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SPECIAL EDUCATORS AND  
JOB SATISFACTION

by  
Joyce A. DeVito

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division  
of Rowan University  
May 1998

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_

Date Approved 4/30/98

## ABSTRACT

Joyce A. DeVito

Special Educators and Job Satisfaction  
Thesis Advisor: Dr. S. Jay Kuder  
Special Education Graduate Program

This study examined how specific variables affected job satisfaction among special educators at a special education school district. The variables examined were gender, student population, number of years teaching, number of years teaching a specific population, and age of students. It was hypothesized that female teachers and teachers who worked with emotionally disturbed students would express less job satisfaction than male teachers and teachers working with other special education populations. It was further hypothesized that the greater the number of years teaching and working with a specific population, the greater the expressed job satisfaction. In addition, it was thought that teachers working with elementary students would express greater job satisfaction than teachers working with middle school or high school age students.

An independent groups *t* test was performed on each of the conditions and no significant differences were found between job satisfaction and any of the five variables studied. A closer examination of the responses from all special educators revealed high job satisfaction in areas related to teaching as a profession and lower satisfaction scores in the areas of administrative support and recognition, having a meaningful reward system for teachers, and receiving adequate parental support.

## MINI-ABSTRACT

Joyce A. DeVito

Special Educators and Job Satisfaction  
Thesis Advisor: Dr. S. Jay Kuder  
Special Education Graduate Program

This project examined how special educators job satisfaction was affected by working with varying special education populations, gender, number of years teaching, number of years teaching a specific population, and age level of students. An independent groups *t* test was performed on each of the conditions and no significant differences were found between job satisfaction and any of the five variables studied.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Problem**

#### **Introduction**

Special education teachers graduate from college certified as a Teacher of the Handicapped. This certification allows them to teach students with disabilities. Students with disabilities differ in ability, age, learning style, and personality, as all children do. Students are determined eligible for and placed in special education because their learning needs differ from those of similarly aged students. The disabilities of students in special education vary greatly. Students may have cognitive impairments, such as mental retardation, which ranges from mild to profound, or specific learning disabilities that are unrelated to intelligence, but interfere with their ability to learn. Other students have physical impairments that require the use of wheelchairs or other adaptive devices. Some disabled students have sensory deficits, such as auditory and visual impairments, while others have chronic health problems, multiple disabilities, or behavioral problems. Any or all of these problems could apply to any one student and no two students have the same exact problems. Basic curriculum classes, practicum and student teaching experiences do not prepare the teacher for every single special education population and the challenges that come with each individual student.

Special education teachers work in a variety of school settings. They may work in a resource room, a self-contained class, a private special education school, a residential

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school, a public special education school, or if the trend continues, in a regular education class as support staff to the regular education teacher. The diversity of the students, as well as the diversity of educational settings, presents each teacher with many and varied rules, expectations, and challenges.

### **Statement of Problem**

Current trends show that children with disabilities who need well-trained professionals are often the least likely to have them. The population of school-aged children is increasing, and in particular, the population of youth who require special education services is on the rise due to a variety of social, medical, and economic trends (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996). The need for special education personnel is related to the increased numbers of students who qualify for special education services, and the fact that service agencies have consistently reported difficulties in locating qualified personnel. Although states differ in the areas in which they need special education professionals, most states report needing more than they are able to find (Cross & Billingsley, 1994).

Declining enrollments in special education teacher preparation programs compose one aspect of the problem. At the same time as the supply of qualified professionals has been declining, the demand for special education teachers and other related service providers has been growing ( Frank & Mckenzie, 1993). Another aspect of the problem is that there is a high rate of attrition among special educators. Job-related stress, burnout, and job satisfaction have been topics of discussion in both professional and popular literature. Special educators have become a subject for study because working with children who have problems is viewed as stressful. Many factors, such as setting, administrative support, student population, and various mandated federal legislation for handicapped students have placed significant demands on special educators. These demands cause job related stress and could lead to job dissatisfaction.



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Job satisfaction has been proven to have a direct effect on intent to stay in teaching (Cross & Billingsley, 1994). The impact of stress producing factors is that some teachers burn out but stay on the job counting the hours until the next day off, some learn coping skills, and others leave teaching altogether (Platt & Olson, 1990). Shortages in the field, high attrition rates, and increasing demands on special educators have made the issues of job satisfaction, stress, and burnout more important. The challenge of finding, training, and keeping qualified personnel in the special education profession is a major problem for public and private school districts.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions to be investigated are as follows:

1. How does job satisfaction differ among special educators working with varying special education populations?
2. How do other factors such as gender, number of years teaching, number of years teaching a specific population, and age of students affect job satisfaction?

### **Hypothesis**

Job satisfaction will differ among special educators depending upon the population of students they teach. Furthermore, factors such as gender, number of years teaching, number of years teaching a specific population, and age of students will affect job satisfaction. The hypotheses are as follows:

1. Teachers who teach emotionally disturbed students will report less job satisfaction than teachers who teach students with other handicapping conditions.
2. Female teachers will express less job satisfaction than male teachers.

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3. The greater the number of years teaching a specific population the greater the expressed job satisfaction.
4. Teachers who have taught for ten or more years will express more job satisfaction than those teaching less than ten years.
5. Teachers working with elementary students will express greater job satisfaction than teachers working with middle school or high school students.

### **Purpose**

The increasing population of youth who require special education services, the declining enrollment in special education teacher preparation programs, and the reported need for qualified special education professionals suggests that further research in special education teacher job satisfaction is warranted. This study will identify specific factors that influence special educators' job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In order to recruit and retain qualified personnel, it is important to understand what factors contribute to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the field of special education.

The purpose of this study is to determine how student population affects job satisfaction among special educators. Other factors to be investigated include gender, number of years teaching, number of years teaching specific populations, and the ages of the students taught. An overview of the factors affecting job satisfaction in special educators will be presented in Chapter two. In Chapter three the design of the study will be discussed. An analysis of the data collected will be provided in Chapter four, and the conclusions of this study will be discussed in Chapter five.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

Researchers have been studying job satisfaction in both industrial and educational settings for many years. Interest in job satisfaction has been influenced by the belief that satisfied employees perform at higher levels, however debate exists over whether job satisfaction causes productivity or productivity causes job satisfaction (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985). Rinehart and Short (1994) reported that research on job satisfaction was initiated in 1935 by Hoppock who coined a definition as the combination of psychological, physiological, and environmental circumstances that cause a person to say, "I am satisfied with my job".

Job satisfaction is associated with feelings of positive affect with the work and the work environment (Lam, Foong, & Moo, 1995). In a study by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, researchers found that 96% of former teachers were satisfied with their new occupations, while only 47% were satisfied with teaching. In addition, 58% claimed they missed teaching, but 83% said it was likely they would never return (Whaley & Hegstrom, 1992). Results from a study by Bridges (1980) indicated that elementary school teachers who experienced higher job satisfaction had less tendency to be absent compared to those who experienced job dissatisfaction. A significant relationship between job satisfaction and employee turnover has also been found (Gerhart, 1990).

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Brownell and Smith (1992) report that Boe examined a national database and found that the attrition rate for special educators was 7.3% compared to 5.3% for regular educators. In 1988 the yearly attrition rate for special educators in Wisconsin was found to be 13.7% and 5.8% for regular educators (Brownell & Smith, 1992). Differences exist in the national and state reported attrition rates, however it seems clear that attrition rates in special education are higher than general education. According to Singer (1993), the U.S. Department of Education reported in 1991 a shortage of 27,977 special education teachers during the 1988-89 school year. At the same time, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that the population of children aged 5 to 13 will increase by 10% between 1987 and 1997, and the population of youth aged 14 to 17 will increase by 4% (Brownell & Smith, 1993). Along with the increasing school-aged population, current social, economic, and medical trends contribute to the number of children who may be placed in special education. As the population of children with disabilities becomes larger and more diverse, the need for greater numbers of special educators becomes critical.

There is considerable information about the reasons for high attrition rates among special education personnel. For example, certain kinds of working conditions are stressful and over time cause burnout and eventual attrition. It is important to examine the factors that contribute to job satisfaction in order to understand how these factors contribute to the attrition or retention of special educators.

### **Job Satisfaction**

In response to the growing awareness and concern about retention issues, researchers have conducted studies in recent years to help shed light on the factors that both contribute to and inhibit the retention of special education professionals. These data collection efforts have indicated that a number of factors interact to contribute to the high attrition rate among special educators. Researchers have categorized these factors in various ways. Billingsley (1993) referred to external factors (e.g., societal, economic, or

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institutional variables), employment factors (including teacher qualifications, training, and working conditions), and personal factors (such as family needs, demographic variables, and individual interests/personality) that influence teachers' career decisions. Similarly, Brownell and Smith (1992) described five contributing factors: historical influences (referring to the quality of teacher preparation), teacher characteristics (similar to demographic factors), environmental influences of the workplace, federal/state/district policy factors (similar to the external factors in Billingsley's scheme), and external influences (similar to Billingsley's personal factors).

### **External Factors**

Teacher attrition/retention is influenced by factors external to the employing school district and the teacher. During difficult economic times teachers are less likely to have alternative job opportunities and therefore may stay in their positions for longer periods of time. Societal factors, such as community characteristics, may influence a teacher's decision to stay or leave their position. In a study of North Carolina and Michigan special educators, districts in the top salary range were more successful in retaining teachers than districts in the bottom salary range (Singer, 1993).

Teachers' unions may influence attrition and retention in that they have the power to change specific institutional problems. Federal and state mandated legislation may influence attrition and retention by creating policies that require excessive paperwork demands from teachers.

### **Employment Factors**

Billingsley (1993) suggests that four major employment factors influence teachers' career decisions, including professional qualifications, work conditions and rewards, employability, and commitment.

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Teacher retention literature has indicated that training provided before teaching and initial experiences within the profession influence special educators' decisions to remain within the field (Westling & Whitten, 1996). Whether as a result of perception or actual performance, teachers who rate quality of preservice training higher tend to believe they are better prepared for teaching and therefore remain in the field longer than teachers who view themselves as less prepared. Singer (1993) noted that special educators view preservice preparation as a key variable in retention. Banks and Necco (1987) found years of teaching experience and alternative certification to be negatively correlated. Special educators with full certification had, on average, more experience in the classroom than those with alternative certification. Brownell and Smith (1992) report that Metzke found that general and special education teachers who attended graduate school are lower attrition risks than their colleagues with undergraduate preparation only.

Banks and Necco (1990) found that training background had a significant effect on teacher job burnout. Alternatively certified teachers had significantly lower burnout levels than did teachers with training that matched their current positions. From these results, these researchers concluded that an "at risk" candidate for job burnout would be a young teacher with only an undergraduate degree in special education, who is teaching in either a resource room or a classroom for students labelled behaviorally disordered.

Teaching students who are gifted/talented was found to be related to increased job satisfaction, whereas working with students having learning disabilities was related to decreased job satisfaction (Lobosco & Newman, 1992). Decreased job satisfaction was especially found to be higher among teachers who were not specifically trained to work with students with special needs.

Where there are teacher shortages, teachers may be asked to teach subjects for which they are not trained. A study by Garnett and Lowe (1989) found that 20% of the teachers teaching math did not have a recognized qualification in math. If the educational setting requires a teacher to teach an area which they are not qualified, the teacher may

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feel incompetent to teach this subject area which may lead to leaving that position.

Research has identified a host of work-life factors that are significant contributors to job satisfaction and the intention of teachers to leave their careers. Workplace influences on attrition/retention can be determined by examining student and school factors. Lack of support from administrators and parents, excessive paperwork, student factors, and lack of recognition are frequently cited reasons for special education teachers' departures from the classroom. Billingsley and Cross (1991) identified and surveyed former special educators who were teaching in general education. The factors most reported as contributing to attrition were burnout, paperwork, lack of administrative support, and student factors (such as diversity in needs, too many students, disruptive students). To a lesser extent, inadequate parental support also affected special education teachers' decisions to transfer to general education. Platt and Olson (1990) also found inadequate parental support to be a contributing factor underlying special educators' decisions to leave the classroom.

Dangel, Bunch, and Coopman (1987) found excessive paperwork and general factors (such as little opportunity for advancement and low salary) to be major factors in the attrition of teachers who left learning disabled classrooms in Georgia and Mississippi. Similarly, inadequate time for paperwork, student attitudes, and inadequate support from administration and parents were among the factors found to contribute to attrition among teachers of behaviorally disordered students (George, George, Gersten, & Grosenick, 1995). Platt and Olson (1990) also found that excessive paperwork, stress, too many students, lack of support from administrators and parents, and inadequate resources contributed to the attrition of special educators who transferred to general education.

Rosenholtz (1989) identified factors influencing special education retention from the perspective of current teachers and administrators. Factors found to contribute to retention included administrative support, adequate teaching resources, adequate preparation in special education, and the desire to work with disabled children. Billingsley

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and Cross (1993) reported that Metzke also found that administrative support, as well as, colleague support contributed to the retention of special education teachers.

Principal support and communication has been shown to influence the feelings that teachers have about themselves and their work. Teachers function better both mentally and physically when principals communicate to the teachers that they are valued colleagues (Dworkin, Haney, Dworkin, & Telschow, 1990). Billingsley and Cross (1992) reported that intent to stay in teaching was higher among general and special education teachers who received higher levels of administrative support than those who received less support. Teachers who characterize their principals as supportive find work more rewarding (Conley, Bacharach, & Bauer, 1989); enjoy a productive, motivating work environment (Blase, 1987); demonstrate lower attrition rates (Rosenholtz, 1989); and experience less job-related stress and burnout (Zabel & Zabel, 1983).

Westling and Whitten (1996) conducted a survey of 158 rural special education teachers to determine the teachers' plans for remaining in or leaving their current teaching positions. Teachers who were not planning to be in the same position or in a similar position in 5 years were those who were frustrated with the system and frustrated with those in the system who are perceived to affect their professional lives, primarily administrators. They reported having a lack of support, little help with solving problems, and an inadequate amount of time for paperwork and planning. Some felt there was little recognition, understanding, support or acceptance from their general education colleagues. Results showed that the probability of staying is increased when the teacher is satisfied with the job, feels there is adequate time for paperwork, has a positive attitude toward the profession, and when the teacher is the primary breadwinner.

Whaley and Hegstrom (1992) found a correlation between teachers' perceptions of their principals' communication effectiveness and job satisfaction. Specifically, communication of feedback and rewards affected overall teacher job satisfaction.

Rosenholtz (1989) found that nonsupportive principals can lead teachers to feel frustrated



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and unimportant. Lack of principal support can also create an atmosphere of ill will and helplessness (Blase, 1987; Rosenholtz, 1989).

Although referred to less frequently than administrative support, unsupportive colleagues and isolation from colleagues appear to influence special educators' attrition and retention. Brownell and Smith (1992) reported that Metzke (1988) found that special educators intending to leave or stay were equally dissatisfied with support from general educators, but that special educators intending to stay felt more supported by classroom professionals than those intending to leave. Rosenholtz (1989) found that opportunities to collaborate with fellow colleagues is positively correlated with teacher satisfaction and retention in the workplace.

Career commitment is defined as the employee's willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, and the desire to remain as an employee of the organization (Lam, Foong, & Moo, 1995). Working conditions that allow teachers to meet their professional goals and gain recognition from colleagues, supervisors, and parents enhance teachers' feelings of efficacy as well as their commitment to teaching (George, George, Gersten, & Grosenick, 1995). Reyes (1989) found that administrators tended to be more satisfied and committed to their jobs than teachers. In addition, this study also found that women were more committed to their jobs than men. Billingsley and Cross (1992) studied the extent to which commitment and job satisfaction influence special and general educators intent to stay in teaching. Research results suggest a positive relationship between leadership support and teacher commitment. Higher professional commitment was found to be a significant predictor of intent to stay in teaching. Work-related variables have also been found to be better predictors of commitment and job satisfaction than were demographic variables. Examples include excessive paperwork requirements, increasing caseloads, low salaries, lack of administrative support, collegial isolation, role conflict or ambiguity, challenging student behaviors, and lack of visible student progress (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996).

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### **Personal Factors**

Personal factors influence teachers' career decisions. Life cycle events, career opportunities, and economic considerations are variables that influence teacher attrition and retention. Singer (1993) listed family relocation, marriage, and birth of a child as frequently cited reasons for teachers leaving the field. Dangel, Bunch, and Coopman (1987) noted family relocation as one of five most important factors influencing special educators' decisions to leave teaching.

Special education retention has also been correlated with teacher characteristics such as age, experience, and sex. Singer and Butler (1987) found that special education teachers tend to be younger and less experienced than do their general education colleagues. At the same time, Singer (1993) found that inexperienced special educators are significantly more likely to leave the profession than are older, more mature teachers. In addition, female special education teachers were found to leave the field with more frequency than do male teachers.

Career opportunities may also result in a teacher's decision to leave the workplace. Schlechty and Vance (1983) noted higher attrition rates for chemistry and physics teachers. Higher attrition rates were hypothesized to be the result of physics and chemistry teachers' opportunities to earn better salaries in the private sector than their peers in other subject areas. Lack of career opportunities can also have the opposite effect and cause teachers to remain in the classroom despite their dissatisfaction with the workplace (Brownell & Smith, 1992). Chapman and Green (1986) found that general education teachers who had taught continuously perceived themselves as having fewer career opportunities than teachers who returned to teaching intermittently.

### **Teacher Burnout/Stress**

Teacher stress has received increasing recognition in research literature. Several surveys of the sources of teacher stress have revealed that up to a third of teachers regard

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teaching as highly stressful (Borg & Falzon, 1989; Solmon & Feld, 1989). Yet, despite apparently high levels of stress, the majority of teachers (at least 60-70%) were found to regard teaching overall as rewarding and satisfying (Borg & Falzon, 1989).

Boyle, Borg, Falzon, and Baglioni (1995) did a survey among 710 full-time primary teachers to examine the sources of teacher stress, job satisfaction, and career commitment. Results of this study indicated that teacher stress was primarily a function of workload and student misbehavior.

Beck and Gargiulo (1983) compared burnout scores in teachers of retarded and nonretarded children in rural school settings. They found that teachers of children labeled as moderately retarded had significantly less burnout on two of the scales when compared to their regular education counterparts. Another study examined burnout among teachers of students with moderate, severe, or profound retardation (Weber & Toffler, 1989). This study found varying levels of burnout among the groups of teachers. Background and organizational factors appeared to be more related to burnout than did the severity of the handicapping condition. The age of the students and the teachers' perceived levels of supervisory support were found to be related to teacher burnout. The older the student and the less perceived support, the higher the reported burnout. In addition, the teachers' educational status and their perception of colleague support was related to reported burnout.

Zabel and Zabel (1983) found that older, more experienced, and more highly trained teachers had lower levels of job burnout. Billingsley and Cross (1991) stated that burnout was given by about 40% of those sampled as a reason for leaving special education teaching. Banks and Necco (1990) examined the relationship between job burnout and several variables, including special education category of the teachers' students, training background, age and years of experience. Results indicated that age had a significant relationship with job burnout; older teachers indicated fewer feelings of job burnout. Years of experience was not related to job burnout, but the area of

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exceptionality served by the teacher was. Teachers of students labelled behaviorally disordered and teachers in resource rooms had significantly higher levels of job burnout.

In a national survey, special education program directors expressed deep concern about their ability to find qualified teachers of students with emotional and behavior disorders (Grosenick, George, & George, 1987). Only about half (53%) of those surveyed indicated that all their teachers were fully certified in behavioral disorders. Estimates of the number of staff holding emergency certification or less than full certification, in the area of behavior disorders ranged from 25% to 33%, with rural districts having more difficulty recruiting fully certified teachers than urban districts.

In a 13-year study of all special education teachers in two states, Singer (1992) reported that the median number of years for teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities was 6 to 7 years at the elementary level and 5 to 6 years at the secondary level. In contrast, the median length for a teacher of students with learning disabilities was 9.5 years at the elementary level. Examining the career intentions of 96 teachers of students with emotional disorders, George (1995) reported that 36.5% of the sample intended to leave the field in the next year, and an additional 10.4% were unsure about their future career plans.

McManus and Kauffman (1991) examined the working conditions of teachers of students with behavioral disorders through a random sampling of classroom teachers who are members of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders. The results indicated that teachers of students with behavioral disorders work in highly demanding settings, work in relative isolation, and are moderately satisfied with their jobs.

The effects of work-related variables on two groups of special educators were examined to determine their intent to stay in teaching (Singh & Billingsley, 1996). The final sample included 159 teachers of students with emotional disorders and 499 special educators from other special education areas. Results indicated that job satisfaction was the strongest common influence on intent to stay in teaching for both teacher groups. Job

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satisfaction also had a direct effect on teacher commitment. Principal support, role problems, and stress had direct effects on job satisfaction for both teacher groups. Satisfied teachers reported greater principal support, fewer role problems, and less stress than those who were less satisfied. In both groups, stress influenced intent indirectly through job satisfaction and commitment. The effect of stress was found to be more severe for the teachers of students with emotional disorders.

### **Summary**

There are many factors to consider when discussing job satisfaction among special educators. Attrition can be attributed to many factors which may ultimately lead to job dissatisfaction. If a teacher is not satisfied in their job situation, they will not stay. On the other hand, job satisfaction has been related to job commitment. A satisfied teacher is more committed and likely to stay in their current position.

Research has shown that external, employment, and personal factors influence the job satisfaction of special educators. External factors such as the economy, institutional factors, and community factors affect the attrition and retention of teachers. Many employment factors that were found to contribute to teacher burnout or stress were also found to contribute to the attrition and retention of teachers. Workload, training, administrative/parental support, role ambiguity, student characteristics, years of experience, and colleague support were reported in many studies as contributing to teacher attrition/retention and job satisfaction.

Career commitment was also found to affect teacher career decisions. Leadership support, working conditions that allow teachers to gain recognition and attain professional goals were found to enhance teachers' feelings of efficacy, as well as their commitment to teaching.

Personal factors were also cited as influencing teachers' career decisions. Life cycle events, family relocation, and child care needs are variables found to affect teacher

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attrition and retention. Teacher burnout and stress have been shown to affect teacher job satisfaction, retention and attrition. Burnout and stress appear to be significant factors that influence career decisions among special educators. Teachers of the behaviorally disordered are especially difficult to find and retain due to the nature of the students that they teach. Research clearly shows that working with behaviorally disordered students is demanding and compounded with the other work-life variables that affect teacher job satisfaction, it seems clear that further research in this area is required.

The results of the literature reviewed indicate further examination of special education teachers' job satisfaction is warranted. Given the reported increase in school age children requiring special education and the shortage of qualified special education personnel, it appears especially important in the special education field to examine the factors that influence job satisfaction. Improving job satisfaction is important to teacher retention. It seems reasonable to expect that job dissatisfaction among teachers who work with emotionally/behaviorally disordered students will be greater than those of other handicapping conditions. The variables chosen for consideration in this project include type of population, age, gender, years of teaching a specific population, age of students, and years of teaching at this specific special education school district. The research reported in this paper examines the effect of such variables on special educators' job satisfaction.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Design of Study**

#### **Introduction**

Increasing numbers of school age students requiring special education, lack of available qualified special education personnel, and high attrition rates for special educators demonstrate that there is a need to identify and understand what factors contribute to special educators' job satisfaction. Identifying factors that contribute to special educators' job satisfaction could assist in the development of intervention strategies geared toward recruiting and retaining special education teachers. The purpose of this study was to determine how specific factors such as special education population, gender, number of years teaching, number of years teaching a specific population, and age of students affect job satisfaction.

#### **Sample**

Eighty-four special education teachers participated in this study. All work at a special services school that serves handicapped students from suburban and rural districts in southern New Jersey. The special services school serves approximately 1,200 students ranging in age from 3-21 years old. Students are classified as multiply handicapped or emotionally disturbed. Out of the 84 teachers surveyed, 65 were female and 19 were male. Twenty-three of the teachers surveyed worked at the elementary level, grades K-6.

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Of those 23 teachers, 6 worked with emotionally disturbed students and the other 17 worked with students classified multiply handicapped. Twenty-seven of the teachers surveyed worked at the middle school level, grades 7-8. Of those 27 teachers, 18 worked with emotionally disturbed students and the other 9 worked with multiply handicapped students. Thirty-four of teachers worked at the high school level, grades 9-12. Of those 34 teachers, 16 worked with emotionally disturbed students and 18 worked with multiply handicapped students.

### **Measures**

A survey developed by the author was used to measure job satisfaction of special educators. Recipients were first asked to respond to questions about personal characteristics such as gender, number of years teaching, classification of students currently working with, years working with that specific classification, and age of students currently working with. In order to clearly identify the different types of students within each population, the teachers were asked to circle the characteristics that "best" described their class.

The next part of the survey had twenty questions that related to job satisfaction in a Likert scale format. Many of the studies reviewed used this type of format to measure job satisfaction (Banks & Necco, 1990; Lam, Foong, & Moo, 1995; Platt & Olson, 1990). Questions deal with the teacher's feelings about the teaching profession, the support and recognition provided by the administration, the workload, the support of colleagues, and the student population.

### **Procedure**

The survey was distributed to all teachers at a weekly staff meeting for each campus. The teachers were given instructions on how to complete the survey and were then asked to complete it. Of the 120 surveys distributed, 84 were completed.



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### **Analysis**

An independent groups *t* test will be used to analyze the relationship of job satisfaction and the following variables: gender, years teaching, years teaching a specific population, age level taught, and student population. A .05 alpha level will be used to define the rejection region, with 79 degrees of freedom.

There are several assumptions that underlie the use of the *t* test. First, it will be assumed that the distribution of scores within each population follows a normal distribution. Second, it will be presumed that the variances of scores with each population are equal across populations.

One limitation of these assumptions is that all respondents were from the same school district. Therefore, the results will be less generalizable. Other assumptions were made in the collection of this data. The first includes a belief that all respondents answered the questions with an equal amount of effort and honesty. Furthermore, it is assumed that each participant was willing and able to complete the survey, and all items answered reflect his or her own thoughts.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

This project was undertaken to determine how specific factors affect job satisfaction. The factors examined were special education population, gender, number of years teaching, number of years teaching a specific population, and age level of students. A survey containing questions concerning teachers' feelings about the teaching profession, the support and recognition provided by the administration, the workload, the support of colleagues, and the student population was used to examine the job satisfaction of 84 special education teachers.

It was hypothesized that female teachers and teachers who taught emotionally disturbed students would express less job satisfaction than male teachers and teachers working with other special education populations. It was also hypothesized that the greater number of years teaching and working with a specific population, the greater the expressed job satisfaction. In addition, it was hypothesized that teachers working with elementary students would express greater job satisfaction than teachers working with middle school or high school students.

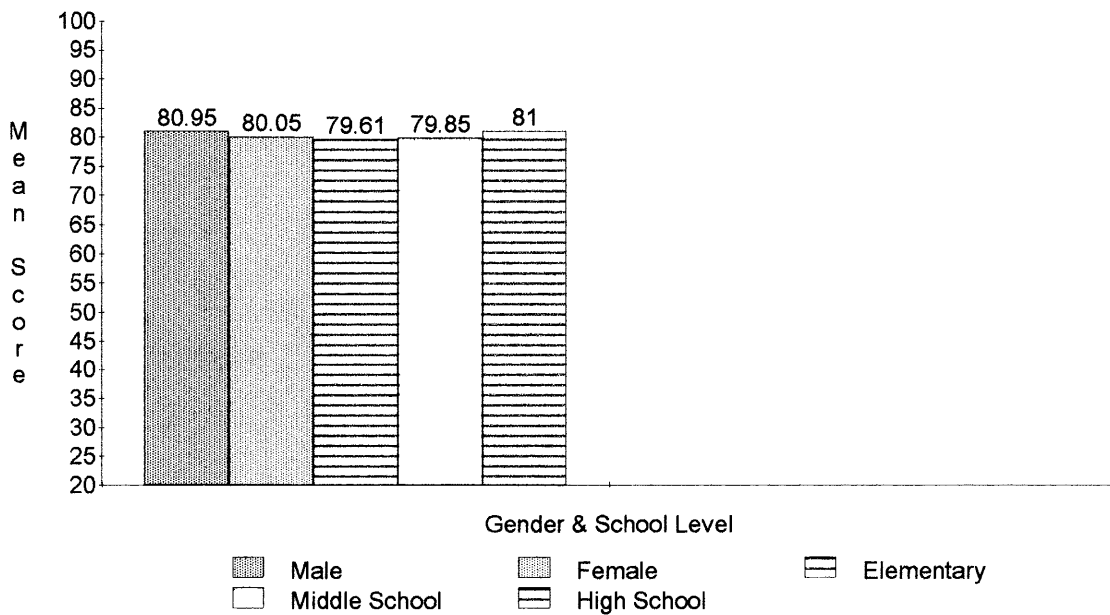
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## Results

In order to examine whether or not there was a significant difference between any of the five variables an independent groups *t* test was performed on each of the conditions. Overall, no significant differences were found between job satisfaction and any of the five variables studied. All groups examined reported a high level of job satisfaction.

This lack of significance is highlighted in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

**Table 4.1**  
Job Satisfaction



As shown in Table 4.1 female special educators express no less significant job satisfaction than male special educators. In addition, teachers working with elementary students expressed no significantly greater job satisfaction than teachers working with middle school or high school students. The other variables are shown in Table 4.2 on the following page.

## Special Educators Job Satisfaction

**Table 4.2**  
Job Satisfaction

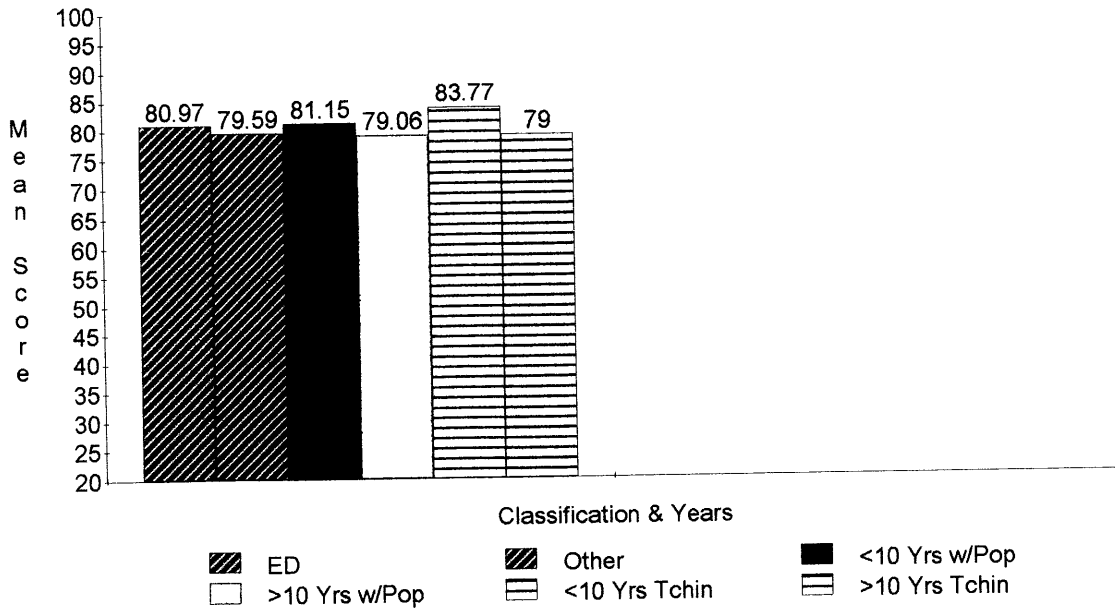


Table 4.2 displays the similarity in mean scores of three different variables. The first is the classification of students. As shown, teachers who teach emotionally disturbed students report about the same level of job satisfaction as teachers who teach students with other handicapping condition. Furthermore, the greater the number of years working with a specific population makes no significance difference on expressed job satisfaction. Finally, teachers who taught for ten years or more express no more significant job satisfaction than those teaching less than ten years.

Although there was no statistically significant difference in the total raw scores, Table 4.3 shows the actual percentages of responses from all special educators who participated in this study. Teachers reported satisfaction in all areas that related to teaching as a profession. Satisfaction scores were lower for questions 8, 9, and 10 which related to supervisory/administrative support and recognition. In addition, satisfaction scores were low for questions 12 and 20 which related to having a meaningful reward system for teachers and receiving adequate parental support.

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## Table 4.3

<b>Percentage Results of Job Satisfaction Survey</b>		
<b><u>Strongly Agree / Agree</u></b>	<b><u>Undecided</u></b>	<b><u>Strongly Disagree / Disagree</u></b>
<b>88%</b>	1. I look forward to going to work each day. 7%	5%
<b>95%</b>	2. I am motivated to work in the teaching profession. 4%	1%
<b>97%</b>	3. I enjoy my job. 2%	1%
<b>76%</b>	4. If I could start anew, I would choose teaching as my profession. 14%	10%
<b>75%</b>	5. The teaching profession allows me to develop my full potential. 14%	11%
<b>88%</b>	6. I am satisfied with teaching as a profession for me. 8%	4%
<b>82%</b>	7. I feel that my colleagues give me professional support. 12%	6%
<b>69%</b>	8. I am satisfied with the support given by my supervisor. 18%	13%
<b>64%</b>	9. I receive adequate support from the administration. 18%	18%
<b>64%</b>	10. My efforts are recognized by my supervisors in the school. 19%	17%
<b>75%</b>	11. The working conditions in my school are good. 20%	5%
<b>39%</b>	12. Our school has a meaningful reward system for teachers. 25%	36%
<b>81%</b>	13. My workload as a teacher is manageable. 8%	11%
<b>96%</b>	14. I enjoy working with this student population. 4%	0%
<b>98%</b>	15. I am qualified to work with this student population. 2%	0%
<b>98%</b>	16. I have a good interpersonal relationship with my students. 1%	1%
<b>95%</b>	17. I believe my efforts make a difference in the students' lives. 5%	0%
<b>85%</b>	18. I would choose to work with this same student population. 13%	2%
<b>93%</b>	19. I am satisfied with my classroom management and control. 5%	2%
<b>38%</b>	20. I receive adequate parental support. 19%	43%

## Special Educators Job Satisfaction

### Summary

In conclusion, this project examined the level of job satisfaction among special educators. Several factors were investigated. These included: gender, student population, age level taught, number of years working with a specific population, and number of years teaching. Eighty-four special educators were surveyed.

It was hypothesized that females, teachers working with emotionally disturbed students, and teachers working with middle school or high school students would express less job satisfaction than males, teachers working with other handicapping conditions, or teachers working with elementary students. In addition, it was thought that the greater the number of years teaching a specific population and the greater the number of years teaching overall, the greater the expressed job satisfaction. The results of an independent groups *t* test on each of the independent variables proved otherwise.

There was no significant difference found between job satisfaction and any of the variables examined. By examining the response percentages for all special educators participating in this study, reported satisfaction differences were found in specific areas. High job satisfaction was found for all areas relating to teaching as a profession. Satisfaction scores relating to administrative support and recognition, having a meaningful reward system for teachers, and receiving adequate parental support were lower.

In Chapter 5, differences in responses and the lack of significance found will be discussed.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

This project sought to determine how job satisfaction differed among special educators working with varying special education populations. In addition, it also examined how specific factors such as gender, number of years teaching, number of years teaching a specific population, and age level of students affected job satisfaction. Eighty-four surveys were collected from special educators at a special education school district.

It was hypothesized that female teachers and teachers working with emotionally disturbed students would express less job satisfaction than male teachers and teachers working with other special education populations. It was further hypothesized that the greater the number of years teaching and working with a specific population, the greater expressed job satisfaction. In addition, it was thought that teachers working with elementary students would express greater job satisfaction than teachers working with middle school or high school age students.

An independent groups *t* test was performed on each of the conditions and no significant differences were found between job satisfaction and any of the five variables studied. A closer examination of the responses from all the special educators revealed satisfaction differences in specific areas. High job satisfaction was found for all areas related to teaching as a profession. Satisfaction scores relating to administrative support

## Special Educators Job Satisfaction

and recognition, having a meaningful reward system for teachers, and receiving adequate parental support were lower. Explanations for these results will be discussed in this chapter.

### **Discussion**

Overall expressed job satisfaction was high among all special educators surveyed and there was no significant difference found among any of the variables tested. Female teachers were found to have no less job satisfaction than male teachers. In addition, the number of years teaching had no significant effect on expressed job satisfaction.

The literature reviewed suggested that a significant relationship between job satisfaction and employee turnover exists (Gerhart, 1990). Singer and Butler (1987) found that inexperienced special educators are significantly more likely to leave the profession than are older, more mature teachers. They also found that female special education teachers left the field with more frequency than male teachers. It would seem likely that dissatisfied special educators would leave the job or field.

The lack of significance among the variables can perhaps be explained by the expressed high job satisfaction. Although the turnover rate was not examined in this study, the reported high job satisfaction would suggest that the educators surveyed will remain in the field and at their current position.

There was also no significant difference in job satisfaction found regarding the student population taught, years teaching a specific population, and age level of students. Banks and Necco (1990) examined the relationship between job burnout and several variables, including special education category of the teachers' students, training background, age, and years of experience. Results indicated that older teachers had fewer feelings of job burnout and teachers of students labelled behaviorally disordered had significantly higher levels of job burnout. Research also suggested that teachers of the



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behaviorally disordered were especially difficult to find and retain due to the nature of the students they teach (Grosenick, George, & George, 1987).

This project found no significant difference in job satisfaction among teachers who taught emotionally disturbed students and teachers who worked with other special education populations. McManus and Kauffman (1991) found that teachers of students with behavioral disorders work in highly demanding settings and are moderately satisfied with their jobs. The effects of work-related variables on two groups of special educators was examined to determine their intent to stay in teaching (Singh & Billingsley, 1996). The final sample included 159 teachers of students with emotional disorders and 499 special educators from other special education areas.

Results indicated that job satisfaction was the strongest common influence on intent to stay in teaching for both teacher groups. This research supports the findings of this project. All special educators reported high job satisfaction regardless of the student population, years working with a specific population, and age level of students taught.

Although there was no statistically significant difference found among any of the variables tested, examining the responses of all special educators revealed several common areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Job satisfaction is associated with feelings of positive affect with the work and the work environment (Lam, Foong, & Moo, 1995). This project found that in all areas relating to teaching as a profession, all special educators reported high job satisfaction. Lobosco and Newman (1992) found decreased job satisfaction was found to be higher among teachers who were not specifically trained to work with students with special needs. Ninety-eight percent of the special educators surveyed for this project felt they were qualified to work with their current student population.

Rosenholtz (1989) found factors that contribute to teacher retention included administrative support, adequate teaching resources, adequate preparation in special education, and the desire to work with disabled children. Ninety-six percent of the special

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educators surveyed reported that they enjoyed working with their current student population. Seventy-five percent felt the working conditions at the school were good. It seems clear that the special educators involved in this research enjoy teaching and working with special education students in this setting. These findings are consistent with the research reviewed.

Although overall reported job satisfaction was high, there were some areas that received overall lower percentage scores. These areas related to administrative support and recognition, having a meaningful reward system for teachers, and receiving adequate parental support.

Lack of support from administrators and parents, excessive paperwork, student factors, and lack of recognition are frequently cited reasons for special education teachers' departures from classrooms. Working conditions that allow teachers to meet their professional goals and gain recognition from colleagues, supervisors, and parents, enhance teachers' feelings of efficacy as well as their commitment to teaching (George, George, Gersten, & Grosenick, 1995).

Billingsley and Cross (1991) identified and surveyed former special education teachers who were teaching general education. The factors most reported as contributing to attrition were burnout, paperwork, lack of administrative support, and student factors (such as diversity of needs, too many students, and disruptive students). Inadequate parental support also affected special education teachers' decisions to transfer to general education. Platt and Olson (1990) also found inadequate parental support to be a contributing factor underlying special educators' decisions to leave the classroom.

Whaley and Hegstrom (1992) found a correlation between teachers' perceptions of their principals' communication and job satisfaction. Specifically, communication of feedback and rewards affected overall teacher job satisfaction.

Sixty-nine percent of the eighty-four special educators surveyed for this project were satisfied with the support given by their supervisor and sixty-four percent felt they

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received adequate support from the administration. In addition, sixty-four percent reported that their efforts were recognized by their supervisors and yet, only thirty-nine percent felt that the school had a meaningful reward system for teachers. Finally, only thirty-eight percent reported that they received adequate support from parents.

The research reviewed seems to support the lower scores related to the areas of administrative support and recognition, having a meaningful reward system for teachers, and receiving adequate parental support. The literature also suggests that regardless of other work-related variables, job satisfaction was the strongest common influence on intent to stay in teaching. The high job satisfaction found in this research indicates that the special educators who responded to the survey are likely to be committed to teaching and will stay in their current positions.

### **Summary**

This purpose of this study was to determine how specific variables affected job satisfaction among special educators at a special education school district. The variables examined were gender, student population, number of years teaching, number of years teaching a specific population, and age of students. There was no statistically significant difference found between job satisfaction and any of the five variables examined.

A closer examination of the responses of all the special educators participating in this study found common areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Expressed job satisfaction was high for all areas related to teaching as a profession. Lower scores were found for areas relating to administrative support and recognition, having a meaningful reward system for teachers, and receiving adequate parental support.

Research reviewed suggests that there are many factors to consider when discussing job satisfaction among special educators. Workload, training, administrative and parental support, student characteristics, and years of experience were reported in many studies as contributing to teacher attrition and retention, and job satisfaction. The

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lack of significance among the variables examined seems to be a direct result of the high job satisfaction found in this study.

In addition, the lower overall satisfaction scores reported by the special educators in the areas of administrative support and recognition, having a meaningful reward system for teachers, and receiving adequate parental support also seem to be supported by the literature. Stress, turnover, and job dissatisfaction have been linked to a lack of support and recognition from administration and parents.

The overall lack of significance found can be directly linked to the high job satisfaction reported by all the special educators. The sample in this study reported high job satisfaction, therefore they are likely to be committed to teaching and to staying in their current job situation.

### **Study Limitations**

One of the problems encountered in this study was that most of the students were classified as multiply handicapped. There used to be clearly defined teams of teachers and campuses working with students who had a primary classification of emotionally disturbed. Given the push for inclusion and government incentives for keeping classified students in their sending districts, students coming to the district are the more severely handicapped and behaviorally challenged. All of the campuses have seen an influx of behaviorally disordered students. The survey attempted to account for this fact by asking for the primary classification, however, many responses as to category of student taught were not clearly defined. Therefore, it is not clear whether or not an accurate sample of teachers working with emotionally disturbed students was obtained.

The results of this study are also limited by the fact that all of the special educators participating in this study worked at the same special education school district. However, there are differences among the four campuses. Each campus has a different administrator, some campuses have a behavioral officer, and all campuses have a variety of

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student populations and age levels. The similarities that exist among the campuses include membership to the same union, the same rules, regulations, benefits and salary guide for teachers. Given these facts, the ability to generalize these findings is limited to other specific special education schools with similar characteristics.

### **Future Research**

The increasing population of youth who require special education services, the declining enrollment in special education teacher preparation programs, and the reported need for qualified special education professionals suggests that further research in special education teacher job satisfaction is warranted. Although it is not clear whether the push for inclusion will be successful, it does seem clear that certain children exhibit challenging behaviors and others have special needs that cannot be successfully handled in regular education settings. It therefore seems likely that alternative special education settings will continue to exist. In order to accurately assess the job satisfaction of special educators, future research should examine job satisfaction as it relates to the many and varied job settings that special educators work in.

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