienced diminished self-worth because the demand for her to work to support her family was immense. Two participants had spousal income that provided for the family and one was single and able to live with his family.

Having a permanent teaching position was important to all participants so, when opportunity presented itself in the form of special education teaching, they accepted. None of the participants had special education certification and all were working under an emergency license. This emergency license meant that, in addition to teaching, they would need to attend classes to learn how to teach special education at the same time that they were teaching special education. All participants chose the same university to obtain their special education training. The university was located within one hour of their homes for three participants. One lived two hours from the university.

The experience of teaching special education on an emergency license caused discomfort in the beginning. For all participants, their caseload of students with disabilities and the problems they encountered serving these students – inattention, absenteeism, poor grades, disruptive behavior, lack of parental support -- was similar to the experience of other

special education teachers who were already licensed. They concerned themselves with many aspects of special education – legal issues, teaching strategies, extraordinary paperwork, collaborating with colleagues and parents – while learning how to be special education teachers.

There was little time to prepare for their new special education teaching jobs. All participants were hired within two weeks of the first day of school. This time frame was spent preparing their classrooms and learning the names of their students, their disabilities, and the individualized education programs (IEPs) designed to meet their unique needs. Two participants had previous experience with this district and already knew some of the staff and the students but neither of these two teachers was familiar with the students' IEPs. One of the participants was new to the district but had been hired by the same principal who hired her to teach social studies at another district. One inherited a “disaster” in having to move her classroom prior to the start of the school year.

All four participants expressed fear and anxiety about the tasks assigned to their special education teaching positions, especially that of writing an IEP and facilitating IEP meetings. Two participants expressed difficulty in collaborating with other teachers who were more experienced, teachers who would be required to provide some of the modifications students with disabilities would need according to their IEPs. All four noted differences between teaching students in general education classes and students in special education classes. Teaching special education meant using different teaching strategies, slowing the pace of instruction, more communication with parents and other teachers, and modifying tests and assignments. They experienced feelings of inadequacy about special

education teaching and noted that learning “on the fly” was a component of teaching on an emergency license.

The demands of teaching on an emergency license were numerous and all four participants experienced a loss of time for themselves and/or their families. In addition to teaching all day, participants were required to attend classes during the evenings and in the summers, complete assignments, and collaborate with their instructors and fellow classmates. Time needed to prepare lessons for their students was now focused on learning special education teaching. Time with their family needed to be planned in advance. Two participants also had extracurricular coaching roles that devoured a great deal of time. All participants enrolled in at least one course per term. The degree to which they participated and the rate they completed the licensure program varied among participants and had to do with other school and family roles they occupied.

The demands of the emergency license also placed them in situations where they were dependent on others for support. The districts of all four participants provided a formal mentor who answered questions for them about special education teaching and who introduced them to the school community. Other colleagues offered support, both solicited and unsolicited, designed to help them get to know the students, their parents, and the school curriculum. Though all four participants stated that they felt comfortable asking others for help, one added that he was concerned about his reputation and did not want to come off as being incompetent. Having to ask others for help exacerbated their feelings of inadequacy.

Faculty members teaching courses in the required special education teacher licensure program were experienced as helpful and empathetic. Three participants noted that the faculty was understanding of their commute and additional responsibilities as teachers and

parents and showed flexibility in allowing them to miss or be late for class meetings. Courses were delivered utilizing a hybrid format and all participants expressed joy in not having to drive to campus each week. Two participants experienced course assignments as meaningful in that they could actually use the new information in their current teaching.

Family members played an integral role throughout the emergency license status. Three of the four participants had children and, due to the shortage of time available to care for the children, depended on other family members to provide childcare in their absence. Additionally, family members were a source of moral encouragement to complete the emergency license status. The spouse of one participant allowed her to hire a housekeeper.

Students and parents were either unaware or did not express that it mattered to them that their children's special education teacher was on an emergency license. Two participants involved their students in conversations about the assignments they were completing for their university faculty. One noted that he had never shared with his parents that he was on an emergency license but he did not think they cared as they often requested him to help their children with homework and other school issues outside of class.

Stress was an ever-present partner throughout the emergency licensure period. All four participants discussed the impact of stress on their emotional well-being. One listened to music to and from work each day. Another experienced the demands through implementation of the "glass half full" attitude and the use of humor. Two participants noted that they managed the stress by being organized. Specific times were set aside to grade papers, do homework, spend time with the family, answer e-mails, and touch base with the general education teachers who also served their students.



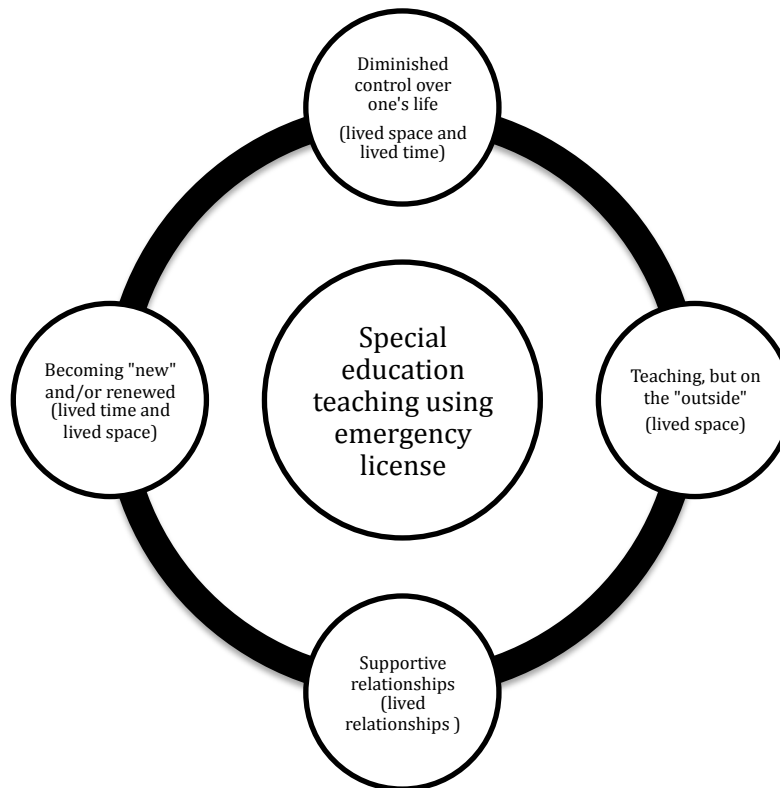
Feelings about teaching special education were initially those of fear and anxiety for all participants but, after months of experience and training, are now those of comfort and confidence. The participants are learning what constitutes special education teaching by participating in special education teaching. They are expressing self-beliefs that they can do the job. One participant expressed that he now knows how to read kids and has established trusting relationships with the other teachers. The feelings of intimidation are waning. Another participant, one who felt meek in the beginning telling older, more experienced teachers how to modify for her students, now stands up to them and they have stopped questioning her. One participant described the comfort she felt at reaching a point where she knew what to do without relying on others. With each course completed, time has also become less an irritant. One participant noted the freedom she was feeling as she neared completion of the program and is beginning to realize that time is more her own.

The experience of teaching special education on an emergency license left an impact. Their beliefs about teaching have changed. One participant expressed that he has learned that the authoritarian style of teaching does not work with students in special education, and he doubts its effectiveness with students in general education either. All participants experienced new and different teaching strategies and have learned to adapt their delivery of instruction to meet the unique needs of all students they serve. The experience has made them reconsider their original professional teaching goals. Because having a teaching position and maintaining job security is important to them, all participants will keep their special education teaching positions once they have completed the requirements of the emergency license. For three participants, their teaching special education in their current district would be more inviting should the district choose to offer them opportunity in general

education along with special education. One participant desires to stay in special education and has already passed up one opportunity to apply for a general education position in the same district.

From the individual and composite textural descriptions presented around the themes of diminished control over one's life, teaching, but on the "outside," supportive relationships, and becoming "new" and/or renewed, the researcher then sought to interpret the meaning of these descriptions through imagining various universal structural themes that could help explain and deepen the understanding of special education teaching using an emergency license. Three universal themes provided insight and understanding—lived space, lived time, and lived relationships (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**Integration of Textural and Structural Themes**



The universal theme of lived space illuminated three themes--diminished control over one's life, teaching, but on the "outside," and becoming "new" and/or renewed. Lived space is a place where people know each other, feel comfortable, and have a great deal of control over what happens in that space. Participants in this study, on the contrary, did not feel at home, especially in the beginning. Because of the demands of their teaching position and emergency license requirements, they expressed feelings of being out of control. They were teaching in an area unfamiliar to them, and time was not their own. They were dependent on others for their survival and development and were unable to predict what might happen in their classroom. Feelings of fear and uncertainty consumed them.

The universal theme of lived time served as a tool for deepening this researcher's understanding of the themes of diminished control over one's life and becoming "new" and/or renewed. In the beginning of their new special education teaching experience, participants expressed that their original goals of teaching general education were often present in their thoughts. They expressed feelings of regret that they were unable to discover teaching positions in their areas of expertise. Their current existence represented new career goals. Though special education teaching was becoming more familiar and comfortable to them over time and with experience, their future plans were uncertain.

The final universal theme that facilitated an understanding of this phenomenon was lived relationships. Participants all expressed an appreciation for others who helped them as they struggled through the emergency licensure experience. Family members assumed home maintenance and child care tasks. School districts provided formal mentors and other colleagues provided support on an informal basis. University professors in the certification program showed empathy, were flexible in their attendance requirements, and provided

instruction they described as meaningful and applicable to their current teaching. Participants also relied heavily on themselves for support. Time management, task prioritization, goal setting, and commitment were actions they took to help themselves.

### **Structural Descriptions**

An individual structural description for each participant's experience provides further detail in relation to each of the three universal themes—lived space, lived time, and lived relationships. They are presented next.

#### *Beth*

The structures that permeate Beth's experience as a special education teacher on an emergency license and evoke feelings and emotions are expressed in her relation to space, her relation to time, and her relation with others.

#### Lived space

Regarding Beth's relation to space, teaching special education on an emergency license is experienced as operating in the unknown, the unfamiliar. She is situated within a structure that is relatively threatened and uncomfortable. She worries about the emergency license always "looming" over her and about "being able to keep this job." The space she occupies as a teacher new to special education places her on the "outside" where she questions whether she can do the job. "I quickly learned that I couldn't teach the same way I used to teach." Now in her second year, she is becoming more "comfortable" and "confident;" yet, she still desires to return home to the "rigor" of general education social studies and kids who want to be "there." This is what she knows.

#### Lived time

Regarding Self in relation to time, Beth fills time with teaching special education during the day and attending classes or caring for her young son by night. Time is expressed both as moving too slowly and too quickly. She is conscious of time moving too slowly when she wants to quickly finish the university program or is dealing with discipline problems. Finishing the program means she can “safeguard” her position “cuz I’m the only person in the district in special ed who is unlicensed.” But, time is also a precious commodity. Planning meetings and phone calls to parents consume her and she has no time for “developing lesson plans” or “looking for new and interesting resources” to use with her students.

Time spent in the past dots in and out of her mind as she recalls the enjoyment she experienced teaching general education social studies as well as the pain she experienced in being laid off. Living close to the poverty level, the “meaningless” substitute teaching, and the untimely death of her husband all punctuate her feelings of loss and the “appreciation” she feels in “having a job.”

The past evolves into the present. “I was nervous in the beginning that I would never get the hang of it.” She is evolving into a special education teacher. “I started to feel more comfortable midyear last year, but by this year, I feel good.”

She contemplates her future as a special education teacher. “If given the option to go back to regular education, I probably would go back . . .” She grapples with the idea that teaching special education would be more appealing if she could spend part of her day teaching general education. “Even if it was just one class.”

#### Lived relationships

Her relationships with others are expressed both as being crucial and demanding. A formal “mentor,” numerous colleagues, and university faculty prove “helpful” in teaching her how to be a special education teacher. But, her “overwhelming” caseload is full of students who need more or something different than she has to give.

Teaching special education on an emergency license is Beth’s current existence. She operates in the unknown and on the outside but uses time to her advantage -- to develop skills that will allow her to call special education home or to contemplate a return to her previous home in social studies. Relationships that are both supportive and challenging add dimensions to the experience.

### *Kyle*

Thoughts and feelings connected to Kyle’s experience of special education teaching on an emergency license are expressed in his relation to others, to lived space and to time.

### Lived relationships

Regarding his relation to others, Kyle’s experience of teaching special education emotes thoughts and feelings about the relationship he has with his family. He is situated within a family structure that cares for one another. He was a “stay-at-home dad” so that his wife could establish her career and now that it is his turn, they fill the void created by demands of his new position. He has “huge family support” and members “chip in and help each other out.”

We gain the impression that he is physically present with his students. He offers assistance, “I’ll just drop everything and give some attention right then and there.” He motivates them, “We can work with this . . . get by . . . figure (out) how to do it.” He provides positive reinforcement, “I very rarely get negative with them.” His students are

comfortable interacting with him. “Haven’t you gone through enough school?” He responds as someone interested in modeling learning for his students. “That’s part of life. I’m still learning.”

There is a sense of mutual respect between Kyle and some of his colleagues. He openly seeks them out. “I would ask her questions about things, trying to understand the true aspects of the students’ disabilities,” and they respond. “They know I’m learning and will actually . . . reach out a little bit more and help me.” With others, he does not experience this sense of mutual respect. They do not “modify” their tests for his students so he must “quote, unquote, (be) the expert on the history, on the algebra . . . “

Regarding his relation to self, Kyle’s experience evokes thoughts and feelings that his worldview plays a role in meeting the demands of his emergency license. “I’m always the glass is half full, very optimistic . . .” He uses humor to deal with the “chaos” and is willing to put in the time. “I was taking two classes at (the university), coaching and teaching in two different worlds.”

### Lived space

We sense that special education is a place for him but a place that he cannot quite call home. The place makes him “nervous” because he is not sure whether he will ever be able to “identify the things” or “modify tests and assignments.” The place is not yet familiar to him as a home would be. He is unable to predict what will happen in this space. Teaching “in the trenches” is filled with learning through “trial and error.” But, over time and through interactions with self and others, this place is becoming more familiar. He is “starting to be able to read the kids a little bit better,” and he is learning “how . . . to get a student to understand.”

### Lived time

Regarding his relation to time, Kyle's career establishment as a teacher was not a priority early on in his adult life. Instead, he was a "stay-at-home dad" while his wife worked on her degree. Once she became established, he was ready to take on a teaching role and move his career forward; however, jobs in his area were scarce and the family was unable to move due to his wife's job. Opportunity presented itself in the form of special education teaching in the school district where his family resided. This is not where he saw himself along life's path, but he is becoming more knowledgeable about his current special education teaching—"starting to be able to read the kids a little bit better" and learning "how to (use) different angles of attack to try and get a student to understand"--and anticipating a future that may continue to include special education. "I like working one-on-one with students."

In the larger sense, this experience with the other, self, lived space, and time is giving him a sense of purpose and possible new direction in his life. "Teaching these resource room kids . . . is no different than teaching AP kids . . . they're both looking for the answers . . . and want you to give them the answers . . . I could do that . . . but it's not teaching the kids' life skills."

### *Justin*

It is through the structures of space, time and relation with others that the lived experience of being a special education teacher on an emergency license for Justin is expressed.

### Lived space

Regarding self in relation to space, Justin occupies a classroom within a school where he has history. It is to his alma mater that he returns to experience special education teaching



on an emergency license. The place is familiar to him. It is his home. He had been a trap drummer here. Being in a place that is familiar brings comfort. Yet, Justin's role here has changed. He is now a "teacher" and he questions whether this place will continue to feel like home. As a student, teachers had a "favorable impression" of him and he concerns himself now with whether this reputation will continue. He is not just a "teacher" but a "teacher on an emergency license." "I don't want anyone to feel that I'm incompetent whatsoever in any facet of my life."

Teaching at his alma mater is experienced as both threatening and safe. He is vulnerable in that he is teaching special education, an area for which he is not certified to teach so he feels "inadequate." He worries about the "liability" issues. "I wanna be real sure I know all my protections." At the same time, he expresses feelings of safety. He contemplates needing help or something going wrong but has a sense that someone familiar will pick him up should he fall. "... any troubles I would have, it would be no problem to just run to them or shoot them an e-mail."

#### Lived time and lived relationships

Regarding self in relation to time and in relation to others, Justin is a young man embarking on the beginning of his career. He is a college graduate with a "job." His first job is in his hometown, where he has history and where he is excited to work. "Ooo, this is gonna be a good (job) . . . this is my hometown." Having history means having connections to the past. He feels "comfortable" working with people from his past. He expresses the safety he feels in believing that, if he makes a mistake or has a problem, "someone familiar" will help him out. He remembers his experience working at the "local grocery store" and is

reminded of his friends when students tell him, “You’re the guy that my older brother hung out with.” He grew up in the community and his family still lives there.

There is a sense that he experienced safety and comfort in his past. Teachers have a “favorable impression” of him. And, if he is to engage in something risky today, like teaching special education on an emergency license, he wants to experience it among people who view him as a “complete equal,” who will be “helpful” in times of distress. There is also a sense that he took this risk because of his family. The family relationships of yore were such that he wanted them in his present world. “If I didn’t have family here, I’d be gone in a second.”

### *Carrie*

The structures that permeate Carrie’s experience as a special education teacher on an emergency license and evoke feelings and emotions are expressed in her relation to space, time, and with others.

### Lived space

Regarding self in relation to space, Carrie’s early conception of home was a kindergarten classroom. But, unable to find a kindergarten position, accepted a job teaching in an area for which she lacked certification. Now, she had a “job,” a professional space to occupy.

Individuals feel comfortable in a space when they have a purpose there, know how to accomplish that purpose, and have reasonable expectations about what is going to happen in this space. In the beginning of her experience of teaching special education on an emergency license, Carrie is uncomfortable in her space. She feels “nervous” and “scared” because she did not know “what place the kids (had) been left at in the different programs.” She did not

know what to do with the “student who kicked me” or the one who could not “control himself.” She felt “meek” in working with older, more experienced teachers. “It was my first official job. I wasn’t highly qualified and didn’t have the experience or the background” that they did.

### Lived time

Over time, she becomes familiar with others who occupy her space and knows what to do in this space. She has come to know her students’ “personalities . . . what makes them tick,” her colleagues through a daily “lunch group,” and how to teach special education by attending to the unique needs of “every kid . . . with extra special needs.” The experience has given her “confidence” and become her “home.” “I plan on staying here . . .”

### Lived relationships

Regarding self in relation to others, Carrie’s experience of teaching special education while using an emerging license emotes is expressed through her relationship with her family, the university faculty teaching the courses required for her special education licensure, her district, and her students. Her husband is “supportive” and her extended family “involved” in caring for the family while she undergoes the demands of teaching during her period of emergency license status. Her teachers at the university encourage her. “You can do this,” and teach her special education strategies that she “could actually put into practice.”

The relationship with district personnel is expressed as both “helpful” and “intimidating.” Carrie experiences a feeling of “comfort” when her “mentor” answers questions about “anything I was confused about” and brings her into the “lunch group.” Her paraprofessional “listens” when she needs to “vent.” She feels “meek” when dealing with colleagues more experienced than she. “I wasn’t highly qualified and didn’t have the

experience or the background” that they did. This feeling of “intimidation” subsides with time, time she uses to gain knowledge and expertise. “I look back at the little memo I had given them in my first year that said, ‘here are some guidelines that you can follow if you want,’ and now I’m like . . . (you) don’t have a choice.”

Carrie has come to know her students on a personal level. The relationship extends beyond the “Hey, Bob. Hey, Joe” as she comes to know “their personalities . . . what makes them tick . . . what inspires and motivates them.” She cares for them. “I’m gonna cry at the eighth grade promotion ceremony.”

For Carrie, the experience of teaching special education has been one of gaining a home in special education. Time and supportive relationships are experienced as necessary steps in her transformation from feeling “meek” to feeling “confident” and at home in special education. “It wasn’t what I started out wanting to do, but I love it now.”

#### *Composite Structural Description*

Experiencing special education teaching on an emergency license evoked powerful feelings and emotions in relation to space, time, and interactions with others and self. The experience was one of transition from being on the “outside” to being on the “inside,” from experiencing dis-comfort to comfort.

#### *Lived space*

Teaching special education on an emergency license is experienced as operating in the unknown, in unfamiliar territory. The participants in this study felt threatened and uncomfortable and worried about being able to keep their jobs. The spaces they occupied as teachers new to special education placed them on the “outside” where they questioned whether they could do the job. They concerned themselves with worry over legal issues,

interactions with people who may question their competence, and how to motivate and inspire students with disabilities. Unfamiliar with the teaching strategies used in special education, they found themselves learning “in the trenches” and through “trial and error.” They experienced special education teaching as something to fear and felt unqualified. The experience caused them stress. For them, the teaching was temporary and conditional and their classrooms did not feel like home. Over time, special education teaching was coming into focus. They became more familiar, gained confidence, and developed a sense of purpose. They began to feel comfortable and their classroom felt more like a home.

#### *Lived time*

Time was expressed both as moving too slowly and too quickly. Time moved ever so slowly when they were filled with feelings of fear and inadequacy. It ground to a halt when they sized up the demands of the emergency license. They desired to quickly finish the university program to safeguard their teaching positions. Time was a precious commodity. Time evaporated when deadlines loomed. Planning lessons, collaborating with colleagues, communicating with parents, commuting to university classes and doing the homework consumed them and they had no time left for themselves.

Time spent in their past is never far away. They recalled their earlier dreams to teach something other than special education. The past evolved into the present and a realization that this dream has eluded them. They use time now to prepare for something new. Teaching special education is not what they really want. But, they rejoice in that they have a job. The job gives them economic security and a sense of purpose. They hold out hope for a return to their original dream in the future.

#### *Lived relationships*

Feelings of fear, nervousness, and discomfort are constant companions in the beginning. They are squeezed between their old life and their new life. They are on the “outside” of teaching, somewhat lonely and dependent on others. They have little control over the demands being placed on them by the emergency license. They concern themselves with whether they can do this job. Supportive relationships relax and give them encouragement. Within the self, there is the possibility of re-gaining control and becoming comfortable. What is required is commitment to new goals. They plunge forward and emerge on the “inside” of special education teaching. Self-satisfaction and fulfillment fill them with pride.

### Synthesis

Finally, the researcher integrated the composite textural description and composite structural description into a unified statement of the essences of the phenomenon as a whole. The synthesis represents the essences of special education teaching on an emergency license from the merged perspective of all participants and is organized around the evolving themes: Diminished control over one’s life; teaching, but on the “outside”; supportive relationships; and becoming “new” and/or renewed. Universal structural themes of space, time, and human relations are incorporated throughout.

#### *Diminished control over one’s life*

Based on verbatim expressions from the interviews with participants in this study, teachers practicing special education on an emergency license experience diminished control over their lives during both the period prior to accepting this position and the beginning teaching experience on an emergency license. They had prepared for teaching positions in

other areas but are unable to find jobs, primarily due to market demand for those positions in their areas. Their previous direction has been interrupted and they sense a feeling of loss. Unable to move, they turn to substitute teaching. While this provides some income and some sense of fulfillment in that they are, at least, teaching, they do not experience the joy and satisfaction that comes with investing in a full-time position. Through substitute teaching, they gain experience in special education and consider a new direction for their lives. When special education teaching positions open up in or near communities where they live, they commit to that new direction.

They soon learn that life as a special education teacher on an emergency license is demanding and requires much time. They experience time as a precious commodity, something they need to contemplate and then decide how to divide. They need time to prepare for the teaching position that came up at the last minute. They need time to get to know their students, develop lesson plans, complete individualized education plans, monitor student progress, and become familiar with special education laws and legal issues. They need time to for travel to and from their own classes at the university and for completing assignments and activities related to those classes. They need time to fulfill their roles within family and social structures. Their fill their days, nights, weekends, and summers completing day-to-day duties related to their various role as teachers, coaches, graduate students, family members, and friends. They find time wherever they can – early mornings, teacher preparation periods, evenings, in the car, at home, in school. They cannot find enough time to do all they need to do and experience feelings of stress, fear and inadequacy. They worry about how this loss of time impacts their students, colleagues, and family members.

Participants described a sense of independence they had lost during the emergency license period. Being in special education reminded them of the loss of direction they experienced when they could not find teaching positions in areas in which they wanted to teach and were already certified. It also reminded them of the intense commitment of time they were making to pursue a new direction. The new position required them to depend on others, at least temporarily, and this was unsettling for them. They sought guidance from district-assigned mentors, building administrators, school psychologists, university teachers and the Internet. Family members and friends provided moral support. All participants had bachelor's degrees, two had master's degrees, and one was pursuing her master's degree. They had made obvious commitments to previous goals and had been successful in obtaining them. Being dependent on others now was something they realized they must be but they eagerly anticipated completing the certification program and becoming qualified in special education to earn back their independence.

#### *Teaching, but on the "outside"*

Time is spent briefly in the past recalling their former direction but mostly in the present -- new goals and new plan. Thoughts of joy are emoted about the new job – an income, insurance, and possibilities for the future – and intermingle with thoughts of uncertainty. The emergency license would mean teaching on the “outside,” teaching but learning how to teach at the same time. Once school began in the fall, feelings of uncertainty overwhelmed them. The students were experienced as different from students with whom they had worked in the past or for whom they had trained, students who were less motivated, attentive, capable, and interested. The instruction needed for these students would be different as well. They needed to learn how to provide accommodations, complete an



individualized education plan, individualize instruction, and how not to be general education teachers but collaborate with general education teachers. They yearn for the familiar, a home that was less messy and disorganized.

### *Supportive relationships*

The experience is made different through interactions with others. Support was experienced as crucial to their survival. Relationships with district-provided mentors, administrators, fellow teachers, and university professors provided much needed encouragement and advice. Colleagues welcomed them into the school settings and listened. Mentors provided assistance with planning and instruction. University professors empathized with their situation and provided flexibility in class attendance and assignment completion deadlines. Certification coursework was experienced as meaningful and geared to practical application. Family members picked up the slack at home. The participants' own worldview made a difference. They shared examples of self-talk that encouraged them and the use of humor to balance difficult situations.

With time and support from others, participants' feelings of fear and anxiety began to dissipate. The classroom home became more familiar and comfortable, and they began to feel more in control. They were optimistic about their contributions to student learning in their building and what they were learning about special education.

### *Becoming "new" and/or renewed*

The theme of becoming "new" and/or renewed came to mean obtaining fully certified special education teaching stature, re-gaining control over their lives, and discovering new things about themselves along the journey. Now at or near the end of their emergency license stage, participants expressed joy, relief, and self-pride at having overcome many early

challenges as beginning special educators. Becoming fully certified would mean greater job security and emoted feelings of safety in that their jobs could not be as easily taken away. Completion of the emergency license would also mean re-gaining some control over their lives, especially the use of time. Time needed to prepare for and instruct students would be more available as would time to participate in family activities. They were beginning to view themselves, not as general education teachers in the content for which they had originally obtained certification, but as special education teachers. Special education has become more comfortable for all participants and one has projected that she will continue in special education. The other three will probably pursue general education teaching opportunities if they become available but, for now, they appear to be comfortable with what they are doing.

Participants also gave many examples of self-discoveries as a result of their emergency license experience. They are more protective of and empathetic towards children with a disability. They have learned to use strategies they describe as more effective and anticipate that these strategies will benefit them in general education settings as well. Once uncertain of or intimidated by colleagues with more experience, they have learned how to collaborate with them in providing special education services and how to stand their ground when general educators rely too much on special educators to do their job.

Finally, the experience has taught or reminded participants of the importance of commitment. Each of them made a commitment by accepting a special education position on an emergency license. As they reflect now two or three years later, they realize what that commitment meant. Though a tremendous investment of time and energy, all have had job opportunities they would not have had without the commitment, and all express positive teaching experiences that have been a result of that commitment.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND OUTCOMES

### Summary of Entire Study

Chapter One introduces this phenomenological study of special education teachers using an emergency license. Recruiting teachers with an emergency license is one means of addressing a current severe shortage of available special education teachers. The need to understand this experience in relation to policy development and the implementation of recruitment and retention policies is explained. A brief section reveals details about the research design and delimitations.

Chapter Two presents a literature review around special education teaching. Sections within this chapter review legal requirements of special education, the shortage of special education teachers, causes of the shortage and experiences of beginning special education teachers.

Chapter Three presents the design of this qualitative study layered with the traditions of phenomenology. Phenomenological research methods and procedures are explained and specific information detailing how this researcher conducted this study utilizing such methods and procedures is provided.

Chapter Four elucidates the texture and structures of teaching special education on an emergency license found in this study's findings. Textural descriptions are provided around four themes – diminished control over one's life; teaching, but on the "outside;" supportive relationships; and becoming "new" and/or renewed. Diminished control over one's life was interpreted as having three meaning units: a loss of direction, loss of time for self, and loss of

independence. Teaching, but on the “outside” was determined to have three meanings units: opportunity to work, being unfamiliar with special education, and feelings about the experience. Supportive relationships was interpreted as meaning encouragement from school, family, university personnel and self, and becoming “new” and/or renewed was interpreted as meaning becoming a fully certified special education teacher, re-gaining control over one’s life and discoveries about self. The core universal structures of lived time, lived space and lived relationships were explored as a means of determining how special education teaching on an emergency license came to be.

Chapter Five discusses this researcher’s discoveries about the experience of special education teaching using an emergency license and connects them to findings from the literature review. Implications for her own research as well as for the broader field of special education teaching are provided. Limitations of the research design are revealed as well as recommendations for future research.

### **Discussion**

Beginning special educators on an emergency license experience teaching that is very different from that for which they were originally trained. The use of teachers on an emergency license is allowed by states as one means of addressing the shortage of available special education teachers but often these teachers struggle in their early years. The full time teaching load in an area with which they are unfamiliar, together with the requirements of obtaining certification, is demanding and requires tremendous sacrifice. Receiving a broad base of support during this period, while considered essential to survival, is not always enough to influence these teachers to stay in special education.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to interpret meaning of teaching special education on an emergency license. Four teachers practicing special education on an emergency licensed provided descriptions of their experience during semi-structured interviews with this researcher. A discussion of the findings, in relation to the broader literature found in Chapter Two and framed around secondary research questions, is now provided.

*How do teachers experience their early years as beginning special education teachers on an emergency license?*

The experience of beginning special education teachers on an emergency license is filled with mixed emotions. As was the case for all participants in this study, beginning teachers are happy to have a job even if it the job requires certification they do not have and means they must seek an emergency license. States allow emergency licenses in special education because of the national shortage of special education teachers (Thornton, Peltier & Medina, 2007; McLeskey, Tyler & Flippin, 2004; ; Katsiyannis, Zhang & Conroy, 2003; Brownell, Sindelar, Bishop, Langley & Seo, 2002), and local districts increasingly hire teachers willing to seek an emergency license because they are unable to recruit fully certified special education teachers for their open positions (Katsiyannis, et al, 2003; CEC, 2003). The number of special education teachers considered unprepared for their teaching assignments today is around 14%, according to Nichols, Bicard, Bicard and Casey, (2008). Being on an emergency license means full time teaching in an area for which teachers lack qualifications while simultaneously participating in a program that will lead to new certification. This experience is often characterized on three levels: It is very different from

that which teachers had originally prepared, it is demanding and requires sacrifice, and their survival is dependent on support from others.

Beginning special educators on an emergency license often experience special education teaching as much different than general education teaching. Students in special education have a disability that “adversely” affects their educational performance and, as a result, require “specially designed instruction” to meet their needs (IDEA, P. L. 101-476). Many beginning special educators on an emergency license, including those in this study, have been trained for general education, and they struggle initially with pedagogy, managing time, and dealing with issues related to special education. To participants in this study, teaching special education required them to learn different strategies, such as slowing the pace of instruction, facilitating more communication with parents and other teachers, and modifying tests and assignments. Justin sought training in the Love and Logic model after he discovered his authoritarian style of teaching did not work with children in his program. Beth, who previously taught social studies for 10 years, learned that, due to “disruptions,” she must work to “keep the kids on task” and require that completed work be left in the room, lest it be “misplaced.” Activities such as “outside reading,” “lecture,” “mock trial,” and “simulation” did not work with her current students.

Beginning special educators, according to Jones (2009), sometimes struggle with knowing where to go to find information on effective teaching strategies. One participant in this study, Beth, revealed that this has been the case with her. Sometimes, she would use the Internet or contact classmates in her certification program to request help, especially in the area of classroom management. All participants expressed views that they relied upon

available teachers and administrators in their school settings as well as university professors and classmates in their certification program.

Special education teachers also have many legal requirements with which to become familiar. Billingsley and Tomchin (1992) found that their participants struggled with how to complete special education paperwork, provide accommodations, and collaborate with general education teachers and parents. The legal aspect of their teaching concerned participants in this study as well. All four participants expressed fear and anxiety about the tasks assigned to their special education teaching positions, especially that of writing an IEP and facilitating IEP meetings. Said Justin, “I wanna be real sure I know all my protections and what I can do in a situation if it gets ugly.” Kyle experienced a lack of cooperation from general education teachers he perceived as responsible for providing their own modifications. They expect him to “quote, unquote, (be) the expert on the history, on the algebra.”

Beginning special educators experience early years of teaching as demanding and requiring great sacrifice. New NCLB guidelines require them to be licensed in all areas they provide instruction and to ensure that children in their program become proficient (Thornton, Peltier & Medina, 2007). For those on an emergency license, there is pressure to quickly gain status as fully certified and to provide instruction that will result in academic gains for their students. While the subject of teacher quality was not a topic of this study, certification status was.

All participants were graduate students in the same special education certification program with a campus commute between one and two hours from their homes. All participants readily acknowledged responsibility for completing coursework but described difficulty in juggling these requirements with those of day-to-day teaching. Said Kyle, “I was

taking two classes at (the university), coaching and teaching in two different worlds.” Some days he had to use his “prep hour to do “homework.” Another participant, Carrie, had to “drive every other week (to the university) two hours one way” and found this “exhausting.” In addition to the homework requirement at the university, she said, “I’m still a teacher” with lesson plans, IEP paperwork, and papers to check. Teacher working conditions, including job assignment, class load, stress and paperwork, is one reason special education teachers leave the profession (Thornton, Peltier & Medina, 2007; Billingsley, 2004). Key findings by Miller, Brownell and Smith (1999) report a higher level of attrition among uncertified teachers as opposed to certified teachers. Those on an emergency license are considered at high risk of leaving and, particularly, in need of support.

*How are teachers supported during the emergency license period?*

Numerous studies confirm the importance of supporting beginning special educators through formal mentoring programs, administrative actions, and collegial climates that are warm and receptive. Brownell, Hirsch & Seo (2004), in noting that, “Beginning teachers are most vulnerable” (p. 57) recommend a high quality induction program that includes an opportunity to work with mentors. All participants in this study were provided with mentors by their employing districts and expressed that they benefited from these mentors. For one participant, Carrie, a mentor answered questions related to “anything I was confused about” and made her feel comfortable by bringing her “into the lunch group.”

Teachers appreciate being supported emotionally by having others take an interest in their work and communicating openly with them (Littrell, Billingsley & Cross, 1994). Beth’s principal was “very present, Kyle’s administration would “sit and talk,” and Carrie’s husband “listened.” Participants who identified communication and collaboration as an important



form of support in a study by Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, Hou and Garvan (2009) interacted frequently with other teachers. In this study, Justin described the staff in his school as “very helpful,” and described frequent interactions with the school psychologist and a special education teacher who showed him “examples of IEPs” and answered any questions. For Beth, “Everyone came forward to offer assistance” and a school psychologist ran a couple of IEP meetings so she could see how they went.

Although not a focus of the Chapter Two literature review, participants expressed having received support also from family members, a paraprofessional, and district-provided professional development. Kyle’s wife came home earlier from work and his parents, as did Carrie’s, helped out with childcare. All four participants described their college courses as helpful and professors as welcoming. Kyle said they gave the program an “easy feel.” Carrie described a district-sponsored professional development course on “how to de-escalate” a student.

*How do teachers expect their teaching roles to change upon obtaining fully certified special education teaching status?*

Currently, special education certification programs do not graduate enough teachers to meet the needs of the K-12 system (Thornton, Peltier & Medina, 2007) and retention rates among special education teachers are substantially lower than that of general education teachers. As stated previously, up to 25% of special education teachers leave their positions each year (Boe, Cook & Sunderland, 2008). “One of the most straightforward methods to address the shortage of special education teachers is to keep those who are hired” (Thornton et al).

Participants in the study provided examples of how they had grown professionally throughout the process, the subject of Theme Four: Becoming “New” and/or Renewed. They had learned new instructional “tools” and were becoming “comfortable” and “confident” in their positions. As they developed skills in “classroom management,” “teaching strategies,” and “reading the kids,” special education was becoming a home for them. Justin expressed that he found that students were beginning to “identify” with him and parents were requesting that he “spend more time” with their children. Carrie expressed that she learned things about herself. “I’m way more organized than I ever thought I could be. For one who used to hate change, I know now I can roll with it and adapt to anything.” All four projected that they would complete their certification program within 6 to 18 months of the date of this study. Upon obtaining fully certified special education teaching status, they expect that they will re-gain some of the control they gave up during the emergency license phase, especially control over time.

Despite their description of the emergency license period as positive and the fact that they are nearing completion of the emergency license status and expect less stress and anxiety as a result, only one, Carrie, specifically stated that she intends to continue in her current position. The experience has made “me a better person both in the school community and in my personal life. I plan on staying here until I get burned out.” Two will continue in their current positions but project a migration to general education positions in their original area of certification as soon as positions open up in their area. “Security” and living close to family, not “teaching special education,” is Justin’s “number one priority.” He prefers to be teaching social studies “because I like history” but, for now, teaching special education “will do.” Beth expresses that she feels “fortunate” to have a job and even admits that she has

grown to “love her current position. But, she misses the “rigor” of general education, the “intellectually stimulating” conversations with “college-bound kids.” When a social studies position opens up in her area, she “would apply for it, yes.” And, finally, Kyle did not specifically reveal his intent. He admits to enjoying the “one on one” teaching in special education and already occupies a role that allows him to spend one-half of his time in environmental science and biology, his general education area of expertise. “Teaching these resource room kids” he says, “is no different than teaching AP kids. They’re both looking for answers. Perhaps, because of this, he will stay.

In summary, from the perspective of this study’s participants, special education teaching on an emergency license means an opportunity to work, early struggles related to an unfamiliarity with specially designed special education instruction, a sacrifice of time to meet the demands of beginning teaching while completing a certification program, and a dependence on others for support.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited by the researcher’s ability to thoroughly explore participants’ experiences from their perspectives, the researcher’s ability to set aside biases brought to the study, and the size of the participant pool. The nature of qualitative research allows researchers to interpret meaning of an experience by gathering data in the natural setting of those experiencing the phenomenon but the natural setting can be chaotic. For this study, the in-depth interview served as the primary method for data collection and interviews were conducted in the participants’ classrooms during their preparation periods. At some points during the interview process, students requiring additional help from the participants,

colleagues needing information, or messages over the intercom interrupted the interviews. There were also instances when participants struggled to recall specific people and/or events that led to thoughts and feelings they had about the emergency licensure experience. Certainly, there is more to the experience than what the researcher collected on the three occasions she interviewed each participant.

A second limitation is researcher bias. Phenomenology requires researchers to reflect on previous experiences and biases they bring to a study. This researcher engaged in reflexivity and captured these biases and experiences in a Positionality Statement prior to the study. She regularly read and re-read them in relation to the evolving interpretation to dissuade their influence on the study's findings. However, it is difficult to conclude that the results are completely free of bias.

Finally, the small number of participants limits the study. Phenomenologists intentionally select small samples for their studies to allow for relationship building and in-depth study of a particular phenomenon. The current study consists of four teachers practicing special education in the same geographical area in the Midwest. The researcher had previous relationships with all participants in the study as students in a special education certification program she coordinates and in which she teaches. She took time during the reflexivity process to set aside what she previously knew and believed about each participant and captured these in the Positionality Statement to discourage their influence on this study's findings. In addition, she took extra time to get to know the participants on a more personal level prior to conducting the interviews to encourage them to feel comfortable and share more details during the research process. Additionally, the researcher spent considerable time with the participants in the natural setting of their classrooms to develop thick data. The

small number of participants and restricted geographic location of the study, however, make it difficult to generalize the results of this study to all beginning special education teachers using an emergency license. A similar analysis of another group of teachers across a wider geographical region or even the same teachers at a different point in their emergency licensure period may yield different themes. The influence of context on a study's outcome is unknown. Despite these limitations, an alignment of this study's findings with the results of other research may lead the field to an increased understanding of the experience of beginning special educators using an emergency license.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

Answering the question, "What is the meaning of special education teaching on an emergency license?" has practice and policy implications for this researcher as well as others interested in special education teacher recruitment and retention. Results of the study imply that using special education teachers on an emergency license is a viable means of filling open positions in special education and that these teachers benefit from a broad range of support during the emergency license period. It is suggested that states continue the policy of allowing the use of emergency licenses to fill open positions in special education and that this researcher's university continue to provide a certification programming for area teachers desiring special education certification.

Due to the extra demands placed on teachers during the emergency licensure period, however, it is recommended that teachers have available a broad range of support during this time. Specific recommendations include the following: 1) alignment between beginning special education teachers' needs and curriculum in the certification program; 2) flexibility in

certification program attendance requirements and the use of web-enhanced instruction to decrease demands on teacher time; 3) local professional development to allow opportunities for teachers to acquire skills in specially-designed teaching strategies required by children with a disability as well as in IEP development and monitoring; 4) use of mentors to welcome beginning teachers and orient them to the building/district's policies and procedures; and 5) communication and collaboration mechanisms practiced by all staff in the local schools. Specific recommendations for each follow.

*Alignment between teachers' needs and certification program curriculum*

Participants in this study expressed problems, especially in the area of effective teaching strategies for children with a disability and special education legal issues. Certification program curriculum should focus on providing opportunities for teachers to learn a variety of teaching strategies deemed effective for children with a disability and acquaint them with legal issues related to serving children with a disability. Furthermore, teachers in the program should provide opportunities for participants to share their day-to-day teaching challenges and receive feedback not only from the teacher educator but also from other participants in the program. Additionally, program providers are encouraged to visit special education teachers in their own classrooms for the purpose of observing their teaching and providing immediate feedback.

*Flexibility and use of web-enhanced instruction in certification program*

Time demands presented emotional and physical problems for participants in this study. Therefore, recommendations for certification program providers are to remind university teachers in these programs of these demands and encourage them to develop flexible attendance policies and to use web-enhanced instruction that would decrease the

amount of time teachers are required to travel to campus. This would allow teachers more time to develop lessons for their students, learn new pedagogical methods in their classrooms, and spend time with their families who see much less of them during this period due to the time demands.

#### *Professional development in the local schools*

Because they were all trained for positions in general education, participants in this study expressed feelings of being unfamiliar with special education and not knowing where to turn to receive training. Furthermore, participants expressed few opportunities were available to learn about legal issues related to special education, classroom management strategies, and how to collaborate with general education teachers who shared responsibility for students on their rosters. Local districts should become familiar with their teachers' beginning knowledge and skills in the area of special education and monitor their development of effective teaching practices over time. Local, regional and state professional development seminars, workshops, or classes should be made available to assist the struggling beginning teacher.

#### *Mentors*

All participants in this study had been assigned mentors by their employing districts and expressed that they benefited from the services provided by these mentors. Having someone with whom to share their observations – what they see, hear, and feel – and to bounce ideas off help beginning teachers to reflect on what has gone well, what has not gone so well, and what they can do about it. It is recommended that this practice of assigning mentors for beginning teachers continue. Mentors should focus initially on helping beginning teachers feel comfortable by introducing them to others in the school and explaining policies

and procedures used by the school but then focus on modeling effective teaching practices or connecting beginning teachers up with others who can teach them effective teaching practices. Beginning teachers have different problems throughout the emergency license period. Building administrators are recommended to ensure a schedule that allows mentors and beginning teachers various opportunities to communicate either in person or through e-mail. This ongoing support is crucial to their overall development.

#### *Communication and collaboration mechanisms*

School climates that benefited participants in this study included principals who were involved and listened to their teachers and colleagues who reached out to welcome and support beginning teachers. Principals who recruit and district personnel who support these individuals can show interest in and concern themselves with the new teachers' strengths and, in particular, their needs so that relationships can be established to help them feel comfortable and nurtured in their new positions. In addition, principals and colleagues are recommended to look for opportunities to lift some of the traditional new teacher burdens from these teachers so that they may participate in the certification program. Not giving them the most difficult roster of students or challenging schedule or requiring that they teach summer school when they already have university coursework would be examples. Furthermore, principals should develop school policies and practices that encourage communication and collaboration between and among beginning teachers on an emergency license and experienced teachers. In particular, schools should implement activities that encourage team building and provide opportunities for common planning time to facilitate shared responsibility for children with a disability and outline legal responsibilities for general education teacher involvement in providing modifications to their curriculum.



The study's findings also have implications for recruitment of special education teachers by using general education teachers willing to pursue emergency licensure. Participants in this study describe emergency license experiences that were initially unfamiliar and demanding but became more familiar and less demanding over time. School districts and institutes of higher education should initiate or continue efforts to recruit special education teachers by affording teachers trained in general education to learn about job opportunity in special education in light of the shortage and the means of support available during the emergency license period. If more general education teachers, especially those currently unemployed, pursue special education teaching and endure a period of emergency licensure, more open positions in special education will be filled. Moreover, these teachers may have a positive experience, develop into effective teachers, and make the decision to continue in special education, thus reducing the overall shortage of special education teachers.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Further studies should include the use of longitudinal studies of this population from the time they begin teaching special education using an emergency license until they complete the certification requirements. This could facilitate long-term goals in effective recruitment and retention policies and practices. Studies that include more diversity in demographic characteristics, especially in comparison to results of other studies, would provide greater generalizability.

Given the thoughts and feelings expressed by participants in this study in relation to the importance of support, further studies should seek focus on specific mentoring and

induction models, in particular an investigation of the link between teachers who leave special education, migrate to general education, or continue in special education. Although it may be difficult to isolate specific components of these models that impacted and/or influenced teachers most, it would be helpful to learn more in this area.

Further research is also recommended in the area of certification program alignment with special education teachers' needs as well as efficient means of delivering these programs to teachers already under great time demands. It would be helpful to know what certification program curriculum beginning teachers deem essential not only to their survival but also to their development into effective teachers. Because this is a period of excessive time demands, it would also be helpful to understand what instructional delivery models interest teachers using an emergency license. For example, is meeting face-to-face on a weekly basis worth the time commitment or would teachers prefer to participate in more web-enhanced instruction that would allow them the opportunity to learn from home? What impact does the delivery model have on teacher development?

### **Summary**

Addressing the shortage of special education teachers is complex and must start somewhere. One seemingly appropriate point to begin is a study of special education teachers using an emergency license. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to deepen the understanding of this teaching experience by interacting with four individuals currently experiencing this phenomenon. For participants in this study, the emergency license experience is initially a period characterized by a lack of control over their lives and unfamiliar teaching but, with time and support from others, becomes a period characterized

by feelings of being “new” again or renewed. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the results are not generalizable to all special education teachers using an emergency license but this study’s results, together with the results of other research, may lead the field to an increased understanding of the experience of beginning special educators using an emergency license.

## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVALS

### IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board  
Office for Responsible Research  
Vice President for Research  
1138 Pearson Hall  
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207  
515 294-4566  
FAX 515 294-4267

**DATE:** 28 October 2009

**TO:** Sue Alborn-Yilek  
11833 Deer Valley Trail  
Dubuque, IA 52001

**CC:** Dr. Scott McLeod  
N243E Lagomarcino

**FROM:** Roxanne Bappe, IRB Coordinator  
Office for Responsible Research

**TITLE:** Phenomenological Study of Unqualified Special Education Teachers

**IRB ID:** 09-436

**Approval Date:** 28 October 2009  
**Date for Continuing Review:** 27 October 2010

The Chair of the Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has reviewed and approved this project. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use the documents with the IRB approval stamp in your research.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by completing the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office for Responsible Research website [[www.compliance.iastate.edu](http://www.compliance.iastate.edu)] or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.



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9/3/09

Sue Alborn-Yilek  
School of Education  
UW-Platteville

RE: IRB Protocol #2009-10-02

Project Title: Phenomenological Study of Unqualified Special Education Teachers

Approval Date: 9/3/2009

Expiration Date: 9/2/2010

Your project has been approved by the University of Wisconsin-Platteville IRB via an Expedited Review. This approval is subject to the following conditions, otherwise approval may be suspended:

1. No participants may be involved in the study prior to the IRB approval date listed above or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated or serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB.
3. All modifications to procedures, participant selection, and instruments used (surveys, consent forms, etc) must be reported to the IRB chair prior to their use.
4. If the project will continue beyond the expiration date, then the researcher must file for a continuation with the IRB at least 14 days prior to the expiration date. If the IRB approval for this project expires before approval for continuation is given, then a new protocol must be filled out and submitted. Federal guidelines allow for no exceptions to this rule.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB chair at the address below. Include your protocol # on all correspondence.

Sincerely,

*Dr Barb Barnet*

Dr. Barb Barnet  
Institutional Review Board Chair  
Professor, Mathematics Department  
Gardner 451  
University of Wisconsin-Platteville  
(608) 342-1942  
[barnetb@uwplatt.edu](mailto:barnetb@uwplatt.edu)

1 University Plaza • Platteville, WI 53818-3099 • [www.uwplatt.edu](http://www.uwplatt.edu)

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

Sept. 1, 2009

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on the experience of teaching special education on an emergency license while participating in the Cross Categorical Special Education Teacher Licensure Program at UW-Platteville. I value the unique contribution that you can make to this study and am excited about the possibility of your participation in it. The purpose of this letter is to serve as a follow-up to the things we have already discussed and secure your signature on the Informed Consent form that you will find at the end of this letter.

The research model I am using is a qualitative one in which I am seeking comprehensive depictions or descriptions of your experience. In this way I hope to illuminate or answer my research questions: How do teachers who are unqualified for a special education teaching positions think and feel about their teaching? What motivates individuals to accept special education teaching positions for which they are unqualified? How does the teacher\_training program in which unqualified special education teachers participate influence their daily teaching practices? How do unqualified special education teachers expect their experiences to change upon completion of their teacher-training program?

Through your participation, I hope to come to understand the essence of special education teaching on an emergency license while participating in a special education teacher-training program as it reveals itself in your experience. You will be asked to recall

specific episodes, situations, or events that you experience in your special education teaching, your decisions to enter into this teaching position, and what expectations you have for yourself once you become a highly-qualified special education teacher. I am seeking vivid, accurate and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for you: your thoughts, feelings and behaviors as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experience.

A research study plan is summarized as follows:

1. The purpose of this study is to come to understand the phenomenon of special education teaching on an emergency license while participating in a special education teacher-training program.
2. You will be interviewed on three occasions. Each of the interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder. The first interview will focus on your current teaching experiences, the second on your thinking and decision-making that led up to your acceptance of a teaching position for which you were unqualified, and the third will focus on the expectations you have for yourself upon completion of the teacher-training program. You will be given an opportunity to read transcriptions from the interviews to check for clarity and accuracy. In addition, I will visit your special education classroom and/or university classroom for the purpose of “hanging out” with you to gain a better understanding of the thoughts, feelings, incidents, relationships, and beliefs that comprise special education teaching on an emergency license. I will collect field notes from these visits.
3. Each of the three interviews is expected to take approximately 90 minutes. Each of the classroom observations is expected to take about four hours.

4. There are risks involved in participating in any study. For example, participation will require you to give of your time and energy during this study, which I expect to last from November to December, 2009. Because this particular study is a phenomenology, I am soliciting from you your beliefs and feelings about your special education teaching experience. Some of the data you share could be perceived as negative towards your colleagues and/or district and, if released, could damage your relationships with these individuals. To ensure your rights and protection as a participant, the information gathered in this study will be used in a confidential form and shared only with my dissertation committee at Iowa State University. Pseudonyms will be used to identify you and your school district. Descriptions of you, your classroom, and your district will be changed in order to protect everyone's identity. A link between you and your pseudonym will be maintained and protected in a secure location separate from the data.

5. It is my hope that as a participant you will benefit from participating in this study by reflecting on and sharing your teaching experiences. Others will benefit as well. Findings from this study will contribute to the knowledge base regarding teachers on an emergency license who practice special education while enrolled in a special education teacher-training program. It is important for K-12 and university administrators to understand what it means to be unqualified for special education teaching and the experiences of these teachers so that better support can be provided. In addition, state and federal policymakers need to understand the experiences of unqualified special education teachers so that progress can be made in the area of reducing special education teacher shortages.

6. Your participation in this study is voluntary. Should you join the study and choose to withdraw later, you may do so without penalty or repercussions. The information from you



up to that point would be destroyed if you so desire. If you have any questions afterward, you may contact me or the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Scott McLeod, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Iowa State University, Ames, IA. His phone number is 515.294.1241. Once the study is completed, you may request a summary of the results by contacting Dr. McLeod or me.

7. In consideration of the time and effort required to participate in this study, participants will receive \$10 for each of the interviews and observations in the study or a total of \$60.00 if he/she completes the study. If a participant withdraws from participation, he/she will receive \$10 for each of the interviews and observations completed.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, there are people you may contact at either Iowa State University or at University of Wisconsin-Platteville.

Iowa State University -- IRB Administrator at (515) 294-4566, [IRB@iastate.edu](mailto:IRB@iastate.edu), or Office for Responsible Research Director, (515) 294-3115, 1138 Pearson Hall, Ames, IA 50011, or at University of Wisconsin-Platteville -- Kathryn Lomax, Office of Sponsored Programs, Director, 608.342.1456, [lomax@uwplatt.edu](mailto:lomax@uwplatt.edu).

I value your participation and thank you in advance for the commitment of time, energy, and effort. If you have any further questions before signing the release form, I can be reached at 515.689.5455. Once I receive your Informed Consent, I will call you to establish a schedule for the interviews and classroom visits.

Sincerely,

Sue Alborn-Yilek

---

#### Informed Consent

I have read the above information and willingly consent to participate in this study. In doing so, I am giving Sue Alborn-Yilek permission to interview me and visit my special education and/or university classrooms.

Please print your full name (First, Middle, Last):

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Interview #1 Current

1. Mentoring – Think about a person who has formally or informally mentored you in your job as a special educator. Describe what actions he/she has taken in this role.
2. Workload – Describe your teaching responsibilities. What subjects do you teach? In what grades are your students? With whom do you share responsibility for teaching students with disabilities? How do you feel about your workload?
3. Challenges – Think of a particularly challenging incident. Describe what happened. How did you feel about what happened? How would you handle a similar incident in the future? What have you learned?
4. Inclusion – How do you feel about including children with disabilities in the mainstream? What is your role in this process? Describe how you interact with a particular co-teacher? Is there a particular co-teacher with whom you work that you would describe as non-cooperative? Why? Describe this person’s behaviors. How would you like your co-teaching relationship to be?
5. Collegiality – Describe the overall climate of collegiality between special educators and general educators in your school. How do you feel about this relationship? Why? How would you like this relationship to be? Why?

6. Professional Development by School – Describe a professional development activity provided by your school in which you participated. Did you experience growth as a teacher? Why or why not? If you could participate in any professional development activity, what would it be? How would this help you grow as a teacher?

7. Describe your perceived strengths as a teacher. Cite a specific incident that demonstrates one of your strengths. How does this incident represent growth in a goal that you have set for yourself?

#### Interview #2 Past

1. Educational Background – Explain your professional training that contributed to your being selected as a special education teacher. How has that training prepared you for your position? What are your strengths in serving children with disabilities? Describe areas of teaching that you knew would be difficult? How did you mentally and physically prepare for your first year of teaching?

2. Teaching Experience – What teaching experience did you have prior to accepting this special education position on an emergency license? How did your past teaching experiences assist you with this new position? Think of the fears or inadequacies you may have been feeling prior to the start of this new position? Describe your deciding factor in accepting this position and explain why.

3. Career Goals – Prior to accepting this position, what were your career goals? Explain why you made the decision to accept this position as opposed to continuing a search for a position in your trained area.

4. Family/Personal Situation – Describe any family and/or personal situations that contributed to your decision to accept this position. Think about the other options you had. What were they? What was the leading family/personal factor that contributed to this decision?

5. Feelings About Special Education – Describe the experiences you had with special education and special education teaching you had prior to accepting this position. How have these changed?

#### Interview #3 Future

1. Expectations for Change – As you contemplate completing requirements for HQT status, what expectations do you have for future teaching? Do you believe you will stay in this area or seek a position in your original area of teaching? Why or why not?

2. Qualifications – How will having completed requirements for HQT status change your qualifications for a special education teaching position? What knowledge and skills will you have that do/did not have while on an emergency license? Describe the impact that you believe this will have on your perception of your own teaching. How will this make you feel about the job you do.

3. Career Goals – Do you believe your career goals will change after having obtained HQT status? Think of an incident while teaching on an emergency license that makes you believe your career goals will change upon completion of your requirements. How has this contributed to this change in thinking?

4. Self-Assessment – Where are you at in the process of obtaining HQT status? What strengths in teaching do you have now and what strengths in teaching do you project to have upon completion? How will you go about obtaining support for areas in which you would like to improve in the future?

## APPENDIX D: PERMISSION FROM SCHOOL TO VISIT CLASSROOM

Principal

Address

City, State ZIP

Dear:

The purpose of this letter is to formally request permission to visit \_\_\_\_\_ (participant's) special education classroom(s) up to three times this fall with each visit being four hours or less. \_\_\_\_\_ has agreed to be a participant in a dissertation study I am completing for my doctoral degree at Iowa State University. As a participant, she will be interviewed by me and, with your permission, visited in her special education classroom and/or university classroom at UW-Platteville.

The focus of my study is on coming to understand the phenomenon of special education teaching while on an emergency license. The research model I am using is a qualitative one in which I am seeking comprehensive depictions or descriptions of these teachers' experiences. I hope to illuminate or answer the following questions: How do teachers who are "unqualified" for special education teaching think and feel about their teaching experience? What motivates them to accept these positions in the first place? How does the teacher training program in which they participate influence their daily teaching practices? How do these teachers expect their teaching experiences to change upon completion of the teacher-training program?

The information gathered in this study will be used in a confidential form and shared only with my dissertation committee at Iowa State University. Data or summarized results will not be released in any way that could identify your teacher or school district.

Pseudonyms will be used.

If this agreeable to you, please sign and return the permission on the next page by Friday, Sept. 11, 2009. You are welcome to call me at 515.689.5455 for further explanation or clarification.

Sincerely,

Sue Alborn-Yilek

#### Permission to Visit Classroom

I have read the above information and give Sue Alborn-Yilek permission to visit my school.

Please print your full name (First, Middle, Last) and your school district:

\_\_\_\_\_

Full Name	School District
-----------	-----------------

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Ryan Evely-Gildersleeve—Co-chair and methodologist. Ryan was the first one I sought to assist with my study after taking one of his qualitative research courses. Though early in his career as a professor at Iowa State, he proved to be such a great teacher. It is because of Ryan that I chose to conduct a qualitative study. From the beginning, I appreciated his candor and, later, his insistence that my study meet his high standards. I remember calling him one day when I was on the road and complaining that I was getting lost in the myriad of tasks associated with my study. He assured me that this was normal and that things would work out. They did!

Dr. Scott McLeod—Co-chair and educational leadership extraordinaire. I was one of the first doctoral students assigned to Scott when he came to Iowa State, and I am glad now that I was. Scott gave me valuable advice, especially concerning how much literature to review and how to connect my findings to the global issues. Through my emotional journey, Scott has been the one who has kept me sane! There were times when I wanted things to move more quickly, like waiting three months for IRB Approval. Scott identified the problem and, within a few days, my proposal was expedited. Then there were his e-mails full of encouragement that meant so much to me. He left me a congratulatory card after my oral defense and thanked me for “allowing” him to be a “small part” of my journey. Scott, the pleasure was mine! Thank YOU for being a HUGE part of my journey.

Dr. Joanne Marshall, Dr. James Scharff, and Dr. Michael Book—Committee members representing teacher education and educational leadership. I am grateful for the time and

assistance they also provided. Their expertise and depth of experience gained from their roles as either university professor or Iowa superintendent helped me develop a more comprehensive study and deepened the meaning of the whole experience.

Judy Weiland—From the beginning it was obvious Judy was the glue who held the department together. I am so impressed with the rapport she has with each student and the interest she takes in our individual stories. For helping with paperwork, connecting with my committee, scheduling meetings, and just being that welcoming and reassuring face at Iowa State, I am forever grateful. She is an invaluable resource and Iowa State is lucky to have her!

University of Wisconsin-Platteville Colleagues—I feel so fortunate that God selected this university position for me because of the kind, caring, and incredibly talented group of professionals and students with whom I get to work each day. Though there are too many to mention by name, I do want to especially thank Judy Belken for her support. She has become much more than just a colleague who “spotted” me on so many occasions. She is a great friend! And, I also want to especially thank Erin Robbins, my graduate assistant for the past two years. Among other things, she transcribed the interview data and served as my sounding board as I tried to make sense of all the incoming data. She will be Dr. Erin someday and I hope I am around to help celebrate! I’d like to also thank Dr. Wally Iselin and Dr. Rea Kirk, colleagues who showed faith in me from the beginning by recommending me for this doctoral program.

Huinker and Coffelt Families—These two families saved me a ton of money over the past five years by allowing me to stay in their homes rather than rent hotel rooms when I had

classes in Des Moines or Ames. We had some fun as well as great conversations while I was there, which certainly helped to alleviate the stress of coursework and the six-hour round trip drives.

Brackey, Alborn, and Yilek Families—I am indebted to the foundation laid by my parents, Harley and Vera Brackey, and regret that they were not here to see this dream come true. They encouraged me to finish my bachelor's degree many years ago and instilled in me the value of an education. I will never forget the advice they gave me to invest in an education because no one can ever take that away. My two older brothers, Roger and William Brackey, have supported my educational endeavors from afar, and I appreciate the confidence they helped to instill in me to accomplish this task. I have been fortunate to have two outstanding husbands, Dwight Alborn and Michael Yilek, and I want to acknowledge both of their families who have loved and supported me as though I were their own.

Ashley, Josh, Randi, and Rylie Moore and Jordan Alborn and Sarah Thomason—our children and grandchildren who have always served as my inspiration. Through my doctoral research process, our children have been embarking on big goals of their own. These past nine months the Moore Family has lived with us awaiting the purchase of and transition to their new home. Jordan and Sarah are scheduled to marry this September. When this mountain of a goal seemed too big for me, I need only look in the eyes of our beautiful children and grand girls, Randi Marie and Rylie Sue, and I knew everything would be OK. My life has been dedicated to them and I have tried to serve as a positive role model in lifelong learning. If I leave no other legacy, I have always strived to be the best at whatever I do and I pray they do the same.



Michael Yilek—Finally, I wish to thank my husband. He is the one who understood from the beginning how important this degree was to me. Whenever an obstacle stood in my way, he cleared the path. Because of his selfless love, this dream has become a reality and this accomplishment is as much a tribute to him! Love YOU the Most!