A Narrative and Historical Study of Special Education: Stories of Retired Special Education Teachers' Perspectives on the Effects of Special Education Legislation in the Classroom

A Dissertation submitted
to the Graduate School
Valdosta State University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in Leadership

in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership and Technology
of the Dewar College of Education and Human Services

August 2014

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ABSTRACT

Educational services for students with disabilities were extremely limited until the enactment of PL 94-142 in 1975. It was only after federal involvement that most students with disabilities received special education services and the field of special education began a period of rapid growth. This study follows 30 years of special education legislation and its impact on services for students in Georgia and Lowndes County and uses narratives to focus on the perspectives of three retired special education teachers as they began and ended their careers in this 30 year period.

A qualitative research methodology was used in this study. Participants were interviewed and their narratives were transcribed and reconstructed into stories. The data were coded and compared for similarities. These categories were compared to the questions in the interview guide and from this themes were generated.

Themes generated from the data revealed teaching experiences, curriculum changes, attitudes towards mainstreaming and inclusion, challenges in teaching special education and teaching as a calling. The literature review detailed the history of special education legislation and expectations and then illustrated how these expectations were met in Georgia and Lowndes County.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my husband Andreas I offer heartfelt thanks. He stood by me from beginning to end always believing in me.

To the men and women who volunteered to give their knowledge and stories to make this dissertation a possibility. I am amazed by their dedication to their profession.

To Dr. Pate and Dr. Tsemunhu for getting me through the process. I appreciate all their help and guidance. To Dr. Lowney and Dr. Rieger for their suggestions and advice.

To the VSU library reference desk staff, archive staff and ILL staff. Your unending patience and knowledge was greatly appreciated.

DEDICATION

To my father, William M. Gartmann with love.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Drawing from my own experiences in the field of special education over the past 22 years, and hearing the stories of many veteran teachers, I have discerned and observed that there are many different ways to implement an idea in the classroom. Over time, the influence of educational reform and policy has added to the uncertainty for special education teachers. This work tells the stories of three veteran teachers whose chosen field was to teach students with disabilities and how legislation has influenced their beliefs and practices. Carr (1986) writes, "It is by virtue of this story that the community exists, coheres, and continues as a social entity" (p. 169). This study also presents an historical overview of the federal, state, and local special education legislation, summarizes the policies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and examines the impact of reform through the experiences and perceptions of special education teachers who taught in southern Georgia schools during this roughly 30 year period from 1975 until the present. The study highlights what effect these policy changes had on special education teachers and how they adapted in order to successfully educate students with disabilities.

There has been research published about teaching students with disabilities and the effect a student's disability can have on his or her education. There is much research about learning styles and how to accommodate them. However, there is limited research regarding the impact of roughly 30 years of special education legislation in the classroom

from the voices of school personnel (O'Dell & Schaefer, 2005), much less on how those policies and procedures have influenced teaching practices and special education services in south Georgia schools.

Context of the Study

It is important to step back and look at where we as a society have been in order to make sense of the future. Patton (2002) says, "Documenting and understanding the context of a program will require delving into its history" (p. 284). In our society, an historical reflection on the treatment and conditions of the lives of individuals with disabilities is a painful reminder of what life was like for people with disabilities. We have made progress from times when most persons with an obvious physical or mental disability were often shunned by society, considered less than human and hidden away in institutions without the benefit of education (Winzer, 1993).

The treatment of persons with disabilities throughout history was governed by the religious and philosophical beliefs of the times (Winzer, 1993). During the 1800s in Europe and America, asylums became common for persons with disabilities. These were intended "to alleviate the burdens of poverty, distress, misfortune, or disability" (Winzer, 2009, p. 7). Many of these asylums were created for those who were known as deaf and dumb (Melcher, 1976). Institutions for the blind soon followed. Universally these institutions also served to warehouse persons with mental disabilities. While society viewed it to be its religious duty to provide for these children, the nature of the institution isolated these children from the very society that sought to protect and serve them (Winzer, 2009). In the early 1900s a few states started schools for the "truant, dull,

stupid and delinquent" (Winzer, 2009, pp. 23-4). Institutions and asylums were the norm until legislation was enacted to force schools to educate everyone.

It wasn't until 1965, with the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, that funds became more readily available for schools to address the education of students with disabilities (Nazzaro, 1977). In 1975, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) or Public Law 94-142 was enacted. This made it mandatory to provide a free, appropriate, public education for all children (Nazzaro, 1977). Since the enactment of PL 94-142, special education services have been provided in a variety of ways. Today, this process is called a continuum of services and includes, but is not limited to; separate schools, separate classes, mainstreaming, and full inclusion (Guernsey & Klare, 1993). Guernsey and Klare maintain the Local Education Agency (LEA), is required to provide this continuum of alternative placements for students with disabilities. In 1986, EAHCA was amended. In 1990 it was again amended and became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Meyen & Skrtic (1995) reported that IDEA was reauthorized in 1976. In 2001 the No Child Left Behind Act became law. Finally, in 2004 IDEA was reauthorized again. This legislation from 1975 until the present has brought many changes for teachers of students with disabilities.

Special education services in south Georgia were implemented more slowly than in more urban areas of Georgia and the United States. The state had difficulties in funding schools and educating the general population because of the devastation caused by the Civil War (Joiner, Bonner, Shearhouse, & Smith, 1979). In addition, the state was largely agricultural in nature and the education of children was conducted around farming practices. Lastly, there was the bitter fight against efforts to desegregate the public school

system in the South. According to Meyen and Skrtic (1995), "Changes in the education of African American children and of children with disabilities came about through effective advocacy and court action, not through educational leadership" (p. 55).

In 1851, one of the first attempts to provide a school and services for students with disabilities was established. W. S. Fortescue founded the Georgia Academy for the Blind in Macon, Georgia (Joiner et al., 1979). Services were disrupted during the Civil War but restored soon after. In 1945 Georgia enacted its first special education legislation for school to maintain services for speech and hearing problems, but it was not funded (Joiner et al., 1979). It wasn't until the 1950s that Georgia made a concerted effort to provide educational services to students with disabilities. According to Joiner et al. these services were still limited. During these early years, the services were available mostly to students with speech or hearing disabilities. Over time educational services for students were slowly added until 1975 when the mandate came that all students with disabilities would receive educational services. By 1975, 120,000 students were being served in 160 school systems by special education teachers (Joiner et al., 1979).

Valdosta, Georgia, was incorporated in 1860, and is located in the south central part of the state, twelve miles from the Florida border. It was largely a rural farming area with cotton, tobacco and pine timber being the agricultural staples. The racial make-up of the city is 51.1% African American, 41.5% White, 4.0% Hispanic, 0.3% Native American, 1.7% Asian, 0.1% Pacific Islander and 1.2% from other races and1.9% from two or more races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Valdosta is situated in Lowndes County along with Hahira, Lake Park, and Clyattville. There are currently two school systems in Lowndes County, one city system and one county system, several private schools, and a

state university. Additionally, there are numerous manufacturing plants and an Air Force base in the area. It has grown significantly in the last 5 years and is the fourteenth largest city in Georgia.

It is within this context that this research takes place. As a result of the mandates of PL 94-142 in 1975, many changes have occurred in the field of special education; from the belief that not all children can be educated, virtually nonexistent special education services, and inadequate funding and facilities, to believing that all children have a right to the same type of education and the right to be included in the general education setting. It is during this last 30-year period that this study is focused.

This period saw the most growth and change in special education legislation (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995) and implementation with the state and local school systems. This phenomenological lens provided an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of what it was like to be a special education teacher during this period. According to Van Manen (1990), "lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research" (p. 36).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to share the lived experiences of three retired special education teachers who worked in Valdosta City and Lowndes County, Georgia schools during a 30-year period from 1975 to 2005 and how they coped with federal and state legislation in a rapidly changing environment and to analyze them to provide insight. This study presents in their own words their stories and what they experienced during this time of tremendous change in the way children with disabilities were

educated. A phenomenological approach known as narrative inquiry was used for the study. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) define narrative inquiry as:

> Narrative approaches focus on collecting narratives, because the point of collecting stories is to understand the experiences and the way narratives are told, seeking clarity about both the events that have unfolded and the meaning that participants have made of them. Narrative approaches are theory, process, data and product combined to create a unique form of inquiry.
>
> (p. 231)

More specifically Savin-Baden & Major (2013) describe one form of narrative as life history research. This method "is seen as an approach that provides a link between personal and social worlds" (p. 233).

Research Questions

The following research question guided this study:

RQ1: What were the lived experiences of special education teachers in rural southern Georgia from 1975 until 2005 as a result of changes in federal and state legislation?

RQ2: How did Georgia, and specifically Valdosta City and Lowndes County Schools, respond to the changes in federal and state legislation from 1975 until 2005?

RQ3: How did changes in federal and state legislation from 1975 until 2005 influence or change the perspectives of special education teachers in Valdosta City and Lowndes County Schools?

Significance of the Study

As our society changes and our beliefs and knowledge base changes, schools are changing in response to public calls for reform (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995). The current study is important because it illustrates how one field of education, special education, has changed and how attitudes may or may not have changed as a result of legislation and a demand for equity in education. It describes how educators have tried to implement these changes in their classroom in the face of frequent reforms and resistance to new ideas. The results of this study may help those in education see that change is a part of what happens in any organization. As Winzer (2009) stated, "the historical literature in the area of special education is narrow and specialized…there is so little comprehensive research that historical development remains a relatively unexplored cul-de-sac within the history of education" (p. ix). This study is an opportunity to look at special education from a broader perspective encompassing the laws and national movements, with a focused perspective on Georgia and the southern region of the state, specifically Lowndes County and the city of Valdosta. This research could enhance the historical literature on special education verified from state and private archives, and the impact of education reform for special education students through their teachers' narratives. This study offers special education teachers an opportunity to tell their stories. It adds information to the body of literature on special education and offers insights and suggestions for future educators in the field of special education. As Atkinson (1998) maintains, "sharing one's story helps create community and may show that we have more in common with others than we thought" (p. 26). By exploring the literature and narratives of teachers in this study it may be possible to understand the particular challenges special education

teachers faced and perceive the current changes and trends in special education. This research also provides the educational community with a broader and more comprehensive look at special education in south Georgia from the perspective of those whose passion it was and is to teach special education.

Definition of Terms

The terms used in this study are unique to the field of special education and give clarity to the concepts and ideas of this study. For this study the following definitions were used:

Comprehensive Psychoeducational Services of South Georgia (CPES). Georgia has a network of GNETS (Georgia Network of Educational and Therapeutic Services) programs that serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders that are separate from the regular school. In Valdosta this program was referred to as the Comprehensive Psychoeducational Services of South Georgia (CPES) until the name was changed to Horizon Academy in 2007. The program is referred to by both names in this study.

Continuum of Services. Students with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled to the maximum extent possible. Therefore, a continuum of services is necessary to ensure the least restrictive environment for student with disabilities. The continuum is structured like this: regular education classroom, inclusion classroom, resource room, separate school, home services, institution or hospital. Each one of these setting is considered more restrictive than the regular education classroom (Yell, 1998).

Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR). A term used to describe the highest level of retardation, including individuals capable of becoming self-sufficient and learning academic skills through upper elementary grades (Meyen & Sktric, 1995).

Georgia Alternative Assessment (GAA). A portfolio of student work that enables the demonstration of achievement and progress relative to selected skills that are aligned to the Georgia curriculum (Georgia Department of Education, 2014).

High-stakes Test. Any test used to make important decisions about students, educators, schools, or districts, most commonly for the purpose of accountability—i.e., the attempt by federal, state, or local government agencies and school administrators to ensure that students are enrolled in effective schools and being taught by effective teachers. In general, "high stakes" means that test scores are used to determine punishments (such as sanctions, penalties, funding reductions, negative publicity), accolades (awards, public celebration, positive publicity), advancement (grade promotion or graduation for students), or compensation (salary increases or bonuses for administrators and teachers) (Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).

Resource Room. A program option involving placement of a student in a regular class plus assignment to a special teacher for remedial or supplemental instruction. The room in which this special instruction occurs is referred to as a resource room (Meyen & Sktric, 1995).

Self-contained Classroom. A program in which pupils with similar needs and skills are assigned and taught by the same teacher throughout the school day (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995).

Trainable Mentally Retarded (TMR). A term introduced in state educational codes to define children who are not able to profit from regular classes or classes for educable mentally retarded students. The IQ range for these students is 35 to 55 (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995).

Conceptual Framework

"When one asks what it means to study education, the answer – in its most general sense – is to study experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. xxiii-xxiv). I have worked in the field of special education for 22 years. This work is an outcome of my passion for the field and the respect for those who have made it their career. My professional journey has only been in the field of special education. This field has seen many changes, especially in the last 36 years, and although I was a teacher for 16 years, it wasn't until I became an administrator that I began to look backward as well as forward and try to make sense of the journey. The persons who entered my life through the collaboration and sharing of our jobs either briefly or more long term have brought thoughts, ideas and differing perspectives into my realm of experience. They have all left something meaningful with me. The stories I have heard over the years have been funny, sad, poignant, and sometimes unbelievable. As Czarniawska (2004) notes, "stories permit access to the emotional life of organizations" (p. 42). The status of the special education teacher has gone from almost non-existent to being declared a critical needs field, to not being highly qualified, all in the span of about 30 years. This is the length of a career from the beginning to retirement. Legislation has impacted not only how teachers teach, but also their status as professionals and their beliefs and feelings as individuals regarding their chosen professions.

The literature on the legislative changes in special education and the subsequent attempts to enact this legislation in Georgia and Lowndes County provides a framework for the narratives. As Van Manen (1990) says, "phenomenological reflection is not introspective but retrospective" (p. 10). We look back and recollect. The historical

overview is drawn from books, journal articles, newspaper articles, and information from the local school systems, the Lowndes County Historical Society, the State archives, the archives from the Georgia Association of Retired Educators, Odum Library archives, and personal interviews.

I bring to the study a set of assumptions about special education teachers and their experiences based on everyday observation and interaction with others. Most recently I have become an administrator and have had to try and help the teachers I lead find ways of adhering to policy while helping the students they teach. One would think the two go hand-in-hand, but sometimes there is a disconnect. It has been my experience and observation that special education teachers must love what they do, given the challenges they face on a daily basis. Regular education teachers seldom experience the unique challenges found in teaching special education. The strong rapport between student and teacher that must be established to teach special education students is something very unique. Given the laws requiring individualized and specialized evaluation, assessment and instruction, special education teachers are accountable despite being hindered in what they can accomplish due to factors such as lack of time, lack of funding, and at times, a lack of support from their colleagues and administration (Green, 1994). Most difficult is when they encounter viewpoints that special education is somehow not quite as important as regular education, particularly in a high stakes testing and accountability climate of education reform (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle & Farmer, 2011; Kirk & Wall, 2010; Westling & Whitten, 1996). I also feel that school policy sometimes lags behind legislation with regards to implementation; mostly in the form of resistance to change.

Positionality Statement

According to Carr (1986), "historical inquiry... has always had a central place in the field: namely, the case of historians writing about their own society, especially about its relatively recent past" (p. 169). I have worked in the field of special education for 23 years and all of them in one program. Even with my years of experience in special education, I am still somewhat of an outsider. This is for two reasons: first, my original degree was not in special education and second, I relocated and my autobiography is both from the North and the South. It gives me a different perspective from those I will be interviewing. On the other hand, I am passionate about what I do and I think that all teachers who love and work with students, no matter where they come from, somewhat speak the same language. We, as educators, all share some of the same experiences. Shutz argues,

> My lived experiences of you are constituted in simultaneity or quasisimultaneity with your lived experiences, to which they are intentionally related. It is only because of this that, when I look backward, I am able to synchronize my past experiences of you with your past experiences. (as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 38)

Organization of the Study

This research study is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 includes the research project, statement of intent, context of the study, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, conceptual framework and a positionality statement. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature and begins with an overview of federal legislation, state legislation, local efforts to implement the legislation and then

professional issues, which have affected special education teachers during this period. Chapter 3 addresses methodology, including the research design, rationale, informed consent, selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, the pilot study and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 contains the narratives and discussion of themes. Chapter 5 is the findings and Chapter 6 is the summary, conclusion, implications, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of federal and state legislation related to special education from 1975 until 2005. State legislation during this period was driven by changes in federal legislation. Additionally, it provides a brief historical overview of efforts by the state of Georgia and local school systems to comply with this legislation and implement the changes to special education services for students. The remainder of the chapter addresses the many and various issues that impacted special education as special education teachers attempted to comply with the changing world in which they worked. These issues were resilience, retention of teachers, the changing identity of special education teachers, and the drastic change from self-contained programs and classrooms to full inclusion of special education students in regular education classrooms.

In the years leading up to the late twentieth century in the United States, special education was practically non-existent. The United States prided itself on a belief in and support for education, and compulsory attendance laws were mandated in all states by 1918 (Yell, 1998). Yell stated students with disabilities were not included in education. In fact, several court cases upheld the exclusion of students with disabilities from public schools. Beginning in 1893 with *Watson v. City of Cambridge* and ending as

recently as 1969, courts often cited reasons for excluding students with disabilities. The most common reasons were that a student with a disability would not benefit from instruction or would disrupt the learning environment of the other students. Winzer (2009) wrote, "What special education classes there were, provided low quality education, were held in inferior facilities, with untrained teachers" (p. 114). Winzer stated, the decade of the 1960s saw much change in attitudes towards persons with disabilities. This was in part due to parent organizations, the Civil Rights Act, and President John F. Kennedy's National Panel on Mental Retardation (Winzer, 2009). All of these efforts fostered public awareness and research. It wasn't until the 1970s that support and legislation for special education services began to impact schools. Prior to that, efforts were sporadic and usually privately driven and funded; the one exception being schools or programs for students with sight or speech disabilities (Joiner et al., 1975, Winzer, 1993).

Federal Legislation

One of the first pieces of important legislation was Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI states that:

> No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance (United States Department of Justice, 2013, Sec 2000d)

What this meant to schools was that if they were found to be in violation of this Act, federal money would be withheld or would be turned over to the Department of Justice for sanctions (United States Department of Justice, 2013). This Act was amended in

1966 (PL 89-750) to establish a program of grants to the states that would help them initiate, expand, and improve programs designed to help in the education of students with disabilities (Turnbull, 1986). This law was repealed in 1970 and replaced with a grant program that had a similar purpose (PL 91-230). In 1972 two Supreme Court decisions, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Mills v. D.C. Board of Education* ruled that students with disabilities have an equal right to access public education. The first case, *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, was concerned with the exclusion of children with mental retardation from school (Yell, 1998). This case established four critical points; the first point was that all children with mental retardation are capable of benefiting from education. Second, education could not be defined as only the provision of academics which legitimized life skills training. Third, the state could not now deny to any student with a disability a free public education. Lastly, the earlier they started with their education, the greater the benefits were (Yell, 1998). The second case, *Mills v. D.C. Board of Education*, involved the school using suspension and expulsion as a means to keep students with disabilities out of school. Due process procedures were outlined as a result of this case (Turnbull, 1986). According to Turnbull, these two cases brought national attention to the rights of children with disabilities and launched efforts on a national scale to get states to provide services for all of their students with disabilities and stop making excuses as to why they could not educate these students. A paper by Mayer, (1976) listed these statistics which were given to Congress by the Comptroller General of the United States in 1974; an estimated 7 million children in the United States have mental, physical, emotional, or learning handicaps that require special education services. Only an estimated 40 percent

(or 2.8 million) of these children are receiving the education they need. One million are excluded entirely from the public school system, and during the 1971-72 school year only 16 states provided special educational services to more than 50 percent of their estimated school-aged handicapped population (Mayer, 1976, p. 25).

In 1973 Congress passed PL 93-112, the Rehabilitation Act. Section 504 of this act, prevents discrimination of persons with disabilities (Yell, 1998). This, according to Yell, was federal antidiscrimination legislation or civil rights legislation and prohibited states which receive federal funds from discriminating against persons based solely on their disability, through employment and educational institutions. Turnbull (1986), stated, "These two federal laws so significantly affect the education of handicapped children that they overshadow other related federal legislation" (p. 18). By 1974 Congress became weary of waiting for the states to make significant progress towards the education of students with disabilities. Turnbull (1986) reported that Congress amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, with PL 93-380. This amendment was significant because it validated students with disabilities' right to an education and it increased federal aid to the states for special education (Yell, 1998). Section 613(A) of this law set forth the due process procedures that became the basis for many of the provisions in PL 94-142 (Yell, 1998).

In 1975 Congress enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) (PL 94-142) which today is called IDEA or Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It was signed into law by President Ford in November of 1975. This law mandated that all school districts educate students with disabilities or give them a "free and appropriate public education" (FAPE). Winzer (2009) listed four major provisions:

(a) it guaranteed FAPE, (b) it ensured that students would be taught in the least restrictive environment, (c) it required clear procedures for special education, and (d) it provided federal funds to supplement the costs of special education programs. A fifth provision of this law was nondiscriminatory evaluation (Yell, 1998).

Both of these regulations, PL 94-142 and section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), provided a set of rules to which school districts must adhere when providing educational services to students with disabilities (Turnbull, 1986). Section 504 is federal antidiscrimination legislation and PL 94-142 is a federal grant program with conditions attached. Between the two regulations, most of the gaps were covered and schools could no longer find ways around the education of students with disabilities and would have to begin to carry out the policy of zero reject and nondiscrimination (Turnbull, 1986).

The Provisions of PL 94-142

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Students with disabilities are assured the right to a free appropriate public education at public expense (Yell, 1998). FAPE also requires that special education and related services meet requirements of the state education agency and conform to the individualized education program (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995).

Procedural Safeguards. Procedural safeguards were put in place to assure basic fairness. According to Yell (1998), these safeguards consist of four parts; the major two being general safeguards and dispute resolution. Parents must be informed of their rights and given a copy of them at every Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting. Parents must receive prior written notification of any planning and placement decisions.

These must be in understandable language and in their native language (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995). Parents must give consent for their child to be evaluated or placed in another educational setting. All records of a student in special education are to be kept confidential and parents must give permission for outside agencies to view the records. Parents are allowed to see all of their child's records upon request. Lastly, they say parents of students with disabilities who feel that their student is not receiving appropriate services or accommodations or that the student's IEP is not being followed, for example, might attempt to resolve the issue with the school in several ways. First, is a discussion with administration and the teacher. If parents do not feel that there is a resolution then they might ask for mediation or a formal hearing. Mediation is voluntary and both parties must agree to it. The state department is contacted and a mediator found. In this process both sides seek to find a resolution to which they can agree. A mediator has no decision-making powers so both parties must agree on a resolution (Yell, 1998). Finally if this does not work parents might seek to have a formal due process hearing, which is much like a trial and often stressful and lengthy. During this procedure the student remains in the setting where he or she is currently being served (Yell, 1998).

Least Restrictive Environment. The least restrictive environment or LRE means that students will be served as much as possible with their regular education peers (Yell, 1998), in a setting that is the least restrictive for that student. In order for the student with a disability to succeed in the least restrictive setting, accommodations and support services are to be provided to the student. There should be a continuum of services. Meyen and Skrtic (1995), describe this continuum as, the regular education classroom, the regular class with consultation, regular class with support from a special education

teacher, regular class with part day in the resource room, special education class with part of the day in a regular class, full time special education class, day school, hospital, and finally residential placement (p. 83). The less students are around their typical general education same age peers, the more restrictive the setting. Students can only be removed and placed in a more restrictive educational setting when the nature of their disability is so severe that they cannot receive an appropriate education in another less restrictive setting (Yell, 1998). To help accommodate this requirement, federal funds were appropriated and all funding mechanisms were required to be placement neutral (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000).

The Individualized Education Program. The law also mandated that schools develop an IEP for all students with disabilities. The IEP is the means of providing appropriate education to students with disabilities (Turnbull, 1986). An IEP is a document written by a committee usually consisting of the regular education teacher, special education teacher, special education compliance coordinator, the parent, sometimes the student, and any other person who might be involved in related services. Turnbull reported that, this committee details how and where the student will receive services as well as what current educational or behavioral goals and objectives the student will be working on for one school year. The IEP, according to Turnbull, Strickland and Hammer (1978), must contain a description of the student's current level of performance, annual goals and objectives, date the services will start and end, segments for regular education and special education, accommodations, special education and related services, a transition plan when the student gets older, participation and accommodations for state mandated testing and measured progress.

Nondiscriminatory Evaluation. One of the problems with identifying students who have disabilities was that traditional tests were considered unfair because of racial or cultural bias (Yell, 1998). Turnbull (1986) found the biggest complaint was that the tests were designed for white middle class students and did not take into account the cultural background of the student and were therefore biased. In order to be found eligible for special education services students need to be tested to determine if they have a disability, and the type of disability they have. Classifying students as having a disability when they do not, or giving them an inaccurate label can deny them of their right to an appropriate education or place an unjustifiable label on them (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995). In addition, schools were often using tests that were not valid or reliable or only used a single test to determine eligibility (Yell, 1998). Yell reported that several court cases led to specific requirements for testing. The requirements were: students must be tested in their native language, tests must be validated for the specific purpose to which they are intended, they must be administered by trained personnel, no single test is used as the sole means by which to determine eligibility for special education services, and the student must be evaluated in all areas related to the disability.

Historical Overview

By 1977 the federal regulations regarding PL 94-142 were released with 1978 the deadline for implementation. It was no longer allowable to exclude students with disabilities on the grounds that there were no available programs or the student's disability was too severe (Winzer, 2009). Winzer posited the requirement to educate all students sent states scrambling to re-allocate resources, educate teachers to fill positions,

and to generally try and determine how to fulfill the requirements of a free and appropriate education for everyone.

The 1980s – Reform, Early Childhood Programs and Mainstreaming. A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (ANAR) was released and sent alarm racing through the nation. The claim was that high school diplomas were meaningless, there were too many electives in schools and there needed to be a return to basics and improved teacher preparation programs (Winzer, 2009). ANAR encouraged a national curriculum, strengthened high school graduation requirements, more time for learning and better salaries for teachers. The national standards movement collapsed when no one could agree on history standards, and the reform movement created by ANAR was left empty (Ravitch, 2010). Ravitch believed this was what prompted the No Child Left Behind Act. Now schools and teachers were attacked by legislators and the public, not for what they taught but how they taught, which could be measured. This, Ravitch says, was the beginning of accountability and high stakes testing. Special education also came under scrutiny. The question became, were special education students being offered the same educational opportunities as their regular education peers?

Typically in those early years of special education, students with disabilities were taught in a separate classroom called a resource room. They might spend part or all of the day in this classroom. A typical resource room was multi-grade, multi-ability, and had students with differing disabilities. One teacher was responsible for individualized education for all of these students. This education usually took the form of remediation or supplemental education (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995). Winzer (2009) wrote that these resource rooms came under scrutiny as well. Were resource rooms effective? Could the

education of students in resource rooms be delivered more effectively in the regular classroom with support?

Mainstreaming was another concept that schools tried during this period. The belief behind mainstreaming, was that students with disabilities could be placed in one or more regular education classes depending on their ability to cope and do the work, but that these students first belonged in the special education classroom and then in a regular education classroom (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). In other words, special education students must prove that they belong in the general setting. Most of the time students in special education were taught the academic subjects in a resource room and then went out or mainstreamed for electives like art, music and physical education (PE). Were they being mainstreamed? Were they still being excluded because of their disabilities? These were some of the questions being asked by stakeholders (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000).

In 1986, Madeline Will, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services of the Department of Education, proposed the Regular Education Initiative (REI). She believed that general educators should be more responsible for the education of students with disabilities. She did not advocate for a complete consolidation of services but rather that general, compensatory and special education teachers would work together to meet the needs of all students (Winzer, 2009). The debate then raged over what services to provide; a full continuum (from general education classrooms to a separate school) or full inclusion (all students in the general education classroom).

In 1983 PL 98-199 an amendment to the Education of the Handicapped Act replaced the State Implementation Grants with the Early Childhood State Grant Program

(birth through age 5) (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995). This amendment awarded grants for schools to serve children with disabilities from 3 to 5 years of age. In 1986 an amendment included infants and toddlers with disabilities so early intervention could be provided to this population (Yell, 1998). This amendment also addressed the transition from school to adulthood, which added transition plans to the IEP. A transition plan outlines what the student will be working toward in the future and what steps could be taken to ensure that the student meets his or her goals.

The 1990s – Inclusion and Accountability. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) allowed schools to create "504" plans for individual students. This Act allowed schools to help students who did not fall under the requirements of the Education of the Handicapped Act (Turnbull, 1986). Also in 1990, EHA was revised and re-named the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA required schools to look at outcomes for students with disabilities and provide vocational education. Among other changes were those that expanded the categories of disabilities, and covered transition planning (Yell, 1998). The law was also changed to stress people-first terminology so instead of saying "disabled child" it was "child with a disability" (Winzer, 2009, p. 284). Winzer reported, in 1997 IDEA was reauthorized and this time discipline and the authority of school personnel to handle children who were a danger to themselves or others were included. It also addressed curriculum and stated that the general education curriculum was to be the starting place for all students and that goals and objectives IEPs must be tied directly to the general education curriculum goals and objectives (p. 210). This reauthorization according to Winzer, stated that the regular education classroom was

the primary placement where possible and that regular education teachers be a part of the IEP team.

The Twenty-first Century – No Child Left Behind. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed by Congress in 2001 (PL107-110). This law required that all students to be proficient in math and reading by the year 2014. This law impacted: (a) testing, (b) teacher training, (c) school funding, and; (d) held schools accountable to stake holders. Ravitch (2010) reported that this legislation consisted of four principles which were: (a) all students in grades three through eight would be tested annually using state tests, (b) decisions on how to reform the school would come from the states, (c) low performing schools would get help to improve; and (d) students who were in consistently failing or dangerous schools could request to be sent somewhere else. The states had to come up with plans as to how they would implement these guiding principles. Schools had to meet yearly goals which became known as Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and all teachers were required to be "highly qualified" in the area in which they were teaching. Sanctions were put in place for schools that failed to improve, or did not make AYP, and measuring and punishing became the norm for education (Ravitch, 2010).

High stakes testing is a result of NCLB (Ravitch, 2010). This yearly testing was now tied into school AYP and teacher evaluations. The assumption made by Ravitch was that if students are rigorously tested every year then schools and teachers can see the deficit areas and make changes to close the gaps between the lowest learner and the highest learner; leaving no child left behind. High stakes testing affects students with disabilities as well. Students in special education were now required to participate in all state mandated testing and if they have severe cognitive impairments that prohibit them

from taking standardized tests, an alternative assessment was used (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, & Jones, 2007). They reported schools were required to write continuous improvement plans and use student achievement goals as part of the plan. These plans were made public to stakeholders through school "report cards." Any school failing to make AYP for two or more years could suffer severe sanctions, including having faculty replaced, being taken over by an outside agency or closed altogether. Parents of students who are in a school that is "failing" have the right to ask that their student be sent to another school that is not failing. Finally teachers must be highly qualified (or be certified in) the content area that they are teaching. If they are not, a letter must go home to parents telling them that someone who is not highly qualified is teaching their child. Teachers in the Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Supports (GNETS) programs were allowed to use a consultative model if they are not highly qualified (The Georgia Implementation Guidelines, 2010). Many special education teachers are not highly qualified because the classes are typically multi-grade and all subjects and most teachers, unless they are certified in early childhood, are not certified in all grades and subjects.

Compliance Efforts in Georgia

In Georgia, during the 1930s and 40s most of the educational efforts to include students with special needs focused on speech correction, hospital or home bound instruction, and some effort was made to form classes for students with cerebral palsy (Joiner et al., 1979). Joiner pointed out most of these efforts were centered in Atlanta. The Easter Seal Society provided some of the funding for these programs and some of the classes were held in private buildings (p. 430). Funding for these programs was not yet

available from the public schools or the federal government. In 1951, Georgia hired Mamie Jo Jones in the Georgia Department of Education as Coordinator of Programs for Exceptional Children (CEC Committee, 1977). Civic and professional groups such as the Georgia Speech Association, the Cerebral Palsy Association, the Georgia Parents and Teachers Association and the Atlanta Junior League Association were active in urging state services for students with disabilities (CEC Committee, 1977, p. v.). The Georgia Council for Exceptional Children was organized and started in Georgia in 1955. There was an area chapter in Atlanta that had been started in the mid 1930s and another from the southern region was needed so the organization could apply for a charter for federation status in the international CEC (CEC Committee, 1977, p. 8). These organizations began the work to promote the cause of students with disabilities in the state of Georgia.

In general, most emerging programs were either provided through state hospitals or run privately and were isolated from the regular public schools (CEC Committee, 1977, p. v.). In a thesis entitled *Provision for the Exceptional Child in Georgia*, Geraldine MacGuigan (1937), interviewed several staff members at state programs for students with disabilities. Some of the schools she visited were the Georgia Academy for the Deaf, the Academy for the Blind at Macon, Georgia Training School for Boys at Milledgeville, and the Georgia School for Mental Defectives at Gracewood. She looked at services for students who were deaf, blind, mentally defective, crippled, had speech problems, and were labeled maladjusted. She asked questions about what type of training the students received at the facility, what year did the classes start and what ages were served, what was the size of the classes, did they have specially trained teachers and were

their salaries higher than other state employed teachers, what was the length of the school year and so forth. What she found was that only two county school systems in Georgia in the 1936-37 school year made any provisions for students with disabilities. These were Morgan County and Clinch County. They each had a class for students who were referred to at that time as mental deficients. She also asked these questions of specific cities and found that only Atlanta had any school-related services. Services at this time involved some academics and then crafts, sewing for girls, basket weaving, and forestry, vocational or shop work for boys. She then went on to discuss what the state institutions, mentioned above, were doing to provide educational services. She said that efforts to educate the students in these facilities were hampered by inadequate equipment and a limited number of teachers and classrooms and the budget with which they had to work. According to MacGuigan (1937), many of the students who were sent to those facilities were mentally deficient, and this made it harder to educate them.

Another example of an early program for children with disabilities in Georgia was the High Hope Training Center in Lawrenceville, Georgia. It was started by the Gwinnett County Chapter for Retarded Children in 1960. Classes were held in a house owned by the First Baptist Church in Lawrenceville (Long, 2008). The school was funded by donations and fund raisers and the teacher was paid $100 a month. Other than state facilities, this school was typical of early efforts to provide special education services to students.

In 1969 the Georgia Retardation Center was opened. It was a joint effort by the Division of Mental Health and the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR) and was supported by appropriations from the Georgia General Assembly (Rosenfeld, 1975).

It was a 480 bed residential facility in North DeKalb County. The service objective of this facility was to increase the functional levels of the students. In 1975 an audiology intern (Rosenfeld), wrote a report on her experiences there and learned various techniques for giving hearing screenings to the "difficult to test" population at the center. A second internship completed by Pierce in the fall of 1975, was in the area of special education. This intern went to West Central Georgia Regional Hospital located in Columbus, Georgia. Because of the changes in legislation, the facility was just starting to provide education to the clients in addition to their mental health needs. The facility's goals were to expand its educational services to a larger population, develop individualized training programs, develop communication with outside agencies to insure continued follow-up after discharge and reduce the number of re-admissions (Pierce, 1975). This intern felt that her internship was a very valuable experience, and that the facility did a good job, but was seriously underfunded. The last intern report for this year (Rosado, 1975), studied the relationship between behavior disorders and achievement. She interned at the Challenge School for Boys, DHR. This intern worked in the capacity of an academic teacher assistant. Most of the boys were behind academically and had serious behavior problems. Her job was to give the students work in math and reading that they could have success with, while not being overwhelmed. In her words her experience was "challenging" (Rosado, 1975).

The 1970s. Efforts around the state to meet the needs of students with disabilities centered mainly on students with speech or hearing disabilities until the 1970s (Joiner et al., 1979). This was due primarily to the Civil Rights movement, which overshadowed but ultimately was intertwined with efforts to provide educational services to students

with disabilities. Once integration occurred, local school systems turned their attention to the education of students with disabilities. State needs were vast after PL 94-142. There was a shortage of special education teachers and training programs. This caused a restructuring of universities to train future special education teachers to meet the demands. It also caused a redistribution of resources, as special education is costly (Winzer, 2009). In addition, school systems had to find space to form these classes. Many early programs were held in separate schools that had been abandoned and were substandard (Joiner et al., 1979). The service model for students with disabilities varied widely during this period. In the summer of 1970 the Georgia Council for Exceptional Children wrote that special education programs should be top priority in order to comply with House Bill 453 (Special Education Programs Should be Top Priority, 1970). Planning should ensure that all students receive services by 1976.

Programs started springing up around the state and state money was put in place to help with these programs. An article in the CEC newsletter from December of 1973 said "state special education programs in 1972-73 included 3,300 public school personnel serving approximately 84,000 children. Of 188 school systems, only two do not have special education programs" (State Special Education Services 1973-1974, 1973). In a speech given by State School Superintendent Jack P. Nix July 23, 1974, (Nix, 1974), Georgia had "5000 teachers for 108,500 children and was one of 17 states in the nation, according to USOE, that was providing special education programs for more than half of the handicapped population" (par. 16). Many of the services for students with disabilities at this time were in separate schools or centers. Central State Hospital approved funds for a new special education facility (Special Education Facility Approved, 1973). The

Psychoeducational Network was started and by 1975 there were 24 centers around the state. The centers at that time served students aged 3 to 14. They were designed to work with mental health and the Department of Juvenile Justice to serve students with emotional behavioral disorders. The Developmental Therapy Model, developed at the University of Georgia by Mary Margaret Wood, was the focus of instruction for these students (Wood, 1972). In 1977 the North Metro Center in Atlanta began a pilot program to serve students ages 15 through 21.

A pamphlet published in 1975 by the Georgia Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood and Special Education, reported that Georgia's special education programs were started in 1951 and were currently providing educational services to over 100,000 children (Georgia Department of Education, 1975). It further stated that all students eligible for special education services shall have access to an education by 1977 and that many such programs were already available. The pamphlet mentioned the centers which served emotionally disturbed children through age 14 and financial assistance that was available to educate trainable mentally retarded either in public school centers or in non-public residential facilities outside the state (p. 5). At this point the State of Georgia was only minimally serving students with disabilities in the public schools and was serving the most severe outside of the public school system. For example, Gwinnet County had Oakland Center, which in 1979 was serving 75 trainable and mentally retarded students (The Oakland Center Takes New Directions, 1979). The curriculum included specialized programs in self-help skills, pre-academics, pre-vocational, sex education, and therapeutic recreation.

As the deadline approached for PL 94-142 to be implemented fully, the state hurried to develop programs to train teachers in the area of special education. In a Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) article (Special Education Needs in South Georgia, 1978) south Georgia expressed a need for trained special education personnel. A needs survey was mailed out in 1977 to 46 local education agencies in South Georgia to determine the special education needs in south Georgia, to assist in advising students concerning training and employment, and to adjust the special education program at Valdosta State College to meet the needs of local educational agencies. The survey found that there was a critical need for trained personnel to teach students with learning disabilities and students with behavioral disabilities. A large number of districts were in need of speech therapists, school psychologists, and school psychometrists. Several rural school districts in the southern part of the state still needed teachers for educable mentally retarded (EMR) and trainable mentally retarded (TMR) students.

Much of the correspondences between school systems and the Georgia Department of Education during the late 1970s were several requests to the State Department for help in understanding PL 94-142. There was much skepticism and much confusion about this law. The law clearly had least restrictive environment written into it, in Georgia most students with disabilities were being served outside of the regular public school. A 1977 memo from the Office of the Governor is indicative of the confusion over the law. Part of the memo questions what services would be available for some students with disabilities. He says, "all people in day care centers from the ages of 6 to 16 are going to have to be placed in the common school. This would mean that a person 15 years old still wearing diapers would have to be placed in a public school and

there is no place for this type people" (Governors Special Affairs Office, April 28, 1977). He requested someone look into the regulations and let him know as soon as possible. The Governor's office found out that this was indeed the case and schools should prepare themselves to handle all students with disabilities.

The 1980s - Early Childhood Programs and Mainstreaming. During the 1980s service models were still varied across the state. In this era, however, services were being expanded while service models were being given greater consideration. In the early 1980s pre-school and early childhood services became the focus. During the winter of 1981 the Division for Early Childhood, a division within the CEC, was formed to address the needs of children with disabilities from birth to 8 years of age. An overview on preschool services (Preschool services for handicapped children: A state overview 1981), outlined briefly services being provided to preschool students. The December 1980 pre-school student count showed 171 school systems were providing services to 3 to 5 year olds. Services, according to the document, were also available to preschool students through the psychoeducational center programs and in 1980 approximately 1,385 students were being served in these centers. The overview listed seven exemplary preschool programs located in Cherokee County, Northeast Georgia CESA, DeKalb County, Bartow County, Richmond County, Thomas County and Douglas County.

One of the problems during this period of transition was who was financially responsible for special education students' education. There was much discussion between the DRH and the local school systems about who was responsible for educating wards of the state or students who were in DRH training centers. A memo dated January 13, 1981 stated, "the school system was told by the Department of Human Resources that

they had no option except to take all students of school age regardless of the severity of the handicap… we had cooperative agreements with the Department of Human Resources which clearly indicated that those students who could not function in an educational program in the school would be served in the DHR training center" (Educational Office of Instructional Services, January 13, 1981). Similar questions were asked about who was responsible for educating school-age inmates in state correctional facilities who had disabilities.

Discipline, accessibility, and an extended school year were also some of the issues that arose during this decade. The greatest focus was on "mainstreaming." There was some recognition that students with disabilities should be served wherever possible in the least restrictive setting. The assumption still remained that students with disabilities needed to function "appropriately" in the general education setting in order to be allowed to participate in it (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000).

The 1990s - Inclusion and Accountability. The resource or special education classroom all but disappeared in the 1990s. Then it was replaced by full inclusion in the regular classroom with or without the support of a special education teacher. The only students who were self-contained for portions of the day were those students with moderate, severe, or profound intellectual disabilities. This trend continues today and has been strengthened even more by the advent of NCLB. As a result, more attention is paid to accountability and results on tests than ever before. Research-based methods for instruction and documentation of results affect instruction today. One of the results of accountability has been to look at disproportionality in regards to the over-identification of students with disabilities. Traditionally there has been an overrepresentation of

minority males in special education (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). They report this overrepresentation is a result of problems and biases that are inherent in the assessment instruments and to those who do not fit into the White, middle-class norms of classrooms. Under the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, states were asked to identify and address disproportionality. With NCLB and increased accountability, schools needed to teach the same curriculum to all students regardless of their disability and to decrease the achievement gap between the highest and lowest learners in the classroom (Ratcliffe & Willard, 2006). This led to more students with disabilities being served in the regular classroom and better methods of identification of students with disabilities.

Georgia responded to the increased emphasis on academics and accountability by developing the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) which replaced the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) in 2002 (Curriculum Frequently Asked Questions, n.d.) The revised curriculum was intended to strengthen instruction and drive assessment in Georgia's schools.

Compliance Efforts in Lowndes County

Valdosta State College. Recognizing the need for trained teachers in the area of special education, Valdosta State College in 1969 requested approval for a program in Education with a major in Special Education. It was approved by the Board of Regents and began in the fall quarter of 1969 (Robinson to S. W. Martin, July 10, 1969). The college hired Dr. Leo Kelly from Memphis State University, to head the program. Dr. Kelly was the Callaway Professor in special education and the head of the department at Valdosta State College. He was considered a specialist in the field of special education. He was brought to Valdosta State College to develop a strong program in special

education (Martin to Chancellor Simpson, June 16, 1969). Dr. Margaret Hiers joined the faculty September, 1970 to work full-time in Mental Retardation (Mental Retardation Grant Application, 1970).

Early Programs in Valdosta City Schools. The Valdosta Junior Service League (VJSL) was instrumental in starting programs for exceptional students (Valdosta Junior Service League, 2013). According to their website, they also taught a small class of students with mental disabilities at the Christ Episcopal Church preschool building. This class started in 1951. They picked up the students, taught them, and returned them home. In 1961 the VJSL opened the School for Trainable Children. The VJSL paid the rent and the teacher, as well as furnished all supplies. Members served as classroom helpers. These programs were eventually assumed by the Valdosta City School System (Valdosta Junior Service League, 2013).

One of the first schools for children with disabilities in Valdosta was the Magnolia School. The Magnolia School was first built in 1915 for African American students (Moore, 2006). Moore reported that when the high school students moved to Dasher High in 1929 it became Magnolia Elementary School. In 1970 the main building was razed when the schools integrated, but part of the newer wing became a special education facility until the end of the 1978-79 school year. This wing was rather like a motel with the six classrooms opening up to the outside. It also had one large, main room. The building was declared surplus and sold in 1980. In 1979-80 the special education classes were moved to a wing in the South Street Elementary building that then became the South Street Education Center. It was located next to Lomax-Pinevale Elementary School. Juanita Pritchard (personal communication, January 22, 2013) a

special education teacher who taught at South Street served students with mild, moderate, severe and profound intellectual disabilities and a few students with behavior disorders from kindergarten to 21 years of age. Pritchard described the facility as having six multi-grade classes where students were grouped more by ability than by grade. Teachers did not give the students academic grades or send home progress reports. Teachers were required to make three home visits a year. The focus of the curriculum was on functional academics and self-help skills. The Center had a full kitchen, laundry facilities and also routinely took the students into the community. A lead teacher served as the administrator. Pritchard and the lead teacher, who were getting their master 's degrees at the time, developed the curriculum. Another curriculum was later designed by a committee and was aligned with the current QCC standards. They had many students who had no running water at home and they did a lot of bathing and laundry. Another teacher who worked there said that they had some of the nicest facilities available. They had a full physical therapy room, full shower facilities, a kitchen, a shop and a garden. She said it was wonderful working there; they were like a family. They kept clean clothes for some of the students. When Pritchard first began working there she was 21 years old and some of her students were her age or older. She reported none were toilet trained or had ever been in school. A huge chunk of the day was spent in training for Special Olympics. After finishing the program the students transitioned to LARC (Lowndes Advocacy Resource Center) for job training (Pritchard, personal communication, January 22, 2013). This facility closed in the fall of 1986 due to the Special Education Ruling by the State Department and students were transferred to various schools (Valdosta Board of Education, 1970).

One of the teachers who came to work there, who first worked with the preschool students and then later the high school class, remembers when the Center closed. The last class left in 1986. This class was the high school class and it went next door to the campus of Lomax-Pinevale Elementary School. This class was housed there for about 4 years during which most of her students were graduated. The remaining three students moved with her to the Comprehensive Psychoeducational Center on the campus of the old Westside High School.

Early efforts to mainstream these students and incorporate them into the regular schools were sporadic and did not serve the intended purpose of PL 94-142. The high school class that was on the campus of the elementary school would sometimes be allowed to go to pep rallies at the high school. Later they would go to eat at the high school once a week but the direction from the administration was to keep the students out of the way. When the middle school class was moved to the local junior high, the teacher and 14 students with varying disabilities were put in an isolated classroom across from the cafeteria. The administration told the teacher "keep them out of my sight and out of my mind and you and I will get along just fine." She did not have a paraprofessional until Christmas of that year and her biggest support came from the lunchroom ladies and the coaches. Her class was not allowed to eat in the cafeteria when the other students were there so they either waited or ate in the classroom.

By 1960 the category of behavior disordered had been added to special education services in Georgia. It wasn't until 1972 however, that a comprehensive program for students with emotional/behavorial disabilities was organized. This program, intended to be the joint responsibility of education and mental health programs, was named the

Georgia Psychoeducational Center Network and served emotionally disturbed students, aged 0 to 14 years. It began operation in July, 1972 with one of the original centers in Valdosta, Georgia (Wood, 1972). This facility was housed for many years at the old Westside High School which had been a school for African American high school students. It is currently located in the old Parker Mathis Elementary School building.

Aside from the Psychoeducational Program, renamed, Georgia Network for Therapeutic Services (GNETS), there are no other self-contained schools that serve the local school systems. There are few remaining hospitals for children, and there are youth detention centers who are required to provide educational services when students are in their facilities. They are required to follow the same curriculum and testing that the public schools follow. Local schools in Valdosta and Lowndes County went through the same restructuring of delivery models as other schools around the state as a result of special education legislation.

Early Programs in Lowndes County Schools. Lowndes County's first special education programs began in 1966-67. According to Sharon Hayes, a retired special education teacher in Lowndes County, the late Sarah Hester and Mrs. Nettie Reeves were the first EMR teachers for Westside High School. When the schools fully integrated in 1969-70, those two women and their students were transferred to Lowndes High School.

The following information is drawn from written recollections given to me by a former Lowndes County Director of Special Education and is my summary of her written recollections (S. Lanier, personal communication May 4, 2013). One of the first superintendents of Lowndes County Schools, recognized the fact that when the ESEA Act created the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, schools were going to have to

provide education for students with disabilities. In the mid sixties, he employed Mrs. Zant to establish services in the schools. Students who were mentally retarded were served by the Department of Human Resources (DHR). A school social worker assisted parents in enrolling their children in this program. DHR programs were transferred from a house in Valdosta to a wing of the old Westside High School on James Road. This program served students with profound, severe and moderate intellectual disabilities until the county system established the TMR Center at Westside in the early seventies. The first special education services were provided to students with communication problems. Two speech therapists were employed as itinerant teachers for the five elementary schools in Lowndes County.

Seba Lanier reported there was a need for classes for students with mild intellectual disabilities and the first class was self-contained and located at Lake Park Elementary School. Mrs. L taught the class. The teachers were not trained or certified to teach special education because Valdosta State College (VSC) did not have programs yet to train the teachers. The government established a fund to train teachers to work with students with disabilities and in 1968 VSC started a summer program with Miss Becky Peterson from the University of Georgia as the instructor. Mrs. Zant recruited regular education teachers from each school to enroll. Initially, classes that were a result of this training were for students with mild intellectual disabilities and were self-contained in each school. Dr. Leo Kelly received the Callaway Chair in special education and was instrumental in developing the program in special education. Valdosta State College then employed Mrs. Margaret Hiers to coordinate classes needed for MR certification. The migrant program held at Lowndes High School served as the setting for the initial set of

teachers to do their student teaching. Students met eligibility for migrant services but were not identified as special education students. Dr. Hiers supervised the teachers.

Seba Lanier's notes indicated that classes were being established in the schools for the mildly intellectually disabled and teachers sent in names of students to the Principal and Mrs. Zant. At this time there was no formal due process. Psychologists from VSC were contracted to test referred students. The report that the psychologists sent back to the school system was listed on one or two sheets of paper per school. The information included the list of students, their birthdays, grade, IQ score and if they qualified for MR services. Special education teachers made home visits and discussed the program with parents. Permission for the child to be placed in a self-contained classroom was obtained. The classes for the severely and moderately intellectually disabled were established at Westside in 1968 or 1970. Mr. H served as the lead teacher. Moderate and severely intellectually disabled students were transferred from the DHR Center to the Lowndes County TMR Center. The students with profound intellectual disabilities remained in the DHR Center. In addition to the TMR Center and the DHR Center, the Comprehensive Psychoeducational Center (CPES) was also housed at Westside. The Center, when it first opened, served students aged 4 through 14 years of age. Lowndes County Schools established a class for secondary students with emotional/behavioral disorders at the central office. It was called Preparing Adolescents for Living or PALS. When the system sold the property this class was moved to the Westside campus. Finally, a multi-handicapped class was housed at the Westside campus. Students in this class were bussed from all over and the class served students

with orthopedic disabilities, other health impaired, visually impaired, and deaf. This class was transferred to Parker Mathis Elementary in 1980.

As the state established criteria for eligibility in other exceptionalities, classes were started. Resource classrooms became the service model because there were so few students in some exceptionalities; therefore students with Behavior Disorders, Learning Disability, and Mildly Intellectually Disabled were served in the same room (end of personal communication with S. Lanier, personal communication May 4, 2013).

Today in Valdosta City Schools and Lowndes County Schools, students with disabilities are served in the general education setting with the exception of those students who are classified as moderate, severe, or profoundly intellectually disabled. These students still spend a portion of the day in a self-contained classroom. Students whose behavior is considered too severe by the IEP committee to be managed in the regular school are served by the GNETS program which is a self-contained, separate school.

Professional Issues Related to Teaching Special Education

The requirements of FAPE created the need for special educators, but the unique roles and responsibilities of their jobs have created challenges that regular educators don't face. Most special education teachers worked with a variety of students with disabilities. Green (1994) noted some of the challenges that special education teachers faced. They are the case managers who coordinate annual meetings for the committee that develop the IEP. They must be flexible in the use of teaching strategies in order to deliver effective instruction to a variety of diverse learning styles. They may teach in a self-contained classroom, a pull-out resource room or an inclusive classroom with a

general education teacher. If they have a student on their caseload that is consultative, they must make time to consult with the general education teacher once a month to once a week. Green also maintains most special educators also supervise paraprofessionals who assist in the classroom. In addition to lesson plans, IEP's and progress reports, special educators must also manage all paperwork for eligibility reports, IEP's and progress reports and make sure that it is in compliance with federal law. These and other challenges have powerfully impacted teaching in the field of special education.

Resilience, Retention and Changing Identities. Many studies have been done to determine what makes special educators stay in the field and what makes them leave. Two qualitative studies from the United Kingdom, Mackenzie (2012) and Kirk and Wall (2010), listed several of the reasons teachers stay in the field and some of the stressors involved in teaching special education. The Mackenzie study interviewed 19 special education teachers who had been in the field for 15 or more years. They found that in spite of the structural changes that they faced over the span of their careers, they stayed because of things like intrinsic rewards, "the buzz" they received from the job, service to others, the challenge or struggle to overcome, emotional closeness and empathy towards the students, and having knowledge that others needed. In the study conducted by Kirk and Wall (2010), three teachers who had worked during the late 1980s, a time of great change in education in Great Britain, were interviewed. This study looked at resilience and loss in relation to the teacher's occupational identities. Some of the things that caused them to question their chosen profession were lack of support by administration, and having to rethink their work identities in mid-career (Kirk & Wall, 2010). This loss of identity comes from the "insistent emphasis on results, on quantitative measurements

of teacher ability" (p. 630). The study reports that even though many teachers did not leave the field during this time of change, many felt disillusioned thus the major themes were both resilience and loss (p. 633).

A study done in a rural southern state on recruitment and retention of special education teachers found that it was difficult to retain special education teachers because of teacher burnout, and lack of support (Berry et al., 2011). Berry reported that teachers in rural areas, because of lower student populations, often must provide instruction to students with very differing abilities in multi-grade classrooms. One quarter of the teachers questioned in the study said they were leaving the field to teach in general education because of reasons listed above. A similar study surveyed 158 rural special education teachers to find out if they planned to stay or leave the field (Westling & Whitten, 1996). Reasons for staying included job satisfaction, administrative support, adequate time for paperwork, positive attitude toward the profession and because the teacher was the primary breadwinner. Reasons for leaving included lack of administrative support, inadequate amount of time for paperwork and other duties, no planning period, and little respect from general education colleagues (p. 9). Recommendations from this study included informing general education teachers about the duties and responsibilities of special education teachers and encouraging cooperation, particularly in the area of inclusive practices.

Green (1994), presented an overview of careers in special education, and listed comments by several special education teachers as to why they stayed in the field and the challenges they faced. Some of the comments were: "Teaching special education is a challenge to yourself because the focus is on the child and his or her individual needs, as

opposed to the curriculum," "My emphasis as a special education teacher is on how I'm going to present that curriculum, how the student is going to learn" (p. 12). "Special education is a pretty dynamic field...it's changing all the time" (p. 12). A teacher of students with EBD remarked that on the last day of school one of her student dropped everything to give her a hug. Her comment, "That made it all worth while…I don't know where and I don't know how, but maybe he'll remember something we did" (p. 12). The teacher further reported that another benefit was low unemployment.

In the 1990s special education was a critical needs field and some special educators received signing bonuses or other incentives especially in rural or inner city schools (Green, 1994). Stressors related to teaching special education included, paperwork above and beyond the normal amount, a feeling of isolation from other faculty, lack of support by administration, and resentment by regular education teachers because special education teachers seem to have lighter workloads due to smaller class sizes (p. 13).

Weintraub (2012) discusses the challenges that special education has faced over half a century. He maintains that "there is not a national shortage of qualified special educators – only a shortage of special educators willing to practice special education in our schools" (p. 50). He reported that special education teachers did not leave the profession at a higher rate than general education teachers, they just moved into general education classrooms more than the reverse. Weintraub commented that the biggest change to special education over the past two decades was that special education teachers have gone from being the primary deliverer of instruction to being a support system for general education, and not willingly (p. 51). The last significant challenge he mentions is

the fear of non-compliance that special educators face. They are in a constant state of fear both from monitors and parents.

Gehrke and McCoy (2007) interviewed beginning special education teachers to find out what made them stay or leave the field. They found that regardless of size and location of the schools they worked in, what mattered was support either from a mentor or someone who could related to them, having adequate classroom materials and knowing how to use them and knowing how to align curriculum for students with disabilities to the expected standards.

Self-contained to Full Inclusion. The earliest delivery model for special education was the self-contained classroom or separate school. It was the general consensus that this was the appropriate place to educate students with disabilities. This could be because students with disabilities were already being served in separate state facilities or private programs. Winzer (2009) makes the observation, "The special segregated classes, destined to become the backbone and the chief bone of contention in special education for almost all of the next century, arrived largely unheralded" (p. 155). Early research focused on teaching strategies for these students and which strategies were most effective and had the most achievement gains. Mainstreaming was an early attempt to educate students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers. In a study done in 1980 in Kansas City, Missouri (Graham, Burdg, Hudson & Carpenter, 1980), regular education teachers and resource room teachers were given questionnaires about their perceptions of mainstreaming and resource room effectiveness. Results indicated that both regular education teachers and resource room teachers felt there was a need for mainstreaming, but while regular education teachers felt it benefited the students with disabilities

academically, resource room teachers did not. Furthermore, neither group felt that regular education teachers had adequate skill training for mainstreaming. This was an area that could be addressed by in-service training.

A study by Larivee and Cook (1979) examined variables responsible for regular education teacher's attitudes towards mainstreaming. A sample of 941 regular education teachers, K-12, from urban, sub-urban and rural schools were selected to participate. They were given questionnaires containing attitude scales as well as questions about the variables. They found that as the grade level went up the attitudes towards mainstreaming became increasingly negative. Junior high teachers had the most negative response towards mainstreaming. Class size, school size and type of school had little impact on attitudes towards mainstreaming. Teacher perception of success, administrative support, and availability of support services had the most impact. Teachers in rural settings perceived themselves as having achieved less success with mainstreaming than teachers in the other two settings.

A study by Pernell, McIntyre and Bader (1985) interviewed regular education teachers before and after they took a course on mainstreaming. The course was designed to help the teachers understand mainstreaming. The assumption was that if the teachers had knowledge of mainstreaming they would be more willing to participate in mainstreaming. Comments before the training for mainstreaming were very negative. Some of the comments by these teachers were, "this makes me angry," "I think they (special education teachers) wish us to share in their troubles," and "I wish they would do this differently" (p. 135). Teachers also questioned the competency of law makers and administrators. By the end of the training the teachers were more positive about

mainstreaming. This was because teachers had the opportunity to work with students with disabilities and became focused on the needs of their students with disabilities which gave them more confidence to work with these students.

In 1986, Madeline Will's Regular Education Initiative (REI) reported that the current trend of educating students with disabilities was not working and called for a dual system of delivery (Winzer, 2009). In 1990 Congress reauthorized PL 94-142 under the name Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). One of the significant changes to this law was the requirement that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum and in the least restrictive environment. Some attempts were made to "mainstream" or offer students with disabilities opportunities to interact with their same age peers. It wasn't until NCLB passed in 2001 and IDEA passed in 2004, that serious attempts to "include" students with disabilities in the general education setting occurred. Teacher perceptions of these attempts were generally very negative.

A study in 1994 involving 74 teachers from a large metropolitan school district in the Southeast, used focus groups to determine teacher attitudes towards inclusion. The overwhelming response from the groups was negative towards inclusion (Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher & Saumell, 1994). Several teachers said it would be enough for them to change jobs (p. 13) and most said they did not see how it was going to work. Fears about inclusion centered around academic success of both groups of students, lawsuits, workload and the changing roles of the teachers.

Another study conducted in 1994 in southeastern Pennsylvania, surveyed teachers who taught in schools where inclusion had been implemented or who were going to implement full inclusion (Sardo-Brown & Hinson, 1995). In this study, Sardo-Brown

and Hinson (1998) asked questions about implementation, teacher's views of full inclusion, the amount of support by administration, effects on instructional practice, and the advantages and disadvantages of full inclusion. Of those surveyed, 69 percent said their school was in the process of implementing full inclusion, 27 percent said their schools had already begun full inclusion and 2 percent said their schools had only discussed inclusion but were on the verge of implementation. The interesting finding from this study was that the term inclusion meant different things in different schools. In some of the schools full inclusion was moving all students into general education classrooms, for others it was moving only the students who were previously mainstreamed into general education classrooms all day and in a small percent of the schools full inclusion was grouping students with disabilities into newly formed classes of similar students thereby not really including them (p. 20). Most of the respondents favored full inclusion but felt they needed more in-service training and were frustrated by disruption caused in particular by the students with emotional/behavioral disorders (EBD). As for instructional practices 35 percent of respondents said that they had to teach at a slower pace and 25 percent said they made no changes to the pace at all. Most changed their teaching practices in a way to accommodate students with disabilities in their classes.

Lalvani (2013) interviewed 30 teachers about their beliefs on the education of students with disabilities and their thoughts on inclusion of students with disabilities in the general curriculum. Throughout this study there was an "unquestioned acceptance of implicit assumptions in special education" (p. 14). Most teachers felt that access to general education classes be based on students' disability type, IQ scores, behavior and

how they functioned. Those teachers who supported inclusion did so mainly "because they held strong beliefs about social justice, democracy and equitable education" (p. 14). Most of the general and special education teachers interviewed in this study held to the medical model that identified impairments as the source of the problem and not the impact of sociocultural attitudes and reactions to the disability. They tended to believe that inclusion was a privilege rather than a right.

Summary

As long as there have been people, there have been people with disabilities. In most cultures, until recently, persons with disabilities were looked upon as different, abnormal, handicapped, and deviant. Persons with disabilities were hidden away in institutions or hidden away in homes. They were not considered educable or able to participate in normal life. The ability and willingness to provide services for students with disabilities has been slow in coming and overdue in many places. Not until the Civil Rights Movement and the battle that African-Americans fought for equality did the rights of persons with disabilities come fully into the forefront in the United States. On the educational front this was, and still is, one of the last civil rights battles being fought. In some states, change came more swiftly, but in Georgia where racial integration was a major issue, change for those with disabilities came much slower.

Some of the problems associated with fulfilling legal requirements facing school systems in Georgia were teacher training, funding, and service models. Many schools, especially in rural areas, were not equipped to teach students with disabilities. It took an extended period of time to get things in place. In addition, the attitudes of the majority of persons responsible for educating students with disabilities had to be changed. Many

administrative and government level leaders simply did not believe that students with disabilities could be educated with the general population.

Once integration occurred in Georgia schools, the Department of Education in Georgia turned its attention to providing services for all students, including those with disabilities. Students with only mild disabilities like speech, mild intellectual disabilities, and orthopedic disabilities were integrated into schools easily. Students with more severe disabilities continued to be taught outside the regular school in self-contained schools, classrooms or institutions. Georgia developed a network (GNETS) for educational support which still serves students with emotional disabilities and autism outside the regular school environment.

In spite of the uncertainties, attitudes, difficulties and changing legislation, there have been dedicated people who teach students with disabilities. There has been much debate about why special education teachers leave or stay in the field. Questions remain about how special education teachers feel about their changing roles, and whether or not full inclusion works, and if NCLB is an appropriate approach for all students.

The historical context and assumptions of special education policies should be clear. Like most things in life, special education continues to change and evolve. Special education began as a way for students with disabilities to be included in school. This study and its framework and narratives allows special education teachers to "give voice" to their experiences, beliefs and feelings during an era of educational change.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study bounded by time, roughly a 30 year period from 1975 until 2005 during which special education legislation came into being and began to impact schools, focuses on special education and is designed to highlight the unique needs of students with disabilities and the teachers who were responsible for their education. Since 1975, and the passage of PL 94-142, special education has taken many forms. Historically, all students with disabilities were taught separately from the general education population. With every re-authorization of PL 94-142, new and different models of instruction were developed to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995).

The purpose of this study was to share the life history and experiences of three retired, veteran special education teachers in narrative form. I have worked in special education for 23 years and have watched as school systems endeavored to implement special education legislation within their schools. I have been privileged to work with some very dedicated persons and hear their stories. My desire was to weave some of their stories through the historical times in which they worked and relate the experiences special education teachers have lived as legislation has changed and continues to change their work. According to Merriam (2002), "to strive to understand the meaning"…these teachers "have constructed about their world and their experiences" (pp. 4-5). Previous studies have examined issues as resilience, retention, and identity issues related to

teaching special education (Berry et al., 2011; Green, 1994; Kirk & Wall, 2010; MacKenzie, 2012; Westling & Whitten, 1996). In other studies, teacher perceptions about mainstreaming and inclusion were examined (Graham et al., 1980; Sardo-Brown & Hinson, 1995; Vaughn et al., 1994). These studies indicated federal legislation affected the lives of special education teachers and how they performed their jobs.

Research Design

The research design for this study was narrative inquiry. Atkinson (1998) wrote, "Life story as a narrative form has evolved from the oral history, life history, and other ethnographic and field approaches" (p. 3). Riessman (2002) asserts that narrative inquiry does not "fit neatly within the boundaries of any single scholarly field" (p. 217). It is derived from the field of phenomenology. Phenomenology and narrative research both share the common belief that temporal experience as told through language is meaningful. The use of narrative inquiry viewed through a phenomenological lens allowed me to develop a better understanding of special education teacher's perceptions.

Patton (2002) stated, "personal narratives…reveal cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experiences" (p. 115). Through this method of data collection common themes that may lead to future trends in special education were uncovered. I used life story interviewing to obtain data and narrative inquiry to analyze and interpret the findings. This approach is inductive and allows one to generate meaning from the data (Creswell, 2009). Creswell maintains that humans make sense of their world based on their historical and social perspectives. Because I was interested in a particular phenomena and a period of history, this paradigm supports the narrative approach for the study. This approach allowed me to better understand the change that

has occurred in special education, some of the challenges that special educators encounter and perhaps, see things from varying perspectives. Mertova and Webster (2007) observe that "stories contain knowledge that is readily put to use in the world…they are the knowledge we want learners to possess" (p. 20).

Narrative research has expanded significantly in the last 15 years and is particularly suited to "addressing the issues of complexity and cultural human centerdness in research" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 3). Narrative research allows one to look at the "lived" experiences of someone placed in an historical context. I sought to understand the lived experiences of special education teachers during a specific historical period from 1976 to 2005. Atkinson (2002) writes, "an oral history most often focuses on a specific event, issue, time or place" (p. 8). Carr (1986) expanded this idea;

> Discovering or rediscovering the story, picking up the thread, reminding ourselves where we stand, where we have been and where we are going --these are typical narrative-practical modes of discourse which are as prevalent and as important for groups as they are for individuals. (p. 168)

Phenomenology

Patton (2002) described the phenomenological approach as focusing on how people make sense of experiences and how they translate them into shared meaning. This approach requires the researcher to capture the essence of and describe how people perceive, feel about, remember and judge a phenomenon. Creswell (2009) suggested using phenomenology to understand the lived experiences of others as a philosophy. Phenomenology was a significant element of the conceptual framework of this study since the purpose was to understand the lived experiences of special education teachers as

they were related to special education services during this 30-year period. I explored how the experiences of these teachers changed over a 30-year period as a result of changes in special education legislation. Van Manen (1990) described this type of research by stating, "the aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence" (p. 36). For this study the intersubjective context was situated in the experiences of special education teachers as they began their careers until they retire. "Man not only has a place in the universe but a central place from which meaning and value radiate" (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, pp. 67-68). The school and classroom was this place for the participants of this study. Each person told her story and decided what she wished to share. Phenomenology places being before knowledge (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990), therefore participants in this study chose to share what they considered important to them and what they wished others to know.

Emergent Design

Patton (2002) writes that a researcher should be flexible and open to changing the inquiry as understanding deepens. He warns against "getting locked into rigid designs" (p. 40). This type of inquiry gives persons being interviewed the freedom to tell their stories and respond to the researcher's questions. Assuming the person being interviewed follows the interview questions, and the interviewer does not interrupt, this inquiry can lead to unexpected information.

During the interviews I let the participants complete their thoughts before asking the next question, or asking for clarity on their previous response. This was to increase trust and allow them to share what they felt was most important. Some of the questions were emailed to the participants. For these questions their responses were often to the

point. In these circumstances participants were called and asked for additional details or for clarity, often eliciting even more information. This method of gathering data allowed flexibility during the interview process. It allowed the interviews to unfold without formality. Each participant was allowed to tell her story with emphasis on what was important to her.

Informed Consent

The superintendents of both Valdosta City Schools and Lowndes County Schools were contacted and permission requested to conduct research in their systems. Approval was granted (Appendix A). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Valdosta State University approved the project prior to beginning the study (Appendix B), and all participants were informed of the purpose of the study. Participants whose narratives were included in the study were asked to sign the "Consent to Participate" form (Appendix C). Participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent and discontinue participation at any time. Confidentiality was assured by using pseudonyms. All taped recorded interviews and notes taken were secured to assure confidentiality.

Selection of Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study. Creswell (2009) writes, "the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites…that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p. 178). Patton (2002) agreed, "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (p. 230). The criteria for choosing participants for this study were persons who had been teaching or working in a school for at least 30 years, with most if not all of the teaching done locally. Another

criteria was most of their teaching had been in the field of special education, and whether they were retired. The thought was these criteria could provide a snapshot of what teaching special education in the region for the past 30 years was like. I contacted teachers who matched these criteria and asked for recommendations for others who met the criteria. This technique, known as snowball sampling, (Miles & Huberman, 1994), is quite effective in identifying persons who fit the needs of a specific study. I was able to find persons willing to participate using this method. Where appropriate, accounts of other educators were included to give insight into the entire phenomenon.

Data Collection

The life story interview was used as the method to collect data from participants. The format for the interviews was Seidman's (2006) three interview series. He suggests establishing rapport and getting background information in the first interview, getting the details in the second and reflecting with the participant on meaning during the third interview. The data collection method was a semi-structured interview which included in-depth, open-ended interviews, much like a conversation, and an interview guide with open-ended questions (Appendix D). The questions in the interview guide were validated in the pilot study. Other persons in the field of special education provided supplementary data as necessary for the history of special education services in Valdosta and Lowndes County because some of the history resides only in the memories of those who worked during this period. A tape recorder and field notes were used to record participants' responses during interviews. The interviews were recorded to assure the entire conversation was captured. Each interview was approximately 1 hour in length. Notes were taken so that data could be readily available for transcription. Additionally, email

and phone conversation were used because time constraints often inhibited face-to-face meetings. Some participants preferred to answer questions through email or a phone conversation. One preferred to put her thoughts on paper as it was easier to organize them although she was personally interviewed. She wrote notes and gave them to me later. One participant did not want to be taped so notes were taken and the interview took a little longer. The participant who emailed her responses was contacted after each set of questions to confirm meaning and obtain more in-depth information. Each participant was contacted more than three times to assure accuracy and for clarification of data. On occasion participants needed to think about and recall information, before submitting data at a later date. All interviews were conducted over a three month period. Interviews were conducted at participant's homes, my office, a restaurant and one interview was done entirely by phone and email.

The process used to interview was the three-interview series (Seidman, 2006). This phenomenological process allowed in-depth interviewing and gathering of rich, descriptive data (p. 16). Seidman (2006) writes that the first interview creates a beginning and background for the life history. Following Seidman's advice, general background information was used both as a starting point and as a way to get to know the participants. The first interview provided an opportunity to talk about my research with the participant to get the informed consent document executed. The process allowed for planning of future interviews and discussing the best method to collect the data.

The purpose of the second interview (Seidman 2006), was to allow the researcher to gather details of the experiences of the participants. The role of the researcher was to listen, prompt when necessary, or asked for clarification during the interview. With one

participant several questions at a time were sent via email for her response, with follow-up phone conversations.

The final interview allowed both the participants and researcher to reflect on the meaning of the narratives. The stories were written from the transcribed notes, emails and then returned to the participants for review and reflection to determine if the document was an accurate summation of their stories and if they had anything else to add or delete. Initially there were three interviews planned, but a follow-up sessions with all three participants became necessary in order to obtain the full story. The structure remained constant in these follow-up sessions.

The use of an interview guide ensured that there was some structure to the interviews. The open-ended interviews were supported by the interview guide. The use of both methods according to Patton (2002), "offers the interviewer flexibility in probing and in determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth or even to pose questions about new areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated in the interview guide's development" (p. 347). McCracken (1988) maintains that the interview guide serves four very crucial purposes in an interview: to cover the terrain for all respondents in the same order, it manufactures distance (necessary for trustworthiness issues), it establishes channels for the direction and scope of discourse, and it allows the interviewer to give all of their attention to the testimony (pp. 24-25). The questions for the semi-structured interview are found in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

The data sources for this study were the interview transcripts, field notes, as well as archival information used to support the narratives. Interviews were transcribed and

coded after each was completed. Maxwell (2005) encourages immediate transcription and an ongoing analysis of data. Initial coding breaks the data down into "chunks" or segments of text which can be categorized. Coding is a method of assigning a descriptive label to participant language that honors the participant's voice (Saldana, 2009). Once the data is cut into "chunks" (coded) meaning can be assigned to these "chunks." Savin-Baden and Major (2013), described coding as labeling data with descriptive nouns, adjectives and adverbs in order to identify patterns worthy of investigation. Coding begins to reduce the data into something meaningful. This coding helps bring meaning to the whole across all interviews. Merriam (2002), suggests creativity is an important element in analyzing data (p. 149). Merriam says, using code words that represent underlying concepts can give rise to insights. The stories were read line by line as a method of coding the data and finding themes. Moustakas (1994) states, "Themes and meanings are used to develop the textural descriptions of the experience" (p. 118). Savin-Badin and Major (2013) define a theme as "a unifying or dominant idea in the data, and finding themes is the heart of the data analysis procedure" (p. 427). These themes reflect the meaning found in the narratives from the teachers interviewed about their experiences in special education. Each coded narrative was put in a table (Appendix E, F and G). Categories were created from the coding. These categories reflected common experiences. Several key themes emerged from this process. The questions were aligned with the themes that emerged from the responses given by the participants. Themes were then used to analyze the data from the interviews and the narratives.

Table 1 *Themes*

Questions	Theme
1 – 5	Influences on Career Choice
6 – 8	Similarity of Teaching Experiences
9 & 10	Effects of Curriculum Changes
11 & 12	Effects of Mainstreaming and Inclusion
13 & 15	Perceptions of Identity
14 & 16	Teaching Special Education as a Calling

Table 1 illustrates the linkage of the interview guide question items and how they aligned to themes that emerged from the data.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity in research refers to something that is sound, plausible, trustworthy, generalizable and accurate. While validity is important in research, validity in narrative research is based on criteria which take into account the human-centered aspects of qualitative research. Huberman (as cited in Webster & Mertova, 2007), points out, "what is sought are new measures such as access, honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity, transferability and economy" (p. 94). These criteria, according to Webster and Mertova (2007), have the researcher making the data accessible in ways that can be understood by those who have an interest in the data (p. 90). In order to maintain honesty, verisimilitude and authenticity in research, the researcher must avoid threats such as bias and focus. There are two possible threats to the validity of the study. The ideas and concepts could be misinterpreted or the questions used in the interviews could reflect bias or be too narrow in scope. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believe it is

difficult, or nearly impossible, to completely step outside of one's self when doing narrative research. They state, "We are in the parade we presume to study" (p. 81). Creswell (2009) suggests bias clarification as a method of reducing validity threats. Researcher bias can be minimized by including the background of the researcher and being transparent about one's beliefs.

Member checking or respondent validation is another method of countering these threats to validity and reliability. Maxwell (2005) writes, "Respondent validation is systematically soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying" (p. 111). This ongoing process, as one looks at the data and responds to it, lends authenticity to the study. Atkinson (1998) believes the storyteller should be the authority on his or her own stories. The transcribed story should be given back to the storyteller to be confirmed and verified.

Triangulation was also used to address validity and reliability for this study. Maxwell (2005) describes triangulation as collecting information using a variety of sources (p. 93). In addition to taped interviews, phone and email conversations and field notes, newspaper articles from the historical society, CEC newsletters from the Georgia Retired Teachers Association, government documents from the Georgia archives, personal communication, and school board documents were used to support the narratives. The documents were cross-referenced with the interviews, with each other, and with the literature to analyze the data and support the findings. In one case, the documents were annotated photographs that helped the participant recall her story and keep an accurate time line. Interview data was not shared among participants, strengthening validity.

The Pilot Study

Before conducting official interviews, a pilot interview was conducted with a work colleague who taught special education exclusively in her career. Various other educators were interviewed to get the history of special education in Lowndes County. This created a sense of what the interview process was like and helped determine what changes should be made to the interview questions. Seidman's (2006), "three-interview series" was chosen as the format to be used. This allowed me to establish rapport in the first meeting, conduct a full-length interview and then a follow-up interview for understanding, clarity and verification.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited by the sample size as there were only three participants. However, using a smaller sample size allowed for more in-depth investigation of the phenomenon under investigation for the study. This study was limited to only teachers who had taught special education during the last 30 years. The study is further limited by the fact that only Lowndes County and Valdosta City teachers were interviewed. Their experiences could be very different from experiences of special education teachers in other regions of the country. The study findings might be different if others retired special educators were included. Lastly, the inability to obtain some older documents and artifacts that might have provided more information and insight into early special education practices and issues in Lowndes County could have limited the study. These documents could not be found or were missing from the library.

Chapter IV

NARRATIVES

This study included three participants from the two schools systems located in Lowndes County. They are Lowndes County Schools and Valdosta City Schools. One participant began in the Valdosta City School system and then moved to the GNETS program until retirement. The second participant began working for the Valdosta City School system, and then worked briefly for the GNETS program, before moving to the Lowndes County Alternative program, then back to the city schools until retirement. The last participant began with Lowndes County Schools and finished her career there. The names used are pseudonyms.

The narratives presented in this chapter are a summation of face-to-face interviews, phone conversations and some email correspondence. The face-to-face interviews were taped and transcribed or taken as dictation. One interview was conducted entirely through email. Each special education teacher explored her career from beginning until retirement and discussed how federal legislation impacted their jobs. After each interview, the data were examined and memos were written to help organize the data into categories and then themes. Each participant had the opportunity to review the narratives after they were completely transcribed and add or delete information. The narratives were used to provide the data for research questions one and three. From the narratives common themes emerged and these themes provided a framework for data analysis and presentation.

Linda's Story

I was born and raised in Valdosta, GA. My father was from Mineola/Hahira. He graduated from Hahira High School when there were only 11 grades. My mother graduated from Valdosta High School. I lived in the same house until 1990. My father worked for Dasher Farms and served in the Merchant Marines during WWII. He worked at a store called Colonial Big Star as produce manager, and later as produce manager at Harveys. He retired when he found out he had cancer. My mother worked 40 years for McCrorys which was a dime store and then for Woolworth. When Woolworth closed she went to work as a foster grandparent in the Valdosta school system until she became disabled. I went through the Valdosta City School system and graduated from Valdosta High School in 1977. I attended Valdosta State College and got my degree in Mental Retardation. I went straight through and got my master's degree. I took two classes from Margaret Hiers. She was one of the best. Later I added Behavior Disorders and Early Childhood. Behavior Disorders was to give me interrelated and Early Childhood was to make me highly qualified. I taught for almost 31 years. I stayed in special education because I liked it. Progress in the students was often slow and sometimes you did not see a lot of progress, but when you did it was great. I felt like that's where I was supposed to be. I honestly didn't think I could teach in a regular class.

I became interested in special education because I used to go and help with a neighbor's son who was severely mentally handicapped. He would not eat for his parents and I would go and tell him to eat and he would eat. The neighbor's son was the first person I knew with a severe disability. I really enjoyed helping him and he loved my dad. My dad whistled all the time and when he was outside the boy would try to whistle

with him. I graduated from high school and did not know what I wanted to do, so I went to college for almost 2 years undecided and then I decided on Special Education. I always liked the lower functioning students. I guess it stems from helping the neighbor's child and I felt comfortable with them.

I taught preschool handicapped for 5 years at the old Lomax Pinevale, 1981-1985, for the Valdosta City School System. Then I taught Severe and Profound adolescents at South Street and then Lomax Pinevale from 1985-1990. In 1990 I went to CPES and taught the autistic teenagers until I asked for the younger class. I taught the younger autistic class after this. They were also lower functioning. I stayed with the group and moved up with them to the high school class until I retired last year.

When I first started teaching, I was teaching preschool in a self-contained classroom on the campus of the old Lomax-Pinevale Elementary School. The class started out half day, but after 2 weeks it went to full day. Before it was on the campus of Lomax-Pinevale I believe the class was at VSC. I did not have a support teacher at first, but I had two foster grandparents. We kept the student's busy doing calendar, counting, ABCs, colors, shapes, music, art, playing and communication. Most of the students had problems with speech so we did a lot of language lessons. I also had a gifted hearing impaired student that with the help of a hearing impaired teacher we planned more for him to do. I had a legally blind and hearing impaired student that had to have her work modified. The speech therapist helped me with her. I made materials for her out of heavy black line, sandpaper and I used glue and let her feel things. The students that needed speech and occupational therapy had those services. We did not really have a curriculum to go by in those early years. Two of the lead teachers developed one and the

focus was mainly on life skills. I built my curriculum around theirs. We did a lot of eating skills, dressing skills, toileting skills in addition to the language and numbers and alphabet. We ate lunch in the South Street lunchroom with the training center students. We did not really go in to the elementary school.

IEPs in those days were done by hand. The secretary took all the minutes at the meeting and then recopied everything on the IEP form which had several carbon copies. If the secretary was not available the psychometrist took the notes. Eventually the teachers started doing their own IEP meetings. In those days a regular education teacher did not have to be present. We did IEPs by hand until computers were used. This was around 1993 or 94 I think. When I first started, for the first 2 years, we did home visits. But after that it got dangerous so we stopped and just called the parents. I did not want to do any more home visits after a visit to a parent in a rooming house. When I went to see the parent they weren't there but there was someone there that was high on something and did not want to let us out. I took my support teacher with me because there were some places they did not want you to go by yourself. But the first 2 years I did home visits. You get a pretty good picture of what some of these children are living in when you do a home visit.

The funding was cut for this preschool program so I went to South Street full time to teach severe-profound adolescents. I taught there for 2 or 3 years before they closed the South Street center and moved our classes back into a wing of Lomax-Pinevale Elementary. I think there were four or five classes on that wing. We were considered part of the Lomax-Pinevale staff, but other than attending faculty meetings, we never interacted. Our students ate in the lunchroom after the Lomax students so we had it to

ourselves. I can remember during this time that we started going to regular campuses for "mainstreaming." My class went once a week to the high school and ate lunch. We were given a spot away from everyone else. Sometimes we would attend a pep rally at the high school. This could be difficult because I had severe and profound students and we were away from our classroom facilities and bathroom facilities. In 1990 each class was finally moved out to an age appropriate campus. My class was the last to go. I was scheduled to go to the high school with my remaining students, but at the last minute my students were moved to CPES. I said I would go with them and the Director of CPES and my principal made the arrangement for me to teach them there.

I enjoyed my time at South Street. We had more freedom to do things with the students. We had a kitchen, washer and dryer, and a leisure room. We could take the students in to the community on a more regular basis. We did not have to have the trips approved 2 weeks in advance and the budget was there to support us. We went bowling and swimming as well as to Special Olympics. I felt like we were giving the students what they needed.

At times when I taught preschool at Lomax Pinevale the other teachers treated me different because I taught special education. Some of them thought I got paid more, and also my duties were different and I didn't have to do bus duty, but I was with my students all the time. I did bus duty with my students and meal time duty, and bathroom duty and taught them all day. When I went to South Street and later back to Lomax, we were looked at different and sometimes not accepted like others. Mostly we got along fine with the others. The others did not like to be around our students. We were different and it took time for them to accept us. I wasn't always treated with the greatest respect by the

regular teachers. At first they thought we were paid more. Then because I had a washer and dryer in my classroom, they would send their students to be cleaned up if they had an accident. My paraprofessional at that time told the principal. They knew each other from church and she stopped this practice, but the teachers thought I had complained.

CPES was nice as well because again it was a self-contained center. We didn't have as nice a facility. It was an older building. Just classrooms without the facilities we had a South Street, but I still liked it there. In the early days at CPES I had four older students with severe/moderate disabilities. I did not get a paraprofessional until I began to get hurt (bruises, scratches, etc.). We were usually in the smallest room and the room furthest away from the bathrooms. We worked on vocational skills, self-help skills, communication skills, leisure, and some academics. We did Special Olympics, went on community trips and went skating, bowling and swimming with the Parks and Recreation Department in the city. We went to the fair and the fire station in October.

I took over a class of younger students with the same type of disability. When I took over this class we ended up in an office that had no windows or heat for a classroom. We did potty chairs in the room for toilet training. If they were already potty trained we took them to the restroom. We did some of the same activities. We went to the mall at Christmas and Easter to see Santa and the Easter Bunny. In October we went to the mall to see the fire prevention puppet show and then to the fire department. We stopped participating in Special Olympics when it got more expensive and it was harder to get the physicals that the students needed in order to participate. We used these activities for mainstreaming. When we went to the mall there were other classes of children from the regular school. One or two of my students could play with students in

another room at CPES or go to the library when they took their trip. We would go on community trips to the different stores and out to eat; I paid for this. The parents paid for skating and bowling, but if the student did not have the money there was a fund the school had that would pay. It was easier to takes trips in those days. I got permission at the beginning of the year for my community outings. I would send a note home to the parents to let them know where I was going, but I did not have to get permission unless it was something out of the ordinary. I did not have to write goals for my trips.

I taught my students using IEP goals and from a curriculum we used in the city to go with the QCCs. I also gave the Brigance and wrote narratives for progress reports. We did not give grades. As the laws changed, academics became more important, and I tried to incorporate that in my class by using pictures, picture books, and real objects to introduce concepts. My student still had to use concrete items to learn. We tried to use age appropriate items as much as possible. I would use an object and let the students touch it or feel it but not play with it. We usually did an art activity to go along with the lesson. During this time at CPES I added interrelated to my certificate because it was a requirement and then I took the test for Early Childhood to be highly qualified.

CPES moved from the Westside campus in 2006 and our center was split between two locations for 2 years. My class was housed with three others on the old Pine Grove campus. We were given one very small wing; room only for four classrooms and an office. The other half of our program was in a large trailer next to the board office. After the new Westside Elementary School was built we moved into Parker Mathis and that is where I retired from. At this point in my career the focus was completely on academics.

I started giving grades instead of writing narrative progress reports. There was no more talk of mainstreaming my students by taking them to a regular campus.

For academics I used calculators and coinulators to help students with math. We would do simple science experiments, and study body parts, nutrition, solar system, community helpers and so forth. We studied the seven continents and did simple things from social studies or history. We used music to play following direction games and for leisure to dance and sing. We watched PG movies and participated in field day activities that I set up, and sometimes my students would participate with the entire school and be on different teams. The laws changing forced us to do more academics and give grades in the different subjects. GAA started and we had to test by doing different portfolios in the different academic subjects. Passing depended on if the teacher picked the right standard and context and wrote it up and presented it in the correct way. I feel like in the early years we gave the student more of what they needed, but I do think teaching and introducing the students to different things, such as the way I taught academics was fun and helped the students. For example, when teaching Black history, we used picture books with pictures for the students to match. I made books about people they would know like Michael Jackson, Oprah, etc. We learned about Martin Luther King Jr. using books I made and the book about his big words – love, peace, equality, etc. My students learned to recognize Mr. King. We would play Michael Jackson's music during leisure and we would play the sports of the athletes we studies. We would toss a baseball, shoot baskets and throw the football. I liked it when you could incorporate both aspects. Learn and do fun things and do the life skills activities that were necessary. Having the state mandated testing requirements took away from giving what the students really needed. I

love teaching and working with students. I miss that, but not all the hoops we had to jump through to please everyone.

My biggest reward was seeing progress in my students although slow and it took a long time. It was great to see when they learned something and did the task. The next best thing was the people I worked with. They are the greatest family other than my real family I have ever had. They are loving, caring, and supportive people.

My biggest challenge was working in small classrooms at certain times during my career and not having room to move and let the students move and learn. The biggest challenge was when we had to go to Pine Grove because our former building was torn down to make a new school. We were in such a small space and there was barely room to turn around let alone run a classroom. I had middle school students and the bathroom facilities were intended for preschool students. We were not allowed to eat in the cafeteria or go on the playground if other students were outside. We could not join any fun activities the school had. We were treated different and looked on as being different by that school's staff. We were ecstatic to move to the Parker Mathis campus and have normal sized classrooms and our school family back together. I stayed at Parker Mathis until December of 2012 and then retired.

I think my job changed because at first, we were more intent on teaching our students life skills and survival skills. Our focus was to teach them how to be as self-sufficient as possible. We taught some academics, but this was not the focus when I first started. My lower functioning students would need to be looked after as adults and so we tried to help them be as independent as possible so that they could go to a day program like LARC and be able to participate. We wrote goals for this on their IEPs. Then I can

remember there was complaint about teachers for these lower functioning students not doing activities that were age appropriate. There were some teachers that just put these type of students in front of the TV all day to entertain them. I always kept my students busy. I tried to make my materials age appropriate, but you have to get it on their level. But I still think they need daily living skills. You need to be able to use the teachable moment in every activity. We always taught some academics but not like when I retired and they wanted grade level content to be taught to non-verbal students and grades given. My students were mostly non-verbal and most could not write. It is a waste of their time to teach them coordinate algebra. I'm not saying they can't learn some things, but mostly by memory, not by understanding, and in the end, what will they do with academic knowledge? State mandated testing and academics became more important than giving the students what they needed in life. Also at the end of my career the budget prevented us from even going out into the community. We did a lot of this in my early career. Community based learning just sort of disappeared. These students need to go out into the community.

I knew it was time to retire because of all these changes in testing and curriculum and students in my class who I did not feel belonged there. It became too difficult to teach in a multi-grade and multi-ability classroom with the changing regulations. It worked my conscience. I miss it though. I feel like special education was my calling. What I was meant to do.

Susan's Story

I was born and raised in Jacksonville, Florida. I attended public school from second grade to twelfth in Jacksonville. My parents had lived in various places around the United States before coming to Jacksonville. My mother's family was originally from Lawrence, Kansas, and my father's family was from the Columbus, Georgia, area. My maternal grandfather was a professor of architecture at the University of Florida and my maternal grandmother had been a business/typing teacher before she married. My paternal grandparents lived in a variety of places across the United States and owned and worked in a variety of businesses.

I knew that I wanted to be a teacher when I was 7 years old. A family friend was an elementary public school teacher. She would include me in her trips to look for tadpoles in the creek or when she taught summer school classes for students who needed extra help. When I was in high school my mother knew a pediatrician who had an interest in helping students with learning disabilities and got me 2 summer jobs. The first summer I was assigned individual students to tutor for reading help. The second summer we did a full day language arts program for a group of about 18 students. The pediatrician was also testing a vitamin to see if it had any effect on the students' hyperactivity. Unfortunately due to the "smell" of the vitamin we (and the students) could tell who the control group was during the 6 week program and I don't think the results were promising. This later influenced me to teach special education.

I attended Cottey College in Nevada, Missouri, from 1973-1975. I received an AA degree there in Liberal Arts. I transferred to Valdosta State College in 1975 and in 1977, graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Education with the emphasis in Special

Education. My certificate at that time was for EMR/TMR. In 1981 I completed a Master's degree in Special Education and in 1986 I went back to earn certification for EBD so that I would have an interrelated certificate. In 1994 to 1995 I attended Georgia Southern University to receive certification in Related Vocational Instruction. I currently hold a T-5 certificate. At Valdosta State College, Margaret Hiers was my instructor for several classes. She was known for her work in special education. I was interviewed by Verda Zant and Seba Lanier who were with the Lowndes County School System and was hired for my first teaching position for fall quarter of 1977. The following year I was transferred to Lowndes High School where I taught 30 additional years. I taught EMR/TMR until 1985.

My first year teaching was 1977-78. I was at Westside School which was a center for special education classes. It housed classes for multi-handicapped, mentally handicapped, CPES, the tech class, and the DHR class. I was in a self-contained multi-handicapped class with students who ranged from 11-16 years of age. Each student had individual activities which included language arts and math and we also taught units for science and social studies. My students had physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech, hearing and vision impaired services throughout the week. We participated in PE with the other classes at the school as well as participated in Special Olympics activities. I and a paraprofessional had them all day and took them to lunch, to PE, and to other activities. I was at Westside for the 1977-78 school year and the following year all of the Multi-handicapped, EMR, and TMR students moved to special education classes on school campuses that were age appropriate. The 1978-79 school year I went to Lowndes High School.

The focus of the curriculum in the beginning was mostly basic language arts and math as well as life skill classes. At the high school we did not have books to begin with so we looked for a variety of resources and taught basic skills to our students with mild mental disabilities. Those included basic health/science, basic math/banking and checking accounts, "pre" vocational skills, Georgia and US history. You know, there was no organization in those days as to what to do. We came up with our own curriculum. We taught budgeting and how to read a map, how to fill out a job application and other subjects that would be useful in life. Then all of a sudden there was a big hullabaloo over teaching the regular curriculum in special education so we spent a lot of time creating course numbers and so forth. We were expected to teach the regular curriculum content and use the same texts, but our course numbers were to reflect that the students were in special education.

In the early 1980s there didn't seem to be a cap on the number of students that could be in our classes and our EMR classes could run from 15 to 26 students in a class with no paraprofessional. The cap on class size eventually became standard and the numbers were more reasonable. The recommended class size was eight and you had to have a paraprofessional if you had more students than that. In 1985 we were encouraged to take/add either EBD or LD certification to make an interrelated certificate. I took certification classes in EBD at Valdosta State and a Practicum class through CPES to get my interrelated certificate.

In the early days of mainstreaming, around 1992 or 93, we tried to schedule students who were strong readers into regular classes with teachers that we thought would work with us and the student. I helped match teachers for collaboration. The

teachers had to have a common planning period and have similar styles in order to work that closely together. At first, I really had to sell this idea to the regular education teachers, but I wanted the special education students to gain access to that regular world. During this time students could come to a special education teacher for assistance but many of these students would not want to leave the classroom to receive help and were not always successful. The mildly handicapped students I taught at the time were not strong enough academically to handle the regular courses. We began one collaborative biology class with a special education teacher and a regular Biology teacher which went well. We made sure they both had common planning periods and tried to choose students that would be successful in this environment. These teachers created "hands on" activities to teach the content. They also read tests aloud to not only special education students, but to regular students who were having difficulty. This class worked so well that additional classes were developed in the other academic departments with regular ed. teachers who were sensitive to the lower level students. Class size was considered so that these classes did not become overloaded. The higher functioning mildly handicapped students could function in theses collaborative classes and did well with support.

In 1994, I went through training to be one of the related vocational instruction teachers (RVI) now called career technical instruction (CTI). I worked with special education students in their vocational classes, taught a Life Skills class and oversaw a work study program for special education students. My day began with 6 to 10 students who went to work in the community on the work study program. Their jobs were developed by the vocational rehabilitation counselor and/or myself. I made jobsite visits throughout the semester to check on their progress and help work on any problems that

might develop. The students were on the job for two blocks or about 2 ½ hours. While the students were on the job, I was also assigned to four or five vocational classrooms to assist students on the RVI/CTI caseload. I worked in a variety of classrooms; family and consumer science (food classes, interior design, and child development), auto mechanics, construction, technology, drafting, FFA and some business classes. I helped our students complete assignments, prepare for tests, and helped in lab situations (cooking, auto mechanics, sewing, computer projects) – whatever had to be done. I also assisted other students who needed a little help, especially in the auto mechanics and family and consumer science classes. I taught one life skills class each day for our lower functioning ninth grade students. We used that class to help these students decide what vocational area they would like to enter in the tenth grade.

When being "highly qualified" was implemented, I went back and added home economics to my certificate. It was very stressful for teachers to have to take tests to become highly qualified. Some of my friends took the tests and then switched to regular education. I stayed in special education especially at the high school because I could see progress in my students and most days enjoyed interacting with them. I knew that I wanted to teach when I was very young and in high school I realized I wanted to teach special education. Teaching special education students was what I was meant to do. My biggest challenge throughout my career was the changing rules and regulations and going back to college periodically. I had earned my Master's degree in SPED early in my career but had to go back to add on certifications in behavior disorders and several years later added related vocational instruction. Dividing your time between college classes at night and teaching, plus family life, was difficult. Changing rules and regulations always

meant changes in the amount of paperwork for IEPs, eligibility forms, and testing we had to complete for the students on our caseload.

My role as a special educator started out as being a classroom teacher. The job changed slowly as the expectations of special education changed. I think we had to become advocates and guidance counselors for our students. We helped them choose their classes and think about vocational choices. As students moved towards graduation we tried to guide them with options for life after graduation. By the time I retired the students were different than when I started in 1977. They were more eager to work and participate in class during the early years. In my final years the students did not seem to be as motivated and were much more streetwise.

I think I could have stayed in teaching longer, but the atmosphere was too different – it was sad – the good old days when we could just work with kids and teach them useful skills was over. My biggest reward has been when I come across students and parents of students several years after they have graduated and hear about the student's accomplishments and where they are living and working. I still see some former students today who are now in their 40s, but they still seem to remember me. They have jobs and I think, "we did something right." I have come across them in all walks of life and they seem to be as happy to see me as I am to see them. I do feel I did some good.

Today I am self-employed with Lowndes County 4-H. I go to the county elementary schools and teach the 4H science and language arts curriculum in fifth grade classes. I also visit the middle schools and lead monthly club meetings for those students. I feel like I am making a connection with students in this program and the

teachers in these schools. I am lucky that I have found a place to continue my teaching experiences.

Betty's Story

I was born in Columbus, Georgia. My dad was in the army and stationed at Fort Benning in Columbus. When I was about 9 or 10 we moved to Arlington, Georgia in Calhoun County. It is between Albany and Dothan, Alabama on highway 62 and to this day there are only 5,000 people in the whole county. It is very poor. If you are not a farmer or do not have a business or teach or nurse there are no jobs. That's where I was raised. Best childhood anybody could ever hope for. We never had to lock our doors and everybody knew everybody. My daddy bought an old country store. We sold whatever you needed. Most of our customers were on food stamps. He'd keep their stamps in the safe in the store and he would have them all month when they came to shop. That way they would have food all month. Many of his customers could not read or write. When I was 14 years old my daddy had this big pick-up truck. Some of our customers could not drive or did not have a car. If they could find a way into town Daddy would load up the pick-up truck and I would drive them and the groceries home. Mother got a job at Early County's TMR center. She did not have a college degree or training in special education. She got the job around 1976. After PL 94-142 this center opened and took children; with basically every exceptionality. These children had never been in school. I volunteered there in the summers when I turned 16. That experience at the Early County TMR center influenced me to become a special education teacher.

I received my training from Valdosta State College. I had Margaret Hiers for several classes. She was wonderful and amazing. I did my student teaching in the county

school system. I graduated in 1981 on a Friday and went to work on Monday. I graduated late because I got married and had a baby. I got my first job at South Street Education Center on the campus of JL Lomax Elementary in the Valdosta City School System. It was a separate wing connected by covered walkways from the main campus. We had our own bathrooms in every classroom, kitchen and laundry facilities. So even though we were on an elementary school campus it was a self-contained facility for EMR and TMR students ages 3 through 18. I had fifth and sixth grade TMR. Back then when they tested the students they tried to make them all TMR to keep them out of the regular school. I worked there from 1981 until 1986. It was a good place to work. We had everything for those children. We had a physical therapy room, we had a shower, we had a kitchen, private girls and boy's bathrooms that were fully equipped, and an auditorium off the kitchen. We had a full breakfast and lunch for the students. The food was home cooked and was good. We had a shop which we could do woodwork and arts and crafts and job skills. There was a home living room where we taught life skills, how to clean and make a bed and so forth. We grew a garden every spring. We had wonderful field trips. Every Wednesday we took the kids to the skating rink. We did a lot of Special Olympics. I do not remember writing IEPs when I first started working. I think someone else did them. We all had teacher aids until they passed the law that all aids had to have a high school diploma and many lost their jobs. I hired mine as my nanny. After 1986 we had to take our students to a regular age appropriate campus. My last year at South Street I had six very physically handicapped high school boys in wheel chairs.

A typical day when I first started teaching was very different than when I finished my career. In those first years we would get the students off the bus and deal with any

bus issues. We would go to our rooms and take care of bathroom needs. The students would get to school by 8:30 a.m. and we had one student from another county that came at 9:00 a.m. We had breakfast at 9:00 a.m. We ate family style and taught table manners. Then we went to the restrooms. I had a paraprofessional and we would take turns. One would go with the boys and one with the girls. We did not have to go in with them except we had one student with muscular dystrophy. Someone anonymously paid another student to go in and help him. This student was not MI, but was environmentally deprived. In the classroom we did lots of hands on activities and life skills and what academics we could. We had a beautiful clothes closet with clothes and hygiene items. The students got free time if their behavior was good. We had lunch after this. Every class set their own table. The ladies would bring the food out and we would eat. Unfortunately this did not last long. Soon we had to go to the cafeteria and through the lunch line. After lunch we went back to the room for quiet time. I read to them or we did a quiet activity. Then we had PE. I think one of the churches bought playground equipment. Our kids would go out and play. We were in a poor neighborhood and so in about 3 weeks or so someone broke in through the fence and stole the playground equipment. They couldn't get the slide, but they got the jungle gym and the swings! Then more bathroom and then sometimes a small snack. A little more instruction ABCs and 123s and they left at 2:30 p.m. We got to leave at 3:00 p.m. because we had no lunch break and no planning period. When the other teachers at Lomax complained the principal had a staff meeting and said to the entire staff, "Now, the issue about my South Street staff leaving early. They have my permission and if you don't like it you can

spend a week over there with those pitiful children who can't do anything and see how you like it. They can't do anything without help. Any questions?"

In the fall of 1986 I landed at Valdosta Junior High School. They moved me because of least restrictive age appropriate environment. My high school boys went to the high school with another teacher and I took 12 junior high students to that school. When they found out I was coming the principal was furious. They were afraid. The principal greeted me with the words, "are you that special ed. teacher we been hearing about bringing those children out here? I am the principal here and let me tell you something. You keep those children out of my sight and out of my mind and you and I will get along just fine." It was very cruel and I was just doing my job. I liked the center better. She put us in a walled-off fourth of an art room. There was only enough room for student desks and my desk. No window. No blackboard or supplies other than paper and pencil. We had to walk through another classroom and walk down three steps to get into our room. Some of my students were physically disabled and had a hard time with the stairs. You could get out of the classroom through a back door right by the lunchroom. We made friends with the lunchroom staff. We could also use the little grassy area outside for PE (we weren't allowed in the gym). We got permission to plant a garden out there. Most of these students had behavior problems so I had to teach them to get along with the others. If they were quiet I would let them play some days. They left around 1:30 p.m. I was there about 6 years. The lunch staff brought our children ice cream and cried over them. Also the coaches helped. Hard to believe I know, but they were our allies. They would come when they could and also helped get them on and off of the busses. Not everyone would help and they looked at us like it was contagious. I was

always telling them "it's not contagious." After a couple of years the librarian would let us come check out books. When I first got to the junior high you'd have thought we were Martians. Everyone would step back from us. No one spoke to me the first year I was in a regular school except the coaches and the lunch ladies. The longer we stayed though the better it got, but not everyone warmed up to us; so different from a self-contained school.

In 1990 I went to CPES. I went there because another teacher told me it was more like South Street and I would like it there. I loved CPES when I first got there. I liked the self-contained center better and I was tired of the way they treated me and my students at the other school. We could not even go to the pep rallies on Friday. When we finally got permission to go to the high school for a pep rally I was stopped in the hall by a principal and he said who in the hell are you? I taught second, third and some fourth graders at CPES. Now instead of teaching students who were TMR/EMR I taught students who were primarily EBD. We had multi-grade classes. We had no curriculum. We made individual work packets for the students based on their academic ability. Behavior was the focus. We worked on that first. We tried our best to be therapeutic. We did not have much support from the administration. They were happy as long as we kept the students quiet and happy. We did not have to mainstream when I was there. There was never any mention of our students going to the regular campus until they were behaviorally ready. I left CPES in 1999 because there was an opening in the alternative school.

I worked for Lowndes Alternative School until 2006. I taught the special education students who came to the alternative school. Working for the alternative

program was the best job I ever had. We held each other up. We were like family. My principal always bragged on us and appreciated what we did. He came around and asked us if we needed anything and checked on us. I had to get interrelated on my certificate when I was at the alternative school, and take the test for highly qualified.

It took me 2 weeks to clean up my room at the alternative school. It was the old home economics room. It was great! It had computers lining the walls and we used them for instruction. They could work at their level and pace. The students did 45 minutes of work and had 15 minutes break time if they worked appropriately. They played games like UNO, Connect Four, chess, checkers and art. Some of the kids would not work, but most of them wanted to. We had a full kitchen on campus and we fed the students breakfast every morning. Some students learned to cook and helped with clean-up. I was there 5 years. They tore down our school. I did not want to leave the alternative school and go to a regular campus. I did not want to co-teach. Inclusion was not for me. I watched teachers do it and everything that goes wrong gets blamed on the SPED teacher. Sometimes regular teachers do not want them in their room.

In 2006 I took a job in the City School system as the behavior specialist. I worked with students sixth through twelfth grade. I could have gone to another school in the county but I wanted this opportunity. Also full inclusion bothers me. It was time for me to get out of the classroom. We had no choice but to put those children in a regular class even though they were looked on as outcasts. I had five schools and was able to help the teachers with interventions. As the behavior interventionist, it was a new experience. There had not previously been a behavior interventionist and so the job was evolving. We did the best we could to help with severe behavior problems or issues. The

school would give me a referral and I would go see the child and complete a behavior plan. Everything was data driven. I was a member of several community based resources such as, Department of Juvenile Justice Pre Court and Juvenile Court Committee, Mental Health Association, and several other associations through mental health. I conducted manifestation determination meetings and wrote behavior intervention plans. I spent a lot of time in the classroom trying to find ways to help the student be successful. I also went to make home visits and tried to get the parent on our side. I gave advice to the teachers. This was when full inclusion came and they would have a child with a behavior and they didn't know what to do. There were no more self-contained special education classrooms because of NCLB; only for students with moderate, severe and profound intellectual disabilities. Even some of these students were expected to participate in electives with the general population. It was sad to me that they made these students go to regular classes when they were scared or upset or couldn't do the work. I had so much experience with behavior and special education I could help the regular education teachers. I had some teachers just boo hoo on my shoulders when they found out I could understand and help. The focus was on academics and some kids just couldn't do them.

My biggest reward was helping those children; being able to see success with some of my students. Trying to love children that no one else wanted to or could deal with. It's just me. They needed someone who could reach them. Not all of them though – you can't save them all. And doing what I loved for 31 years. My biggest challenge was some of the people I had to work for. I felt like the administration never cared or

looked down on us. They were not very understanding and I did not have much support until I went to work for the alternative school.

I retired in 2011 because of the politics in the city and too many people mistreating my kids. I just did not want to put up with it any more. Plus, they were laying off people with 30 years or more, so if I had not retired I would have lost my health insurance. Also the incentives for retiring were good then. I was scared but I was tired of it all. I stayed in special education though because I loved it. Especially when you are so appreciated and people say "how do you do what you do?" I wanted to help little special education children. I do not have one regret. I guess God just said I needed to be in special education. I miss the kids and I miss so many dear friends I had when I was working and still have.

> Our prime purpose in life is to help
> people. If you can't help them,
> at least don't hurt them.
> - Dalai Lama

Summary

This chapter presented in narratives the lived experiences of three retired veteran special education teachers as they began their teaching careers in a time when special education services were very new to the public school system. They discussed how their careers changed over time as a result of 30 years of federal special education legislation and what that meant for them. They discussed some of the challenges and rewards of teaching special education. Chapter 5 discusses the emergent themes from these narratives. These themes are cross referenced with the research questions and current special education literature.

Chapter V

FINDINGS

This study investigated 30 years of federal special education legislation and revealed through narratives how this legislation influenced the beliefs, feelings and teaching responsibilities of three retired, veteran special education teachers as they sought to implement these changes in their classrooms. This period from 1975 when PL 94-142 was first enacted, until 2005, has been a period of great change for special education teachers. The three participants were special education teachers who were selected because they taught or worked with students with disabilities in the local school systems for 30 years or more. All three teachers began their careers in the late 1970s when special education services were mandated in public schools in this area.

Data presented in this chapter was collected through archival documents, conversations with school personnel, as well as researcher memos and interviews that were conducted either face-to-face, over the phone, or through email. There were 18 open-ended questions in an interview guide (Appendix D). Interview questions were directly related to research questions and supplemented with questions that arose spontaneously during the interviews. After each contact, a memo was written to record reactions during the interview process. Memos were part of the data and were used to help organize the interviews. Interviews were transcribed and data coded immediately after each session. The format for interviewing was Seidman's (2006) three-interview series. Each participant was contacted a minimum of three times. Finally each participant

reviewed her story and made changes as needed. The narratives were then coded and sorted by categories and themes. Themes served as the basis for data analysis. Research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: What were the lived experiences of special education teachers in rural southern Georgia from 1975 until 2005 as a result of changes in federal and state legislation?

RQ2: How did Georgia and specifically Valdosta City and Lowndes County Schools, respond to the changes in federal and state legislation from 1975 until 2005?

RQ3: How did changes in federal and state legislation from 1975 until 2005 influence or change the perspectives of special education teachers in Valdosta and Lowndes County Schools?

The narratives and researcher memos provided data for the research questions. Additional data used to address the questions were collected by interviewing other teachers and administrators and from a search of archives, the retired teachers' association records, reviewing the literature, reviewing documents and records from the school boards, and newspaper articles from the historical society.

Development of Themes

Memos were written shortly after each interview to note feelings and organize thoughts. Individual lines of text were read and coded (Appendices D, E, F) after each transcription. When the narratives were completed and coded a comparison matrix was developed. In the comparison matrix, categories and commonalities were noted by

whether or not they appeared in the interview. These similarities were then cross-referenced with the interview questions (Table 1). The following themes emerged from the data.

- Similarity of Teaching Experience
- Effects of Mainstreaming and Inclusion
- Effects of Curriculum Changes
- Influences on Career Choice
- Perceptions of Identity
- Teaching Special Education as a Calling

Research questions in the study examined the experiences of special education teachers in rural southern Georgia, specifically in Lowndes County and Valdosta City, as special education services were implemented in public schools due to federal legislation during the 30 year period between 1975 and 2005. Through interviews, phone conversations, and written responses, participants shared their experiences and perspectives on special education services in Lowndes County and Valdosta City Schools. The themes that emerged after the narratives were coded and analyzed, provided points of reference to address Research Questions 1 and 3. Research Question 2 was answered from the historical data collected.

Findings for RQ1

Similarity of Teaching Experiences. The participants in this study each started their teaching careers at a time when special education services were relatively new in public schools in Lowndes County. At its inception, PL 94-142 mandated LRE. All students with disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive setting with their non-

disabled peers. When schools began providing services for students with disabilities, the general education setting was not considered. A memo from the Georgia Governor's office in 1977 asked someone to examine the responsibility the public schools would have for a student who was 15 and still in diapers (Governors Special Affairs Office, April 28, 1977). This was typical of the confusion and uncertainty caused by PL 94-142. As educational leaders became more familiar with PL 94-142 and its re-authorizations, services for students with disabilities began to be provided in settings that were not exclusively self-contained.

All three women interviewed in this study began teaching in schools in which special education students were housed separately from regular education students. These settings were considered self-contained settings. Linda and Betty taught for the Valdosta City Schools System and Susan for the Lowndes County Schools System. The time each participant taught in a self-contained setting varied. The common factor when all three began teaching was that self-contained, separate classrooms and schools were the accepted service model for students with disabilities. Federal legislation, PL 94-142, mandated that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (Yell, 1998). The initial interpretation of this law by educators was to serve students with disabilities in separate schools or facilities. Most of the self-contained classes were moved to regular school campuses as educators became familiar with the law. Susan, who worked for Lowndes County was moved to a regular campus in 1978. Betty who worked for Valdosta City Schools was moved to the regular campus in 1986, almost 10 years after Susan. Linda's class was the last to be moved. She said, "My class was the last to go. I was scheduled to go to the high school with my remaining students, but at

the last minute my students were moved to CPES." CPES was a self-contained, separate school. This last move was in 1990; 14 years after PL 94-142 became law and the students were moved from one self-contained, separate school to another.

Once these classes were moved to the regular campus, students with disabilities were still served separately from the other students. Not only were the special education students separated from the others, but there were discrepancies in materials and supplies for special education classrooms. Susan was in a separate class on the high school campus and remarked, "you know there was no organization in those days as to what to do." Betty was in a separate classroom at the junior high. Betty said, "She [the administrator] put us in a walled-off fourth of an art room. There was only enough room for student desks and my desk. No window. No blackboard or supplies other than paper and pencil." Susan remained at the high school until she retired and by that time most of her students were with the general population. Only the life skills classes (lower cognitively functioning students) remained self-contained. Betty taught on a regular campus for 4 years then moved to a position in a self-contained, separate center where she remained until she became a behavior interventionist. Her job was to help students with disabilities experience success. During her career, Linda never taught on a regular campus. She remained in a self-contained, separate school until retiring. A self-contained, separate school continues to be the norm to this day for some students with disabilities.

Effects of Mainstreaming and Inclusion. Mainstreaming and inclusion were attempts to comply with PL 94-142 and the requirement that students with disabilities be served in the least restrictive environment. Mainstreaming became popular in the 1980s

and early 1990s. Winzer and Mazurek (2000), described this as placing students with disabilities in one or more general education classes depending on their ability to cope. The prevailing thought was that students with disabilities belonged in the special education classroom and in a regular classroom only under special circumstances.

Contrary to Winzer and Mazurek's (2000) definition of mainstreaming, for Betty and Linda mainstreaming meant taking the students on a bus to a regular school campus to attend a pep rally or eat lunch. This was in the late 1980s. Linda recounts, "My class went once a week to the high school and ate lunch. We were given a spot away from everyone else. Sometimes we would attend a pep rally at the high school." Later while working at CPES, they used community field trips were sued to achieve the concept of mainstreaming. She says, "We used these activities [field trips and Special Olympics] for mainstreaming." Betty remembers minimal attempts at mainstreaming when she worked at the junior high school. She recalls, "When we finally got permission to go to the pep rallies at the high school on Fridays, the principal stopped me and said 'who the hell are you?'"

Susan's experience was very different and very positive. Her first attempts at mainstreaming her students occurred in 1992 or 1993. She recalls, "We tried to schedule students who were strong readers into regular classes with teachers that we thought would work with us and the student." The early attempts at mainstreaming that Betty and Linda were required to make to put their students in settings around regular education peers were not educationally relevant. For Susan it was more of an honest effort to include students with disabilities into the regular classroom. Larrivee and Cook (1979), interviewed regular education teachers about variables that affected their attitudes

towards mainstreaming. The findings indicated that teacher perception of success with students with disabilities had the most impact on attitude towards mainstreaming. This compliments what Susan said about finding teachers who would work with the student so everyone could be successful. Two additional variables that had an impact on regular education and special education teacher attitudes were administrative support and supportive services. Neither Linda nor Betty reported having administrative support for the concept of mainstreaming. Graham et al. (1980) found that perceptions about mainstreaming, both from regular education teachers and special education teachers, were positive. However, where regular education teachers felt the special education students benefited from mainstreaming, the special education teachers involved in this research, did not. Both regular education and special education teachers felt that more training was needed to help make mainstreaming effective. None of the teachers interviewed for this study spoke of training being made available for mainstreaming for either special education teachers or regular education teachers. Susan was responsible for the limited training available as she was the special education teacher for managing mainstreaming. It was her responsibility to convince the regular education teachers to implement mainstreaming. She said, "At first, I really had to sell this idea to the regular education teachers, but I wanted the special education students to gain access to that regular world."

Pernell, McIntyre and Bader (1985), while examining mainstreaming, reported comments made by regular education teachers about mainstreaming before they were given a 30 hour university course on mainstreaming. The most frequent comments made before educators took the course were, "we are already overworked," "why can't they stay in special education," "are they (administrators) crazy," "are we wasting time with

some children?" "I feel sorry for those children," and "I have pity for teachers of handicapped children" (p. 135). Teacher attitudes became more positive as a result of the course. Betty experienced similar attitudes from her administration. One administrator in the early 1980s, referred to her students as "those pitiful children who can't do anything for themselves," and both Linda and Betty had administrators who wished those children could just stay self-contained.

Winzer (2009) explained that the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 made the regular education classroom the primary placement, when possible, for students with disabilities and required that regular education teachers be part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team. An IEP team consists of the special education teacher, principal, parents and other school personnel involved in the student's education such as the occupational therapist or speech therapist. Prior to the reauthorization of IDEA a regular education teacher did not need to be present. The special education teacher assumed all responsibility for the education of the student. This new requirement that a general education teacher assume some of the responsibility for educating students with disabilities fostered the concept of inclusion.

Serious attempts at including students with disabilities in the regular classroom began with the passage of NCLB (Winzer 2009). NCLB required students with disabilities to be provided the same advantages as their regular education peers. Research suggests that the response by special education teachers and regular education teachers to inclusion was largely negative. Vaughn et al. (1994) conducted a focus group with 74 teachers from a large metropolitan school district in the South. The topic was inclusion. The overwhelming response from the teachers in the focus group was negative. Several

teachers reported that inclusion would be enough for them to change jobs. Fears from the teachers about inclusion, centered around academic success for students, lawsuits, workload and changing roles.

The three teachers interviewed for this study felt NCLB and the inclusion requirement affected their job. Inclusion was never a possibility for Linda's students. She remained with them in a separate, self-contained classroom until she retired. She reflects on the changes NCLB brought. Linda said, "At this point in my career [2006] the focus was completely on academics…there was no more talk of mainstreaming my students by taking them to a regular campus." Betty continued to teach in a self-contained facility when she moved to the Lowndes County Alternative School. The alternative school students came and went as a function of disciplinary action. They were returned to the regular school after serving their time at the alternative school. As a result inclusion was not necessary. She says of inclusion, "I did not want to leave the alternative school and go to a regular campus. I did not want to co-teach. Inclusion was not for me." Susan, on the other hand, was in a position at Lowndes High School to match regular education and special education teachers for collaborative teaching. She remembers,

> We began one collaborative biology class with a special education teacher and a regular biology teacher which went well. This class worked so well that additional classes were developed in the other academic departments with regular education teachers who were sensitive to the lower level students.

Lalvani (2013) interviewed teachers to ascertain their beliefs about inclusion. Most of those interviewed held the belief that in order for students with disabilities to be

included in the general curriculum inclusion criteria should include IQ, type of disability, and whether or not special education students could benefit from the instruction. Those interviewed believed inclusion was a privilege rather than a right and was not for all special education students.

Effects of Curriculum Changes. PL 94-142 did not address curriculum for special education students. Curriculum decisions were left to the states and local school systems. Life skills, vocational skills and basic functional academics were the focus of instruction for students with disabilities until the passage of NCLB. Mainstreaming and inclusion provided some students with disabilities a chance to participate in the general curriculum. When NCLB was enacted the expectation was that all students, even the most severe, would have access to the general curriculum. The law further required that all special education teachers be "highly qualified" to deliver academic content.

When Susan, Betty, and Linda began teaching they were not given a curriculum. Linda said,

> We did not really have a curriculum to go by in those early years. Two of the lead teachers developed one and the focus was mainly on life skills. I built my curriculum around theirs. We did a lot of eating skills, dressing skills, toileting skills in addition to the language and numbers and alphabet.

Betty discussed the curriculum in her narrative but gives no explanation to why it was that way. She confirmed that the emphasis was on life skills and basic academics. Susan said of the curriculum,

> The focus of the curriculum in the beginning was mostly basic language arts and math as well as life skills classes. At the high school we did not have textbooks

so we looked for a variety of resources and taught basic skills to our students with mild mental disabilities. Those included basic health/science, basic math/banking and checking accounts, "pre" vocational skills, Georgia and US history…We came up with our own curriculum.

As the PL 94-142 was reauthorized, the lack of focus on curriculum changed. PL 94-142 mandated that students with disabilities should have access to the general education classroom. In 1997, IDEA stipulated that IEP goals and objectives should be "tied directly to the general education curriculum" (Winzer, 2009 p. 210). With the implementation of NCLB, schools had to provide evidence they were meeting yearly achievement goals through test scores (Ravitch, 2010) and that all teachers, regular education and special education, were certified in the content area they taught. This requirement for teachers became known as being "highly qualified." This change resulted in an increased emphasis on developing academic skills. Linda recalls, "At this point in my career [2006] the focus was completely on academics. I started giving grades instead of writing narrative progress reports." Susan says, "When highly qualified was implemented, I went back and added home economics to my certificate. Some of my friends took the tests and then switched to regular education." Betty avoided becoming highly qualified by taking the position as behavior interventionist.

Findings for RQ2

State and Local Response to Federal Legislation. In response to early federal legislation the state of Georgia provided services to students with disabilities that focused on speech correction, services for the blind, and on those with physical disabilities. Most of these efforts were centered in Atlanta (Joiner et al., 1979). Many were private and

funded by civic and professional groups such as the Georgia Speech Association and the Cerebral Palsy association (CEC Committee, 1977, p. v.). Some services were provided through state hospitals. In 1937 Geraldine MacGuigan, a master's student at Emory University, interviewed several staff members at state run programs for her thesis. She was interested in what kinds of services were provided, what type and age of students did they serve, what was the training of their teachers and salary. Programs in operation in 1937 that she visited were the Georgia Academy for the Deaf, Georgia Academy for the Blind, the Georgia Training School for Boys and the Georgia School for Mental Defectives (MacGuigan, 1937). She found that in 1937 only Atlanta had any public school services for students with disabilities. MacGuigan also found that efforts to provide educational services to students in the state facilities were hindered by funding, educational materials and limited teaching staff.

In 1969 the Georgia Retardation Center was opened in North Dekalb County (Rosenfeld, 1975). It was a residential facility for students with disabilities. Most early efforts were limited to private schools or state hospitals. One exception was a grant program for students with severe emotional disorders. This became grant program later became the Psychoeducational Network. The Psychoeducational program was started in 1975 and served students aged 3 to 14 who had behavioral disorders (Wood, 1972).

When PL 94-142 was enacted in 1975, students with disabilities began attending Georgia's public schools. This legislation required that all students should have begun receiving services by 1976. The state scrambled to find funding and teachers to meet these new educational demands. A needs survey completed in 1977 detailed the shortages in the southern part of Georgia (Special Education Needs in South Georgia,

1978). Critical areas of need were learning disabilities, behavorial disabilities, speech therapists, and school psychologists. A few rural areas in the southern part of the state were in need of EMR and TMR teachers.

As special education services expanded in the public schools, emphasis was placed on "mainstreaming" students with disabilities into the general education classroom (Winzer, 2009). The focus of the curriculum changed while more and more students with disabilities entered the regular classroom. By the 1990s inclusion replaced the resource room for students with disabilities. The NCLB Act of 2001 increased academic expectations for students with disabilities (Ratcliffe & Willard, 2009).

Valdosta State College (VSC) responded to the need for trained personnel in special education by applying for a new degree program in special education (Program Development Grant, 1969). They hired Dr. Leo Kelly to head the department and develop the special education program at VSC (Letter to Chancellor Simpson, June 1969). Margaret Hiers was hired a year later to teach classes in mental retardation. Dr. Kelly met with Liska Wetherington, Special Education Director for Valdosta City Schools and Verda Zant, Special Education Director for Lowndes County Schools to determine personnel needs for special education in the school systems.

In Valdosta, early efforts to serve students with disabilities in the public schools began in the mid 1960s. When Dr. Kelly wrote his grant for the fall of 1970, Valdosta City Schools had 13 classes for mentally retarded students and Lowndes County Schools had 18 (Program Development Grant Application, 1970). The Valdosta City School System used the old Magnolia School to serve students with disabilities. The Lowndes County school system special education programs were housed in the old Westside High

School. The two schools had previously been schools for African American students. Magnolia was demolished and services moved to South Street School on the campus of Lomax-Pinevale elementary school. Westside continued to house special education programs until it was demolished in 2006. Special education services continue today with all students, except those that attend the GNETS program, attending on regular age appropriate campuses. The GNETS program serves students from local school systems whose behavior prohibits them from being able to achieve in the regular educational setting. Today on regular school campuses in Lowndes County and Valdosta City, full inclusion does not exist. There remains a continuum of services from least restrictive to most restrictive depending primarily on the severity of the disability.

Findings for RQ3

Influences on Career Choice. The initial interview was designed to gather background information on each respondent and to determine what specifically brought them in to the field of special education. Participants' backgrounds and experiences influenced their career choices. Each of the participants had early experiences through their families that led them in to the field of special education. Each was raised in the south; two in rural areas and one in an urban setting. They attended college at Valdosta State College and became teachers in the local school systems. Additionally, all had an early experience with a person or persons with a disability who influenced them to become special education teachers. Linda says, "I became interested is special education because I used to go and help with a neighbor's son who was severely mentally handicapped." Betty and Susan both had jobs as teenagers which led them to the field. Susan remarks "When I was in high school my mother knew a pediatrician who had an

interest in helping students with learning disabilities and got me two summer jobs." Betty's experience was similar, "Mother got a job a Early County's Trainable Mentally Retarded (TMR) center. I volunteered there in the summers when I turned 16." Because of these early experiences each interviewee decided to become special education teachers.

Perceptions of Identity. Issues or barriers that emerged from the literature and from the participants describing challenges that special education teachers faced were resilience, teacher identity and daily challenges of working with students with disabilities. The challenges that each participant in this study faced were different. This was partially related to where each of them worked and to the level of administrative support they received. Perceptions of identity are affected by stressors. Green (1994) interviewed several special education teachers about their careers and found that certain stressors led them to question their roles as special educators. Findings indicated that feelings of isolation from other staff, excessive paperwork, physical and emotional challenges and problems with administration were stressors for special education teachers. A narrative study in Great Britain examined teacher resilience and work identities as a result in relation to educational reforms over the course of their careers. MacLure (as cited in Kirk and Wall, 2010) referred to these feelings as loss in work identities and described these feelings as "teacher burn-out," "innovation overload," and "de-professionalisation" (p. 628). Kirk and Wall said these feelings of loss or failure derive from a loss of autonomy in the workplace. Teachers interviewed in this study experienced some of the same stressors and challenges.

Some of the same issues and barriers emerged from the interviews. The teachers interviewed all felt they faced challenges throughout their careers. For Susan it was class size and changing rules and regulations. She says, "In the early 1980s there didn't seem to be a cap on the number of students that could be in our classes and our EMR classes could run from 15 to 26 with no paraprofessional." She says her biggest challenge was changing rules and regulations which often meant more paperwork or going back to school to better prepare for the changes.

> Dividing your time between college classes at night and teaching plus family life was difficult. Changing rules and regulations always meant changes in the amount of paperwork for IEPs, eligibility forms, and testing we had to complete for the student on our caseload.

Betty recalls her biggest challenge as, "some of the people I had to work for. Before I went to work for the alternative school in 1999, I felt like the administration never cared or looked down on us. They were not very understanding and I did not have much support until I went to work for the alternative school." Linda's challenges were related to her environment. She says, "My biggest challenge was working in small classrooms at certain times during my career. We were [at one time] in such a small space there was barely room to turn around let alone run a classroom." She also felt she was treated differently by regular school staff at various times. She remarks, "At times when I taught preschool…the other teachers treated me different because I taught special education. Some of them thought I got paid more, and also my duties were different."

The literature supports feelings of being treated differently and daily challenges of working with students with disabilities. Kirk and Wall (2010), interviewed teachers in

Great Britain during the 1980s and asked questions relating to their work identities. The study suggested that stressors for teachers were lack of support from administration and loss of identity due to high stakes testing. Green (1994) stated that some of the most commonly reported stressors for special education teachers were large amounts of paperwork above and beyond the normal amount, lack of support from administration, and resentment from regular education teachers who perceive special education teachers as having an easier work load due to smaller class sizes. MacGuigan (1937) discussed the lack of adequate equipment, limited teachers and classrooms, and an inadequate budget as barriers to providing services for special education students and stressors for teachers. This study was conducted well before the enactment of PL 94-142, yet the findings mirror those of today. Betty and Linda both experienced inadequate classroom space. All three experienced lack of adequate or non-existent classroom materials.

Teaching Special Education as a Calling. In spite of the stressors associated with teaching special education, there are also rewards. Mackenzie (2012), found that special education teachers remained in the field because of intrinsic rewards such as "the buzz," they received, service to others, emotional closeness and empathy towards their students, and having knowledge others needed. Green (1994) listed several reasons for continuing to teach special education. She asserts that the focus is on the child rather than the curriculum. She wrote, it's a dynamic field always changing, low unemployment and signing bonuses are offered for rural or inner city schools. Gehrke and McCoy (2007) examined why special educators stay or leave the field. They found that special education teachers left the field because of lack of support (of any kind), difficulty with the curriculum (what to teach and how to align it with expected curriculum), and lack of

materials. These findings were consistent regardless of size and location of schools. Teachers who stayed in the field all felt they had sufficient support or help in these areas.

The women in this study all remained in special education even while facing similar challenges. All of them faced curriculum challenges early in their careers. Perhaps it was because of their college training but they were able to improvise and create curriculum or adapt what others were doing to match their student's needs and abilities. Each participant was affected in various ways by the changes in legislation but chose to stay in special education and listed very similar reasons. They stayed because they felt it was their calling. Linda says, "I miss it though. I felt like special education was my calling. What I was meant to do." Susan says, "I knew I wanted to be a teacher when I was 7 years old. I do feel I did some good." Betty remarks, "I stayed in special education because I loved it. I do not have one regret. I guess God just said I needed to be in special education."

Summary

The themes that emerged from this study revealed some of the changes that special education legislation brought to the classroom. For many teachers educating students with disabilities presented rewards and challenges. The research questions, and the themes that emerged, point to educational and social changes that educators and administrators should not overlook. Research Question 1 focused on changes to special education as a result of federal and state legislation. The first three themes dealt with changes that occurred as a result of federal special education legislation. Themes that emerged were similarities of teaching experiences, effects of mainstreaming and inclusion, and effects of curriculum changes for students with disabilities. Teachers

reported working in self-contained centers when they first started teaching. Two of the teachers were moved to age appropriate campuses and one remained in a self-contained center. Two teachers reported having minimal experience with mainstreaming. They went to lunch or pep rallies on a regular school campus. This was not educationally relevant. One teacher reported successful attempts at mainstreaming and then later inclusion. She helped facilitate these experiences for her students. All three teachers interviewed reported creating their own curriculum in the early years of their careers. As PL 94-142 was reauthorized and NCLB was enacted, the focus of the curriculum went from a functional curriculum to an academic one.

The second research question addressed the efforts in Georgia, Valdosta City and Lowndes County to comply with special education legislation. Historically, efforts in Georgia and Valdosta to serve student with disabilities were privately run and funded or were provided through state hospitals. As educators became more familiar with federal special education legislation, PL 94-142 and its subsequent reauthorizations, services began to change and more students with disabilities were educated in the general education setting; first by being placed in classes on age appropriate regular education campuses and then later being mainstreamed when possible into general education classrooms. With the enactment of NCLB in 2001, most students with disabilities were "included" or educated in the general education classroom with their non-disabled peers.

The third research question addressed social issues that special education teachers face during their careers. Themes that emerged from the narratives were, influences on career choice, perceptions of identity, teaching special education as a calling. Participants in this study revealed several potential issues for special educators through

their narratives. Among them were, class size, lack of support from administration, inadequate materials and inadequate classroom space, being treated differently, large amounts of paperwork and changing certification requirements. Lastly, participants of this study revealed what motivated them to remain teaching students with disabilities. They all felt that it was their calling, what they were meant to do. They reported that teaching special education came with its own rewards; being able to see success in their students was very rewarding.

If given consideration the themes that emerged from this study can provide the basis for schools to build better relationships with special education teachers. There are significant advantages when special education and regular education teachers work to provide students with disabilities opportunities for inclusion. Schools should develop consistent expectations and practices so student with disabilities and special education teachers are successful in the general education setting.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSIONS

The focus of the study was through narratives, to identify and describe the experiences of three retired special education teachers and to understand how their careers changed as a result of federal and state laws, rules, and policies which were enacted in the 30-year period from 1975 until 2005. A qualitative, inductive approach using narrative inquiry as the method of data collection, archival records, memos and interviews with three retired special education teachers generated the narratives that are presented in this study. Data gathered from the narratives were analyzed coding each narrative and then comparing the common threads. A comparison matrix was generated to look for further similarities and differences. This data was then cross referenced with the research questions to generate themes used in data analysis. The themes were: similarity of teaching experiences, effects of mainstreaming and inclusion, effects of curriculum changes, influences on career choice, perceptions of identity, and teaching special education as a calling. These themes provided the points for discussion in this chapter.

Findings and Generalizations

Archival evidence, the narratives, memos, and the literature related to changes in special education legislation, resulted in findings that verified significant changes in the educational services for students with disabilities which had occurred over the 30-year period studied. The themes that emerged from the data; similarity of teaching

experiences, effects of mainstreaming and inclusion and effects of curriculum changes addressed changes in classroom routine and appeared to be a result of changes in federal and state legislation. The accepted practice, before PL 94-142 was enacted, was to provide educational services for students with disabilities in separate facilities. Public schools had to provide educational services to students with disabilities. When PL 94-142 was passed, "least restrictive environment" became better understood and interpreted by educators. This resulted in students with disabilities being moved to classrooms on regular school campuses. For Susan this occurred after her first year teaching in 1978. For Betty it was 1986; Linda was never moved to a regular campus. Linda chose to remain with her students in a separate facility. Even though Betty was moved to an age-appropriate campus she and her class remained in a self-contained classroom. Slowly, the concept of mainstreaming was accepted by educators as a method of introducing students with disabilities into regular education classrooms as self-contained classrooms were challenged. Greater attempts were made to allow students with disabilities into the regular classroom after the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997. Susan was able to mainstream her students and found it to be a positive experience. Her students were regularly included in the general education setting. For Linda and Betty the experience was generally negative and because they were activities such as lunch or pep rallies, they were not educationally relevant to the students. Betty's and Linda's students were only allowed access to a regular campus for lunch or to attend pep rallies. With the enactment of NCLB in 2001 and the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 the regular education classroom became the primary placement for students with disabilities. Inclusion became a standard practice. Self-contained classrooms disappeared except for students with

moderate to profound cognitive disabilities and those with significant behavior disorders. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) further strengthened the idea that all students should be educated in the general education setting. NCLB added sanctions for schools and districts not doing so and not making educational gains with all students on a yearly basis.

The literature about inclusion confirmed that there was still much confusion about what inclusion was. For some school districts inclusion meant moving all students into the general education setting (Sardo-Brown & Hinson, 1995). For others, it meant moving the students who had previously been mainstreamed into regular classes full day instead of part day. Teacher attitudes about inclusion were overall negative. Vaughn et al. (1994) said, [inclusion] would be enough to make teachers change jobs and many said they did not see how it would work. Lalvani (2013) found attitudes about inclusion were unchanged, with the belief that students with disabilities should be allowed into regular education classes based on IQ, behavior and the ability to succeed. Susan was the only teacher in this study who had experience with inclusion. She was responsible for identifying students who could be successful in the general educating setting and pairing them with teachers who had positive attitudes towards inclusion.

Effects of curriculum changes was another theme associated with the influence of legislation on classroom practices. All three teachers reported having no curriculum to follow in the early days of their teaching careers. They taught what they thought was important and adapted or created materials to fit the needs of their students. Goldstein (as cited in Winzer, 2009) states, "teachers generally cobbled together programs for those who were mentally retarded" (p. 165). The teachers all said the focus of the curriculum

was on life skills or functional skills such as eating, dressing, toileting, vocational, reading a map, banking, and basic reading and math skills. This curriculum was considered meaningful for students with disabilities; primarily those with cognitive disabilities (Meyen & Skrtic, 1995). As PL 94-142 changed with each reauthorization, the focus on curriculum changed so that it mirrored the general education curriculum. Susan remembers the "hullabaloo" this caused because she had to help create course numbers for special education classes. Linda recalls the changes that occurred after NCLB, "At this point in my career [2006] the focus was completely on academics."

Efforts around the state to educate students with disabilities were primarily privately run or were located in state run institutions (Joiner et al., 1979). A network of psychoeducational programs began in 1974 to serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders. In Valdosta, early efforts to serve students with disabilities began in the early 1970s. There was one separate school for the Valdosta City School system and one for the Lowndes County School system. The exception was the psychoeducational program; this network of programs was re-named and still exists throughout the state. The GNETS programs are some of the only separate, self-contained special education schools. "The programs provide comprehensive educational and therapeutic support services to students who might otherwise require residential or other more restrictive placements due to the severity of one or more of the characteristics of the disability category of emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD)" (Georgia Department of Education). The GNETS program serves students with behavioral disorders or autism. Students who have behavior that prevents them from being successful in the regular school setting can be referred to this program. The remaining state run hospitals

and the youth detention centers are required to have on site school programs. Public schools are expected to serve students in the least restrictive environment and so most students with disabilities attend regular classes.

The themes, background and early influences, perceptions of identity and challenges, and teaching as a calling were addressed by all three teachers interviewed. All interviewed were raised in the South; two in rural areas and one in an urban area. All of them attended Valdosta State College when its special education program was relatively new. In addition, all had an early experience with a person or persons with disabilities that led them to the field of special education. Each of them began teaching in a self-contained EMR/TMR classroom on a separate campus.

Some of the challenges these teachers faced were similar to the challenges reported in the literature; lack of support from administration, large amounts of paperwork, inadequate supplies and classroom space, being viewed differently by other educators, and class size. These findings were mirrored in the literature (Kirk & Wall, 2010, and Mackenzie, 2012) on teacher perceptions and work identities.

When the teachers interviewed in this study first began teaching they were isolated, given very few resources and expected to develop their own curriculum. Two of them were treated very differently by other teachers and felt the lack of administrative support. Classroom space and facilities weren't always adequate. South Street School was furnished and equipped very differently than the classrooms where two of the teachers would later teach. In spite of the fact that students with disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive environment, all three teachers taught in self-contained classrooms or facilities; two exclusively in self-contained settings and the other partially.

They all had rewards as well as challenges and believed that teaching special education was what they were meant to do. They only made the decision to retire when classroom practices, due to legislation, became something they no longer believed in.

The conflict between the two laws, IDEA and NCLB, has not been resolved and is causing confusion and tension in schools. Under IDEA instruction should be individualized to provide FAPE. Under NCLB all students should meet the same requirements and the achievement gap between the highest learner and the lowest should be closed. Neither act specifically discusses curriculum, nor what curriculum is appropriate for students with disabilities. NCLB refers to state standards which are vague at best. The three teachers interviewed in this study were all expected to be the experts on curriculum for students with disabilities when they first started and each felt that this was appropriate for the students they taught. If schools follow the medical model for students with disabilities as Kauffman (2007) suggests, then individualized instruction and prevention would be standard practice. Special education teachers should be the experts on curriculum and instruction for their students. Fair is not everyone gets the same thing, fair is everyone gets what he or she needs. Progress and outcomes should be measured by the goals and objectives on a student's IEP, not by a test. Closing the achievement gap is not a realistic outcome. It is not supported by any research and requires some students to achieve multiple years of growth in one academic year and others to slow down (Ratcliffe & Willard, 2006). Providing relevant instruction is.

NCLB imposed sanctions for schools who continued to provide services to students with disabilities in a self-contained classroom with the exception of the most cognitively impaired students. If sanctions were lifted and the continuum of services was

restored in schools, students with disabilities could receive services in a variety of settings based on their needs and recommendations of the IEP team. According to Ratcliffe and Willard (2006), NCLB measures academic success at every level except that of the individual student over the instructional year. NCLB has created fear and a sense of other between special education teachers and regular education teachers. It is difficult to place a student with a disability in the least restrictive environment when teachers fear punishment if they do not succeed in correcting perceived academic deficits. A sense of cooperation and response to difference in the classroom should be the focus for all students.

Implications for Practice

PL 94-142, (1975) states that all students with a disability have a right to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive setting. What constitutes the least restrictive setting varies from place to place and school to school. It depends on the attitudes of the administration and the general attitude of the community in which the school resides. Students with disabilities are treated differently when they are denied the same things that their regular education peers can access. In Georgia we still have a network of therapeutic programs (GNETS) that serves students mostly in center-based, self-contained classrooms separate from the regular school campus. A beginning point to equity in educational services might be to decide if the services these programs provide could be implemented in the regular school provided they had appropriately trained staff. This would enable students with disabilities to receive educational services in the general education setting and would reduce some of the inequalities that exist in public schools because of this separation.

Another area that should be considered is tolerance. The current educational system considers students with disabilities and often their teachers as outsiders. In his 2008 study DeMik states,

> We should strive for combined ownership of all students; teachers, administrators, and parents must work together for the success of all students. When everyone works together, special education teachers will feel as if they are important members of a team instead of being the 'enemy' (p. 31).

Unless a school has full inclusion of all students, even those with the most severe cognitive or behavioral deficits, students with disabilities and their teachers will spend part or all of their day separated from their general education population. If the expectation of schools is to produce citizens who can think and work in a global market, we should start by accepting one another and having tolerance for diversity in our own schools. Edgar (1997) argues for "a school system…that is more caring and tolerant of diversity—diversity of culture and heritage, as well as diversity of talents and skills" (p. 324). Georgia has encouraged schools to become part of the positive behavior support movement. Many school systems in Georgia have become Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) schools. PBIS helps schools build a positive school climate. The premise is that behavioral expectations should be taught as any core subject (SWPBIS for beginners). Reasons for this are primarily to address discipline issues, but the more schools find ways to intervene in positive ways and have tolerance for one another the better schools will become for everyone. Educational leaders have the opportunity to change school culture and climate so every student has a positive experience.

Kauffman (2007) discusses the advantages a medical model has over a legal model when describing services for students with disabilities. Kauffman's perspective favors the medical model. He says, "the legal system conceptualizes negative variation as wrong… and punishes, the medical system conceptualizes negative variation as ill health and responds with treatment or prevention" (p. 246). He believes that if law becomes even more dominant in special education it will be judged a failure. As the law tightens its grip on education, special education becomes more and more like regular education and as Kauffman states, "what is written [the law] trumps what is fair or reasonable" (248). He sees NCLB as being in direct conflict with IDEA. The same standards can't be set for all students if some students need individualization to accommodate for differences in educational needs. The last argument he makes for the medical model is, "the fact that jails have hospitals and psychiatric units is a testament to the fact that even the legal system recognizes that something other than the law is required for some individuals' well being" (p. 251). Even while schools are still operating on a legal model they can choose treatment and prevention over punishment..

The GNETS (or psychoeducational) program began in 1972 as a way of providing therapeutic educational services to students who would otherwise need youth detention centers or hospitalization. For some students this is the least restrictive environment. There should be educational options on every level of the continuum. I believe the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA and NCLB Act have changed this continuum to the disservice of many students with disabilities. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Stecker (2010) describe this change. They say that the continuum has changed from regular education, resource, self-contained class, separate school, residential, hospital to Tier 1, differentiated instruction,

Tier 2, team problem solving and Tier 3 expert consultation in the general education classroom. Not every school has full inclusion, but statistics from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, as cited in Ratcliffe and Willard (2006) said, "87.1% of students with disabilities are educated outside of the general classroom for less than 21% of the school day" (p. 6). Most students with disabilities are spending the majority of school time in the general education classroom. Kavale and Forness (2000) stated the belief that there was no longer a need for a continuum because the LRE was the general education classroom, ignored student needs and instructional practices. This debate as to where educational services for students with disabilities should take place has not been resolved.

Curriculum and testing for students with disabilities needs to be reconsidered as Kauffman suggests. Relevant and realistic curriculum that is individualized for each student with a disability should be the standard instead of the one-size-fits-all approach currently in use today. What is meaningful, relevant, and useful is not always the same for every individual. Ratcliffe and Willard (2006) contend, "proficiency involves more than academic performance and test scores" (p. 5). They believe skills that lead to proficiency in the workplace and as adults are also necessary.

What does the continuum of services look like in more affluent areas or other states? How can we overcome existing attitudes and barriers to provide more equitable services to students with disabilities? How do parents feel about the services their child with a disability is receiving? These questions and the answers to them hold implications for special education policies.

Finally, issues that affect special education teachers should be addressed. Peterson (2013) says the decline in teacher satisfaction for general educators corresponds to the recent economic crisis and the educational budgetary crunch. He says special education teachers have dealt with the factors caused by this crisis for decades. He further states career rewards stem from student achievement. When faced with barriers to student achievement special educators often lose enthusiasm. These barriers are inadequate training, support, materials, and isolation from colleagues. Administration should encourage all teachers to work together to support a diverse student body. All students should have adequate facilities, teachers and resources.

Recommendations for Further Research

Methodologically, this study presented perspectives of teachers as interpreted through the lens of the researcher. The possibility that my interaction with the informants led them to raise particular issues and to ignore others cannot be ruled out. What was presented in this study was one view of the special education landscape. There were no formal interviews with other stakeholders such as parents and students. It would be interesting to examine the perspectives of these stakeholders and compare that to what the three participants said about special education. I recommend further research be done in this area as this study was limited to a very small population and a very small area of the United States. A study should be done to look at this area in other locations and other states. How can we overcome existing attitudes and barriers to provide more equitable services to students with disabilities? How do parents feel about the services their child with a disability is receiving? Have the outcomes after graduation for students with disabilities improved as a result of these changes?

Studies on curriculum and the results of high stakes testing for students with disabilities should be ongoing to determine whether or not the changes that have been made in our state are having the desired effect, not only for students with disabilities but also for regular education students. If it is our desire to produce students who can think and solve problems, are we still teaching curriculum designed to prepare students to do these things? PL 94-142 requires instruction for students with disabilities should be individualized. Studies should be conducted to determine if this is actually taking place.

Special education services have changed considerably in some areas such as curriculum and delivery model, but are still the same in others such as attitudes about where services for students with disabilities should take place and what those services should look like. In spite of the best intentions of PL 94-142, IDEA and NCLB there remains resistance towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. This is due in part to sanctions, real or perceived, for teachers who fail to make educational gains with students with disabilities and also because the school culture is steeped in tradition and traditionally students with disabilities were outsiders. The conflict between IDEA and NCLB does not help educators come to a consensus about best practices for students with disabilities. However, as issues and conflicts in teaching and educating students with disabilities are identified and examined we have the ability to keep what is working and strengthen or abandon what is not. We can move forward with a positive intent for all students not just those with disabilities.

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Appendix A: Superintendent Approval

LOWNDES COUNTY SCHOOLS

Home of the Vikings

1592 Norman Drive • Valdosta, Georgia 31601 • 229-245-2250 • FAX 229-245-2255

Sara Lazari
slazari@lowndes.k12.ga.us

September 9, 2011

Dear Ms. Lazari:

This letter serves as permission for you to conduct research with Lowndes County School System for your doctoral dissertation through Valdosta State University. You have requested permission to look at school policy in the area of special education and to interview current and /or retired teachers from the Lowndes County School System.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study will be to look historically (twentieth and twenty-first centuries) at federal, state and local school legislation and policy regarding special education and document the accounts and experiences of teachers who have taught during this 30 year period.

Procedures: The investigative procedures will include looking at local school system policy for this time period and interviewing teachers. The interviews will be transcribed and included in the dissertation. Participation is voluntary and all information will be kept confidential.

I agree to give Sara E. Lazari permission to conduct research in Lowndes County School System.

E. Steve Smith
Signature

9/12/11
Date

Working Together For Excellence Every Day

Your Future ... Our Mission. Imagine the Possibilities!

VALDOSTA CITY SCHOOLS

Our vision is to prepare students to pursue infinite possibilities for the future.

Office of the Superintendent

Sara Lazari
slazari@lowndes.k12.ga.us

August 31, 2011

Dear Ms. Lazari:

This letter serves as permission for you to conduct research with the Valdosta City School system for your doctoral dissertation through Valdosta State University. You have requested permission to look at school policy in the area of special education and to interview current and/or retired teachers from the Valdosta City School System.

I understand the purpose and the procedures as outlined by you in the information below:
Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study will be to look historically (twentieth and twenty-first centuries) at federal, state and local school legislation and policy regarding special education and document the accounts and experiences of teachers who have taught during this 30 year period.

Procedures: The investigative procedures will include looking at local school system policy for this time period and interviewing teachers. The interviews will be transcribed and included in the dissertation. Participation is voluntary and all information will be kept confidential.

I agree to give Sara E. Lazari permission to conduct research in the Valdosta City School System.

Willie O. Cone
Signature

8-31-11
Date

The mission of Valdosta City Schools is quality teaching and learning, resulting in superior performance for all.

1204 Williams Street • P.O. Box 5407 • Valdosta, GA 31603-5407
[p] 229.333.8500 [f] 229.247.7757

Appendix B: Internal Review Board Approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-02721-2011 **INVESTIGATOR:** Sara Lazari

PROJECT TITLE: A historical analysis of Special Education legislation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: Narratives from Special Education teachers on the effects of Special Education legislation in the classroom

DETERMINATION:

☑ This research protocol is exempt from Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category(ies) 2. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

☐ Exemption of this research protocol from Institutional Review Board oversight is pending. You may **not** begin your research until you have addressed the following concerns/questions and the IRB has formally notified you of exemption. You may send your responses to irb@valdosta.edu.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:

Although not a requirement for exemption, the following suggestions are offered by the IRB Administrator to enhance the protection of participants and/or strengthen the research proposal. If you make any of these suggested changes to your protocol, please submit revisions so that IRB has a complete protocol on file.

Barbara H. Gray Date: 9/23/11
Barbara H. Gray, IRB Administrator

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

cc: Dr. Karla Hull (Dean - COE)
Dr. Julia Reffel (Advisor)

Appendix C: Consent to Participate

Valdosta State University

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to volunteer to participate in a qualitative research project entitled A Historical Study of Special Education Legislation in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries: A Narrative Study of Special Education Teachers' Perspectives on the Effects of this Legislation in the Classroom. This research project is being conducted by Sara E. Lazari, a student in the Educational Leadership Department at Valdosta State University. The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask the researcher any questions you have to help you understand this project and your possible participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. Please read this carefully and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of the study is to document your accounts and experiences as a special education teacher during the last twenty to thirty years. Some of the major legislation that will be discussed is the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)(P.L. 94-142) and the subsequent amendment's to this act and then the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. This information will be used to complete a dissertation for an Ed.D. Degree.

Procedures: The investigative procedures will include interviews which will be tape recorded, questionnaires, and possibly any personal documentation you have kept. These interviews will take place at a place of your choosing and should last no more than an hour at a time. There will be approximately 3 to 5 interview contacts per person as consistent with a narrative research design. The entire interview process should take part over the period of one semester or two semesters.

Possible Risks or Discomfort: Although there are no known risks associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks.

Potential Benefits: Although you will not benefit directly from this research, you participation will help the researcher gain additional understanding of special education.

Costs and Compensation: There are no costs to you and there is no compensation (no money, gifts, or services) other than my sincere thanks, for your participation in this research.

Assurance of Confidentiality: Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information. The information collected from you will be used to compile elaborated notes and develop narratives that will be used to complete the dissertation. Unless you provide express written authorization, at no time will your name be used in the study. Pseudonyms will be used to report data used collected from all participants. Only information that you agree to will be included in the study. All transcripts and audiotapes will be kept in a locked cabinet. These will be destroyed later by me.

Voluntary Participation: You decision to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you agree now to participate and change your mind later, you are free to leave the study. You may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Your decision not to participate at all or to stop participating at any time in the future will not have any effect on any rights you have or any services you are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University.

Information Contact: Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Sara E. Lazari at 245-7501 or selazari@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of

research participants. If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Agreement to Participate: The research project and my role in it have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, I am indicating that I am 18 years of age or older. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study: _____ Yes _____ No

Mailing Address: _____

e-mail Address: _____

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____

Signature of Participant Date

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for the Narrative Study

I will start with background information in the first interview.

1. What is your family background? For example is your family originally from Valdosta? Did you grow up in this area?
2. Where did you receive your training? What is/are your degree(s), certifications?
3. How did you become a special education teacher? What led you into the field?
4. Where and how long did you teach?
5. What grades and subjects? What disabilities did you serve?

Second interview will be to have them tell their story. Specific questions will be used if needed.

6. Describe what you did as a special education teacher.
7. What was a typical day like when you first started teaching?
8. What was a typical day like the year you decided to retire?
9. What was the focus of the curriculum when you first started?
10. What was the focus of the curriculum when you retired?
11. How did the re-authorization of PL 94-142 affect your classroom practices (mainstreaming, least restrictive environment)?
12. How did NCLB influence your classroom practices (accountability, inclusion, curriculum)?
13. Did you ever feel you were treated differently because you were a special education teacher instead of a regular education teacher?
14. What was your biggest reward as a teacher?

15. What was your biggest challenge?

16. What influenced you to stay in the field of special education?

The third contact will be to have them read and reflect on their story.

17. Is there anything else you would like to add? Is there anything I haven't covered that you would like to add?

18. Do you feel that this captures your teaching experience? Why or why not?

Appendix E: Coded Text from Linda's Story

Coded Text from Linda's Story

Text segment	coding
I was born and raised in Valdosta	local/southern
I helped with a neighbor's son who was handicapped	early interaction w/PWD
I guess it stems from helping the neighbor's child	decision to teach sped
I attended Valdosta State College	college
Taught 31 years	years taught
I taught at the old Lomax Pinevale school	local school sytem
Self-contained classroom on campus of Elementary school	first job/self-contained
We did abcs , colors, shapes, music, art and lots of language lessons	curriculum
We did not have a curriculum in those days. Two lead teachers developed one and the focus was on life skills. I built mine around theirs.	curriculum
We ate lunch with the training center.	isolation
IEPs were done by hand in those days.	IEPs
We did home visits	home visits
I went to South Street	self-contained
I remember during this time we started going to regular campuses for "mainstreaming"	mainstreaming
This could be difficult because	difficult
I enjoyed my time at South Street	positive feeling
We had more freedom to do things	freedom
Field trips and Special Olympics	activities
We were looked at different	challenge
We had to go to age appropriate campuses	changing regulations
CPES was nice because it was self-contained	positive feeling/self-contained
We were usually in the smallest room	challenge/facility
Field trips in the community	mainstreaming/freedom
QCCs	curriculum changes
I got interrelated and later early childhood	requirements/highly qualified
At this point in my career the focus was completely on academics	curriculum changes
GAA started	testing requirements
I liked it when you could incorporate both aspects.	Curriculum
biggest reward	seeing student progress people I worked with

biggest challenge	bad facilities treated differently
At first we were more intent on teaching life skills	change over time
State mandated testing and academics became more important than giving the students what they needed for life.	change over time
I retired because of these changes	reason for retiring
I felt I was meant to teach special education	reason for remaining

Appendix F: Coded Text from Susan's Story

Coded Text from Susan's Story

Text segment	coding
I was born and raised in Jacksonville, FL	southern/urban
I knew I wanted to be a teacher when I was seven	early decision
two summer jobs with students with LD	early experience w/PWD
I attended college at VSC	college
My degree was in EMR/TMR	degree
Taught 31 years	years taught
I went back to earn certification for Interrelated	regulation changes
First job at Westside	local school/self-contained
Moved to LHS	regulation change/age approp
Special Olympics	activities
Curriculum in beginning was basic language, math and life skills	curriculum
we had no books to begin with	curriculum
no cap on number of students	class size
In the early days of mainstreaming…	mainstreaming
We began one collaborative biology class	collaboration
This class worked so well…	positive feeling/collaboration
I went through training for RVI	job change
My day began with…	job duties
I went back and added home ec	regulation change/highly qualified
It was very stressful	challenge/highly qualified
Changing rules and regs always meant more paperwork	challenge/regulation changes
My role change…	challenge/paperwork/expectations
By the time I retired the students were different	challenge/difference
I would have stayed in teaching longer but the atmosphere was too different	challenge/reason for retiring
biggest reward	positive feeling/student success
biggest challenge	changing rules and regs
I stayed in sped because I could see progress	positive feeling/reason for staying

Appendix G: Coded Text from Betty's Story

Coded Text from Betty's Story

Text segment	coding
I was raised in Arlington, Ga	rural/southern
I volunteered there in the summers when I was 16	early experience w/PWD
That experience influenced me to become A special education teacher	influence
I received my training from VSC	college
Taught 25 years/BSS 6 yrs	years taught
I got my first job at South Street	local school system/self-contained
It was a good place to work	positive feeling
Field trips and Special Olympics	activities
We had everything for those children	positive feeling/facilities
We taught life skills	curriculum
We all had teacher aids until they passed the law that they had to have a high school diploma many lost their jobs	regulation changes
We had to take our students to a regular age appropriate campus	regulation changes/age approp
I took 12 students to that school It was very cruel and I was just Doing my job	challenge/different
Not everyone helped and they looked at us like it was contagious	challenge/different
I loved CPES when I first got there	positive feeling/self-contained
We did not have a formal curriculum	curriculum
We did not have to mainstream when I was there	mainstreaming
I worked for Lowndes Alt School	job change
Best job I ever had	positive feeling/self-contained
We were like family	positive feeling/co-workers
I had to get interrelated on my certificate	regulation change
We used computers	curriculum
I took a job as the behavior interventionist in the city school system	job change
Also inclusion bothers me	challenge/regulation change
It was sad to me that they made these children go to regular classes when they were scared or upset or couldn't do the work	challenge/inclusion
biggest reward	helping students
biggest challenge	lack of support from admin
I retired because of the politics	challenge/retirement

I stayed in special education because	
I loved it	positive feeling/reason for remaining
I guess God just said I needed to be in Special education	positive feeling/reason for remaining