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WHY THEY STAY: AN EXPLORATION OF PART C COORDINATORS' PERCEPTIONS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my family and friends. A special gratitude to my parents who encouraged curiosity and a strong work ethic, both traits that helped me to persevere. Thanks to my mom, husband and children who have been patient, kind, encouraging and steadfast in their support, pushing me when I wanted to give up and supportive when I needed extra support. They have learned all kinds of new skills as I sat in class or at a computer at all hours of the day and night.

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Abstract

Leadership in early care and special education programs is critical to the school readiness and educational success of young children with disabilities. Increased turnover in recent years poses a challenge to stability of programs. This dissertation utilizes a descriptive qualitative method to identify key factors that influence IDEA Part C coordinators' decisions to stay in their position. Eight Part C coordinators participated in the study. I conducted semi-structured interviews with them. I employed thematic analysis and constant comparison methods to analyze the interview data. Findings suggest that on-the-job factors that contribute positively to their decision to stay include commitment to serving young children with disabilities, qualifications for the job, challenges in organizational leadership, and teamwork and collaboration. The off-the-job factor is related to family responsibilities. This study offers multiple practical implications for recruiting and retaining the leadership of EI programs which will lead to improved outcomes for young children with disabilities in the programs.

Key words: *IDEA Part C, Early Intervention, job embeddedness, on-the-job factors, off-the-job factors, young children with disabilities, public managers, retention, turnover*

Chapter 1: Introduction

Leadership in early care and education programs, whether at the local, district, or state level, is critical to the school readiness and educational success of young children (Snyder et al., 2012). However, leaders (coordinators) in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) early intervention program that serves young children with disability are leaving the field in higher rates than seen in the recent past (Greer, 2018). This increased turnover creates challenges that ripple through the state system and impact implementation at the community level, creating a "wicked problem" (Head & Alford, 2015; Armstrong, 2017).

Wicked problems are those problems in education that are complex and, without resolution, pose a challenge to young children with disabilities receiving quality services. Data from the Infant Toddler Coordinators Association's (ITCA) survey showed that for the 2018 fiscal year, 70% (35) of coordinators had less than five years' experience and of that, 36% (13) had less than two years of experience in their positions (Greer, 2018). Conversely, in 2005, only 39% of coordinators had five or fewer years of experience, and more than 67% had been in their jobs for six years or more (Greer, 2018). These numbers indicate that there is an increase in the turnover rate of Coordinators over the past several years.

Effective leadership and management of early childhood special education programs is critical to successful outcomes for young children with disability. Given the complexities of providing early intervention (EI) services, maintaining and supporting the educational leadership within the EI program is important. Increasing rates of turnover at the highest levels of administration threaten the stability of EI programs (Greer, 2018), yet research on voluntary turnover of administrators is sparse across the early childhood special education (ECSE) field.

There has been limited research on coordinators in their role as leaders and managers of the IDEA Part C programs (Cregard et al., 2017; LaRocco et al., 2014; Van Wart, 2003), let alone of their job satisfaction. IDEA has two key sections focused on early childhood special education (ECSE)—Part B addresses services for students with disabilities, ages three-21, while Part C focuses on infants and toddlers, birth to age three. This dissertation explores the factors that may contribute to Part C coordinators' decision to stay, identifying and addressing issues and challenges that have led to the high turnover rates. More specifically, this study offers the perceptions the coordinators have of their roles in the Part C Program; aspects of their jobs they find satisfying and/or challenging; and personal, family, and community factors that influence their decisions to stay.

Understanding turnover in leadership is an important concept as leadership at the state level is critical to the quality of the program implemented. The breadth of understanding gained from this study can inform strategies for retention of these leaders.

Background

In each of the 50 states, one person holds the position of State Part C Coordinator. This person is responsible for providing direction and management of the IDEA Part C program in their state, commonly referred to as "Early Intervention" (EI). The position is most often located in a state government health or education agency, designated by the governor. The complexity of this program requires that the coordinator complies with both federal and state law, as well as lead and manage the program, and coordinate resources within and across agencies to meet the needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

In review of trend data, coordinator turnover rate began to increase significantly in 2015. This was also the same year that the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) mandated

increased accountability standards through the requirement of a multi-year State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP; USDOE, 2014). The increased accountability and emphasis on improving outcomes for young children with disabilities through multi-year, state systemic improvement planning started in 2003 with the State Performance Plan /Annual Performance Report and was increased further with the implementation of the SSIP in 2015. These accountability plans put additional focus on the importance of consistent, effective leadership.

Recent studies indicate recruitment and retention of employees are one of the most critical issues facing organizations (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006). In early 2019, the Director of the USDOE, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) announced an agency priority focused on personnel preparation, retention, and attraction related to those providing special education services, including Part C Coordinators (R. Fitzpatrick, personal communication, March 18, 2019). In response to the concern about this issue, the OSERS is conducting a yearlong symposium on attracting, recruiting, and retaining professionals in the special education field. Specifically, in the summer of 2019, a day-long symposium was held with various stakeholders in the early childhood special education field to discuss leadership and the importance of retaining and sustaining those leaders in the field. Concerns about this issue is supported by the ITCA survey data demonstrating increased Part C Coordinator turnover for the past several years (Greer, 2018). Given the concern about turnover of early childhood special education leaders the focus of this study are Part C Coordinators who are currently serving in the role of leading and managing the EI program. Having stable, effective leadership and management of the EI program is critical to successful outcomes for young children with disabilities. The EI program is complex and turnover at the highest levels creates instability. Employee turnover, which means employees' departures from their current workplaces, has

become a critical managerial concern for early childhood special education (ECSE). Research has consistently demonstrated that frequent turnover of leadership leads to low morale and lower productivity of staff, impacting the consistency of service delivery (Mor Barak et al., 2001; Oberfield, 2014; Staw, 1980). Additionally, Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner (2000) reported that workplace turnover had an impact on an organization, resulting in substantial resources needed to replace workers and a negative impact on organizational effectiveness. The impact of high turnover of Part C Coordinators has implications for continuity of program quality as well as the implementation of current systems change efforts intended to improve outcomes for infants and toddlers with disability (Greer, 2018).

Employee turnover has been one of the most widely studied organizational issues. Various theories have been developed to identify and explain the factors contributing to turnover and are classified as content models, which explain why people leave, and process models, which explain how employees leave (Singh & Sharma, 2015). The early research studies focused on content models. March and Simon (1958) introduced the first theory of turnover, positing that employees stay as long as the benefits of the job match expectations. Over time, theories have advanced to process models, those theories that take into account a broad range of factors both job- and community-driven, that compel a person to stay or leave.

The theoretical framework for this study is informed by two theories, the ecological theory and job embeddedness theory. Ecological theory is a systems theory based on the belief that a child's development is affected by everything in the surrounding environment. This theory focuses on explaining and predicting the ways in which organizations and people behave. A child with a disability seeking services and supports is impacted by the system that serves them. Leadership can support or inhibit the quality of those needed services. When changes occur at

different levels of the system, e.g. turnover of a coordinator, this can have a cascading impact down to the child and family level. This theory provides the background on why systems matter and change at any level ultimately impacts children and families.

Turnover research traditionally focuses on job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The reality is that many things influence whether an employee stays with an organization, and job embeddedness theory addresses the various factors that influence the decision to stay or leave. This study draws on the job embeddedness theory of fit, link, and sacrifice of on-the-job and off-the-job factors, those connections that a person has with their organization and in their personal, family, and community life that influence the decision to stay or leave (Mitchell et al., 2001). This theory aligns with the goals of this study as it reflects the most recent research and understanding of the role of on-the-job and off-the-job factors that influence coordinators' decisions to stay or leave. The critical elements of the theory are defined as fit—how a person's work relates to their goals and personal values; links—how a person is connected to people and activities within their organization and the broader community; and sacrifice—the level of disruption a person would experience if they were to leave. As the position of Part C Coordinator is unique within each state, the exploration and description of job embeddedness factors may provide valuable insight into the problem of high turnover of Part C Coordinators.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the factors that contribute to the decision to stay in the position of Part C Coordinator. Understanding the experiences of Part C coordinators will provide insight into strategies and resources that support the position, thus, improving retention of those with the critical role of leading and managing the program.

The research questions guiding this qualitative study are:

RQ1: Which job-related factors do Part C Coordinators perceive as critical to their decision to stay in their position?

RQ 2: Which non-job-related factors do Part C Coordinators perceive as critical to their decision to stay in their position?

The interview protocol informed by the two research questions captures information related to which job-related and non-job related factors coordinators perceive as important to their decisions to stay. The method of using interviews allowed for a full description of what each factor meant from their perspective, using their own words, and understanding which ones seemed more relevant to the decision to stay in the position.

I adopted the qualitative descriptive research design for this study. This approach provides a clear, straightforward description from the coordinators themselves on their perceptions of why the stay and their understanding of their job and responsibilities. The rationale in using a qualitative descriptive approach is to gain an in-depth understanding of the key themes involved in the decision to stay as perceived by the coordinators.

As noted, there has been limited research on turnover of leaders and less on early childhood special leaders. It is important to establish an understanding of coordinators' perceptions and understanding of the issues using their words and ideas. The need to determine the factors that influence a person to stay in their position is best achieved through open and closed ended questions in an interview format using a qualitative descriptive approach.

Significance of the Study

Cregard et al. (2017) noted that leadership and management at the state level are critical to the quality of the programs implemented. However, there is a paucity of research on public administrators (e.g., coordinators) and their understanding of their roles and responsibilities in

supporting high quality special education programs and understanding what contributes to their job satisfaction. Because of the critical roles these coordinators play in the lives of young children with delays or disabilities, research is needed to understand what contributes to retention in order to address turnover.

Supporting leadership in early intervention is becoming increasingly important. The current environment offers challenges and opportunities in which early care and special education leaders need to show strong leadership skills within their work settings, and the broader community. Given today's focus on program improvement, and systemic change, leaders must acknowledge the complex social and political context in which they work. The complicated changes experienced by early intervention leaders require specialized leadership skills in order to transform the systems serving our youngest children with disabilities. Frequent turnover disrupts the early intervention program and delays ongoing change as a new person must learn how to address the needs of the planned systemic change to improve the program.

There is a need to build a base of evidence in areas of leadership and management in the early intervention program. The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) believes the Early Care and Special Education (ECSE) field should conduct research on the construct and demonstration of leadership skills and building and sustaining leadership capital across ECSE service systems (DEC Policy Statement, 2015). To this end in 2015, the DEC released a position statement on leadership in early intervention and early childhood special education (EI/ECSE). DEC emphasized the importance of developing and supporting high-quality leadership within and across all levels of EI/ECSE service systems. Moreover, there was a call for related research due to the paucity of research in the field (LaRocco et al., 2014). This dissertation study seeks to

identify those factors that support EI leaders in their positions, reducing turnover and supporting retention.

While quantitative survey data on Part C Coordinators have been collected and reported since 2002 by the Infant Toddler Coordinator Association (ITCA), there has not been additional research beyond the aggregated survey data. Without additional descriptive data, it is impossible to accurately determine the factors that cause a person to leave or stay. This descriptive qualitative study provides an in-depth picture of the perception the coordinators have of the work and community factors that influence their decision to stay. Their responses are used to provide insights and information to inform the development of resources to support retention. This study offers additional insight to illuminate the data that have already been collected through the annual ITCA surveys. Given there are very limited data on Part C Coordinators, qualitative interviews provide further descriptive data, and they allow the voices of the coordinators to be heard. Additionally, these findings have the potential to inform the research on job embeddedness of not only Part C Coordinators but other public administrators who also serve in special education.

Waniganayake (2002) concluded that definitions of early childhood leadership work lacked clarity, coherence, and comprehensiveness, due to a failure to take into account changing circumstances and the evolving roles of leaders in response to these changes. Given the increasing complexity and challenges facing early intervention leaders it is imperative that they are well prepared to respond educational and wellness needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities. This study provides further clarity to early childhood special education leadership positions through a better understanding of their experiences and perceptions of the coordinators who currently serve in this role and what factors influence their decisions to stay.

It is relatively easy to describe what successful leaders do that makes them effective. But it is much more difficult to tease out the components that determine their success (Prentice, 2004). Understanding the perceptions that state leaders have of their role and the factors that contribute to their retention will inform the field and provide support to current and future leaders in early intervention program.

Philosophical and Theoretical Assumptions

We bring certain assumptions and beliefs to our work based on our experiences in the world, shaping our reality and informing our approach to inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Crotty, 1998). My worldview is one of social constructivism; knowledge does not exist independent of the learner, and knowledge is constructed through social interactions (Creswell, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). When the coordinators provide their understanding, they speak from a place shaped by social interactions, personal experiences, and historical views (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Crotty, 1998). In addition, their perspectives need to be interpreted and understood against the broader sociocultural contexts.

My philosophy also aligns with pragmatism. Creswell (2013) stated, "Pragmatists agree that research always occurs in social, historical, political and other contexts" (p. 28). I am interested in finding solutions that support Part C Coordinators in their role as educational leaders. Creswell and Clark (2011) suggested reality is multi-layered and that researchers must consider the experiences, thoughts, and objects of a person's whole life and the impact on the situation being investigated. Thus, pragmatic, and social constructivist perspectives align with my worldview that individuals construct meaning as they engage with the world, and there are multiple perspectives of any given issue. My research agenda is one of using the best research method to effectively answer the question and provide information on what works through

understanding the lens through which coordinators perceive and understand their positions. This qualitative descriptive research design lends itself to answers for questions of special relevance in the arena of IDEA Part C.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, because there is only one person in the position of coordinator in each state, they may not have been forthcoming with their answers for fear of potential negative consequences. They may have felt compelled to provide answers they thought the researcher wanted to hear or were uncomfortable discussing challenging aspects of their positions (Merriam, 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). Every effort was made to build trust and a level of comfort in providing information, assuring their anonymity and confidentiality.

As a researcher who has previously held a position in EI, there is potential researcher bias I have to guard against throughout the study. Awareness for potential bias requires awareness of how I asked questions and ensured that information was processed through careful data analysis. Restating and using the words of the participants and sharing information gathered for clarification were other ways I addressed bias (Charmaz, 2014). Providing data to the participants and seeking their input helped address potential bias.

Additional efforts were also made to ensure the quality of the study was not compromised. Confidentiality was obtained through use of consent forms and through data "cleaning", where personal information was removed, and names were replaced with pseudonyms (Nespor, 2000). The use of member checking was used to ensure that conclusions reached were grounded in the data (Creswell, 2003). Careful documentation of each source of data, along with memos and field notes, ensured data collected were of high quality and that conclusions inferred represented the coordinators' perceptions. Careful design and

implementation of this study improves the credibility and reliability of the findings, providing important information to the field.

This study provides important insight that can inform additional research, as it maps the terrain of the coordinators' current understandings of their positions, contributing descriptive information to previous data collected by ITCA. As noted, this is an emerging issue for which there is little previous research, and this study builds and expands the knowledge base about Part C Coordinator turnover. With the findings additional research questions can be asked and answered. Findings may result in development of resources to support and retain coordinators in their positions, leading to more stable programs that improve outcomes for young children with disabilities.

With the increasing demands of high-quality early intervention programs, there is a need to place emphasis on research regarding early intervention leaders in this complex and diverse field. The focus of the research focuses on the critical role of leaders of the early intervention program, identifying those factors that contribute to retention in order to ensure stable programs. This study is important in order to gain a better understanding of the complex roles of early intervention leaders and to examine the practice, professional and personal factors that influence decisions made by state leaders to stay in their position. We have invested significant resources in understanding the importance of the early years for young children, and we have engaged communities in better understanding the developmental needs of our youngest and defined the components of high-quality programs. Yet interestingly we have not invested in understanding the role of early intervention coordinators in leading and managing the program investments we have made.

The focus of this research is to examine which on-the job and off-the job factors influence their decision to stay. The results of this study will contribute to the understanding of how to support the retention of early intervention leaders and thus support the provision of high-quality services to young children with disabilities.

The remaining chapters address the literature review, research methods, findings, and conclusion. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature, including an in-depth review of the literature on IDEA Part C, managing and leading, and theories on turnover and retention, with a focus on the theory of job embeddedness. Chapter 3 addresses the methodology of the study, including the selection of study participants, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 reports the research findings from participants' interviews and analysis of their perceptions of the factors that impact their decisions to stay. In the final chapter, Chapter 5, a discussion based on the findings of the study is given. Additionally, recommendations for further study are provided.

Definitions of Key Terms

Job embeddedness - Job embeddedness represents a broad array of influences on employee retention. These aspects are important both on (organization) and off (community) the job.

DEC – Division for Early Childhood, the division of CEC that focuses on early childhood.

CEC- Council for Exceptional Children, the national membership organization for those working in the field of special education.

EI- Early Intervention, used throughout the document interchangeably with IDEA Part C.

ECSE – Early Childhood Special Education.

IDEA – Individual with Disabilities Act; the federal act includes several parts: Part A covers the general provisions of the law; Part B covers children from age three-21 with disabilities; Part C

covers infants and toddlers with disabilities, birth to age three; and Part D provides for the national activities to support the program.

IDEA Part C - Individuals with Disabilities Act, Part C – federal act that defines services for children with disability age birth to three.

OSEP – Office of Special Education, the office within the United State Department of Education that provides support for special education.

Part C Coordinator – person in the position of managing the IDEA Part C program, throughout the document is used interchangeably with coordinator, manager, leader.

Public sector manager – used to represent those in a leadership/management position in a federal or state education or health agency.

SSIP – State Systemic Improvement Plan, an annual plan that is submitted to OSEP related to improving outcome rates for children with disabilities.

Turnover – refers to workers who leave an organization either voluntarily or at request of employer.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review consists of the theories and research that inform this study. The purpose of the first section is to provide the conceptual framework, an overview of the ECSE system, and the role of the Part C coordinator as leader and manager of the EI program. The second section will review the literature that consists of the theories and research that inform this study. Lastly, the research questions will be provided.

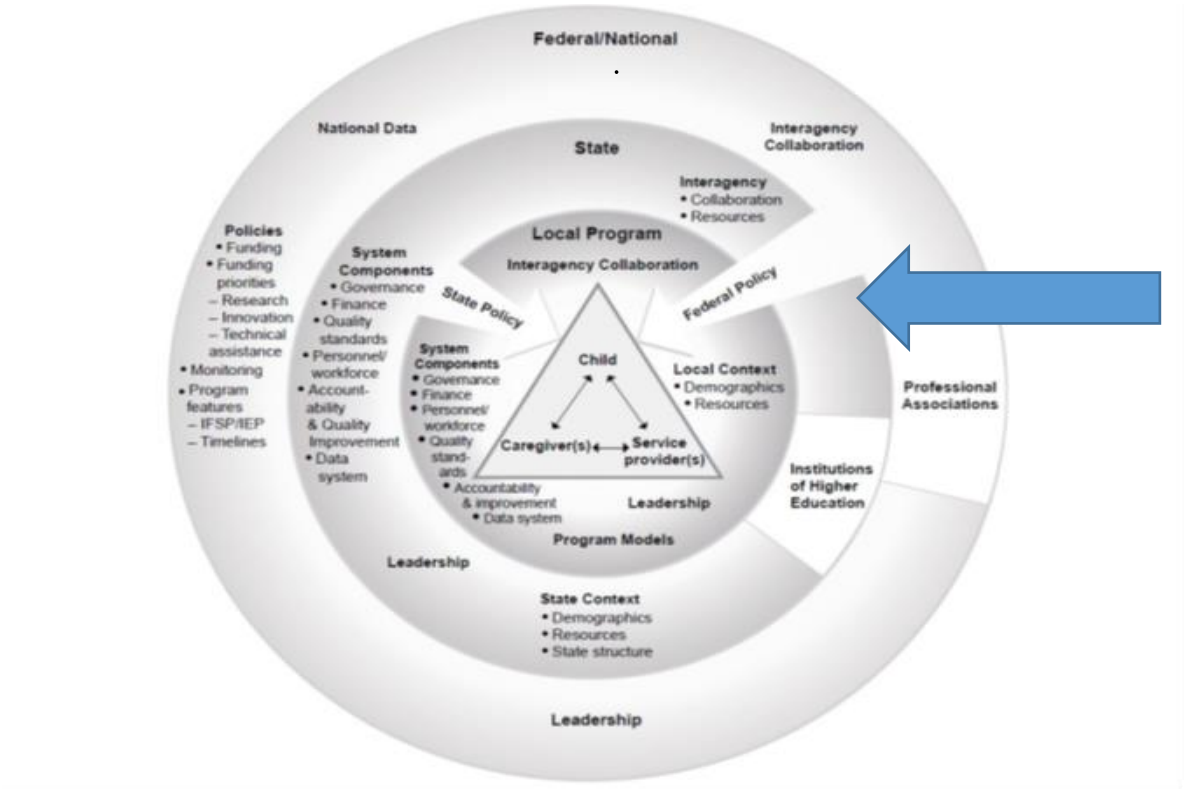
Conceptual Framework

In this study I adopt a framework informed by the ecological view of the EI system with a focus on the state level where Coordinators are placed. The diagram below describes the intersection and interconnectedness of the ECSE at the national/federal level, state level, local level, and the impact on those interactions at child/family/practitioner levels.

The organizational structure of programs within the EI system are made up of resources, policies, program procedures, eligibility, and practices, and are interdependent. In order to be effective, there must be alignment and coherence among the various elements in the state programs. A specific theory that describes the complexity of the ECSE is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory that focuses on explaining and predicting the ways in which organizations and people behave (Odom 2016; Rous et al., 2007). Ongoing program improvement requires administrators who can develop effective state-level partnerships, align the structures to improve and promote change, and provide a supportive culture within the program that encourages data-informed decision making at all levels of the system. Administrators also reach out to practitioners on important issues in order to better align the structure to support their work (Hebbeler et al., 2012; Rous et al., 2007).

Figure 1

An Ecological View of the Multiple Influences in IDEA Early Childhood Services



Note: Adapted from Hebbeler et al., 2012.

Bronfenbrenner's' theory suggests that a child's development is also influenced by the systems of services and supports that serve them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hebbeler et al., 2012; Odom, 2012). The interdependent relationships among organizational and leadership structures, policy, program models, data, and personnel standards are consistent with the ecological theory of development (Harbin & Salisbury, 2005; Hebbeler et al., 2012). Local programs are influenced by state factors, which are influenced by federal and national factors (Hebbeler et al., 2012; Rous et al., 2007). Despite what we know about how systems work, a challenge remains around leadership and management, program quality, and implementation of proven practices in serving young children, and in particular, young children with disabilities (Cook & Odom, 2013;

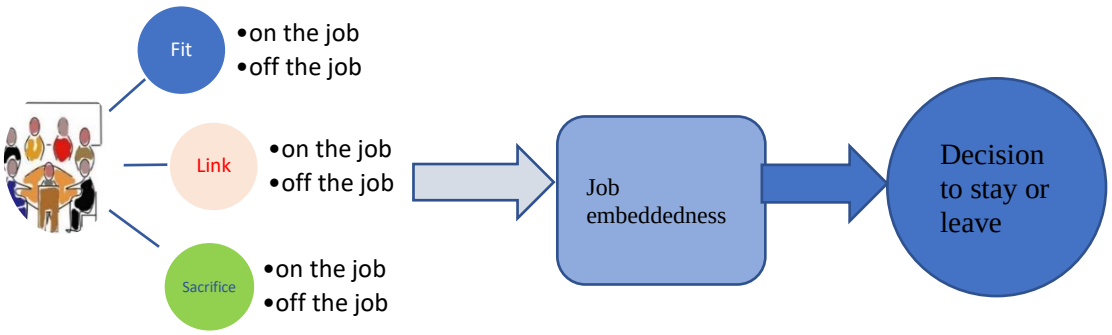
Hebbeler et al., 2012). Critical leadership and management at each level can inhibit or facilitate the quality of services and impact how infrastructure supports are implemented to support high quality practice (Fixsen & Blase, 2008; Harbin et. al., 2000).

In complex systems such as the ECSE system it is important the coordinator of the Part C program have the ability to see the larger ECSE system and how the Part C program "fits" into the bigger picture of ECSE. One role of the coordinator is to lead program staff in understanding their role, not only in the broader ECSE system, but also within the Part C program in order to jointly work together to serve young children with disabilities. Coordinators create the conditions that can lead to high quality services, which is a very different skill than providing direct services. The critical role of the coordinator impacts the entire system, setting the stage for either ongoing improvement or fractured service delivery. The higher the level of position that experiences turnover, the more potential for disruption in the delivery of services (Holtom & Burch, 2016; Staw, 1980). High turnover of coordinators can have a demoralizing impact on the organization, causing a change in work attitude which can lead to additional turnover of program staff at all levels (Staw, 1980).

Using the ecological perspective to understand the broader EI system, the job embeddedness theory constructs for fit, link, and sacrifice of on- and off-the-job factors influence a coordinator's decision to stay or leave their position. I briefly illustrate the six dimensions of job embeddedness in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Job Embeddedness Theory



This framework reflects the fit, link, and sacrifice of on-the job and off-the-job factors that may influence voluntary turnover or a decision to stay.

ECSE Organizational Structure

The ideal organizational structure of ECSE programs is made up of resources, policies, program procedures, eligibility, and curricula/practices (Rous et al., 2007). For an ECSE program to be effective, there must be alignment and coherence among these program components. General systems theories, or those that focus on explaining and predicting the ways in which organizations and people behave, are applicable to ECSE systems as well (Odom, 2016; Rous et al., 2007). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the broader ECSE system and the role of serving young children with disabilities through the EI program.

Early Care and Special Education Systems

Research on the development of organizations indicated adequate infrastructure increases the likelihood that high quality practices will be supported and implemented (Harbin & Salisbury, 2005). More specifically, having adequate infrastructure in place influenced the process by which leadership, governance structures, monitoring procedures, support for professional development, and data for decision-making were developed and implemented

(Hebbeler et al., 2012; Odom, 2016; Rous et al., 2007). These facets of ECSE infrastructure and their interdependent relationships were consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development (Harbin & Salisbury, 2005; Hebbeler et al., 2012). Bronfenbrenner's theory posits multiple layers of influence on the developing child. The ecological model is interactive and dynamic between four systems: micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-level systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Within ECSE, the microsystem includes the child's immediate setting (e.g., family), which is influenced by the state system of supports and services for young children with disabilities and their families (i.e., the exosystem). The quality of this interaction and availability of community services are important factors for young children with disabilities and their families (Hebbeler et al., 2012; Tudge, et al. 2017). While the ecological systems theory serves as a framework for understanding of how local, state, and federal levels influence and connect to the service delivery model for children and families, it is also important to understand the implementation of programs and practices.

Fixsen and colleagues' (2013) theory of implementation science and its application to early childhood programs lays the groundwork for the provision of high-quality services (Halle, et al. 2013). Their theory defines how evidence-based practices can be implemented to improve the quality and effectiveness of programs. The model emphasizes both technical and adaptive leadership as critical drivers of systemic change (Fixsen et al., 2013; Odom, 2016). "Implementation science exists at the nexus between research and practice. Successful implementation is the mechanism by which young children and families benefit from the practices and programs that research has identified as effective" (Halle, 2013, p. 21).

Research on the implementation of high-quality programs with proven interventions has shown meaningful effects on child well-being and improved family outcomes, setting the stage

for success in school (Fixsen et al., 2013; Loeb et al., 2004). Practice must be supported by an infrastructure that links practice to policy, provides professional knowledge, and ongoing leadership supports at all levels of the system (Odom, 2016; Rous et al., 2007; Stamopoulus, 2012). Both the ecological model and improvement science point to the importance of effective leaders. Systems and programs require effective leaders who can develop effective partnerships, align their structures to improve and promote change, and provide a supportive culture within their program that encourages data-informed decision making from local program to state level (Hebbeler et al., 2012; Rous et al., 2007). Effective leaders have the experience and knowledge of IDEA necessary to provide leadership for the program. The experience and knowledge necessary are gained over time and through career choices that lay the foundation for leading and managing this specific program. The IDEA Part C program, often referred to as EI, sits within the broader ECSE system. The program serves infants and toddlers with disabilities, birth through age 2, with the intention of enhancing their development through services to meet their unique needs and preparing them for education and full participation in their community.

IDEA Part C

The provision of educational and related services for young children with disabilities is relatively new with the passage in 1986 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), providing the foundation for provision of services for children birth to age three. States vary in their Part C and delivery systems, with IDEA (2004) providing the framework that allows states to "design" their systems of services. The intent was for states to coordinate and collaborate among the various services available to support families and provide services to children with disability. These systems are complex and include multiple partners at multiple levels and various local, state, and federal funding streams. The focus of the last 30 years has

been on building and sustaining high-quality early intervention (EI) services. This remains a complex and ongoing process for state leaders. In order to continue progress, there is a need for leadership capacity and stability to ensure the achievement of quality outcomes for children and families, the development of appropriate ECSE environments, and the identification and implementation of evidence–based interventions (LaRocca et al., 2014).

Leadership and Management of Early Intervention Programs

Leadership is defined as the proactive process of influencing others to "act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations, the wants and needs, aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers" (Burns, 1978, p.19). As this definition implies, leadership is complex, and there is growing agreement that one person cannot do it all (Kangas et al., 2016). In the broader early childhood sector, there is an additional complication, the reality that early childhood leaders often lack status of school leaders (Coleman et al., 2016).

Leading and managing change in EI requires specific skills in order to provide high quality services that improve outcomes for our youngest children. However, research on administrators in early childhood special education overall is under-represented (Bush, 2012; Kangas et al., 2016; La Rocco et al., 2014). Aubrey (2007) also noted there is a lack of empirical research on management in the broader field of early care and education (ECE) and no clear consensus on the definitions of leadership and management skills necessary to delineate the role of administrators.

To address the issue of leadership in early childhood special education (ECSE) the Division for Early Childhood (DEC), released a position statement on leadership in EI/ECSE in March of 2017 which focuses on the importance of developing leaders at all levels of the ECSE system. In 2013, identified leaders (e.g., coordinators, parents, researchers) in the field of EI

were invited to national summit on EI/ECSE to discuss their perceptions of what is needed to build and preserve the field's leadership capital. The final report highlighted several themes of leadership in the ECSE field. One key theme expressed was that effective Part C leaders needed to be skilled at communicating with the entire range of stakeholders, engaging relevant parties in problem-solving, and consistently building systemic capacity (LaRocca, et al. 2014). Additionally, participants described how leaders at the higher levels are unprepared or underprepared for leadership roles and the various aspects of leading at multiple levels (LaRocco, Bruns et al. 2014). The research further indicated a need for Part C coordinators to take action and positively influence colleagues, policy makers, providers, and the families with which they work. They need to take action to transform the status quo and inspire others to work toward the same goals (Burns, 2004).

Further research was conducted following the Summit by Bruns et al. (2017) in order to gain an understanding of the competencies needed to be an effective leader at any level for the EI/ECSE system. The research identified six knowledge areas comprised of child development, evidence-based practices, state laws and regulations, family-centered approaches, federal laws and regulations, and group processes. The five competency areas identified comprised of professional learning, effective relationships, shared responsibility, data use, and effective communication. This research indicated the need for evidence in areas of leadership and leadership development in the EI/CSE field. The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) further recommended that the EI/ECSE field conduct research on the constructs and demonstration of leadership skills and building and sustaining leadership capital across EI/ECSE service systems (DEC Policy Statement, 2015). In 2015, the DEC of the Council for Exceptional Children released a position statement on leadership in early intervention and early childhood special

education (EI/ECSE).

The statement emphasized the importance of developing and supporting high-quality administrators within and across all levels of EI/ECSE service systems. Moreover, there was a call for related research due to paucity of research in the field exploring any issues related to administrators (LaRocco et al., 2014). For Part C coordinators recommendations included providing opportunities for leadership roles in EI and ECSE, and ongoing preservice and in-service management training. Waniganayake (2002) concluded that definitions of early childhood administrative work lacked clarity, coherence, and comprehensiveness, due to a failure to consider appropriate roles and responsibilities. Given the increasing complexity and challenges facing EI administrators it is imperative they are well prepared to respond to the education needs and wellbeing of children and their families.

This issue is not unique to ECSE; there is research evidence on the shortage of special education administrators in school settings as well, noting that additional research on why they stay and why they leave is needed (Crockett, 2002; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). School systems have focused on addressing teacher shortages, but there is limited research on recruiting and retaining school and district leaders (Odden & Kelly, 2008). Special education administrators are also faced with increased performance accountability requirements, and the increasing complexities of special education programs. They too have to bring resources, personnel, and key stakeholders together to solve problems of practice for children with delays or disabilities. Yet, special education administrators often are not prepared for the complexity of the position, sitting at the crossroads of general education and special education (Boscardin et al., 2011). ECSE administrators serve in public settings that come with unique circumstances and expectations.

The Role of Administrators in Public Settings

Lowi (1985) classified government agencies in four categories: distributive, redistributive, regulatory, and constituent policy. Distributive agencies refer to agencies that affect society on a larger scale, providing needed services to particular populations (Lowi, 1985; Sabharwal, 2015) and includes Departments of Education and Health, the two primary agencies in which coordinators are employed. These public agencies have unique characteristics that define their purpose and drive the goals of the organization, which are

- Complexity. Part C programs have a variety of stakeholders that have priorities and demands, including parents of children with disabilities, providers, and policy makers.
- Permeability. Part C programs as public programs are influenced by external pressures and are open systems in order to be responsive to the public need. There are more formal procedures for decision making; IDEA services are defined in federal and, sometimes, state law.
- Instability. Political pressures and the budget cycle place public agencies in a position of instability. Priorities are often set by the political process, not by managers or key stakeholders
- Absence of competitive pressures. Education or health agencies typically are the primary provider of services for young children with disabilities. particular population. In particular, IDEA Part C programs are expected to collaborate with other services and agencies to meet the needs of the population served (Boyne, 2002).

Leaders in public services seek out positions in public health and education agencies

because of their desire to do work that improve outcomes for their clients. These administrators have an important role in developing their organization, with a direct impact on employees, and, indirectly, on change processes (Tvedt et al., 2009). Administrators set the tone for their employees when it comes to employee motivation to do a good job. As leaders, their behavior is transferred to employees they manage (Downe et al., 2016). Thus, frequent turnover at the leadership level can lead to low morale and lower productivity of staff, which can, in turn, impact employees' job satisfaction and lead to a drop-out decision, thereby further impacting consistent service delivery.

Leadership in any sector is difficult, but public sector leaders are expected to administer programs efficiently in order to provide services that address complex needs and address regulatory requirements (Head, 2010; Van Wart, 2003). However, the position is more difficult now as administrators are faced with increasingly complex issues related to structural issues (e.g., coordinating across ECSE and ECE agencies), navigating systems issues (e.g., navigating poor governance or systemic planning), relationship issues (e.g., with diverse stakeholders, families of children with disabilities, and providers of services), program issues (e.g., lack of resources and providers) and accountability (e.g., increased monitoring and required reporting). Additionally, in today's social media-driven environment the public has greater access to and show less tolerance for leaders' mistakes and programmatic challenges (Van Wart, 2003; Yankelevich, 1991).

Given the uncertainty of policy shifts, shrinking resources, and diverse needs, new structures are emerging in the public sector. No longer does the classic model of administration of state or federal law and standard service delivery work. New models of public administration require collaborative governance across multiple sectors with broad stakeholder engagement and

innovative solutions to complex problems (Cregard & Corin, 2019; Head, 2010). A public sector manager must navigate the politics, stakeholders, competing goals, and diverse expectations.

Additionally, they have a responsibility to respond to the stakeholder expectations for provision of services to children with disabilities and support families in understanding and addressing their child's development. Disability issues have long been considered, debated, and legislated through public discourse and advocacy. The issues and concerns of families of children with disabilities cross many sectors and cannot be easily addressed with a simple policy directive, but through a collaborative approach. The IDEA legislation recognizes that a multi-faceted approach to addressing these issues would be needed, thus the legislation requires multiple partners to engage in solutions. The role of the coordinators is to lead and manage the program using adaptive approaches that require ongoing adjustments as conditions change, and a willingness to seek innovative solutions (Chapman, 2004; Head, 2010). The important difference in solving social problems is that there are no easy solutions, they are influenced by politics, societal values, and attitudes, and not easily solved.

In today's environment of managing to result, similar to private sector managerial styles, Head and Alford (2015) noted that this shift in the public sector (e.g., health and education) requires adaptive leadership. There is value in engaging the various stakeholders impacted by the issue in order to understand and help create solutions. In addition to traditional bureaucratic duties, the new paradigm of managing public programs includes strategies for managing people toward meeting performance measures and collaborative governance (Head & Alford, 2015). This is certainly true for the IDEA Part C program; the requirement to collect and report data on specific indicators, and develop and implement a state systemic improvement plan with broad stakeholder engagement, focused on building infrastructure and implementing evidence-based

practices aligns with the research on addressing “wicked” problems through dialogue and collaboration (Conklin, 2006; Head, 2010).

The turnover of Part C coordinators has been a growing concern. To provide support and address the concern the ITCA, OSEP, and funded technical assistance centers began, in 2009, to conduct orientation for new Part C coordinators in a face-to-face format, moving over time to periodic calls and now to a website with resources. In recognition of the changing roles of managers in the public sector and challenges of attaining, recruiting, and retaining administrators in EI/ECSE, OSEP has chosen this topic as an area of focus. There is a yearlong OSEP Symposia on leadership recruitment and retention with a mission to develop strong leaders in early childhood special education (ECSE). The symposia are exploring the factors that contribute to personnel shortages, highlighting research, and sharing practices that make a difference at the state level. A technical assistance center has been funded to increase the knowledge, skills, and competences of those serving infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families, provide resources, and develop leadership competencies through a stakeholder process of surveying experts in the field and current Part C coordinators. Additionally, an initiative has been established to support new Part C coordinators in their positions, providing mentorship, resources to support the day-to-day work, and guidance on meeting the federal requirements.

There has been limited research done on state leaders and their perceptions of what factors support them in their position and contribute to their job satisfaction. In fact, there has been very little research done on administrator turnover. In a review of the research conducted by Cregard, Corin and Skagert (2017) it was noted that between 1992 and 2014 there were only 12 peer-reviewed articles on voluntary turnover of state administrators. This paucity calls for additional research to investigate reasons for decisions to stay or leave.

Wicked Problems in Early Childhood Special Education

The concept of "wicked problems" introduced in the 1970s by Rittel and Webber (1974) is described as those issues that are complex and resist typical solutions. Wicked problems are unique but also connected; for instance, disabilities issues are connected to education, poverty, and beliefs about disability. A wicked problem is defined as a "social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve for as many as four reasons: incomplete or contradictory knowledge, the number of people and opinions involved, the large economic burden, and the interconnected nature of these problems with other problems" (Kolko, 2012, p. 10).

Special education is often politicized and debated by parents, educators, politicians, and researchers as to how to best meet the needs of young children with disabilities and their families (Armstrong, 2017; Rittel & Webber, 1974). Coordinators sit at the center of these discussions, balancing the competing views with the requirement of state and federal law. Furthermore, ECSE is a complex, dynamic system, requiring multi-level strategies, various partners, and increasing resources. The support needs of young children with disabilities and their families cross multiple sectors and require individualized approaches to improve educational outcomes and inclusive opportunities in the community. However, the challenges presented by understanding the wicked problems of turnover can evoke innovation in support for coordinators in their complex role (Murgatroyd, 2010).

One of the reasons to conduct this study was to contribute to the identification of solutions to the problem of high turnover through qualitative interviews with coordinators and analysis of existing ITCA data to better understand what influences a coordinator to stay or leave. As new coordinators enter positions, strategies can be used to embed an employee in the organization in a variety of ways through on-the-job and off-the- job supports, and for those

coordinators who have been in their positions longer, understanding what factors related to fit, link, and sacrifice have supported their decisions to stay would be informative as well.

The importance of research in identifying, understanding, and resolving the "wicked problems" of administrator turnover in EI programs poses a positive take on addressing the problem. Job embeddedness theory offers some insight into why they stay. In early childhood special education (ECSE) insights from research can be translated to inform strategies that support retention of Coordinators in order to maintain their leadership and management of programs. Ongoing stable leadership improves outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families (Armstrong, 2017; LaRocco et al., 2014).

The significance of this research seeks to add to the minimal research base available on administrators of an ECSE program, the results of which can inform strategies to support and retain effective management and leadership of ECSE programs. Effective management and leadership are critical in order to provide high quality and efficient services, delivered by competent providers, with a clear mission and the necessary resources to address need. It is noted there is a lack of research on ECSE administrators and a lack of administrative theory in the public sector overall (Cregard & Corin, 2019; LaRocco et al., 2014; Odom, 2009; Rodd, 2013; Van Wart, 2013). This research contributes to the knowledge base, providing data that can inform administrative theory on ECSE administrators and identify potential strategies to improve satisfaction and retention. To begin to explore this issue it is important to first review the research on administrator turnover to date.

Administrator Turnover

Types of Turnover

There are three types of turnover: voluntary, involuntary and retirement. Voluntary

occurs when an employee quits, involuntary occurs when an employee is fired or laid off, and retirement occurs when an employee leaves after meeting specific requirements (Seldon & Moynihan, 2000). The negative consequences of high turnover of administrators is significant, leading to high costs of replacement, and impact on the stability and quality of services provided to infants and toddlers with disabilities (Hambrick et al., 2005; Mor Barak et al., 2001). Data from the Infant Toddler Coordinators Survey (ITCA) indicated that Part C coordinator turnover reasons are primarily voluntary (ITCA, 2018). To reduce the loss of this key position it is necessary to understand why people stay and why they leave, allowing employers to make informed decisions about resources, strategies, and actions that can be used to prevent voluntary turnover.

Attracting and retaining employees has been a focus of empirical study since the seminal work of March and Simon (1958) focused on turnover as a matter of perceived ease of moving from one position to another and the motivation to leave. Theorists began to construct models addressing the cause of turnover as early as 1938, when Banard noted that the most important resource of an organization is its people. March and Simon (1958), building on the concept, introduced the model of organization equilibrium, citing an organization as a system of interrelated social behaviors—employees remain if inducements offered match or exceed contributions put forward. However, the employees perceived desirability of the job and perceived ease of leaving impact this balance. March and Simon (1958) research identified the concept of job satisfaction, which is impacted by supervisory interaction, pay, and job assignments. The theory included the concepts of organizational opportunities tied to satisfaction or reduced satisfaction and ease of movement tied to economic conditions. This seminal research is said to have influenced a generation of theorists building on, deconstructing, testing, and

redefining the model, and creating new models on why people stay and why they leave.

In the years following, research on voluntary turnover focused on identifying the antecedents of turnover behaviors broadly categorized as internal to the workplace—demographics, managerial, workplace environment, employee relations, and organizational structure. Decades of research have strived to answer the questions of why people leave and why people stay with limited success in predicting the path from intent to actual leaving (Burton et al., 2009; Hom & Griffeth, 1995).

Voluntary turnover has an impact that is both disruptive and costly to an organization and is undesirable as the employer did not request the exit. Griffeth and Hom (1995) defined two types of voluntary turnover: *functional*, defined as the exit of substandard performers and *dysfunctional* turnover, representing the exit of effective performers, staff who are highly skilled and not easily replaced. Dysfunctional quits are costlier to the organization (Allen, 2006). Based on Abelson's (1987) work, Griffeth and Hom (1995) further defined dysfunctional exits as avoidable and unavoidable; unavoidable quits represent exits that are driven by external factors such as childbirth or family moves, and avoidable quits are those that can be managed through realistic recruitment, job expectations, personal connections within the organization, and alignment of the person's values and beliefs with those of the organizations.

Research would suggest that focusing on retention of those employees who fall in the category of effective performers (dysfunctional exits) is a good investment. Those employees who have fit within the organization, are connected to people and groups in the organization, and have commitment to the goals and tasks of organization are known to support successful organizational outcomes.

The personal and organizational costs of turnover are high. At a personal level there are

costs even if the reason to leave is voluntary, such as learning new skills, and adapting to a new organizational culture. Estimates indicated it can take up to one year to adjust and get a career back on track. Furthermore, adjustments are made by family members, especially if a move is required, a spouse must find a new job, and children have to attend a new school (Shellenberger, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2001). At the organizational level, the costs include lost knowledge and skills, cost of recruiting and interviewing, training costs, and lost productivity. The higher the level of position that turns over the more potential for disruption. This can have a demoralizing impact on the organization, as turnover at a high level can cause a change in work attitude, leading to additional turnover (Staw, 1980). Replacement costs are estimated at about 50-60% of a person's annual salary, other estimates point to a cost of $10,000 per employee on salaries under $30,000 (Watlington et al., 2010; Mitchell et al., 2001). Turnover costs of administrators have even more of an impact.

In addition to the personal and organizational impacts from high voluntary turnover of administrators, there are additional implications for the quality and stability of public services (Mor Barak et al., 2001), leading to negative publicity and an unfavorable view from citizens (Leland, 2012).

Most research cites administrator turnover as a negative; however, some turnover may in fact be positive. When an employee is underperforming, the costs of replacement can be cost efficient to the organization by hiring an employee who can perform the tasks effectively, particularly at higher levels of the organization (Abelson, 1987; Meier & Hicklen, 2007). Replacing low performers can also serve as a notice to others in the organization, providing a source for new ideas and improved morale (Meier & Hicklen, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2001).

Administrators are key assets in creating effective organizations with a sense of direction

and providing a sense of satisfaction among those conducting the work. In contrast there are indicators that high levels of turnover among managers decreases organization efficiency, increases costs, and decreases satisfaction with services. While recognizing the importance of the administrator's role, there has been a paucity of research on reasons for voluntary turnover. Additional knowledge about the intentions and actual turnover of administrators has implications for not only program stability, but in understanding the causes for administrative retention and turnover. The limited findings in research related to managerial turnover in the public sector reflected that dissatisfaction may stem from lower pay, inflexible work processes, and less work autonomy. However, Part C coordinators are more likely to have higher level of satisfaction because of strong motivation to serve (Wang et al., 2012) and place higher value on helping others (public service) than their private sector counterparts (Boyne, 2002; Wright, 2001).

The next section presents a brief history and current status of research concerning public sector turnover.

Turnover in the Public Sector

Researchers and practitioners have sought to identify critical antecedents and consequences of employee turnover in various sectors, including the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Employee turnover is not a single event, it is a process of disengagement that eventually results in a decision to leave (Branham, 2005). This section presents a brief overview of the research on turnover intention and actual turnover.

Traditional models of turnover have been based on cognitive and behavioral constructs. The traditional models of turnover have been shaped by several studies, notably the conceptual models developed by March and Simon (1958), Mobley (1977), Steers and Mowday (1981), and Hom and Griffeth (1995). March and Simon (1958) introduced the seminal work on

organizational equilibrium, where individuals maintain their employment as long as the benefit meets or exceeds their expectations. Over time, the concepts of job satisfaction and job alternatives became the major constructs of voluntary turnover, influencing the future direction of research for decades. Mobley (1977) proposed a model of the employee withdrawal decision process, elaborating on the intermediate linkages in the job satisfaction-turnover relationship. The model theorized that job dissatisfaction leads to thoughts of quitting and the costs associated, comparing the alternatives, and then making a decision to stay or leave. Steers and Mowday (1981) focused on a "met expectations" model, integrating previous research on turnover and suggested linkages. They proposed a multi-route model, expanding and building upon the previous conceptual models by proposing the following variables that lead to an employee staying or leaving: 1) job expectations, 2) affective responses depending on a variety of non-work influences, and 3) intention to leave leads to actual leaving. An empirical study by Lee and Mowday (1987) tested the constructs, finding that results supported job satisfaction and organizational commitment were predictors of intention to search for another job. Homs and Griffeth (1995) advanced the alternative linkages model by demonstrating the multi-dimensional aspects of turnover to expand and include organizational commitment and labor market factors. The defining factor was that intention to leave was influenced by the labor market.

Traditional models of turnover focused on on-the-job factors and suggested that job satisfaction, organization commitment, and other organizational factors related to job attitude were indicators of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. While there have been studies of the various variables linking job satisfaction and its antecedents, predicting actual turnover has been disappointing (Griffeth & Homs 1995; Maertz & Campion, 1998; Yang et al., 2009).

Recent research has expanded perspectives on turnover and the question has turned from

why they leave to a focus on why they stay. Research has moved to view turnover in a variety of ways beyond the original concept that a dissatisfied employee with alternatives quits. The factors and context of these decisions are more complex and dynamic, raising new questions.

Unfolding Theory of Turnover and Related Research

A notable exception to the traditional models of turnover was Lee and Mitchell's (1994) unfolding model of voluntary turnover. This alternative theory explains how and why people leave organizations; there are alternative pathways to voluntary turnover that are not always related to job dissatisfaction. Events may precipitate leaving other than job dissatisfaction, and these events may have different attributes proposed by Lee and Mitchell as "shocks" – a positive, neutral, or negative event on the job that may that cause a person to consider their options, creating different pathways to leaving. Drawing on the image theory (Beach & Mitchell, 1987), a shock is an event that challenges information about a person's system of beliefs and images (Mitchell & Lee, 2011).

Image theory contributed to the unfolding theory through the defined concepts of images a person uses to organize their knowledge in order to evaluate their options and make decisions (Beach & Mitchell, 1998). There are three images that drive decision making: a *value image*, which represent a person's principles; *trajectory image,* representing the attainment of a goal (Beach & Mitchell,1987; Mitchell & Lee, 2001); and the third, *strategic image*, which represents the plans to attain the goals and future options and pathways. This theory recognizes that decisions occur in steps as a person screens out acceptable and unacceptable options (shocks) when their images do not match their expectations. Thus, the process of disengaging occurs through an event that challenges a person's image of their work or the organization.

There are factors that push or pull a person to stay or leave. A push factor is seen as a

factor controlled by the organization, pushing a person toward the door, such as conflict with management or a poor work environment. The pull factors are said to be out of the control of an organization and include factors such as a job offer or family priorities.

Building upon key concepts from decades of research on understanding why people leave and incorporating the theories of Lewins' field theory and Beach and Lee's image theory, Mitchell and Lee proposed the unfolding model, which holds that an employee judges whether a job alternative can be integrated into or fits with the values, goals, and strategic images of an organization (Beach & Strom, 1989). Moving beyond the traditional theories focused on cognitive and behavioral factors related to the organization, the unfolding model focuses on a broad array of factors that influence why a person leaves their position (Burton et al., 2009). Mitchell at al. (2001) sought to expand the perspective on leaving and staying based on their research conducted over 11 years, which identified four pathways to leaving:

Path 1. The person is following a plan and have a script in place that when a certain event occurs, they will exit. The person in this case is usually not on the job for long and had probably not intended to stay long, these are typically seasonal or temporary employees. Job satisfaction is not the focus of their employment, and evaluation of job alternatives is not a consideration in the decision.

Path 2. The person leaves without a plan, often initiated by an unforeseen event. There is an event, most often negative, of a personal or work-related nature. The person has to assess their commitment to the organization. There may not be a match between employee's values and fit with the goals of the organization (e.g., a change in direction of the organization, or a change in personal life that impacts the job). The person then leaves without a specific plan in place.

Path 3. The person leaves for something better. This starts with an unsolicited job offer,

being passed over for a promotion or change in job role, the employee then has to consider the circumstances and the options between staying or quitting for a better job alternative. The individual may like their current situation, but the benefit of the alternative outweighs the status quo or based on fit, they choose to stay.

Path 4. Unlike prior decision paths, no singular event prompts a decision to leave, it is an accumulated dissatisfaction with the job that prompts a search and attainment of different employment. This path may start in two ways: a) over time, the organization changes, resulting in elements that no longer fit with principles or values of the employee or b) a person becomes dissatisfied without comparing the images of value, trajectory, or strategy. In this case the person periodically reassesses their options, there is no shock event but more of an emotional decision.

The unfolding theory holds that job dissatisfaction leads to lower organizational commitment, more job search activities, stronger intention to quit, and higher likelihood for employee turnover (Holtom et al., 2008). The research data support that dissatisfied people who have options quit, although at different time lengths. People leave due to shocks external to the organization (e.g., family issue, unsolicited job offers), or other internal shocks (e.g., poor performance review, work environment, change in job) may prompt a decision to leave (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Data also support that leavers were relatively happy with their decision (Holtom et al., 2008). There were personal and organizational events that led a person to consider their options, then those options play out differently over time based on the person's perceived images of value, trajectory, and strategy, and fit with their principles. Understanding the determinants and the path that a person may take in their decision to leave can provide the organization with information to increase job satisfaction and organizational commitment through retention strategies that may be systemic or individualized.

While “shocks” represent a “push force” on an individual to consider their employment options, job embeddedness serves as a “pull force” on a person to remain (Burton et al., 2009). In the public sector, push factors included conflict with supervisors, conflict with political appointees, political shifts, reduced resources, and public scrutiny. Pull factors referred to opportunities for professional advancement, increased salary, or promotion, and these factors were most often external to the organization (Feiock et al., 2001). Maertz and Campion (1998) noted there is little research focused on how and why an employee remains and what leads to attachment. The push/pull factors that precipitate leaving may differ from those that support staying.

While developing and conducting research on the unfolding model of turnover, Mitchell, and colleagues (2001) began an ongoing discussion about their own tenure and long term standing at their jobs. As they discussed why they stayed in their positions and reviewed their years of research on why people leave they began to explore on a personal level and through review of additional research the reasons why people stay (Lee et al., 2014).

The Job Embeddedness Theory and Related Research

Mitchel and Lee’s (2004) concept of *job embeddedness* describes the complex on-the-job and off-the job factors that contribute to the decision to stay or leave. Job embeddedness has been defined as “the combined forces that keep a person from leaving his or her job” (Yao et al., 2004 p. 159), absorbing the shocks. The concept has two mid- level subfactors, *on- the-job embeddedness* refers to how a person is attached to the organization in which they work and *off-the-job embeddedness* relates to connections in the community; these forces influence and bind people to the organization and the community (Crossly et al., 2007; Mitchell et al., 2001). It is the web of connections to an organization or social network comprised of links, fit, and sacrifice.

In other words, people who feel attached to an organization or a community become embedded.

Continuing to build on the previous theories on voluntary turnover, their research was informed by Kurt Lewins' Field Theory, based on a central premise that people and their surroundings and conditions depend closely on each other (Lewin, 1951). People are attached in various ways, through a network of forces and attachments that may be weak or strong. Someone who is deeply embedded will have many strong attachments, those who are not have few attachments (Mitchell & Lee, 2001). Field theory holds that each person experiences a situation differently, molding their behavior and perceptions (Lewin, 1951). The more embedded a person is the less likely they are to leave.

There are three factors, fit, link, and sacrifice, that contribute to job embeddedness, defined as a) the extent to which they *fit* or are a good match with the job and community; b) the extent of strong attachments or *links* to people or groups on-the-job or in their community; and c) the degree to which they would have to give up or *sacrifice* if they left their job (Mitchell & Lee, 2001, p.216).

Traditional views of why people stay included factors of turnover research related to job satisfaction, or the absence of alternatives based on economy or sector. Other research factors included job attitude, related to positive or negative feeling about the organization or job duties, and organizational commitment and support. Research on voluntary turnover does not typically consider the impact of personal relationships (Maertz & Campion, 1998). The job embeddedness construct emphasizes those factors related to relationships and sense of community that keep an employee on the job versus previous theories that describe the thought process of leaving a job.

Job embeddedness is defined as the on-the-job and off-the-job factors associated with

individual links, fit, and sacrifice. The concept of job embeddedness considers additional variables that are non-work related and the attachments to people or events in the organization. The job embeddedness theory construct examines an individual's perceptions of their *fit* with the job, organization, and community. Fit refers to an employee's overall compatibility with work and non–work settings. There is a large body of research on person-organization fit (Edwards et al., 1998). Employees gage the perceived fit with an organization's mission and values, organizational climate, and homogeneity with leaders and staff (Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). If an employee perceives a misfit with job duties or organizational culture, they are likely to leave. Socialization of new staff and ongoing training (Cable & Parsons, 1999) help to orient a staff person to the organization, creating a "fit." Off-work fit includes access to hobbies, flexible work schedule that allow the person to participate in family events, part-time work schedules, or the size of the city or climate. For those families with a child who has a disability, fit may be related to inclusive opportunities for their family and child. It is possible that someone enjoys their work but not the community environment and vice versa.

The theory also emphasizes links to other people, teams, and groups. Links are the formal or informal connections that an employee has with other individuals or groups on or off-the-job. These links are often described as the web of connections an individual has to their job and their community, the stronger and more expansive the web, the harder it is to leave. Maertz and Campion (1998) and Hom and Griffeth (1995) described in their research that relationships and commitment to those relationships impacts an employee's decisions. Leaving a job would mean an end to those relationships; one could be attached to a person or team and dislike the organization (Mitchell & Lee, 2001). Building organizational commitment in the public sector appears to be closely related to work characteristics of autonomy, job satisfaction, and

relationships with coworkers (Steinhaus & Perry, 1996). On the other hand, on-the job- links encourage employees to choose internal workgroups to accomplish tasks or clients. Mentors may be assigned for new staff or to encourage growth. In conjunction, off-work links play an important role as well. Commitment to family relationships (e.g., caring for an elderly parent, children in school, or access to specific services for a child with disabilities) or involvement in church or community programs or hobbies, influence an employee's link to the community. Positive work and community links support employee retention through those relationships that matter to the employee. There are pressures that impact the decision to stay or leave through friends and family. The stronger the number of links the harder it is to leave and start over.

Furthermore, this theory focuses on beliefs about what they would have to *sacrifice* if they left their jobs. This reflects the cost of what people would have to give up when leaving a job. An employee may have material or psychological losses, for instance retention bonuses, retirement, pleasant work environment, job training, and skills development. Off-work sacrifices might be related to loss of access to good schools, nice neighborhoods, or good friends. While fit and link are more related to events or connection, sacrifice is more of an attitudinal factor—what are the perceived losses if one leaves.

Integrating the theories on leaving and staying provides a framework from which to understand the decisions employees make related to their job. The unfolding theory demonstrates that people leave in different ways, while the job embeddedness theory posits that the processes involved in staying are different than the processes for leaving. Staying is associated with a stuckness or embeddedness.

Subsequent studies extending and replicating the job embeddedness theory across different populations have found that, while results may vary in strength across different

demographic groups, it is a predictor of retention (Mitchell et al., 2001). Results showed that lower levels of on-the-job embeddedness predicted higher levels of turnover and higher levels of job embeddedness led to continued retention.

While traditional theory of voluntary turnover has centered on affective factors, the job embeddedness theory offers a framework to consider the non-affective and non-job-related factors that influence an employee's decisions to stay or leave. For purpose of this research a focus on why they stay or understanding the factors that lead to stuckness will be explored.

Challenges in the Research. Understanding and addressing the factors that influence retention or turnover of administrators is a vexing one for all organizations, yet the research on both public and private sector administrators is sparse. Over the decades, researchers have identified a varied array of antecedent variables throughout research conducted related to turnover. The results reflected the introduction of different constructs in different settings with different populations, studied with varied results without having identified how the previous constructs contributed to turnover motivation (Hom & Griffith, 1991; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004).

In a literature review on employee-turnover studies found in influential management journals over 52 years, Allen, Hancock and Vardaman (2014) found that the research conducted is stuck in the domain analysis mindset (DAM). They analyzed the content of over 447 empirical studies and found the existence of DAM. This DAM may be slowing theoretical progress in at least two ways: (a) by limiting the conceptualization of research questions, variables, and relationships, and (b) by encouraging research practices that constrain explanatory power. Russell (2013) further stated that the current research literature on voluntary employee turnover exhibits at least four shortcomings: low predictive validity, a focus on predictors, low rigor, and little relevance.

Allen et al. (2014) suggested addressing DAM through field research that may yield more relevant information than an experimental, qualitative design. The focus on experimental designs may impact the research design, data collection, measurement, and analysis. They described the pressure to replicate theories and research already successfully published in journals, leading to newer scholars building on the work of others, and training that emphasizes specific analytical approaches (Allen et al., 2014; Cregard et al., 2017; Russell, 2013). However, there is no overarching framework available for researchers and practitioners to understand the motivation to stay or leave an organization. Maertz and Griffeth (2004), after conducting a synthesis of the research to date, have proposed a framework to address the gaps in theory.

This research will contribute to the knowledge base, providing data that can inform administrative theory on ECSE administrators and identify potential strategies to improve satisfaction and retention. Allen et al. (2014) have warned that turnover research is stuck in a dominant analytical mindset (DAM) that has impeded development of different constructs. They recommended that turnover research be conducted using qualitative research methods, expanding the diversity of theoretical perspectives (Cregard & Corin, 2019).

Research Questions

In this study, I seek to answer the following questions that influence the decision to stay or leave the position.

RQ1: Which job-related factors do Part C Coordinators perceive as critical to their decision to stay in their position?

RQ 2: Which non-job-related factors do Part C Coordinators perceive as critical to their decision to stay in their position?

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter provides the research design used in this descriptive qualitative study. The criteria for inclusion, data-collection procedures, and data analysis for this study are described. Qualitative research is based upon the assumption that reality is constructed by individuals interacting within various settings and focuses on gaining insight and understanding of the perspectives of those who participate in the study (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, Creswell (2013) defined a qualitative study "as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words, reporting the detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting"(p.15)

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive method was used within this study to determine Part C coordinators' perceptions of the factors that contribute to career decisions. A qualitative descriptive design provides a straightforward description of a phenomenon (Kim et al., 2017; Sandeloweski, 2000). Sandeloweski (2000) described qualitative descriptive studies as research seeking an account of the phenomenon that most people would agree is accurate. According to Creswell (2013), "The general qualitative process uses inductive and deductive logic. Inductive logic is used to gather data to build a comprehensive set of themes, and deductive logic is used to check the data against the developed themes" (p. 45). The design used in this study is one that helps to provide an in-depth understanding of complicated issues and focuses on experiences and perspectives. This comprehensive summary—a rich description of people's perceptions and understandings that includes both inductive and deductive logic—provides information on the coordinator's perceptions of their job and the reasons for which they stay.

Research Questions

This study sought to understand the factors that have contributed to the decision to stay or leave the position of Part C Coordinator through the following research questions:

RQ1: Which job-related factors do Part C coordinators perceive as critical to their decision to stay in their position?

RQ 2: Which non-job-related factors do Part C coordinators perceive as critical to their decision to stay in their position?

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of currently employed state Part C Coordinators who have been in their position for five years or longer. I chose this population based on the recent data indicating increasing turnover rates (Greer, 2018). The participants are middle managers in a public agency. Each state has only one Part C Coordinator, who is tasked with implementing the IDEA Part C requirements as defined by federal law.

The study used purposeful sampling to gather data. Participants were selected based on the following criteria, 1) individuals who are especially knowledgeable about the topic (i.e., Part C Coordination and IDEA), and 2) how long the individual had been in their position (e.g., five years or longer) (Creswell &Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2002), as this maximized efficiency and validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Morse & Niehous, 2009; Patton, 2002).

Based on the focus of this study, the criteria were to include only currently employed coordinators who have been in their position for five years or longer. Additional criteria for selection was based on a selection of the coordinators who are from a) states that serve the largest number of children, and b) all other states. There are seven states who serve the most children in their Part C program. The participants were s drawn from the list of the larger states

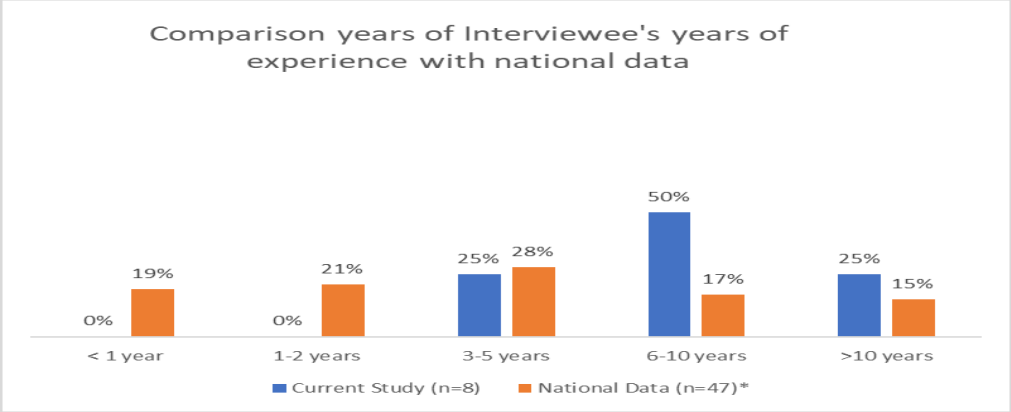
first, with additional interviewees drawn from the list of other states' coordinators who responded based on those who responded first. A thick description of their understanding and perceptions of their roles and responsibilities and the factors that influence their decision to stay are provided in Chapter 4.

The participants consisted of six women and two men. The detailed descriptions of these interviewees provide insight into the perceptions of coordinators as leaders of the program serving infants and toddlers with disabilities and the factors that influence their decisions to stay.

The average length of time the interviewees had been working in their profession was 29 years, with a range of 21 to 40 years. The average length of time they have served in the role of Part C coordinator was nine years, with a range of five to 20 years. All but one interviewee had a career background of working within early childhood education or disability services. All were working in state government in either an education (3), health (3), or other (2) agency at the time of data collection. The latter of which comprised of an agency that is co-led by an education and human service agency and another led by a health and human services agency within a state public health division. The following chart compares the interviewees' data on years of service with the ITCA national data.

Figure 2

Comparison of Interviewee's Years of Experience



Based on a comparison between the ITCA national data on lead agencies and the data from the current study, 50% (4) of the interviewees in this study work in health departments: two in education and two in other agencies. In the ITCA national study, 38% (18) of states are in the "other" category compared to the two agencies in this study.

Eight of the 50 current Part C coordinators were recruited through an email request from this researcher to participate in an hour-long interview. I made individual phone calls to those who expressed an interest in participating in the study to gather additional information, obtain permission to participate, and confirm that the criteria were met. The participants that met the criteria were placed on a list and chosen based on larger states then moving to smaller ones. I started by interviewing the participating coordinators from the seven states that serve larger numbers of children and then from the list of all other states. If a participant had chosen to drop out of the study, the next person on the list was invited to participate in the interview. No participants dropped out of the study.

Qualitative analyses typically require a smaller sample size than quantitative analyses do, as long as the data from participants are large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions. Obtaining most or all of the perceptions leads to saturation, which occurs when adding more participants to the study would not result in additional perspectives or information

(Creswell, 2013; Morse, 2015). The concept of information power was introduced to define the needed number of participants for the study. Information power refers to the "specifics of the experiences, knowledge, and properties among participants in the study" (Malterud et al., 2016, p. 17). When analysis of initial data did not indicate saturation, additional participants were recruited (Marshall et al., 2013). To ensure ethical and valid research the IRB approval was pursued while recruiting participants for the study.

Institutional review board approval was obtained through the University of Oklahoma, and written consent was obtained from all of the participants prior to participating in any research activities. The consent form included (a) the participant's right to withdraw at any time, (b) the purpose of the study, (c) the data-collection procedures, and (d) information about maintaining participants' confidentiality and is included in appendix A. The consent form in appendix B also addressed confidentiality and any perceived risks and/or benefits from participating in this study. Confidentiality was ensured to all, and the participants received an explanation of how the results would be used. To promote safety and health of the participants they were informed they could remove themselves from the study at any time without penalty.

Data Collection

Data Sources

My data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with eight participants. One occurred in person, all others occurred through phone or video conference based on the preference of the participants.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The main data source was information gleaned from semi-structured interviews that were guided by the research questions. The development of interview questions was also informed by

the main constructs of the job embeddedness theory and on contextual data that was collected through the ITCA Survey. Probes and follow-up questions were individualized and focused on gaining clarification and finding out more detailed information from the participants. The interview protocol included both open- and close-ended questions (Appendix C). Asking open-ended questions allowed the participant multiple opportunities to share their thoughts and elaborate on their original responses. The use of open-ended questions also allowed for the discovery of new information or themes. The closed-ended questions provided fixed responses that allowed descriptive information from interviewees. The interviews were designed to last approximately one hour and were audio recorded. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Data saturation was reached with the eight interviews when no new information emerged. Saturation was reached with six interviews and an additional two were conducted to verify saturation (Guest et al., 2006).

Prior to the actual interviews, the interview protocol was piloted for accuracy and validity with two volunteers familiar with EI program. The findings were used to revise the protocol. Once the protocol was finalized, I started interviews with the first person on the list of the coordinators who agreed to participate and moved on to the next until data saturation was reached.

IDEA Infant and Toddler Coordinator Association (ITCA) Survey

Data from the ITCA survey were used to provide additional contextual data about the coordinators and the EI program. The annual ITCA survey has been administered since 2002, with an average return rate of 92–96% (Greer, 2018). The information gathered is used to track emerging program issues and state responses related to coordinators' demographic data, job

roles, and responsibilities and program information. For the current study, data from the specific survey questions related to job satisfaction and reason for turnover, if known, for the time period of 2015–2019 were reviewed and analyzed.

Data management is important in qualitative research as it defines how the data are documented, stored, and shared, protecting the confidentiality of the participants and for future use in verifying research findings. Verbatim transcriptions were completed using a professional transcriptionist who signed a confidentiality form. All analysis was conducted by this researcher. All data was maintained on a password-protected computer. Data will be destroyed in 3 years.

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers must translate their data into accounts that are relatable and informative for the reader. I analyzed the data so that individual perspectives would be heard and considered in depth. The contextual data from the ITCA survey provided a broader understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the coordinators (Birks et al., 2008). The ITCA survey data were analyzed to describe the characteristics of the coordinators in a broader context.

Data from the qualitative interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. I analyzed the closed-ended questions of the survey to identify the average number of years of tenure in the position, education levels, and scope of job responsibilities. Analysis of the answers to the questions specifically related to on-the-job and off-the-job factors was conducted to find patterns in the answers. These results were summarized and reported.

A secondary data source was obtained through field notes. Written field notes were kept by this researcher regarding observations, ideas, and themes that emerged and connections between participants' experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As recommended by Yin (2011) a systematic process was used for each field note, including both descriptive and reflective notes to

capture information. Descriptive notes included a description of the setting and a summarization of the interview process, observation of the interviewee as well as this researchers' behavior in the setting (Creswell, 2007). Notes include phrases, images, and direct quotes. Reflective notes were kept documenting my observations, ideas, and related thoughts about the interview and research process. Field notes were written as soon as possible after the interview was completed in order to capture important facts and observations, forming the basis for the development of memos (Montgomery & Bailey, 2007; Yin, 2011).

As data collection progressed memos were written to record what was being learned from the data collection, recording ideas and emerging concepts. This useful and powerful sense-making analytic tool allowed meaning to be garnered from the data and exploration of the experience from the participant and researcher view (Birks et al., 2008; Glaser, 1978). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), memoing shifts the researcher toward an integrated understanding of events, processes, and interactions by pulling together and making explicit the commonalities in the data. Memos were categorized as operational, mapping the research process used and decisions made; coding memos detailed the process of developing codes and categories. Analytical memos allowed for exploration of the data at a conceptual level, evolving over time. Memos were written both during and after data collection and data analysis, providing a mini analysis about what I was thinking and learning during the research process (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In analysis of the interview data I followed the steps of thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017) and also the constant comparison method for data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In combination with the thematic analysis method, the constant-comparative method described by Corbin and Strauss (2015) was used to code and analyze the data. I used the thematic analysis

method as my overall method of data analysis to analyze data and identify themes. The steps in the process included (a) preliminary data exploration by reading through the transcripts, in some cases several times in order to get a sense of the data, (b) coding the data and labeling the text for the first interview and then proceeding to each of the interviews after that, (c) using the codes to develop themes, (d) identifying and connecting interrelated themes to develop major themes, and (e) constructing a narrative composed of descriptions and themes (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I also used constant comparison analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to code and analyze interview transcripts. The cycle of comparing and contrasting the data, by reflecting on the "old" and the "new" material, allows for identifying commonalities and differences in perspectives. Constant comparison analysis assists researchers with (a) understanding multiple meanings from the data, (b) providing a systematic and creative process for analysis, and 3) identifying, creating, and seeing relationships among the data to construct themes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008).

There are three steps of the constant comparison method: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The first step of the coding process was to review the transcript of the first interview by reading through it several times to get an idea of the interview, before breaking it into parts. A line-by-line open-coding process was used by hand with each line of the interview transcript reviewed, and a code assigned. After the entire transcript was coded, the codes were reviewed for redundancy and grouped into similar categories, resulting in a list of 25–30 prominent categories (axial coding). From this, a code book was developed with which to review and code several more interviews, while checking to assess whether new codes emerged (Creswell, 2012). If new codes emerged, the initial interviews were analyzed again and compared with the newly emerging codes. This iterative process continued until no new codes or

categories were identified. The final step was selective coding. I looked for connections between and across the categories of codes and a list of five prominent themes related to the research questions were identified.

To ensure accuracy of this study data were validated through triangulation using member checking and external auditing. The findings were returned to the participants to check for accuracy. Secondly, an experienced researcher external to the project was asked to provide an external audit of the data and findings to evaluate whether the findings and conclusions were supported by the data.

Ethics

Research ethics refer to the specific principles, guidelines, and norms of the research community (Creswell, 2007). To ensure research ethics, institutional review board approval was obtained through the University of Oklahoma The four key principles are (a) respect for persons; (b) beneficence, or to minimize risk and maximize the benefits to participants; (c) justice, in that participants be selected from groups of people whom the research may benefit; and (d) respect for communities, or to protect and respect communities' values and interests (Creswell, 2012). To address these principles, the participants signed a consent form prior to the interviews being conducted that outlined the research purpose, the potential risks and benefits, and the use of the collected data as described previously. The established guidelines for ethical practice in were followed in this research (Creswell, 2013; Crotty 1998).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is concerned with the trustworthiness of the results, or as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher's ability to convince the reader that a research project's findings are worthy of attention. Trustworthiness establishes how confident the researcher is in

the findings based on the design and analysis (Krefting, 1990), and on how well the threats to internal validity have been managed (Sandelowski, 1986). Lincoln and Guba (1985) further stated qualitative research must seek to establish the trustworthiness of the results using the related concepts of credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability.

In gathering data through qualitative research with the intent of reporting the participants' perceptions, care must be taken to portray the participants' perceptions as accurately as possible. Careful observation and reporting are critical; however, Wolcott (2005) also urged qualitative researchers to trust their instincts and value their experience, while recognizing what the researchers themselves know and do not know. The trustworthiness of any qualitative study relies on the researcher's role, as the human instrument. I ensured the trustworthiness of the study through awareness of issues of credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to understanding the nature of the phenomenon under study (Krefting, 1990; Leninger, 1985). Creswell (2013) recommended that at least two procedures be used to provide credibility and validation of the study process and findings. Credibility of this study's findings was established in three ways. First, I have the professional skills necessary to engage interviewees in the interview process, based upon my history and background as a trained facilitator of individual and group sessions and as a social worker and community organizer. These disciplines require an understanding and the application of active listening skills, including asking probing questions and repeating what the participant has stated by paraphrasing. These skills build trust with the participants. Second, member checking was conducted through email with individual participants to check conclusions and determine

whether personal biases and experiences were distorted by my perceived meaning of the participants' responses and the factual reporting of the information shared. Third, I triangulated the findings across the participants and data sources to establish the credibility of the themes that emerged in analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The key to a study's credibility is the extent to which the participants recognize their experiences in the findings (Krefting, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The credibility was gathered through thick descriptions of their perceptions, member checking, and reviews of the contextual data, which allowed transferability to similar settings, if appropriate.

Transferability

Transferability allows a reader to apply the findings from a study to other situations and to gain insights that may have personal meaning. However, the goal of qualitative research is not to produce data that another researcher can replicate in a similar situation; rather, the goal is to explore and shed light on the perceptions of an event or experience. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, "It should be clear . . . that if there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere" (p. 298). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also stated that "the responsibility of the original investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgments possible" (p. 298). In this study, I ensured transferability by using complete, detailed descriptions of the context of the study and the collected qualitative data. Providing a complete, detailed description allowed the reader to derive personal conclusions as to the transferability of this study's results to another situation.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the assurance that the research stands up to critical and objective

evaluation. This assurance is reached via an external auditor reviewing all of the materials and being able to follow through the progression of steps in the study and reach a similar conclusion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The confirmability of this study's results was established through triangulation and the use of multiple methods or sources to secure as in-depth and accurate understanding of the data as possible. An experienced education researcher from a research agency reviewed the notes, summaries, and coding categories to determine that I properly analyzed the data. The individual participants then confirmed the findings.

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted there is no credibility without dependability. Dependability in qualitative research refers to the consistency between the findings and the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A researcher must use methods to ensure that credible and dependable findings are produced. Dependability was established in this study by triangulating the data. Triangulation of the two different data sources and member checks were used to establish the dependability of the findings. A panel of researchers checked the research plan to address any weaknesses in the study design. The data auditor reviewed the process of data analysis as well as the development and identification of themes to ensure dependability.

The goal of this chapter was to outline the research methods used to answer the research question. A discussion of the participants, data collection, and data analyses were detailed. Chapter 4 will present the findings related to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from data analysis, which sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: Which job-related factors do Part C coordinators perceive as critical to their decision to stay in their position?

RQ 2: Which non-job-related factors do Part C coordinators perceive as critical to their decision to stay in their position?

The use of a qualitative descriptive study design required a rich description of the perceptions of on-the-job and off-the-job factors that influenced the coordinators' decision to stay in the position. Six main themes were identified. The themes included commitment to serving families and children with disabilities, qualifications for the job, challenges,, building teamwork and collaboration, and family responsibilities. These themes offered a picture of the perceptions of on-the-job and off-the-job factors that influenced the interviewees' decisions to stay or leave their position.

Profile of Interviewees

The following section consists of a brief description of each interview and interviewee to provide the context and background of the individual coordinators involved. Further detailed descriptions of responses to the research questions and themes that evolved will follow.

Sam

The first interview began on December 20, 2019, at 10:00 am and lasted 1.5 hours with a brief 15-minute break. This interview was conducted with Sam, a coordinator from a mid-sized centrally located state. He consented to the interview as it was close to Christmas and work was slower than usual. This interview was conducted in person at Sam's office. His office is in the

State Department of Education, the lead agency for the program, on a higher floor with windows looking out over the capitol complex. It is a mid-sized office with a desk and a small conference table. As we sat at the table, he shared that, although he was on leave this week, he came in for this interview because he thought this was important. The following describes his professional background, perceptions of the role of coordinator, and family and community links.

Sam earned a bachelor's degree in hotel management. After obtaining the degree, he realized it did not fit with his personal and professional values, so he obtained a master's degree in family relations and child development in the mid-1990s. Through an internship with the EI program, he began working in a mid-sized rural area. He accepted a formal position as a resource coordinator in the same community, and within one year he was promoted to regional coordinator, before moving to the state office as assistant to the Part C coordinator. At this point, Sam became the coordinator, first serving in an interim position. Sam has served as a coordinator for the past 20 years and is the second person to hold this position in the state. Sam has worked in the field of early childhood education with a focus on serving young children with disabilities for 22 years. His current plans are to retire from this position; however, he would be open to considering another position if the pay were higher.

He is married with two young-adult children and extended family who live in the state. He would like to remain in the state as his family is here. One of his hobbies is biking, and he is actively involved in his church.

Carol

The second interview occurred on December 27, 2019, at 9:00 am and lasted two hours. We did not complete all the questions and rescheduled for December 30 at 9:00 am. This interview also lasted one hour. Carol is from a small northeastern state and was the first person to

respond to the email request to participate in the research.

When I contacted her to set up an interview time, she shared that she responded to this request because it was an interview; she had three requests on her desk for surveys and was not going to respond. She stated that "it is important for the voice of the coordinators to be heard" (Carol, interview, December 27, 2019). This interview totaled three hours over two sessions. Both interviews were conducted over the phone from Carol's home. She said she wanted to be able to talk and not feel distracted by the office, and she wanted to be able to say what she wanted without others overhearing.

Carol has served as a coordinator for six years and was previously an assistant coordinator for 18 years. She has worked in the field of early childhood education for 24 years. She did indicate that, following a death in her family, she took a leave of absence and returned to the position. She has a bachelor's degree in marketing and management and is pursuing a master's degree in special education. She began working for the EI program as a data entry clerk and progressed to training the staff to use the data system as the training administrator. In order to understand the data entry, she felt she had to learn and understand the regulations for IDEA Part C. She progressed to the data manager for the state and then to assistant to the Part C coordinator. She has served as the current Part C coordinator for six years.

On a personal level, Carol described that part of her motivation to continue working in the EI program was the birth of her son, who has disabilities and is now in college. She described the feeling she had as a parent, expecting a child and then finding out he has a delay or disability. The experience of working through this and navigating the system to obtain services for her child helps her to support other families. She indicated that, even though she was working for the early intervention program, "I was too proud to ask for help"; this experience helps her better relate to

families. She remarried after the passing of her first husband. She plans to retire from this position and remain in the state but move closer to her family.

Sandy

On January 2, 2020, at 10:00 am, I interviewed the coordinator from a rural northern state. Sandy has worked in the position of coordinator for seven years and in the field of early childhood for over 20 years. She has served in the position of coordinator for the past seven years. She has a bachelor's degree in early childhood and had completed most of the courses for a master's degree in elementary and special education. Her previous work experience is in teaching kindergarten and working as a literacy specialist for Head Start. From there she began writing grants and playing a role in implementing them. When the Part C Coordinator position was posted she applied, thinking that the work would be a new challenge and be at more of a system's level. She stated that her background as a teacher and understanding IDEA Part B lent a level of experience that would help her be successful in the coordinator position. She stated that her career has always been focused on working with children at risk. She shared that the agency is currently reorganizing to bring several of the early childhood programs together into one division based on a recent statewide assessment. She feels that this change will be a benefit to not only her in the role of coordinator, but also to the support available for young children with disabilities.

Sandy is married with two young adult children. She stated that she hopes to retire from this position in the next five to seven years and move to a warmer place. She described her "wonderful husband" and a "great group of girlfriends" as a support to her in this work. She described her hobbies as quilting, sewing, and reading, as well as outdoor activities.

Chris

The January 6, 2020, interview was conducted with a coordinator from a large eastern state. Chris has a bachelor's degree in psychology. He worked with adults with intellectual disabilities for the first half of his career. The shift to working with children with disabilities occurred as part of a change in leadership at the state level. He was asked to move to the new bureau and work on the monitoring of the program, adding the balance of compliance and quality to the process. For the past seven years he has served as the coordinator for IDEA Part C and Part B 619, the program providing services to preschool-aged children with disabilities. This is a unique role to lead both early childhood IDEA programs. The Part C program resides in an agency that includes all early childhood programs and is supported by both the education and human services agencies. Chris's career progression to the current role began initially at the local level as a direct care worker for people with intellectual disabilities, then moved into a management role at a local program. He then progressed to a statewide leadership role for community and state-operated facilities for people with disabilities. Chris transitioned from services for people with intellectual disabilities to early intervention services for infants and toddlers. As the IDEA Part C and Part B programs began to merge, one of the responsibilities was to develop a data management system to collect and report the required data. He was part of the initial team that was asked to lead the efforts of moving the early childhood disabilities programs (Part C and Part B, IDEA) to the newly formed single agency for early childhood programs. Finally, he was asked to lead the state's Part C and Part B 619 early intervention system as well as the state's Home Visiting and Family Support Programs. Chris has over 40 years of experience working in some capacity with adults or children with disabilities.

He shared that he is at the end of his career and hopes to retire from this position. He is married with adult children and would stay in his current community as he is responsible for

elderly family members and his children still live in the state. He considers his childhood home "home," instead of the community he has lived in for the past 20 years. He reflected that being at the end of his career he considers it important to include children with disabilities in the larger early care and education system, especially related to the inclusion of children with disabilities.

Fran

The next interview was with a coordinator from a larger Midwestern state and took place on January 23, 2020. We made several attempts to find a time to talk before I contacted her and let her know it was fine to withdraw, but she said that she still was eager to participate. We did find a time to talk, and I interviewed her by phone as she was not able to participate by videoconference. Fran has worked in the state system for over 32 years, beginning her career in high school, working as a screener for people applying for benefits such as Medicaid or food stamps. She worked in this program as a caseworker for many years before transitioning to work on the development of a data system for multiple programs. She moved to the bureau of early intervention 15 years ago as a result of a reorganization of programs. She described that she has held every EI state-level position, working on compliance, finances, policy, data and now as Part C coordinator for the last five and half years. She feels that her experience working at all levels of state government and understanding the needs of families from her early days contributes to her success. She describes this background as helpful and focuses on building a team of people who understand the direct service aspect of IDEA. The balance of her understanding of how government works and the expertise of staff regarding service delivery provide the best support for the EI program.

Fran is married with two children, who live in the state. She has one grandchild. She

plans to retire from this position and move back to her childhood home, where most of her relatives still live. She is supporting her one child through college and joked that as soon as her child is out of college and settled, she will retire. The move to her current place of residence was based on employment opportunities for both her and her husband. She is actively involved in her church and still volunteers at the church school. She stated that wherever she lives she will volunteer.

Sally

Sally shared her experiences and perceptions with me on January 24, 2020. She is the coordinator in a southern state, a position she has held for 13 years and has worked with children with disabilities her entire career, over 40 years. Again, as several of the interviewees indicated, she came to the position through a reorganization at the state government level, resulting in the EI program being moved from one agency to another. She was serving on the statewide council for infants and toddlers with disabilities (ICC) and working in a clinic for high-risk infants when she got a call asking her to serve in the position of coordinator. She began her career as a speech pathologist in a segregated school, serving only children with disabilities, before the passage of IDEA. As this program was closed, she proceeded to work with the Department of Education in a program for families of children with disabilities. Later, she became the director of a regional early intervention program that served children with suspected delays or disabilities in an eight-parish area. Subsequently, she accepted a position as a neonatal intensive care unit discharge and clinic follow-up coordinator. In this role, she worked with parents to prepare them to take their infant home; arranged follow-up needs such as home health, medical equipment, and medication, and followed up with children in local and regional "high risk" clinics along with a neonatologist. She stated that, while she has been offered leadership positions higher up in the

agency, she feels her career path led her to this position, and she did not join the program to move up but to do this work.

Sally is married and has lived in the capital city for 27 years. She plans to retire from this position and stay in her current community. Her parents were originally from this community, but as a child, being part of a military family, they moved frequently. She described her hobbies as her work and watching sports on TV. She and her husband get together with other sports fans. She stated that both she and her husband are workaholics and respect that about each other.

Mary

The interview occurred on January 26, 2020, with Mary from a large south-central state. The interview occurred over the phone as Mary was in her office during the workday. She shared that she was interested in this topic and when she saw the email requesting participation, she felt that she had to contribute. Mary has held the position of coordinator for five years, entering the position as the state was in a process of sun-setting and consolidating programs. Through the consolidation, the EI program was moved from a smaller agency that was dissolved to a much larger agency with combined health, developmental, and human services. While several of the interviewees worked their way up the ranks to the position of coordinator, Mary had a different path. Her career progression includes working for non-profits and then attending graduate school in the nation's capital. After graduate school, she worked as a lobbyist for a non-profit. She moved to the south-central state as her husband was from this state, where she worked in the state's aging services agency in the regulatory arm overseeing long-term care facilities and home health agencies. As the agencies were restructured and consolidated, she served first as the coordinator, then with the completion of the transfer of the program, she became the director of EI.

She is married with school-aged children. She indicated that she would consider staying in this position for the time being as she is dedicated to working with families and children. She would have to seriously consider taking a promotion as it would mean additional workload and stress. She shared that running and hanging out with her family is her happy place.

Carla

The final interview was conducted on January 31, 2020, with a coordinator from a mid-sized Midwestern state. Carla has served as a coordinator for eight years and previously worked in the EI for four years as a monitor of the EI programs. Although she started college to obtain a degree in accounting, she switched to a degree in education after deciding to work with children and families. She has a master's degree in early childhood education special education and has obtained all but dissertation (ABD) for a doctorate in education at the age of 50. Due to a family event that required her to focus on personal issues, she did not complete her degree. She stated, "I have everything I need to be successful, so it would not add to my salary at this point to go back" (Carla, interview, January 31, 2020). She started her career in childcare centers and university laboratory schools after completing college in her late 20s and then worked in a non-profit supporting family in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

She began working for the early intervention program as a compliance monitor and provided support in developing an online data system for individual family service plans (IFSPs). She described that coming to her current position at a later age and the various work and personal experiences prepared her for the current position.

She raised her two adult children as a single parent and is now also a grandparent. She shared the experience of being a single mom, having to apply for services and how "dehumanizing that was and walking out feeling like a nobody" (Carla, interview, January 31,

2020). This motivated her to attend college and dedicate her work to helping families. She also shared that her children were involved in her early work—they accompanied her to see families—and she believes this has impacted their career choices. She was encouraged by hearing her children talk about helping people with disabilities. Her hobbies are her grandkids and scrapbooking. Her current plans are to retire from this position. Her extended family lives in a nearby community, but she would move closer to her grandchildren, who are in another state.

The profiles of the interviewees provide the background and context of their perceived experiences related to their current position as coordinator. The breadth of their personal and professional experiences was reflected in the themes related to the factors that have contributed to the decision to stay.

Major Findings

The following presents the major findings from the data collected and analyzed. These findings are presented in terms of themes and related subthemes which emerged through the analyses of the interviewees' descriptions of the on-the-job and off-the job- factors that have influenced their decisions.

Theme 1. Commitment to Serving Children with Disabilities

An overarching theme identified throughout the data was interviewees' commitment to serving young children with disabilities and their families. All the interviewees expressed this ongoing commitment to make a difference as the impetus for their work at the systems level, defined as the coordinator for the states' IDEA Part C program. This on-the-job factor was expressed as a commitment to something larger than the job, driven by personal experiences with a family member or early career experiences working in direct services. There was agreement across the interviewees that the result of their dedication and work would result in improved

outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families.

When asked what they enjoyed about their position, each of the interviewees indicated a commitment to improving outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families. Three of the coordinators have been involved with the EI program since the passage of IDEA for infants and toddlers with disabilities in the late 1980s. The experiences of working with children or adults with disabilities who were served in institutions or segregated settings, while accepted at the time, has impacted their commitment to providing services in home and community settings.

Sally described her early experiences working with children with severe disabilities in a segregated setting, which included a program for the children's families. This early experience was noted as a critical point in an ongoing commitment to working with this population throughout her career. Chris described his early experiences of working with adults with intellectual disabilities for many years, and as IDEA was enacted, he saw this as a way to "start earlier to make a difference" (Chris, interview, January 6, 2020) with the shift to working with young children with disabilities.

Sandy indicated that the program in her rural northern state has been delivering services in the same way since IDEA was initially enacted, and she is working with a system that does not want to easily change, stating "it's been a painful, painful growing process. I really do have a strong passion for children; this is about the opportunity to really change a child and family's life when they have been given a diagnosis" (Sandy, interview, January 2, 2020).

Carol described that this work is a "passion—as a parent you have dreams about your child's future; families do not expect to be in this position, and we [EI] can make a difference" (Carol, interview, December 27, 2020). She described that her own child had a mild delay when

she began working in the program, and he is now 20 years old and attending college; she reflected that “it is not disappointment, it’s fear. I will not be able to give this child everything they need; how do I plan for this?” (Carol, interview, December 27, 2019). As such, she felt she could relate to families of children with disabilities. Of this job, she stated,

> I can plan for it; the best thing I can do is be supportive not only of families but the people who work in the program. So, it’s not a job, it’s almost unhealthy. Passion is sometimes seven in the morning to seven or eight o’clock at night. This position allows me to make a difference for more (families) (Carol, interview, December 27, 2019).

The commitment to serving young children and families was informed by experiences working directly with families in the past, but now that they are in a leadership position that often separates them from the direct contact with children and families. Chris summarized that “It's not like my work lets me be in the field that often, but the opportunity to talk with parents… and their appreciation of the program and what it means to them …and realizing how important this early influence was on them—those are the factors that make me respect the position… to make sure that I'm honoring those parents that came before me and the staff that came before me (Chris, interview, January 6, 2020). In sharing what she enjoys about her job, Fran stated that “I really do enjoy coming into work every day, trying to resolve issues and trying to find ways to get all children who need services into the program.” (Fran, interview, January 23, 2020).

The coordinators talked about the challenges they face and their abilities to address them. Sandy said, "You address the challenge, you can change the course of a child's life" (Sandy, interview, January 2, 2020).

Carol also communicated, "I feel responsible for steering the ship; [you] must have a strong personality. Have to be strong in this position" (Carol, interview, December 27, 2020). A

person holding this position must be an eternal optimist (Fran, interview, January 23, 2020; Sandy, interview, January 2, 2020) and like to be challenged (Sally, interview, January 24, 2020; Mary, interview, January 26, 2020; Chris, interview, January 6, 2020; Carol, interview, December 30, 2019). According to the interviewees, there is personal satisfaction in the work, and moreover, in this position, the coordinator feels they can make a difference.

Each interviewee indicated the reason they stay is to make a difference through improving outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families. They do so by leading and managing the IDEA Part C program. Each described their perception of working for a program that makes a difference, noting that this is "awesome work and is critical for families at a critical time in their lives" (Mary, interview, January 26, 2020).

Theme 2. Qualifications for the Job

When asked "How well do you fit in this position?", each interviewee indicated they were well suited for their position. As described previously, a common theme throughout the interviews was the career decision to make a difference by working with young children with disabilities and their families. While each of the interviewees had a different career path that led to this point, they all described that experiences in previous positions provided them with the knowledge and skills needed to be a coordinator. Several of the interviewees noted they were meant to hold this position, and their experiences to date prepared them for this. The experience and perceptions of what is required to perform the job and what fosters job satisfaction are described further.

Knowledge and Understanding of How Government Works and Politics

A perceived critical factor of success was that an understanding of how state government works and an ability to navigate politics helps one navigate the system both internally and

externally. Interviewees indicated their longevity in state government and understanding of the agency and state politics allowed them to navigate the politics and advocate for the program. In those cases where they may not have had direct experience working with children with disabilities, their experience in government and policy had prepared them for this role. This was reflected in the following statement from Fran, "…when it comes to handling the bureaucracy and the politics behind some of the situations, I am a bit more versed and prepared for that" (Fran, interview, January 23, 2020). Mary also addressed the importance of understanding state government and policy and said,

> What's really required of me in this role is to communicate with various stakeholders, think about the financing of the program, work on legislative and policy issues, and administer all of this from a state level…this supports the providers so they can help families. (Mary, interview, January 26, 2020)

Understanding the bureaucracy and politics both internally and externally prepares a coordinator to be effective and able to lead and manage the program. Fran shared that "because we are a government program, understanding the politics and bureaucracy and how things work and who you can talk to and shouldn't talk to is important" (Fran, interview, January 23, 2020).

Carol shared,

> I know I fit this position when we are looking for a budget increase at the state level; that's my opportunity to highlight a specific set of projects or new initiatives and highlight our growth. I call these door-openers, and I am good at them (Carol, interview, December 27, 2019)

She also stated,

> Political capital is to not only engage the leadership of your agency to be more invested

in the program but to also reach out to the community to those groups that have a similar purpose and engaging them in supporting you. (Carol, interview, December 27, 2019)

Leveraging and understanding the politics of the lead agency, state government, and various stakeholders come from lessons learned and skills developed over time. Several coordinators noted that, while they were aware of politics in their previous positions at the local level, they were surprised at the impact of politics at the state level. For example, Sandy said, "leading change within a local program is hard, but leading change that is politically motivated at the state level is another layer of complications. I have talked to several other coordinators recently, and you have to think through this" (Sandy, interview, January 2, 2020). This knowledge and understanding are just one aspect of the early care and education system for early childhood education; it is important to understand the federal IDEA requirements as well.

Knowledge and Understanding of IDEA requirements

Understanding the complexity of the EI program includes an understanding of the IDEA regulations, the reality of implementation, and the ability to lead. Carol noted that "nothing prepares you to be a Part C coordinator, there are no classes that prepare you. To be effective you have to understand each aspect of IDEA, you have to be a subject matter expert" (Carol, interview, December 27, 2019).

Three of the interviewees noted that coordinators must understand the reality of the implementation of IDEA at the provider level and the resources needed to address the changing needs of families, such as effects of the opioid crisis and the socio-economic issues in many communities (Sally, interview, January 24, 202; Sam, interview, December 20, 2019; Sandy, interview, January 2, 2020). Sam indicated that in order to understand the role of coordinator it is necessary to "work your way up from the provider level" (Sam, interview, December 20, 2019).

She further noted this was the best way to understand how IDEA works from the provider to state to the federal level.

Leadership Preparation

Carol also shared that what prepares a person for this position is an understanding of leadership, and "while coursework in a bachelor or master's program prepares you to understand the development of children, there are no courses offered on leadership. OSEP or someone needs to offer professional development on leadership" (Carol, interview, December 27, 2019).

Carla lamented,

> The Part C coordinator is the loneliest job in the world. You are the only one with this position in the state and expected to lead and manage change from the provider level to the state level and keep everyone going in the same direction. (Carla, interview, December 2018)

She reflected that all state Part C coordinators need to support one another if they were going to be able to make the necessary system changes, because they could not reflect on their struggles with staff or they (the staff) would lose faith. They needed to be able to convey the vision and purpose of systemic change from the provider level to the state agency level to the governor level. This understanding of vision and purpose is key to leading and managing the program. Several of the interviewees shared that their support in leading and managing the program comes from other coordinators and the technical assistance centers, as well as building on their previous experiences in leading and managing in other positions as they worked to advance toward the lead position as a Part C coordinator.

Leadership and management skills can be learned through various experiences. It was noted the previous experiences and support of supervisors in developing leadership skills

contributed to their fit for the position. "I had opportunities for individual leadership on some early projects I worked on, both individually to lead and influence people, but also to be a leader of a process or implement a process and oversee the implementation" (Chris, interview, January 6, 2020). The opportunity to learn about leading on a smaller scale allows for "growing into positions of leading and making decisions" on a larger scale (Chris, interview, January 6, 2020).

Decision-Making Ability

The ability to make decisions for the program contributes to the perception of fit in the position. Each of the interviewees shared examples of when they were or were not empowered to make decisions. Six of the eight interviewees described that their current relationship with their superiors was one of trust built over time and, as a result, they are given the freedom to make and implement day-to-day decisions for the program. Sam shared that "each agency has supervision; you don't get to pick your supervisor, you learn that early on" (Sam, interview, December 20, 2019). Building that trust takes time; some major decisions are made in collaboration with upper management, while the day-to-day decisions are made independently. Such understanding is important to have. Mary reflected on the importance of building relationships and trust:

> We were having monthly calls with CEOs of contracted agencies and quarterly meetings with directors of programs across the state; my boss and my boss' boss were participating in each call…I got to a point where we built those relationships and a comfort level of being able to stand under fire and handle things when they [the bosses] just stopped [hovering over]. They were just like 'yeah, you got this.' That is really empowering, to know that I can handle it. That comes from the trust of seeing it done and having confidence in my knowledge and how to handle the nuance of things. (Mary, interview, January 26, 2020)

Fran said, “It’s a combination of the two of us: She trusts me, and I trust her” (Fran, interview, January 23, 2020). This perception is based on the ability to know when to reach out to higher-up leadership to make key decisions in cooperation and building the trust of the agency leadership in the ability to make the day-to-day decisions regarding the program. “So those two things…the leadership and the recognition of [me] being able to resolve things…those always meant a lot to me.” (Sally, interview, January 24, 2020).

Theme 3. Challenges as Motivation to Stay

The interviewees identified several challenges they had to cope with as Part C coordinators. Interestingly, they indicated most challenges were a part of the job, challenges to which they were up to the task. Several of the interviewees expressed that they were particularly capable of addressing these challenges and thus were motivated to stay and take them on. If they were successful in addressing, they would consider that they had been successful as a leader. However, two challenges posed more stress and were seen as something that kept them up a night: incompatibility with the lead agency and adequate funding.

Challenges in Organizational Leadership

The interviewees raised several issues about organizational leadership. One major issue is related to lead agency upper management’s lack of understanding of the IDEA regulations or program requirements and how the program aligns with the mission of the lead agency. Three of the interviewees perceived that, even in cases where the lead agency values the program, they do not necessarily understand the program. Another shared they are constantly having to ensure that the EI program is recognized and receives the resources necessary to support the program (Chris, interview, January 6, 2020). An example shared by Fran demonstrates this; she shared she was talking to superiors about a staffing need and had to keep explaining the program need related to

IDEA requirements, stating their decisions just “don’t make sense” (Fran, interview, January 23, 2020). She was eventually able to move forward based on her relationship with upper management and her knowledge of “how to work the system”.

Coordinators are left to make major policy decisions on their own when the lead agency does not understand the nuances of the program. This also places the coordinator in the role of constantly informing and advocating for the program. Sandy shared, “I am empowered to make all the decisions because no one has paid attention to me for all these years. The support I have received has been from the technical assistance centers” (Sandy, interview, January 2, 2020).

The change of leadership at the upper levels of the lead agency impacts the understanding and support of the program, which was exemplified by the following perception of a coordinator in a large agency who shared,

> As leadership changes, there is a constant re-education of people about this program. I am going through this thing with new leadership, educating people about the program, and keeping them invested and interested and then just trying to get information. (Mary, interview, January 26, 2020)

Respect for their leader can impact the decision of a coordinator to stay or leave as well. One of the interviewees (Chris) retired for several months after an agency leader was appointed who “hunkered down” during a particularly tough time for the agency, stating, “no one was allowed to make changes to the system.” After six months, a “new dynamic leader” was appointed and contacted this interviewee, asking Chris to return. Chris met with the incoming director to discuss leadership style and goals for the program; being satisfied, Chris decided to return. Chris stated that working with a person who knows how to work the system and includes staff when implementing change is important to their desire to continue working. The ability to

be considered in decisions about implementing change was echoed by several of the interviewees.

Regarding a more recent challenge, Sally stated,

> For the first time in my career, I am considering leaving and am thinking…if I can live in this environment. Can I live with it and do as much as I can? I don't see anyone around me who has career goals to make a difference for children and families. (Sally, interview, January 24, 2020)

Sally also described this troubling experience related to leadership change—from one that was supportive and innovative to one that has a "limited understanding of the issues and doesn't seem motivated to address problems." This change made her job more difficult as she then had to "take on extra work to address issues and make sure people [received] the services they need[ed]" (Sally, interview, January 24, 2020).

Another common theme related to challenges was the politics. Sandy laughed as she described that "politics could kill a lot of Part C coordinators" (Sandy, interview, January 2, 2020). The bureaucracy and politics were perceived by the interviewees as stopping them from moving forward to improve the program, thus requiring them to constantly educate and advocate within the lead agency and in the state about the needs of the program. The ability to work through the state process of issuing contracts contributes to frustration with the position as well. The bureaucracy can take a considerable amount of time and results in delayed payments to providers who deliver services to children with disabilities. The interviewees described their frustration with the role of managing contracts to make sure providers are paid in a timely way for services delivered and the process and time it takes to get invoices paid or employees hired (Fran, interview, January 23, 2020; Mary, interview, January 6, 2020; Sally interview, January

24, 2020).

Incompatibility of EI Program with Lead Agency

The interviewees indicated they are a good fit for the program, but at times, the program was not a good fit for the agency under which it is housed. This was supported by the data that reported in this subset of states, six of the interviewees came to their position when the EI program moved to either a new division or agency. In one of those states, the program has recently been moved to a new division that will include multiple early childhood education programs.

There were varying perceptions among the interviewees regarding the fit of the program within the agency. Sam described,

> This is a loaded question. While I am a good fit for the program…the leadership of the agency depends on whether the program is a good fit for the agency. So, [I am] kind of an odd fit for the agency, but I am a good fit for the program. (Sam, interview, December 20, 2019)

Another interviewee noted that the current lead agency is a fit for her background, but the program might fit better in another agency; however, she does not have the educational background for a position in this agency (Carol, interview, December 30, 2019).

Inadequate Funding

All interviewees shared that the EI program remains underfunded; state and federal funds do not keep pace with the number of children to be served. This was described as a primary stressor and challenge of the position, followed by shortages of staff as a result of limited funding, and requirements of IDEA. Mary shared that if the program were fully funded, she would be done, “there would be nothing left to work on. The funding is inadequate, and I know

it's the source of my stress and across the states" (Mary, interview, January 26, 2020). There is perceived stress associated with being responsible for obtaining enough resources so that everyone can do their job well and focus on supporting children and their families. Carla summarized that "finance is always a stressor, the budget is just not enough to do the work" (Carla, interview, January 31, 2020).

Advocating for and obtaining resources is perceived as especially critical to continued services for young children with disabilities. As shared in the interviews if the program were adequately funded, it would be easier for the coordinators to deliver the services the children need.

While the interviewees were forced to deal with these challenges, they accepted them as a part of leading and managing the EI program. These challenges in a way made them want to stay and motivated them to make extra efforts to ensure that their programs run efficiently and effectively and serve the children and their families properly.

Theme 4. Teamwork and Collaboration

Building and leading a team has been described by the interviewees as not only a key factor to their job satisfaction but also as a contributing factor to the success of the program. Interviewees described that building and leading a team is rewarding and that having shared goals supports the program improvements that need to be made.

As the interviewees described their commitment to the program, they described their staff as being committed to the program as well. Having a team and knowing that the team is on the same page and committed to the same goals is perceived as important to interviewees' job satisfaction. Chris described, "Knowing that there is a team of people that believe the same ….and working with that team…. It's something I know I will miss when I leave (Chris,

interview, January 6, 2020).

According to Mary, having a team that is knowledgeable and dedicated supports the coordinator in delegating the work to team members and feeling confident that the work will get done (Mary, interview, January 26, 2020). “I want everyone to come together as a team and be able to engage and share their experiences; we are on the same team. What is that quote? ‘A rising tide lifts all ships’” (Carol, interview, December 27, 2019). The interviewees shared that having a team builds a sense of ownership in the program when everyone is working toward a common goal.

The ability to lead and influence others by implementing a process and seeing it through contributes to their satisfaction with the job. Sam stated that “job satisfaction [is] a funny thing. I get satisfaction through working with my team…the program is statewide and [the realization] that I can make a difference from where I am—that is what helps me through tough times” (Sam, interview, December 20, 2019). The position of coordinator within the IDEA Part C program gives an individual the opportunity to work with a team of people who are committed to a common goal. Mary described that she “really likes working with my team, it makes a big difference. I have a great team and a great boss. I don't know everything about early intervention…. but I have team members that are experts in different things” (Mary, interview, January 26, 2020). This sentiment is shared by Carla as well, “when things go wrong, we all go wrong because we all share in the, "jeez this didn't work", what do we do next” (Carla, interview, January 31, 2020).

There are also challenges in working with teams, as described by Sally:

> I think we’ve [EI team] developed a good working relationship over the years, even though sometimes it's frustrating. Of course, any time you're working with people, it's

> frustrating sometimes. But if you look at the fact that I've only…lost three people and to retirement (Sally, interview, January 24, 2020)

The perception of job satisfaction is linked to connections with staff in the program. Each of the interviewees, when asked what they would miss most about their position if they were to leave, said they would miss the people they work with, followed by working on something that makes a difference. Sandy illustrated this through her comment, “The people I work with are so important to me…. The work that we are accomplishing, is nothing short of miraculous… I would miss that; I would miss that a lot if I left” (Sandy, interview, January 2, 2020).

This sense of honoring past work is followed by a need to continue the work of the team and have a succession plan. Sally noted that she is currently looking for her replacement but cannot find someone who has the career goal of making a difference for children and families (Sally, interview, January 24, 2020).

Even though the job was perceived as difficult, there was a connection and sense of commitment to the team, a sense of shared leadership through teamwork, and attempts to build leadership in others. Sandy reported that “I don't feel like I can leave it yet, that it’s ready to go to somebody else. That day is coming though” (Sandy, interview, January 2, 2020). She shared that she is looking for her replacement within the program. In support of this, Sam stated that “I want to increase our infrastructure here at “x”, improve those pieces I can control to be ready for the time when I leave” (Sam, interview, December 20, 2019). He further shared that he was preparing his team for the future to ensure the program would continue to improve once he left.

Carla described her job as ensuring that others around her are successful as part of a team and become future leaders in the program. Furthermore, Fran described that her role was to build the future leaders of the program so one of them could take her place, after she reached her

goals for the program (Fran, interview, January 23, 2020). Sally described she had a team member who was great at her job, however, was offered a promotion to another program. She encouraged her to take the promotion and saw this as building a broader team across early care and education.

While the connection to the staff in the program was considered a strength, the connection to the agency was not always as strong. Sally shared,

> So those two things…the leadership and the recognition of being able to resolve things…those always meant a lot to me. And then, of course, we have a great team in the program, not so much in the central office [lead agency], but within our central office [EI program] and our regional staff. (Sally, interview, January 24, 2020)

The superiors in the lead agency and their leadership style has an impact on coordinators' decisions to stay or leave. Several of the interviewees described a critical point when they had considered their options. One interviewee (Carla) described that the “agency's leadership [is] stifling, and [I] can't think outside the box.” She decided to stay even when offered a job in a different program after doing some "soul searching" and declined the job, stating “it's about the work, not the bureaucracy…the team I work with in the program is like family but the upper management in the agency makes it a hard road.” This has ultimately been a good decision as she now is doing the work she loves with a team that is “committed to system change and makes meaningful decisions that happen through teamwork, and makes needed changes for practice and improved outcomes for children and families” (Carla, interview, January 31, 2020).

The IDEA Part C program is designed to include multiple agency partners who are responsible for providing services; working with a cross-agency team contributes to job satisfaction. Having an interagency collaborative relationship and joint team leaders making

decisions for the program was a benefit and a challenge for individuals in this position. Carla described that "having a great team around me and…several colleagues in different agencies…we work together, this makes me feel confident, and the group helps to sort out ideas" (Carla, interview, January 31, 2020). When the team works well together, it is "really effective for the program" but "over the years, this interagency collaboration has suffered" (Sam, interview, December 2019), and this impacts the program as well as teams at the local level. These shared perceptions highlighted the benefit and challenges of the leadership and collaboration from an interagency program.

Broader collaboration within the early care and education system also influenced the perceived job satisfaction:

> It's also having collaboration with each of the other pieces of the early learning community...How can we talk about suspension and expulsion from an early learning perspective and not just early intervention or a QRIS system… those are things that have made the job worthwhile and beneficial. (Chris, interview, January 6, 2020)

The benefits of developing cross-sector teams with other organizations serving similar populations provide support to the interviewees as well. Carla described her interagency team as three to four colleagues across agencies that have formed a team. "We fit well together, we each bring different skills, talents, and knowledge…. None of us alone are whole, but together we are a pretty dynamic team" (Carla, interview, January 31, 2020).

Having a clear sense of accomplishing set personal and professional goals serves as a marker for when to leave the program. The successful achievement of these goals emerged in the discussions of why the interviewees have stayed in their positions. While these accomplishments were different for each interviewee, the attainment of said accomplishments tended to indicate it

was time to leave the position. There was a perception that having clear professional and personal goals aligned with the mission of the program was important to job satisfaction; this was demonstrated when several of the interviewees described wanting to leave the program in a better condition than when they began the job (Chris, interview, January 6, 2020; Fran, interview, January 23, 2020; Sally, interview, January 24, 2020).

This personal investment was conveyed through Sally's response when asked about personal satisfaction with the job:

> Yeah, but it's just my own investment, and I feel like I've made improvements, and I just want to see those things continue, and I don't want it to end up back like it was when the previous staff in the office of public health had it.(Sally, interview, January 24, 2020)

This position can be humbling and seem like a big job, as described by Chris, " after four years I've gotten more comfortable with what you can accomplish… and the ability to build a team around myself and support them…. understanding my limits and skills" (Chris, interview, January 7, 2020). Chris went on to comment that recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of the team, as well as your own strengths and weaknesses support the ability to understand what can and cannot be accomplished. Fran, Carol, and Mary described they were able to bring a strong background in state government bureaucracy and politics to the program and then they purposely surrounded themselves with team members who were knowledgeable about early childhood. This sentiment was shared by several of the interviewees who indicated their ability to succeed was in recognizing their abilities and building a team of staff that brought varied necessary skills to the work (Carol, interview, December 30, 2019; Fran, interview, January 23, 2020; Mary, January 26, 2020). "Leadership through teamwork and building leadership in others has absolutely driven me…"; Carol further expressed she depends on the people around her, that

“staff and stakeholders find a problem and fix it, … they come to my aid. I feel like I have to steer the ship and they help...” (Carol, interview, December 30, 2019).

The personal drive for program improvement was also influenced by the families that interviewees came in contact with; this interaction provided the impetus to continue the work. Sandy expressed this through her description of what she would miss the most were she to leave her position. “They [Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC)] are quite an active group. There are six parents who are passionate…. They are empowered … quite delightful to listen to and hear their ideas. I would miss them because they make a difference” (Sandy, interview, January 2, 2020). She went on to share that she viewed them as her team and support system.

Theme 5. Family Responsibilities

Immediate and extended family also played a role in the coordinators’ decisions about their continued employment. Four of the eight interviewees have grown children and, in some cases, grandchildren. Several interviewees described that they moved to their current community because of their position. Now, with their children raised, their considerations about where to live are related to the proximity of their adult children and the need to care for extended family members. Sam described that, when children are young, the family situation impacts one’s decisions. As they get older one has more choices; when they leave home, one has even more freedom when making employment decisions. However, the decisions then shift to older parents or relatives. He shared that he would stay in the state where most of his family is located but move to the city where many of them live (Sam, interview, December 20, 2019).

Two of the interviewees still had children either in grade school or college, which influenced their decisions about employment. The interviewees indicated they would consider additional options regarding location after their children finish school, living near the school

influenced decisions at this point in their careers. Mary shared that, while her children were school age, she had to consider the impact on moving seriously. To maintain the work-life balance, she stayed in her current position (Mary, interview, January 6, 2020). Carol indicated that while her son was in college she wanted to stay in her current community, which was closer to the university town.

Unexpected family events can impact a coordinator's decision to stay or leave. Carol described the death of a family member and the decision to take a short leave of absence to recover her sense of perspective. Carla described a family event that caused them to "take a U-turn" and step back from pursuing other opportunities in order to support a family member.

Each of the interviewees shared their thoughts on potentially moving back to the town in which they were raised after leaving the coordinator position. Seven of the eight were seriously considering this as an option. One (Sally) planned on staying in her current community, which is the hometown of her parents and grandparents.

This chapter reports five major themes and subthemes that emerged from data analysis. The themes are commitment to serving families and children with disabilities, qualifications for the job, challenges, building teamwork and collaboration, and family responsibilities.

The interviewees in this study are passionate about what they do. The following statement by Chris exemplified the thoughts most of the interviewees shared through their in-depth descriptions of why they stay.

> What I enjoy about the position…Thinking of the history of the program, and how long it's existed and all the people before me and the work that they did to create the program that we have in (X State), and it's understanding that when I sit in this chair that I'm the caretaker of something that a lot of people worked very hard to make happen. …I have a

respect for the position and the history and its impact on families and children and having had the opportunity to make a difference... (Chris, interview, January 6, 2020).

Chapter 5: Discussion

This dissertation seeks to provide an in-depth description of critical on-the-job and off-the-job factors that influence Part C coordinator's decision to stay in their position. This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings and concludes with a discussion of the practical implications for future research, and summary. The research questions for this study are:

RQ 1: Which job-related factors do Part C coordinators perceive as critical to their decision to stay in their position?

RQ 2: Which non-job-related factors do Part C coordinators perceive as critical to their decision to stay in their position?

Drawing upon the theory of job embeddedness, I investigated the factors that have influenced these Part C coordinators' decision to stay on their job, adding to the limited body of research related to retention of IDEA Part C coordinators who are mid-level managers in education or health and human service agencies. Traditional turnover theory has focused on why people leave; job embeddedness, however, focuses on the on- and off-the-job factors that support retention. The examination of job embeddedness offers insight and strategies that can be used to reduce high turnover of Part C coordinators. The interviewees in this study offered their perceptions of the factors that have contributed to their decision to stay in the position.

Essentially, this study finds that the stronger the person's web of connections to both job and family are, the more embedded they are and the greater the perceived sacrifice they would encounter should they leave. Findings from this qualitative descriptive study also support major concepts of the job embeddedness theory. By revealing their perceptions of factors that have resulted in their decision to stay in their position this study may lead to development of effective policies and practices to retain Part C coordinators.

Both questions of this study are answered. The study identifies multiple themes related to on-the-job factors. The factors that contribute positively to their decision to stay on the job include (a) commitment to serving young children with disabilities, (b) qualifications for the job, (c) challenges as motivation to stay, and (d) building and leading a team. One theme related to off-the-job factors primarily focuses on family responsibilities. This chapter also provides further discussion on how these factors influence the coordinators' career decisions.

In answering the research questions related to critical on-the-job factors, the most compelling shared by each of the interviewees is the commitment to serving young children with disabilities. The perception of working to improve outcomes for this population was consistently woven throughout the responses of each of those interviewed. All the coordinators are fully committed to this noble cause, and this has been their most important motivator to stay in their current job.

Having an in-depth knowledge and understanding of how government programs operate, along with ability to implement state and federal policy, were identified by each interviewee as additional factors that support success as the leader of the EI program. As this position is often a middle management position there were noted challenges related to working with the lead agency management and ensuring ongoing support and adequate resources for the program. However, these factors, while shared as challenges, were also seen as a part of the job and did not contribute to thoughts about leaving. In fact, the coordinators had strong self-efficacy and were proud of their knowledge and understanding of how government programs work and their ability to implement the policies.

Additional factors shared that contribute to job satisfaction were related to building and leading a team as well as having the support of team members in meeting the mission and goals

of the program. Working with the people involved in the program, from providers to parents to state-level EI staff, was identified as what they would miss most if they were to leave their position.

However, they also identified events or situations that caused them to consider leaving their position. These events, both professional and personal, were significant enough to cause a moment of indecision about staying in the position. However, because of the level of embeddedness within their job, they chose not to leave.

As described earlier, the off-the-job factors described in the job embeddedness theory are *fit, link, and sacrifice* related to family and community. Decisions related to family factor into a decision to stay or leave as well. Coordinators make decisions related to their job based on their responsibilities to family; factors such as having school age children, living near adult children and grandchildren, and salary as a resource to support family impact decisions on continuing in the position.

In this study, I identified several specific job-related and non-job-related factors from the data analysis critical to interviewees' decisions to stay in their position. The findings from this study provide empirical support for the job embeddedness theory related to several on-the-job factors and a specific off-the-job factor related to family.

Fit and Part C Coordinators' Decision to Stay

The constructs of *fit, link,* and *sacrifice* of on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness create the web that holds a person in their job and community. The information in the sections below provides a detailed description of how fit, link, and sacrifice influence these Part C coordinators' decision to stay and how this information can provide practical strategies for recruitment and retention. The major findings are detailed related to fit, link, and sacrifice.

Readers will observe some findings are related to one or more of the constructs and noted throughout the discussion.

A key factor in the coordinators' decision to stay is their commitment to serving young children with disabilities and their families. The coordinators expressed they had personal and professional goals related to serving young children with disabilities and their current position enables them to improve the program, leading to better child and family outcomes. This is what Mitchell et al. (2001) referred to as a *good fit*—a commitment to the program's goals that are in alignment with their personal values, leading to a willingness to go above and beyond.

Consistent across all of the interviewees was a belief that their career choice was driven by a broader sense of purpose and that they were contributing to the greater good, improving the outcomes for children with disabilities. There is perceived personal and job satisfaction seen as a return on investment, achieved through the time and effort expended on managing and leading a program that makes a difference for young children with disabilities. As the data show, each interviewee responded to the question of "Do you fit in this position?" with a positive response. The responses indicate compatibility with the program and alignment of the interviewees' personal values and career goals. The personal and professional commitment as described in the data sustain the interviewees in working toward the goals of the EI program and contribute to the perception of *fit* in the position.

Commitment is supported by a perceived sense of belief in one's abilities to manage and make a positive impact on the program. This sense of self-efficacy contributes to the perception of *fit* in leading and managing the EI program. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to perform tasks and reach goals (Bandura, 1997). This was described through the data collected as the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills gained throughout one's career that prepared

them for their current position, contributing to their confidence and ability to react to various situations in the workplace.

This sense of self-efficacy further contributes to a *perceived fit* between the interviewees' skills and the demands of the job. As described in the job embeddedness theory, perceived fit is also related to having the job skills, knowledge, and abilities to meet the demands of the job (Mitchell et al., 2001). Responses to the questions about preparation for the position indicated that having a working knowledge and understanding of how government works, the IDEA regulations, and the autonomy to make decisions about the program contributed to a perceived fit for the position. The results clearly suggested a perceived fit between the interviewees' skills and the demands of the job. The understanding of IDEA and having the knowledge and skills for the job support the coordinators in their commitment to their work and continued engagement with the lead agency and the EI program.

Along with the necessary experience, interviewees expressed their commitment to serving children with disabilities and their ability to lead and manage also led them to seek positions at the highest level of the program in order to contribute to systemic change. As leaders and managers of the EI program, the interviewees expressed a desire to create conditions that can lead to high-quality services for infants and toddlers with disabilities. This perceived feeling of responsibility for and commitment to leading the EI program that makes a difference for young children with disabilities once again aligns with the job embeddedness construct of fit (Mitchell et al., 2001).

The findings indicate that to lead and manage the EI program, specific knowledge, skills, and abilities are needed to achieve systemic change. It was noted through the data analysis that the systems perspective requires different skills than simply providing direct services.

Interviewees expressed their belief in the importance of having a working knowledge of organizational and leadership structures. Part C coordinators have an important role in the EI program through their direct influence on the policies and procedures of the program and the indirect influence on providers who deliver the services to children with disabilities and their families (Cregard & Corin, 2019).

Additionally, the organizational structure of the EI program is influenced by the lead agency in which it resides. Alignment of the EI program with the goals of the lead agency and, more broadly, with the broader early childhood special education system adds a dimension of complexity to the role of leading and managing the EI program (Hebbeler et al., 2012). This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development related to a systems perspective of EI programs (Harbin & Salisbury, 2005; Hebbeler et al., 2012).

This consideration of Bronfenbrenner's theory also provides valuable insight into the findings, considering the interaction between and among the various aspects of local, state, and federal policies and practices that influence the interaction among the child, family, and provider (Hebbeler et al., 2012; Rous et al., 2007). Coordinators in this study understood their role in shaping these interactions through their role at the state level and the important but indirect impact on the interactions between the child with a disability, the family, and the service provider. Having a clear understanding and knowledge of the IDEA requirements, the workings of government systems, and an ability to navigate politics were a particular skill and source of knowledge identified as necessary to their ongoing success in leading the Part C program. Furthermore, this knowledge and understanding contribute to their ability to lead and manage in a complex system of interactions. The collective knowledge and ability of a coordinator is important to the role of navigating and orchestrating this inter-agency program. It requires a

highly qualified person.

An interesting finding of this study is related to *fit* of the EI program within the lead agency. This study did not specifically ask questions about the fit of the program within the lead agency; however, six interviewees shared that while they fit in the position, the EI program did not fit in the lead agency, regardless of an education or health and human services lead agency. Contributing to this is the perception that lead agency management does not understand the requirements of IDEA and how the EI program fits within the mission of the lead agency. Interviewees shared they were constantly educating the lead agency about the requirements and importance of the EI program.

While the coordinators reported frustration at times with their supervisors, the findings of this study suggest the positive factors counteract the negative factors. The coordinators with positive supervisory support reported they were in a better position to lead and manage the EI program, feeling a perceived trust by their supervisors in their decisions. Research indicates managers who receive supervisory support through advice on issues, ability to make day-to-day decisions and removal of administrative barriers leads to the manager feeling appreciated for their work and a perceived sense of control over their day-to-day leadership decisions (c & Corin, 2019; Mitchell et al., 200). Interviewees shared experiences of working with the lead agency management as positive when there is a perceived trust and respect on both parts. This contributes to perceived fit of the person for the position and contributes to stronger links to the organization. Again, the positive factors support embeddedness and buffer against the struggles.

In this study, data from questions related to fit for the position indicate an alignment of the coordinators' values and goals with those of the EI program in which they work. The data also indicate each of the coordinators reported feeling they were well equipped to meet the

demands of the job related to their skills, knowledge, and abilities. However, fit in the community, which is related to the perception of the community as an environment that "fits" with the needs of the coordinators, including factors such as activities, closeness to workplace, or amenities (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006), does not seem to play a major role in their decision to stay. This finding is of specific interest as the job embeddedness theory places the value of off-the-job factors as equal to on-the-job factors in decisions to stay in a position.

Dealing with Challenges and Stress

Workplace stress occurs when the demands of the situation are greater than our resources to deal with the situation. Events seen as manageable are perceived as challenges, while stress is related to those events perceived as beyond our control or resources. As described earlier, there is an annual survey conducted to better understand the issues and challenges with implementing the Part C program. The 2019 ITCA Tipping Points Annual Survey asked several questions related to the most stressful factors for Part C programs. Coordinators from 47 states (94%) responded to the 2019 survey; 74% (34) indicated lack of providers to meet service delivery needs was the most stressful, followed by 57% (26 states) indicating insufficient funding as a stressor. Other stress factors identified included managing the statewide EI program, staff turnover at the state and local level, lead agency misunderstanding the federal requirements of IDEA Part C, politics, and availability of funds for professional development on evidence-based practices. While the survey results are valuable, this study extends the findings of the survey. The descriptive data in this study allow for an in-depth description of the perceived factors that play a role in the retention of the coordinator.

The ITCA survey provides a list of stress factors identified by all the Part C coordinators. There was a distinction made between stressors and challenges according to the coordinators

participating in this study. Interviewees shared that taking on a challenge can be seen as motivating and partially what drives them to pursue and stay in the position as coordinator.

How the coordinators address both challenges and stressors may offer valuable insight into why they stay. For these coordinators, navigating state and federal politics, balancing the demands of state and federal rules and regulations, and working within the lead agency are seen as challenges that are a part of the job. They indicated they are prepared and up to the challenge, in some cases even motivated by the need to support the program. While the challenges were seen as a necessary part of the leading and managing, stressors were described as something that could not be easily addressed.

The factors identified by the interviewees as stressful include lack of adequate funding for the program as the number of children eligible for the program continues to increase and federal funding does not increase to meet demand. Lack of available funding leads to the inability to increase the number of providers available to meet the rising demand. These stressors of funding and the resulting lack of providers were noted by each of the interviewees as an ongoing concern and issues that could not be easily addressed. The stressors of funding and availability of providers were described as "what keeps me up at night" by one participant.

The primary stressors of lack of funds and, thus, lack of available providers were identified in both this study and the ITCA survey as critical. Understanding the need for additional resources for the EI program at the federal, state, and lead agency levels could address the issues and would contribute a reduction in stress for the coordinators. Work-related stress can lead to the decision to leave if there is a break in the web of embeddedness, thereby impacting the longevity of leadership which, in turn, contributes to the stability of programs and services.

As described through the data collected, challenges can be expected and manageable,

stressors can cause a person to consider more drastic actions as described in the unfolding theory (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). The research identifies this as a disconnect between a person's personal beliefs and the actions of the lead agency, causing the person to consider their options and make a decision to stay or leave. While there was not a research question related to personal intention to leave, each interviewee described a critical event or shock event that caused them to consider leaving.

Not everyone reacts to negative events in the same way. This finding was not related to the research question but emerged through the data collection. The significance of the events and the reaction of the interviewees are notable and merit inclusion in this discussion. Because the interviewees were embedded in the program in positive ways they chose to stay. Once again, the stronger one's web of connections to and fit within the program strengthened their resolve to weather the shock event and make a decision to stay (Crossley et al., 2007; Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Additionally, information shared by the coordinators indicated they each strongly considered what they would sacrifice should they leave the program at that point. The *professional and personal sacrifices* identified were a) the inability to achieve the goals they set for the program, and b) a loss of accrued benefits based on the number of years of service in the lead agency.

The interviewees were deeply embedded in the organization, choosing to support the EI program and work through the job-related shock. Perceived *fit, link,* and *sacrifice* are ongoing issues throughout one's career. There have been various events over the course of their careers that may have caused reflection on their fit with their current position. In each of these events, the strength of their commitment to serving children with disabilities and to the people they work with led to the decision to stay. Understanding by lead agency management of the potential

impact of shock events and the mitigating effect on job embeddedness could support retention of coordinators. If the lead agency management is able to take necessary action to provide support when negative events occur, it could increase retention of coordinators.

Importance of Teamwork and Collaboration

The job embeddedness theory describes *links* as the connections between a person and the organization. The data support that these interviewees have attachments to not only the mission of the EI program but to the people in the program who are part of their team. The interviewees described their decision to stay because of the web of attachments formed through a commitment to serving children with disabilities, a fit with their job responsibilities, and positive links to people with whom they work.

As shared by the interviewees the commitment to working with and supporting a team was identified as a critical factor in terms of contributing to the job embeddedness construct of link. When asked about what they would miss most about leaving the position each of the interviewees shared they would miss the people and teams they work with most. There is perceived *sacrifice* of losing important relationships if one were to leave and, additionally, a loss of achieving goals as a team that are important to the interviewee.

Research indicates commitment to teams or other individuals at work contributes to job satisfaction (Reicher, 1985; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). This commitment to shared goals through teamwork has been linked to improved outcomes. There are benefits to leading a team and supporting team members to achieve shared goals (Mausberg,2004). The interviewees serve as mentors to staff and recognize that staff count on them for support. This contributes to their decision to stay on the job, independent of how they may feel about the lead agency. Several noted their responsibility to staff by building their capacity to assume leadership roles in the

future. There are formal and informal connections (*links)* between the interviewees and the people in the program (Holtom et al., 2008) that are formed through the relationships built with the work teams, providers, and parents involved in the EI program.

The data further indicate that building the capacity of individuals on the team by allowing the team to create and implement solutions develops a sense of ownership and confidence. Additionally, this shared sense of ownership provides support to the coordinator in achieving the program goals, contributing to the *fit* and *link* of not only the coordinator but of team members as well.

As described throughout the study, the EI program is essentially built on a web of connections among multiple agencies who provide services and supports for young children with disabilities. The role of interagency collaboration involving multiple individuals and agencies is identified as a factor leading to job satisfaction for the interviewees, and it was noted in the interviews that this results in the interviewees having a broader team of co-workers from which to draw support for their work.

Family Impact on Decision to Stay

The following section provides the findings related to the second research question of what off-the-job factors influence the decision to stay. Job embeddedness theory suggests the number of connections an employee has to their family, non-work friends, and community activities influences retention. When employees do not have strong social ties to the community and low embeddedness with their job, they are at risk of leaving (Mitchell et al., 2004)

In this study, the off-the-job factors that influenced employment decisions was related to family. Again, drawing on systems theory (Brofennbrenner, 1979), individuals exist within work, family, and community domains that interact and influence their actions. Factors related to

family, such as family well-being, family expectations, and responsibilities, can factor into decisions related to work. The data suggest decisions to stay are more closely related to family than to community. This is a departure from job embeddedness theory which places equal value on both constructs. Although, several interviewees described their "community" as their team, this perception of community is not considered by the job embeddedness theory. The construct of community merits further exploration in future research.

The findings suggest family responsibilities have an impact on the interviewees' career decisions. Each of the interviewees shared they take their immediate and/or extended families into consideration in their decisions related to their positions. Abelson (1987) found that family responsibilities and children impact people's decision to stay in their position. The two people interviewed who have school-aged children expressed they would not consider moving while their children were in school. They indicated the sacrifice related to leaving the job and changing school districts would be too disruptive. For several of the interviewees their responses were related to having a sense of freedom in where they lived now that their children were adults. Consideration was given to extended family, grandchildren, and aging relatives who may need support. The construct of family in the job embeddedness theory focuses on the influence family has on job decisions and the perceived level of satisfaction of balancing work and family demands. Interviewees described the support they receive from family as positive but indicated, at times, there was a struggle to achieve a work/life balance due to the demands of the job.

Commitment to caring for extended family members appears to have an impact on one's plans for the future when considering where to live after leaving their current work position though. Five of the interviewees indicated they would move closer to extended family upon leaving their current position. To address these issues the lead agency could support work/life

balance through policies, procedures, and practices that support the coordinator, but also provide support for the families; social activities for families, flexible work schedules, and resources to support child and elder care as a strategy for retention.

Community Connections as a Non-Factor for Retention

The construct of community as a factor in decisions to stay or leave is new in the research on employee turnover. In this study, the findings suggest that community as defined in the job embeddedness theory has minimal impact on the coordinators when they decide to stay or leave. Interviewees each shared their hobbies, volunteer work, and satisfaction with community amenities, but also shared that if they left, they could easily continue these activities in a different community. The research questions related to one's fit and link as well as sacrifice if they were to leave their community indicated that, while having connections in their current community, six of eight planned to move to new location upon leaving the position.

Four of the interviewees responded to the questions related to hobbies and what they enjoyed about their community with the statement that this question caused them to think and realize that given the time they invest in their jobs they did not have hobbies or considered their jobs their "hobby". Previous studies indicate that job embeddedness dimensions of fit and link within the community and perceived sacrifice if one were to leave predicted positive engagement in the workplace (Griffeth et al., 2000). The literature related to job embeddedness addresses current connection to the community in which someone lives. The data shared in this study also indicated future plans related to community once the coordinator retired from the position. The theory places the off-the-job construct of community as equal in value to on-the-job factors. The data in this study did not support this view. The role of community in employee retention warrants future research. Some possible implications of this finding could be to better specify the

term ‘community,’ particularly in professions with a high level of commitment and connection to the work, as in education and health and human services fields.

The underpinnings of the job embeddedness construct theorize that connections to the community influence an employee to stay, striking a work-life balance and increasing connections across the “web” of work, family, and community (Mitchell et al., 2001). Lee et al. (2004) posited employees who value their community connections are less likely to sacrifice those connections by leaving. The findings of this study, while not conclusive, may indicate retention is strengthened as the community connections are within the program more so than in the broader community. The work community serves as the connection that binds the coordinator to the people they work with and would be sacrificed if they left.

Practical Implications

This study offers several practical implications for how to support retention of Part C coordinators. The extent to which the lead agency can address the critical constructs of on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness, the more likely they are to retain the coordinator. This section will provide several practical strategies that support job embeddedness in the EI program.

As evidenced by the data, a person with a commitment to serving young children with disabilities is more likely to weather the ups and downs of leading and managing the EI program. When making hiring decisions for the position, consideration should be given to the candidate who demonstrate a strong commitment to serving children with disabilities and their families. The position requires extensive knowledge and skills related to leading and managing the EI program at various levels, understanding of systems theory in relation to leading an interagency EI program, and a grasp of state and federal law related to IDEA. Having a realistic job preview during the interview process would inform potential job candidates of the nature of the roles and

responsibilities of the position. In addition, providing ongoing training and development opportunities related to leading and managing a state agency program will help support long-term retention of Part C coordinators.

Additional recommendation is related to higher education. People who are in these positions, for the most part, received higher education in allied health or education; it was recommended that content related to leading and managing be included in coursework as leadership is needed at all levels of the EI program. This would contribute to self-efficacy and fit within the profession of early childhood special education.

Also identified is the strategy of developing a leadership program at the national level, either through ITCA or the technical assistance centers. This would provide ongoing support to those who are in a leadership position in EI programs through professional development and peer support across those that serve in this position in each state. Key topics essential to the leadership program include information and support on accessing and managing fiscal resources, leading, and managing a program, working with stakeholders, and managing multiple demands. In particular, knowledge and information on how to acquire and manage the fiscal resources available to the EI program would help reduce stress.

IDEA legislation was initially passed based on a strong advocacy effort, and the program has never been fully funded. As lack of funding and available providers was seen as contributing to stress, identifying key strategies to address this stressor is critical. Several interviewees suggested that engaging advocacy groups, parents, and providers to make the case that more state and federal funding is needed to meet the need. Additionally, having a roadmap on how to blend and braid funding to support the various services would provide a way to increase funds.

Working effectively with the various people involved in provision of services to young

children with disabilities, from families to lead agency management, is at the core of this work. As the findings indicate, working as part of a team to achieve the goals of the EI program is a benefit of the job, providing professional development and training on managing a team and engaging various stakeholders would contribute to not only job embeddedness of the Part C coordinator but also of program staff.

Creating intra-agency teams within the lead agency would broaden the understanding of the Part C program by lead agency leadership and, conversely, the Part C Coordinator would understand the other programs in the lead agency. This could lead to a better understanding of how the EI program supports the goals of the lead agency and lead to shared resources across programs to support families of children with disabilities. This strategy creates links to the lead agency and the various people in the programs that are housed in the lead agency. An alternative is to re-evaluate program alignment and place the EI program under another lead agency that understands and supports the mission of the program.

This study also suggests that shocks or events that challenge the coordinators' values and beliefs may lead to a decision to leave. Understanding by the lead agency management of the potential shocks and taking action to reduce their impact would contribute to support of the coordinator in their role.

The EI program is inter-agency by design. While six of the interviewees indicated a challenge with the fit of the program in the lead agency, in two of the interviews it was indicated that the EI program is a good fit in an agency that houses multiple early childhood programs. Further exploration of this concept may be of interest. The EI program may fit better in an early-childhood-focused agency.

In regard to off-the-job factors of family and community, recognizing the importance of

family in making decisions about staying, offering information about community resources, encouraging involvement in the community, and providing opportunities for family engagement in the organization through socialization events that include family could contribute to embeddedness. Supervisory support for work-life balance could also contribute to longevity and decreased stress.

On-the-job and off-the-job factors combine to create a web of connections that reduce the intention to leave and contribute to the longevity of a coordinator. These strategies provide a practical approach to supporting retention and longevity of the coordinator in the position that provides the vision and purpose of IDEA Part C services and supports for young children with disabilities.

Future Research

Job embeddedness theory is relatively new; a limited number of studies have been conducted thus far, and even less research has been conducted on leadership of EI programs. This descriptive study provides an in-depth look at the perception of coordinators in their roles as the leaders of the EI program and the factors that influence their decision to stay

Much of the research on retention and job satisfaction occurs with data that is collected after the person leaves the position; the data for this study was collected while the interviewees were still employed. Additional longitudinal research on this cohort of interviewees, following up on the actual path that each of the interviewees takes over the next several years will yield additional information and provide better answers to the research questions.

Given that the writing of this study occurs during the COVID-19 pandemic and data was collected prior to the pandemic, it would be of interest to follow up one year from now with this same cohort on their perceptions of their positions at that point. Additionally, conducting a

survey of all existing coordinators using the job embeddedness constructs could identify the current strength of job embeddedness and result in strategies to retain and support coordinators through the lead agency, technical assistance centers, and the ITCA.

Job embeddedness constructs do not discuss the on-the-job factors that may influence a person's job satisfaction within a program with a specific mission nested within a larger agency. Additional research applying the theory to public education or health and human services may yield insights on those in public services. The job embeddedness theory currently focuses on fit, link, and sacrifice related to one's job within an organization. Further exploration of a construct in the job embeddedness theory that measures intra- or inter-organizational relationships would be applicable to government agencies which often house multiple programs.

To summarize, this study contributes to our understanding of the work Part C Coordinators do and what supports their decision to stay. The job embeddedness theory offers on-the-job and off-the job factors that provide a new way to think about how to ensure retention of coordinators and implement strategies that recognize and reduce turnover and intention to leave. This study supports several constructs of the job embeddedness theory, while offering a new finding to fine-tune the theory. It also illuminates how this theory can be applied to retention of mid-level managers in education and health and human services programs. The increased retention of highly-qualified, committed coordinators will offer the leadership needed to support a stable system that provides high-quality services to young children with disabilities, ultimately resulting in improved educational outcomes for those served in the EI program.

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Appendices

Appendix A



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: November 25, 2019 **IRB#:**11395

Principal Investigator: Grace E. Kelley **Approval Date:** 11/25/2019

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: Why They Stay: An Exploration an Exploration of Part C Coordinators Perceptions of their Jobs

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved
for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor. Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,



Ioana Cionea, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix B

Oral Consent Script to Participate in Research

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Would you be interested in participating in a research project I/we are conducting at the University of Oklahoma? I would like you to participate because you Part C Coordinator in the IDEA Part C Program in your state have been in the position for three years or longer.

I am conducting this research project because I am interested in understanding more about the on the job-related and off the job factors that Part C Coordinators perceive as critical to their decision to stay in their position. About eight to 10 people will participate.

If you agree to participate, I will be asking you questions in an interview that will be audio-recorded with your permission. The interview should take about an hour. Afterwards, if you agree, I will also email you the themes the findings reveal and ask you to confirm them, which would take a maximum of 15 minutes.

Your participation in this research doesn't involve any direct risks or benefits to you. There is the potential for professional risk only if your identity is deduced by the background information provided. You will be able to use a pseudonym to further protect your confidentiality. If at any point you feel a question might pose risk to you professionally or might allow someone to deduce your identity, you need not provide a response. The audio tape may be shared with a transcriptionist who will be bound by confidentiality.

There is no compensation for participating in the research.

We will not share your data or use it in future research projects.

All of the information I'm collecting will be kept secure and confidential, and only the researchers or the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board will be able to look at it.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant or any concerns or complaints regarding your participation, you can contact; Grace Kelley at 405-642-1039, gkelley3@cox.net; Dr..Jiening Ruan at 405-325-1498, jruan@ou.edu; or OU's IRB at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

In order to preserve your responses, they will be recorded on an audio recording device. **(Delete any that do not apply)**

Do you agree for your interview to be to audio recorded? _____ (note response)

Do you agree to being quoted directly? ____ (note response)

May I contact you again to recruit you into this research or to gather additional information?

_____ (note response)

Before you agree to participate, remember that your participation is completely voluntary, you don't have to answer any question, and you can stop at any time. If you do choose to participate and then change your mind, you won't be penalized in any way. Finally, if you would like a printed copy of the information, I've just read to you, you are welcome to have this one.

Appendix C

Qualitative Interview Protocol

Protocol for Interview

Time of interview

Date

Place

Interviewer

Interviewee

Process:

- Explain purpose of study
- Request interview
- Conduct interview
- Thank interviewee for their time

Introduction

Thank you for time and willingness to participate. As you know, I am interested in talking to you about your role as a Part C Coordinator. Particularly, I am trying to understand and explore your thoughts and perceptions about your role and aspects of your job that are satisfying and those that are challenging, as well as the off-the-job supports you have in your role. Please feel free to share information at any level of detail that you are comfortable. You also have the option of declining to answer – passing on – any of the questions. Do you have any questions before we start?

General background information

1. What is your name?
2. How long have you been in your current position?
3. Describe your educational background.
4. Describe your work experience prior to this position.
5. Describe your experience(s) that prepared you for this position.

The following set of questions are related to the on-the-job factors that may influence your decision to stay in your position.

1. What do you enjoy about your current position?
2. How well do you think you fit this position?
3. Describe a time that you felt empowered to make decisions about your job.
4. Can you describe some examples of decisions that you make?
5. What job-related reasons contribute to your decision to stay in this position?
6. What do you tell people about your decision to work and stay in this position?

7. What challenges you about your position?
8. What creates stress for Part C Coordinators in this position?
9. If you were to leave this position, can you describe what elements of your job you would miss the most?
10. If you had the power to change one thing or things about your position what would this/those be?
11. Describe your career progression goals? Talk about your ability to make decisions and move forward with your career goals.

Thanks for answering these questions. There are a few more questions I would like to ask that relate to the personal, family and community factors that may influence your decision to stay in your position. Again, you may pass on any question that you do not feel comfortable answering.

12. How long have you lived in ___ (your community)?

13. What role/ roles does your family play in your employment decisions?

- immediate
- extended

14. What role/ roles does your community play in your employment decision?

- neighborhood,
- local community
- state

15. What kinds of activities are you involved in on your personal time?

16. What do you like about your community?

17. What you would miss in your community if you were to leave the position and move away?

Additional Questions

- Is there additional information you would like to share?

Thank you for your time in answering these questions. I will be getting back to you with a summary of themes and possibly to ask some additional clarifying questions if needed. Have a good day. Do you have any questions about the next steps?