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Special Educators in the Itinerant Model: A Phenomenological Study of Factors Associated with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teachers' Job Satisfaction

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Special Educators in the Itinerant Model: A Phenomenological Study of Factors Associated with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teachers' Job Satisfaction

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

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The dissertation of Angela Sorrem Gray is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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Dedication

For CAS.

Epigraph

Deaf people can do anything hearing people can do except hear.

I. King Jordan

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Special Educators in the Itinerant Model: A Phenomenological Study of Factors Associated with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teachers' Job Satisfaction

by

Angela Sorrem Gray

Doctor of Education in Education Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2023
California State University, San Marcos, 2023

Professor Joni Kolman, Chair

The number of deaf and hard of hearing students served in an itinerant capacity in recent years has steadily increased. As a result, school districts have increased need for an itinerant teacher workforce that is engaged, satisfied, and committed. However, while research tells us a good deal about special educators' job satisfaction, research tells us relatively little about deaf and hard of hearing itinerant teachers' job satisfaction. A variety of factors affect itinerants' job satisfaction, including how they support students, how they structure their time, the number of students served, type of leadership and level of supervisory support, and the politics and cultural factors they must navigate at school sites. This literature highlights the barriers and supports that

itinerant teachers experience in their quest to provide effective services for deaf and hard of hearing students. The phenomenological study, informed by ecological systems theory, explored the experiences of itinerant teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing and was designed to understand the personal and organizational practices and policies that affect their job satisfaction. It included 20 individual interviews and a focus group with itinerant teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing from school districts and local education agencies across the country. The study identified ways that itinerant teachers feel engaged and committed, as well as the conditions that promote dissatisfaction.

Chapter One: Introduction

Deaf education has gone through a transformation in recent decades. The imagined scenario of a class of six deaf youngsters signing away at the helm of a Teacher of the Deaf is no longer. Rather, the average student with hearing loss attends school in their neighborhood, often learning alongside typically hearing peers, attending as the only student with hearing loss in their school, and affectionately deemed in the literature "a solitaire" (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2006, p. 99). In 1999, a deaf educator stated, "The percentage of time that I spend directly working with students decreases as the years go on and as philosophies change" (Yarger & Luckner, 1999, p. 310). This quote simply describes the ongoing shift as deaf education abandons its rich history of segregated and specialized placements and moves toward inclusive educational programming in general education (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Foster & Cue, 2009; Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013).

The most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education reports that over 87% of deaf and hard of hearing students are educated in a general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Deaf education has changed and the question begs to be asked: how does this affect the teachers? This shift has immense implications for the itinerant teacher for deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students. A DHH itinerant teacher is a traveling teacher that provides special education services, through either direct instruction or consultation, to students with hearing loss across multiple school sites (Antia & Rivera, 2016). In a more inclusive setting, teachers of the deaf may have less direct contact with students and spend more time working as a consultant to general education teachers. The change in a DHH teacher's role has implications for their job satisfaction as they navigate issues of isolation, role ambiguity, and feelings of ineffectiveness (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Foster & Cue, 2009; Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013).

For the purposes of this dissertation, DHH describes students with a range of hearing loss and communication modality preferences. The hearing loss may include one or both ears and range from mild hearing loss to profound. Communication modalities fall on a spectrum, ranging from listening and verbal communication to a full-time use of visual, signed language. This definition of DHH is in line with the majority of states' eligibility criteria for special education. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), deafness, hard of hearing, and deaf-blindness are considered low-incidence disabilities (IDEA, 2004). A low-incidence disability is considered a disability that includes fewer than one percent of students receiving special education services (El Dorado Charter SELPA, 2017). DHH students are considered to have low-incidence disabilities as they make up just 1.2% of students with disabilities served under IDEA Part B (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Teachers of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

DHH teachers, like teachers of students with other low incidence disabilities, tend to serve students in an itinerant capacity, meaning they work with students of all ages (birth to high school) at the students' neighborhood school rather than students being transported to a specialized program (Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013). This service model may involve a high level of direct teaching to students, or may be entirely consultative in nature, where the itinerant teacher has a caseload of schools and primarily supports the classroom teacher and other personnel who work with the student (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). While itinerant teaching is not a new model, it has indisputably risen in prominence as more students with low incidence disabilities are participating in general education settings (Johnson, 2013). This can be attributed to technological advances that result in more parents choosing spoken language over manual language, the DHH teacher shortage, and parent preference for keeping children in their

neighborhood schools (Johnson, 2013; American Association for Employment in Education, 2020).

Indeed, the number of DHH students attending their neighborhood school continues to rise, with the majority of students in regular education settings 87% of the time (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Over half of DHH students receiving services in the general education classroom are the only students with hearing loss in their school, creating often overlooked implications for the child's social and emotional development (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2006). This shift in educational placement, combined with a lack of research on what works in itinerant teaching, brings new challenges for district administrators, teachers, and families. Itinerant teachers are relied on by school staff to bring clarity to a student population that is often misunderstood or whose needs are underestimated (Miller, 2014). As findings from this dissertation will describe, large caseloads, role ambiguity, and a lack of administrator understanding impact itinerant teachers' feelings toward their work.

Itinerant teachers are uniquely positioned to contribute to positive student outcomes. They deliver instruction, typically one-on-one, in academic and non-academic areas, most commonly reading, writing, and self-advocacy (Antia & Rivera, 2016). The itinerant teacher covers instructional areas not routinely addressed by other education professionals, specifically study skills, assistive technology, and social skills, with instruction delivered through methodologies best suited for DHH learners (Antia & Rivera, 2016). With many districts moving toward a consultation model for DHH students, the itinerant teacher has increasing responsibility for helping the IEP team understand and implement the accommodations, curricular modifications, and instructional strategies that help students with hearing loss benefit from their educational program.

The itinerant teacher has a sphere of influence that exceeds direct teaching time with the student. While itinerant teachers may not deliver the quantity of direct teaching that students receive from their general education or special education resource teachers, they interact with a set of students over the course of years. The relationship that develops between a student with hearing loss and their itinerant teacher often develops throughout the child's education, guiding the student through transitions that span from early intervention through high school graduation. This partnership has effects that transcend academic outcomes, specifically the child's self-efficacy and ability to advocate for their educational access (Yarger & Luckner, 1999).

Statement of the Problem

DHH teachers' lack of satisfaction is due to a variety of factors unique to deaf education. DHH teacher training programs have focused on preparing DHH teachers for self-contained classroom teaching positions, not itinerant teaching positions (Johnson, 2013; Miller, 2000; Yarger & Luckner, 1999). Teacher preparation programs are out of date with the current job market and have caused DHH teachers to report that they feel underprepared for their itinerant roles (Luckner & Howell, 2002). They may enter the profession with the expectation that they will be working with students in a specialized class for DHH children, only to find that itinerant work is their only employment option (Dolman, 2010; Johnson, 2013; Yarger & Luckner, 1999). Further, many DHH teachers initially pursued their line of work because of an interest in sign language, a skill that is no longer regularly used in DHH teaching positions (Miller, 2000). As a result, there is a mismatch between the type of training DHH teachers receive, the type of work they are expected to do after completing the training program, and the expectations teacher graduates have about their employment options (Dolman, 2010). As a result of this mismatch, DHH teachers are among the highest needed teachers in special education, rated as having a

"considerable shortage" on a survey of school districts from the American Association for Employment in Education (2020, p. 7). DHH teachers exit teaching at higher rates than general education teachers due to a variety of factors such as job stressors, including compassion fatigue, work overload, and a lack of resources (Kennon & Patterson, 2016; Luckner & Hanks, 2003).

The job satisfaction of teachers of DHH students is a complex, multifactor issue. The research has found that a teacher's job satisfaction influences how likely they are to remain in teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Nationally, up to half of the special education teachers in the United States leave the profession within five years, a rate significantly higher than in general education (Tyler & Brunner, 2014). Like general and special education teachers, these itinerant teachers' job satisfaction influences their retention in the field (Luckner & Hanks, 2003). Although there have been significant increases of DHH students nationwide, the number of DHH teachers has remained the same (Johnson, 2004). A steady decline in DHH teacher preparation programs since the 1980s has only exacerbated this shortage (Dolman, 2010). Although we do not have current data on this, it is generally accepted that this issue has persisted.

An itinerant teacher's level of job satisfaction affects their retention, engagement, and the overall efficacy of the Individual Education Program (IEP) team (Luckner & Dorn, 2017). Without a high level of job satisfaction, there are far-reaching consequences for DHH students' educational, social, and emotional outcomes. Poor working conditions for teachers, a primary barrier to job satisfaction, have dire consequences for students, including reduced effort, lowered expectations, and a lack of engagement (Gersten, et al., 2001; Harrison et al., 2023). Low levels of job satisfaction have been shown to result in high teacher turnover, increased costs to school districts, disruption to the organizational culture, and a less committed workforce (Antoniou et al., 2022; Boe, et al., 1997; Gersten, et al., 2001). Kennon and Patterson (2016) also found that

"DHH students are impacted directly by the stress and burnout of their educators as well as by the inconsistency in instruction created by high rates of turnover" (p. 1). The shortage of DHH teachers has forced some states to hire teachers that do not have the necessary experience or credentials (Johnson, 2004).

Little is known about the factors that influence the job satisfaction of a DHH teacher serving in an itinerant capacity; however, literature on the job satisfaction of special education teachers can inform our efforts to understand DHH teacher job satisfaction. Special education teachers experience less job satisfaction than their general education counterparts (Stempien & Loeb, 2002). In addition, there are numerous studies showing a large discrepancy in retention and burnout rates between general and special educators, both of which are highly correlated with job satisfaction (Gersten et al., 2001; Billingsley, 2004a, Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). An examination on the literature of DHH teachers specifically finds that in the last 20 years, two studies have been conducted to assess DHH teacher job satisfaction, both surveys, and neither focuses on itinerant teachers specifically (Luckner & Dorn, 2017; Luckner & Hanks, 2003). Since Luckner and Hank's study of itinerant teachers was published in 2003, the educational landscape of itinerant teaching has changed considerably. These changes include a change in the students themselves, who are more ethnically diverse than ever before, have more residual hearing, communicate via listening and spoken language, are educated with hearing peers in general education, and are more likely to have additional disabilities (Johnson, 2013). Further, deaf education research has focused on students with the singular disability of deafness, however, nearly half of deaf students have additional disabilities, a number that is growing (Guardino, 2015).

I believe that this inquiry into the teacher's perception of their career--particularly those teachers who were trained for classroom teaching and began their career in classroom teaching--is largely missing from the literature on deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) teacher job satisfaction. Missing from the literature is also an examination of how the scope and context of the itinerant teacher's role--and how that role may vary depending on regional practices, district resources, organizational capacity, and teacher shortages--results in positive or negative job satisfaction (Dolman, 2010; Howley, et al., 2017).

It is urgent that itinerant teacher's job satisfaction be examined to determine the factors that lead to a high level of satisfaction. If we do not understand the factors involved in the itinerant teacher's level of job satisfaction, we are missing an opportunity to create stability and engagement in the DHH teacher workforce. A greater understanding of job satisfaction may also lead to an improvement in working conditions. The success of students with hearing loss depends on our collective understanding of barriers and supports for the DHH itinerant teacher's level of job satisfaction.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This phenomenological qualitative study examines the experiences of DHH teachers who work in an itinerant capacity in public school settings. The research has argued that job satisfaction is necessary for teachers' mental health and emotional availability for students (Platsidou, 2010). There is research on how the itinerant model impacts students, but very little on how the itinerant model affects teachers (Norman & Jamieson, 2015). Obtaining an introspective look at how itinerant teachers view their work can provide crucial insight into how to provide more satisfying work experiences for itinerant teachers and how the itinerant model can be structured to support positive experiences. As an itinerant teacher who has worked in a

variety of settings in deaf education (self-contained classroom, early childhood intervention, resource room, and itinerant teacher) in several states, I use my experience as a lens to unpack the perceptions itinerant teachers have about their work. This study seeks to answer:

1. How do deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers describe the factors that shape their job satisfaction?
    1. In what ways, if at all, do the contexts of their work shape this satisfaction?
2. In what ways do the deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers' caseloads shape their job satisfaction?
3. In what ways, and to what degree, do deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers perceive and experience the various ecosystems in which they work?
    1. How do the ecosystems in which they interact shape their job satisfaction?

Theoretical Framework

Itinerant teachers work in a variety of ecosystems that shape how they navigate and experience their workplace. Brofenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory (EST) serves as a model that I built upon to frame my research. In his original conceptualization, Brofenbrenner placed the child at the center of four systems, which are organized by order of the level of direct influence on the child, from most direct to least direct. There are four main layers in his original conceptualization: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The ecosystem is concerned with the processes of human development and using these processes to explain the connection between contextual factors and individual factors.

Rather than Brofenbrenner's original concept of placing the child at the center of practice, I build upon his theory by placing the DHH itinerant teacher at the center, with a focus

on the aspects of their work that most prominently shape what they do and how they feel. My adaptation of this framework places the DHH itinerant teacher at the forefront, with a focus on the various roles they play within a complex network of social and cultural practices. Itinerant teachers work in multiple systems simultaneously, requiring the itinerant teacher to be adept at navigating multiple organizations' political and cultural systems. EST was used as a lens for breaking down the complexity of data gathered from participants in the study and provided a guide for determining how participants respond to various influences in their environment. I focused heavily on the microsystems that DHH itinerants directly interact with, including schools, classrooms, and the DHH program office. The teacher's mesosystem, which involves the relationships from their multiple microsystems is a critical piece for analyzing the strength of interactions among teachers, administrators, students, other service providers, and families. These relationships can influence a teacher's feelings toward their work. The broader exosystem include factors that the teacher does not cause or affect, which may include school district consortiums, school district central offices, special education departments, health departments, audiology clinics and hospital settings. In each of these spaces the itinerant generally operates as a visitor, navigating a variety of policies and bureaucracies. Lastly, the teacher's macrosystem includes the various cultures and subcultures that the teacher operates in. For the DHH teacher, this may include Deaf Community Cultural Wealth, inclusion, ableism, audism, medical models of disability, and socio-cultural models of disability.

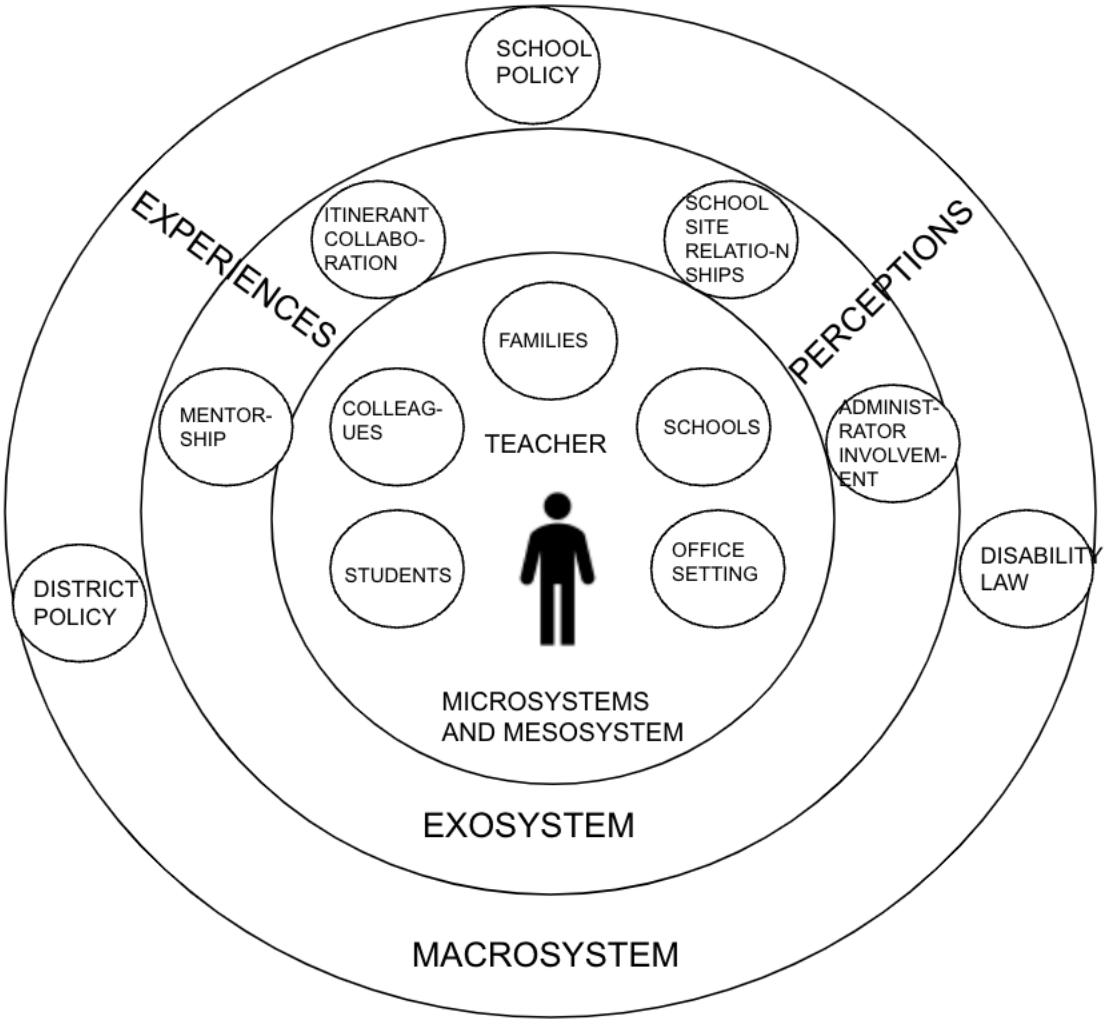

Figure 1. The context of deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teacher's ecosystem

Itinerant teachers work in multiple systems simultaneously, navigating multiple organizations' political and cultural systems that all may have an impact on the itinerant's job satisfaction. Each of these systems contains a complex web of relationships and has their own values and level of influence. By looking at DHH itinerant teachers' experiences in this way, I focus on how DHH itinerant teachers participate in their world and navigate the complex dynamics of the various contexts in which they work. This theory lends itself to examining job

satisfaction because the research on job satisfaction indicates that there are aspects solely related to the individual, such as the teacher's mental health, physical health, personal relationships, and life experiences, in addition to all the various institutional factors that play a role in itinerant teaching. These influences are multi-directional, affected by interactions within the various systems and the systems' unique contexts.

Positionality

My general observation is that many DHH teachers enter the field because of a personal connection to someone who has hearing loss. My story is no different in that regard—I was motivated to become a DHH teacher because my sister is Deaf (use of a capital *D* indicates that the person identifies as culturally Deaf) and I have the utmost respect and admiration for the service providers who helped her to achieve her greatest potential. My inspiration for embarking on this research held a similar motivation—I am dedicated to the profession and want to see our field reach its greatest potential. As a former classroom teacher, resource room teacher, and current itinerant teacher for DHH students, I feel a personal stake in understanding how DHH teachers can thrive. Through this research, I sought to learn how our profession can achieve its highest level of satisfaction so that our teachers can reach optimal commitment, well-being, and effectiveness.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored the shift in the educational landscape for students with hearing loss and the shift in roles and responsibilities for the teachers who serve these students. I described the failure of research to date to investigate how this shift in educational models has influenced itinerant DHH teachers' job satisfaction. By ignoring these teachers in the literature,

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are failing to understand an important subset of employees. Understanding positive job satisfaction may allow individuals in LEAs to identify the barriers and supports that are unique to this group of teachers.

In the next chapter, I will describe the literature on teacher job satisfaction, looking holistically at job satisfaction for educators across domains. From there, I will narrow my scope to look at job satisfaction research specific to special educators, followed by deaf educators, and lastly the scarce research that has examined itinerant DHH teachers. I will look at the itinerant role as introduced in this chapter, suggesting that the variability in implementation of the itinerant role creates a challenge for drawing conclusions about job satisfaction in an itinerant role.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of DHH itinerant teachers, obtain insight into the factors and working conditions that produce more positive experiences for itinerant teachers, and obtain insight into how the various workplace contexts can be structured to support positive work experiences. This chapter provides an overview of the research on general education, special education, and deaf education teacher job satisfaction to help answer the research questions:

1. How do deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers describe the factors that shape their job satisfaction?
    1. In what ways, if at all, do the contexts of their work shape this satisfaction?
2. In what ways do the deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers' caseloads shape their job satisfaction?
3. In what ways, and to what degree, do deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers perceive and experience the various ecosystems in which they work?
    1. How do the ecosystems in which they interact shape their job satisfaction?

This review examines the factors that contribute to unfavorable work conditions for teachers and establishes the premise that poor special education teacher job satisfaction negatively affects their retention in the workplace. It covers job satisfaction in education holistically, followed by research examining job satisfaction in special education, and concluding with the limited research available on job satisfaction in deaf education. The research on job satisfaction focuses largely on general educators but can serve as a primer for understanding job

satisfaction for special educators, including teachers working in highly specialized areas such as deaf education. This literature review examines the factors specific to special educators, as well as their unique roles and responsibilities, to understand aspects of job satisfaction that are divergent from general education. In addition, factors specific to teaching in the COVID-19 pandemic are covered.

Further, research on special education retention and attrition is explored due to the correlation between job satisfaction and teacher retention (Jentsch et al., 2023; Ker, et al., 2022; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). There is sparse research on the contributing factors that lead to positive or negative job satisfaction for DHH teachers. In addition, much of the literature on itinerant teachers is from the late 1990's and early 2000's. Due to this lack of research, the following examination of job satisfaction characteristics for the special education teaching profession overall will act as a primer for understanding DHH teachers' experiences today.

Theoretical Framework: Ecological Systems Theory

Brofenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory offers a constructivist framework for examining the various contexts in which teachers work by viewing the individual as active participants in their environment. In his view, the individual (and in the context of this research, the DHH itinerant teacher) continually adapts to their changing environments, or *ecological systems*, to develop and respond to the system of settings in which they live and work. Brofenbrenner (1979) uses an analogy of nested Russian dolls, which puts the individual at the center, and each larger doll representing the various levels of a system. His theory helps to illustrate how a change in one part of the ecosystem affects other parts and how the system functions overall.

The first layer, the *microsystem*, are the systems that the teacher is directly part of, in which they exist in and interact with. Each person's microsystem is unique and made up of the individual's activities, roles, and relationships. The *mesosystems* are the interactions and relationships between the microsystems that contain the teacher. The *exosystem* includes the interactions and relationships that may or may not directly include the teacher but directly influence the teacher's microsystem. Lastly, macrosystems describe the contexts that create the culture of the teacher's environment. Influences are multidirectional, meaning a change in one part of the ecosystem affects other parts and how the system functions overall. This is important to consider when examining DHH itinerant teacher's job satisfaction, because no two itinerants' experiences will be identical. The environment that a DHH itinerant works in shapes their feelings toward their work, which in turn, changes their relationship with their work.

Use of this framework to study teachers' experiences through the lens of interrelationships between settings afforded insight into how teachers, and specifically DHH itinerant teachers, are influenced by the various contexts in which they work. This may include classrooms, school districts, students, the office they share with DHH colleagues, in addition to personal contexts such as family and friends and how they balance their work with competing personal demands. Itinerant teachers must adapt to the ecosystem they are in, which includes the many cultures and unwritten rules that exist within these ecosystems.

Brofenbrenner (1979) also speaks of "molar activities" which are larger, meaningful activities that define an individual's role (p. 45). In the case of itinerant teachers, this may include direct teaching to students, collaborating with other professionals, developing their professional repertoire through training and evaluation, and supporting the implementation of accommodations and assistive technologies. However, research in special education also

suggests that teachers deal with role ambiguity, which Brofenbrenner (1979) argues can lead to conflict and competing demands (Billingsley, 2004a).

Power brings on an interesting dimension to the relationships in the ecosystem. It refers to who is dominant in directing activities and influence in a relationship. This dimension is particularly relevant for itinerant teachers, who may be employed through a consortium or private practice model, as opposed to by the school district that they are working in and making recommendations to. Brofenbrenner makes the case that a positive affect (the feelings involved) leads to high reciprocity (give and take of the transaction), which leads to more equally balanced power in a relationship. The opposite is true for a negative affect, which can lead to unbalanced power. As outsiders at a school site, it could be argued that DHH itinerant teachers experience less reciprocity and more negative affect when examined from Brofenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

Teachers, like all workers, want to work in an environment that is motivating, provides a feeling of accomplishment, and a sense of contribution (Duggah & Ayaga, 2014). This requires settings and activities across various microsystems that are "complex, challenging, and satisfying" (Shelton, 2019, p. 89). Examining the various contexts is critical for understanding itinerant teachers' satisfaction and experiences. I am building on Brofenbrenner's EST to contextualize the factors that lead to DHH itinerant teacher satisfaction and better inform the strategies and supports that lead to more positive work experiences. Using a lens of EST may help explain discrepancies in the itinerant teacher experience across individual caseloads, school districts, and regions of the country.

Teacher Job Satisfaction

For the purpose of this dissertation, I used Duggah & Ayaga's (2014) definition of job satisfaction: "…how content an individual is with his job. Simply stated, job satisfaction refers to the attributes and feelings people have about their work. Positive and favourable attitudes towards the job indicate job satisfaction." (p. 12). A teacher's job satisfaction, similar to employee satisfaction, can be defined as the positive or negative assessment that they have of their work and the impact that evaluation has on their emotional state (Aldridge & Fraser, 2015). Employees need to believe that they are making a genuine contribution, that their work is meaningful, and that what they are doing is important (Duggah & Ayaga, 2014).

It is a worthy societal goal for teachers, like all workers, to find satisfaction in their work; the research suggests this is often not the case. The last twenty years in education has created a political environment that has been harsh to teachers, from recent limits on collective bargaining to legislation that reforms teacher tenure (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Moore, 2012). These increased demands have created added stress and pressure to an occupation already rife with workplace instability (Glazer, 2018). Teachers' effects on the school community cannot be understated, and their satisfaction has implications for the morale of their school communities, the workplace climate, and school performance (Hester et al., 2020; Moore, 2012). Research indicates that teachers with higher levels of job satisfaction have greater wellbeing, better classroom management skills, better student-teacher relationships, and provide more instructional support to students (Harrison et al., 2023). In recent years, teacher turnover has accelerated, which can be attributed to student behaviors and classroom management issues, low pay, and a lack of administrative support, particularly for Teachers of Color (Baker et al., 2022). Regular feedback, autonomy, and social support are also factors that make a significant impact on teachers' level of job satisfaction (Jentch et al., 2022).

Psychological Challenges Impacting Job Satisfaction

A teacher's emotional well-being impacts their level of job satisfaction. Teachers may experience dissatisfaction and depersonalization when they do not feel like they are making a difference. Depersonalization happens when a teacher develops a negative and cynical attitude towards their students, colleagues, or students' parents, which results in the teacher emotionally distancing themselves from these various groups (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Shen et al., 2015;). Dissatisfaction can lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion, which can affect teachers' mental health and well-being (Pedditzi et al., 2021; Platsidou, 2010). Teachers can be highly competent in the classroom and still experience dissatisfaction, burnout, and anxiety (Moe, et al., 2010).

Burnout, in particular, has been shown to be highly correlated with negative job satisfaction (Pedditzi et al., 2021). A meta-analysis of 28 articles and 13 dissertations found that teachers' level of self-efficacy and their support from school personnel were the two biggest contributing factors to teachers' burnout rates (Park & Shin, 2020). A meta-analysis by Madigan & Kim (2021) found that burnout and job satisfaction together accounted for 27% of the variance in intentions to quit teaching. Teacher attrition from burnout, which appears in symptoms such as exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment, has been increasing over time (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

COVID-19 and the Impact on Teacher Satisfaction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought psychological challenges to many genres of workers, and teachers were no exception. Teachers experienced exhaustion, concerns over safety, and concerns for equity in students' learning (Trinidad, 2021). Teachers were forced to adapt and be resilient, while acquiring new teaching strategies to compensate for in-person learning (Rogowska & Meres, 2022). This period caused teachers incredible stress, resulting in anxiety

and depression (Rogowska & Meres, 2022). Teachers, like other workers, had to balance their own families' needs with the pressure of teaching, leading to emotional exhaustion, and mental overload (Rogowska & Meres, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted teachers' satisfaction toward their work, and generally not in a positive way (Jackson, et al., 2022). Teaching online proved to be even more time-consuming than face-to-face instruction, causing teachers to adopt new practices without a transition period or adequate training (Aktan & Toraman, 2022; Li &Yu, 2022). Further, teaching online made it more difficult to develop personal connections with students, which leads to positive well-being and is widely considered to be one of the most satisfying aspects of teaching (Aktan & Toraman, 2022; Rogowska & Meres, 2022). Further, there was a societal perception that teachers put in little time when online teaching (Aktan & Toraman, 2022). Distance education teachers experienced feelings of guilt and shame that they were not optimally educating their students, given the constraints of online learning (Aktan & Toraman, 2022). A recent study found that in-person teachers were more satisfied than fully remote teachers, and teachers working under a hybrid model were the least satisfied of all (Trinidad, 2021).

COVID has not been entirely negative for teachers. Teachers, like other professions, benefitted from a lack of commuting, more accessible professional development, a motivation to develop technologically, and the comfort of working from home (Aktan & Toroman, 2022; Glaveli et al., 2023; Li & Yu, 2022). Teachers developed their digital literacy, their feelings of competence increased, which increased their satisfaction (Li & Yu, 2022). Not surprisingly, teachers who were provided more support and resources had higher feelings of satisfaction while teaching online (Mahmood et al., 2021). For teachers that transitioned to in-person learning, the

teachers' perception of their vulnerability to disease was associated with low satisfaction (Pretorius, et al., 2022). Teachers that perceived a heightened level of risk caused emotional exhaustion and burnout (Pretorius, et al., 2022).

Student and Organizational Implications

As discussed with depersonalization, the job satisfaction of teachers has profound implications for student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2003). The job satisfaction of general educators has implications for teacher turnover and attrition rates, which are highly detrimental to students (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Harrison et al., 2023). Teacher turnover in general education is problematic, with a quarter of beginning teachers leaving before their third year (Chang, 2009). Further, without a positive sense of job satisfaction, teachers may experience disengagement and reduced organizational commitment (Akomolafe & Ogunmakin, 2014).

Poor job satisfaction also affects job performance, effort, and attitude, all of which have a direct impact on student learning (Aldridge & Fraser, 2015). Teachers who are experiencing poor satisfaction and burnout negatively influence students' motivation (Shen, et al., 2015). A study by Mertler (2016) surveyed 9,053 public school teachers in Arizona and found a dissatisfaction rate of 26%, with dissatisfaction being the primary reported reason for the teachers' lack of motivation. In this study, dissatisfaction was referred to as "not happy with the work that they are contractually obligated and dedicated to perform" (Mertler, 2016, p. 43). Various studies indicate that there are a multitude of factors that may explain teachers' lack of job satisfaction. This includes personal factors, such as personality, motivation, self-esteem, and emotional state, as well as situational factors such as task identity, variety and significance, feedback, and autonomy (Akomolafe & Ogunmakin, 2014; Mertler, 2002). Among these factors, task identity,

variety, and autonomy are particularly relevant for special educators, including DHH itinerant teachers. This review probes these concepts in more detail in later sections.

Studies by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010; 2015) looked at working conditions within schools. They examined how the context of the school environment influences teachers' job satisfaction. In their earlier study (2010), they examined how the context of the school environment influences teachers' job satisfaction and found that job satisfaction was positively associated with managerial support, supportive relationships with colleagues, and a sense of belonging. In their later study, Skalvik and Skalvik (2015) conducted qualitative interviews with 30 teachers and expanded on their earlier findings by identifying four main categories as sources of job satisfaction: working with children, task variety, cooperation and teamwork, and autonomy. The teachers in the study found meaning in their work and were motivated to teach because they enjoy working with children, seeing them develop, and feeling a sense of excitement over the unpredictability of the work.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) found a correlation between dissatisfaction and attrition. A teacher's motivation to leave the teaching profession was positively related to emotional exhaustion. This held true across subgroups, including age, gender, and setting (urban or rural). They found that a teacher's feeling of belonging, and level of emotional exhaustion, was significantly related to their level of job satisfaction. In relation, the authors explain "reduced personal accomplishment" as a teacher's feeling that they are "no longer doing a meaningful and important job" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010, p. 1060). The level of belonging, emotional exhaustion, and reduced personal accomplishment that teachers feel are closely tied to the teacher's working conditions. High demands, pressure, and work overload combined with a lack of support are a recipe for burnout and job dissatisfaction. Skalvik and Skalvik's (2015) study

found that the stressors that resulted in dissatisfaction included workload, time pressure, sufficiently differentiating instruction, problematic student behavior, a lack of autonomy, and lack of status. These stressors led to exhaustion and psychosomatic symptoms, reduced accomplishment, and loss of self-efficacy, as well as negative affect and loss of self-esteem.

Impact of Leadership on Job Satisfaction

School and district leaders play a critical role in setting the stage for a satisfied teacher workforce. They can allocate resources that allow teachers to feel supported (Ortan, et al., 2021). In addition, they can implement practices that increase satisfaction and lower stressors. This was shown through a meta-analysis of twelve studies on principal leadership styles and its effect on teachers' job satisfaction. The authors found that when principals moved away from using transactional leadership behaviors (focus on tasks and contingent rewards) to more transformational leadership behaviors (cultivating individual strengths), teachers' job satisfaction increased (Aydin, et al., 2013). According to these authors, a leader is able to demonstrate transformational skills by using their influence to inspire and motivate, focus on the teacher's individuality and strengths, and create an intellectually stimulating school climate. A meta-analysis of 34 studies by Borman and Dowling (2017) and a meta-analysis by Juhji et al. (2022) corroborated Aydin et al.'s (2013) findings and reached similar conclusions regarding leaders' behavior and its impact on teacher satisfaction.

Distributed leadership and using a shared decision-making process has also been shown to substantially improve teachers' job satisfaction (Liu et al., 2021). This is due to a change in how teachers connect, communicate, and collaborate, which results in a stronger school culture (Liu et al., 2021). Further, strong instructional leadership also results in improved teacher self-efficacy, which has been shown to increase teacher satisfaction (Liu et al., 2021; Ostan et al.,

2021). Teachers need to feel like there are clear expectations from their school leaders as well as be provided autonomy in decision making (Maas et al., 2021). Further, when leaders are able to reduce demands and provide resources, teachers tend to experience higher levels of satisfaction (Maas et al., 2021).

Job Satisfaction of Special Education Teachers

Special education teachers' roles and responsibilities are guided by requirements outlined in federal education law. The Education for all Handicapped Children Act, authorized by Congress in 1975 and reauthorized in 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), aims to provide children with disabilities access to a free, appropriate public education through specialized instruction and/or related services, modifications, and accommodations. To qualify for special education services, children must meet eligibility criteria in at least one of 14 eligibility categories. These include Autism, Deafness, Deaf-blindness, Developmental Delay, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Visual Impairment including Blindness (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). Low incidence disability categories are a subset of the 14 eligibility categories and include Hard of Hearing (HH), Deafness (DEAF), Visual Impairment (VI), Orthopedic Impairment (OI), and Deaf-Blindness (DB) and make up the smallest portion of the special education population (El Dorado Charter SELPA, 2017). Federal special education law guides the work of special education teachers, including assessing children for special education services, developing, and implementing the child's Individualized

Education Program (IEP), modifying the general education curriculum, and fostering the inclusion of special education students (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015).

There are a multitude of factors that impact a special educator's level of job satisfaction. Researchers have sought to define these factors in order to create a special education teacher workforce that is committed and sustainable (Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Like general education teachers, there is a clear link between special education teacher attrition and poor job satisfaction (Robinson et al., 2019; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). While working conditions have been cited as the primary reason for special educator attrition, working conditions and teacher satisfaction are highly correlated (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). There has been a shortage of special education teachers since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was passed, enrollment in special education teacher preparation program is at its lowest point, and projections indicate that shortages are growing (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). In fact, the majority of states are experiencing a special education teacher shortage (Robinson et al., 2019). Special education teacher attrition exacerbates the teacher shortage, particularly for high poverty schools (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Special education teacher demographics, qualifications, responsibilities, and forms of support, as outlined in the following subsections, are known factors that affect special education teacher satisfaction and retention (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

Demographic Factors

The literature on special education teacher retention and attrition makes clear that different demographic groups behave differently and have different outcomes. Certain groups of teachers are at higher risk for dissatisfaction, and therefore, attrition. The most prevalent demographic driver is a teacher's age (Conley & You, 2017). Younger special education teachers

report the lowest levels of retention and are also at higher risk of leaving the profession due to unrealistic expectations, difficulty applying what they learned in university coursework, a reluctance to seek help, and difficulty managing new responsibilities (Billingsley, 2004a; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Younger special educators have been found to be "more workaholic than operational" suggesting that younger teachers have the resolve to be dedicated, but may not enjoy the work (Antoniou et al., p. 15, 2022) The literature suggests that young special education teachers need the highest level of support in order to prevent high levels of burnout and improve their likelihood of staying in teaching (Boe et al., 1997; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Theoharis & Fitzpatrick, 2013).

Certifications and Experience

Teacher certification is widely cited as a predictor of a special education teacher's job satisfaction and commitment. Teachers who lack full certification and are teaching on waivers or emergency credentials are more likely to experience professional struggle and leave the profession entirely (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). In contrast, teachers who have had a comprehensive preparation program, including ten or more weeks of student teaching, are more likely to be teaching after their first year (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Experience is another strong indicator of a special education teacher's likelihood of leaving, with teacher turnover decreasing as experience and level of certification increased (Hagaman & Casey, 2018).

In recent years, states have moved toward multi-categorical disability licensure to allow for more flexibility in hiring and placing teachers (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Thus, these individuals may not be equipped to teach students in the disability area that they have been hired to teach (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Billingsley & McLeskey, 2004). Teachers who have

students with varying disabilities in their class, versus the same defined disability tend to be less satisfied, even if the students have similar instructional needs (Aldosiry, 2022). This is also problematic because teachers with low levels of self-efficacy are less likely to be satisfied teachers (Akomolafe & Ogunmakin, 2014; Ortan et al., 2021). Even traditional teacher preparation programs do not commonly prepare special educators for the co-teaching model, frequently used by schools for service delivery, which makes implementation more difficult and decreases job commitment (Billingsley, 2004b). Research shows that teachers who are satisfied have higher levels of organizational commitment and are therefore less likely to leave teaching (Akomolafe & Ogunmakin, 2014).

Working Conditions and Obligations

Variables such as school size, community type (urban, suburban, rural) or region of the country were not found to be explanations for teacher turnover for both general and special educators (Conley & You, 2017; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021; Toropova et al., 2021). However, special educators have been found to be 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession than teachers in general education due to poor working conditions, including paperwork, caseload size, roles, and responsibilities, which are frequently cited as reasons for teacher dissatisfaction (The CEEDAR Center & The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, 2019; Akomolafe & Ogunmakin, 2014; Ostan et al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). In addition, though teacher ethnicity was not shown to be a factor for attrition, special education teachers were more likely to leave schools that served high percentages of low-income, non-White, and/or low achieving students (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Player, et al., 2017). The authors theorized that “teachers who perceive a strong fit between their abilities or needs and the demands of the teaching

profession are likely to be committed to their schools as well" (Player et al., 2017, p. 338). This is plausible considering what the literature suggests about higher levels of self-efficacy correlating with higher levels of satisfaction (Akomolafe & Ogunmakin, 2014).

Special education teachers are significantly more likely to experience lower levels of job satisfaction due to role ambiguity, work overload, and poor job design (Aldosiry, 2022; Kozleski, 2000). These issues result in high levels of teacher stress and decreased levels of commitment (Pretorius, et al. 2022; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). At the forefront of these issues is caseload size. As the teacher's caseload increases, the amount of paperwork and planning increases, resulting in teacher attrition (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). As a result, teachers' attention toward their students' learning decreases and they rely increasingly on paraprofessionals or assistants to deliver instruction (Billingsley, 2007). Further, teachers report feeling overwhelmed by the workload related to state assessments and feel that time requirements for administrative tasks related to state testing reduces the time for student services (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Nance & Calabrese, 2009).

A literature review performed by Billingsley & Bettini (2019) found that paperwork was cited as a major deterrent to special education teaching and a primary reason the author identified for why special educators in urban districts plan to leave teaching. There is a large discrepancy between general educators and special educators, with special education teachers spending significantly more time on administrative paperwork and completing forms than they do on lesson planning (Billingsley, 2004b; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Aside from paperwork being time-consuming, many educators are discouraged by the nature of the paperwork, finding it unnecessary and redundant (Billingsley, 2007; Billinsley & Bettini, 2019). The research makes

clear a strong connection between work overload, high levels of stress, and poor job satisfaction (Hester et al., 2020; Stempien & Loeb, 2002).

The research has found there is variability in a teacher's job satisfaction depending on whether the special educator serves an elementary versus secondary population, as well as variability depending on the disability categories served on their caseload. For example, resource room teachers are least likely to feel exhaustion and lack of accomplishment, two predictors of low job satisfaction (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). This may be attributed to resource room teachers' level of higher level of autonomy in controlling their own schedule as compared to other special educators and general education teachers (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Elementary teachers and teachers of students with learning disabilities, physical/multiple disabilities, and intellectual disabilities were cited as more likely to stay than other disability categories (Billingsley, 2004b). Teachers of students with emotional disabilities are cited as having high turnover, which is likely related to student discipline issues causing burnout (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Cancio, et al., 2014; Toropova et al., 2021). Teachers of students with speech, hearing, or vision impairments have been cited as the most likely to leave because they tend to serve students in an itinerant capacity (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Mclaughlin, et al., 2008).

Teacher Preparation and Support

Beginning special education teachers face challenges during their first few years, including disciplinary issues, conflict with parents, a lack of support, navigating school bureaucracy, understanding the curriculum and standards, special education law, collaborating with other school professionals, and school routines (Billingsley, 2004b; Hester et al., 2020).

Without enough support in all these areas, inexperienced special education teachers are at risk experiencing low job satisfaction. In a survey of 58 special educators in the southwestern United States, only a third of secondary special educators and less than half of elementary special educators believed their district makes a concerted effort to retain special educators (Fish & Stephens, 2010). Further, a teachers' perception of their workload is significantly associated with teacher job satisfaction (Billinsley & Bettini, 2019; Toropova et al., 2021). The research suggests that higher levels of support, through beginning teacher induction programs and/or mentoring, helps new teachers to develop confidence, view their role as manageable, believe they can persevere with students with behavior difficulties, and provide effective instruction (Robinson at al., 2019; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Mentors may serve as role models for how to find satisfaction in challenging teaching situations (Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Despite mentoring being a source of support, recent research suggests that new special educators find time for collaboration with other teachers to be even more valuable than mentoring (Newton et al., 2022).

It is unclear how common specialized induction programs are for special educators versus an induction program in which special and general educators are lumped together. Programs designed specifically for special educators tend to be more effective than induction programs that group special and general educators together (Billingsley, 2007). Informal mentoring may provide a first-year special educator with more problem-specific advice, rather than a formal mentoring program, increasing effectiveness and retention (Vittek, 2015). Peer observation and professional networking are also cited as effective aspects of a special educator induction program (Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Many districts rely on a formal evaluation process for

feedback, however, special education teachers surveyed reported receiving no feedback after formal and informal observations (Benjamin & Black, 2012).

Special educators who are new to teaching are more likely to report having positive job satisfaction when having undergone a strong special education teacher preparation program (Newton et al., 2022; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Within a teacher preparation program, case studies have proven to be an effective research-based approach for teacher preparation. They help prepare future teachers to teach in a variety of environments, gain an understanding of real-world problems, and conceptualize how they can generalize strategies across settings (Luckner & Howell, 2002). Further, they expose novice teachers to different perspectives and help develop interpersonal skills, which serves as a reference for handling a variety of situations (Luckner & Howell, 2002). A strong teacher preparation program results in higher levels of self-efficacy for the special educator (Newton, et al., 2022).

Administrator support is a crucial component of increasing job satisfaction because special educators have reported feeling marginalized, misunderstood, and unappreciated (Billinsley & Bettini, 2019). Teachers that receive higher levels of administrative support are less likely to leave teaching (Aldosiry, 2022). Principals especially can make an impact on a positive school climate, which in turn, increases levels of support among special education teachers and their building colleagues (Benjamin & Black, 2012; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). They accomplish this by creating an inclusive environment for special education students, providing instructional leadership, modeling collaborative leadership, developing organizational processes, and building strong relationships with parents and the community (DiPaola, et al., 2004; Scott et al., 2022). Special educators want principals to support them by monitoring their professional

skills and knowledge, however, they report that principals are lacking the skills needed to do this (DiPaola et al., 2004; Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Newton et al., 2022). This is critical because special education teachers cite a lack of support from their supervisor as a barrier to finding satisfaction in the workplace (Aldosiry, 2022; Benjamin & Black, 2012). Further, a lack of support from district leadership, particularly the special education director, has been cited as a source of dissatisfaction (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

Collegial support also plays a factor in job satisfaction. In a case study of novice special education teachers, the special educators reported a failure to be included in content-area meetings that would hold value for them yet are often required to attend meetings that hold no relevance to their role (Benjamin & Black, 2012). The special educators in the case study found support among their special education colleagues but saw their relationship with general education teachers as more challenging, with interaction only occurring at IEP meetings (Benjamin & Black, 2012). These findings were also reported in a meta-analysis by Billingsley & Bettini (2019) and a study by Robinson et al. (2019). In a qualitative study of special educators, the teachers reported feeling isolation, a lack of support, and a lack of understanding from colleagues in their building (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). Lastly, a district's ability to retain strong paraprofessionals decreased special educator attrition (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

Professional Development and Supports

Professional development has a significant effect on teachers' job satisfaction (Ker et al., 2022; Ostan et al., 2021). Studies on professional development (PD) offerings for special education teachers indicate there is an association between relevant PD and a teacher's job satisfaction **(**Leko & Smith, 2010). More recent research on general education teachers affirms

that teachers who participate in high quality professional development have higher job satisfaction (Toropova et al., 2021). For special educators, professional development specifically related to mitigating work stressors and improving mental well-being has shown to be effective (Hester et al., 2020). Teachers who stay in the profession long-term independently tend to pursue professional development opportunities on their own accord and cite the importance of university teacher training to their professional development (Billingsley, 2004b). While professional development for special educators is important, special educators report that professional development on special education topics for their leadership and general education colleagues is even more impactful to their work than accessing professional development opportunities for themselves (Robinson et al., 2019).

Implications for Districts and Policy Makers

While unsatisfied teachers may continue to teach because they see it as a calling, there are too many downsides to low satisfaction, including poor student outcomes, low organizational commitment, psychological withdrawal, and poor overall job performance, for policy makers to ignore (McGee et al., 2022). The literature suggests that districts can increase satisfaction by providing more administrator support, professional development opportunities, and a clear, realistic job definition for teachers (Fish & Stephens, 2010; McGee et al., 2022). Leaders should identify teachers that are experiencing high levels of dissatisfaction and stress, which may be addressed through training on collaboration, stress management, and coping skills (Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Wang et al., 2022). They should be proactive in identifying stressors and alter the responsibilities or work conditions that most contribute to teachers' frustrations (Hester et al., 2020; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Additional practical strategies for increasing teacher efficacy

include providing regular feedback, learning from veteran teachers in a variety of fieldwork placements, experience with multiple types of disabilities, and observing IEP meetings led by a veteran teacher (Morewood & Condo, 2012). Policy and bureaucratic recommendations include loan forgiveness programs, higher salaries, streamlining hiring processes, financial incentives, credential/license reciprocity, scholarships, and fellowships (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; McLeskey et al., 2004).

Itinerant DHH Teacher Experiences

Having detailed research on special educators, this review now turns to the DHH teacher population and the limited research on their job satisfaction. To create a comprehensive picture of DHH itinerant teachers, this section will cover the role of the itinerant, including historical context and trends in the itinerant teaching landscape, followed by research on factors that promote satisfaction and success in the role, barriers and challenges experienced by itinerant teachers, and lastly, the most relevant research on their job satisfaction.

Role of the Itinerant

In order to contextualize the shift from segregated to general education placements, it is useful to understand the factors that led to DHH students being placed in general education settings with itinerant support. Despite making up a small proportion of the special education teacher workforce, DHH itinerant teachers make up the majority of deaf educators (Howell & Gengel, 2005). DHH itinerant teachers are responsible for training staff, obtaining materials and equipment, inclusion practices, direct instruction, creating opportunities for connection among DHH students, assessment, evaluating classroom acoustics, determining placement, monitoring hearing aid use, and participating in the IEP process (California Department of Education, 2000.)

The itinerant model developed due to shifts in technology, family preference, and broader special education trends. Historically, students with hearing loss were predominantly served in residential schools and self-contained classrooms, apart from rural districts, which primarily utilized itinerant teaching services due to its convenience and cost-effectiveness. With school districts now favoring inclusion, or integration into general education placements, DHH students predominantly receive direct instruction from itinerant teachers (Reed, 2003).

Itinerant teachers' training varies and is dependent on state certification requirements, but in general, DHH teachers are expected to be skilled in the following areas: history of deaf education, early intervention, itinerant teaching, collaboration, assessments, bilingual English-ASL instruction, spoken English instruction, compensatory skills, behavior management, hearing technology, and general education standards (Johnson, 2013). DHH teachers are trained to wear many hats to meet the needs of diverse learners, who are increasingly being instructed through general education placements with itinerant support (Antia & Rivera, 2016).

Fueling the shift to itinerant services has been innovations in technology and medicine. The increase in students who have undergone cochlear implantation has resulted in a decrease of students using American Sign Language (ASL) (Dolman, 2010; Mitchell & Karchmer, 2005). Students with cochlear implants generally communicate through listening and spoken language, which reduces the need for specialized instruction in ASL and bicultural models of deaf education (Miller, 2000). In addition, while DHH children continue to benefit from access to peers with hearing loss, the need for access to peers who use ASL has lessened.

As a reliance on audiological devices has increased, the need for specialized placements for DHH students has decreased, resulting in the widespread closures of residential schools for the deaf and specialized DHH classes (Dolman, 2010). Further, the majority of children with

hearing loss are born to parents with typical hearing, which drives their motivation for using listening and spoken language over sign language (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2005). Not surprisingly, most parents prefer their children to be served in neighborhood schools, where they can attend school with siblings and neighborhood peers (Howley, et al., 2017).

Itinerant teachers wear many hats, and an integral part of itinerant teaching is coordinating progress toward students' IEP goals. Itinerant teachers do this by providing direct instruction or monitoring the regular education program to ensure that goals are being met. Itinerants describe their role as trying to fill gaps in a child's education and individualize their educational program using a disability-specific lens (Clifford, et al., 2004). Itinerant teachers commonly provide instruction in non-academic areas, particularly if the district's service model uses multi-categorical special education teachers to provide academic instruction in a resource room (Antia & Rivera, 2016). In this common scenario, the DHH itinerant teacher focuses on developing self-advocacy, self-esteem, and social skills in addition to serving as a consultant for accommodations related to hearing loss (Antia & Rivera, 2016). Additional itinerant duties may include conducting student assessments, adapting classroom materials, monitoring, and observing students to determine their functioning in the general education classroom, planning, attending meetings, and providing technical support for amplification equipment (Foster & Cue, 2009; Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013; Luckner & Howell, 2002).

Factors that Promote Success

School districts face unique challenges with creating supportive working conditions that contribute to positive job satisfaction for itinerant teachers. Due to their unusual role, itinerant teachers tend to be more successful when they are efficient in planning and organizational skills because they do not have a set schedule or work location (Comptom, et al., 2015). Itinerant

teachers often appreciate the flexibility and variety of having a varying schedule. The nature of the work involves a significant amount of driving, which often averages about a fifth of the itinerant's workday (Luckner & Howell, 2002). Many itinerants appreciate the break that driving provides and use the time to regroup in between school sites and mentally prepare for the next instructional session (Luckner & Yarger, 1999).

Barriers to Satisfaction

The role of itinerant teaching is challenging for three primary reasons: a mismatch of expectations, a lack of instructional time with students, and feelings of isolation. The itinerant model is implemented differently depending on whether the district covers an urban, suburban, or rural area (Larwood, 2005). Some itinerant teachers grapple with large caseloads that may lead to minimal service minutes or working with students on a mostly consultative basis (Yarger & Luckner, 1999; Antia & Rivera, 2016). Whether the itinerant teacher provides the majority of service on a direct or consultative model, he or she has little influence on the curriculum, which is directed by the general education teachers (Yarger & Luckner, 1999; Antia & Rivera, 2016). The realities of itinerant teaching are starkly different from teachers' expectations due to teacher preparation programs that prepare DHH teachers for classrooms and residential placements (Luckner & Miller, 1993). Most preparation programs for DHH teachers do not require fieldwork or student teaching in an itinerant setting, leaving beginning teachers unprepared for the itinerant role (Correa-Torres & Johnson, 2004; Foster & Cue, 2009). Further, school districts do not consistently provide formal job descriptions, with 38% of itinerant teachers surveyed reporting that they had never received one, contributing to role ambiguity (Hyde & Power, 2004).

Itinerant teachers are motivated to enter the teaching profession to work with students, however, itinerant teachers find much of their day is spent collaborating and consulting with IEP team members (Correa-Torres & Johnson, 2004). As the number of students on an itinerant's caseload increases, their approach changed from providing instruction to students to consulting more with adults (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Kluwin et al., 2004; Yarger & Luckner, 1999). This contrasts with DHH teachers' belief that direct teaching to students is their most important responsibility, a conclusion that has been cited in a variety of surveys (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Foster & Cue, 2009; Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013). In a small survey, itinerant teachers reported spending 48% of their time with students, which is in contrast with classroom teachers, who may spend up to 98% of their day with students (Correa-Torres & Johnson, 2004). In fact, a lack of student interaction was cited as the biggest drawback of the itinerant role (Correa-Torres & Johnson, 2004).

Itinerant teachers report that one of the most challenging aspects of their work is a lack of support and a feeling of isolation. Not having a home base or home school results in a disconnection from colleagues, particularly socialization and relatedness (Luckner & Yarger, 1999). It prevents the itinerant from feeling as though they have a strong professional network (Luckner & Yarger, 1999). Itinerant teachers may be the only itinerant teacher in their school district, requiring them to rely on itinerant teachers from neighboring districts to create a professional network (Correa-Torres & Johnson, 2004).

Further, itinerant teachers report that they strive to shorten commute times so there is more time for direct instruction, causing them to feel pressure and stress (Clifford, et al., 2004). Time constraints prevent itinerant teachers from covering the material they intended, with special events and schedule changes causing students to miss direct instruction sessions (Reed, 2004). A

lack of time on the part of the general education teacher and their misunderstandings about low incidence disabilities also make for challenging collaborative relationships (Antia & Rivera, 2016).

Itinerant teachers confront barriers related to collaborative and interpersonal skills. For example, working at multiple sites requires itinerant teachers to be savvy about the political climate within the school or district (Correa-Torres & Johnson, 2004). In addition, school personnel lack a clear understanding of the itinerant role, requiring teachers to constantly reexplain their role to classroom teachers and building leadership (Morris & Sharma, 2011). In relation, itinerant teachers find themselves in a difficult position when general education teachers fail to carry out their recommendations (Marschark & Spencer, 2003). Specifically, they encounter difficulty convincing general education teachers and school leaders of the need for disability-related instruction not related to academic standards, such as teaching self-advocacy or about personal assistive technology (Morris & Sharma, 2011). When value differences or personality conflicts arise, it is generally the role of the itinerant teacher to reduce friction (Marschark & Spencer, 2003). School leadership may not understand the role of the itinerant teacher, with itinerant survey respondents reporting obstructionist experiences with building principals (Foster & Cue, 2009).

Job Satisfaction for DHH Teachers

Focusing specifically on the job satisfaction of DHH teachers, Luckner and Hanks (2003) surveyed 608 teachers of the deaf. They found that deaf educators were mostly satisfied with their job, with similar responses whether the teacher worked as an itinerant, elementary, secondary, or resource room teacher. Areas of highest satisfaction included relationships with colleagues, the opportunity to use their training and education, feeling challenged in their work,

and designing lessons. In a more recent study, Luckner and Dorn (2017) conducted a mixed methods study of 495 DHH teachers that included a survey of demographics, Likert-type scale questions, and a qualitative portion of open-ended questions. The study did not focus solely on DHH itinerant teachers, but did break down the results by teacher type, including itinerant teachers. Itinerant teachers made up the majority of respondents (41%), followed by other (29%) elementary (19%), and secondary (10%). Nearly all the respondents were female, and the majority were hearing and had a master's degree. The study built on a questionnaire developed by Luckner and Hanks (2003) and added questions that cater to the current roles and responsibilities of DHH teachers.

The items that participants cited as providing the most satisfaction include being challenged, teaching vocabulary, applying their education, attending IEP meetings, working with a wide age range of students, working with students from diverse cultures, and designing lessons. The items cited that promote dissatisfaction include state testing, providing students with adult role models, professional development related to deaf education, family involvement, accessing tests appropriate for DHH students, time for non-teaching responsibilities, time for collaboration, and evaluations. The items identified in Luckner and Hanks' (2003) study as promoting dissatisfaction have considerable overlap with Luckner and Dorn's updated (2019) study. Areas of dissatisfaction included paperwork, state testing, lack of family involvement, time for non-teaching responsibilities, and providing adult role models. These items also echoed Luckner and Dorn's updated (2019) study as well as the literature on special education overall (Billingsley, 2004).

When comparing Luckner and Dorn's (2017) study and the literature on job satisfaction in special education overall, there are aspects that overlap and aspects that differ. Both deaf

educators and special educators find satisfaction from working with students from diverse backgrounds and designing lessons. In contrast to deaf educators, special educators do not cite attending IEP meetings as a satisfying aspect of their work. Special educators, unlike deaf educators, are more likely to cite professional development and family involvement as satisfying (Billingsley, 2004). Both deaf and special educators find dissatisfaction with state testing, paperwork, a lack of time for collaboration, and a lack of time for non-teaching responsibilities (Billingsley, 2004; Luckner & Dorn, 2017).

There were significant limitations to Luckner & Dorn's (2017) study. The majority of respondents had a caseload of between 7-12 students. This contrasts with a study by Pedersen & Anderson (2019), who surveyed 267 itinerant teachers and found that 36% of itinerant teachers had 10-15 students and 30% of respondents had 16-25 students. Itinerants were assigned to ten buildings on average. In addition, Luckner and Dorn's study (2017) does not specify how many of the students on the teachers' caseloads have hearing loss as their primary disability (e.g. versus a primary disability of autism or intellectual disability). Pedersen & Anderson's (2019) study reported 30% of students on teacher's caseload with a primary disability other than hearing loss. Further, Luckner and Dorn's (2017) study does not specify what percentage of time the respondents spend on direct service versus consultation services.

Despite dealing with many challenges, itinerant teachers surveyed found job satisfaction because their role allows them to work with a diverse group of students of varying ages and abilities and they experience a lack of monotony due to varying schedules, students, and schools (Yarger & Luckner, 1999). Itinerant teachers cited favorite job aspects as their capacity to fix injustices, promote change, not having to answer to one person, anticipate problems and take other preventative measures for administrators and classroom teachers, work independently and

take on new challenges (Clifford at al., 2004). Because itinerant teachers often work with students throughout their education, they find satisfaction seeing students' progress over the years (Correa-Torres & Johnson, 2004). Itinerant teachers weigh these positive aspects with job stressors.

Currently, researchers are unable to gauge exactly how to make the itinerant model optimally satisfying, given internal factors such as teachers' skills, backgrounds, and professional knowledge and external factors such as salary and legally mandated responsibilities. It is unclear how many students to assign to itinerant teachers, how much direct instruction should be given, where direct services should be provided, how best to work with families, and how best to provide administrative and peer support to itinerant teachers (Howell & Luckner, 2002). The research shows that a lack of administrative support, insufficient teacher preparation, and feelings of isolation are fundamental causes of deaf educators' conflicting feelings toward their work.

Summary

The research makes clear that all teachers experience depersonalization and dissatisfaction when they do not feel they are making a meaningful difference for their students (Shen et al., 2015). This can be heavily consequential, causing teachers to experience burnout and emotional exhaustion (Hester et al., 2020; Platsidou, 2010). Not only does this affect teachers' well-being, but it can lead to poor student outcomes, such as decreased motivation (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Harrison et al., 2023; Shen, et al., 2015). Dissatisfaction also causes decreased performance and effort, compounding negative effects for students (Aldridge & Fraser, 2015). The research has indicated there are contextual factors that can strongly impact job

satisfaction. These include school leadership, collegial relationships, and a sense of belonging (Skalvik & Skalvik, 2015).

There are a multitude of factors unique to the special educator role that can influence their level of satisfaction. Teachers that are certified through alternate and emergency credentialing programs are known to experience more professional struggle, and these alternative routes are far more common in special education (Billingsley, 2004). The research suggests that special education teachers experience issues with role ambiguity, work overload, and poor job design (Hester et al., 2020; Kozleski, 2000). At the heart of work overload is the legal compliance paperwork, high caseloads, and administrative tasks (Billingsley, 2007; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Reed, 2003). In relation, special educators experience a lack of collegial relationships, understanding of special education from building leadership, and mentorship (Aldosiry, 2022; Benjamin & Black, 2012)

DHH itinerant teachers specifically experience conflict with their role and job design. They may not have the opportunity to have consistent interaction with students if their school district's service delivery model focuses on consultative services over direct instruction (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Yarger & Luckner, 1999). In addition, they struggle with a lack of preparation for itinerant-specific responsibilities, isolation, and a lack of understanding of their role from general and special education colleagues (Foster & Cue, 2009; Morris & Sharma, 2011).

In summary, the research is clear--teachers want to teach. They are motivated by human connection--relationships with students, relationships with their colleagues, and the opportunity to serve their community. Teaching provides an optimal opportunity to make a difference in the lives of students, which in turn provides a deeply satisfying experience for teachers. However, teachers are continually bogged down by tasks and job design that takes away from the work that

serves their greatest purpose: educating students. Further, teachers are not getting the support that they need to be effective, committed, and satisfied.

The methodology chapter proceeding this review aims to investigate the factors that lead to itinerant teacher satisfaction, or lack thereof. In short, this study asks how the contexts in which the itinerant teacher works shape their satisfaction.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of DHH itinerant teachers, obtain insight into the factors and working conditions that produce more positive experiences for itinerant teachers, and obtain insight into how the various workplace contexts can be structured to support positive work experiences. This chapter describes the methodology used to answer the following research questions:

1. How do deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers describe the factors that shape their job satisfaction?
    1. In what ways, if at all, do the contexts of their work shape this satisfaction?
2. In what ways do the deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers' caseloads shape their job satisfaction?
3. In what ways, and to what degree, do deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers perceive and experience the various ecosystems in which they work?
    1. How do the ecosystems in which they interact shape their job satisfaction?

The itinerant teacher of DHH students may work in a variety of itinerant models that differ based on roles and responsibilities. The increasingly common role of a DHH itinerant teacher as consultant has implications for the itinerant teacher's job satisfaction that has been minimally explored in the literature. Through a phenomenological approach, DHH itinerant teachers' job satisfaction was explored through an ecological systems theory lens. As discussed previously, this framework places the DHH itinerant teacher at the forefront, with a focus on the various roles they play within a complex network of social and cultural practices. Itinerant

teachers work in multiple systems simultaneously, requiring the itinerant teacher to be adept at navigating multiple organizations' political and cultural systems.

Research Design

This study used a phenomenological qualitative research design in order to deeply understand the lived experiences of 20 DHH teachers working in an itinerant capacity. A qualitative design was selected because it is best suited to understand "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdall, 2015, p. 6). Phenomenology is particularly appropriate for this study because it helps provide an explanation for how different people live through similar experiences which is useful when there is little relevant research available (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As discussed in the literature review, little is known about itinerant teachers' job satisfaction, and phenomenology was the ideal avenue to gain new perspectives. The extant literature on DHH teacher job satisfaction has used survey design, which fails to obtain insight from teachers into their reasoning as to why they are experiencing positive or negative job satisfaction (Luckner & Dorn, 2017; Luckner & Hanks, 2003).

Three data collection methods were used for this study: an online questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. This combined approach allowed me to understand how the participants' job satisfaction is shaped by what they are experiencing in their schools, itinerant programs, and special education departments. By using EST as a guide and considering these immediate environments in the teacher's workplace, I was able to gauge how these systems influenced the teachers and how the different levels of influence interact with each other.

Participants

Table 1. Participant Demographics Obtained from the Questionnaire

Participant Number	Pseudo-nym	Focus Group Partici-pation	State	Years of Experience	Case-load Size	Employer Type	Workplace Setting
1	Elizabeth	Yes	CA	13	50	Consortium	Combination
2	Claudia	Yes	CA	20	45	Consortium	Suburban
3	Jessica	No	KS	9	27	School district	Combination
4	Lila	Yes	ND	5	15	School district	Urban
5	Mallory	No	MN	22	18	School district	Urban
6	Kristy	No	IL	26	42	Consortium	Suburban
7	Dawn	No	OR	4	30	Consortium	Urban
8	Stacy	No	NC	21	12	School district	Urban
9	Jessie	No	NY	12	14	School district	Suburban
10	Mary Anne	No	ND	37	8	School district	Urban
11	Nancy	No	MA	3	55	School district	Urban
12	Abby	Yes	CA	4	28	School district	Combination
13	Logan	No	MA	3	9	School district	Urban
14	Lenny	No	FL	14	17	School district	Combination
15	Cici	No	IL	29	12	School district	Urban
16	Rachel	No	FL	36	30	School district	Combination
17	Phoebe	No	VA	1	13	School district	Urban
18	Monica	No	MA	15	16	Consortium	Rural
19	Clarissa	No	AZ	9	16	Agency	Urban
20	Sabrina	No	CA	27	78	School district	Combination

Participant Recruitment

Both novice teachers (first, second-, and third-year teachers) and seasoned teachers that work as an itinerant teacher full-time (100% of the work week) were encouraged to participate, and I aimed to recruit as much diversity as possible when looking at the potential participant's

location and demographics. I made a post on Facebook groups (Appendix A) in June 2021 informing itinerant teachers of the opportunity to participate. By using Facebook groups, I hoped to reach itinerant DHH teachers across the United States and obtain a sample that includes teachers in at least three distinct regions of the contiguous United States (regions referring to Pacific Northwest, West Coast, Southwest, Midwest, Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Southeast). This allowed me to have a broader range of experiences represented. The social media post contained a link to a questionnaire (Appendix B), in the form of a Google Form which contained three sections: 1) background information, 2) workplace setting and program information, and 3) roles and responsibilities. This questionnaire served as a screening device that allowed me to select participants who meet the criteria for this study.

Fifty itinerant DHH teachers completed the questionnaire and were screened for meeting the required participant criteria. Forty-eight participants met the criteria, with two teachers screened out because one was an administrator and the other was a student teacher. From the remaining 48 teachers who met the criteria, I did a secondary screening and prioritized teachers who work in an itinerant capacity for 100% of the work week. Additionally, itinerant teachers who work with age levels preschool through high school/transition were prioritized over itinerant teachers who only work with one age group (e.g., high school) or part-time itinerant teachers. These inclusion criteria allowed me to select participants that represent the most common type of itinerant teacher role (Antia & Rivera, 2016). As an itinerant teacher myself, I wanted to have a voice in the research. I involved myself as a researcher-participant by having a DHH itinerant teacher colleague and fellow doctoral candidate interview me. Ultimately, 19 teachers participated, as well as my own participation as a researcher-participant, for a total of 20 participants.

Participant Background

The participants work in various parts of the United States and have years of experience ranging from 1-37 years. All the teachers are currently working full-time and teach in 12 different states. Most teachers (70%) work for a school district, with the remaining teachers working in consortiums or state agencies. All teachers work in public schools with the majority (50%) working in an urban area. Thirty percent of teachers work in a combination setting (urban, suburban, and rural), followed by 15% of teachers in a suburban area and only five percent of teachers working exclusively in a rural area.

The teachers' caseloads varied greatly, ranging from eight students to 78 students. The median number of students on a caseload was 27 and the average sized caseload was also 27. The majority of teachers (90%) work with all age ranges. Most teachers (60%) served as a classroom teacher (resource room or self-contained classroom) before becoming an itinerant teacher. The majority of teachers estimated that 25-50% of their caseload have a primary disability other than hearing loss. Eighty percent of respondents said their supervisor did not have a background in deaf education and fifty-five percent of respondents said their program supervisor position requires an administrative credential. Forty-five percent of respondents said their supervisor is minimally involved, 35% said their supervisor is moderately involved, and 20% said their supervisor is very involved in the program.

When asked how often their itinerant program meets, 25% said weekly, 25% said monthly, 20% said not at all, explaining that they are the only DHH itinerant in their district, followed by responses indicating "varied" meeting habits (depending on the needs of the program at that point in the school year), and the remainder of responses indicated quarterly, biweekly, or that their program is in the process of changing their meeting habits. When asked to

estimate how much of their time is spent directly teaching students, 45% of teachers said 51-75% of their time, 35% said 26-50% of their time, and 20% estimated 76% or more of their time directly teaching students. When asked to estimate how much of their time is spent consulting with IEP team members, 50% of teachers said 26-50% of their time, 35% said 25% or less, 10% estimated 51-75% of their time, and 5% said 76% or more of their time is spent consulting. When asked to estimate how much of their time is spent consulting with IEP team members, 50% of teachers said 26-50% of their time, 35% said 25% or less, 10% estimated 51-75% of their time, and 5% said 76% or more of their time is spent consulting.

Given that respondents were asked to estimate their time, the estimation may explain the discrepancies in how the itinerants calculated their overall time usage. Overall, what emerges is a picture of itinerant teachers that work in regions across the country, with varying levels of experience, in mostly urban and suburban areas. The average years of experience among teachers was 13 and the average caseload size was 27 students. The majority of participants have a program supervisor that requires an administrative credential and the overwhelming majority of supervisors do not have a DHH background. My goal was to obtain a diverse sample of teachers in experience, geographic region, and caseload size. My participant sample was able to meet the criteria that I set out to obtain when recruiting participants.

Data Collection

The following methods were used for data collection: a questionnaire, individual interviews, and a focus group.

Questionnaire

I created the aforementioned questionnaire, shown in Appendix B, to obtain background information about potential participants in order to identify itinerant teachers that met the criteria for the study. In addition to being a screening tool, the questionnaire was designed to obtain information about the service delivery model and other contexts in which the itinerant teacher works, as well as their roles and responsibilities. The "background information" section sought to obtain information about how long the itinerant teacher has been teaching and in what settings, the make-up of their caseload, and information about their district or consortium of employment. Specifically, the background section asked about: 1) number of years teaching, 2) employed by district or consortium/county office, 3) urban, suburban, or rural setting, 4) caseload size, 5) state employed, 6) percentage of time working in an itinerant capacity and 7) age range of students served. The "workplace setting and program information" section sought to obtain information about how their DHH program is led and the "roles and responsibilities" section aims to find out how the itinerant teacher spends their time. The participants had an opportunity to clarify any questionnaire responses in a comment box at the end of the questionnaire. The information obtained from the questionnaire was saved on a secured Google Drive account.

The information gleaned from the questionnaire provided insight into research question 2a (How does the service delivery model that they work under shape this satisfaction?), priming me to construct meaning from the interview sessions. The questionnaire also allowed me to gather responses regarding the various ecosystems in which the itinerant teacher works, providing insight into the direct and indirect links among the educational settings in which they work.

Interviews

Each participant completed a semi-structured interview (Appendix D) lasting between 30 and 75 minutes. Before beginning the interview, I spent 5-10 minutes establishing rapport with the participants. I attempted to make the participants feel comfortable by asking about how the end of the school year is wrapping up and if they had any summer plans. Given our shared experience as itinerant teachers, rapport was quickly established. The interview questions (Appendix D) consisted of five sections: 1) background information and motivation, 2) workplace setting and program information, 3) roles and responsibilities, 4) job satisfaction, and 5) participant reflection. These sections included questions that elicited information to answer my research questions, with a focus on the activities, roles, and relationships that make up the teachers' workplace context. The questions are designed to obtain added context, beyond what the questionnaire offered, for understanding the teachers' service delivery models. By asking questions that target the interrelationships between settings, I sought to understand how DHH itinerant teachers navigate the various contexts in which they work and their feelings toward their job satisfaction.

The semi-structured nature of the interview protocol allowed the questions to be individualized, with the opportunity for follow up questions and a more natural interaction style (Merriam & Tisdall, 2015). The flexible questioning structure of semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdall, 2015) allowed me to respond to information about the various educational ecosystems, to consider the unique perspective of the respondent, and how details about service delivery models affect the teacher's success and satisfaction in those ecosystems. I used prompts for probing the participant in the interview protocol, which helped to keep the conversation flowing, and allowed me to co-construct meaning with the participants. The flexibility afforded by semi-structured interviews prevented the protocol from being solely grounded by

predetermined ideas, literature, or theories. The specific line of questioning in the protocol was as a guide that helped the participants remain focused and set parameters to the conversation.

Preparation. Participants were contacted by email to set-up a time for the semi-structured interview. An information sheet and informed consent document (Appendix C) was attached to the email describing the nature of the research. In the information sheet, participants were informed that their personal information or identifying school or district/consortium information would not be included in the dissertation. The interview questions (Appendix D) were also attached to the email to create accessibility for individuals who may have hearing loss. There were no incentives offered to participate in the interviews.

Setting of Interviews. The interviews were conducted on Zoom, a video-conferencing platform. Videoconferencing was the most logistically feasible approach to interviewing in order to make participation accessible to teachers across the country and to allow for safety in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. No other persons were present for the interviews, but given the nature of Zoom calls, occasionally family members and house mates were in proximity of the participants. I do not feel this affected the quality of the participants' responses or ability to be candid with me. The Zoom interviews were recorded, with participant permission, and saved on a secure OneDrive folder. The interviews were transcribed through Rev, an add-on for Zoom that records and transcribes audio. Traditionally, Rev was a stand-alone transcription service, however, they have added an option for Zoom integration, which is available as a paid subscription service. The service is a Zoom extension and provides live captioning during meetings and provides written transcripts.

Interview Process. The first interview was my interview as a researcher-participant. The interview was completed by a DHH itinerant teacher colleague and fellow doctoral candidate and

lasted 60 minutes. The colleague was briefed on the interview protocol and the semi-structured nature of questioning. I chose to be the first interview because I did not want other interviewee's responses to influence my answers in any way. Being the first interview also allowed me to better understand the position of the interviewee and reflect on how I would customize the interviews. Most participants acknowledged that they reviewed the interview questions prior to the interview, but no participants had questions about the process or interview questions. All participants expressed a high level of interest in the subject matter, showed a high level of engagement, and expressed an interest in seeing the outcomes of the study. After each interview, a short memo was written to capture initial reactions. The memos provided direction for the thematic analysis that occurred during the data analysis.

Focus Group

All participants from the one-on-one interviews were invited to participate in a focus group, which was incorporated into the research design to provide a greater range of data for analysis (Saldana, 2011). Participants were informed that they did not have to participate in both the one-on-one interview and focus group in order to participate in the study. All interview participants expressed interest in the focus group with the caveat among some participants that summer vacation plans may cause scheduling issues. Interviewees were contacted over email with the invitation to participate in the focus group and a link to a Doodle poll (online scheduling tool). The interviewees were informed that they had three days to complete the Doodle poll at which time a date and time that worked for the most participants would be selected.

There were five participants available on the same date and all participants were notified of the chosen date and time. Ultimately, there were four participants in the focus group (Elizabeth, Claudia, Lila, and Abby) as one person had a scheduling conflict. This included the

researcher, who was participating in the focus-group as a researcher-participant. The focus group was an additional opportunity to co-construct knowledge with the participants and elaborate on the themes that emerged from the individual interviews.

Focus Group Protocol and Process. The focus group protocol (Appendix F) consisted of ten questions that built on questions in the one-on-one interview protocol and were designed to elicit interaction among the participants (Merriam & Tisdall, 2015) around the contexts of the teachers' work and how the various factors involved in their work contexts influenced their level of job satisfaction. These questions supported me in answering research questions regarding the context of their work, day-to-day demands, and their perception of how these factors create positive or negative feelings toward their work.

The focus group was conducted on Zoom, as each of the four participants were from different states. The focus group participants easily established rapport, finding shared connections, and asking one another about their hometowns and DHH training. I obtained consent to record the focus group. The focus group questions were provided in advance over email, again to create accessibility for individuals with hearing loss. In addition, the questions were also copied and pasted in the Zoom chat feature so that participants could look back at the question being asked. The focus group took one hour, and participants were thanked for their time. There were no incentives offered to participate in the focus group.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the individual interviews and focus group, the Rev transcripts were examined for accuracy and compared to interview notes. To establish accuracy and readability for coding, I replayed the interview recordings to remove time stamps, inaccurate transcription, and decipher distortions. This step promoted validity and reliability (Maxwell, 2013). In

addition, I shared a Google Doc of the transcription with participants, asking them to member check to ensure that the transcript accurately represents their perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Participants were instructed (Appendix E) to use the comment function of Google Docs to make edits or comments. Ultimately, only one interviewee chose to participate in member checking, and provided minimal feedback, mostly in the form of word choice. I believe this was attributed to the timing of the interviews, which took place during either the last week of school or the first week of summer break for participants. The majority of participants mentioned during the rapport-building time set aside before the interviews that they had upcoming plans.

After transcribing, I used a hybrid inductive and deductive coding approach by creating anchor codes based on my research questions. In the first round of coding, I analyzed the data set using open coding, specifically descriptive, process, and emotive codes as well as the original anchor codes. The first-round codes were meant to be emergent and open to change. For example, an initial code such as "disagreement over content" was later refined for clarity and changed to "agreed upon curriculum". The codes were organized using Delve, a qualitative analysis software. The initial coding was followed by axial coding, which employed pattern codes based on the concepts developed in the initial coding round (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). From there, I collated codes to look for categories and themes, causes and explanations, relationships among the themes, and concepts that related to my framework (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Table 2 includes the full list of codes.

Table 2. List of Codes

A Priori Codes	Codes
Job Satisfaction Described	Job security (6), Salary is motivating (5), Seeing student growth (13), Developing relationships over time (11)
Day-to-Day Demands	Appreciate flexibility and autonomy (9), Assessment feels impactful (2), Overwhelmed by caseload (22), Appreciate variety (5), Equitable or preferential caseload distribution (5)
Collaboration Across Ecosystems	Strong workplace camaraderie (9), Department expertise (2), Purposeful networking (7), Collaboration with itinerant colleagues (13)
Categories	
Leadership	Multiple supervisors create challenges (5), Supportive leadership (9), Unsupportive leadership (6), Lack of DHH specific feedback (1)
Role Ambiguity	Unprepared for itinerant role (4), Supervisor doesn't understand role (29), Role confusion (14)
Sources of Dissatisfaction	Lack of relevant PD (5), Little room for growth (3), Politics and bureaucracy (4), Itinerant teacher challenges (12), Challenging family relationships (3)
Isolation	Feelings of Isolation (16), Unprepared for itinerant teaching (4), Disconnected from school community (16), Often forgotten by IEP team (4), Feel like an outsider (4), Lack of mentorship (2)
Itinerant Program Model	Itinerant model differentiation (7), Low stress role (4), Access to curriculum (4), Role feels inefficient (9), Role constraints (9), Little input in design of itinerant model (7), Desiring more meaningful work (11), Able to design model or role (4), Involved in decision making (3), Opportunity for leadership and growth (4)

Thematic Analysis of Interview and Focus Group Transcripts

To organize my thinking, I used my research questions to develop analytical questions that were used to guide my thinking while I looked for patterns in the interview and focus group data. I looked at each analytical question and key variables associated with the question, including the participant, evidentiary text from the transcript and documents, relevant information from the questionnaire, my thoughts, and pattern codes. An example of an analytic question for my first research question was: “For teachers who feel positively about their role, what is shaping this satisfaction?” Another example of an analytic question for my first research question was: “How do structured and unstructured support systems foster satisfaction or lack of satisfaction?” The analytic questions provided an opportunity to make sense of similarities and differences in responses across teachers. For example, when asked to describe their job satisfaction, half of the teachers interviewed had a response related to seeing student growth and almost half of the teachers mentioned the development of relationships over time.

From there, I collaborated with a colleague to gather insight about alternative ways to analyze my data. Each analytical question broke the larger analytical question into smaller, more focused questions that allowed me to hone in on themes within a theme. I used the matrices to look for connections between the various categories. Using my theoretical framework and analytical questions as a guide, I analyzed the data by viewing the teacher at the center of the ecosystem and considered the various factors that influence their job satisfaction. I reflected on the themes that emerged from my data and related them to my research questions, considering how the themes in my data analysis relate to the concepts of job satisfaction, service delivery models, contextual factors, and linkage among the itinerant teacher’s ecosystems. Using these themes, I was able to develop conclusions and practical recommendations that were based on the data.

Positionality and Authenticity

Given that I was a researcher-participant in the study, I am acutely aware that positionality should be carefully considered. I have been a DHH itinerant teacher for over ten years, working at school districts/consortiums in the Midwest, West Coast, and Mid-Atlantic. I have worked with school districts in urban, suburban, and rural areas. As a result, I have seen the wide range of service delivery models and styles of DHH program implementation. In full disclosure, I have a bias against predominantly consultative models for DHH students and recognize the potential for this to cloud my impressions. To mitigate this bias, I wrote analytical memos about the evolution of my interpretations as I analyzed the data (Maxwell, 2013). Optimistically, I hope that my insider status and awareness of this bias allowed for more reflexivity and partnership with my participants. Analyzing my own interview and writing memos about the experience of participating helped me to confront assumptions that could have derailed my thinking. By analyzing my own interview first, I suspect that I was able to develop a deeper awareness of the biases that may not have developed had I analyzed my own interview toward the end of the data analysis process.

Trustworthiness

According to Merriam & Tisdell (2015), the peer review process is built into the dissertation committee process, however, I hoped to increase the validity of my study by involving a trusted colleague, also a doctoral candidate in education and a DHH itinerant teacher, to serve as an impartial sounding board for debriefing my impressions. I conferenced with her regularly with the goal of attending to my biases and relying strongly on my framework to guide my data analysis. Overall, I feel my current position as a DHH itinerant teacher allots many

benefits to this research. My insider perspective provides a depth of understanding to the role that would be difficult to comprehend without first-hand lived experiences and training.

In terms of the study's credibility, attempts were made to challenge themes and explanations by collaborating with the trusted colleague to investigate various possible explanations for the data. Before embarking on the study, I obtained approval from the California State University- San Marcos Internal Review Board. Informed consent forms (Appendix C) were distributed to participants prior to beginning the study. The form detailed the purpose of the study, any risk involved, explained how the participants' personal information would remain confidential, and informed participants that they could withdraw from the study at any point.

Limitations

This study presented with limitations in the areas of sample, researcher bias, and methodology. This study lacked generalizability due to its small sample size. Findings from this study cannot apply to all DHH itinerant teacher experiences, however the results will build on the current body of knowledge related to DHH itinerant teacher job satisfaction. The depth of the findings was reliant on participants' willingness to be vulnerable in sharing their employment experiences. Further, the nature of interacting over a videoconferencing platform may not match the level of rapport that could be established in person due to limitations with body language (Holton, 2001). Less comfort may be prohibitive to open communication and meaningful interaction (Holton, 2001). Thus, I attempted to build rapport with participants before beginning the interview, find points of commonality, and keep a conversational tone throughout the interview.

Another potential limitation was the recruitment method. Participants in this study were all users of Facebook, so teachers who do not use social media were not able to be a part of the

sample. The majority of teachers included were female, while although representative of the profession, does not lend itself to greater perspectives (Cannon & Luckner, 2016). This lack of participant diversity may prevent itinerant teachers of other genders from sharing what aspects of the itinerant experience led to more satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Further, the sample of participants may be at risk for volunteer bias, given that the participants filled out an initial questionnaire and were additionally willing to invest their time in a one-on-one interview, and in some cases, a focus group as well. These itinerant teachers may not be representative of the greater DHH itinerant teacher population as evidence by their commitment to furthering the field of deaf education.

In this study, all the participants were part of the public school system. None of the participants worked for a private agency, which may be seen as a limitation. As common in qualitative research, these findings cannot be generalized to all DHH itinerant teachers, all itinerant teachers, all special education teachers. Rather, these findings should be examined by only considering the perspectives of the teachers involved. Multiple quotes from each participant were included to aid readers in determining how much of the participants' experiences mirror their own.

The interview questions and protocol were designed by the researcher and not from a validated set of questions. The questions were designed to reflect themes in the literature, however, there was no formal review, except for the researcher's dissertation committee. To lend validity to the questions and protocol, the interview was field-tested with a colleague to determine clarity and how much interview time would be needed. This test run indicated that one hour would likely be sufficient for most participants. In addition, the questions were deemed clear in the test interview.

Another possible limitation to consider is researcher bias. My ten-plus years of experience as an itinerant teacher may interfere by imposing personal biases. I have experience as a DHH teacher in several LEAs, as well as private practice. I am perceptive to my personal areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, as well as the reflection that I have done in comparing the various LEAs that I have worked for. In addition, my retention in the field suggests there are a significant number of favorable considerations that I needed to consider while assessing the overall positionality and reflexivity. To mitigate this bias, I unconventionally made myself a participant in the study, which created an appropriate time and place for her perspective to come through. To avoid further bias, I took notes after the interviews and examined her take-aways for bias. Interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word to ensure the participant's voice was captured accurately.

While my experiences may lend itself to some bias, I consider this experience to be more of a benefit overall. Having extensive experience as an itinerant teacher helped me to design questions that accurately capture the itinerant experience, build rapport with the participants, and create a comfort level that may have been hard to achieve otherwise. This background knowledge, in addition common professional language, helped the researcher to probe participants during the interview and achieve the semi-structured phenomenological design the researcher sought to implement.

Summary

This chapter began with an explanation of the study's purpose and the components of the study including questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and focus group. I described how the theoretical framework informed the study's procedures and data analysis. I included a discussion of the study's research design, including criteria for inclusion, recruitment procedures,

participant background, and interview setting. Next, the protocols for interviews and the focus group were detailed. Following an explanation of the various data collection phases, I explained the methods used for data analysis and presented my positionality and authenticity, as well as trustworthiness and limitations related to the study.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of DHH itinerant teachers, obtain insight into the factors and working conditions that produce more positive experiences for itinerant teachers, and obtain insight into how the various workplace contexts can be structured to support positive work experiences. This chapter describes the findings of this study responsive to the following research questions:

1. How do deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers describe the factors that shape their job satisfaction?
    1. In what ways, if at all, do the contexts of their work shape this satisfaction?
2. In what ways do the deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers' caseloads shape their job satisfaction?
3. In what ways, and to what degree, do deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers perceive and experience the various ecosystems in which they work?
    1. How do the ecosystems in which they interact shape their job satisfaction?

In this study, DHH itinerant teachers reported on their perceptions of what makes their work satisfying or why it may fail to satisfy them. A comprehensive understanding of what makes teachers satisfied has implications for leadership and the overall design of the LEA's itinerant model. This findings chapter presents the questionnaire, interview, and focus group data collected from 20 DHH itinerant teachers. The findings were identified through thematic analysis. Direct quotes from participants are shared to validate the findings in addition to offering background and contextual information.

The findings are considered in light of the teachers' various environments, using Brofenbrenner's EST as a guide. EST was adapted by placing the DHH itinerant teacher at the center, with a focus on the aspects of their work that most prominently shape what they do and how they feel, including their microsystems, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The itinerant teachers interviewed work in multiple systems simultaneously, requiring the itinerant teacher to be adept at navigating multiple organizations' political and cultural systems.

The first finding addresses the first research question (How do deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers describe the factors that shape their job satisfaction?). The second finding addresses the second research question (In what ways do the deaf/hard of hearing teachers' caseload shape their job satisfaction?). The third and fourth findings address the third research question (In what ways, and to what degree, do itinerant teachers of the deaf/hard of hearing perceive and experience the various ecosystems in which they work?).

Factors Shaping Job Satisfaction

When asked specifically to define job satisfaction, the concepts of student growth, developing relationships over time, and finding meaning and fulfillment in one's work were repeated themes. The data suggests that it is important for these itinerant teachers to feel like they are making a difference in the lives of their students, which provides motivation for continuing to do the work. This is supported in the broader research that shows that employees are motivated when they believe they are making a genuine contribution, that their work is meaningful, and that what they are doing is important (Duggah & Ayaga, 2014). An overwhelming majority of participants (15/20) spoke about the satisfaction of seeing students grow and develop, make progress on their goals, and hearing acknowledgements from staff and parents that the itinerant teacher's efforts have contributed to student successes. The itinerant

discussed multiple ways in which they viewed student success, such as attending graduations, measuring progress on IEP goals, and appreciating the slow but steady progress that comes with working with a caseload of students over the course of years, rather than months. The responses that make up this theme showcase the high value that DHH teachers place on having consistent caseloads that allow them to develop relationships with students and families. This finding contains the following sub-findings: 1) Job satisfaction and student growth and 2) Satisfaction and relationships.

Job Satisfaction and Student Growth

This finding is not surprising, given DHH teachers' belief that direct teaching to students is their most important responsibility, a conclusion that has been cited in a variety of surveys (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Foster & Cue, 2009; Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013). When Mary Anne was asked about how she describes her satisfaction, she immediately cited student successes: "Oh, when my kids are successful. That is the crowning glory. You know, hearing my youngest one producing four-to-five-word sentences. Hearing from other teachers 'oh, my gosh, you know, so-and-so did this today.'" A-ha moments came up frequently as a source of satisfaction, as it did for Kristy, who says "any time I can see a light bulb moment where it's like, that kid would not know that if it wasn't for me."

Due to infrequent contact with students, it is not unusual for itinerant teachers to question if they are making a difference. The itinerant teachers' large caseloads can prevent the teachers from seeing incremental growth that classroom teachers have the satisfaction of witnessing on a regular basis. However, Abby discussed feeling satisfaction when student growth occurs, even if she did not get to see it firsthand:

> I think the satisfactory part of it is, even though I have 28 kids on my caseload, I still get to see the growth of some of them. And I think: That's why a lot of

> teachers are teachers, to see those moments. I went to a workshop during this last year and the speaker gave the analogy of itinerant teachers being gardeners and planting seeds. And I think that really helped me not be so bummed about my job and not being able to help more because she just explained that we plant seeds. We plant a seed, we water it. We don't get to see the growth. And the rewards of what we do with our kids on a day-to-day basis, because like we work with them once a week and we say, 'here are some tools and then we just go, I hope you're implementing them.' And then to later hear back from a teacher or to hear back from the student, 'I did this, and I tried that and it worked or didn't work,' those are the inspiring moments.

Abby's comments illustrate her thought progression. While it can feel discouraging not to be immersed in their students' growth, she reminds herself that she set the stage for learning to occur. Abby created an environment where students are primed to learn from their classroom teacher by "planting seeds" and as a result, classroom teachers can provide students access to the curriculum.

Results from the questionnaire show that half of the itinerant teachers surveyed estimated that 26-50% of their time is spent doing consultation. As a result, it is evident that itinerant teachers have many other responsibilities outside of direct teaching, and it may not be consistently clear how their efforts are positively impacting students. This results in a variety of feelings regarding their sense of accomplishment. Clarissa reported:

> I think when there are those days where I say, I felt like a teacher today and I felt like I did what I know to be good for students. When I can have consistent days where I felt like I was a teacher today...that is when I know that I'm really happy in my job. And again, that's always tied to students.

Clarissa's wording "felt like a teacher" indicates there are times when she does not feel like a teacher. With a large percentage of their time spent doing consultation, itinerant teachers may feel like teaching is not their primary role. This can create a disconnection between how the teacher wants to experience their role and how they are actually experiencing it. The research on DHH itinerant teachers supports a higher feeling of satisfaction when teachers feel like they have

sufficient instructional time with students (Yarger & Luckner, 1999; Antia & Rivera, 2016). This sentiment came up often in the interviews. For instance, Cici finds the most satisfaction in seeing student growth because of direct instruction, which she noted can be the most fun and interactive part of her work:

> I think that's just some of the rewarding is just the interactions with the kids and those really fun times you get to have because not all the lessons are that fun. A lot of it's work, but when you see them and they're applying what you taught them. And you're like, 'oh my God, that's really rewarding.'

Cici brought up themes of student interaction, student growth, and feeling reward through those experiences. Similarly, Phoebe commented that she enjoys "seeing them connect the dots of what we've learned and make those connections that make me think, oh, I'm doing my job correctly." Phoebe also stated "I like being with the students, like when I'm working with a student, that's the part that I like. All the paperwork and meetings and taking notes and data and stuff, I could go without, but being with the students is great." Clarissa, Cici, Abby, and Phoebe shared the idea of feeling fulfilled by their students progressing. While they may not have the level of interaction that they desire with their students, experiencing their students' growth creates satisfaction.

Monica clearly states how her work ties to her sense of meaning and purpose. She finds that she feels she is making a difference when she makes an impact on the school community and has put forth her best effort:

> I guess it's just feeling good about what you are doing at the end of the day, knowing that you made a difference, you did the best that you could. Leaving teachers, the other students and your own students in a better place than when you started. My satisfaction always just comes from my students, making progress and my students needing me less and becoming more independent. Those are the things that make me feel good about my job.

Monica's statement echoes previous findings of seeing student growth and elaborates on those

findings by discussing how she finds fulfillment in helping the school community be "in a better place than when you started." Six out of the 20 teachers specifically cited themes of meaning, fulfillment, and purpose. For these teachers, their work helps them to feel like they are making a difference for students and for the larger community.

Satisfaction and Relationships

Itinerant teachers often have the same students on their caseload for many years– sometimes a student's entire educational career. Working in a role that supports students in kindergarten through high school creates a unique opportunity for developing relationships. This relationship progression can help to drive the teacher's satisfaction. The teachers interviewed listed multiple benefits to seeing the same students over a number of years. In the following anecdote, Lenny illustrated the benefits of seeing the same students over time:

> I just went to graduation for a student I taught since kindergarten. I was with her kindergarten through 12th grade. And her parents celebrated me as if I graduated from high school. We were just like, you have been an integral part of her entire education and, and it's, it's so amazing for me to grow with the student.

Not only did Lenny appreciate her student's growth, but she also reflected on how the student pushed her own growth. She noted that the parents showed their appreciation, which she attributed to their long-term relationship. This degree of closeness would not necessarily be achieved if the itinerant role was not structured to support a long-term service delivery model. For example, Jessie described how itinerant programs are uniquely structured to allow teachers to loop with students and see them through their entire educational career:

> The relationships I have with them, just the way I get to watch them become who they are. And truly year after year, I don't have them for a year and then pass them onto someone else. I have a boy right now, who I started with in kindergarten. And now he's in 10th grade. And just like seeing where he started and where he is now. And being able to just be a part of that, it's like, by far the most rewarding thing.

Jessie goes so far as to cite the long-term relationships as “the most rewarding thing”. She noted that the satisfaction does not simply stem from witnessing academic progress–she watches them “become who they are.” The itinerant teacher develops a relationship with the whole child, which requires an investment of time. Further, the structure of itinerant programs allows teachers to maintain a connection to their students over time, even if they are no longer on their caseload. Dawn spoke about how itinerant colleagues help each other keep tabs on former students, which supports positive satisfaction:

> I think again, the students making milestones. I had a student who graduated last week who, yes, this was my first year with her but I was able to see videos of her, as she went through our program. She really gained confidence this year just working with me, and confidence for college.

Dawn’s itinerant colleagues were able to show her videos that illustrated the student’s development, which supported her feelings of closeness to the student. Even when students make slow, incremental progress, itinerant teachers are uniquely positioned to see progress that other providers may not have an opportunity to witness. For example, Jessica stated:

> I mean, you know, it has to be the relationships with the kids and the families. And then just seeing that growth over time. I've had a little girl since she was in third grade, she's going to be a senior this year. And she's like a slow but steady progress kid. You know, I call her my gentle drizzle. She doesn't make lightning progress. It's a gentle drizzle. And just to see them growing up and building their skills. It just doesn't get better as a teacher. Just see them being successful, academically and socially.

Despite the student’s slow progress, Jessica was able to appreciate her growth because she worked with her for almost ten years. Like Jessie, Jessica felt like her long-term relationships with students allowed her to see growth across multiple domains. She goes so far as to say, “it doesn’t get any better as a teacher.” Itinerant teachers feel a sense of fulfillment not only when witnessing student growth, but when witnessing a student’s personality develop and seeing the relationship strengthen over time. Phoebe discusses this aspect:

> And being able to see, especially the younger kids, starting to form their personalities and their senses of humor and stuff like that is really nice. And working with my signing student, I spend so much time with him that I feel like we do have like a pretty deep friendship and student to teacher relationship together.

Similarly, Elizabeth appreciates how the long-term nature of the itinerant teacher-student relationship benefits both parties and provides a sense of stability and satisfaction for both student and teacher:

> The most satisfying thing is definitely if you've been at one place for a long time, seeing the same kid grow and change and go to different schools. And you had them in elementary school and then they see you in middle school. And they're like, oh my God, you're here too. You're back. That's awesome. And then they go to high school. And you see them again, and they're like, you're here too. And they appreciate that continuity and it's fun. Seeing the same kids I've had all along grow and just have that relationship develop. That's definitely my favorite part.

The itinerant role may be uniquely positioned to develop relationships due to the one-on-one nature of the work. Classroom teachers may have limited time to work with students one-on-one, but individual instruction tends to be the default for itinerant services. Nancy discussed how one-on-one time fosters a sense of trust in the relationship, even though she may not have high direct service minutes with her students:

> First, I think the most important thing is building relationships with my students. I think that the students that I know the best and like, cause I get to, we get to spend one-on-one time with kids. Even if it's just like once a week or if I see a kid four times a week, he gets a lot of one-on-one attention from me. It's cool to build a relationship with a kid and then you get to get so much more done because they trust you.

In Nancy's situation, relationship development benefits not only her personally but results in increased buy-in and progress during sessions. Similarly, Jessie discussed how a sense of trust can expand the role of the itinerant, creating a blurred line of the teacher role. Students often feel more comfortable confiding in the itinerant, due to the longevity of the relationships and one-on-one nature of the role:

> As cliche as it sounds, I love knowing I'm making a difference in their life. I love the relationship I have with them. They tell me things. It's not just teacher-student. When they get older, it almost becomes a friendship because I've been with them so long and they're comfortable talking to me about anything. I am almost a teacher and counselor and therapist all in one.

Claudia discussed how the longevity of the teacher-student relationship provides credibility to the rest of the IEP team, who may not have the same background or history with the student, and can provide important context that is exclusively obtained by itinerant teachers:

> I think one of the benefits of an itinerant is, it can be a pro and a con, but for the most part, it's a pro following the students for so many years, you really get to know them and their families. And in that way, I can feel like an important part of the team, because I can say I've worked with this student for four years now. Whereas most of the other teachers or even the, some of the other service providers, maybe they've only known them that year and only know them in a group setting or a large class setting. So that is definitely something that I appreciate being able to get to know them so well and know their families and follow up. And I think that provides important information to the team of, I remember in second grade, you know, they were really struggling and now in fifth grade, they're doing amazing. I get a lot of satisfaction from those relationships.

Claudia brought up multiple aspects of relationships that benefits not only her satisfaction but increases her effectiveness as a service provider. In her situation, other providers look to her as an expert on the student because she has been uniquely positioned to know the student over time. Not only does her history with the student benefit the IEP team, but the depth of her relationship with the student helps to provide important context to the team as well. Elizabeth, who supports primarily a high school caseload, discusses how itinerant teachers have the capacity to be a constant in the student's life, which can benefit the student and provide a source of satisfaction for the itinerant teacher:

> Even if I'm not loving what I'm actually teaching them, the fact that they like having a consistent person checking in with them over time and making sure that they're doing okay. I think they liked that because there's not always a lot of other people in the school building who are doing that and keeping an eye on them and holding them accountable and things like that.

In Elizabeth's example, the depth of her relationship with students supports their success. The students on her caseload can avoid being lost in a large school environment because she has regular check-ins. In addition, she provides accountability to the student, which can support their success across multiple educational domains. Itinerant teachers create lasting relationships not only with students, but parents as well. Monica discussed how one-on-one time creates stronger relationships with both the students and their families:

> I've actually become really close with a lot of my students' parents, which kind of made me worried, knowing that somebody lost their job because they were overstepping and becoming close, but I feel like when I become close with those families, the relationship I have with the students flourishes too. One of my moms sent me videos of her daughter outside of school. Because I was able to see my student do that, I could talk to her about that part of her life. I feel like she opened up more to me. I feel like it's almost more personal when I'm able to pull out kids one-on-one and really get to know them and know their strengths and weaknesses and who they are as people. And I really like that connection. A lot of times the parents go to me in the IEP team meeting looking for advice and support, even if it's not related specifically to their hearing. They just think of me as an advocate.

Monica brought up multiple aspects of relationship development, including fostering a home-school connection, having individual time with students, and mentoring parents. The structure of itinerant services allows for teachers to become close with parents, because they have one on one time to report on and can develop a relationship over years. Classroom teachers do not necessarily have the same opportunities for relationship development with parents. All of these factors can impact the teacher's mood and outlook on teaching. The work can be energizing or draining, which can impact their level of job satisfaction as described by Lenny:

> For me, it's energy having, you know, you get in different periods of your life, where you have negative energy or positive energy. You hope that the positive outweighs the negative, you know, it's balanced, you, you know, and for me, it's about having positive energy about my job. I don't wake up and go, you know, 103 days of school left. I don't do that.

Nancy described her job satisfaction as closely tied to positive feelings about her work. These feelings can affect her mood. Further, positive feelings about the work continue after the workday is over, and have a positive effect on the rest of one's day, as described by Nancy:

> Job satisfaction for me is like, you feel positive about your work. You feel like you're doing something that's meaningful and it's not something that is not something that you feel negative about throughout the day. Not just while you're doing it, but after work, you feel good and you feel positive about the type of work that you're doing. It doesn't have a lingering negative effect on you.

Jessie also tied her satisfaction to mood and went a step further, tying her satisfaction to the difference that her services make for her students and society as a whole. In her interview, she discussed how positive feelings about her work keep her motivation strong:

> Wanting to go to work every day, being happy, waking up, going to where you're going and knowing you're contributing to society and in a good way, and helping the future of this country and the world… I know what I'm doing for these kids is leading to all those things.

Like Nancy, in the passage below Phoebe acknowledged how she may have good days and bad days, but overall, she finds the work to be energizing. Her workday experience affects her mood and motivation. Like Jessie, Phoebe attributed her satisfaction to making a difference for her students:

> I think going to work every day and genuinely enjoying what you're doing or feeling like what you're doing is meaningful. And feeling supported by the people that you work with and work for. Waking up and going to work and not feeling that inner dread of just, I don't want to go do this. Everyone has that feeling on certain days in certain instances, but I think just enjoying what you're doing and it not exhausting you at the same time.

In her anecdote, Cici discussed how student interaction helps her to maintain a high level of satisfaction. She goes so far as to assert that she would not be afraid to pivot in her career if she were dissatisfied:

> I think job satisfaction for me would be my desire to keep doing it. You know, how much I want to stay in this district. How much would I keep wanting to do

> what I do? Or what I want to change, I think if my job satisfaction was not high. I would probably move or change jobs or do something different. But at the end of every year, I'm sad when the kids go and at the beginning of every year, I'm thrilled to pieces to hear their stories.

The interviews illustrated that the ability to build long-term relationships with students and their families is a key source of job satisfaction for itinerant teachers. These relationships were built over time through regular, one-on-one interactions. Itinerant teachers appreciate the opportunity to see students grow and develop and they value the trust and respect that is built through sufficient instructional time. Their job satisfaction is influenced by student growth, even if they do not get to see it firsthand. They appreciate the moments when they can witness a student breakthrough or apply what they have learned. These relationships can provide a sense of fulfillment and is a key component to satisfaction for itinerant teachers.

Influence of Caseload on Job Satisfaction

The majority of participants (12/20) spoke about how caseload distribution and implementation dictate their day-to-day work satisfaction. Caseload design involves the following factors: location of schools, age range of students, whether the students have additional disabilities, signing or auditory-oral means of communication, instructional strengths, and length of time previously worked with the school or site. Caseload design is done in a variety of ways, but the input of the itinerant teacher and consideration of their preferences tends to foster higher satisfaction for the teachers in this study. According to data from the questionnaire, caseloads for participants ranged from 8-78 students. The questionnaire also revealed that teachers spend the majority of their time doing consultation. There was a wide variety in the amount of autonomy the participants had in designing their caseload, with some participants taking full responsibility with their teacher peers and other participants being fully assigned a caseload with little opportunity for teacher preference.

The interviews revealed that teachers who are able to have a higher level of contact with their students see improved relationship building with their students as well as a stronger sense of effectiveness in their work. Caseloads that feel particularly large or spread out appeared to foster feelings of ineffectiveness. Some participants moved forward with changing itinerant positions because of pressure, stress, and burnout related to their caseload. Further, participants reported that staffing shortages caused feelings of burnout due to larger than ideal caseloads. Conversely, when teacher's preferences are accounted for in caseload design, morale tends to improve among the itinerant teachers. In addition, the teachers reported higher satisfaction when they had independence and autonomy in creating their schedule.

Time with Students Leads to Increased Feelings of Self-Efficacy

This sub-finding is corroborated in the literature on DHH itinerant teachers which indicates that itinerant teachers who have large caseloads have less time for direct instruction and end up working with students on a mostly consultative basis (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Yarger & Luckner, 1999). In the focus group, the concept of large caseloads repeatedly came up, specifically how a lack of time affects relationships with students, as described by Abby:

> I'm hearing you all say 50 on your caseload. I'm crying at like the 30 that I have. I see kids once a week pretty often and see some kids daily. I saw one kid for an hour daily. I hear you all say 50 and I struggled. I had a few kids that I was seeing once a month and I couldn't develop a relationship with them to where they even wanted to work with me.

Later in the focus group, Abby discussed the expectations for building relationships with adults, but a large caseload affects her feelings of effectiveness:

> I think one of those things is, it was brought to my attention, is that you make connections with people. That's how you get them to do things for you. I don't even have time to make these connections with people. I don't have time to develop these relationships. When do you want me to go? I'm slammed. With just services and just trying to get IEP stuff done. And planning because you're

> planning, not just for a group of 35 kids, you're planning for every individual kid on your caseload.

Abby lamented that her large caseload prevents her from feeling as productive as she would like. Her tone of voice indicated frustration with the situation. In the focus group, Claudia agreed and discussed how a lack of time affects her feelings of effectiveness:

> I probably have anywhere between 40 and 45 at any given time, which I know there are people who have twice that–three times that even, but when I worked in Arizona, I had at the most 13. And I saw them daily. At the very least, I saw them once a week. Where now that's the high end of my minutes is to see them once a week. Those are the really needy students who need more support. I think a smaller caseload size is hugely important. To be able to give that level of service that, that they need.

Claudia's anecdote described both how having a larger caseload affects her as an employee and her perception of how a large caseload affects her students. Further, large caseloads can sometimes result in less-than ideal methods of scheduling students, as described by Jessie (the sole itinerant for DHH students in her district), who has had to inappropriately group students in order to meet the minutes on her caseload:

> Even though I should only be seeing kids one-to-one I tend to see kids grouped or in a small class, sometimes up to three to five kids in one session, which is not good for itinerant services at all, but they just try to get away with more where I am. Especially with being the only one in the district and they don't really want to hire more people right now. They try to fit as many kids into my schedule as possible. There was one year where I was teaching like seven out of nine periods a day. And then I had one period of travel and my lunch, like I had no prep at all. It was insane.

Like Abby, Jessie had a clear tone of frustration. Not only is her caseload assignment a source of dissatisfaction for her, but she laments about how it negatively affects her students as well. As the lone itinerant in her district, she is unable to distribute her caseload any differently.

Caseloads, Burnout, and Job Satisfaction

The research indicates that work overload is a contributor of special educators' job dissatisfaction (Kozleski, 2000; Stempien & Loeb, 2002). Dawn, had to manage a large caseload of over 100 itinerant students, described feeling despair over how her work life was affecting her mental health. She questioned whether itinerant work was a good fit for her, considering all the stress it was causing:

> There's one week where I had like 20 IEPs… And I was like, what am I doing? Why am I putting myself through this stress? I think that was a moment that I realized, I can't do this next year. I was having a lot of anxiety at that time and just juggling mentally and it didn't get better after COVID because I had those hundred kids and then I was a preschool teacher last year. I was asked to do a hundred kids plus teach half of the preschool class. I think the combination is that I can only do so much, you gotta have to have a personal life too.

Dawn had to juggle multiple roles and a high caseload that prevented her from spending time teaching students. Ultimately, Dawn's large caseload and high level of stress led her to move to another state and find an itinerant position that better suited her need for a healthy work-life balance. She contrasted the two itinerant roles in the following excerpt:

> In my previous itinerant position, I had a hundred kids. I was way over worked. I was looking for a job that was less--I'd have a caseload of less kids. Because with my last job, I was working way over my contract and not getting paid for it. I was looking for a contract where I would actually work eight to four and not be working in the evenings. Now I have 30 kids on my caseload and I close my computer at four and I don't work in the evening. I'm able to get everything done during the day.

Elizabeth has held several itinerant positions and described the discrepancies that exist between districts when looking at caseload numbers. Here she recalls when she first began her current position:

> I remember when I got my big stack of IEPs. I had over 50 students in this job, and that was way more than I had in (former district #1), where I was part-time and had nine at one point. And then in (former district #2) I was also a part-time itinerant and had 14 students. But even if I were full-time, that would have been half of what I have now. Those caseloads were manageable compared to what I'm

> taking on now. It makes me feel overwhelmed and like I can't do right by my kids.

Several teachers mentioned that their large caseloads were due to their program being understaffed, either because the program could not find teachers to fill the positions or because their administration did not support hiring additional itinerant teachers. In the following quote, Elizabeth laments about how caseload distribution could be better, given how difficult it is to fill positions, despite support from her administration to hire more teachers:

> We have such a hard time recruiting teachers that, you know, even if we wanted to expand the scope of our work and hire more people and be able to deliver more services, we just can't find people to do that. Our admin wants us to have a good work-life balance and is willing to fund positions appropriately, but the teachers aren't there.

Conversely, Lila struggles with understaffing in her organization but does not have the support of her administration. In her anecdote, it was difficult to make a case for an additional itinerant teacher because her administration fails to understand her role.

> We did have a third one. She was let go this year. Now it's just the two of us. By the grace of God, I don't know how, but we're managing. But we could definitely use another teacher of the deaf, at least a half teacher. That would take so much of the stress away. And this discussion was brought up this year, when that third one left. And what myself and the other teacher of the deaf found was that it was really difficult for us to justify why we need a third or like another half teacher of the deaf, in the respect that it was hard for us to justify it on a level for them to understand.

Dawn, Elizabeth, and Lila shared feelings of stress and frustration. For these teachers, understaffing was at the root of their work overload. Dawn moved as a solution to her work overload. For Elizabeth and Lila, there was no clear or easy solution to their work overload. There were instances in which the workload led to burnout, which resulted in job dissatisfaction. Unfortunately, in the administration in these examples failed to remedy the issues related to work overload and burnout.

Teacher Preferences and Job Satisfaction

The itinerant teachers interviewed discussed the difference between having a caseload given to you by administration versus designing caseloads collaboratively with their itinerant teacher colleagues. Nancy describes how her itinerant program works collaboratively and considers itinerant preferences and skills:

> We do it as a group. We do a day towards the end of the school year, usually the last week of school. We call it caseload day. We all sit down with our huge spreadsheets of our kids and we kind of go through and talk about each student and say, who has this student now? Who would like him in the future? And we try to not keep our students for more than three years on one person's caseload, because we want them to have the opportunity to work with other people and experience different types of teaching styles or different types of signing styles. We try to mix them up, but there are some students that I kept from last year that I knew that I wanted to keep working with that I had invested a lot of time into, and I think my coworkers had kids like that too. But then there are some that I knew that I don't have the capabilities to work with effectively. So I gave them to somebody else...yeah, there's definitely little preferences. Like the woman who mainly does high school, that is her strength and what she likes. Unfortunately, a lot of it is geographic. There is some flexibility, you can say, I don't want that neighborhood anymore. And then that could be up for grabs for the team. And I can get maybe an area that I do want.

Nancy brought up age preference, geographic preference, teaching strengths, and variety in determining itinerants' caseloads. Interestingly, Nancy brought up caseload continuity because the teachers in her program see benefits to changing caseloads more frequently. This contrasted with findings from the majority of participants who prefer having the same students over time because it helps them to develop relationships. Caseload design, as described by Nancy, can be an intricate dance that seeks to make sure everyone's needs are met. In the following excerpt, Rachel elaborates on that concept and describes how the teacher's family life and personal logistics are considered when her program is designing caseloads:

> ...and then distributing the kids and even working together with the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher. If you really liked working with high school kids and you felt like that was a strength, you might end up heavier on the high school,

> middle school versus, you love to teach reading and you love the little kids, but you're a little petrified of it. We all work together and go with the logistics of the distance between the schools. That school is on my way or this school is five minutes from my house. I like having one school near my house. If somebody has their own kids in that school, they say I want that school, that's where my kids are. I want to know the teachers in the school. Some teachers want distance between home and work. And it doesn't bother me because I've always lived in the neighborhoods where my students lived. I'm not embarrassed that I'm going to see them at Publix.

Even when the itinerant teachers cannot design their own caseload, it makes a difference having an administrator or program lead who will design the caseloads with the teachers' preferences in mind. Stacy reflects on how her lead teacher tries to make caseload divisions equitable and play to individual teachers' logistical needs and preferences:

> Our lead teacher has to figure out where in the district people live to try to get you close to home for at least one school. And then she'll plot out our schools and make sure it's distributed fairly evenly so that you're not overwhelmed or underwhelmed. She'll pass schools off as things shift. We have a lot of say in that kind of thing, because of who our lead is. She wants everybody to be happy. She will also say, you've got to give me something here. I want to make you happy, but I can't satisfy all of your wants. Pick two things that you really want and I'll work on it.

Nancy, Rachel, and Stacy brought up a variety of aspects of caseload design that help contribute to their satisfaction. For some, working at the school their children attend is a priority. For others, having schools close to their home was more important. And for some teachers, their preferences focused more on teaching–subjects taught, age ranges worked with, and their instructional strengths and weaknesses. Multiple teachers brought up designing the caseloads among the group, however, it was possible for caseload design to match preferences when designed by a supervisor or lead teacher.

Support, Connection, and Job Satisfaction

Itinerant teachers are spread out between many schools, which can make it difficult for them to become part of the school community. They are often unrecognized and seen as a guest

in the school. However, by integrating themselves in the school community, itinerant teachers can find more support and connection with the staff at their school sites. Participants in the interviews and focus groups spoke how they need to be intentional about building relationships at the school sites, including with general and special education teachers, other related service providers, administrative staff, and school leadership. Given itinerants' time constraints, this can prove to be difficult. This is supported in the literature on DHH itinerant teachers, which concludes that when teachers do not have a home base or home school, they feel a disconnection from colleagues, particularly with socialization and relatedness (Luckner & Yarger, 1999).

Outside of school site communities, itinerant teachers benefit from spending time with their itinerant colleagues who specifically understand their role, including time that is both structured, such as regular meetings and unstructured, such as meeting up for lunch. The itinerant teachers who find the most connection have a space that is structured for togetherness, such as a shared room or building, rather than personal offices at separate schools or even more detrimental, no available office space. This is not surprising, given that the research indicates that higher levels of support lead to more positive job satisfaction (Stempien & Loeb, 2002).

Multiple itinerant teachers in the study were the only DHH itinerant teachers in their district. In this instance, it becomes more important for the teacher to connect with other itinerant staff, which may include speech-language pathologists, vision teachers, etc. as well as connect with online networks, whether regional or national. The teachers interviewed made clear there were both benefits and drawbacks to working for smaller districts versus larger DHH programs. Itinerants in smaller districts often felt as though their leadership, when looking at the overall organizational structure, did not know where to place them. Itinerant teachers in larger, more established and heavily resourced districts often found collaboration and camaraderie, as long as

the leadership was intentional about prioritizing connection and social opportunities. Itinerants in any size program occasionally experienced feelings of being forgotten or overlooked within the overall organizational structure.

Disconnection with School Communities

Participants in 8/20 interviews as well as in the focus group discussed how disconnected they felt from their school communities. Feelings of disconnection impacted the teachers' perception of their satisfaction. The nature of itinerant work often leaves the itinerant from establishing themselves in the school or even be recognized for their role, as described by Jessica: "it is nice to see smiles, friendly faces and people who know what you do because a lot of times I'll walk into a building like I know you, I know your face--I don't really know what you do." Lenny also lamented over how difficult it is to be recognized on campus, much less become part of the school community:

> It's hard because they still won't get our titles. They don't remember my name. I've been at the school for years and years and sometimes they're like, what do you do? They're still asking you and you've been there like six years straight.

Similarly, Claudia expressed how the lack of time spent at her school sites contributes to the anonymity that she feels is detrimental to the itinerant experience:

> When you go to a school once a month for half an hour, they never remember who you are, even if you've been going for years, they might know your face, but they really don't know what you do or where you work so building those relationships can be a lot more challenging and in an itinerant role those relationships are crucial.

Mallory discussed how she must be intentional about making herself known and that makes a difference in her experience at the school site:

> I don't always have great connections with teachers. But walking into a building and having them say, hey Mallory, how are you? How's so-and-so doing? I go, oh, you know who I am. I used to walk into a building and for three years, I let some teacher call me Melanie instead of Mallory. Because I was too shy to

> correct him. And I figured I'm just in and out. But now I make more noise coming into a building. I don't sneak in and out so much. I check in more and I'm just more of a presence, which makes an impact on how much I'm communicated with and respected and acknowledged in the building.

Mallory's story explained how although she has felt overlooked, she has made a concerted effort to change her situation. By investing time in establishing a presence, she improved her experience and feelings of satisfaction. Like Mallory, Abby complained about how the lack of acknowledgement has prevented her from feeling seen at her schools. In her interview, Abby discussed how not being housed at the school site affected how they saw her role and ability to contribute to the learning environment, which caused her to feel undervalued:

> I could honestly say walking into certain environments that I did not feel valued. My knowledge was not valued. My expertise was not valued nor taken seriously. And I just feel like they were thinking, why do I have to take you seriously? You're not here on campus. You're not here everyday. Like, I totally understand. I'm not here enough. Sorry, that's the nature of my job. I just think that that's hard because you're because you're not part of that community, then you just don't become as valued because you're not part of that community.

Abby's comments showed that she understands the perspective of the building staff, however, it still feels challenging to be an outsider. Similarly, Claudia talked about how the lack of connection to the school site can have implications for her effectiveness at work, as is the case when she is forgotten about during the IEP process:

> We play such a small role...often we're forgotten. They forget to invite us to IEP meetings. They forget to put us on the assessment plan. And then we find out like the day before that they're telling us the assessment's due and we have done nothing.

Claudia's excerpt goes beyond a failure to be acknowledged when she enters the building. In her experience, she is being left out of the IEP process, which has detrimental effects on her students. When DHH itinerant teachers are not invited to IEP meetings, there is no one to explain how hearing loss is impacting the student's development, both academically and emotionally.

The itinerant teacher is unable to provide assessment and progress data that would help the IEP team develop an appropriate plan for the student. Similarly, Cici lamented that sometimes she is only thought of by the school site when things are not going smoothly:

> My big, frustrating thing is if a parent complains or something happens, then all of a sudden I'm important. But a lot of times they just don't see me cause they don't evaluate me. So they don't see me as part of their faculty. They don't understand how that affects the kids. If the kids have a different place to work every single time, it impacts them. And they feel like they're not important and that's not fair.

Cici brought up several issues–she is overlooked until there is a problem. She does not feel included because her teaching is not evaluated by the school administration. Further, she lamented that being seen as an afterthought by building staff can be detrimental to her students. In contrast, Rachel discussed how the itinerant teacher can be a part of the school community, given the right conditions:

> Some people are really great. They know who you are when you walk in. They make sure they know who you are. I mean, you have to go find the principal and introduce yourself and say oh, by the way, this is who I am. There's some schools where they really do make an effort and you can get a mailbox and, and you're invited to everything and they make sure you have a room.

Like Mallory, Rachel feels comfortable taking initiative and making her presence known. As a result, she experiences positive benefits, such as having a mailbox and a room to work in. Looking at the broader picture, Elizabeth, who has had multiple itinerant jobs, found that working for a school district tends to lead to a higher level of connection than working for multiple districts within a consortium. When covering only one district, she feels less like a guest:

> I feel like working for a consortium is completely different than working for a school district. And what I've learned is I much prefer working for a school district because you are not an outsider. You are a part of the system. And it's a completely different feeling when you are constantly coming in from an outside agency versus you know, an employee of that school district, even with the badge,

> you're just looked at differently. My seniority has now allowed me to be with one district primarily, I have an email address with the district and a badge. And just having people be able to look me up on the district directory makes a difference, and, accessing all the district resources and their websites for resources and the curriculum guides, the pacing guides, like knowing what all my kids are doing without having to even ask the teacher. It's a very different experience when you're employed by the school district.

Like Elizabeth, Abby feels like an outsider in the system. In the following excerpt, she discusses how working at multiple school sites can cause the itinerant teacher to feel underappreciated and disconnected from the typical teacher experience:

> There's teacher appreciation week. I saw nothing of teacher appreciation week. I got an email saying, oh, food was being delivered for teacher appreciation week. Someone's providing us lunch…But because you don't have a relationship with one particular school and then you go, can I just show up to the school and take advantage of that? I don't know, the relationship isn't there with the school because I was covering 13 schools and I wasn't really working with staff on campus and people didn't even know who I was.

In Abby's experience, she is missing the social connection that happens when you are a member of a singular building community. She feels unsure of whether she is welcome or not and this affects whether or not she takes advantage of offerings to the school community. Similarly, Stacy talked about how gestures of appreciation impact her experience and how it affects how much time she wants to spend at the school:

> One thing I do like about being itinerant is if it's a school that I am not as comfortable with or if I don't get along as well with the staff there, I'll see my student and get out. And if I really like the place, they usually have someplace for me to work or they've got like a cabinet that I can put a couple of toys in and leave them there and not have to worry about it. But you don't feel part of the family like you do when you're in a self-contained classroom. Like when I was at the self-contained classroom, I got a t-shirt every year from the school and you know, there was teacher appreciation week and we got to participate in all this stuff. And I don't have a t-shirt for any of the schools I work at now and don't participate in teacher appreciation things.

Stacy, having been both a DHH itinerant and DHH classroom itinerant, was able to compare the sense of community she felt in both roles. As a classroom teacher, she as able to find her place in

the school. As an itinerant, she invests more time at the schools where she has better relationships. Overall, eight out of the 20 teachers interviewed mentioned feeling like a guest in their schools, which was attributed to factors such as being greeted upon entering, participating in teacher appreciation events, accessing resources, and being included in the IEP process.

Lila, in the focus group, discussed how the tone of the school building affects her outlook when acclimating herself to a school community:

> Things that I enjoy from schools are feeling supported and welcomed. If I feel supported and if I feel welcomed in that school, I can conquer the world. And I can go, I can walk into school with confidence. I can handle situations. I can teach the kids and I feel great. But I've also worked in schools where I am not supported by the admin. And I feel about this small and worth nothing. I would say if there's support and if you're like being welcomed into the school, that's when I feel the best.

Even just one person on campus can increase the itinerant teacher's sense of belonging, which positively impacts their job satisfaction. Lila continues by discussing how when one staff member makes an effort to welcome her, it positively affects her experience. She wishes that there was a more formal effort to introduce the itinerant teacher to the school site:

> I think those moments when you actually get a teacher that A, reaches out to you or B, accepts your invitation to have a discussion. I don't know if it's so much as a school but it is with individual people on that campus. But I know I've also had some admin that has been very welcoming and helpful, like, hey, I've never been on this campus. And they're like, oh my God, let me show you everything. I really wish that there was more of an introduction where I didn't have to go in and introduce myself. I do try very hard to be like, okay, where's the principal, who's the principal. And try to introduce myself. But I really wish that there was more of a formal introduction of us.

Lila, in the focus group, elaborated on her feelings of being incorporated into the school community. She discussed how the school staff doesn't necessarily need to understand her role; however, it makes a big difference when the school has a friendly attitude toward itinerant staff.

Despite trying to demonstrate a friendly attitude, she does not consistently feel welcomed at her schools:

> I think it sometimes is school-wide and sometimes it's really individual. Some people are just really great at reaching out, even though they may not necessarily understand our role, they know that we're an integral part of the team. I can think of a couple SLPs, for example, where the case managers and they include me on everything. They let me know how much they appreciate and value what I'm doing. I understand from a school's perspective on the one hand, if you have like one student at a school that you see once a month, they have so many people in and out…As long as they're welcoming and willing to work with me, then that makes a huge difference. There's some schools where I dread going because they just never found me a place to work and they're not willing to help me find it. At my last job, my supervisor said part of our job is relationship building. I think that's so true. And I'm a pretty personable person. It comes pretty easy for me. And I think that that is a huge benefit is building those relationships because I can go into like a bunch of office staff, but they might not know my name or what I do, but they know that I'm there regularly. They know that I'm there to support the kids in whatever capacity that is. And I'm fine with that. They don't have to know everything that I do, but they genuinely seem happy to see me. When the principal comes out and says, oh, hey, you need a place to work, let me go open this room for you. And I'm like, they're so busy. And to do that, it's such a small gesture and it makes such a huge difference. It's just those, those welcoming things.

Monica described that although she is usually in and out of school buildings, one student in particular needed a great deal of support and the student's high number of direct instructional minutes helped to foster a relationship with the teacher that is typically less attainable in her role:

> It really depends on the teacher when it comes to the school, and the amount of time there too. When I first started, I was in a kindergarten room with one of the students and she had an hour of itinerant services within the classroom and half an hour of pull out every day. So I was in that room a lot...And I really became close with that crew and we actually looped together too. So that whole class went on to first grade together. We were super close and I was going on field trips with them and just became a part of that classroom. That's kind of atypical...That's the closest I've gotten to any teachers for the most part. It's just like I'm in and out.

Rachel provided input regarding how the itinerant model is implemented and the effect it can have on the itinerant's ability to form relationships:

> Some teachers are more communicative and they want to work with you. Like, you know, who really cares about the kid and values you as a resource, who's

> helping their kid, not as a nuisance, who's looking for a place to work. Or a nuisance who's pulling the kid in the middle of a lesson or going over five minutes. So you just have to kind of know what to expect. Sometimes it's gonna be great and you're invited in. Some schools want the push-in. If you're pushing, you have a chance to socialize with the teacher, because you're getting to know them on a different level.

The feeling of being disconnected from a school community is a common experience for DHH itinerant teachers. This disconnection can have a negative impact on job satisfaction, as it can lead to lack of support and feelings of isolation. Many of the teachers interviewed talked about how they were not welcomed into the building, not invited to participate in teacher appreciation events, and not included in the IEP process. Schools failed to provide a dedicated workspace and included DHH teachers as collaborative partners. This resulted in the teachers feeling as though they are not valued members of the school team.

Connection with Itinerant Colleagues

The DHH teachers who were part of an itinerant team, and not the lone itinerant in their district were able to develop a network of support. Through this network, they were able to establish a sense of belonging that they were not able tap into at school sites, which increased their level of satisfaction.

Sabrina's district includes a large team of itinerant teachers with whom she collaborates frequently. She describes their relationship: "I collaborate with them a lot. It's a beautiful relationship that we have. I give them advice. They give me advice. We support each other. I lean on them when I need feedback or different perspectives or ideas of how to improve services." Clarissa was looking for the kind of camaraderie that Sabrina enjoys. She was the only itinerant in her district and the feeling of isolation prompted her to switch to a larger district with a team of itinerants. She discusses the transition: "What caused me to come back to [state] was being with other teachers of the deaf… I wanted to be with teachers of the deaf again and not be

the only one. To have supervisors who are teachers of the deaf and to have an audiology department that I could work with." Like Sabrina and Clarissa, Stacy benefits from being on a larger itinerant team: "Fortunately, we've got a number of teachers here and that's what really makes all the difference. I could go to any of the other teachers for the deaf and hard of hearing and been like help, I don't know what I'm doing and they would've walked me through something."

Phoebe shares those sentiments and describes how her itinerant team serves as an effective substitute for the lack of support in schools: "I have such a strong bond with my coworkers that that kind of makes up for the fact that I don't have a school community. We have a group chat that we text in pretty frequently to check in on each other throughout the week and stuff like that. So I think that makes up for the fact that I don't have a school." Nancy also found that checking in with the other itinerants has been useful for her: "We collaborate a ton…everyone on my team is just like a phone or like a gchat away. We're constantly talking. We have so many group texts."

Itinerant teachers are housed in a variety of ways, including offices in schools, central office buildings, portable buildings on school campuses, and home offices. Some of the itinerants interviewed had an office at one of their school sites, which meant that the itinerants were not at the same common location, causing them to have fewer casual interactions with their itinerant teacher colleagues. Others itinerant teachers had offices in the same building, often a central office building. Rachel noted her current arrangement: "We have a main office where a lot of the other itinerant teachers are, like the visually impaired teachers. You know, we all are housed in the same building now and around other teachers who get our role." Lenny shares a central office with other itinerants as well and the benefits go beyond personal friendships and offer

professional advantages as well: “We all have the same office space, although we all have different schedules. You're rarely there by yourself. There will always be somebody there. If we're having something challenging, we'll, we'll hit it off at each other, like, hey, have you ever had this?”

As a new teacher, Nancy found herself leaning on itinerant teacher colleagues as she navigated starting her role. In particular, the shared office space was especially helpful as she was learning the ropes of being an itinerant teacher and and allowed her to lean on veteran colleagues at her office:

> I’ll go and sit in my friend's office, like if I would had a stressful week, I could say this is what happened to me, is that normal, and there's people who are like, yes, like this happens all the time. This is what you do, or this is who you email. Whereas if I had just been the only itinerant, which I have some friends who are the lone itinerant, I would have just lost my line. I had a really negative experience, like a month into my job. A special ed coordinator was really nasty to me. I would have been like this job is not for me, cause it was that bad, but all the people on my team were like, no, like this is what you do. You're in the right. You're doing the right thing.

At a former job, Dawn had the experience of not being given any office. In her current position, she has a cubicle among many teachers of the deaf and was able to compare the work environment between the two positions: “At my last job, I didn't even have a desk at the office. I was just a traveling teacher… I was working at home by myself. It lessened my collaboration there. Now it's a much more inclusive and collaborative environment.” This finding illuminated how important it is to job satisfaction to have a network of itinerant teacher colleagues to lean on for support and comradery. Without a strong network, the participants felt isolated and experienced less collaboration.

Itinerant teachers who have a common office space and work as part of a team seemed to experience more satisfaction. This appears to result in increased support and comradery among

the teachers. This also helps to reduce isolation and increase collaboration. Having a group of colleagues who understand the unique aspects and challenges of the itinerant role can serve as a valuable resource to support professional growth and emotional well-being.

Role Confusion and Job Satisfaction

Role confusion and ambiguity was a detrimental issue for itinerants across systems, including at the school site, within the itinerant program, as well as the itinerant teacher's own understanding of their role. Role confusion and ambiguity is referring to the teachers' confusion regarding job tasks, priorities, and priorities (Aldosiry, 2022). Ideally, itinerant teachers would have a clearly defined job description so that their role is clear to all the various systems that they interact with—colleagues, leadership, and contacts at the school sites. A formal job description is important to prevent role confusion because it outlines the teacher's roles and responsibilities and can be easily shared with interest holders. Unfortunately, role confusion was rampant among participants in the study. In fact, only one participant was able to access a formal job description.

One of the most impactful issues surrounding role confusion is when the itinerant teacher's supervisor does not understand the itinerant role. The study revealed that this has implications for these itinerant teachers' effectiveness, morale, and the direction of the program. An itinerant teacher's supervisor could include but not be limited to: a principal, director of related services, director of special education, special education middle manager position, or director of a special education consortium. In the study, the majority of participants (11/20) did not feel as though their supervisor had a clear understanding of their role. Supervisors are often unaware of what itinerants learn in their teacher training programs. Teacher training programs for DHH teachers often emphasize language, literacy, and auditory skill development, whereas itinerant positions often focus on consultation with adults and self-advocacy skill development

with students (Luckner & Muir, 2002). This can lead to a clash over what is best for students and what kinds of roles and responsibilities are central to the itinerant role. It can also lead to a poorly designed itinerant model due to the supervisor's philosophy of itinerant teaching and narrow understanding of the role. This is not surprising given that itinerant teachers in both this study and the broader literature on DHH itinerant teachers are not provided with a formal job description (Hyde & Power, 2004). On the contrary, a lack of understanding on the part of the direct supervisor can lead to increased autonomy and decision-making for the itinerant teacher.

Role Confusion and Teacher Training

In her interview, Claudia explained how her supervisor designed the program to be focused on self-advocacy skill development, without realizing that deaf educators have specialized training in language and literacy. Claudia's supervisor is a director of special education services for a consortium and does not have a DHH background. She shared her experience in educating her supervisor:

> It was a real eye-opener a few years ago when my supervisor, who does not have a DHH background didn't know that we didn't learn all that self-advocacy stuff in our credential program or in graduate school. Like I finally kind of flat out said, cause she would always say reading is not your area of expertise or language, not your area of expertise. And I'm like, that's actually what I learned in graduate school…When I finally said, well, I didn't learn self-advocacy stuff in school. I learned it on the job. And she had no idea. And so just really just having her, not even realize like what our skill set is and what our training is, was really frustrating.

Claudia continued by discussing the implications of her supervisor's ignorance on how their itinerant model is designed and implemented:

> She's willing to fight for us, but we have to defend ourselves to her. I don't find myself having to defend myself so much to the districts because they're so used to what our model is. They don't question it, but really, I think more to maybe our supervisor, my supervisor, we have to defend our role more, I would say. Because she's the one who kind of always, that's not your job. That's not your job. More so than the districts do. So I think that our, our service delivery model of being so

> heavily focused on self-advocacy and consultation plays a big factor in not just mine, but some of my colleagues' job dissatisfaction. Cause we're very narrow in the scope of what we're able to do. The last few years, we've had high turnover and it's not been so much because of job dissatisfaction, people moved for different reasons or retired. But every time we get new teachers coming in and they're like, when we interviewed them, they have all these skills and like, they're not going to like it here because they're not going to be able to use any of those skills. They're going to have to take everything that they've done and push that aside.

Claudia was referring to new itinerant teachers who may have an understanding that they would be doing more academic teaching in their role, such as language and literacy development. In her itinerant role, the teachers are not allowed to work on academics or language development. Her supervisor believes this type of instruction should be left to special education teachers who work full time at one school site, even though they are not credentialed to teach DHH students. Claudia even went so far as to say that her supervisor's lack of understanding of her role is the reason that she wants to leave her position and is actively looking for other opportunities:

> But then the frustrating part is I feel that in my role right now, so many of my skills, professional skills that I learned in graduate school, that I learned as a classroom teacher, that I used in other itinerant jobs that are not being used now. We're kind of constantly told that's not your job. That's not your job. That's not your role. Someone else can do that. And to me, that's extremely invalidating and frustrating. And I get it's all because of funding and because of politics, I understand that. But professionally that's really, really like, I mean reason that I will not stay at this job, you know, long term. For sure.

In discussing various supervisors' backgrounds over the years, Clarissa lamented over the misconceptions regarding deaf educators' skill sets. Like Claudia, Clarissa's supervisor did not seem to understand the role DHH itinerant teachers play in supporting students' language and literacy development:

> None of them have had a teacher of the deaf or a teacher of the blind experience. There have been statements about what teachers of the deaf do and don't do and know how to do and don't know how to do. And this idea that we support literacy, I think is questioned. And it's like been told, like teachers of the deaf don't learn how to teach reading. And I just was like, all of my classes were teaching reading

> to the deaf, teaching writing to the deaf, teaching vocabulary to the deaf. And so I don't know where that idea comes from.

Similarly, Lila expressed feelings that if her supervisor had a DHH background it would help them better understand how to meet students' needs. Even though she stated that her supervisor is supportive, she does not feel that support can necessarily be a substitute for having a DHH background:

> The huge difference between having a supervisor that has the same background and one who doesn't is just their understanding of our training, our knowledge of the unique needs that our students have. And how we are equipped to meet those needs. Sometimes I wonder if our service delivery model would be different if we had a director with a DHH background. Because she would know she's very open to listening to what we have to say. But ultimately, I don't know how much she truly understands of all of our training and all of our experience and all of our skills. I think that makes a big difference.

Multiple itinerant teachers spoke of working in an itinerant model that focuses heavily on self-advocacy, and how the curriculum was determined by supervisors who do not have a DHH background. In this role, they are unable to use their training on literacy and language. In another example, Elizabeth found herself sharing similar thoughts and experiences with Claudia and Lila:

> There was an incident where I was letting our boss know that the self-advocacy stuff is not what we were trained to do. And that's not our background at all, and that's not our training. And the fact that she really had no idea. It just, it was very frustrating to me. There was just such a disconnect between my capabilities and what I thought would be of benefit to the students and what she thought we were there for and what she saw as important. And even though nothing really changed because of that it was just kind of eye-opening hearing her say that she didn't know that. We did more than self-advocacy or that we didn't learn any of that in school. I definitely see advantages to having somebody who has a DHH background in that position.

When supervisors fail to understand their teachers' training and skills, it can result in a negative impact on the teachers' job satisfaction. In the interviews, the teachers expressed feelings of frustration that there were limited opportunities to use their training and skills.

This was particularly evident when teachers discussed their specialized training in language and literacy development. As a result, the teachers' scope of work was limited, which caused the teachers frustration and dissatisfaction.

Supervisor Effectiveness and Job Satisfaction

Supervisors who do not have a DHH background are still able to be supportive and effective leaders, however the majority of itinerant teachers interviewed feel that an essential part of understanding is missing when they are lacking that background. Research in the broader field of special education supports the need for administrators who have a strong background in special education because it affects their ability to provide support and assist with skill development (DiPaola et al., 2004). For example, Lenny has felt frustrated in trying to get her needs met from a supervisor who does not have a DHH background:

> I think that leadership piece is huge because I've had both. And I noticed a huge difference when you ask for things, The understanding of what we might need kind of intuitively is there. And then also just a better understanding of what we're experiencing on a day-to-day basis and providing that support in a more holistic way versus having to maybe explicitly ask for everything, having to fight for everything, having to...I mean, my supervisor is incredibly supportive. Incredibly supportive and we'd have two now actually like a director and a coordinator. Both are amazing, but neither of them have a DHH background and it does make a difference. I've asked to attend certain professional development that but have been told no, because it's not related to my job. Just because it doesn't have DHH in the title…Which is really a bummer to say the least. So I feel that the leadership piece is really, really big.

Similarly, Clarissa has hit roadblocks with getting permission for professional development, which she attributes to her supervisor's lack of DHH background:

> It's with administration currently. Yeah, it just seems like they, [they being the director of itinerant services for her county's educational agency], do not have an understanding of what an itinerant teacher of the deaf is. And therefore not supporting professional development that we're requesting. Making changes that as teachers we've identified… The administration does not value the experience of the teachers when it comes to making decisions, changes, implementing professional development. I think that breakdown is what has pushed me out of a

> couple of jobs. And I always wonder: is this like a Clarissa thing that's wrong? Why do we not have administrators in our field who are in our field who are really understanding? And is that too pie in the sky for me to think that that exists?

Clarissa's dissatisfaction with her administrator's understanding has pushed her to change districts several times. She wonders if it is even possible for a supervisor to understand her needs without having a DHH background. Further, Clarissa's program is going through restructuring and she is concerned that her supervisor's combination of lack of DHH background and failure to seek input from DHH itinerant teachers could result in misguided decisions:

> We have gone through this change and I know that there's been a lot of concern through this change. I don't know how much impact the supervisor level has on the next level up and the decisions that are being made. I think I'm in support of this idea of, we want to look at the agency as a whole and see what's not working and what is working and kind of lift up those areas that aren't working. And maybe share resources for things that are working. So do you necessarily need to have a deaf education background for that? Maybe not, maybe more. That's like an organizational leadership type position. But I think when we're talking about what the role of the itinerant teacher is and restructuring based on that philosophy, if you've never done it, I have a hard time understanding how you would be effective in changing the structure. Also, if you're not super open and willing to have teacher committees, getting that feedback and really understanding from the teacher level. So it seems like a lot of top down decisions are being made with not as much understanding or room for feedback bottom up.

In Clarissa's excerpt, she discussed how not holding stakeholder meetings prevents her from feeling confident in the transparency and decision-making processes of the programming changes. Without feedback, she feels apprehensive that the changes will be successful. Involving teachers can go a long way toward successful programming. While her district does not have DHH teachers in leadership, Phoebe discussed how there is an in-between role which helps to fill in the gap between the teachers and their supervisor:

> We have a senior coordinator that works at our central administration building that oversees us, but she has no background in deaf and hard of hearing at all. So that's kind of a challenge because I don't think she truly understands what we advocate for or understands our requests at some points, but we have a teacher

> specialist that's kind of in between the two teachers and senior coordinator who has a background in deaf and hard of hearing. So the two of them kind of work to help us. Get things done and, you know, request things and stuff like that.

This partnership has been beneficial for her programming, However, issues still come up that would be better addressed if her supervisor had a DHH background. For example, later in her interview, Phoebe elaborated on this issue when it comes to her evaluation and obtaining helpful feedback:

> I feel like it affects me greatly. Because I don't feel like she's able to give me an accurate observation of my abilities or what I need to work on. She doesn't know sign language at all. And has never really taken the initiative to learn any. So if she's observing a student that signs she requests that I speak and that all the instruction is taken through an interpreter, which is already how our students spend a majority of their life. So it can be frustrating. We've reached out to the appropriate channels to try to fix some of that. But I don't feel like she's able to accurately evaluate me, but thankfully I do have other coworkers that have been in the field a lot longer than me that are able to help me out where those gaps are.

Phoebe found the evaluation particularly frustrating because of her evaluator's lack of fluency in sign language, the language of instruction. Without an understanding of the language of instruction, the evaluator is limited in the quality of feedback they can provide. It can be especially problematic when the supervisor not only does not have a background in DHH, but does not have a background in special education, as described by Jessie:

> She just doesn't understand anything about special ed. So she kind of then sends it to the building level to stay on top of. And he enforces it because of her. She's not great. I don't feel like it's super common for them to have a special ed background. Unfortunately, they don't get it. She's like, I don't understand why there are only two kids in your group. I'm like, I can't go through this with you. You're not going to understand. Then she's like, if they have an implant they can hear, or, you know, they're wearing hearing aids. Why can't they keep up with everyone? And I'm like, I don't have the patience to go through this with you, this is your job to know these things. I have sent her PowerPoint presentations that I give with the gen ed teachers at the beginning of the year, or even handouts. I do the simulations that are on YouTube to show them how they're hearing through these devices. They just...she still doesn't get it.

Similar to Jessie, Lila finds herself needing to provide education to her supervisor about her students' needs. She feels that her supervisor's lack of knowledge negatively impacts their program. As one of two DHH itinerant teachers in her district, Lila explains the dynamic with her supervisors:

> Going back to our supervisors and like the district special ed coordinators...they don't even really know what deaf education is. I find us educating, you know, the higher up people in the district, on our position and what our position is and on our needs. There's that component. A big lack of knowledge on the higher up level. And so when there's that lack of knowledge, I don't feel like we get the resources that we need at all times.

Kristy shares in Jessie and Lila's frustration of having a supervisor who does not have a DHH or special education background. At her workplace, the itinerant supervisor position is constantly being rotated through by people who do not have the relevant experience:

> We just had a parade of people because it's a great upwardly mobile position above us. The boss oversees hearing and vision. So you're the boss of approximately 45, 50 teachers between the two areas. And you're in charge of 64 school district itinerant services. And almost everyone is using us as a stepping stone to another greater, better job. The lady who has this position now just started. She just finished her first year with us. She's great, and it's not her fault, but I mean, she's not even a special educator. At least the people before were special educators before they became administration. She is a math teacher who became an administrator. And now she's in charge of, you know, 50 special education itinerant teachers. But she's not going to stay. I mean, there's no way this is her goal. Right? So this is a stepping stone position. We constantly have people coming and going. We did have mid-level leaders for a couple of years, and then when that person retired, they didn't replace her. So then all of a sudden, now, now it's been about 10 years where we have a boss that doesn't know what we're doing.

Kristy asserted that her boss' position is used as a means to move up the hierarchy in the organization and to help secure promotions. Like Kristy, Lenny has experienced heavy turnover in the DHH teacher supervisor position, with new supervisors every several years. Further, her anecdote discussed how a lack of background in low-incidence disabilities has implications for her students and getting them what they need:

> Yes, she evaluates us, approves equipment purchases, approves trainings, approves, everything like that- she is the key holder. She's the gateway person. Through the years we get a new one quite frequently. Like I said, it's my 14th or 15th year...I need to do the math. And, and she is the fourth manager we've had in that amount of time, but none of the four have ever understood deaf ed. Or understand the needs of our students and understand why they're expensive. I understand, you know, I said, I'm going to make sure it's low prevalence, high maintenance. And like, because even though we have this low prevalence population, their needs are high. I know they cost a lot of money. Interpreters are a lot of money. Equipment is a lot of money. Sending your teachers to specialized, actually research or evidence-based training for deaf or hard of hearing is expensive.

Even when the supervisor has an adjacent background, audiology, conflict comes up regarding the supervisor's understanding of the DHH itinerant teacher role as described by Mallory:

> Our current leader is an audiologist and has never been an educator. And that can be tough because first, he doesn't necessarily understand some of the programming plans that we have or what we need to do to get kids where they need to be. He takes a lot of just his information from the teachers who are talking to him and they tend to be the center-based teachers that are talking more because they share the same office…So he doesn't hear about our daily frustrations because we don't see him daily. Also, he is quick to make decisions based on an audiogram. And he will say, this kid doesn't need that kind of support. They can, they have a mild to moderate hearing loss and with hearing aids, they'll do just fine. And it's not necessarily always giving that big picture. Look at the kids.

Elizabeth went so far as to apply to be the supervisor of her itinerant program because she felt so strongly that the program would benefit from someone with a DHH background, however, she did not feel the top leadership viewed having a DHH background as a priority skill set:

> This past year, our supervisor kind of changed from what it was the first six years. And this person is really wonderful, but again, she doesn't have a DHH background and I applied for that job because I have an administrative credential and thought it might be really useful to have somebody in this role who had a DHH background, but again, the priorities weren't really aligned there with what they thought would be important for that position. So I wasn't considered. But in the future, that's something I'd be interested in doing, because I think it's important to have somebody with that background in the role who understands.

The itinerant teachers interviewed tended to have more success when supervisors acknowledge their lack of DHH expertise and defer to the training and background of the itinerants they

oversee. The supervisors described were more effective when they sought to learn, did not overly question the itinerants' decisions, provided material support, stood up for the itinerants at the district level, and allowed the itinerants to have input in determining how the program should be implemented.

Jessie also described the freedom of not being overly questioned from her supervisor: "My direct supervisor basically lets me do whatever I want…She's been with me since I started. I've set it up in a way where she always knows what I'm doing so we have that trust." Claudia appreciated how her supervisor seeks her input: "we have a new coordinator this year…And she's very, very open to discussion. She's very approachable. You can tell that she genuinely, genuinely wants to know how we're doing, wants our input." On the other hand, mentorship was also cited as an important part of having a good DHH leader, as described by Dawn: "someone who gives you mentorship and advice and checks in with you. I meet with my supervisor every week. We talk about cases. And so having support from an administrative level. And encouraging me that I'm doing a good job."

Mary Anne has had turnover with her supervisors but expressed what has her looking forward to the most recent change in supervisors:

> We have just been assigned a new coordinator. We've had a new one every year for the past six years. I actually requested her because she has been learning with us. And has been asking questions and as expressed a desire to want to know, and that's made all the difference in the world. When you have that person who says I'm going to be there for you. And we we've known [name] for a long time. She's a fighter and we're very excited to have her.

Like Mary Anne, Jessica has a supervisor that will support the DHH teachers at a district level. She also finds it beneficial when her supervisor can provide material support without questioning her:

> It's like, whatever you need, send me a list. Which has been really great. So when I started realizing, oh my gosh, I need more curriculum materials. One year I gave her a big list and she was just like, okay. Which was nice. Otherwise, we don't really collaborate. On what meetings need to look like, or, but if I'm like, if I need her support at a meeting, you know, we collaborate that way.

Jessica's supervisor went so far as to allow her to design how the DHH itinerant services should be implemented. She continued, describing how her supervisor had her determine the scope and curriculum the program would follow:

> When I interviewed with her she was like, I'll be perfectly honest. I have no idea what you do. But I will support you in whatever you need. So I was like, okay, great. When I expressed this concern to her, when I explained my frustration to her, that I was just like, I don't feel like I'm actually teaching. I feel like I'm a para. She was like, here's what I need you to do. I need you to set up your scope of practice. This is what you do. This is what you work on. Make a presentation and don't go out of that scope. She was like, I will have this in my Google drive somewhere. And if someone tries to complain that you're not doing your job, I'm going to pull this up and say, this is what she does.

The DHH teachers interviewed experienced a negative impact on their job satisfaction when their supervisor did not have a DHH background. Due to this lack of background, they failed to understand the teachers' challenges as well as the needs of students in the itinerant program. This, in turn, prevented the supervisors from supporting the teachers with resources, mentorship, and organizational change. Despite the lack of DHH background being problematic for supervisors, they were able to be more successful when they invested time in learning about DHH teaching and sought feedback of the teachers in their program.

Leadership Clashes and Job Satisfaction

Itinerant teachers report having the challenge of reporting to multiple persons of authority–some of which are a direct authority, while others have an ambiguous level of supervision over them. Can you give some examples here so readers can understand what this might look like? This occurs more often when the itinerant teacher has a physical office at a

school site, versus a central office type location. In this instance, the building principal may feel a responsibility toward supervising the itinerant teacher, despite the itinerant teacher having an official supervisor at the district office. In addition, the itinerant teachers reported that they answered to building principals at the various schools that they see students in, Further, itinerant teachers commonly reported heavy turnover in supervisor positions creating instability in their leadership. These issues are consequential because the literature indicates that administrators play a crucial role in positive job satisfaction by creating a positive climate and fostering supportive relationships (Benjamin & Black, 2012). Working with multiple persons of authority can escalate issues of role confusion.

Rachel discussed how she has had to be flexible in who she reports to due to constant organizational changes within the district. This can cause confusion and resentment: “It’s challenging because it changes from year to year. There were years that we were school based with the school principal. And then there were years that we were school based with our own administrator. There were times when we had two administrators, we had a curriculum person and another administrator, which was especially confusing.” Jessica related to Rachel in describing her multiple bosses: “at the co-op I had two different ones because there was the boss who hired me. And then there was my other one who oversaw the special education department for the two other districts that I served. Plus, all of the principals at my school sites.” Itinerants at consortiums commonly discussed issues with multiple supervisors, which Elizabeth noted: “You know, it's ten school districts that each have their own special education directors…So it's almost like you have ten different bosses.”

On the other hand, it can be equally confusing when the DHH teacher has no clear person to report to, as described by Dawn:

> I didn't really have like a supervisor at my last job. It was kind of, you know, like the principal at our school was obviously our supervisor, but then I've also working with the head person of the deaf and hard of hearing programs for all the districts. So it was kind of…I don't want to say awkward, but like, it wasn't really clear of like who I report to, because a lot of times, if I asked the principal of our school something, she didn't really know the answer.

Within each school site, there can be multiple persons of authority, which all require navigation by the DHH teacher, as described by Lila: "At middle and high schools, there's more than one principal. You know, all the schools, there's at least three or four principals. Whereas at an elementary school, there's typically just one principal. And so even having to work with multiple administrators can sometimes be difficult. You know and building that relationship and whatnot."

Overall, the itinerants deal with confusion regarding if they have a supervisor, how many supervisors they must report to, building relationships with multiple supervisors, and educating multiple supervisors on their role. Problems with leadership can be compounded with there is heavy turnover, infighting among the administrators about who is responsible, and competing leadership styles. Can you connect this back to job satisfaction?

Summary

Interview and focus group data from the 20 participants produced four major themes. In sum, the study participants indicated that their positive job satisfaction can primarily be attributed to their students' successes and building relationships with students, families, and colleagues. These indicators lead itinerant teachers to viewing their work as a source of meaning and fulfillment, which motivates them to continue doing their work, and in most instances, helps them to overcome negative or conflicting feelings that they experience. This theme is also

supported in survey data found in the broader literature (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Foster & Cue, 2009; Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013).

The teachers interviewed find caseload design to be highly influential on their overall level of satisfaction. Specifically, the factors that affect itinerant teachers the most include the amount of time they can spend with their students, the stress, pressure, and burnout that a large caseload causes, and the level of autonomy that teachers have in designing their caseloads. These factors are on par with what has been identified in the broader research on itinerant teachers, which indicates that itinerant teachers often feel as though they are lacking in instructional time with students, as a result of caseload design (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Yarger & Luckner, 1999). These factors tended to produce increased dissatisfaction.

Feeling like part of a community, whether at the school sites or with their DHH colleagues, made a difference in the teachers' experience and their level of satisfaction. Some of the teachers interviewed were the only DHH teacher in their district, which increased isolation and made support at the school sites even more crucial. Even teachers with a large, established program experienced feelings of isolation. When the teachers experienced relationships and connection in their workplace, it increased their level of satisfaction.

Role ambiguity emerged as a theme and was found to be particularly detrimental when the itinerant teacher's supervisor failed to understand the itinerant role. Not only was this evident in the study results, but research indicates that role ambiguity is a widespread issue (Hyde & Power, 2004). Supervisor support is a key component for special educators' feelings toward their work and positive climates in schools (Benjamin & Black, 2012). Despite this, many DHH itinerant teachers reported their supervisor does not understand their role. A supervisor's

understanding of the special educator's role and training is crucial to their ability to guide the teacher's professional skill development (DiPaola et al., 2004). This is critical because special education teachers cite a lack of support from their supervisor as a barrier to finding satisfaction in the workplace (Benjamin & Black, 2012). In the next chapter, these findings will be further integrated with the literature. In addition, limitations of the study and future directions for research will be discussed.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Chapter Four introduced the reader to 20 itinerant teachers from across the country and the findings uncovered from their individual interviews and focus group discussion. This chapter connects the findings with the literature on DHH itinerant teacher job satisfaction, reviews the implications for professional practice, and gives an overview of future research opportunities. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers describe the factors that shape their job satisfaction?
    1. In what ways, if at all, do the contexts of their work shape this satisfaction?
2. In what ways do the deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers' caseloads shape their job satisfaction?
3. In what ways, and to what degree, do deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teachers perceive and experience the various ecosystems in which they work?
    1. How do the ecosystems in which they interact shape their job satisfaction?

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of DHH itinerant teachers, obtain insight into the factors and working conditions that produce more positive experiences for itinerant teachers, and obtain insight into how the various workplace contexts can be structured to support positive work experiences. Itinerant teachers are a crucial part of the DHH student's IEP team, and a satisfied DHH itinerant teacher is a key component to teacher retention. It is necessary to understand the factors that lead to satisfaction and dissatisfaction to maintain a work force that is engaged, free of chronic stress, and plentiful enough to support the increasing numbers of DHH students in general education. Further, teachers that have a high level of satisfaction are best equipped to meet students' educational,

social, and emotional needs. A satisfied teacher benefits their employer both financially, through stability and commitment, as well as by contributing to a positive organizational culture.

A phenomenological research study was conducted to deeply understand the lived experiences of DHH teachers working in an itinerant capacity. Whereas other research studies on DHH teacher job satisfaction exclusively used survey design, there has been no qualitative research in this area to date. As a result, there is little insight from teachers into their reasoning as to why they are experiencing positive or negative job satisfaction. The study included three components: a questionnaire, individual interviews, and a focus group.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in chapter four were expressed thematically rather than by research question to give a conversational tone to the findings. The current base of literature provides a variety of explanations for a teacher's level of satisfaction. The existing literature indicates variables with leadership, sense of fulfillment, workload, training and preparedness, support, and mentorship, and working conditions. The findings of this study align to the existing literature in the areas outlined above but also explored role confusion as a central aspect of a teacher's level of satisfaction.

Four major themes emerged to provide an explanation for the teachers' level of job satisfaction. In Finding One, the teachers reflected on how their work provides meaning and fulfillment, generally because of witnessing student successes and building relationships with students and IEP team members. In Finding Two, the teachers outlined aspects of caseload distribution and design that has implications for their feelings of stress and effectiveness. In addition, their ability to interject their preferences into caseload design resulted in higher morale. In Finding Three, the teachers explained how a network of support, through a contact at the

school site or collaborative itinerant colleagues can increase their feelings of connectedness. Lastly, in Finding Four, the teachers spoke on the topic of role confusion as it relates to leadership. The teachers took issue with supervisors that did not have a DHH background unless the supervisor made a concerted effort to educate themselves, defer to the teachers' expertise, and work under an organizational structure that resulted in a clear hierarchy.

Research Question One

The first research question explored how itinerant teachers describe the factors that shape their job satisfaction. As expected, the teachers in the study identified aspects of their work that produced a high level of satisfaction as well as identified factors that cause dissatisfaction. When asked specifically to define job satisfaction, the teachers repeatedly discussed how their work garners a sense of meaning and fulfillment. They seek to feel like they are making a difference in the lives of their students, which provides motivation for continuing to do the work. The broader literature on career satisfaction supports this notion–employees need to believe that they are making a genuine contribution, that their work is meaningful, and that what they are doing is important (Duggah & Ayaga, 2014).

The majority of participants continue to work as itinerant teachers because they garner a great deal of satisfaction from seeing students' progress on their goals and grow as individuals. Further, receiving accolades from the IEP team go a long way in helping the itinerant teacher feel their efforts are worthwhile. The literature on DHH teachers concludes that itinerant teachers find direct student interaction to be their primary responsibility (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Foster & Cue, 2009; Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013). Teachers can witness progress firsthand when they have time to interact directly with their students. Even in a heavily consultative model, participants

found student progress to be one of the most powerful motivators in continuing their work. Through consultation, itinerant teachers can create access to the curriculum that may be inaccessible to students without their efforts.

Research Question Two

The second research question looked at how the teachers' caseload impacts their level of satisfaction. The majority of participants cited caseload distribution and implementation as factors that shape their day-to-day demands the most. Unsurprisingly, caseloads that are deemed more reasonable by the participants (such as driving time, service minutes, etc.) resulted in better feelings of satisfaction among the participants. Participants with more student contact see improved relationship building with their students as well as a greater feeling of effectiveness in their work. Caseloads that feel particularly large or spread out appear to foster feelings of ineffectiveness. Multiple participants cited these factors as reasons for changing itinerant positions, explaining that they needed to prioritize their mental health in order to continue working as an itinerant teacher. This is corroborated in the literature–DHH teachers exit teaching at higher rates than general education teachers due to compassion fatigue, work overload, and a lack of resources (Kennon & Patterson, 2016). It can be challenging to fill DHH itinerant teacher positions, which can negatively impact caseload size and result in teachers feeling stress and burnout.

Conversely, when teachers' preferences are accounted for in caseload design, morale tends to improve among itinerant teachers. In addition, independence, and autonomy with creating one's schedule also appears to lead to higher satisfaction. To achieve optimal caseload design, the teachers interviewed preferred a collaborative process in which teachers can select

geographic areas close to their home, continue working with certain students for relationship purposes, or rotate students to prevent burnout. They may prefer a caseload that is aligned to their strengths–their effectiveness with a particular age range of students, subject matter, or background in serving DHH students with additional disabilities.

Information gleaned from the questionnaire revealed that the majority of participants spend roughly the same amount of time consulting with other professionals as they do providing direct service to their students. This can be frustrating to teachers who feel frustration that teaching is not their primary role. This feeling has been documented among itinerant teachers in the literature–DHH itinerant teachers experience a higher feeling of satisfaction when teachers feel like they have sufficient instructional time with students (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Yarger & Luckner, 1999). The itinerant teachers interviewed discussed how large caseloads lead to a lack of time spent teaching students, which leads to underdeveloped relationships with students, and ultimately feelings of dissatisfaction and a lack of effectiveness. This creates a cycle of emotions–dissatisfaction can lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion, which can affect teachers' mental health and well-being (Platsidou, 2010).

The itinerant model is conducive to working with the same students over a period of years–perhaps even the students' entire educational career. This aspect of the itinerant model supports satisfaction among the itinerant teachers in the study because strong relationships with students and families were identified as a finding in the study. The connection that develops between students and their itinerant teacher is only possible when they have the luxury of time and the ability to work one-on-one with students. Further, the itinerant teachers reported that seeing a student's personality develop over time contributes to positive satisfaction.

Research Question Three

The third research question examined how itinerant teachers perceive and experience the various ecosystems in which they work. Further, the question looked at how the ecosystems in which they interact shape their job satisfaction. The itinerant teachers' feelings of support and connection across the systems was a driving factor in their level of satisfaction. The teachers interviewed needed to take initiative in order to become members of school communities. In order to form friendships at the school sites, they had to be purposeful about their interactions and make a concerted effort to establish a presence. Unfortunately, in several cases, itinerant teachers were not even recognized when in the school building, despite efforts to establish themselves over multiple years. This anonymity has proved to be detrimental to the participants' itinerant experience and could even be harmful for students. For example, when schools repeatedly forget to invite itinerant teachers to IEP meetings, participants reported feeling like they are unable to support students fully in their education. Further, the itinerant teachers are not given a space to work in the school, causing the teacher and student to meet in a different place every time–or worse, move locations multiple times during a lesson. Several participants reported that they are an afterthought until there is a problem with a student–such as when a parent has a complaint.

Oftentimes, it is simply easier to rely on relationships with itinerant teacher colleagues who understand the nature of the role. Having a shared office space with other itinerants often resulted in opportunities for spontaneous connection and collaboration. This proved especially crucial for itinerant teachers new to the role. However, not all itinerant teachers were housed at a common location, making it more difficult to develop collegial relationships. Most concerning, some itinerant teachers were given no office space whatsoever. Further, multiple teachers in the

study were the only DHH itinerant teacher in their district, creating a greater feeling of isolation. These teachers had to make an individual effort to connect with other itinerant staff, often other related service providers, as well as connect with online networks.

The participants identified both benefits and drawbacks to working for smaller districts versus larger DHH programs. Itinerants in smaller districts often felt as though their leadership could not find a clear place for them in the overall organizational structure. They experienced more feelings of isolation, which in fact caused a couple of teachers to switch to districts with a large itinerant program. Itinerant teachers in larger, more established and heavily resourced districts often found more collaboration and camaraderie, as long as the leadership was intentional about prioritizing connection and social opportunities. Itinerants in any size program occasionally experienced feelings of being forgotten or overlooked within the overall organizational structure.

An examination of the itinerants' immediate ecosystem, their itinerant program, revealed that the majority of participants had a supervisor without a background in deaf education and the majority of participants consider their supervisor to be "minimally involved" in the program. When the supervisor does not have a background in deaf education, itinerant teachers were more likely to experience issues such as role confusion, disagreement over curriculum, inappropriate allocation of resources, lack of appropriate professional development, and lack of instructional feedback.

Role confusion and ambiguity was a detrimental issue for itinerants, including at the school site, defining the role within the itinerant program, and the itinerant teacher's own understanding of their role. The majority of participants did not feel as though their supervisor

had a clear understanding of their role. This can be attributed to the supervisor's failure to understand the itinerant teachers' training and skill set. As a result, in some instances, participants clash over what is best for students and what kinds of roles and responsibilities are central to the itinerant role. It can also lead to a poorly designed itinerant model due to the supervisor's philosophy of itinerant teaching and narrow understanding of the role. Almost all participants did not have access to a formal job description, which is also reflected in the broader literature (Hyde & Power, 2004). However, a positive of role confusion that was discovered in the interviews is that a lack of understanding on the part of the direct supervisor can lead to increased autonomy and decision-making for the itinerant teacher.

Other issues can be mitigated when supervisors acknowledged their lack of DHH expertise and deferred to the training and background of the itinerants they oversee. The supervisors deemed effective by participants tried to understand deaf education, trusted the itinerants' decisions, provided material support, stood up for the itinerants with district leaders, and sought the itinerants' input in determining how the program should be implemented. The literature indicates that leaders with some knowledge in special education results in more supportive leadership behaviors (DiPaola et al., 2004).

When examining the interactions that itinerants had with various leaders in their districts, participants reported difficulty with reporting to multiple persons of authority, who often had an ambiguous level of supervision over them. This was seen more often when the itinerant's office is at a school site, away from their itinerant teacher colleagues, and not a direct report of the principal at the school site. This was also experienced at the various school sites where the itinerants provide instruction, as the principal feels a responsibility for services delivered to students at their school. Some participants reported that there was a clash between building

principals and their direct supervisor, with both feeling responsible for overseeing the itinerant. In other cases, the itinerant had no clear person to report to, with seemingly no one claiming responsibility for them.

Overall, the study's findings corroborate Skaalvik and Skaalvik's research (2010; 2015) that found job satisfaction was positively associated with time spent with children, managerial support, supportive relationships with colleagues, task variety, autonomy, cooperation and teamwork, and a sense of belonging. The literature commonly discussed a mismatch of teachers' expectations regarding what it would be like to be a deaf educator versus the realities of itinerant teaching (Luckner & Miller, 1993). However, despite experiencing some role confusion, none of my participants discussed experiencing a mismatch of expectations due to the training they received in their teacher preparation programs.

Of the two studies specific to DHH itinerant teacher satisfaction, state testing, providing students with adult role models, professional development related to deaf education, lack of family involvement, accessing tests appropriate for DHH students, time for non-teaching responsibilities, time for collaboration, paperwork, and evaluations were cited as sources of dissatisfaction (Luckner & Dorn, 2019; Luckner & Hanks, 2003). Nearly none of these aspects of itinerant teaching came up as sources of satisfaction for the participants in this study. Luckner and Dorn (2019) and Luckner and Hanks (2003) cited being challenged, teaching vocabulary, applying their education, attending IEP meetings, working with a wide age range of students, working with students from diverse cultures, and designing lessons as sources of satisfaction. Again, these aspects of itinerant teaching did not appear to be sources of satisfaction for the participants in the study.

When examining research on DHH itinerant teaching overall, there was more overlap regarding favorable aspects including autonomy and witnessing student progress (Clifford at al., 2004; Correa-Torres & Johnson, 2004). There was also overlap regarding unfavorable aspects including isolation and a lack of understanding of their role from general and special education colleagues which was also discussed in this study (Foster & Cue, 2009; Morris & Sharma, 2011). In the literature, not having to answer to one person was seen as favorable, whereas participants in this study identified that aspect as unfavorable (Clifford at al., 2004).

There was more agreement between the participants in this study and studies on special education teachers, which indicated that role ambiguity, work overload, poor job design, a lack of collegial relationships, understanding of special education from building leadership, and mentorship are all driving forces of dissatisfaction (Benjamin & Black, 2012; Billingsley, 2007; Kozleski, 2000; Reed, 2003). The literature on teacher populations overall and this study makes clear that teachers experience dissatisfaction when they do not feel they are making a meaningful difference for their students (Shen et al., 2015).

Implications for Practice

Working as an itinerant DHH teacher requires navigating a variety of systems simultaneously. Itinerant teachers must navigate policies and cultural values that exist in each of the systems, some of which promote satisfaction, and others that result in dissatisfaction. As itinerant teaching has shifted from a model largely focused on direct service to a heavily consultative model, itinerant teachers have needed to adapt and adjust their ideas about what it means to be a Teacher of the Deaf. The itinerant teachers in the study spoke about what contributes to their satisfaction and explored aspects of their work that limits their satisfaction.

This study provided an opportunity to understand the lived experiences of DHH itinerant teachers and how the various ecosystems in which they work play a role in their level of satisfaction. The interviews garnered understandings on the factors the promote positive and negative feelings toward their work. As Deaf education continues to evolve, it is crucial to gain the perspective of the professionals doing the work. The itinerant teachers interviewed were dedicated to students, highly invested in the field of Deaf education, and opinionated as to what aspects of their work provide a source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The interviews provide lessons for leadership and policy, that when combined with current available research, can provide recommendations. Recommendations gleaned from the interviews and available research have been categorized in the following three areas: caseload development and service minutes, leadership structure and practices, and community building.

Caseload development and service minutes. The teachers in the study reported how meaningful it is to have direct interaction with students and how it contributes to their overall sense of purpose in the job. Overly large caseloads can prevent teachers from having the necessary student interaction (Antia & Rivera, 2016; Yarger & Luckner, 1999). The itinerant teachers interviewed discussed how overly large caseloads result in stress and burnout, which promote dissatisfaction. The teachers' morale is improved when supervisors seek their feedback on designing the caseloads, considering their needs and preferences. The teachers discussed how caseloads that feel manageable and allow for ample time with students increase their feelings of self-efficacy, and in turn, satisfaction.

In regard to caseload, the itinerant program may look to state guidelines to determine reasonable caseload sizes. These guidelines may or may not consider direct vs. indirect minutes, however, it could serve as a helpful tool for justifying a reduction in caseload size to district

leadership. Some states do not offer exact numbers, but general recommendations or a range, which is the case in California: “a ratio of 1:10 to 1:24 is an appropriate range of standard caseload limits” considering “mileage, direct service versus consultation model, age of students, number of students with additional disabilities, and dynamics of school climate” (California Department of Education, 2000, pp. 67-68). Caseload design involves more than equitable division of students and minutes. Itinerant programs may want to consider the teacher’s preferences–including geographic location and placing itinerants at schools closer to their home, their instructional strengths, grades taught, subjects taught, and keeping teachers and students together over time, when desired.

Leadership structure and practices. The interviews provided a clear take away–DHH itinerant teachers felt that they would benefit from having a leader with a DHH background. Although study participants did not have a leader with a DHH background, a DHH background should be the standard when possible. Many of the DHH teachers interviewed had multiple supervisors, such as a supervisor in the special education department at their district or collaborative as well as principals at the school sites they serve. Despite the acknowledgement that leaders can demonstrate effective practices that support their work, most participants asserted that best practices are not a substitute for an in-depth understanding of deaf education and training, ASL, and Deaf cultural values.

In fact, although it is rarely the case that a program director has a DHH background, it may be the requirement depending on the state where the teacher resides. The California Department of Education (CDE) states “The program coordinator/director is an experienced educator of deaf and hard of hearing students, with skills to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing students are provided with appropriate instruction and designated services.” (California

Department of Education, 2000, p. 14). Despite this recommendation, none of the four participants in California had a supervisor with a DHH background, creating a mismatch between policy and practice. CDE also acknowledges various deaf education skills that the administrator must have, including knowledge of sign language varieties including American Sign Language, the impact of hearing loss on educational development, Deaf culture, Cued Speech, technology for DHH, and DHH assessment procedures (California Department of Education, 2000, pp. 14, 53-54). Sign language, in particular, would be incredibly beneficial for DHH teachers because their supervisor would be able to observe lessons and understand what is happening. Overall, the participants experienced issues when they supervisor did not have a DHH background, which could promote dissatisfaction.

There are situations where it may not be possible for DHH itinerants to have a supervisor with a DHH background. In these instances, districts may want to look at leaders who have a special education background and with a low-incidence disability or itinerant background when possible. Administrator support and professional development can go a long way in developing leaders' capacity (Fish & Stephens, 2010). Leaders of itinerant programs should make an effort to undergo training on deaf education and use transformational leadership practices to build on itinerants' sense of meaning and fulfillment from work. Transformational leadership behaviors, which looks to cultivate individual strengths and create an intellectually stimulating school climate, results in increased teacher job satisfaction (Aydin, et al., 2013; Borman & Dowling, 2017). Districts could consider a teacher-leader position that could serve as a liaison between leadership and the DHH itinerants. This position would provide an opportunity for a DHH itinerant teacher to take on the tasks that would be particularly specific to someone with a DHH background, including selecting professional development, mentoring, and selecting resources

and curriculum. District leaders should look to their DHH itinerant teacher pool to develop talent that has a DHH background.

If the district is unable or unwilling to have a DHH itinerant in a leadership role, there are still practices that would benefit the itinerant program, as described by participant interviews. Providing autonomy to the DHH itinerants in selecting their own professional development and resources and setting up a peer coaching model may go a long way in the itinerant teacher's satisfaction. Through a peer coaching model, itinerant teachers could get targeted feedback that they so badly desire for their instructional practice.

Leaders should be acutely aware of the organizational structure to ensure that there is no confusion as to who should evaluate the itinerant staff. In the study, participants who had an office at a school site experienced ambiguity as to who they should report to, and school leaders were confused as to whether to evaluate this staff. Districts would benefit from having an organizational chart that is made available to program leaders and DHH itinerant teachers. School site leaders should receive training on the itinerant role, which would create a more supportive environment for DHH itinerants (Foster & Cue, 2009; Morris & Sharma, 2011). In the study, participants repeatedly reported that they have a difficult time finding a place to meet with students. This creates a poor working environment, which is frequently cited as a reason for teacher dissatisfaction (Akomolafe & Ogunmakin, 2014). This included all of the participants that teach in California, which has guidelines that state, "space for itinerant teachers, speech and language specialists, and other support personnel serving deaf and hard of hearing students is clean, well-lit, acoustically appropriate, and of adequate size for instruction and for storage of instructional materials" (California Department of Education, 2000, p. 17).

Formal job description. Leaders should consider developing a formal job description and make it available to new and current itinerant teachers. In the study, only one participant said they were given a job description, and out of the remaining 19 participants, I was only able to obtain one more job description. This is even less than what is cited in the literature, with 38% of itinerant teachers surveyed reporting that they had never received a job description (Hyde & Power, 2004). Once developed, the job description should be updated collaboratively as the itinerant program evolves over time. A formal job description would create realistic expectations for job seekers as well as create clarity for leadership regarding the DHH itinerants' roles and responsibilities. The description should be based on the professional expertise DHH teachers bring, using DHH teacher certification requirements as a guide.

Community building. Participants commonly reported feeling isolated as an itinerant, however, there was variability among participants with some reporting little to no feelings of isolation. Isolation is a common feeling among DHH itinerants overall (Correa-Torres & Johnson, 2004). The participants who experienced less isolation had a common office space with their itinerant colleagues. Although it may be geographically inconvenient, districts may want to explore housing DHH itinerants at one site, rather than separating them to the various schools across the district. Not having a common home base results in a disconnection from colleagues, particularly regarding socialization and relatedness, which may impact their satisfaction (Luckner & Yarger, 1999).

If there is only one DHH itinerant for the whole school district, the district could be purposeful in creating a network for the itinerant and explore the research on "singletons" in a PLC (Leane & Yost, 2022). In this model, teachers without a clear professional peer group are trained in how to connect with adjacent groups that may be a valuable alternative for their

professional growth (Leane & Yost, 2022). If possible, the district could investigate creating a consortium model with other districts, in order to create a core of DHH itinerant teachers, as is the model in many geographic areas of the United States. At the site level, school leaders could invite DHH itinerants to their staff meetings and social events, allowing them to make build community outside of the itinerant program.

Implications for Leadership Policy

With forty-eight states and the District of Columbia currently reporting special education teacher shortages, school leadership faces the daunting task of retaining teachers and attracting new teachers by making special education teaching positions a satisfying career choice (Sutcher et al., 2016). School leadership is underprepared to address this mounting challenge. Many administrators deal with the following common concerns: spending time and money to train new teachers, hiring long-term substitutes instead of credentialed teachers, and uncertainty of how to support special education teachers (Bettini, et al., 2015).

Administrators may feel unprepared to support special education teachers because most states do not require administrators to take coursework in special education as part of their certification and many states only require a test for principal certification (Bettini, et al., 2015; Kozleski, 2000; Roberts & Guerra, 2017). In addition, there are no practicum or field-based requirements for principals and their oversight of special education programs (Roberts & Guerra, 2017). In deaf education specifically, district leadership and human resources have been unsuccessful in their searches for qualified leaders and are hiring teachers and superintendents with no experience with deaf and hard of hearing students (Andrews & Covell, 2006). Not surprisingly, not only is it challenging to find leaders with DHH experience, but districts have

also found even more difficulty finding leaders who are themselves Deaf (Andrews & Covell, 2006).

School leadership may need to seek out special education training to build their leadership capacity as well as their general education teachers' capacity. Survey data shows that 65% of principals felt confident in their conceptual special education knowledge, including assessment, curriculum, IEPs, and instructional practices (Roberts & Guerra, 2017). District leadership may seek to provide special education training for school leaders that increases their understanding of teacher roles and responsibilities and builds their competency in providing targeted feedback for special education teachers (Frost & Kersten, 2011).

Implications for Social Justice

Students are severely affected by special education teacher shortages. High attrition among special educators exacerbates the achievement gap and increases the financial burden to districts (Theoharis & Fitzpatrick, 2013). Caseloads are often increased, and services may be reduced, resulting in an unsatisfactory educational experience for students, lower student academic achievement, and insufficient post-secondary preparation (Billingsley, 2004). When new teachers leave the teaching profession soon after entering and are repeatedly replaced by another first-year teacher, students are more likely to be exposed to years of potentially ineffective teachers or ineffective teaching practices (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). Further, new teachers often leave before they have developed a solid repertoire of research-based teaching practices (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). Students in high-poverty urban schools, remote rural schools and students with serious emotional and behavioral disorders tend to be more disadvantaged by teacher shortages (Albrecht, et al., 2009). In relation, attrition rates are higher

for special education teachers that serve large percentages of low-income, non-White, and/or low achieving schools (Player et al., 2017).

Administrators need not only be thinking about the number of special education teachers that they hire but consider if the teachers they hire accurately represent the student body demographics. Hiring more special education teachers of color is an effective way to ensure more culturally competent teachers and minority role models for minority children (Cartledge, 2001). African Americans comprise 6.8% and 9.6% of elementary and secondary special education teachers, however, 18.4% of special education students are African American (Talbert-Johnson, 2021). In deaf education specifically, the number of Latinx and Asian-American DHH students has increased, however these student demographics do not match the teacher demographics (Andrews & Covell, 2006). DHH teachers tend to be "White, female, and hearing" unlike DHH students which tend to be ethnically diverse (Johnson, 2004).

Interviews with Black special education teachers offer insight into retention strategies, which may be most effective when started in teacher preparation programs. Interviewees recommended cultivating meaningful relationships with White faculty and White peers, connecting to the course curriculum, financial support, a lack of mentoring from Black faculty, and social integration (Scott, 2018). In addition, specialized training for special education teachers is lacking for the increasing numbers of students with disabilities who are English Language Learners (Orosco & Abdulrahim, 2017).

Researcher Reflection

Carrying out this study has been a unique opportunity to lean into multiple roles as a researcher, practitioner, and participant. I went into this study with some hunches as to what I would find, primarily expecting to be validated in the notion that the amount of direct service

time is the primary reason for teachers' level of satisfaction. I did not expect to find such a strong connection between a program leader's background in deaf education (or lack of) and the teacher's satisfaction with working in the itinerant program. Looking back at my own work experiences, this made complete sense.

In my three itinerant experiences, I have seen a variety of leadership models. In the first experience, the program was led solely by a former DHH itinerant teacher. Aside from general leadership traits that I found effective, this leader was able to provide materials, resources, professional development, and instructional feedback that was highly specific to the field of deaf education. In my study, this type of leader was a rare occurrence. In my second itinerant experience, my supervisor had a speech pathology background, which I consider to be a closely related field. However, underneath that supervisor, there was a teacher-leader position that was fully dedicated to implementing the itinerant program. This position was held by someone with a DHH background, and I found this model to achieve similar benefits as having a supervisor with a DHH background, probably because those two positions collaborated closely and there was clearly a high level of trust. However, I did not receive the same targeted feedback in my evaluations as having a leader with a DHH background. In my third and current itinerant experience, the program is led by someone without a DHH background, who oversees multiple special education programs. There is no teacher-leader position. In this experience, I have enjoyed a leader who is supportive, demonstrates democratic leadership, and has a high level of trust toward the itinerant teachers. However, in my perception, there have been issues concerning professional development, a mismatch of opinions between the DHH teachers and leadership concerning the direction of the program, and a lack of targeted feedback during both formal and informal evaluations. This has created feelings of dissatisfaction, and I speculate a reason for

why the program has had high turnover among DHH teachers despite positive factors such as reasonable paperwork, competitive salary and benefits, and autonomy.

The leader's background is only one finding of the study but one that resonated with me deeply. As deaf education continues to evolve toward a model that is highly consultative in nature, I believe it is crucial to incorporate DHH teachers in leadership roles to ensure that itinerant programs are structured to provide positive outcomes for teachers and students. Regarding the literature, research efforts look at student learning and achievement, although critical, fail to take into account teachers' needs. Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of deaf education.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study adds to the minimal research available on DHH itinerant teacher satisfaction, providing an important qualitative contribution to the field of deaf education. To gather more information, these findings could be tested with a larger sample size, using a quantitative method. For example, using questions from the present study, a Likert scale would be a useful way to determine to what extent participants agree or disagree with the findings. A quantitative survey would be conducive to a larger sample size, with greater diversity, and more generalizability as a result.

Second, future job satisfaction research could be carried out specifically with DHH itinerant teachers who have worked with multiple districts. The current study included several participants who organically compared itinerant experiences throughout their career, which offered a unique opportunity to compare factors that lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. By

specifically recruiting itinerant teachers who have had multiple itinerant placements, the study could further home in on strategies for practice that districts may choose to implement.

Lastly, there have been no national studies conducted on job satisfaction that showed differences between special education teachers of different races or disability categories. Little is known about levels of job satisfaction and differences between special education teachers in high incidence disability teaching placements and low incidence teaching placements, including DHH teachers. Within deaf education specifically, there have been no studies that determine whether teachers who work in a purely or predominantly consultation/in-direct itinerant model have differences in their satisfaction levels from teachers who spend the majority of their day interacting directly with students. This study could be replicated with other populations of special educators, or other types of itinerant teachers (visually impaired, orthopedically impaired, etc.), provided that the researcher implement some modifications to the interview questions.

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Appendix A

Social Media Post for Recruitment

Hello Fellow Itinerant Teachers,

I am a graduate student in the Joint Doctoral Program (JDP) in Educational Leadership with UC San Diego and Cal State San Marcos, and also a DHH Itinerant Teacher with the San Diego County Office of Education. At this point in the doctoral program I have formed my dissertation proposal and submitted an IRB for the study to Cal State San Marcos. The topic which I want to research is the job satisfaction of DHH itinerant teachers.

I'm specifically planning to conduct 45-60 min. individual interviews and send out a

questionnaire for teachers who meet the following criteria:

(1) Are working as a DHH Teacher with at least 50% of working hours served in an itinerant capacity

(2) Have at least three years of experience

(3) Currently employed by a Local Education Agency

All responses are confidential and no real names will be used in the publication of my

dissertation study.

If you are interested in participating, please fill out this interest form and I will contact you

personally to provide more information and next steps. I appreciate your support!

Angela Sorrem Gray

DHH Itinerant Teacher

San Diego County Office of Education-East County SELPA

Doctoral Student, Educational Leadership: UC San Diego and Cal State San Marcos

asorrem@ucsd.edu

Appendix B

Special Educators in the Itinerant Model: A Phenomenological Study of Factors Associated with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Participant Questionnaire

Hello,
I am Angela Sorrem Gray and I am currently a student in the UCSD/CSUSM Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. I am conducting a research study to better understand the lived experiences of deaf/hard of hearing (DHH) teachers who work in an itinerant capacity in a public school setting. Thank you for your interest in my study!

To learn more about your experiences, please complete the following questionnaire. All responses provided here are confidential.

By continuing, you are acknowledging that you are 18 years or older and consenting to participate in this questionnaire.

Background Information

- What state are you employed in?
- Who employs you? (check all that apply)
    - o School district
    - o Special education consortium (also may be called a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), Department of Education, County Office of Education)
    - o Non-profit
    - o Government agency (e.g., Department of Defense)
    - o Charter school or charter school network
    - o Private practice
    - o Other: _____
- Is your district/consortium
    1. Urban
    2. Rural
    3. Suburban
    4. Combined
    5. Other: _____
    6. N/A
    - Are you current working as an itinerant teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing?
    - o Yes
    - o No

- How many years have you been
    1. A teacher __
    2. A deaf/hard of hearing educator __
    3. An itinerant teacher of the deaf __
- Were you a classroom teacher (resource or self-contained) before becoming an itinerant teacher? Yes/No
- How many students are on your caseload? __
- How many of these students receive consultation only? __
- How many of your students would you estimate have a primary disability other than hearing loss ("deaf plus")?
    1. 25% or less
    2. 26-50%
    3. 51-75%
    4. 76% or more

- What is the age range of the students that you currently serve?
    - Early intervention (birth-three)
    - Elementary school
    - Middle school
    - High school
    - All age ranges or a combination of age ranges
- What percentage of your work week is itinerant?
    - 1-24%
    - 25-49%
    - 50-74%
    - 75-100%

Workplace Setting and Program Information

- Does your supervisor have a background in deaf education? Yes/No
- Is your DHH program led by a teacher leader or person not required to have an administrative credential? Yes/No
- How involved is your supervisor in your program?
    1. Minimally involved
    2. Moderately involved
    3. Very involved
- How often does your DHH program meet?
    1. Weekly
    2. Monthly
    3. Quarterly
    4. Yearly
    5. N/A- I am the only DHH teacher in my district/consortium.

Roles and Responsibilities

- What percentage of your time do you spend directly teaching students?
    1. 25% or less
    2. 26-50%
    3. 51-75%
    4. 76% or more

- What percentage of your time do you spend consulting with IEP team members (general education teacher, special education teacher, related service providers, etc.)?
    1. 25% or less
    2. 26-50%
    3. 51-75%
    4. 76% or more

If you would be interested in participating in a one-on-one interview and a focus group with other itinerant teachers of the deaf/hard of hearing via Zoom, please provide me with your email address: _____

Appendix C

Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

My name is Angela Sorrem Gray and I am student in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at California State University San Marcos. I am conducting a research study to better understand the lived experiences of experienced DHH teachers (teaching for more than three years) who work in an itinerant capacity in a public school setting. The purpose of this form is to inform you about the study.

Why am I being invited to take part in this study?
You are invited to take part in this study because you

(1) An itinerant teacher of deaf/hard of hearing students
(2) Have at least three years of experience as an itinerant teacher
(3) Currently work in the public school system

What will I do if I agree to participate?
If you agree to participate in the study, you will complete a questionnaire, which is expected to take five minutes. You will participate in an individual interview with the researcher via Zoom (a free, online, video conferencing application). The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be recorded. You will receive the list of potential interview questions prior to your scheduled interview date so that you may reflect on and consider your responses ahead of time. In addition, you will be asked to submit a copy of the official job description provided by your employer. Participants may not be able to provide this document and your participation is not contingent on providing this document. You will review your interview transcript to make sure it accurately captures your responses. This may take up to 30 minutes. Lastly, you will be asked to participate in a focus group via Zoom, which is expected to last 60 minutes and will be recorded.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate at any time, even after the study has started. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study, there will be no penalty.

What are the benefits to me for being in this study?
There are no direct benefits to participation in this study, however, your participation will help the researcher learn more about deaf/hard of hearing itinerant teacher experiences and impacts on their career satisfaction, and society may benefit from this knowledge.

What happens to the information collected for the study?
Your responses will be confidential.

The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. All data will be stored on the researcher's password-protected computer in a password-protected file. All hard copies of data will be contained within a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. Research records will be kept confidential up to three years after the project is finished. The researcher will dispose of research data by shredding paper records and erasing digital files.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? Is there any risk to me by being in this study? If so, how will these risks be minimized?

There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. These include:

(1) A potential to experience boredom, fatigue, or emotional distress while being interviewed.
(2) The amount of time spent doing the interview may be inconvenient.
(3) The potential to feel uncomfortable answering interview and focus group questions.
(4) A potential loss of confidentiality during the focus group where responses may be seen and heard by other participants in the study.

To minimize these risks and inconveniences, the following measures will be taken:

(1) Participants can skip any questions that they feel uncomfortable answering while taking the questionnaire or during the interview.
(2) The surveys, interviews, or observations may be scheduled at a time that is convenient to the participant and at a place that is private.
(3) Focus group participants will be asked to respect the privacy and confidentiality of the other focus group participants.

Who should I contact for questions?

If you have questions about the study, please call me at 414-334-0733 or e-mail me at sorre01@cougars.csusm.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Joni Kolman at 303-550-3129 or jkolman@csusm.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029.

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR RECORDS

Appendix D

Participant Interview Questions

Background Information and Motivation

1. Tell me about how you were motivated to become a teacher of the deaf and specifically, an itinerant teacher.
2. What steps did you take to become a teacher, specifically an itinerant teacher?
3. Tell me about how you pursued your current position. When you were looking for a teaching position, what factors were important to you?
4. How does the itinerant role that you're in now compare to itinerant roles that you've had in the past, specifically thinking about the service delivery model?
5. How did your expectations of itinerant teaching differ from the reality, specifically thinking about your district's service delivery model?

Workplace Setting and Program Information

6. How is your itinerant program structured? Who designed what your program looks like?
7. Tell me about how you collaborate with your DHH itinerant colleagues?
8. Do you feel like the context of your work supports collaboration with itinerant teacher colleagues?

Roles and Responsibilities

9. Tell me about a typical week in your itinerant role.
10. What do you see as being the most impactful roles and responsibilities of your work?

Job Satisfaction

11. Tell me about something in your work that makes your job satisfying.
12. What specifically made that aspect of your work enjoyable or rewarding?
13. Is this scenario or these feelings typical for you in this job?
14. Tell me about an incident or set of events that made you unhappy or reconsider wanting to do this work.
15. Describe how you define job satisfaction.
16. How would you describe the satisfaction or lack of satisfaction that you have with your job?

Probes:

Why do you think that is?
Can you tell me more about that?
How did/does that make you feel?
You mentioned____. Could you be more specific?

Appendix E

Member Check Explanation and Directions

Dear _____,

I appreciate your continued participation in this research study. Your time is valuable to the field of special education, deaf education, and to educational leaders in understanding the factors that create positive or negative work experiences in the itinerant model.

Your interview has been transcribed and you can check the transcription for accuracy. This is a voluntary part of the process. If there is any part of the transcribed interview you wish to edit, please follow the below directions to edit the transcription using the comment function of Google Docs. If you desire further assistance in the member checking process, or would like to set up a time to conference, please call me, Angela Sorrem Gray, at 858-298-2116 or email me at asorrem@ucsd.edu.

Comment Function for Google Docs

1. Open the transcription of your interview that was emailed by the researcher.
2. To insert comments, highlight the word(s)/phrase(s) you want to comment on.
3. Click the tab labeled "insert" and then select "comment." A comment box will appear with the word(s)/phrase(s) you selected. Type in your comment, and for the first comment only, include @asorrem@ucsd.edu to alert the researcher that you have added a comment.
4. Continue this step for any additional comments, without typing in @asorrem@ucsd.edu.

Appendix F

Focus Group Questions

1. As itinerant teachers, our roles can look very different and the expectations for our work can be very different depending on the service delivery model that we work within. Tell me about how you see your district's service delivery model affecting your feelings toward your work.
2. Tell me about a time in which your district created a barrier to you doing good work.
3. Tell me about a time in which your supervisor made your work environment more enjoyable or rewarding.
4. Tell me a time in which you experienced a disconnect with your supervisor on how the itinerant model should be implemented.
5. Tell me about how your itinerant teacher colleagues collaborate and how that impacts your feelings toward your work.
6. What would the ideal itinerant program look like to you?
7. What do you envision itinerant programs will look like in the future?