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Evaluating Special Education Teachers: Do We Get the Job Done? A Regional Perspective.

Robert Edward Widener Jr.
East Tennessee State University

Evaluating Special Education Teachers: Do We Get the Job Done? A Regional Perspective

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by

Robert E.Widener, Jr.

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Dr.Pamela Scott, Chair

Dr.Cecil Blankenship

Dr.Virginia Foley

Dr. Eric Glover

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ABSTRACT

Evaluating Special Education Teachers: Do We Get the Job Done? A Regional Perspective

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Legislation enacted by federal and state governments has created a transition in the service delivery model of instruction provided to many students identified as having an educational disability. As a result of this transition, more emphasis is being placed on educating these students in the least restrictive environment, which moves these students from a self-contained model into a collaborative or inclusive setting. This transition has also created a situation where building level administrators are now evaluating and observing special education teachers in a variety of instructional settings.

This qualitative study was conducted in order to examine perceptions of a group of special education directors and coordinators from Region VII, which is located in the extreme southwest portion of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Two questionnaires were distributed to each school division in Region VII in order to investigate perceptions regarding the evaluation process. Participants were asked to comment on topics that included key indicators, types of observations conducted, and if building level administrators were prepared to conduct observations and evaluations of special education teachers in a variety of instructional settings.

The 2 questionnaires were analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's Constant Comparison Analysis Method to identify any repetitive themes. Analysis showed 3 recurring themes. The themes revealed a need for more professional development for building level administrators about special education and the special education process. Secondly, colleges and universities should examine their curriculums in principal preparation

programs to affirm that proper training is being provided for new administrators. Finally, local school divisions should examine their evaluation and observation tools to see if additional components relating specifically to special education need to be added.

Results from this study indicate that while administrators are doing a good job evaluating special education teachers and programs, additional resources are needed. Attention to this study may help in the development of an evaluation and observation instrument that may provide better insight into the specific roles and responsibilities placed on special education teachers regardless of the instructional setting and offer administrators a better understanding of the multifaceted daily activities experienced by special educators.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family who has always supported me with love.

To my parents Bob and Martha Widener, thank you for everything you have done. You raised me with the understanding of the importance of an education. You set high expectations for us and constantly encouraged and supported us in our pursuits. I am thankful that I was brought up in a Christian home and taught those ideals that have helped me be the person I am today. Dad, who would have thought that both of us would eventually graduate from the same college!

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 3 decades a great amount of attention has been given to the education of students with disabilities. Local school divisions are mandated by federal and state laws to follow certain regulatory procedures. These mandates have created a transition in regard to the provision of special education and related services. Teachers and building administrators can no longer view special education as a place. Special education is a service.

Beginning with the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975, also known as P.L.94-192, students with disabilities are required to be educated in the least restrictive environment. This mandate required that all students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. This law has undergone several reauthorizations. The same requirements are present in the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004.As a result more focus is placed on moving students from self-contained settings, that are the most restrictive, to an inclusive or collaborative setting within the general education setting, which is the least restrictive setting.

This change in the educational setting has created a need to reassign special education teachers to positions where they are actively involved in educating students with disabilities in the general education setting. They are often teaching in a collaborative manner with the general education teacher. As a result building

administrators are being asked to evaluate general education and special education teachers within the same setting. Wilson (2005) found that general education and special education supervisors might not have been provided specific training in observing cotaught lessons. Research also indicates that general education supervisors have had minimal guidance in observing special education teachers (Breton & Donaldson, 1991; Schutz & Zeph, 1990-1991).

With the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), more emphasis has been placed on improving student outcomes. Quality of instruction drives student performance. It is crucial that the quality of instruction is assessed on a regular basis in order to assure that students are learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of perceptions of special education directors and coordinators who are employed in school divisions located in the Region VII Superintendent's study group, in regard to the evaluation and observation of special education teachers. This study examined various observation and evaluation techniques used in 19 school divisions in order to ascertain whether or not the methods used adequately and accurately measured the job of the special education teacher regardless of the instructional setting.

Delimitations and Limitations

Findings of this qualitative study are limited to perceptions of a regional group of special education directors and coordinators from rural southwest Virginia and may not be indicative of perceptions of other special education administrators across Virginia. Internal validity is the believability or credibility of findings and results (Gall, Gall, &

Borg, 2003). Limitations are also those restrictions on a study of which the researcher has no control (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Delimitations are controls put in place directly relating to the study (Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

Limitations of this study are that it relies directly on the responses of participants through the use of a survey instrument as well as an open-ended interview with a focus group. Delimitations associated with this study include only using one group associated with the Superintendent's regional study groups. The population included special education directors and coordinators and only relates to their perceptions, which cannot be generalized to other administrators or other areas outside of the region being studied.

Definitions of Terms

Collaboration: interaction among professionals as they work toward a common goal. Teachers do not necessarily have to engage in coteaching in order to collaborate. (Virginia Department of Education, 2010)

Coteaching: a service delivery option with two or more professionals sharing responsibility for a group of students for some or all of the school day in order to combine their expertise to meet students' needs. (Virginia Department of Education, 2010)

Differentiation: to recognize students varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning and interests and to react responsively. Differentiated instruction is a process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. The intent of differentiating instruction is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is and assisting in the learning processes. (Center for Applied Special

Technology, 2009)

Disability: a child evaluated in accordance with Sec. 300.304 through 300.311 as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment, a serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, any other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services. (United States Department of Education, 2009)

Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE): special education and related services that are:

1. Provided at public expense and without charge;
2. Meet the standards of the Virginia Board of Education;
3. Include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, middle school, or secondary school education in Virginia; and
4. Are provided in conformity with an individualized education program that meets the requirement of this chapter. (Virginia Department of Education, 2010)

General Curriculum: the same curriculum used with children without disabilities adopted by a local educational agency, schools within the local educational agency or, where applicable, the Virginia Department of Education for all children from preschool through secondary school. The term relates to content of the curriculum and not to the setting in which it is taught. (Virginia Department of Education, 2010)

Inclusion: the placement of special education students in a classroom with general education students with the necessary accommodations and services needed.

(Understanding Special Education, 2009)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled and that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (34 CFR 300.114 through 34 CRF 300.120)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): a federal mandate that provides school choice, flexibility, and accountability in order to lessen the achievement gap so that no child is left behind. (United States Department of Education Public Law Print of 107-110)

Specially Designed Instruction: adapting as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this chapter the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction:

1. To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and
2. To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards which apply to all children within the jurisdiction of the local educational agency. (Virginia Department of Education, 2010; 34 CRF 300.39(b)(3))

Special Education: specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parent(s), to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in a classroom, in the home, in hospitals, in institutions, and in other settings and

instruction in physical education. (Virginia Department of Education, 2010)

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. Does the current method of evaluation used in local school divisions adequately measure the effectiveness of special education teachers?
2. Are evaluations of special education teachers more summative or formative in nature and how does this differ from the evaluation of general education teachers?
3. What are the key indicators being observed in the evaluation of special education teachers and do these differ from the evaluation of general education teachers?
4. Is there a perceived difference in the evaluation of special education teachers by administrators with a background in special education as opposed to a background in general education?
5. Do building level administrators have adequate training and knowledge in the observation and evaluation of special education teachers?

Overview of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction, purpose of the study, delimitations and limitations, definitions of terms, research questions, and an overview of the study. Chapter 2 includes a review of literature pertaining to regulations governing teacher observation and evaluation in Virginia, as well as best practices in the evaluation of collaborative and special education classes. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology including research design as well as data

collection and analysis. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of data, and Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not the evaluation and observation of special education teachers was adequately measured by current methods in use within a specific region of Virginia. The purpose of this literature review was to examine the history of special education in the United States; explore regulatory language governing the observation and evaluation of teaching staff in Virginia; evaluate current literature concerning methods of observation and evaluation; and finally, examine the current trend of performance-based evaluations and how this may impact observation and evaluation practices.

An Overview of Special Education

Historically a need for special education services has been recognized; however, for most of our history schools were allowed to exclude students with disabilities (Sacks, 2009). Beginning in the 1800s and lasting into the 1900s, specialized institutions were developed for students with special needs. In 1817 Thomas Gallaudet founded the first residential school for the deaf (Sacks, 2009). In 1832 Samuel Gridley Howe established the Perkins Institute for the blind (Sacks, 2009). These institutions served the needs of a small number of students.

Compulsory school attendance laws were in place by the early 1900s. A review of literature indicates that in many cases these laws did nothing to prevent state and local governments from continuing the practice of excluding students with disabilities (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Yell et al. (1998) further stated that by 1970 most states began

to require and enforce that school divisions educate students with disabilities.

The history of special education is best defined by complex court rulings resulting from legal battles by advocacy groups as well as statutory language that is often vague (Palmaffy, 2001). Sacks (2009) cited the following cases and laws as important landmarks in the development of special education in the United States:

1954: U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on *Brown v. the Board of Education* ended *separate but equal* schools. This set the foundation for future decisions that students with disabilities cannot be excluded from school.

1958: The Education of the Mentally Retarded Children Act, P.L. 85-926 became the first federal law addressing special education. This law authorized funding to train teachers and administrators in the education of children with mental retardation.

1965: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), P.L.89-10 created the Head Start program for disadvantaged children and their families. This law became the basis for future special education legislation.

1970: The Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA), P.L.91-230 consolidates certain federal grant programs into one authorization known as Part B, EHA.

1973: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, P.L. 93-112 bars discrimination against the disabled in any federally funded program and specifically requires appropriate education services for disabled children.

1975: The Education of All Handicapped Children Act, P.L. 94-142 mandates for all children with disabilities (1) a free and appropriate public education; (2) the right of due process; (3) education in the least restrictive environment; and (4)

individualized educational programs. This law served as the basis of special education as it is known today.

1990: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), P.L.101-476 reauthorized EHA and expanded discretionary programs. IDEA also mandated transition services and assistive technology services.

1997: IDEA amended P.L. 105-17 mandated that students with disabilities have the right to be educated, or included, in the regular classroom, and allows for family involvement in the general curriculum eligibility and placement and requires accountability from the school for results. This amendment also required regular education teachers be included in IEP teams.

2004: Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (P.L. 108-466) which was a major reauthorization and revision of IDEA.

Regulatory Language for Teacher Observation and Evaluation in Virginia

The Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (8VAC 20-131) established the role of the principal in schools and instructional leadership. The role of the principal is defined to be that of the instructional leader of the school who is responsible for effective school management that promotes positive student achievement, a safe and secure environment in which to teach and learn, and efficient use of resources. This legislation also declared that the principal as instructional leader shall analyze classroom practices and methods for improvement of instruction. Additionally the principal is to monitor and evaluate the quality of instruction, provide staff development, provide support that is designed to improve instruction, and seek to ensure the successful attainment of knowledge and skills required for students by Virginia

Standards of Learning (SOL) tests.

In order to comply with 8 VAC 20-131, *The Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* each local school division has developed policies and procedures for teacher evaluation and observation.

Administrative Roles and Responsibilities in Evaluation

The role of the building administrator has changed drastically over the last few decades. Administrators are no longer managers; they must be the instructional leaders of their schools. As such, greater responsibility has fallen on them to assure that students are learning and teachers are teaching.

As stated in The Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia, principals have a responsibility to help teachers improve their professional skills and to ensure that learning is occurring (Virginia Department of Education, 1999). When the focus of supervision is on teaching and learning, evaluation is an unavoidable aspect of that process (Sergiovanni, 2006). Blumberg (1980) indicated that many times, teachers do not look favorably on the evaluation process. In order to effectively evaluate classroom instruction, Sergiovanni (2006) stated that supervision and evaluation of teaching should attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What is actually going on in this classroom?
2. What is the teacher and what are the students actually doing?
3. What are the actual learning outcomes?
4. What ought to be going on in this classroom given our overall goals, educational platform, knowledge of how children learn, and understandings of the structure of the subject matter to be taught?

5. What do these events and activities of teaching and learning mean to teachers, students, and others?
6. What are the personal meanings that students accumulate regardless of teacher intents?
7. How do teacher and principal interpretations of teaching really differ?
8. What actions should be taken to bring about even greater understanding of teaching and learning and better congruence between our actions and beliefs?

There are many purposes and reasons for evaluation. It is obvious according to Sergiovanni (2006) that one priority is to ensure that learning is an ongoing process and that students are mastering instructional content. It is also important to realize that evaluation is and can be used as a means of professional and personal growth and development. Further, Sergiovanni (2006) groups the purpose of evaluation into one of three groups: quality control, professional development, and teacher motivation. Hackman and Oldham (1976) suggested that teacher motivation is often neglected yet a very important purpose of evaluation. Hackman and Oldham (1976) also stated that knowledge of results is important in increasing a person's motivation to work and in building commitment and loyalty to one's job.

Danielson (2002) stated that a school's approach to teacher evaluation sets the tone for its professional culture. Danielson (2002) further stated that two fundamental purposes for teacher evaluation exist: quality assurance and professional learning. Danielson (2002) and McGreal (2000) recommended that evaluation systems should help improve as well as assess teacher practice. A differentiated system of evaluation needs to be in place due to the fact that novice and experienced teachers have different needs.

Danielson (2002) and McGreal (2000) also suggested that teachers be afforded the opportunity to engage in self-assessment and reflection, which in turn leads to improved practice. The school divisions' system of teacher evaluation must convey respect for teachers as well as high expectations for performance.

On many occasions ratings of teachers show that the vast majority of teachers in any state, district, or school are rated above or well above average (Donaldson & Peske, 2010). More emphasis is being placed on teacher evaluations due to the affect of teachers on student behavior and learning. Donaldson (2009) showed that on the whole teacher evaluation did not substantially improve instruction. Hanushek, Kain, O'Brien, and Rivkin (2005) indicated that any school is likely to employ more underperforming teachers than its evaluation ratings suggest. Donaldson (2002) identified the following problems with the way in which evaluations could be used to improve instruction and achievement: poor evaluation instruments, limited district guidance, lack of evaluator time, lack of evaluator skill, lack of evaluator will, absence of high-quality feedback for teachers, and few consequences attached to evaluation. It is important to note that as younger teachers enter the workforce there is a move towards more collaboration between boards of education and building level principals to improve the appraisal of teachers (Johnson et al., 2009; Weingarten, 2010).Research has shown that evaluations may not necessarily be seen as a tool for improving the effectiveness of teachers, additional research indicates that regular, consistent feedback on classroom instruction can be a powerful influence to novice and experienced teachers (Olivia, Mathers, & Laine, 2009). Olivia et al. (2009) further suggested that in order to ensure teacher growth principals should assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of their teacher evaluation

systems and take necessary steps to improve them.

Toch (2008) stated that through the focus on the quality of teaching, teacher evaluations are at the very center of the education enterprise and can be catalysts for teacher and school improvement. Typical teacher evaluations consist of a checklist of items that examine classroom conditions and teacher behaviors that do not really measure quality of instruction. Choices generally include satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Toch (2008) continued to state that when models are put in place that improves teaching, the evaluation process improves as well as student outcomes. Toch (2008) cited the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) that uses explicit standards. These standards are based on the work of Charlotte Danielson. In Danielson's (1996) work four major categories (planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities); 22 themes (ranging from demonstrating knowledge of the subjects taught to designing ways to motivate students to learn); and 77 skills (such as when and how to use grouping of students and the most effective ways to give students feedback) are identified. Danielson (1996) also created rubrics for evaluators to use that detail what teachers need to do to earn ratings of unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, or distinguished in each skill category. TAP (2008) further suggests that evaluators have backgrounds in the teachers' subjects and grade levels. Mike Gass (2009), Executive Director of Secondary Education in Eagle County, Colorado, acknowledged that good instruction doesn't look the same in chemistry as in elementary reading. Evaluations should focus on teachers' subject knowledge, professionalism, classroom management skills, and teaching skills.

Evaluation in Collaborative or Inclusive Settings

Administrators are now faced with the challenge of evaluating special education teachers in settings other than the special education classroom. Coteaching has become a common way to address the federal mandates of No Child Left Behind, as well as regulations for students with disabilities as set forth in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA,1997; Murawski & Dieker, 2004) and also as even more strictly set forth in the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 (Mandlawitz, 2006).

As a result of changes in federal language, classrooms no longer appear the same. Friend, Reising, and Cook(1993) assemble instruction into one of five structures that the observer or evaluator may encounter, including (a) one teach, one assist; (b) station teaching; (c) parallel teaching; (d) alternative teaching; and (e) team teaching. A program evaluation of eight schools, as reported by Idol (2006), examined how much inclusion was actually being exhibited and to see how each school was providing for the education of students with disabilities. Service Delivery was identified by the following models: (a) Consulting Teacher Model (Idol, Nevin, & Paolucci-Whitcomb, 1994, 2000); (b) Cooperative Teacher Model (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989); (c) Supportive Resource Programs (Wiederholt & Chamberlain, 1989) and (d) Instructional Assistants. According to Walsh and Jones (2004) a problem with cotaught classrooms is that in many cases these classrooms were filled with students with disabilities. Additionally, it was found that special education teachers were "expected to function more like a teacher assistant than a teacher" (Walsh & Jones, 2004, p.16-17).

Data show that self-contained placements are decreasing and that placement in regular education classes has steadily risen over the past decade (U.S. Department of

Education, 2002). As a result of this increase in regular education placement, a continued need for consultative and collaborative special education personnel is indicated. With the passage of IDEIA in 2004, new provisions were added requiring teachers to be highly qualified. Several options are provided for meeting highly qualified status in special education (Brown & Celeste, 2006). IDEIA (2004) provides the option for special education personnel to serve in a collaborative and consultative role that does not require them to meet the dual certification requirement in order to meet NCLB content certification.

In order for inclusion to be productive and successful administrators must be willing to publicly articulate their vision, build consensus for the vision, and get stakeholders involved. Administrative support and vision are the most powerful predictors of general educator's attitudes toward inclusion (Villa et al., 1996). Due to the emphasis on accountability it is important to evaluate the coteaching program (Wilson, 2005). Criteria should be established to judge the quality of the coteaching programs (Salend, Gordon, & Lopez-Vona, 2002). Friend (2007) offered the following questions to guide the program evaluation: (1). Are both teachers actively engaged in the instructional process? (2). Do both teachers contribute to the discipline and classroom management? (3). Are both teachers involved in grouping students in ways that will help them meet learning goals? (4). Do both teachers address student learning needs and make use of each teacher's strengths?

Magiera and Simmons (2005) identified five categories of quality indicators for the evaluation of coteachers. The categories identified are professionalism, classroom management, instructional process, learning groups, and student progress. They

suggested that indicators be recorded as present or absent when completing teacher observations. They also cautioned the observer to remember that all categories may not be present in each lesson.

Murawski (2008) suggested that all administrators be aware of five keys necessary to create and maintain effective coteaching in the inclusive classroom: (1) Know what coteaching is and when it is needed; (2) Recognize that coteaching is a marriage and you are the matchmaker;(3) Make scheduling a priority; (4) Planning is critical; and (5) Monitor success, give feedback and ensure evidence-based practice.

A survey conducted in 2002 on cotaught inclusion programs showed that 84% of directors of special education rated their coteaching inclusion programs as superior to very good (Wilson & Pace, 2002). Based on this survey Wilson and Pace (2002) raised these questions:

1. How do special education administrators actually know their programs are superior or very good?
2. Do special and general education administrators use similar criteria when evaluating cotaught lessons?
3. How might special and general education administrators collaborate and generate shared evaluation criteria when rating their cotaught inclusion programs?

In order to answer those questions, Wilson and Pace (2002) developed a coteaching observation tool that was broken into four phases. Each of these phases addressed an essential question:

Phase One: What makes a good lesson?

Phase Two: Does the evaluation of a cotaught lesson require a unique perspective?

Phase Three: What are the essential components needed in an observation tool for cotaught lessons?

Phase Four: How useful is the observation tool that was developed?

The Virginia Department of Education (2007) posed the question of what would an observer see and hear in a classroom if instruction is meeting the needs of all students? The following indicators were presented:

1. All students are equal members of the class and valued for their contributions.
2. Students are actively involved and engaged in various learning activities.
3. Students' learning needs are met in a variety of ways.
4. Specific behavioral goals are being addressed.
5. Student attendance remains the same or shows improvement.
6. More student talk is heard than teacher talk.
7. Students are interacting with each other and learning together.
8. Student achievement is maintained or showing improvement.
9. There may or may not be a coteacher in the class.
10. If there are two teachers, they share responsibilities and duties.
11. Every student has the opportunity to display his or her work.
12. Student work is valued.
13. Stakeholder's perceptions regarding the collaborative experience have improved due to the cotaught classroom.

In addition, the following factors are identified as contributing to effective coteaching:

1. Common planning time
2. Opportunity to collaborate

3. Structured process for planning
4. Effective instructional strategies that teach content
5. Good communication skills between coteachers
6. Shared responsibilities
7. Adequate supplies and materials
8. Administrative support (i.e. creating a balanced classroom roster, recognizing the added responsibilities beyond classroom duties for the purpose of planning, providing opportunities to attend professional development for collaboration purposes, and honoring the importance of both teachers being in the classroom at the same time)
9. Consistent family contact
10. Knowledge of students and their IEPs
11. Knowledge of federal and state regulations

Performance Based Evaluations

Sawchuk (2009) reported that nearly every state requires school districts to evaluate teachers; however, the instruments used are commonly designed at the local level. Sawchuk (2009) continued to state that President Obama's administration supports a plan that will require school districts to disclose how many teachers perform well or poorly. According to *Education Week* (2009) school districts use different methods to measure teacher performance such as a checklist, performance based observation, peer review and assistance, and mixed methods. Fuhrman (2010) reported that *Race to the Top* (RTTT), encourages states to develop evaluation means that include student achievement results. Fuhrman (2010) further warned that policymakers need to be cautious in adopting any

approach that ties student performance and test scores with decisions about individual teacher performance without first weighing all contributing factors and that test scores should not be the sole factor used in the evaluation of teacher effectiveness. Tying teacher effectiveness to student achievement has been recommended for several years (Finn, 1999). Critics have countered this belief with the fact that test scores may be misleading because they may be dependent on factors other than teacher performance (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Much of the literature reviewed criticizes the evaluation by principals as being inherently subjective (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993; Blumberg, 1980; Fant & Stevens, 1991; Frase & Streshly, 1994; Kerrins & Cushing, 2000; Machell, 1995; Stodolsky, 1984).

Formative or Summative Observations

Glickman (2010) along with Danielson and McGreal (2000) raise questions as to whether or not formative or summative observations are more precise predictors of teacher effectiveness. Opinions are divided and some believe that a mix of the two can be used successfully.

A formative evaluation is used to describe what occurs in a classroom as a means for professional growth and development. A summative evaluation is an externally imposed, uniformly applied measure intended to judge all teachers on similar criteria to determine their worthiness, merit, and competence as employees (Glickman et al., 2010).

In summative evaluations, forms are standard and judge teachers on the quality of their instruction, classroom climate, planning, the teaching act, and classroom management (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). The literature also indicated that summative evaluation does not lead to instructional improvement for most teachers (Stiggins &

Bridgeford,1984).

Formative evaluations are intended to assist and support teachers in professional growth. Formative evaluations are focused only on teaching and learning that is ongoing and concerned with continuous improvement (Glickman, 2010).

The literature did not suggest that one form of evaluation should be used over the other because both types are necessary. Each evaluation system has an entirely different purpose and should be kept separate (Popham, 1988). The two systems can be used to evaluate teachers as long as the purpose of each method is clearly defined, they are perceived by teachers as being distinct, and the integrity of each is protected (Allison, 1981).

Summary

This review of literature has covered an array of issues dealing with the observation and evaluation of special education teachers. A need for specially designed instruction for students with disabilities has been traced back to the 1800s.

Special education programs have grown and become stronger due to the enactment of federal and state mandates. The federal government has placed greater responsibility on local school divisions by passing these mandates. The most recent legislation is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.

A review of regulatory language governing teacher evaluation in Virginia was discussed along with best practices of observation and evaluation. The review of literature did show there was no clearly defined best method of observation and evaluation.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Design of Study

This qualitative study examined perceptions of a group of special education directors as to the effectiveness of the evaluation process for special education staff within their local school divisions. This study involved special education directors and coordinators located in the Region VII Superintendent's study group. Region VII consists of 19 counties and independent cities located in rural southwest Virginia. Data were collected through two questionnaires. Twenty-nine people were invited to participate in the initial phase, and a follow-up questionnaire was distributed to nine people using a structured guide.

Research Questions

The study was guided by five research questions based on perceptions of special education directors or coordinators:

1. Does the current method of evaluation used in local school divisions adequately measure the effectiveness of special education teachers?
2. Are evaluations of special education teachers more summative or formative in nature and how does this differ from the evaluation of general education teachers?
3. What are the key indicators being observed in the evaluation of special education teachers and does this differ from the evaluation of general education teachers?

4. Is there a perceived difference in the evaluation of special education teachers by administrators with a background in special education as opposed to a background in general education?
5. Do building level administrators have adequate training and knowledge in the evaluation and observation of special education teachers?

Data Collection

Creswell (1998) stated that qualitative research is the study of things or people in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. A convenience sample strategy was used to gather data. Participants in the study were required to be currently working as a special education director or coordinator within their local school division. The number of participants was limited due to each school division only having one director and no more than three coordinators. Participants were notified of this study at a regional meeting. During this meeting the purpose of the study was explained to all in attendance. Participants were informed that they would receive an email link to a secure website hosted by Survey Monkey where they could complete the questionnaire at a time of their choosing. The ethical aspects of research were also discussed with participants. They were advised that participation in this research study involved minimal to less than minimal risk and that only their perceptions would be reported. They were also advised that no payment would be made. Participants were also advised that their participation was completely voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time.

According to Patton (1990) convenience or purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to understand and gain insight and therefore must

select a sample from which the most can be learned. In many cases a qualitative study allows data to be collected that cannot accurately be reflected through quantitative methods. Creighton (2007) supported the premise that quantitative methods do not produce the same data that can be revealed through interviews, focus groups, and observations; all of which are qualitative methods.

Ragin (1987) differentiated between quantitative and qualitative research by identifying a key difference. The key difference according to Ragin is that quantitative researchers work with a few variables and many cases, whereas qualitative researchers only use a few cases and many variables.

Selection of Participants

Participants for this study were selected by a two-part survey method. An initial questionnaire (*Appendix A*) was sent to all of the special education directors and coordinators in Region VII. Region VII consists of 19 school divisions, all of which are located in southwest Virginia. This population was selected based on the fact that each of them is involved in the supervision of special education programs within the school division. A follow-up questionnaire (*Appendix B*) was administered to certain respondents based on their responses to the initial questionnaire. Participants were selected in an attempt to get representation from those with and without special education experience in order to answer the questions guiding this study.

Table 1 lists each of the school divisions, which are arranged in order from the lowest percentage of students with disabilities to the highest percentage. Region VII accounts for 6.3% of the total percentage of students identified as having a disability (Virginia Department of Education, 2010).

Table 1:

Number and Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Division

Division	# of Students with Disabilities	% of Students with Disabilities
A	452	10.4%
B	154	11.2%
C	109	12.7%
D	868	12.8%
E	570	13.9%
F	277	14.0%
G	370	14.5%
H	998	14.7%
I	136	14.8%
J	1,116	14.9%
K	361	15.3%
L	237	15.4%
M	636	15.9%
N	814	16.3%
O	781	16.5%
P	435	16.9%
Q	796	18.4%
R	641	18.9%
S	744	20.4%
Totals	10,495	6.3% of State Sp.Ed Population

Data Analysis

Surveys were created using Survey Monkey. A secure web address was emailed to all participants in the study allowing them to complete the survey at a time of their choosing. Responses were stored on Survey Monkey and were compiled for analysis by the researcher. The initial survey was sent to all special education directors and coordinators in Region VII. A group of nine individuals were selected to complete a second follow-up questionnaire. Upon completion of the questionnaires, data obtained were analyzed using the Constant Comparison Analysis Method of Strauss and Corbin

(1998). Interview results were coded for recurring themes and patterns that existed in the two survey instruments.

Quality and Verification

In order to ensure validity and reliability this researcher relied on several strategies. Merriam (1998) stated that a process of using multiple data collection methods, sources, and analysis known as triangulation is a method to address internal validity. Data sources used included an open-ended initial questionnaire provided to all participants (*Appendix A*). Based on responses, a follow-up questionnaire was administered to select participants (*Appendix B*). This follow-up instrument allowed participants, as well as the researcher, to probe deeper into the questions being asked.

In reporting the results a variety of data techniques were incorporated. Direct quotes from responses, narrative transcription, as well as comments and observations based on the Constant Comparison Analysis Method of Strauss and Corbin (1990) were used. In addition a peer examiner was used to review the investigator's notes and comments and to make sure that any personal biases were not present in the narrative.

Guba (1981) offered four criteria for consideration of the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. These criteria are: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability.

Merriam (1998) posed the question of how congruent are the findings with reality. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Erlandson (1993) suggested that the researcher have a history of prolonged engagement with the participants in order for a relationship of trust to be developed among all parties. This

researcher has been involved with the participants since August 2000, and currently serves as the chairperson of the Region VII special education directors. As a result, we work closely together and mutual trust and respect exists among the group. Triangulation was obtained by using two questionnaires, focus group interviews, and evaluation of the information gathered during the interviews. According to Guba (1981) and Brewer and Hunter (1989), this compensates for individual limitations and strengthens respective benefits. Shenton (2004) stated that triangulation, using informants as data sources, allows the researcher to verify individual viewpoints and experiences against each other that leads to a rich picture of the attitudes of those being interviewed.

Patton (1990) suggested that the credibility of the researcher is important in qualitative research. Alkin, Daillak, and White (1979) stated that trust in the researcher is as important as the adequacy of the procedures themselves.

Guba and Lincoln (1985) also suggested that member checks are the best method that can be used to ensure credibility. Member checks or participant verification were used during the course of this research by having participants review transcripts of the interviews (both personal and focus group) as well as the final narrative. Participants were given the opportunity to revise or edit any comments where concerns existed. Participants were also encouraged to verify emerging theories formed during interviews, as well as to offer reasons for any patterns which may have developed (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Pitts, 1994).

According to Bassey (1981), transferability is when practitioners believe their situations to be similar to that of the study, then the findings may relate to their own positions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Firestone (1993) suggested that it is the

responsibility of the investigator to provide the reader with enough contextual information for the reader to be able to make a transfer.

According to Shenton (2004), dependability is accomplished by reporting the processes in enough detail that would allow a future researcher to repeat the study and not necessarily with the intent of gaining the same results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized that there are close ties between credibility and dependability and that the use of focus groups and individual interviews are overlapping methods which add to the achievement of dependability.

Summary

This chapter included a description of the methods and procedures used in conducting this qualitative research. Topics discussed included the design of the study, the research questions, the collection of data, the selection of participants, analysis of the data, quality and verification, and summary. The purpose of this research was to examine perceptions of special education directors and coordinators in regard to the observation and evaluation of special education teachers within Region VII, located in southwest Virginia. Data were collected from participants who were provided informed consent and were currently serving as directors and coordinators. This study was limited to Region VII of southwest Virginia.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine perceptions of a group of special education directors and coordinators from Region VII in southwest Virginia, regarding the evaluation of special education teachers. Participants' perceptions were analyzed and offer insights into the observation and evaluation of special education teachers.

Research Questions

Based on the perception of a special education director or coordinator:

1. Does the current method of evaluation used in local school divisions adequately measure the effectiveness of special education teachers?
2. Are evaluations of special education teachers more summative or formative in nature and how does this differ from the evaluation of general education teachers?
3. What are the key indicators being observed in the evaluation of special education teachers and does this differ from the evaluation of general education teachers?
4. Is there a perceived difference in the evaluation of special education teachers by administrators with a background in special education as opposed to a background in general education?
5. Do building level administrators have adequate training and knowledge in the evaluation and observation of special education teachers?

Selection of Participants

Participants for this research study were selected from the group of individuals who currently serve as directors or coordinators of special education for their local school divisions. Twenty-nine individuals were invited to participate in this research study, representing 19 school divisions in Virginia. Participants were provided informed consent and approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board of East Tennessee State University as well as the Office of Special Education and Student Services from the Virginia Department of Education.

Of the 29 individuals invited to participate, responses on the initial questionnaire were returned from 26, an 89% rate of return representing 17 of the 19 school divisions. A follow-up questionnaire was distributed to nine special education directors and coordinators. This second questionnaire was returned with a 100% completion rate.

Results from Initial Questionnaire 1

Of the 26 respondents to the initial interview, 3.8% held a bachelor's degree, 69.2% held a master's degree, 11.5% held an Ed. S. (Educational Specialist) degree, and 15.4% held a doctorate degree.

When asked are you now, or have you previously been actively involved in the observation and evaluation of special education teachers, 57.3% responded yes and 42.3% responded no. Participant D-14 stated his county has given that responsibility to school principals; however, they meet with the principals each year to discuss their special education staff prior to the end of the year evaluations. D-10 stated that they were involved in consultation with school level administrators.

When questioned about endorsement in special education, 80.8% reported they were endorsed by the Virginia Department of Education in Special Education and 19.2% were not endorsed in Special Education. Those participants not endorsed did report endorsements in areas of general education, school counselor, school social worker, educational leadership, and school psychology.

In response to the question "Do you feel that special education teachers can be evaluated using the same observation/evaluation tool as general education teachers" the responses were split with 50% stating yes and 50% stating no. This researcher was surprised by this result being so evenly divided. Participant D-14 responded, "We have a variety of special education teachers---collaborative, self-contained, early childhood, vocational--- that do not fit the typical evaluation tool used for general education teachers." Related service providers--- speech therapists, OT, PT, Vision impaired teachers cannot be evaluated using the same tool. D-11 responded that, many of the same competencies should be evaluated, but additional competencies need attention as well. Participant C-7 stated, "Good teaching is good teaching, but case management skills are also an important part of the SPED teacher's job as is the writing of IEPs." D-4 responded that when evaluating SPED teachers, "I feel the inclusion of some additional components to the standard evaluation used for general education teachers could prove most beneficial and improve the process for evaluating SPED teachers." Participant C-3 stated that as far as teaching styles, methods, classroom organization, rapport with students, that:

> I believe that the same instrument can be used effectively. However, I believe that the process should go further with special education teachers. I believe that we must also evaluate the development of IEPs including transition plans. I think that we should also look at the knowledge of

> special education laws as far as staying within timelines on eligibilities and IEPs.
>
> Leadership qualities must also be considered for the special educator

because he or she is often the expert in the school as far as special education goes.

Participant D-2 expressed similar beliefs by stating that:

> I feel that an observation tool used to evaluate special education teachers should include many areas as that of those used to evaluate general education teachers, but should also include a section that more closely and specifically evaluates their specialized instructional training. Special Education teachers have specific and specialized training that varies from that of a general education teacher, and if their job is to provide that specialized training or instructional techniques, the teachers should be evaluated on how well they perform their job related to this.

The final question in the initial questionnaire generated a wider variety of responses. In response to the question "Do you feel there should be any differentiation in the evaluation/observation of special education teachers" 65.4% indicated yes and 34.6% indicated no. It is interesting to note that out of the 17 participants from school divisions who responded, only one division used a different evaluation tool for special educators and related service providers. Participants in the study offered comments regarding this question that tied in closely with responses to the previous question. Several respondents stated that the evaluator should look for evidence of individualized instruction. Even though there appeared to be agreement that some areas of evaluation could be shared, participants clearly stated that differentiation needed to occur. Participant D-5 stated evaluations tend to be broad in nature. Special education teachers need to be evaluated on educational constructs as well as expectations specific to special education, including instructional strategies, knowledge of special education (disabilities, law, IEP development). Participant C-5 responded by saying special education teachers have

different areas of expertise that general education teachers do not. It would be expected that the special education teacher would be able to demonstrate these areas in different situations that the general education teacher would not. Participant C-3 added an additional component by stating that if a teacher is in an inclusive environment, "I feel that there would also need to be a component on the evaluation that would cover willingness to work with others and share in the workload."

Results from Follow-up Questionnaire 2

Nine participants were selected from the initial survey group. All nine participants completed the guided-question interview for a return rate of 100%. The nine participants consisted of six special education directors and three special education coordinators. The intent of the second interview was to probe deeper into the evaluation and observation of special education teachers within Region VII from the perception of the director or coordinator.

In response to the first question that dealt with the school divisions' evaluation process, all nine of those surveyed replied that their division used the same evaluation tool for all teachers. There appeared to be no differentiation during the formal evaluation process. The frequency of observation ranged from daily to once every 3 years. Each representative of the nine school divisions reported the use of walk-through evaluations on an informal basis.

The second question asked if evaluations were of a more summative or formative nature and if this differed from evaluations of general education teachers. One school division representative indicated that evaluations and observations were formative in design. Representatives from four school divisions reported their evaluations were

summative in nature. One of the school division representatives did make note that formative data from high-stakes testing may be used to evaluate teacher effectiveness on a limited basis, but that this was generally used mainly with the general education teachers. Four school division representatives stated that evaluations were a combination of formative and summative measures. One school division representative explained that the principal focused on observed skills in relation to the special education teacher's knowledge and practices of the special education process.

The third question explored key indicators being observed during evaluations and observations. It was apparent from responses to the questionnaire that most of the school divisions in Region VII evaluate using the same criteria even though the instruments may be different. The school division representatives reported the following areas as being observed: posting of objectives, providing appropriate feedback, use of Bloom's Taxonomy, presentation of lesson, directed use of technology and technology devices, evidence of learning, effective classroom management, differentiation of instruction, safety and learning environment, community relations, professionalism, evidence of the use of pacing guides, and evidence of data-driven instruction. One of the school divisions' representative relayed that in the school division, the principals look for teacher's knowledge related to special education practices, their knowledge of IEP development and implementation, the skills to provide inclusive instruction to students, the knowledge and ability to follow special education law and procedures, and the ability to work with others. Another school division representative stated that in addition to the criteria explained above, additional criteria are used in coteaching settings. Within these settings, key indicators would also include the role of each teacher, evidence of

coplanning, evidence of coplanning strategies and modifications, strategies used to actively engage students, reinforcement strategies being employed, and evidence that all students are being appropriately challenged. In this same school division, the building principal uses a different tool to evaluate a cotaught class opposed to a general education class. Each division did stress however that no difference exists between the evaluation and observation of special education teachers and general education teachers.

The fourth question asked the participants if they perceived a difference existed in the evaluation of special education teachers by administrators with a background in special education as opposed to those with a general education background. One school division representative responded that the tool 'equalized' what administrators were looking for in the classroom. This participant further stated that it was felt that special education directors and administrators with experience or background in special education could assist in developing a tool that would look at some additional indicators. This person has developed and received a copyright for an instrument to be used, in addition to the school division's tool, which looks at all the components for general education, special education, and coteaching education but adds additional components specific to special education.

A second school division representative stated that it was perceived that administrators who have formerly been special education teachers should know more of what to look for in evaluating special education teachers. This participant stated that it was perceived that it was more likely that the building administrator would 'glean' or look over the special education teachers and not evaluate the special education teacher as critically as the general education teacher.

A third school division representative reported that sometimes a perceived difference existed. Within the division, the building administrators do not have a background in special education, but each one appears to recognize the expertise of special education teachers equally with the general education teachers. The administrators recognized the job differences and specialized training requirements for special education teachers. This participant stated that he or she had worked in other divisions as well, and it was felt that administrators in those school divisions without a special education background did not seem to understand the job duties, skills, and what is involved in the delivery of special education and related services. As a result special education teachers were evaluated using the same process as general education teachers without recognizing the difference in the job requirements.

One participant responded that he or she had never had an evaluation completed by anyone with a background in special education. No building administrators have a background in special education. It is felt that there would be other factors included if they did differentiate between regular and special education.

Another participant stated that there was a perceived difference. Administrators with a special education background have a specific knowledge of instructional strategies, disabilities, behavior interventions, and paperwork compliance. Administrators without a special education background have a strong knowledge of instruction, but it is not always specific to special education.

One school division participant whose division used a total inclusive educational setting stated that a perceived difference does exist based on the background of the administrator. This is attributed to some administrators who have a history of only self-

contained programs tending to continue to think in those terms. New administrators or those who have been involved in coteaching have higher expectations.

One school division participant also agreed that a perceived difference existed in the evaluation by administrators with a background in special education as opposed to administrators without such a background. This participant stated that administrators with a special education background would have a greater understanding of the role of the special education teacher and even higher expectations for instructional practices than the administrator with the general education background.

The fifth question asked if building level administrators had adequate training and knowledge in order to effectively evaluate and observe special education teachers regardless of the educational setting.

The first school division participant interviewed explained that the school division has provided a great deal of formal professional development to administrators covering general evaluation methods and *look-fors* in general education, special education, and the cotaught model of education. This division has also worked with the Virginia Department of Education in developing *look-fors* which could be used in any class and would evaluate teachers providing instruction in a variety of settings.

The second school division participant stated that it was not a common belief that administrators had adequate training. This participant perceived that most administrators had no idea what should be happening in any special education setting, in particular collaborative and inclusive classrooms. Most administrators are satisfied as long as the students in the self-contained setting are not behavior problems. Instead, this division's

administrators look closely at curriculum or teaching techniques because it is felt that the administrators are unsure of how to effectively evaluate a special education program.

One division representative stated that some administrators were adequately prepared but most were not. Further questioning revealed that this individual felt that principal prep programs were lacking in preparing most building level administrators for supervision of special education programming and personnel within their buildings. As a result it is important for someone in the division to be available to provide administrators with knowledge and guidance regarding special education law, procedures, and guidelines. This person concluded that by building effective administration teams and leaders from the central office level to the building level, principals gain more understanding, knowledge, and skills to effectively supervise special education in their buildings. However, this must begin in university principal prep programs. Most college and university programs only require one or two classes in special education.

One school division representative relayed that even though administrators have increased knowledge to evaluate and observe special education teachers in various educational settings, the school division continues to invite and involve building level administrators in trainings to increase knowledge and skills in effective observation specific to special education. This division also stated that a strong collaboration exists between building level principals and central office personnel.

A school division participant responded to the question by stating that all administrators struggle with what a good evaluation looks like especially for special educators, because coteaching is different in each classroom and with each teacher. The key is finding a team of a general education and special education teachers who work

well together. The last thing this division wants to see is our special education teachers becoming classroom aides. Our principals have had enough training to know that this is not acceptable. However, we do not think they are as knowledgeable about the different coteaching models as they should be to provide effective leadership. Also, administrators tend to have lower expectations for teachers of self-contained programs because they do not know or understand how to determine student progress or achievement.

Of the two remaining school divisions, one school division participant stated that administrators did not have adequate training or knowledge, and he or she did not think that administrators took into consideration the extra things that special education teachers had to do or deal with such as paperwork and alternative testing.

The remaining school division participant expressed mixed feelings. This person responded that it was believed that building level administrators were adequately trained and have knowledge to evaluate special education teachers in the main areas identified on the evaluation tool used by the division. According to this respondent good teaching is good teaching no matter where you are or who is doing it. However, the respondent also stated that not all administrators have adequate knowledge concerning special education procedures to gauge or evaluate teacher effectiveness with paperwork, case management, and the ability to conduct assessments.

Upon completion of the second questionnaire a narrative was sent back to each participant for any additional comments or deletions that were needed. One director responded by stating that it was believed that the special education teachers were often used as aides in the inclusion classroom and that is being allowed to continue because

administrators do not understand what a good coteaching relationship looks like. It is also believed that classroom management skills are valued more than teaching skills.

One director offered the following comments by replying that it is believed that all teachers, especially special education teachers, need to be making data-driven decisions as they relate to the art and science of teaching. Given that this is the pivotal practice leading to success for special education students and it is currently not a part of this division's formal teacher evaluation process, grave concerns exist about evaluation practices. This participant also stated that a better approach to evaluation would be the implementation of a professional portfolio in lieu of the current rating scale. Goals would be crafted by the employee in consultation with his or her supervisor. Each employee would be required to collect evidence supporting the accomplishment of his or her defined goals. This would aid in the elimination of the subjective component of our current evaluation system.

Another director expressed that there should be additional information supplied as to whether or not modifications were provided in the classroom. Another director responded in a similar manner by explaining that within the school division there is no evaluation information for special education teachers beyond the indicators that apply to both special education teachers and general education teachers. Because special education is a complex discipline, it is believed that along with the indicators that are used on the current evaluation tool, there could be indicators that include information specific to special education including IEP planning.

The final participant stated that good teachers, whether they are special education or general education, have the same characteristics. The most effective teachers have a

great relationship with their students and that is difficult to measure with the current evaluation system. Another observation is that there is a difference between general education teachers at the high school level and elementary level. Elementary teachers are generally more student oriented and high school teachers are more subject oriented. All special education teachers are more student-oriented and less subject oriented due to their educational background and the reasons they chose special education as a career in the first place.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to analyze the results of two questionnaires distributed to a specific group of special education directors and coordinators. The initial questionnaire was distributed to all special education directors and coordinators in Region VII of southwest Virginia. A follow-up questionnaire was distributed to nine directors and coordinators located within the same region.

In examining the data, it was apparent that the population questioned were evenly split on whether or not special education teachers could be evaluated using the same observation and evaluation tool as general education teachers with 50% stating yes and 50% stating no. When questioned if there was a need for differentiation in the evaluation of special education teachers respondents overwhelmingly agreed with 65.4% saying yes and 34.6% saying no.

Using the Constant Comparison Analysis Method of Strauss and Corbin (1998) responses were analyzed for repetitive themes. As a result of the analysis several themes emerged. Themes most commonly expressed were in the areas of:

1. Administrators understanding of the role and responsibilities of the special education teacher;
2. The inability of the evaluation tool to measure the different competencies required of special educators; and
3. The perceived difference of expectations between the varied instructional settings.

An observation of particular interest to this study is the fact that the participants were evenly divided when asked if the same evaluation tool could be used. In contrast, 65.4% of the same participants replied that differentiation was needed in the evaluation and observation of special education and general education teachers.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

A great amount of attention has been given to the education of students with disabilities over the past 3 decades. Local school divisions are mandated by federal and state laws to follow regulatory procedures. As a result of legislation special education has transitioned from being a place and has become a service.

The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act requires that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment. As such, many students with disabilities are now receiving instruction in the general education setting. This transition of educational settings has created the need to place special education teachers in teaching positions where they are actively involved teaching students with disabilities in the general education setting. As a result building level administrators now have to evaluate general education and special education teachers within the same instructional setting.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of perceptions of special education directors and coordinators in regard to the evaluation and observation of special education teachers in Region VII located in southwest Virginia. When the building administrator enters a cotaught or inclusive classroom, how aware is the administrator of the roles and responsibilities of those providing instruction and what specialized training has the administrator received in order to effectively evaluate

instructional staff? To investigate this qualitative study was guided by five research questions.

Summary of Findings

In order to ascertain the perceptions of the special education directors and coordinators who participated in this research five research questions were developed. Data were collected from the participants and analyzed for common themes. The following questions were studied.

Research Question 1

Does the current method of evaluation used in local school divisions measure the effectiveness of special education teachers?

Data showed that each school division used the same observation and evaluation tool for all teachers with only one exception. Participants reported that the instrument used in observations and evaluations measured general competencies; however, several participants mentioned that additional components needed to be added to the instrument to make it more appropriate for the role of a special educator. Additional components named were in addition to the general scope of the observation and evaluation and included such items as knowledge of special education laws, rules and regulations, timely completion of required paperwork and documentation, the ability to get along with others, and leadership skills.

Research Question 2

Are evaluations of special education teachers more summative or formative in nature and how does this differ from the evaluation of general education teachers?

All school division participants reported that there was no differentiation between special education and general education observations in regard to summative or formative assessments. One school division participant reported that assessment was formative in design. Four school division participants reported a summative form of observation and evaluation. Four other school division participants reported a combination of summative and formative measures. It was interesting to note that one school division participant stated that formative data disaggregated from high-stakes testing has been used at times; however, this was mainly used in the observation and evaluation of general education teachers. One school division participant also explained that the building level administrators focused on the observable skills as used by the special educator in relation to the teacher's knowledge and practice of the special education process.

Research Question 3

What are the key indicators being observed in the evaluation of special education teachers and does this differ from the evaluation of general education teachers?

The data showed that even though different instruments are used to observe and evaluate teachers, common areas existed. Key indicators reported by the school division participants included making sure that objectives were posted and visible, providing appropriate feedback, use of Bloom's taxonomy, lesson presentation, directed use of technology and technology devices by students as well as instructors, evidence of learning, classroom management, differentiation of instruction for diverse learning needs, safety, community relations, professionalism, use of pacing guides and evidence of data-driven instruction. Two of the school division participants reported that the building administrators also evaluated special education teachers on the teachers' knowledge of

special education practices. These practices included IEP development and implementation, skills of differentiation for students, knowledge of and ability to follow special education laws and procedures and the ability to work with others. The school division participants also expressed that administrators looked for evidence of differentiation of the roles of teachers within the cotaught classroom, evidence of co-planning, reinforcement activities, methods of student engagement, and evidence that all students are being appropriately challenged.

Each school division participant did note that no difference existed between the observation and evaluation process of special education teachers and general education teachers. It is interesting to note however that even though no difference existed in the observation and evaluation, the majority of the school division participants responding had suggestions of components to be added.

Research Question 4

Is there a perceived difference in the evaluation of special education teachers by administrators with a background in special education as opposed to those with a general education background?

Data revealed mixed perceptions among the group interviewed. One school division participant explained that the observation and evaluation instrument used equalized the evaluation process. One respondent stated that an administrator with a background in special education should know more of what to look for but it was their perception that administrators would more than likely glean or look over special educators. One school division participant expressed that a perceived difference did exist. In this division though, administrators recognized the job differences and

specialized training that the special education teachers have received. Some administrators still did not understand the job responsibilities and it was felt this led to evaluations without really understanding the differences that did exist between general educators and special educators. A school division participant reported that administrators have a strong knowledge of instruction, but that is not always specific to special education.

Two school division participants stated that a perceived difference did exist in the local school divisions, based on the background of the administrators. According to both of these school division participants, administrators who are newer to administration or who have had experience in cotaught and inclusive classrooms appear to have higher expectations.

Research Question 5

Do building level administrators have adequate training and knowledge in the evaluation and observation of special education teachers?

Perceptions of the special education directors and coordinators were varied in the responses to this question. None of the school division participants stated that it was felt that building level administrators had adequate training and knowledge; however, they were careful to note that on-going professional development is provided. Most of the perceptions concur that some administrators are adequately trained and some are not. Concerns were expressed that some administrators were satisfied with the performance of special education teachers and students as long as no behavior problems were present. Concern was expressed over the lack of training in special education during the principal preparation program at local colleges and universities. The suggestion was made that all

administrators struggle with what a good evaluation looks like and the key, especially in a cotaught classroom, is to find a team that can and will work well together. Differentiated instruction may look different in each classroom. Finally, several of the school division participants reported that it was the perception that many administrators still did not take into account all additional responsibilities that are part of the special education teachers' job duties such as paperwork, alternative testing, and case management.

Implications for Practice

The data collected from the perceptions of the special education directors and coordinators in Region VII suggest that additional attention needs to be given to the following areas:

1. More professional development opportunities need to be developed and provided to building administrators in the area of supervision of special education teachers with additional focus placed on the differing roles according to the instructional setting.
2. Colleges and universities should be encouraged to examine their curriculums in principal preparation programs in order to ascertain how much training is actually being provided to potential administrators in the area of special education. Emphasis needs to be placed on the wide array of job responsibilities as well as characteristics of each handicapping condition in order for instructional expectations to be able to match educational abilities.
3. Local school divisions should be encouraged to examine their evaluation and observation forms to see what additions may be made to the instrument in

order to address the additional roles and responsibilities involved in providing education to students with differing abilities.

4. Local school divisions should pay attention to the standardized teacher evaluation instrument currently in development by the Virginia Department of Education, in order to see if the tool developed by the State may be more appropriate.

Implications for Future Research

This study was based on the perceptions of a group of special education directors and coordinators located in southwest Virginia. As a result, generalizations may not be drawn from areas outside of this region. Additional research should include:

1. Expand this into a comparative study with another region that resembles the characteristics of Region VII to see if any similarities can be made between the two regions.
2. Expand this study to include special education directors and coordinators from all regions in Virginia.
3. Include building level administrators as research participants in order to understand their perceptions of the observation and evaluation process as well as their knowledge and understanding of special education.
4. Involve special education teachers as research participants in a study as a means of understanding their perceptions of the observation and evaluation process.

5. Study the similarities and differences between the variety of teachers in relation to the instructional level and the implications for evaluation processes.
6. Study teachers in various settings and the implications for evaluation processes.
7. Study role conflict among administrators in evaluating teachers of all kinds and how administrators serve as change agents focused on school improvement.

Summary

Federal and state mandates pertaining to special education have created a transition in the service model delivery of instruction for students with disabilities. Emphasis is now being placed on educating students in a less restrictive environment. Consequently, building administrators are being forced to observe and evaluate special education teachers in a variety of educational settings.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perceptions of special education directors and coordinators from Region VII, located in southwest Virginia. Two questionnaires were distributed and results were analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's Constant Comparison Analysis Method. Data revealed three recurring themes. First was the need for administrators to develop a better understanding of the role and responsibilities of the special education teacher. Second, concerns were expressed about the inability of the evaluation tool to measure the different competencies required of special education teachers. Finally, a perceived difference was felt to exist based on the expectations of building administrators depending on the instructional setting.

Results from the study suggest that administrators are doing a good job of evaluating special education teachers, but concerns have been expressed that additional resources may be beneficial to the building administrators. Results of this study are provided to create an understanding for the need to add or possibly eliminate components to the current observation and evaluation tools in use presently or the creation of a new evaluation tool for use with special education teachers in order to more accurately capture what is going on in special education classrooms across Virginia.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Introduction and Informed Consent

Dear Special Education Director or Coordinator,

I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University working on a dissertation titled "Evaluating SpEd Teachers: Do We Get the Job Done?" This is a regional study, which will involve the Special Education Directors and Coordinators from Region VII. Through this study, I hope to gain insight about the perceptions of the Special Education directors and coordinators from Region VII in regard to the evaluation and observation of teachers who have special education responsibilities. By holding this position in your school division, you have been selected to participate in an initial survey. A "focus group" will be selected based on responses to this short survey. Your participation involves completing a short survey, which should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete. There is no foreseen risk involved with this study. Your participation is completely voluntary and here is no penalty to those who choose not to respond to the survey, and you may discontinue participation at anytime by exiting the survey. Please remember that your participation will provide valuable feedback to this regional study. Your name and that of your school division is only being collected in order for me to contact you back if you are selected to participate in the follow-up focus group. At no time will your name be used as part of this study. Survey data will be stored in a computer file to which only I have access. Also please be advised that completion of this survey is considered to be your consent for participation in this study.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this brief survey. Please mark the appropriate response. A comment box has been added for each question if you wish to make any comments. Your responses will be kept confidential. Again, thanks for participating.

Once again, your participation is voluntary. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at 276-346-2107 or my chair, Dr. Pamela Scott at 423-439-7618. You may also contact the chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 423-439-6054 for information regarding your rights as a research subject.

Please be advised that completion of this survey is considered to be your consent for participation in this study.

Thank you!

Appendix B
Questionnaire #1

Survey Questions

Evaluating Special Education Teachers: Do We Get the Job Done?

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1. Based on your answers to the survey questions, you may be contacted to serve as a member of a focus group. Please complete the following demographic information in case you need to be contacted.

Name:

School Division:

Address:

Address 2:

City/Town:

State:

ZIP:

Country:

Email Address:

Phone Number:

2. What is your highest earned degree?

Bachelors

Masters

Educational Specialist

Doctorate

3. Are you now, or have you previously been, actively involved in the observation and evaluation of Special Education teachers?
Yes

No

Comment

4. Are you endorsed/licensed in Special Education?
Yes

No

Comment

5. Do you feel that Special Education teachers can be evaluated using the same observation/evaluation tool as general education teachers?

Yes

No

Comment

6. Do you feel there should be any differentiation in the evaluation/observation of special education teachers? If so, please comment in the space provided.

Yes

No

Comment

APPENDIX C

Follow-up Questionnaire 2

Evaluating Special Education Teachers: Do We Get the Job Done?

Congratulations!! Based on your responses to the initial survey, you have been selected to participate in this focus interview follow-up regarding the evaluation and observation of special education teachers in our region.

By answering the following questions, you give your consent to participate in this study. This study poses no risk to you.

It is understood that your responses reflect your perceptions of the evaluation process of special education teachers.

Your participation involves completing this survey which should take no more than 20-30 minutes.
Once again, your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study by simply exiting the survey.

A comment box has been provided for each question. Your identity and that of your county will not be revealed. The researcher is the only person who has access to your responses.

Any questions may be addressed to me at 276-346-2107 or to my Chairperson, Dr. Pamela Scott at 423-439-7618.

Thank you in advance for your participation. By continuing on to the survey, you are consenting to participate in this study.

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1. Introduction: Please select your school division from the following choices:

Bland

Bristol

Buchanan

Carroll

Dickenson

Galax

Giles

Grayson

Lee

Norton

Pulaski

Radford

Russell

Scott

Smyth

Tazewell

Washington

Wise

Wythe

2.What is your current position?

Special Education Coordinator

Special Education Director

1. Explain the evaluation process used in your school division. Are all teachers evaluated/observed using the same criteria? What is the frequency of evaluations, etc.

2. Are evaluations and observations of Special Education teachers more summative or formative in nature and how does this differ from the evaluation and observation of general education teachers?

3. What are the key indicators being observed in the evaluation of special education teachers and does this differ from the evaluation of general education teachers?

4. Do you feel there is a perceived difference in the evaluation of special education teachers by administrators with a background in special education as opposed to those with a general education background?

5. Do building level administrators have adequate training and knowledge to effectively evaluate and observe special education teachers, regardless of the teacher's educational setting (i.e. Collaborative/Inclusion v. Self-Contained or Resource)?

6. Please use the comment box below for any additional comments or concerns regarding the evaluation and observation of special education teachers within your local school division.

VITA

ROBERT E. WIDENER, JR.

Personal Data:

Date of Birth: November 27, 1956
Place of Birth: Richlands, Virginia
Marital Status: Married

Education:

Clinch Valley College, Wise,Virginia;
Theatre Arts, B.A., 1979

Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia;
Curriculum and Instruction, M.A.Ed., 1998

Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate,Tennessee;
Educational Administration and Supervision,
Ed.S.,2007

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City,
Tennessee; Educational Leadership , Ed.D, 2011

Professional Experience:

Teacher, Jonesville High School, Jonesville,
Virginia, 1979-1989

Teacher, Lee High School, Ben Hur, Virginia,
1989-2000

Director of Special Education and Fine Arts,
Lee County Public Schools, Jonesville,
Virginia, 2000-Present