

# **Fostering Resiliency for First Year Special Education Teachers**

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# **Problems: Special Education Teacher Shortage & Attrition**

- **High turnover rate (revolving door)**
- **Issues in the Pipeline: Teachers want to teach in suburban areas**
- **Difficult working conditions/school contexts**
- **Feelings of isolation**



# Gap in the Research Literature

- **Most of the literature on teacher retention focuses on factors of attrition**
  - Assumes that eliminating factors of attrition will improve teacher retention
  - Fails to address resilient factors that enable teachers to stay despite experienced adversity
- **Few studies look at resiliency for teachers**



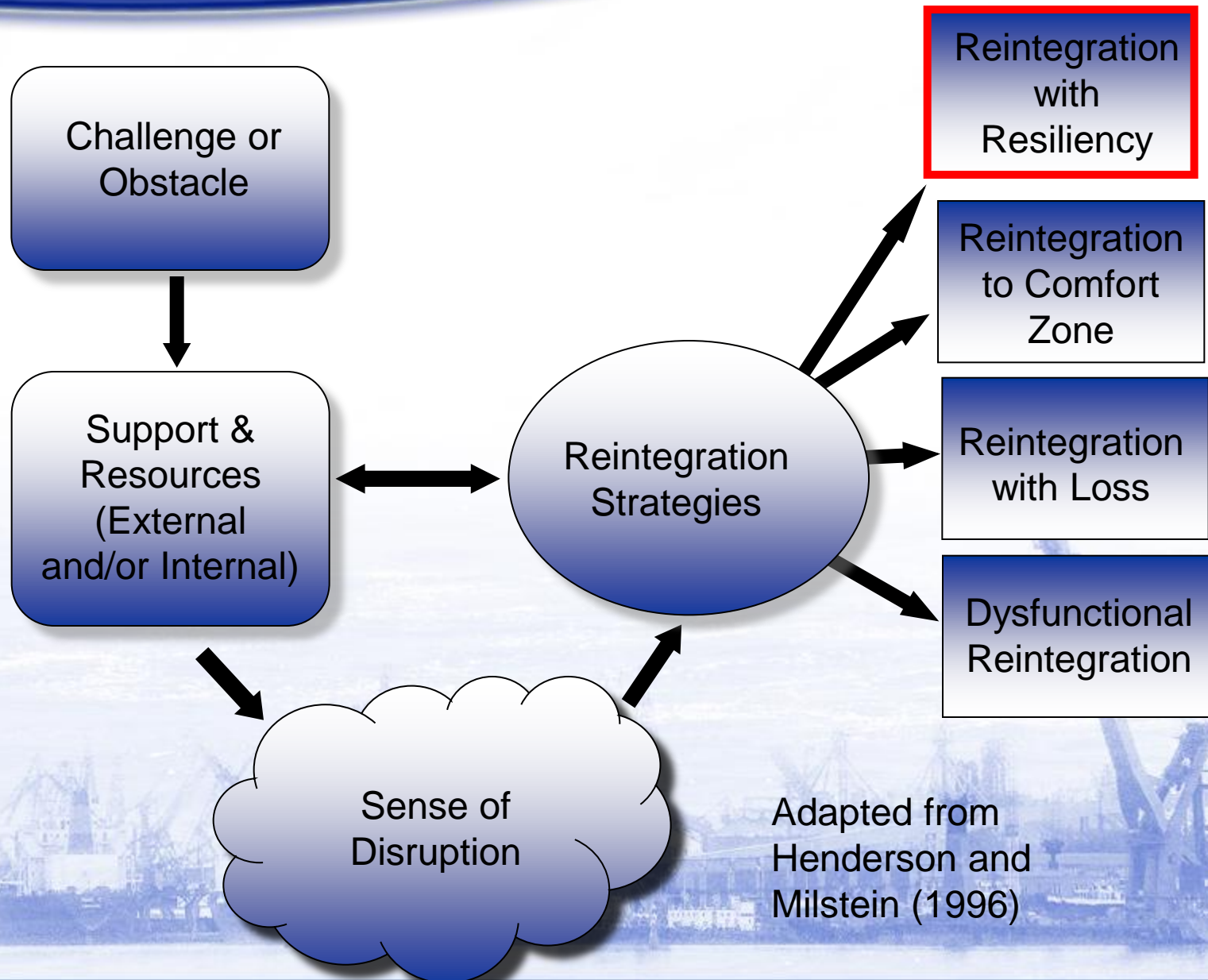
# What is Resiliency?

- **Resiliency broadly refers to the “ability to adjust to varied situations and increase one’s competence in the face of adverse conditions.”**
- **Resiliency strategies refer to ways in which individuals adjust to, cope with, or overcome adversity**



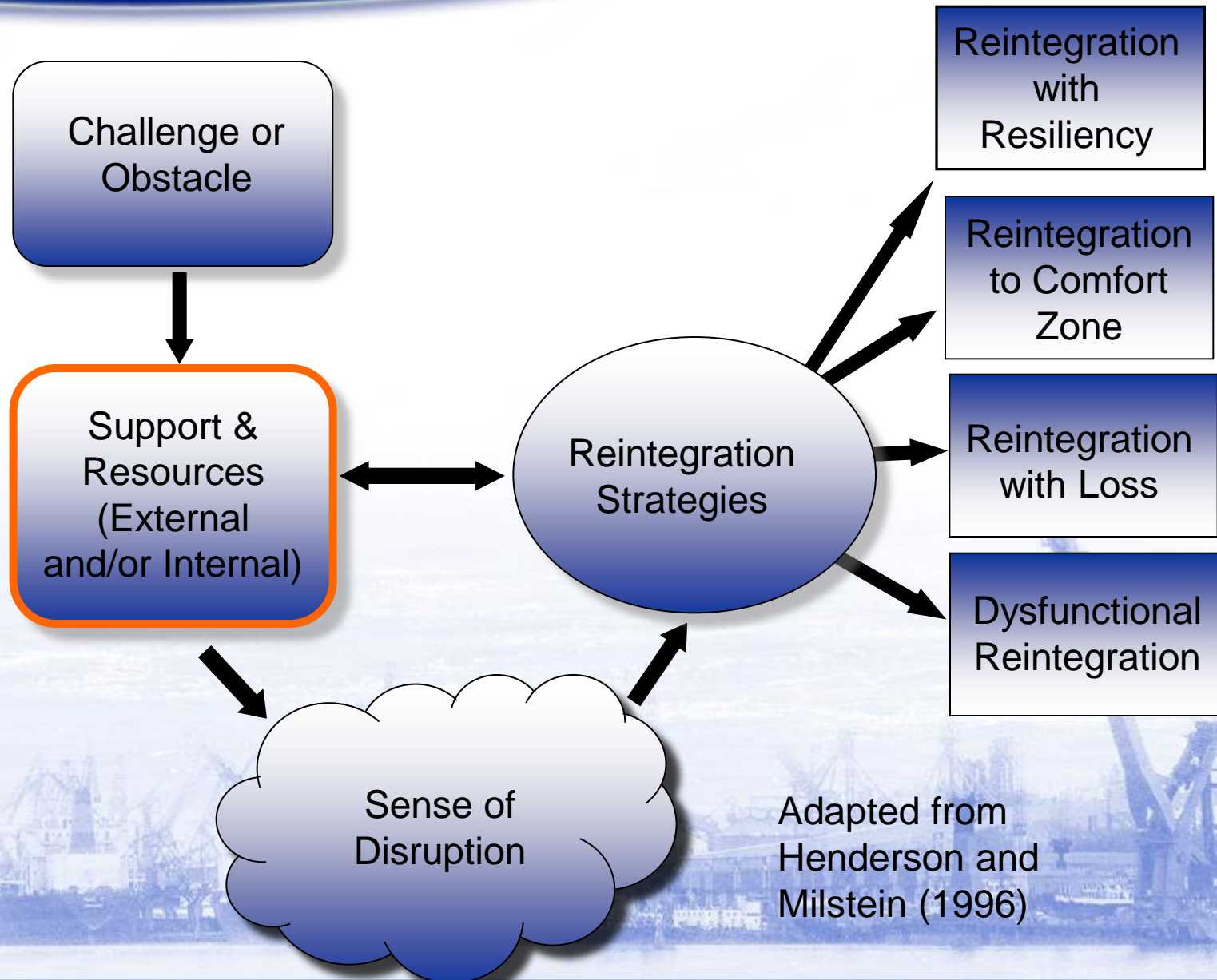


# Model of Resiliency as a Process



Adapted from  
Henderson and  
Milstein (1996)

# Model of Resiliency as a Process



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# Research Questions

- **Question #1:** What are the major challenges that first year special education teachers encounter during their first year teaching?
- **Question #2:** What resources do first year special education teachers rely on to overcome the challenges and obstacles to teaching?
- **Question #3:** What strategies do these teachers employ to gain resources?



# Method





# Research Design

- **On-going qualitative research study of new special education teachers across various school contexts**
- **Preliminary findings from 8 teachers**
- **Teachers recruited from various grade levels**



# Participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Teacher Certification Program</b>	<b>Instructional Setting</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>
<b>Kate</b>	<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Inclusion Specialist</b>	<b>6<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> grades</b>
<b>Jolie</b>	<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Self-Contained Classroom</b>	<b>6<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> grades</b>
<b>Katie</b>	<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Self-Contained Classroom</b>	<b>Pre-k -K</b>
<b>Jenny</b>	<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Resource Room</b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>
<b>Carol</b>	<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Self-Contained Classroom</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grades</b>
<b>Anna</b>	<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Self-Contained Classroom</b>	<b>Pre-K -3<sup>rd</sup> Grades</b>
<b>Mary</b>	<b>Alternative</b>	<b>Resource Room</b>	<b>6<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> grades</b>
<b>Amy</b>	<b>Alternative</b>	<b>Self-Contained Classroom</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grades</b>

# Interviews

- Interviews occurred in the participant's classroom or at a neutral site
- Each Interview lasted approximately between one hour to ninety minutes
- Participants were asked to describe at least two different challenges or major concerns they faced during their first year of teaching



# Data Analysis

- **A constant-comparative method was used to code the interview transcripts**
  - **Researchers coded the data independently**
  - **Transcripts were coded into the categories of adversity/problem faced, resources relied on by participant, specific strategy employed by participant, and outcome of the strategy employed**
  - **Themes were identified**





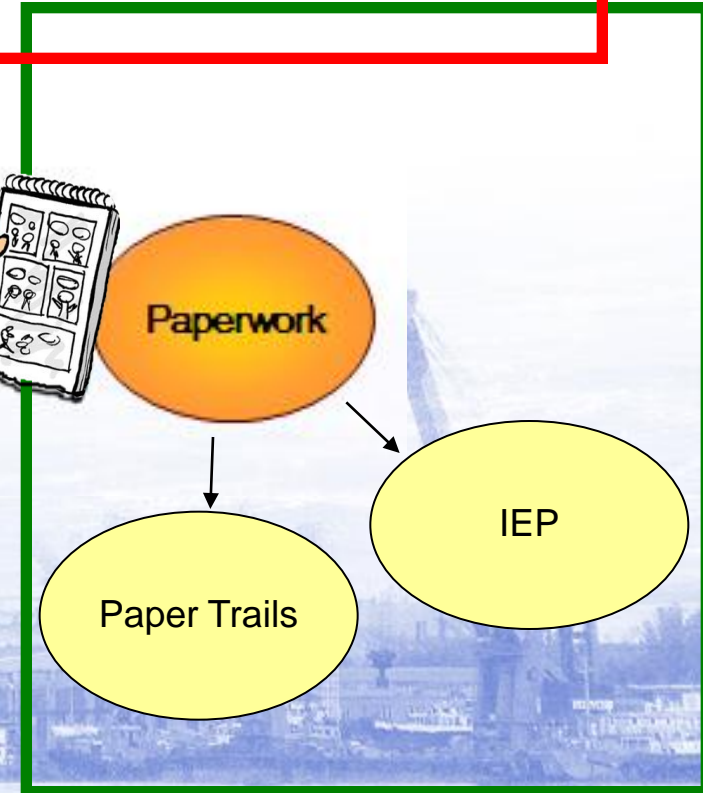
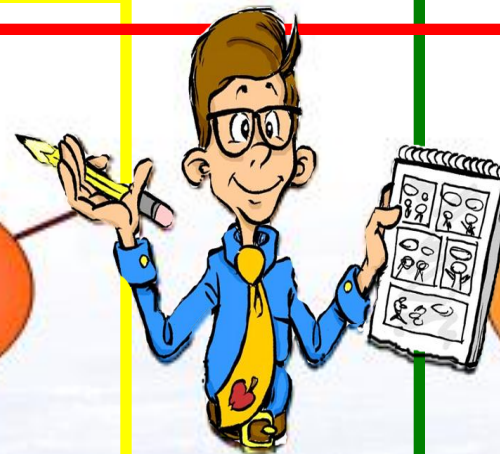
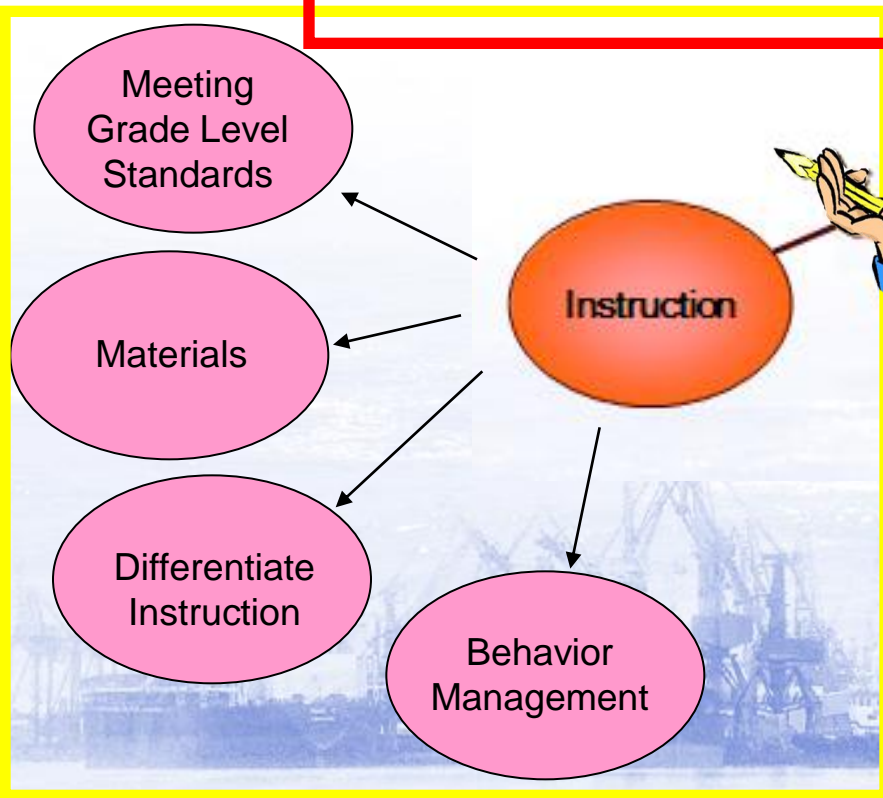
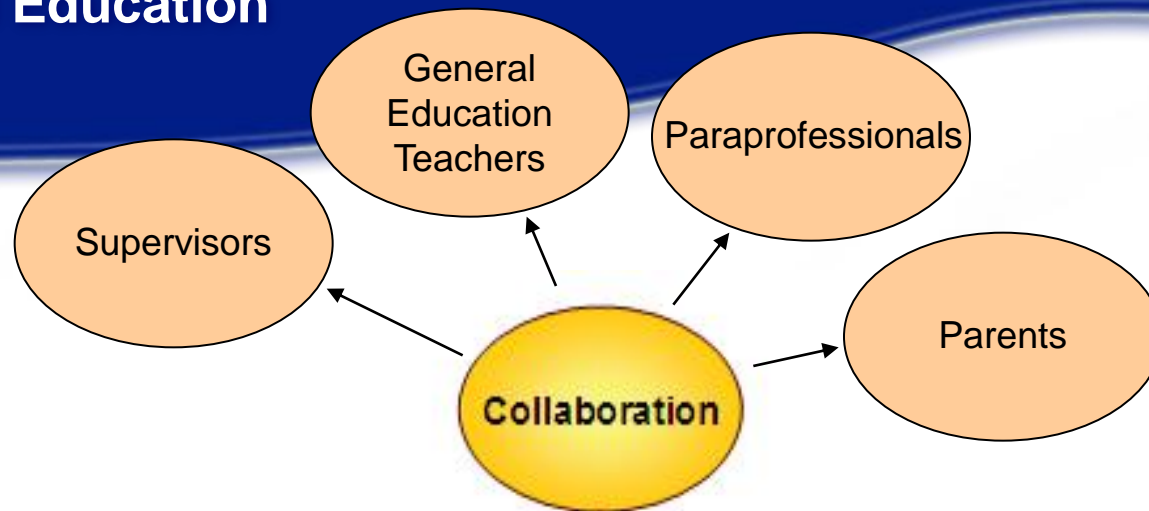
# Results



# Duties of Special Education Teachers



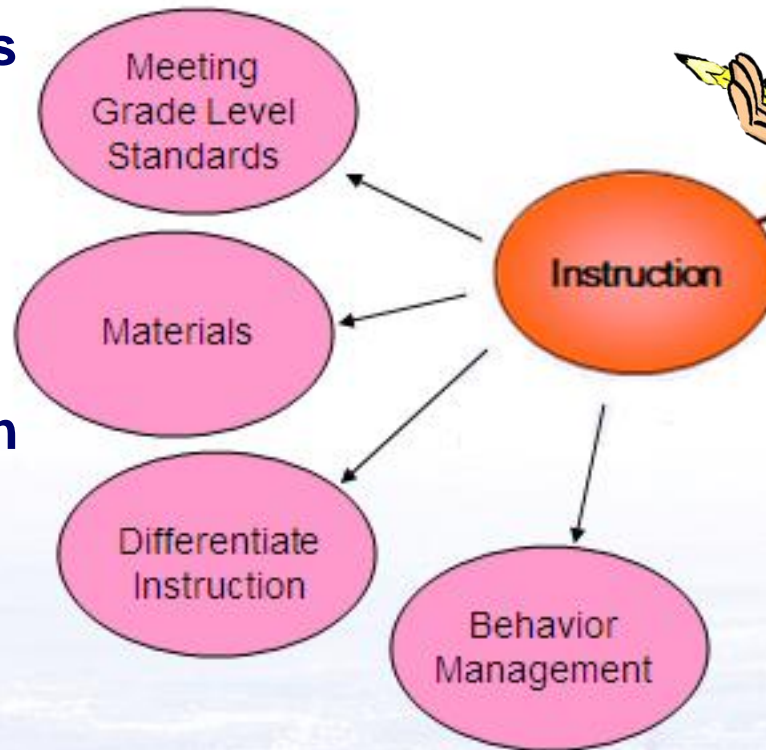
# Duties of Special Education Teachers





# Strategies for Overcoming Difficulties in Instruction

- **Seek help from colleagues or friends**
  - Mentor teachers
  - Team leaders
  - Specialists
  - Administrators
  - Special education teachers in other campuses
  - Cohort friends
- **Research**
  - Internet
  - Research papers
- **In-service training**





# Strategies for Trying to Overcome Difficulties in Collaboration

- Seek advice from mentor, other teachers, administrators, counselors, or cohort friends
- Seek advice from university induction program personnel
- Find a buffer
  - Find another professional who can help minimize the impact of a negative relationship
- Find strategies from books



# Strategies for Resource Building

- Heavily rely on inter-personal skills
  - Breaking isolation
  - Networking

**You don't get a lot of help; well, you have to ask for it....Nobody is going to stretch out their hand to help me unless I go tell them, "Help me!" -- Jenny**

- I did invite people to every time they made a copy they could just drop one in my box, but everyone is in such a rush it's hard to remember that. So, I was really sweet and inviting to all the math teachers that I met and so, they were happy to give me materials whenever I went by. -- Kate
- I think I have studied a lot about human behavior, so I think when you get into a difficult situation knowing how to first be a good listener and to understand where another person is coming from, and consider what all they have on their plate, you know there's so much going on when you're teaching. So, first just being a good listener and observing the situation through someone else's perspective. --Jolie
- He came in in the morning because we had a coffee pot in there and he would come in to get coffee. Honestly, that was the reason I put the coffee pot in there, because I knew I would never see him if he didn't have a reason to come to my room. So, I purposely did that so that if I ever needed to I knew I could flag him down in the morning when he came in to get coffee. That was a self-serving coffee pot, but it worked. --Anna



- Well that's I'm a quiet... like reserved kind of keep to myself kind of person which made it extra hard for me to even go out there and, you know, form relationships with other teachers. I wasn't as ambitious... I kind of just left people to come to me and want to do things. Instead of me being like oh let's go out this weekend or something. I guess passive would be a good word for it so that made it harder. --Mary





# Strategies for Resource Building

- Heavily rely on inter-personal skills
  - Breaking isolation
  - Networking
- Research skills

I type in a skill or content area that I want to research...Like in math, say, 'there's a skill in math I need to teach, regrouping numbers.' You click on regrouping and they [websites] give you a list of literature you can use...resources, you know. --Anna

# Implications for Teacher Education

- **Instruction**
  - Special education teachers should be exposed to state curriculum standards
  - Math instruction should be provided in addition to reading instruction
  - Research skills should be reinforced
- **Collaboration**
  - Collaboration between general and special education teachers should start in the teacher education program
  - Conflict resolutions should be discussed
  - Administrative hierarchy needs to be discussed
- **Role of University induction program**



**It was the kind of things where there were days when you do think about quitting. And you are like, oh, I hate this. Why did I decided to do this. I could be doing something where people don't bite me at work. But it felt good to know that I wasn't the only person that felt that way, that everybody felt that way sometimes. --Carol**



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