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The Emotional Labor of Special Educators: A Mixed Methods Study

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the  
College of Education and Social Work  
West Chester University  
West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

By

Erika M. Thomas M.A., BCBA

May 2022

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## Dedication

I started out yearning to explore teacher mental health as I began this journey in 2019. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, I was initially frustrated that this would essentially steer the focus of my research to be a “Covid-19” inquiry. I knew from being in the classroom and my time in administration that even without the pandemic, there was a huge toll taken on teachers from being in the classroom everyday—emotionally and physically. With the pandemic, I could only anticipate that any survey responses would be solely about the pandemic.

I was right, however, at that time, I did not anticipate how much the pandemic would not only shape my survey responses, but also restructure and revamp the way we teach, how we feel about teaching, and the landscape of the students we serve. Because not only do teachers feel *it*, but our kids feel it, too.

This exploration is for all those who stood in my office (and any administrator’s office across the world) over the last two years in tears not knowing how to help kids any longer, struggling to find the courage to make it in every day and keep trying.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the incredible support given to me from the West Chester faculty in the Doctor of Education program. I would especially like to thank Dr. Matthew Kruger-Ross and Dr. David Backer. Dr. Kruger-Ross for giving me the confidence to run with my ideas and interests and who I am as a researcher and to Dr. Backer for never giving up on my ideas and helping me fight to find my voice. To Dr. Jackie Hodes and Dr. Heather Schugar for supporting a program at the drop of a hat and making it the most supportive, loving, and trusting educational environment I'd ever experienced. And of course, COHORT 4!!! What a journey and I am so thankful to have had all of you to make it through.

To Celeste Brotheridge for your immediate support of use of your survey scale to further the body of research on emotional labor. Many, many thanks.

To Kimberly, my comma police.

To my mom, who forced me to major in special education when I was 18 so that I would have a job. You were right mom, it did get me a job, however, it also gave me a calling and a mission. Thank you for being the model for what a strong, brilliant and headstrong woman is. I'm not sure what the future holds, but if the path you've walked is any indication, it's going to be amazing and you're going to light it on fire.

Lastly, to my husband, Eric. I never knew what unconditional love was until there was you. Thank you for always being there to support, push, and encourage me to keep going, even when the pandemic took a personal toll on me. Thank you for always choosing me first, for making this journey through life better each and every day, and for being totally okay with the mail now saying "Dr. and Mr. Thomas." You are the greatest gift.

## Abstract

This mixed methods study specifically answered the questions (1) How much and what kind of emotional labor do special educators do? and (2) What are the lived experiences of special education teachers as they relate to emotional labor, mental health, wellbeing, and retention? I used the Brotheridge and Lee Emotional Labor Scale to survey 55 special education teachers employed in public education in a mid-Atlantic County and conducted semi-structured interviews with four of the survey participants. Prior literature had found that teachers reported engaging in emotional labor with students; while true of survey respondents, through the qualitative interviews, I found that the greatest emotional labor for special education teachers- leading to increased emotional dissonance and stress- was from interactions with administrators and parents. All interview participants indicated that they had considered leaving their classrooms and/or schools due to the emotional strain and stress from their jobs specific to the emotional regulation required by administrators and parents, but not due to their interactions with students. This study adds to the body of literature on emotional labor strategies as well as efforts to retain special education teachers.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem .....	4
Research Rationale.....	5
Research Questions.....	5
Rationale for Methods.....	5
Quantitative.....	6
Qualitative.....	6
Limitations.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	7
Summary.....	8
Chapter II: A Review of the Literature.....	9
Introduction.....	9
Special Education Teachers.....	10
Emotional Labor.....	12
Emotional Exhaustion and Burnout.....	15
Workload.....	17
Theoretical Framework.....	18
Chapter III: Methodology.....	21
Overview.....	21

Setting and Participants.....	21
Instrumentation.....	21
Survey.....	21
Special Education Teacher Semi-Structured Interviews.....	21
Research Design.....	22
Data Analysis.....	24
Quantitative.....	24
Qualitative.....	25
Threats to Validity.....	26
Summary.....	27
Chapter IV: Results.....	28
Introduction.....	28
Quantitative Survey Data.....	28
Frequency.....	29
Intensity.....	30
Variety.....	30
Surface Acting.....	31
Deep Acting.....	31
Summary.....	32
Qualitative Interview Data.....	32
Administrative Support.....	35
Surface Acting.....	38
Student Specific Concerns.....	41

Unique Qualities/Role Expectations of Special Educators.....	43
Parents.....	43
Compliance.....	45
Paperwork.....	46
Personal Life Impacts.....	48
Barb.....	48
Mary.....	48
Rose.....	49
Sally.....	49
Summary.....	49
Chapter V: Conclusions.....	51
Introduction.....	51
Surface Acting.....	51
Expectations of Stakeholders.....	52
Administration.....	54
Parents.....	56
Students.....	58
Emotion Work vs Emotional Labor.....	59
Limitations.....	61
Future Research.....	62
Final Conclusions.....	64
References.....	65
Appendices.....	75



Appendix A. Informed Consent Form.....	75
Appendix B. IRB Approval.....	77
Appendix C. Emotional Labour Scale.....	78
Appendix D. Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Questions.....	79

## List of Tables

1. Mean, standard deviation and n for subscales.....	28
2. Statistical significance of subscales .....	29
3. Number and percentage of codes identified .....	32

## List of Figures

1. Percentages of identified codes.....	34
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## Chapter I: Introduction

“No one wakes up in the morning thinking, ‘May I suffer the whole day?’” (Ricard, 2004, page number?). So, why do some special education teachers? Indeed, some suffer so much that they leave the field of education altogether. There has been a decline of special education teachers in the field between 2005 and 2012 with rates of teachers entering the field barely rebounding (Dewey, Sindelar, Bettini, Boe, Rosenberg & Leko, 2017). More current research indicates 17-29% of special education teachers each year leave their classrooms to general education positions or leave the field altogether (Mason-Williams, Bettini, Peyton, Harvey, Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2020). In March of 2021, 55% of educators stated they considered leaving the field of education (Walker, 2022). The problem of teacher retention is not new; however, it has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Larkin, Patzelt, Carletta & Ahmed, 2021).

The problem of special education attrition is troublesome as the pandemic has already resulted in an increase from 53% to 63% of students who cannot read or understand simple text by the age of ten in low-to-middle income areas (Azevedo, Gutierrez, de Hoyos & Saavedra, 2021). With a great body of literature on the need to retain special education teachers (Billingsley, Bettini, Morris Matthews, & McLeskey, 2020; Gilmour & Wehby, 2019; Mason-Williams et al., 2020; Theobald, Goldhaber, Naito & Stein, 2021), it is not clear what specifically causes them to leave, making it difficult for schools to actively work to retain them. One under-researched area regarding special education teachers is the impact of emotional regulation via emotional labor strategies used in the classroom. Special education is a job that has many interpersonal job demands and these can create great emotional dissonance (when emotions portrayed do not match felt emotions) and in turn, emotional exhaustion. However,

emotional dissonance and emotional exhaustion has not been studied as it relates to special educator emotional regulation or turnover intention.

## **Background**

Teachers who experience burnout, high stress levels at work, decreased emotional wellbeing, increased anxiety, stress or depression and anger due to the teaching profession are more likely to have adverse effects that span outside of their job responsibilities and into their personal lives. These include increases in emotional fatigue, anxiety, and stress (Alvities-Humani, 2019), decreased physical activity, self-rated health/wellbeing, sleep quality, and increased health complaints (Schad & Johansson, 2019), increased feelings of hopelessness and anger (Buric, Sliskovic & Pnezic, 2019), inability to leave work at work and recover from the day (Gu, Wang & You, 2020), insomnia (Szrajda, Sygit-Kowalkowska, Weber-Rajek, Tudorowska, Ziolkowski & Borkowska, 2019), increased fatigue and tiredness (Cancio, Larsen, Mathu, Estes, Mei Chang & Johns, 2018), and self-blame (Thakur, Chandraskaran & Guddatty, 2018). Polizzi Filho and Claro (2019) found that teachers' wellbeing was statistically negatively correlated with turnover intention.

Teacher turnover has been shown to have a negative effect on students, as well (Bettini, Jones, Brownell, Conroy, Park, Leite, Crockett & Benedict, 2017; Choudhary & Madnawat, 2014; Sorenson & Ladd, 2020). This is true for both students who receive general education support and special education support in schools. Sorenson and Ladd (2020) found that over a three-year study period, reading and achievement decreased by almost an entire standard deviation in schools where there is a 10% teacher turnover rate. The decrease in academic achievement for students in underperforming or economically disadvantaged schools is even greater. For students in special education, this can also be apparent in the quality of their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and the quality of the interventions that are put in place

for them (Bettini et al., 2017). Teachers who are burned out are less likely to write quality and accurate IEPs and could be less likely to adhere to the interventions that have been defined in these documents (Bettini et al., 2017). With work demands having increased over the last ten years (Schad & Johnsson, 2019), and no plan to support teachers to cope, there is an increased impact on quality of work, attention to students (Bettini, Jones, Brownell, Conroy, Park, Leite, Crockett & Benedict, 2017) and overall teacher wellbeing and likelihood to remain in the field. Emotional labor theory is one way to think about the negative feelings special education teachers feel in their workplaces that previous research has not explored as a means to understand suffering and implement interventions to combat it.

Hochschild (1983) defines emotional labor theory as the managing of one's own emotional responses to others in work settings. Within emotional labor theory are display rules (emotional expectations on the job), and emotional labor strategies (surface acting and deep acting). Surface acting is faking emotions to meet display rule requirements and deep acting is summoning up authentic emotions to meet affective expectations (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Emotional labor has previously been studied in service industries where such axioms reign as 'the customer is always right' or even if an employee is having a bad day, they must provide 'service with a smile' (Alev, 2019; Horner et al., 2020; Sonnetag, Venz & Casper, 2017). The emotional labor of teachers means providing supports and services while constantly monitoring their own emotional reactions to the environment. One way to explain emotional labor theory in education is by examining the way teachers are frequently described (e.g., calm, patient, and kind) and then asking if those are true emotions/qualities or if great emotional regulation is required to continue to present the desired affect to their students or colleagues (Horner et al., 2020).

For example, a teacher may be going through a divorce making it emotionally challenging to make it through a work day. At the same time, he/she may have to support a

student who is going through a parent's divorce, engaging in "everything will be okay" discourse. This produces an occupational situation where a teacher must conceal their own pain and emotions and engage in emotional regulation to support their students. There is an expectation of a "social norm" that teachers must abide by when expressing emotion to their students (Alev, 2019). Teachers use their own emotional labor to provide modeling to students, but are also required to conceal their true feelings if their emotions are in response to student behavior. There is an increased care and empathy required for a special educator's job because of the uniqueness of the skills of students with disabilities (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). "Arguments that caring in teaching and caring teacher education have three corner-stones- commitment, intimacy and passion- fail to recognize that performing caring teaching involves a significant amount of emotional labor" (Isenberger & Zembylas, 2006, p. 121). This can impact special educators' wellbeing and intention to remain in the field if the emotional regulation required to do so is too great.

### **Problem**

Emotional labor has not been explicitly evaluated in special education teachers specific to their job responsibilities and has also not elicited the use of mixed methods methodologies to analyze both statistical significance of emotional labor strategies and the lived experiences of those special educators. The data on the lived experiences of special education teachers about the emotional regulation they engage in on the job could be critical. For instance, we know that teachers who are happy with their schools have higher job satisfaction and self-esteem, and were found to be less likely to experience burnout (Stasio et al., 2017). Stasio and colleagues (2017) also found that, specifically for special educators, an increased number of positive relationships in schools acted as a buffer for burnout rates. In addition, working in an environment with an increased number of negative, unsupportive relationships can result in higher stress levels, higher

absenteeism (thus, impacting students' access to the curriculum) (Polizzi Filho & Claro, 2019), and the creation of a learning environment that is high stress for students (Choudhary & Madnawat, 2014). It is unclear how the emotional regulation special education teachers engage in plays a role in the mediation of authentic emotions and fake emotions in the classroom. This information could lead to a greater understanding of why special education teachers leave and what can be done to support them so they do not leave, either the classroom or the field altogether.

### **Research Rationale**

Teacher attrition is one of the leading reasons for the national teacher shortage as more current literature indicates (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). One way to get to the source of this problem is considering the role emotional labor strategies have on teachers' emotional regulation and the implications (Buric, Sliskovic & Penezic, 2019; Hoschild, 1979; Hoschild, 1993; Mekhum, 2020; Tiwari, Saraff & Nair, 2020).

### ***Research Questions***

- How much and what kind of emotional labor do special educators do?
- What are the lived experiences of special education teachers as they relate to emotional labor, mental health, wellbeing, and retention?

### **Rationale for Methods**

Research on wellbeing, retention outcomes, and the impact of emotional labor strategies on teachers span a great deal of methodologies. Quantitative methodology is the most consistently used research method across the literature for teacher wellbeing, burnout, and retention as well as emotional labor inquiries (e.g., Alvites-Huamani, 2019; Bettini, et al., 2017; Choudary & Madnawat, 2014; Naono-Nagatomo, Abe, Yada, Higashizako, Nakano, Takeda &



Ishida, 2018; Wu, Shen, Liu, Zheng, 2019). Throughout the literature, there have been many tools identified to measure mental health/wellbeing in teachers and burnout, almost all find a significant impact on teacher mental health and wellbeing as it relates to work demands, burnout, and teacher expectations. These instruments include, but are not limited to: Well-being at Work (WBW), PsyCap Scale (PsyCap-12), Occupational Satisfaction Scale (SOS) (Polizzi Filho & Claro, 2019), Teacher Stress Inventory, Psychological Capital Scale, Social Support Questionnaire (Li & Zhang, 2019), World Health Organization Well-Being Index (WHO-5) (Scad & Johnsson, 2019), School Teachers Job Stressor Scale (STJSS) (Naono-Nagatomo et al, 2019), and Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Schwarzer, Schmitz & Tang, 2000). No two studies included the same tool to measure teacher mental health/wellbeing, although the result of almost all found significant impact on teacher mental health and wellbeing as it related to work demands, burnout, and teacher expectations.

Qualitative methodology was also present in the body of research. These included phenomenological inquiry (Alev, 2019; Clark, Kelsey, & Brown, 2014; Schnaider-Levi, Mitnik, Zafrani, Goldman, & Lev-Ari, 2017), case study (Curry, & O'Brien, 2012; Doney, 2012; Lloyd, 2012), grounded theory (Horner, Brown, Mehta, & Scanlon, 2020), focus group (Beutel, Crosswell, & Broadley, 2019), naturalistic inquiry (interviews, documents, artifacts and observations) (Gonzalez, Brown, & Slate, 2008), and a thematic content analysis (Mason, & Matas, 2015). None of these studies used emotional labor strategies to better understand teacher burnout, nor did they employ a mixed methods approach of both quantitative and qualitative data to do so.

### *Quantitative*

The survey for this study was the Emotional Labour Scale (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003) and was created in Qualtrics (an online survey tool) that was subsequently emailed to participants. A

correlation was conducted to identify if there was a relationship between the subscales (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). See the survey in Appendix A.

### ***Qualitative***

After the survey results were analyzed in Qualtrics, four participants (8% of total sample) participated in semi-structured interviews. These participants were selected due to their responses on the survey. For example, if their answers indicated a need for follow-up (e.g., a diametrically different score compared to others or results that did not show much variability), they were asked to participate in the interview phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2019). This included participants who both reported higher and lower levels of surface acting and deep acting to add to the quantitative analysis. All interviews were recorded as part of the study procedures with consent and transcribed verbatim first using zoom transcription, then checked for accuracy. Digital interviews have also been shown to be more convenient for participants by providing flexibility (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019).

### **Limitations**

There are limitations of the current study. First, the mental health/wellbeing implications of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 may have an impact on teachers' perspectives on their emotional regulation in the classroom. Engaging with students in person, which was a large change from the pandemic when schools were forced to shut down, regardless of emotional displays, might prove to be the priority and nonetheless a positive. Also, in the case of teacher wellbeing, there could have been some limitations to the self-reporting in the qualitative phase of this study. Despite consenting to the study, some participants may have reported areas of strong emotional memories or feelings not shared in interviews.

### **Definition of Terms**

***Burnout*** “A syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 99)

***Emotional Dissonance*** “When expressions differ from feelings” (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; p. 18)

***Emotional Exhaustion*** Feeling “emotionally spent” (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002, p. 17) due to the increased emotional demands of people work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981)

***Emotional Labor*** “The regulation of emotional displays as part of one’s work role” (Grandey, Rupp, & Brice, 2015, p. 770).

***Emotional Regulation*** “The effortful strategies needed to meet [display rule requirements]” (Grandey & Sayre, 2019)

***Individualized Education Plan (IEP)***- “A written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting” (IDEA, 2017) to include (but not limited to) present levels of academic and function performance, transition outcomes, measurable annual goals, specially designed instruction, and the extent to which students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom.

***Special Education Teacher/Special Educator*** “Special education teachers work with students who have a wide range of learning, mental, emotional, and physical disabilities” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020)

## **Summary**

The future of education is in our teachers. Students will continue to grow and need to be educated, and with numbers of teachers dwindling, our nation is facing a crisis of not enough educators for those who need to be educated. Having a better understanding of the lived experiences of our teachers should continue to be a priority for research. We must learn why teachers leave to retain them and ensure a quality education for our students.

## Chapter II: A Review of the Literature

### Introduction

The National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services (2021) reports that 98% of public districts across the country report a shortage of special education teachers. The Coalition also reports that 14% of students in public schools require special education services, indicating an insurmountable need to retain quality special education teachers. One of the leading reasons why teachers leave has been cited by teachers to be due to their own mental health and the emotions that are brought on by their jobs (e.g., a teacher may worry outside of the school day after a student discloses that they are having suicidal ideation) (Adams, 2019). The shortage of special education teachers is also exacerbated by the fact that districts use lesser qualified professionals to provide special education supports and services, which could lead to costly due process or litigation for districts (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

Emotional labor strategies have not been studied exclusively among special education teachers, however wellbeing in teachers has been studied and found to come from several sources; overall wellbeing and implications of the workplace (Buric et al., 2019; Choudhary & Madnawat, 2014; Lee et al., 2013; Li & Zhang, 2019; McInerney et al., 2018; Stasio, Fiorilli, Benevene, Uusitalo & Chiacchio, 2017; Szrajda et al., 2019), social supports and coping skills (Bettini et al., 2017; Bernotaite & Malinauskiene, 2017; Cancio et al., 2018; Hobson & Maxwell, 2017; Naono et al., 2019; Singh, 2016; Thakur et al., 2018; Uzman & Telef, 2015), and burnout (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Chang, 2009; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Sorenson & Ladd, 2020). All of the aforementioned contributors to teacher wellbeing can lead to a teacher wanting to leave the field. In this literature review, I will first explore the unique roles

of special educators, emotional regulation and its impact on teachers, then discuss to emotional exhaustion and dissonance.

### **Special Education Teachers**

The unique roles special educators play in schools creates a difficult arena to clearly define what manageability looks like for special educators as compared to their general education colleagues (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). “Special educators’ instructional demands vary substantially as well, depending on student needs, and the goals and services outlined in their students’ individualized education plans (IEPs)” (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019, p. 707). Special educators are responsible not only for providing evidence-based interventions to a multitude of ability levels in addition to having a much greater connection to the families in which they teach and/or case manage. The increased responsibility to families can come from the development of IEPs that not only ensure access to a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities, but also the requirement to revise as the students’ needs change as often as that may occur (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Families may request meetings to discuss their child’s IEP at any time and for any reason, thus creating another layer of job responsibility (e.g., increased time demand) that is not present for general education colleagues. Special educators must also comply with federal and state compliance requirements that are demanding, legally binding, and add an additional element of job-related stress (Billingsley, 1993).

Special educators are also required to engage with many stakeholders in a child’s education daily that can include but are not limited to administrators, paraprofessionals (staff assigned to support instruction to students with disabilities), related service providers (speech and language services, occupational therapy services), other general educators, parents, and administrators. The public is also a stakeholder for those teachers in public school settings. Wrobel as quoted by Auger and Formentin (2021, p. 379) states “the public has higher

expectations for teachers than for other fields, and [teachers] should be ‘kind, considerate and willing to help and never tired or irritated.’”

The processes, expectations, and preparation for teachers entering the field in our current society varies greatly from 20-30 years ago (Cochran-Smith, 2004). An increased focus on state mandates, legislation, changing criteria to measure student and teacher success, and the increased workload demands without time added into a day to accomplish those goals is becoming an insurmountable task for teachers. Brownell and colleagues conducted a survey across 93 special education teachers within the state of Florida (1997). Teachers rated the changes in state mandates such as No Child Left Behind, changes in certification processes, including a highly qualified status (requiring special educators to also become certified in a subject area in some states), and increased workloads without an increased sense of support as the reasons for leaving the profession of teaching. At the forefront of this is the ever growing need for administrative support within an organization (Billingsley, 2014; Brownell, Smith, McNellis, & Miller, 1997; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Hughes, 2012).

Hughes surveyed teachers on both personal reasons for leaving the field and organizational needs including administration, salary, facilities, poverty level of the school, school size, and ethnic composition of the school (2012). This author found that teachers were almost twice as likely to remain in the field if they were satisfied with their salary and workload than those who weren't. These variables can be mediated by districts by creating fair and manageable student to teacher ratios in the classroom, providing professional development to continue to grow teachers, build on their strengths within the classroom, and allow them to be part of the decision making (Cochran-Smith, 2004). For special educators, this can mean evaluating the role that they play within their school and how to create an equitable definition of

their job responsibilities when compared to their general education peers. Emotional labor is one way researchers have evaluated educators' role viz mental health and wellbeing.

### **Emotional Labor**

Teachers experience a wide array of emotions while teaching (Buric, Sliskovic & Penezic, 2019; Hobson & Maxwell, 2017). This can in part be due to direct reactions to their students' successes or failures, or it can be related to circumstances that are happening outside of school (e.g., a marital argument, a death, money struggles). Teachers can respond to these emotions in ways that impact students. Emotional labor is defined as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 328). Emotional labor has previously been studied in service industries where they must provide service with a smile and act as though the customer is always right, even if that is far from the truth for an employee (Alev, 2019; Horner et al., 2020; Hochschild, 1993; Mekhum, 2020; Sonnetag, Venz & Casper, 2017).

Emotional labor for teachers to provide their service with a smile can cause an increase in emotional exhaustion and desire to leave the field if the emotional labor required to do so is too great. Arlie Hochschild's foundational research (1983) on emotional labor described the unique vocation of flight attendants and the emotional requirements of the job when encountering rude, belligerent, or even pleasant passengers on airplanes. Hochschild (1979) states, "There is a distinction, in theory at least, between a feeling rule as it is known by our sense of what we can *expect* to feel in a given situation, and a rule as it is known by our sense of what we *should* feel in that situation" (p. 564). Two central facets of emotional labor include display rules and emotional labor strategies (surface acting, deep acting and authentic emotional responses) (Brotheridge, 2006; Humphrey, Ashforth & Diefendorff, 2015).

Display rules are the emotional expectations that employees are to display in certain situations. For example, customer service representatives are expected to exude an air of sympathy for a customer's concern and a mission to help fix the problems, a nurse is expected to exude calmness, empathy and care to patients despite a perhaps heightened stress response from a nervous patient, and teachers are expected to exude high expectations and a happy, calm demeanor despite what might be going on in their personal lives (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2020). Often, these feelings workers are expected to display are not ones that come naturally (Humphrey et al., 2015), which is sometimes also referred to as the removal of emotional autonomy (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002).

Further, display rules are most common in employment situations where acting a certain way regardless of how one is individually feeling is an expectation of the job (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Initially, display rules were coined as "feeling rules" by Hochschild (1979), however, as more recent authors have posited, it is impossible to know others' feelings and therefore, is better defined as a display rule because it more specifically references an outward display regardless of the internal emotional status (Humphrey et al., 2015).

Emotional labor strategies are employed when a person is expected to engage in a display rule, however, they may not be feeling the expected display (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002). Brotheridge (2006) defines display rules as an antecedent to emotional labor strategies (surface acting, deep acting and authentic emotional responses). Surface acting involves hiding one's true emotion and faking a visible affect to match an emotional display that is appropriate for that situation, which can create dissonance between what is truly felt and what is displayed (Humphrey et al., 2015). The emotional dissonance as a result of surface acting can also lead to emotional exhaustion. Deep acting involves engaging in the emotion that is required/appropriate



for a given situation, leading often to a more favorable outcome due to the authenticity of the emotion felt matching the emotion required (Lee & Brotheridge, 2010).

Hochschild (1979) coined deep acting as “an exchange of emotional work” and surface acting as “an exchange of display acts” (p. 568) in an effort to further clarify the differences between the two display rules. Defining deep acting in terms of “work” adds an implied element of effort whereas “display acts” would presumably be less laborious. Another element of emotional labor is authentic emotions (Humphrey, Ashforth & Diefendorff, 2015). Authentic emotions may appear to be laborious, however, do not require the same level of emotional labor to match a display rule. Engagement in surface acting has been shown to create more emotional dissonance (leading to emotional exhaustion) when compared to deep acting. This is because those engaging in surface acting must also continuously self-monitor their affect and emotional state in order to feel one way, and present a different affective display (Auger & Formentin, 2021; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002).

All of the aforementioned sources of mental health concerns for teachers can lead to emotional exhaustion and emotional dissonance. Emotional Dissonance is conceptualized as emotions not matching displays, called “emotional-display dissonance or fake-emotional display” (Humphrey, et al, 2015, p. 751) or when feelings “do not match display requirements, called emotion-rule dissonance” (p. 751). Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) also posit that some vocations carry a greater risk of burnout due to engagement in emotional labor including teaching, healthcare, and social work. Buric and colleagues explored these two techniques of emotional labor while teaching (2019). Those teachers who engaged in deep acting or summoning the internal feelings to control affective responses were more likely to feel authentic feelings of joy and love (positive) whereas those teachers who engaged in surface acting were more likely to feel anger and hopelessness (negative).

Emotional labor has been studied in many areas of ‘people work,’ namely flight attendants and healthcare professionals, and has been explored as a mediator of burnout and also examined for cultural differences (Brotheridge & Taylor, 2007). Many people work positions are filled by women (Hoschild, 1979) leading to an understanding that perhaps women are more easily able to identify with expected emotions when compared to men (Brotheridge & Taylor, 2007). Singh (2016) found that out of dual-career couples, females were more likely to benefit from social support. However, this could be because women may be more likely to seek out the social support of others whereas men are less inclined to confide in others about their stress levels or needs. Increased levels of social support within the job setting with either colleagues or administrators was found to be a beneficial coping strategy (Bernotaite & Malinauskiene, 2017; Hobson & Maxwell, 2017; Naono et al., 2019; Stasio et al., 2017; Uzman & Telef, 2015).

### **Emotional Exhaustion and Burnout**

Even before teachers arrive in their classrooms and engage in emotional labor strategies, they are coming into the workplace with a multitude of stress and burnout. “Burnout Syndrome” as defined by Brotheridge and Grandey (2002, p. 17) includes emotional exhaustion [feeling “spent” (p.17)], depersonalization (detaching from the environment and others in the your environment), and diminished personal accomplishment (experiencing low self-efficacy at work). Work-related stress was evaluated in kindergarten teachers as it relates to physical and mental well-being, finding that not only did occupational stress negatively predict work well-being, but social support positively predicted wellbeing (Li & Zhang, 2019). Choudhary and Madnawat (2014) evaluated life stress on total mental health and happiness in both public (government) and private school teachers, finding that life stress had a statistically significant impact on teacher happiness and wellbeing. Understanding that increased workload is a predictor

of wellbeing and happiness in teachers is substantial to mediating this effect to retain as many teachers as possible.

Madigan and Kim (2021) explored burnout and job satisfaction as it relates to turnover intention, finding several interesting conclusions. The first of which included a positive relationship between burnout and teachers' turnover intention. It also showed that teachers' turnover intention due to burnout may be increasing as time goes on, indicating a great need to better understand teachers' relationship to the negative consequences of their work (burnout), what contributes to burnout, and how to avoid burnout in the future. As a main component of burnout, emotional exhaustion is defined as "feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work" (Maslach et al., 1996, p. 4). Emotional exhaustion was explored in physicians in Rohland, Kruse and Rohrer's (2004) examination assessing a single-item question to establish burnout when compared to the entire Maslach's Burnout Inventory. Twenty two percent of physicians in this study identified feeling burnout to a major degree (5 on the Likert scale) down to "I am definitely burning out and have one or more symptoms of burnout such as physical or emotional exhaustion" (Rohland et al., 2004, p. 78), (rated 3 on the Likert scale).

Teacher burnout plays an integral role on the quality of work completed by teachers, specifically, special educators. Ruble and McGrew (2013) found that there was a 9.3% variance in the goal attainment by students on their IEP goals which was in part due to special educators' emotional exhaustion. The criteria used to define this included both the quality of the IEPs written for special education students, the special educators' adherence to instructional interventions, and the progress made by students. Embich (2001) also evaluated the impact of work demands/manageability in special educators finding that those special educators who co-taught found that workload manageability accounted for 7% of variance and 16% for those special educators who taught in self-contained classrooms.

McInerney and colleagues (2018) sought to examine the relationship between teacher wellbeing and employment factors (e.g., job satisfaction, occupational self-concept and quitting intentions). Many special educators do not feel a sense of school belonging due to the unique requirements of their positions. In addition, special educators often do not have an input in decision-making within school buildings because their jobs are mandated by federal and state mandates for implementation and compliance (Billingsley, 1993). Through her inquiry, Billingsley also found excessive paperwork, another unique job requirement that reduces a teacher's autonomy, to be the most frequent reason for special education attrition.

### **Workload**

Increasing the demand on our special educators can also lead to burnout. Higher stress levels are often caused by increases in workload and higher demands at work, especially when these kinds of responsibilities are not compensated by either time or monetarily (Alvites-Huamani, 2019). Teachers who are experiencing high work stress levels, decreased emotional wellbeing, increased anxiety, stress, depression, and/or anger due to the teaching profession are more likely to have adverse effects that span outside of their job responsibilities and into their personal lives, including bringing work home. This can decrease teacher mental health both physically (Gu et al., 2020; Thakur et al., 2018) and metaphorically (Cancio et al., 2018). There is a period after a workday, in which focusing on other things at home is not just “down time” from work, but actual recovery time (Gu et al., 2020). For example, Sonnetag, and colleagues (2017) discuss the implications of employees not taking the time to “recover” from a workday once the day is finished and its implications on employee well-being. These authors offer suggestions for recovery during the workday, such as actually taking a lunch break away from your workspace. Many teachers bring work home and work more than 60 hours per week (Curry

& O'Brien, 2012). For teachers, bringing work home at the end of every day to continue to work on at home only adds to the lack of a boundary for work and increases their stress levels. Thakur and colleagues (2018) found that teachers who brought work home over a weekend to continue to work had increased role conflict. Adequate recovery time from work during off-work hours (evenings and weekends) can reduce stress, increase mental health, and lessen the impact of exposure to workplace stress (Gu et al., 2020). After feeling tired due to high levels of stress on the job itself, Cancio and colleagues (2018) found that special educators carrying home their problems each day was the second leading cause of stress on the job.

Maslach and Jackson (1981, p. 99) define burnout as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind.” ‘People work’ can be applied to any customer/consumer facing professions (e.g., nursing, customer service, social work, education). Burnout encompasses emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a low self-efficacy on the job (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Maslach, 1981; Maslach, 1986). Emotional exhaustion was defined by Brotheridge and Grandey (2002, p. 17) as feeling “emotionally spent” due to the increased emotional demands of people work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Depersonalization was defined as feeling detached from others and a low self-efficacy being that workers do not feel successful or a lack of personal accomplishment (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Burnout has been shown to have negative effects when it comes to work efforts, morale, and family and home problems (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This study aims to explore if emotional dissonance from the use of emotional labor strategies can also have similar impacts on special educators.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Emotional labor theory has been shown to be effective in studying the display rules required of some occupations and its often-negative consequences (Brotheridge & Grandey,

2002). Hoschild (1993) posits that the emotional labor required for some jobs is much higher, specifically in her paper on flight attendants, but also teachers, social workers, doctors, when compared to others (e.g., assembly line workers). Given that teaching is student-centered, more specifically special education, which is also mandated by special education law, this study will explore emotional labor strategies as they impact the field of special education and how teachers' experiences with emotional labor impact their likelihood to stay in the field. Employers often require employees to engage in emotional labor strategies to recruit customers or put customer emotions first. For teachers, this can create an occupational conflict where a teacher must conceal their own pain and emotions and put on a faulty affect. There is an expectation of a "social norm" that teachers must abide by when expressing emotion to their students (Alev, 2019).

Is the emotional labor expended a factor in teachers' mental health more than a perceived work demand, emotional exhaustion, or burnout? Surface acting has been described as having a great likelihood of emotional exhaustion and negative associated symptoms (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Humphrey, Ashford & Diefendorf, 2015), leading to an increased need to further explore this theory with other kinds of people work. Humphrey, Ashford and Diefendorf (2015) discuss the possibility that deep acting, although not requiring fake emotions, may still require a great deal of emotional effort, thus still leading to emotional exhaustion or fatigue, however lesser levels of negative consequences. As stated, deep acting "improves performance without causing a reduction in wellbeing" (p. 752).

Using emotional labor theory, this study aims to identify the degree to which special educators engage in emotional labor strategies throughout their day (to include surface acting and deep acting), the implications of responses, and an exploration of the lived experiences of these special educators as it pertains to the emotional regulation used. Emotional exhaustion may

look different for different teachers, and especially unique for special educators. Billingsley and Bettini (2019) in their review of the literature state that special educators provide services not only to students, but also collaboration with colleagues, paraprofessionals, and families. With the workload not equitable as compared to their general education colleagues, it is no wonder special education teachers often feel isolated and have workloads that are not just greater in volume, but come with legal demands, increased parental engagement and an obligation to make progress. With emotional labor strategies not specifically assessed in this demographic of teacher explicitly, could a different or more effective emotional labor strategy be used or taught to increase teacher mental health and decrease their turnover intent?

In the 1960s, flight attendants complained at the high number of passengers per jet liner, engaging in nostalgic thinking of times when there were only 25 passengers to one flight attendant (Hochsild, 1979). Similarly, special education teachers cite increased caseloads and increased workload as a main contributing factor to why they leave and the increase throughout the years to have an impact on their emotional exhaustion (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). It is anticipated that it is not just emotional exhaustion from the workload that contributes to a desire to leave the field, but the emotional exhaustion required to engage with students to meet them where they are to provide adequate and appropriate instruction.

## **Chapter III: Methodology**

### **Overview**

The existing body of research on emotional labor has been mostly quantitative, with more qualitative/mixed methods analyses emerging more recently (Auger & Formentin, 2021; Miller & Gkonou, 2018; Waldbuesser, Rubinsky & Titsworth, 2021). There is a need to continue to explore mixed methods inquiry to the study of special education teachers and emotional labor as this is not an area that has been explicitly studied. In this chapter I describe the methods used for both quantitative and qualitative inquiries for purposes of this study.

### **Setting and Participants**

Special education teacher participants were recruited and asked to participate if they were K-12 special education teachers from a county in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. An invitation and consent to participate were sent via email to all special education teachers in the identified county. This study took place solely virtually, including recruitment, survey, and semi-structured interviews. Participants who agreed completed surveys on their own devices.

### **Instrumentation**

#### ***Survey***

The Emotional Labour Scale (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003) was given to participants to complete. Then, 8% of participants were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. The results of this quantitative analysis justify the sequential quantitative analysis. Follow-up to the quantitative phase can include results that show significant results, results that are surprising, outliers, or other unanticipated results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2019).

#### ***Special Education Teacher Semi-Structured Interviews***



Four participants from the survey were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. Five questions were used to frame the interview, follow up questions, and other non-scripted questions were also asked (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The questions included:

- (a) Do you feel like you have to hide your true emotions when in the classroom with students? If so, can you provide some examples?
- (b) Does this impact any part of your personal life (e.g., increased fatigue, increased burnout)?
- (c) Do you find that you take work home a lot related specifically to your special education duties?
- (d) How does that also impact your mental health?
- (e) Are you likely to leave the field of Education?
- (f) What contributes to feelings of wanting to leave?

Interviews were recorded, the transcripts were created through Zoom transcription, and manual corrections of the manuscript were made to increase accuracy of participant responses. Full transcriptions were then uploaded into Dedoose to code via open coding.

### **Research Design**

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to assess special education teachers' wellbeing as it relates to emotional labor in the classroom. Explanatory sequential mixed methods design is conducted with an initial quantitative measure, with a qualitative measure that follows and further informs the quantitative data (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative method was the The Emotional Labour Scale (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003) (used with permission), provided to special education teachers throughout a county in the mid-Atlantic region of the US and the qualitative method were semi-structured interviews specific to the role of a special educator and the impact of emotional labor expended. Mixed

methods are used because there is a lack of mixed methods research regarding emotional labor and education or specifically, special education. More so, there is a substantial lack of qualitative research to examine any level of emotional regulation or emotional exhaustion in special educators.

Schnaider-Levi and colleagues (2017) added to the body of research and examined high school teachers in Israel before and after the implementation of a meditation technique known as Inquiry-Based Stress Reduction (IBSR). The authors used semi-structured interviews to allow for a more open conversation and so as to not limit the participants' responses about the implementation of the twelve-week IBSR program. Schnaider-Levi and colleagues (2017) identified that teaching meditative skills to teachers to combat burnout and increase levels of well-being is imperative, as the workload for teachers and the need for appropriate social interactions with colleagues and students is imperative. This can add an immense amount of stress to teachers thus increasing the emotional labor associated with a job in the field of education (Alev, 2019).

Few empirical studies used mixed methods methodology. Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) evaluated three years of teacher attrition in a school district using t-tests to identify if there was a significant difference between school characteristics and working conditions (quantitative) and a constant comparative method (qualitative) to identify themes across codes, which were then quantified using percentages and frequencies. Larkin, Brantley-Dias and Lokey-Vega (2016) examined job satisfaction and turnover intention for online teachers across public, private, charter, for-profit, and not-for-profit schools. These authors used a sequential explanatory design to evaluate survey data and then focus group interviews for participants. Heineke, Mazza, and Tichnor-Wagner (2014) also employed a sequential explanatory design, however employed survey data for their quantitative method and interviews for their qualitative method. Torres

(2012) used qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, focused on questions specific to attrition to evaluate Catholic teacher attrition.

This small sample of mixed method research does not indicate that there is a great understanding of the lived experience of teachers. The analysis of qualitative data is also varied across studies and limitations noted could have impacted the generalizability of results. For example, Geiger and Pivovarova indicate that the qualitative method was a response to a singular question, “Are there any clarifications or anything you would like to add to help us better understand your school?” (2018, p. 613). This can be misleading to the reader as it is one singular question and also, Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) state that people are more likely to speak up and volunteer information when they are unhappy or have concerns/grievances. The results from Torres data (2012) illustrate that Catholic teachers are more likely to leave due to changes in goals or values and their commitment to teaching, which was not discussed in the other two qualitative inquiries about teacher attrition. This could be due to the novelty of the Catholic vs public sector, however, it is unclear with the limited body of research to evaluate. The values within the teaching profession could also be impacted by the emotional regulation teachers are required to engage in, however, without an understanding of the theory, they may not have the words to describe it. A commitment to teaching could be impacted by the emotional exhaustion caused by emotional labor techniques, which teachers aren’t even aware that they are engaging in. As such, more research on teachers’ experiences could be invaluable to understanding the impact of the profession on teachers’ wellbeing and likelihood to remain in the field.

### **Data Analysis**

*Quantitative.* The survey for this study was the Emotional Labour Scale (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003) and was created in Qualtrics (an online survey tool) that was emailed to participants.

These subscales were developed by Brotheridge and Lee (2003) as emotion-related role requirements specifically to measure surface acting and deep acting. See the survey in Appendix C. Participants responded to the survey questions using a 5-point Likert scale as indicated: Never (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4) and Always (5). The survey also included an initial question of how long in minutes a typical interaction is with, in this study, students. The survey consists of five subscales: Frequency (how often one engages in surface/deep acting on an average work day), intensity (a measure of the strength of employees' required emotions, feelings that they sense they must express in the workplace), variety (a measure of how many different emotions an employee is required to display), surface acting (measures the surface level efforts to resist expressing feelings or emotions) and deep acting (how often they attempt to feel a true emotion when one is expected of them). Examples of questions include but are not limited to, "on an average day at work, how frequently do you: 'Display specific emotions required by your job,'" and "on an average day at work, how frequently do you 'Make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others.'" A correlation was conducted to identify if there is a relationship between the subscales (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

*Qualitative.* After the quantitative phase of the study, 4 participants were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. The selection of participants for this was purposeful in that I was looking to include participants who both reported higher levels of surface acting and deep acting, as well as lower levels. The semi-structured interview questions also included specific concerns about job characteristics that impact autonomy (freedom and discretion afforded to an employee from an employer), task identity (requirement of the completion of a task), significance (degree to which the job impacts others), and work-life balance (Habibi,

Khakpour & Fathi, 2018). This qualitative analysis added to the quantitative analysis by having participants explain their responses on the survey and elaborate their feelings and opinions as their own unique lived experience on the job. Once transcripts were complete, coding occurred via open coding (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Open coding is when themes emerge within a set of data and are explored and analyzed as specific categories of responses. Specific codes are described in Chapter IV.

### **Threats to Validity**

This study used only special education teachers employed in public education in a mid-Atlantic County. It could be possible that because of this there were regional or social factors that would contribute to teachers' perceptions of their emotional regulation with students, administrators, and parents. In addition, within the body of existing literature, there is a lack of a comparative sample. It is also feasible that due to this, the small number of interviews held (4) could not have represented the differences in the way that emotional management is conducted and its impact. For example, of the four participants, Barb's were the most neutral responses and her interviews also indicated a more "go with the flow" attitude of being flexible to change and dedicated to the field. However, four participants is approximately 8% of participants and it is recommended that the qualitative phase has less participants than the quantitative phase in an explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell Plano Clark, 2018). The interviewees' reports were consistent and able to be coded with comparable codes across participants indicating that data saturation ["when data stops giving new information" (Constantinou, Georgiou, & Perdikogianni, 2017, p. 562)]. In addition, the time constraints of this study also hindered any ability to collect additional interviews and/or follow up interviews with the same interviewees.

The final threat to external validity of the study was that two of the interview participants were teachers in the district where I used to supervise. Although the threat would have been

greater if I were still their direct supervisor, there might have been some hesitation in responding, but also a brevity in responding as I already have an established rapport with these teachers. To explain, it could be that the two interviewees that were prior teachers of mine did not elaborate as much on their own emotional management as we had had multiple conversations over the course of time when I was their supervisor regarding their emotional expenditure on the job.

### **Summary**

Mixed-methods inquiry has not yet been used to study the implications of emotional labor strategies in schools for special educators. In the following chapter, I will review the data from both quantitative and qualitative phases of the study and discuss in detail how the qualitative analysis did not support prior literature on the stakeholder group that has been historically studied solely when assessing teachers' emotional management, students. Surprisingly, different stakeholder groups, administrators, and parents, are who interviewees discussed in great length as requiring the most emotional management.

## Chapter IV: Results

### Introduction

In this study, participants were first given the Emotional Labour Scale (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). Once this was completed, scores were analyzed for statistical significance using Qualtrics and interview participants were invited to participate based on responses. These interview participants were included if their results indicated any outlier scores, extreme scores, or scores that varied from the mean of scores that were consistently close to the mean, in order to better understand extreme scores relating to frequency, intensity, variety and engagement in surface vs deep acting. Results for each quantitative and qualitative data inquiry are presented below. Quantitative data will be presented with specific survey results by subscale and participant. Qualitative data will be presented with identified codes from interviews, and specific examples from participants' discussions in the semi-structured interviews.

### Quantitative Survey Data

Fifty-five special education teachers from a county in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States completed the Emotional Labour quantitative survey. Table 1 depicts survey data results for each subscale and across subscales. Across subscales, frequency of engaging in emotional labor strategies with students (4.01) had the highest mean score across participants and intensity (2.88) had the lowest. (One participant omitted one question so their total did not include all 55 responses as indicated in Table 1.) The survey also asked participants to define how long interactions with 'customers' (in this study 'students') were. The interactions in this survey were given four categories of time ranges labeled "less than 5 minutes, 5-10 minutes, 11-20 minutes, 21-35 minutes, and 36+ minutes." The range of duration responses of participants were between 'less than 5 minutes' to '36+' minutes with the average selection being '11-20 minutes.'

Table 1

*Mean, standard deviation and n for subscales*

	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Frequency	4.00	.730	55
Intensity	2.88	.726	55
Variety	3.52	.656	54
Surface Acting	3.61	.793	55
Deep Acting	3.12	.787	55

Participants indicated that they engaged in higher levels of surface acting compared to deep acting as evidenced by a higher mean score for surface acting (3.61). Table 2 shows the correlations between subscales as well as descriptive statistics. Results suggest that surface acting is significantly related to frequency ( $r = .356$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and variety ( $r = .321$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Deep acting was significantly related to variety ( $r = .345$ ;  $p < .05$ ), and variety was significantly related to intensity ( $r = .280$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Statistically significant relationships emerged. In total, surface acting was correlated with both frequency and variety, and deep acting was correlated with variety.

Table 2

*Statistical significance of subscales*

	Frequency	Intensity	Variety	Surface Acting	Deep Acting
Frequency	--	.177	.192	.356**	.149
Intensity	.177	--	.280*	.064	.149
Variety	.192	.280*	--	.321*	.345*
Surface Acting	.356**	.064	.321*	--	.205
Deep Acting	.149	.149	.345**	.205	--



\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

### *Frequency*

Frequency refers to how often one engages in surface/deep acting on an average workday. This subscale is measured by the following questions in the Emotional Labour Scale (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003), “on an average day at work, how frequently do you: ‘Display specific emotions required by your job,’ ‘Adopt certain emotions required as part of your job,’ ‘Express particular emotions needed for your job.’” The average mean score response across participants was 4.01 out of 5 on the Likert rating. The high Likert rating indicates that special education teachers feel that they are often required to show/display specific emotions related to their jobs. Eight of the fifty-five survey participants ranked a mean of 5.00 for the frequency subscale and only two participants scored below a 3.00. More than half of participants, twenty-eight, scored between a 4.00-4.99 on the frequency scale. The frequency subscale question with the highest Likert rating was “Display specific emotions required by your job” with a mean score of 4.11, with 58% of participants rating this as “often.”

### *Intensity*

Intensity is a measure of the strength of employees’ required emotions, feelings that they sense they must express in the workplace. This subscale is measured by statements such as “on an average day at work, how frequently do you: ‘Express some intense emotions,’ ‘Show some strong emotions.’” Intensity scores reflect a mean of 2.88 across participants. This score sits almost in the middle of the Likert Scale ratings. The highest rating (4.50) was only scored by one participant. Scores in the middle of the Likert rating indicates that special education teachers do not often have to express strong emotions, however, sometimes they need to. The question with the lowest mean across all subscales was within the intensity subscale with “Express intense

emotions” having a mean Likert scale rating of 2.78. For this question, 40% of participants scored “rarely.”

### ***Variety***

Variety is a measure of how many different emotions an employee is required to display. This subscale is measured by statements like “on an average day at work, how frequently do you: ‘Display many different kinds of emotions,’ ‘Express many different emotions,’ ‘Display many different emotions when interacting with others,’ ‘Use a wide variety of emotions in dealing with people.’” The mean score for variety was 3.52. Participants scored the variety subscale between 2.00 (one participant) and 4.75 (two participants). Whereas frequency indicated higher reported scores, and intensity were lower, variety was mixed. These scores indicate that special education teachers display a variety of different emotions within their day with different people.

### ***Surface Acting***

Surface acting subscale measures the surface level efforts to resist expressing feelings or emotions. Surface acting was measured by “on an average day at work, how frequently do you: ‘Resist expressing my true feelings,’ ‘Pretend to have emotions that I don’t really have,’ and ‘Hide my true feelings about a situation.’” The mean participant score for surface acting was 3.61 indicating that participants scored in the middle of Likert scale. Three participants scored a 5.00 indicating an ‘always’ response. Neither variety or intensity had any participants scoring a 5.00. The question with the highest mean score was “Resist expressing my true feelings” with a mean score of 3.95.

### ***Deep Acting***

Deep acting asks participants how often they attempt to feel a true emotion when one is expected of them. Deep acting was measured by, “on an average day at work, how frequently do you: ‘Make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others,’ ‘Try to

actually experience the emotions I must show,' 'Really try to feel the emotions I have to show as part of my job.'" Only one participant indicated that they "always" made attempts to engage in deep acting. The mean score for this subscale is 3.12 indicating that less participants engaged in deep acting as compared to surface acting. With both deep acting and surface acting having a different impact on workers' wellbeing, it is important to understand the difference between special education teachers' responses. The second lowest mean scores for questions were within the deep acting subscale. "Try to actually experience the emotions that I must show" had a mean score of 2.93.

### **Summary**

Special education teachers as part of this study reported engaging in surface acting more than deep acting. They also reported engaging in surface acting more often during the course of their interactions, but with less intensity. They also report displaying a greater variety of emotions throughout their day, despite these emotions being less intense. This could be representative of the different stakeholders special education teachers must engage with throughout the course of their day and the different display rules required.

### **Qualitative Interview Data**

Four participants who filled out the survey were asked and consented to participate in semi-structured interviews. Once manuscripts were complete, they were uploaded into Dedoose software, which is an online software that allows researchers to enhance their data analysis by uploading qualitative and/or mixed methods transcripts for data management, coding, and analysis within the software (Dedoose, 2022). Open coding was used to identify specific codes that were then used to identify themes generated by participants across all four interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Table 3 shows the breakdown of codes with more than 5 responses

and their percentage of responses from participants. Figure 1 presents a visual of code representation out of a total of 386 identified codes.

Table 3

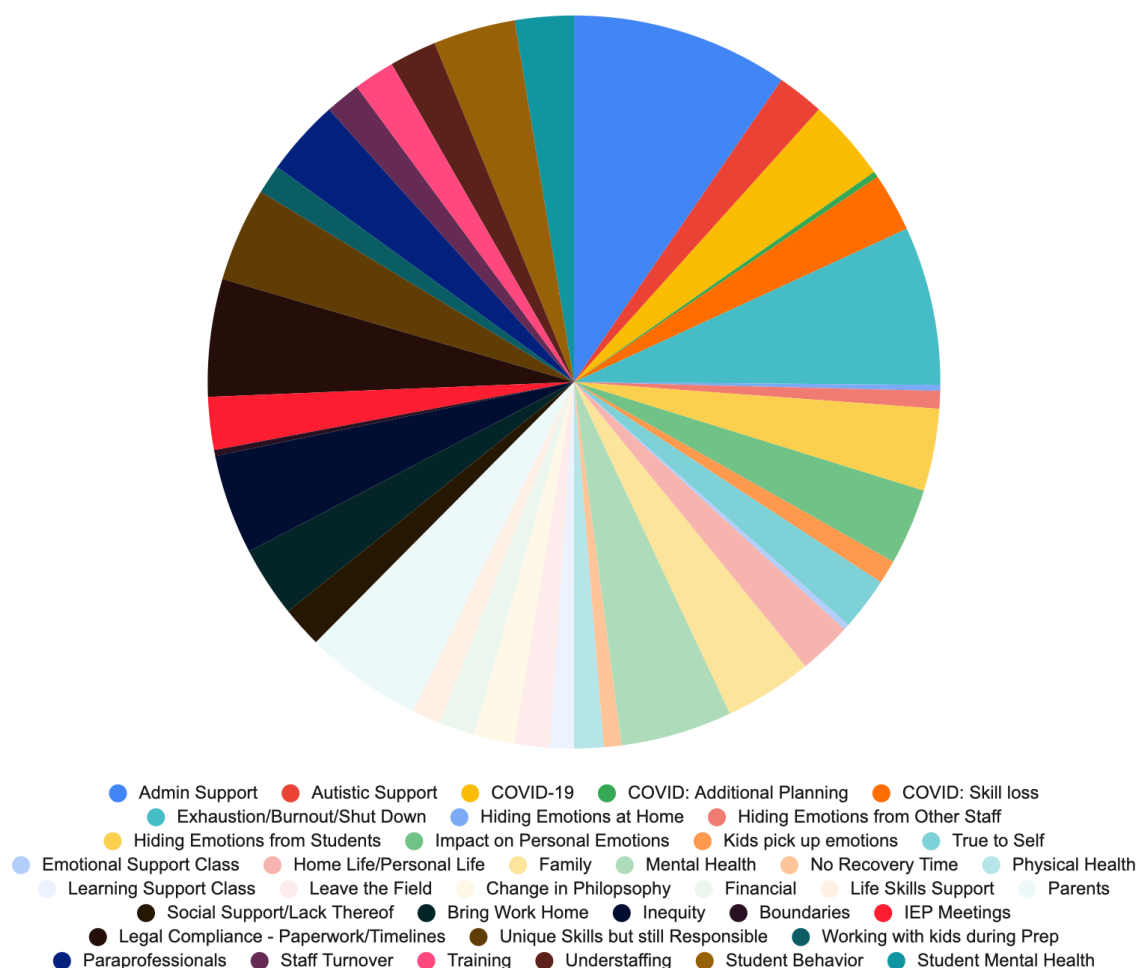
*Number and Percentage of Codes Identified*

Identified Codes	Total Codes	Percentage
Admin Support	37	9.6
Exhaustion/Burnout/Shutdown	27	7
Legal Compliance/Paperwork Timelines	20	5.2
Parents	20	5.2
Mental Health	19	4.9
Inequity	17	4.4
Unique Skills but Still Responsible	16	4.1
Family	15	3.9
COVID-19	14	3.6
Hiding Emotions from Students	14	3.6
Student Behavior	14	3.6
Impact on personal emotions	13	3.4
Paraprofessionals	13	3.4
Bring work home	12	3.1
COVID: Skill loss	10	2.6
Student Mental Health	10	2.6
Home Life/Personal Life Impact	9	2.3

IEP Meetings	9	2.3
True to Self	9	2.3
Autistic Support	8	2.1
Staffing: Understaffing	8	2.1
Change in Philosophy	7	1.8
Social Support/Lack thereof	7	1.8
Staffing: Training	7	1.8
Financial	6	1.6
Leaving the Field to Education or Outside of Education	6	1.6
Staffing: Staff Turnover	6	1.6

Figure 1

*Percentages of identified codes*



Across four participant interviews, a total of 386 codes were identified. The three highest codes identified across participants were administrative support (37; 9.6%), exhaustion, burnout, shutdown (27; 7%), parents (20; 5.2%) and legal compliance/paperwork timelines (20; 5.2%). To have a connection to the lived experiences of the participants and protect their identities, they will be referred to as alias names, Mary, Sally, Rose, and Barb.

### **Administrative Support**

All four interviewees indicated administrative support as a group of stakeholders that require them to engage in the greatest amount of emotional labor. Mary reported specific concerns regarding administrative support as a feeling of a lack of respect for the uniqueness of

the special educator's role in the school. "There is a lack of respect for our profession, even within the admin team and the parents." It is mandatory for a local educational agency representative (LEA) to be present at all Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings in the state of Pennsylvania and federally (IDEA, 2017). In many districts, that person is identified as an administrator (principal, assistant principal, supervisor of special education, etc.). But law is different from reality. Mary stated that often administrators will have to cancel their attendance at IEP meetings in order to attend to other more pressing or urgent matters in the day-to-day operations of a school. This puts special education teachers in a position to either secure another LEA representative to attend the meeting or to have to cancel the meeting, putting all IEP team members in a position to have to coordinate another time to meet, including the parents and, for students over the age of 14, the student as well. Teachers in this situation must go back to students, parents, and other members of the IEP team and communicate the scheduling difficulty on behalf of the administration, compelling them to perform certain kinds of emotions at the inevitably frustrated and sometimes angry parents and constituents involved in the situation. "Admin really plays a big part in my frustration level." Mary indicated that administrators do not make attendance at IEP meetings a priority, which contributes to feeling a lack of respect for the unique role that a special education teacher holds.

Sally echoed this feeling of lack of respect. She stated that as an elementary autistic support teacher, often she faces very challenging behavior from students that requires administrative support. Just as frequently, however, she says she is not given assistance because administrators are occupied in other administrative meetings or trainings. "This kid is melting down and punching and you're trying to call for support [but] the principals are in an admin meeting." In addition, Sally stated that despite conversations about what would be helpful to support her in the classroom, she has experienced her administrators listening to her concerns but

then not offering support or solutions. “[Administration says] you’re fine, you can deal with it. And I’m like, no I can’t and I’m telling you.” Also, Sally has to continue to engage in a professional working relationship with her administrators after incidents such as these, testing her ability to fake emotions of understanding for not being available to help, while knowing that for some administrators, in her perspective, it is easier to sit in administrative meetings than support a teacher with an aggressive student in the classroom. Often, she does not feel as though her administrative staff understand her unique role as a special educator. Sally also shared that she was battling some very concerning medical news and felt no understanding or support from her district administration.

There was one time, where [the principal] just approached me as I returned from a very tough, emergency doctor’s appointment that had very serious health information given to me, you know, and a really tough diagnosis. You know, I was immediately greeted by her in the building [with] ‘oh well, you’re 20 minutes later than you said; you should have sent an email. I’ve scheduled a meeting with you and a union [representative] for 3:15 this afternoon.’ You know, you’re being told that you might have breast cancer, and now you have to deal with this and then walk into a classroom to eight screaming children. And what are you supposed to do? Have a complete nervous breakdown? Like you can’t... So that day specifically I burst into tears, hugged one of my [paraprofessionals], pulled it together and said ‘Alright, we’re good now. Let’s go back to work.’

Barb commented similarly saying that in her more than thirty years in the field as a high school learning support teacher, she has seen more than six supervisors of special education. In this time, she reported that new ones come in, tell the teachers what to do and how to do it, then eventually move on to another position or district. The turnover is intense. And with this turnover, comes a need to learn the new administrator’s preferences, expectations, and stroke



their ego. Having to make a good first impression multiple times per a teacher's career because of turnover requires a great deal of surface acting to make a good first impression and gain favor with a new supervisor. In addition to the interpersonal demand of frequent administrator turnover, the guidance from state compliance and direction from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Bureau of Special Education, changes and each supervisor who comes in has a different set of expectations that the teachers must follow. Barb also commented that it seems as though administration is mostly concerned with the top 20% of the student population. Rose, a high school life skills teacher, agreed. She stated that there have been so many different administrators, "but it still seems to always fall on us," referring to the teachers who are still teaching in the district. Mary echoes this sentiment stating that specifically when it comes to special education litigation, "I get that the district is the one that has to pay out, but I also feel like that looks bad on you."

### **Surface Acting**

All four participants discussed various ways they are required to engage in emotional labor strategies to provide an appropriate affect in their classrooms. As stated above, surface acting (3.61) had a higher mean score on the survey when compared to deep acting (3.12). However, throughout the interviews, participants spoke directly about hiding emotions in various situations and to various individuals in their schools (e.g., students, parents, colleagues, administrators) and did not discuss efforts to reduce the dissonance between their felt and expressed emotions through deep acting. Mary discussed how she, with her elementary learning support students, often hides and fakes her authentic feelings of frustration when students are not doing well, or if there are other variables in her environment that are causing frustration. "I don't always show the full extent of how I'm feeling because I don't think it's right for them to know how frustrated I am all of the time. Especially if I'm frustrated about their behaviors." She

reports that it can be inappropriate for her students to see the extent of her frustration. However, she also indicated that she makes an effort to use some of her authentic emotions as learning opportunities. Barb also echoed this same sentiment. Both report that it's important for students to understand that teachers/adults also can have bad days and stress how to appropriately respond and cope with the fact that others are not always 100%.

Mary further explained that discussing with students how they are feeling rather than acting the way they are feeling is two different things. "So, I tried to use it more reflective[ly], like, 'oh, you did this, how do you think that makes me feel or take a look at my face- what is my face showing you?' But I very rarely to the full extent show them how frustrated I am at work with anything... anything in general." Mary engages in emotional labor as surface acting because she is faking her emotion and not showing the true anger or frustration. Discussing true emotions is good teaching, however, not expressing them to students (depending on the emotion) is appropriate in many situations (e.g., anger, frustration). It may be appropriate however to express authentic emotions such as disappointment in an effort to have students have to encounter that emotion and learn from it.

Rose discussed how hiding her emotions has had a direct impact on her mental and emotional health in the classroom and beyond. Rose is not only a teacher in her school, but a resident of the district. So, when personal things come up, sometimes her students are aware. As an example, she has stepchildren who were enrolled in the district and then moved back with their mom after the pandemic year. "The kids that were [in person] last year know my situation with my stepchildren ... and then this year they weren't there because they moved with their mom. So, that brings up a whole bunch of emotions." It also required her to respond when she had been engaging in surface acting to hide her true emotions in her life skills classroom. Rose also scored the highest possible score on the surface acting subscale (5.00) indicating that this is

a strategy she employs frequently in the classroom. Aside from her personal reasons requiring surface acting, she also engages in faking her affect with the many hats she is required to wear. “It just seems like nothing ever gets better because the students change, [but] it’s just like the [same] story, different day.” “I feel we’re not just teachers; we become therapists to the kids...for all the different roles we have to put on throughout the day. It’s not just being a teacher, and it’s not just doing the paperwork, it’s everything else.”

Sally as an elementary autistic support teacher indicated that she does hide her true emotions frequently as her students do not understand emotions as readily as other students do because of their disability and their age. “You can’t really walk in there and be frustrated or upset. All they do is, you know, play off your emotions and then they get upset so it’s not even worth it.” She also shared that she was at the time fostering a boy with autism in her home so she would mask her emotions all day at work and then come home and mask her emotions at home. Due to the stress of her position, she had to end her time fostering as it was too much for her mentally, physically, and emotionally. Sally indicated that the need for her to hide her true emotions also comes from many places, her teaching position, lack of administrative support, lack of collegial support and burnout. She too scored a 5.00 on the surface acting subscale indicating the highest possible score.

Of the four participants, Barb scored a 2.67 on the surface acting subscale. This may be due to the fact that she is a high school learning support teacher, and her students are older and have greater language skills in order to accurately read affect and social/emotional cues. However, Barb feels it is also because she is an upfront and honest person and uses sarcasm with her students as well. She reports that she “tells it like it is” and is honest about how she feels with her students, colleagues, and administrators. With this, she does not feel that she must hide her emotions as often unless they are very personal. She discussed years when her daughter was

attending the same school in which she taught in and those years were challenging for her emotionally and her students witnessed her true emotions. Barb indicated that she would hide emotions if they were directly tied to frustration or anger for student behavior, much like Mary.

### **Student Specific Concerns**

A large concern brought up by all participants was the concern for student mental health, increased challenging behavior (which can be coupled with lack of administrative support) and the skill loss teachers are seeing from the COVID-19 pandemic. In March of 2020, schools shut down for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. Many districts in the mid-Atlantic region of the US at that time allowed students, based on parent request, to remain at home for the 2020-2021 school year to participate in virtual learning. Other students returned to buildings to participate in in-person instruction, but in masks and socially distanced (always remaining three-six feet away from others). For those students who stayed home, they did not engage with peers or in typical daily activities such as lunch, recess, gym, specials/electives for the school year. Many have also forgotten how to “do school.” Mary reports her job now involves re-teaching her elementary learning support students how to even prepare for a day. “We are in November, and I have a checklist on the board like, when you come in, you get your book box, you sanitize your hands, you get your book out. But every day they come in and they open their iPads and start playing games and I’m like, what are you doing?”

Rose and Barb, who are both secondary teachers (grades 9-12), indicated that there has been a huge change in the deterioration of student behavior since returning in person after the COVID-19 pandemic. For Rose, as a life skills teacher, she sees the regression across all areas, including daily living skills, social reciprocity skills, behavior, and academic regression. Barb cites academic and social regression from her perspective as a learning support teacher as well. “You know it's too much and I think now, too, after COVID, the behaviors you’re seeing are

because of the time they haven't been in school. That has greatly affected what's going on..."

They both cite that despite the obvious (and for many teachers, predicted) skill loss in students, the state and special education law has not allowed grace for students. "[We're] trying to do everything, and you know we're in the hamster wheel- just running triple," Barb states. All participants alluded to the fact that all teachers are still just as responsible for student growth and achievement, despite almost two years of atypical education. Special education law also did not bend, with many districts required to take a greater deal of data to show pre- and post- COVID shutdown levels to account for or to create a new growth measure for students (Gilmour & ebay, 2021). For example, students who showed levels of regression during the COVID shut down would need to be remediated within a far lesser time because of their special education needs. In many ways, this requires teachers to predict the amount that their students will regress during such an unprecedented time; and be responsible for recoupment of those skills.

As Sally states, "all the things we had to do before and now we've got to worry about their health" indicates the strain of now being responsible to not only educate, but to keep medically safe. There are also many different perspectives and opinions on such things as school closure, contact tracing [the reporting of positive cases of COVID-19 to ensure the minimization of spread and to provide resources to those affected (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022)], mask mandates, and school health and safety plans that require teachers to engage in surface acting with families. No participants indicated an opinion either in support or dissent of masking, however, stated that wearing masks makes it more difficult to perform their duties as educators. In my own experience as a district administrator, special education teachers who have close relationships with families must also defend the district's stance on the health and safety plan to families that may disagree, despite their own feelings requiring surface acting and presenting a united front with the district. Mary states that during the COVID closure, she

received a lot of praise and heard from her colleagues about how thankful parents were to be given such superb support and flexibility during an unprecedented time. Once teachers and students returned back, she feels that those parents are the first to question the COVID-19 related regression, stating, “parents are emailing you telling you’re not doing B and C right to support their child.”

### **Unique Qualities/Role Expectations of Special Educators**

Mary, Sally, Rose, and Barb all expressed a great deal of feelings and commentary as it pertains to the uniqueness of their roles in the schools. All discussed being overworked, burned out, having to be more accessible and flexible, being held more accountable to both school mandates but also state and legal mandates, and having to engage in a much more personal and frequent relationship with families.

### ***Parents***

The role of a special education teacher requires that special education teachers as case managers are the ones responsible for the implementation of students’ IEPs and that their colleagues and LEAs are implementing what they should be as guided by the document. This means that for parents, the case manager (special education teacher) is the point person for concerns and questions. All interview participants indicated that parents are unique, in that some are very knowledgeable about their rights as parents and others are just content and gracious to be receiving any level of support. Sally indicated that she began to send her instructional assistants out to the parent pick-up line at the end of each day as she would be presented with questions and concerns about their children while waiting in a car line. She indicated that she could continue to have the same conversation and engage in the same surface acting to display a positive attitude about a child’s disruptive behavior during the day. In Sally’s words, “I can’t [have] another ten-minute conversation with your parent(s) about the same behavior that’s

happened for three weeks straight, like I can't." She also stated that it's difficult to rein in parents in the car line as many take that opportunity to ask questions and express concerns. Despite efforts to tell families to schedule meetings or call to discuss, families understandably are eager to speak about their children, however, some have less recognition of the appropriate time or place to do that.

Mary added that often the most stress comes from a need to accommodate the parents and their needs, rather than solely focusing on the students and their unique needs. Teachers engage in emotional labor strategies not only with students, but with the adults they work with and parents. Some parents can expect that their child's case manager will be available for anything they may need. Rose and Barb indicate the specific phrases "confrontational" and "come after you" regarding some parents. Also, Mary and Rose both indicated that some parents are disrespectful. General education teachers also must engage with families and parents, however, with much clearer boundaries. With special education teachers often having to support students with more unique and sensitive needs (e.g., social emotional, social, hygiene, etc.), the level of communication and gravity of what needs to be discussed can be perceived as more challenging.

Sally also cites lack of parent boundaries as having a great impact on her stress and burnout. With apps such as Class Dojo, it allows parents to in essence "text" their child's teachers to a device and many schools require that teachers use this to communicate more effectively and more immediately with families throughout the school day. Some parents can also send messages at off hours, but they often go right to the personal devices of teachers. Sally receives non-urgent messages to class Dojo which alerts her personal cell phone (as many schools require teachers to use Class Dojo, but do not provide a district cell phone), at all hours of the night/weekend. These communications are more specific to special education teachers as they often have a greater level of need and require a higher level of communication from their

child's special education case manager. Without setting a clear boundary, parents may expect a response back during not contracted hours, requiring teachers to have to present their 'teacher' affect when they are no longer on the clock and could be engaged in another personal activity. Rose and Sally as teachers of students with a greater level of need stated the personal emotional pull this creates, because for many families, the special education supports and services students receive in schools is the only support received for their child. These two teachers by nature also want what is best for their students, so often will respond to messages, emails, and offer support on non-contract time because they care and want to support their families, creating a need to engage in some level of surface acting outside of school hours. Barb agrees; "If we make a mistake in our IEP, we're told...And you know the smart [parents] they come after you."

### ***Compliance***

Special education as a profession comes with a unique role. A large part of the unique role is compliance to state mandated special education law. Chapter 14 of the Pennsylvania state law mandates the timelines that must be followed to ensure appropriate services for students who have been identified by LEAs for special education services. For example, a school team (LEA, school psychologist, special education teachers, parents, and general education teachers) are responsible to continue to determine eligibility for students on a biennial or triennial basis. For students who qualify for services as a student with an intellectual disability, this re-evaluation must be completed every 2 years, and after the report, a new annual IEP must be developed. The special education teacher is integral to this process as they are the "drivers" of the IEP process, providing much of the input and the coordination of meetings. It is also important to note that most teachers in the county where this study took place are contractually obligated to receive a duty-free lunch (i.e., a lunch where they are not responsible for students or other work responsibilities) and a prep period (to prepare lessons, etc.) each day. This is consistent for



general education teachers and special education teachers. Special education teachers who need to hold IEP meetings during the school day must request coverage from their building to have someone responsible for the students while the teacher runs the meeting. This is true of general education teachers who must also participate in these IEP meetings as part of the IEP team.

### *Paperwork*

Each district and school create an expectation for what the role of various special educators will play. State laws define what an acceptable caseload is for each special education teacher, however, this workload is not equitable considering districts work with employees to create a collective bargaining agreement that defines how many periods teachers are to teach, how much prep time they are entitled to, and any other parameters to the work day of a teacher. In some districts, special education teachers are given extra days where they are not in the classroom but can work on paperwork. There are many additional responsibilities that special education teachers are accountable for aside from direct instruction in skill areas. For each student's IEP, each goal requires data collection at the predetermined interval. These data are essential to identify if students are making progress on their goals in their IEPs and to identify if changes in instruction or additional goal areas are needed. Case managers are responsible for collecting this data from other colleagues or the students themselves, summarizing the data, and presenting in a progress report for families 3-4 times per school year. "Our accountability seems so much higher and the responsibility that follows through everything that we need to do. And I think that can be draining." These progress reports are a large part of what goes into their IEPs and informs instruction moving forward. Writing IEPs is also a long process that happens for each student once per year. However, most case managers will say that there are many more meetings that occur through the course of a year, such as when changes need to be made, new data are entered in, or revisions to a student's IEP must be documented. This process also

requires a great deal of interaction with colleagues, in that changes to the IEP that the team decides on often falls on the case manager to enforce. Special education teachers are required to then engage with colleagues to support the implementation of changes or help facilitate the support for the student. It is possible that some general education teachers might not agree with the proposed changes, and the special educator must engage in surface acting to mask frustration towards colleagues for not wanting to implement the changes.

All four participants indicated that with the demand of their daily teaching schedules, meeting with students, talking to families, and being a support to their colleagues, most of the paperwork that is required as mentioned above happens outside of school hours. Mary and Sally indicated that they will often spend hours in the evenings or weekends working on paperwork that they cannot fit in during the day while they are with students. "I don't have a kid free lunch; so IF I'm eating lunch, it's at my desk while going, 'Okay, you need to sit down. Let me grab you this, you know, whatever the case is. And you know there is no prep time- it's because I'm giving up time to pull a student... so you know, all my IEPs are done at home'" Sally protests. Rose said that she too will take copious amounts of work home because it cannot get done during the school day due to the needs of her students throughout the day. Barb indicated that she would prefer to stay after work, often to 5 or 6 in the evening when her contracted hours end at 3:10, to avoid bringing work home. Special educators do get prep time during their day, however, all participants express that they have to use this time to meet with students, collaborate with general education colleagues, call parents or progress monitor students. The lack of time during the day to get the expected work done coupled with the mandated timelines to get the paperwork done is what creates the need for special educators to take work home. This takes a toll on their personal lives and impacts their times with families. To quote Rose directly, "if I didn't bring anything home, I'd never come home." The consistent need to engage with different stakeholders

(parents, admin, students) also comes with varying display rules. The affect and expected demeanor a teacher is required to use with administration is different compared to students. Changing affect to meet various display rules throughout the day also requires an emotional pull that impacts teachers.

### ***Personal Life Impacts***

One of the most challenging themes identified from all participants, and themes that impacted each participant in a different way, was the impact that their unique role as a special educator has impacted their personal lives. This unique role is now characterized by overwhelming stress due to workload, emotional demand and emotional dissonance (a commonplace for those who are required to follow display rules when they do not feel the emotions required) (Humphrey, Ashforth and Diefendorf, 2015) meaning that teachers are conflicted as well as suffering from how they should feel vs how they truly do, and burnout.

**Barb.** Barb is unique in this sample because she is in her last year of teaching. She states that although she can say she was stressed outside of work, she has been doing the job for so long that she's learned to not let it affect her. She also noted that over the years, it's nearly impossible to come home and leave it all at the door. She notes that one part that may contribute to her ability to create a clear boundary between work and home is her desire to never quit, learned in her youth. Barb said the hardest time she had while teaching were the years her daughter was in the same school. Barb had very strong ideas and opinions about her concern for the future of education and namely, the mental health of teachers. "I think I've gotten to the point, doing this for so long, it's just like whatever you know, it is what it is. It's my job. Like, I just have to do it. So I go in, and do it and go in and do it, to the best of my ability."

**Mary.** "It's very challenging on my relationships at home because I'm working all of the time, and nobody understands why I'm working all of the time." For Mary, working all the time

means evenings and weekends, which are far outside of her contracted hours. Her boyfriend and son must occupy themselves on Saturdays so she can go into her classroom and work.

Sometimes, her son comes in and plays with the classroom toys as she works on IEPs, lessons, and progress reports. She writes her IEPs in the evenings in front of the TV since that is something she can do while her family has down time. Mary expressed that she misses her old position; one at a daycare. Mainly because she could work with students all day to support and help them, but without the obligation of IEPs or other special education paperwork.

**Rose.** Rose has started therapy mostly due to stress from her position as a high school life skills teacher. Despite having other stressors, she cites her job as the most salient reason to begin mental health treatment. She cited that the stress can be manageable, but when it's continued for such a long time, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, it impacts her personal life and wellbeing. Rose stated that having stressful things happen outside of work only compounds her stress because of the level of stress that her job brings every day. Rose is stuck. "I definitely thought about [leaving education] many times. Every time I do, I've never really found anything...that I could financially replace it. It's a big financial thing for me."

**Sally.** "It's all falling on teachers." And that's a huge weight to bear. Sally explained a very personal impact from the stress and burnout she feels from her work in the classroom each day. She used to foster a young child with autism and had to end her time due to the stress and weight she endured from her job. Sally also considered doing many other positions other than teaching just to get out of the classroom, including moving into administration or leaving altogether. As of the time of this data analysis, Sally has left the field of education. She cited the lack of administrative support and being overworked and overstretched leading to burnout as the reason.

## **Summary**

In March of 2021, the National Education Association (NEA) conducted a national survey of educators considering leaving the field. At that time, 55% of educators stated they are considering leaving the field of education (Walker, 2022). Emotional labor may not be the bulk of it, however, it certainly contributes to the strain and emotional tug of war that occurs within the special educator's day. The teachers in this study expanded on their reports of engaging in surface acting and deep acting by describing what the occupation of a teacher actually looks like. They all have their own unique traits and strengths, and yet they all report that there are strong elements of emotional demand, lack of administrative support, and parental demand involved in their every day on the job. All of these with different display rule requirements and a certain expectation of hiding emotions. In venturing into this project, I truly felt I would hear more about interactions with students, however, that's not even half of the concern expressed by these professionals. Moreover, the piece about the students that was discussed was not the teacher's frustration with them, but more how their educational environment is having an impact on them and how that is leading to increased student behavior and increased student mental health concerns. With special education being closely tied to law, it isn't difficult for these things to quickly become the special educator's responsibility.

## **Chapter V: Conclusions**

### **Introduction**

This study sought to examine special education teachers' emotional labor via survey by answering questions about their emotional labor in the classroom with students. I aimed to answer the following questions: how much and what kind of emotional labor do special educators do? And what are the lived experiences of special education teachers as they relate to emotional labor, wellbeing, and retention? Results were surprising through both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The following chapter will discuss more in depth the surface acting connection from participants, then interpret data through the framework of emotional labor theory as it pertains to administrators, parents, students, and teacher turnover.

### **Surface Acting**

Emotional labor can have negative effects on teachers in the classroom. Research confirms that those engaging in surface acting can experience more emotional dissonance due to the constant monitoring of their own emotions and ensuring that the emotions expressed are the ones that are required for the situation (Waldbuesser, Rubinsky, & Titsworth, 2021). Humphrey, Ashforth and Diefendorf (2015) argue that "surface acting can cause emotional dissonance and a loss of one's authentic self" (p. 749). Further, engaging in surface acting can lead to negative consequences and increased stress (Humphrey, Ashforth, & Diefendorf, 2015). Further, Lee and Brotheridge (2010) posit that "the expression of unfeared emotions or the suppression of felt ones" can result in a state of emotional dissonance (p. 404). Deep acting is associated with less negative consequences as it requires a degree of summoning up the authentic emotions required in a certain situation, thus creating less emotional dissonance. Participants in this study all engaged in higher levels of surface acting while in the classroom compared to deep acting,

indicating higher emotional dissonance. However, could that be a function of their unique positions as it pertains to the demand from parents and requirements set forth by administrators?

Results indicated that participants engaged in much higher frequency and variety of emotional labor, which could mean that they do not have the time or opportunity to work towards deep acting. It could also mean that they do not know how, and perhaps additional training could support them. Throughout their days and whomever they are engaging with, participants are spending a very large amount of time monitoring their emotions and pivoting their emotional responses to meet the needs and expectations of others, as evidenced by the significantly related scores between surface acting and frequency ( $r = .356; p < .01$ ) and surface acting and variety ( $r = .321, p < .05$ ). In the interviews, participants cited greater concerns leading them away from the field of education aside from their interactions with students. Given their discussions of high stress levels due to work demands, lack of support from administrators and boundaryless parents, in addition to the display rule requirements, it is no surprise that special education teachers report high emotional dissonance on the job. Interestingly, however, it is not due to emotional labor strategies employed with their students. Rather, participants cite the administrators and parents in their environment as being the greatest requirement for display rules and engagement in emotional labor. These results have not been found widely in the previous literature on emotional labor in teaching (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006).

### **Expectations of Stakeholders**

Building rapport with stakeholders in the school takes up a significant part of the emotional labor of special education. Special education teachers establish personal relationships with their students as a function of understanding their unique needs; parents and their unique needs; as well as the concerns, and often demands, of their administration. Once these relationships are established, the needs and expectations of stakeholders become something that

is consistently monitored by special educators, and in turn shapes their emotional responses. Contrary to previous literature (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2020; Miller & Gkonou, 2017), this study via qualitative interviews, found that the relationships with parents and administration require the greatest amount of emotional regulation compared to students. Special education teachers in this study cite that their students require certain levels of emotional labor because of their unique needs; however, it is the compliance with paperwork and requirements to prove growth coming from administration, state, and federal mandates, as well as increased work demands that cause the most dissonance. Special education teachers noted in interviews that engagement with their administration and parents was occurring very frequently and having a negative impact on them.

Whereas the survey specifically asked about emotional regulation with students and confirmed previous research, the interviews featured participants discussing the various ways in which they engage in emotional labor with adult stakeholders rather than with students. Although emotional labor as it pertains to adults was not the explicit focus of this study at the onset, it was clear that the impact of administrative and parental engagement, display rules, and expectations created the most emotional dissonance and self-reported stress on the job in the qualitative interviews. The inclusion of qualitative data analysis (via interviews) added to the existing body of literature in that it allowed participants to elaborate on their survey responses inclusive of the dichotomy between survey results and interviews. Teaching is widely believed to be solely the engagement between teachers and students and the teachers' responsibility to grow students. What many do not see is the varying expectations within any given day, and display rule requirements that teachers must engage in with their colleagues, specifically their administrators, parents, paraprofessionals, colleagues, supervisors or directors of special education, and legal counsel. Administration has a different set of display rule requirements than colleagues do, and



so on. As we saw in the interview data, for each set of adults, teachers must identify what is expected of them and engage in the appropriate display rule for that given situation. These data were only able to be drawn out from qualitative data analysis, as the initial prompt on the survey was “A typical interaction I have with a *student* takes about \_\_\_\_ minutes.” So, the interviews added a dearth of data in addition to solely the survey.

### ***Administration***

Although prior research does indicate that administrative effectiveness has a statistically significant correlation to increased teacher satisfaction and a lesser level of teacher attrition (Husain, Miller, & Player, 2021), studies have not explicitly evaluated the direct impact of emotional labor with administration to teacher satisfaction/burnout, or likelihood to remain in the field. More so, however, participants in this study cite greater levels of emotional regulation from the turnover of their administration. This study’s survey instrument measured teacher emotional labor with students. However, through qualitative analysis, I found strong views about administrators and the emotional labor required. Participants spoke of their students as what is keeping them in the field, however, the emotional requirements from both parents and administrators were almost insurmountable. Rose discussed having to play multiple roles to teach students (e.g., a therapist, a nurse, a teacher). She also reported that the adults in her environment require the same varying level of need.

Administrators, as responsible for the evaluations for teachers, often leave teachers feeling as though they are walking on eggshells. For many teachers, they require support and help from their administration regarding student concerns that are very unique; not academically necessarily, but behaviorally, socially and/or emotionally. All colleagues, special or general education, are responsible for implementing the IEPs of special education students in the classroom. This creates a paradox wherein special education teachers become, in a way, the

responsible party to monitor the implementation of services by their colleagues. They can then also be responsible for providing corrective feedback or seek support from administration if their colleagues are not implementing the IEP as they should. This can understandably lead to more emotional management expended with colleagues and superiors.

Legal counsel is also another highly stressful interaction that special educators may sometimes have to engage with. Much of the fear for engagement with legal counsel stems from special education supervisors whose primary job is special education compliance, rather than day to day classroom operations. If a due process complaint or mediation request is lodged against the district, it is not atypical for special education teachers to have to defend the IEP that they have written in front of a lawyer, mediator, district administration, and the family. The display rules in these situations can be complex and the fear of having to be in this situation is ever present. Special education teachers most often came into the field to support students with great need, not to be in a courtroom. Pennsylvania is among the top ten states in the country with the highest rates of special education litigation (Andre, 2019). Special education is a unique field of caring and service work. The foundation thereof is helping to give students with unique needs the skills they need to be successful in the world, work on a team with families, and ensure growth in skill from year to year. This study found that participants reported a connection to support students' growth as standard, but the pressures reported from administration to meet deadlines and follow compliance standards to be unnecessary. As Barb stated, "if we make a mistake in an IEP, we're told... because we have this document we have to follow."

Administration in schools is critical to maintaining quality special educators. As this study found, administrative support is the most reported reason by participants via interviews (9.6% of codes) for special education teacher emotional dissonance and has the greatest impact on their lived experience in their schools. One component of this level of support that was

reported as lacking from participants was the removal of duty-free prep time. Administrators cannot take away more time and expect service delivery to students to go unchanged. Prep periods are intended to exist despite staff turnover and understaffing, and as participants cite, this is not always the case with prep time being used for other duties or continued work with their unique students. Establishing respect with special education teachers' regular attendance in meetings, offering support in the classroom, and overall follow through could create less surface acting on behalf of the special educators by making them feel as though it is appropriate to be their authentic selves in the presence of their administration. If the atmosphere in a school is such that teachers feel as though they do not have to hide their emotions from their administrators, that element of emotional dissonance leading to emotional exhaustion can be eliminated. There are some display rules educators will never escape, and some that we can work to eliminate.

### *Parents*

In interviews, teachers reported exerting emotional regulation with parents as well. Like administrators, parents come with their own set of expectations and care. Parents of special education students need to be informed about their child, have their concerns heard (even if they are unreasonable or unclear), and be given support for their child, both in the school building and outside. However, participants report an unease with some parents when their demands are not appropriate. Mary even cited she feels that she could lose her teaching license if the complaints from parents are severe enough. Laskey (2002) states that it can take only a very small incident between a teacher and parent to "create the conditions so that a parent is no longer willing to communicate with a teacher or school principal" (p. 844). Recent developments in education reform cite that education is becoming more a service-industry, mandating that teachers are responsive to the needs and wants of the consumers (e.g., parents and students) (Hargreaves, 1998a; Hargreaves, 2003; Tsang, 2011). One result of this is including parents and students as

more active and integral members of the IEP process. When parents are an integral part of an IEP team this creates an overwhelming need for special educators to constantly monitor their affect, and change affects based on the display rule requirements of parents. As stated above, the constant monitoring and engagement in surface acting (assuming participants are not summoning up true emotions when dealing with parents) can lead to great emotional dissonance. Barb states that some parents will “come after you.” There has not been much research on parent-teacher interactions, especially as it pertains to emotional labor in special education (Hargreaves, 1998; Laskey, 2000).

Participants also attest that they are expected to engage in very emotional relationships with students’ families, with little boundaries, and remain professional and objective. Tsang (2011) cites this happening with students, where teachers develop close relationships to students that may blur professional lines, however, again, this study found otherwise. While survey results asked special educators about their experiences with students, in interviews, it is not the lines with students participants reported as blurred, but those with parents and often, initiated by parents. This proves challenging when parents’ expectations about their child’s outcomes are not realistic or parents expect unrealistic skill acquisition. Mary said she must “convince” her parents of things and often, she is accused of things when the student is not obtaining skills as quickly as the parents suggest. Mary also posits that despite the COVID-19 pandemic and two years of atypical schooling for students, parents often expect no disruption to growth.

Despite the conflict that can occur between parents and teachers, a special educator continues to have the distinct responsibility for being the go-to person for parents. This additional stakeholder group comes with its own needs. Many parents are easy to work with, requiring fewer display rules and affective monitoring. However, there are those who come with great demands that the public school system must comply with as they are part of their child’s

IEP team. The lines can become blurred between the professional, objective relationship with parents and the lack of boundaries and increased emotional labor required when interacting with them.

### *Students*

Special education teachers in this study engage in surface acting (mean 3.61) at a greater rate than deep acting (mean 3.12). Again, surface acting requires faking emotions or displaying emotions that are not truly felt creating a representation of a special education teacher that is not a true portrayal of who they are or what their true emotions are. Despite semi-structured interview findings, that emotional labor with students is not a contributing factor to the burnout discussed, teachers surveyed report relatively high amounts of surface acting with students. The literature supports higher levels of surface acting results in emotional dissonance. Although in interviews the teachers in this study report higher levels of stress due to administration and parents, the quantitative survey results indicate that the frequency of surface acting with students does also have a statistically significant relationship ( $r = .356, p < .01$ ) to the work they do daily. The qualitative examination in this study was critical because without that, it could be surmised that the majority of emotional labor is enacted with students; a finding that is supported by most prior literature on emotional labor. However, that is not all that I found.

Qualitative results specific to students also indicated that sometimes surface acting was not to purposefully hide emotions, but to provide instruction and modeling. Both Barb and Mary discussed how they use their emotions as models for their students. For example, Mary stated “it’s important for kids to know that adults have hard days too” as she uses days when she is not her normally bubbly self to model to her students how to persevere through a grumpy mood. Essentially, she is teaching her students that despite not being 100% yourself, you still have to move forward, get the job done, and be polite. Because special education teachers report using

emotional labor as an instructional model, it is difficult to ascertain the survey results as perhaps being an indicator of true surface acting. Prior literature has noted the negative aspects of emotional labor in the classroom (Brotheridge, 2006; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Hargreaves, 1998a; Hochschild 1979), however, research has also shown that emotional labor can contribute to teachers' job satisfaction and effectiveness (Tsang, 2011). This could be because of the aforementioned modeling that is going on as emotional labor. When emotional regulation is used as a teaching strategy, the negative emotional dissonance that may occur could be outweighed by the positive instructional strategy that emerges. This may be why this study found the impact emotional labor expended by teachers created greater emotional dissonance with administrators and parents when compared to students. In fact, survey results indicate that variety of emotional labor is higher than intensity, which could be an indicator of special education teachers engaging in different kinds of emotional labor as instructional, rather than very intense emotional labor due to concealing or faking their emotions. Indeed, recent literature about emotional labor in education is relevant to this interpretation.

### **Emotion Work vs Emotional Labor**

The literature differs on the comparison between emotion work and emotional labor. In her 1979 article, Hochschild defines emotion work, a term she coined, as "the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling. To 'work on' an emotion or feeling is...the same as 'to manage' an emotion to do 'deep acting'" (p. 561). Here, Hochschild creates a synonymous connection between deep acting, where one is summoning up true emotions when appropriate, rather than faking emotions. She further states that unlike surface acting, emotion work (deep acting) is not about suppressing emotions, but evoking them, bringing about a more positive impact felt by the engager, whereas surface acting has a much more negative connotation as "a state of dissonance may occur as a result of either the expression of unfelt

emotions or the suppression of felt ones” (Lee & Brotheridge, 2011, p. 404). Conversely, emotion work also has a different interpretation in the literature. Tolich (1993) indicates that new terms should be used to define the differences between emotion work and emotional labor. They suggest defining emotion work as autonomous emotion regulation and emotional labor as regulated emotion regulation. The key difference is that emotion work does not require “external controls” (p. 1315) and regulated emotion regulation does.

Bodenheimer and Shuster (2019) suggest “carrying out caring aspects of the teaching role, while suppressing emotional reactions, as appropriate, requires the use of extensive emotional labor and impression regulation to negotiate the professional demands of the day-to-day job of teaching” (p. 67). Data in this study’s interviews do not necessarily support this notion, however. In fact, participants reported that using their emotional labor instructionally is more like emotional work rather than labor. The emotions displayed with students is a function of the rapport teachers have with them. Thus, because teachers spend so much time with students in their daily roles, the effort required to engage in surface acting is less, explaining why frequency and surface acting (.356\*\*) were statistically significant, but surface acting and intensity (.064) were not. The intensity of surface acting with students is not as noteworthy as how often teachers reported needing to engage in surface acting with the adults in their environment, including learning expectations of those administrators or parents that are new to them. The emotional regulation required to students is something that often cannot be unchanged. As discussed, special education teachers must either hide their emotions in front of their students because it is appropriate to do so or in an effort to model certain behaviors or expected affects.

Tolich (1993) also cites that the motivation for the emotional labor or emotion work is key to understanding the impact on workers. For teachers, this motivation can be vast, as

evidenced by participants' interview answers (e.g., to teach students through modeling, to hide their own extreme emotions or as a result of supervisor/principal expectation). This makes sense when considering the qualitative data in this study. Teachers reported very little dissonance when engaging in emotional labor with students themselves because they report that students are what is keeping them in the field of education (and for some, financial reasons, also). This can also explain why teachers use the emotional labor to meet display rule requirements with students, but only of a certain kind and intensity: because the motivation is not to appease a principal or supervisor, but to support and educate students. The motivation is not the same with parents and administrators, which can explain the higher reported emotional dissonance when engaging with administration and parents.

Humphrey, Ashforth and Diendorff (2015) cite that higher engagement in surface acting produces a larger dissociation from yourself and your own emotions. It is also an emotional drag to have to compartmentalize all the different role requirements of a special educator's job. Aside from display rules, continuously defending decisions, data, and having to prove the growth of students can be a struggle. The struggle here is more closely tied to Tolich's (1993) interpretation of regulated emotional regulation. Participants in this study report that there is pressure coming from administration and parents to do a job that they are very qualified to do. They are required to engage in emotional labor with all stakeholders and that external mediator is what is motivating their emotional labor. Mary states that even now, two years after the COVID-19 shut down, administration is requiring that teachers make up for any skill loss as soon as possible. She states, "last year it was 'take your time' and now this year it's 'guys, we gotta go, get [your] pencils out.'" Subconsciously this creates a display rule for teachers to engage in with their administration and families. District administrators promise that skill gaps will close, parents expect that gains will be made, and teachers are responsible to make it happen.



## **Limitations**

One clear limitation to this study was the survey tool's orientation towards students when compared to the qualitative interview results. Although the survey was filled out specifically to evaluate the surface acting or deep acting when working with students, the main complaints and impacts of emotional labor were described during interviews as interactions with adults in their environment. If the survey had been directed to be specific to different stakeholders that special educators engage with, the data may have had a very different result. It is also feasible that assessing emotional labor with students or other stakeholders in a larger sample or in different regions may also yield varying results. It is also difficult to ascertain what impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on teachers' responses, being that 3.6% of codes were in reference to the pandemic and its impact. One last limitation was the first interview question, "Do you feel like you have to hide your true emotions when in the classroom with students." It is unclear if the way this question is worded may have elicited a surface acting response. It would have been useful to have included questions to elicit participants to describe deep acting strategies, in addition.

## **Future research**

Special education is just that; special. It is unique, individualized, and requires planning, evaluation, and adjustments that are time intensive and unique for each student. Because of the variety and quality of emotional labor required depending on the stakeholder, the emotional labor requirement can be alienating, isolating, and exploitative of special education teachers. This has not been explicitly studied in education aside from being a possible consequence of engaging in emotional labor (e.g., Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Tsang, 2011).

There are a few ways this research might expand emotional labor research in special education teachers. The first would be to conduct surveys with groups of special education

teachers with questions specific to different stakeholder groups, focusing on adults rather than students. It would be fascinating to see the differences in survey data when filled out about principals, parents, and/or colleagues. This could also provide more information on the way special education teachers adjust their affect based on different groups of people. It would be beneficial to continue the examination into the lived experiences of special education teachers through ethnographic research (Tolich, 1993). With all participants citing administrative support as the highest rated engagement in emotional labor due to the various emotional labor required, it would be useful to further examine that through studies of specific special education teachers and their interactions with administration over time. Included in the phenomenon of teacher turnover, special education teachers have a higher turnover rate when compared to their general education colleagues (Gilmour & Wheby, 2019). This phenomenon extends to administrator turnover, with national data indicating that 20% of principals who are in public school leave their positions each year (Husain, Miller, & Player, 2021). Because of this, special education teachers are required to meet, get to know, and learn about the new administration.

In general, previous research has espoused that increased levels of surface acting result in higher levels of burnout and stress by those engaging in it (Auger & Formentin, 2021; Grandey, Rupp & Brice, 2015; Hargreaves, 2000; Hargreaves, 2001; Hirschfeld, 1983; Tiwari, Saraff & Nair, 2020). However, none, including this study, has explicitly studied what that burnout looks like, feels like, and what the implications of burnout are for special education teachers. Some authors have explored the burnout as a result of emotional labor in teaching (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2020, Brotheridge & Grandy, 2002). Burnout has been included in emotional labor literature including the development of the Emotional Labor Scale (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003), however burnout has not been studied with special educators or using a mixed-methodology. With consequences of managing one's emotions via emotional labor

strategies consisting of (but not limited to) emotional dissonance, mental and physical health, and authenticity of emotional displays (Brotheridge, 2006), it is important to consider the long-term repercussions of emotional regulation. As indicated in this paper, the emotional requirements of teachers are a reason for teachers leaving the field, as Sally indicated. Although qualitative interviews in this study revealed there were elements of burnout reported, future research can focus on this as a way to better understand what burnout looks like for special education teachers, as a way to better understand how to retain quality teachers.

### **Final Conclusions**

Emotional regulation via emotional labor strategies was shown in this study to be more challenging for special educators when working with administration and parents, as compared to students. For Sally, so challenging that she has already moved on from the field altogether. With teacher shortages ongoing for years now, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to understand why our special educators are leaving the field, and work to retain them. Even though special educators do expend emotional regulation with their students, participants did not cite students as the biggest contributor to their reported stress, emotional exhaustion, and reported burnout (7% reported on qualitative interviews). Better understanding the display rules of parents and administrators and working with special educators on minimizing emotional dissonance and feelings of burnout could help retain our caring special educators.

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## Appendix A

### Informed Consent Form

**Investigator(s):** Erika M. Thomas, M.A., BCBA, Dr. David Backer

**Key Information:** My consent is being sought for a research study. I understand my participation is voluntary and I am under no obligation to participate. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the effects of emotional labor on special education teachers. Emotional labor is essentially that "service with a smile" mentality that many customer service reps, flight attendants etc. have to exhibit to customers, despite how they are truly feeling. These emotional labor strategies (surface acting/deep acting) can have a significant impact on individuals' emotional exhaustion, burnout and mental health. The time expected for my participation is approximately 20 minutes for a survey and a one-time interview that will last no longer than 1 hour). The researcher is asking me to fill out a survey about the emotional labor specific to my job and also to discuss my responses to that survey by answering a few questions specific to me and my experiences. The potential risks associated with this study could be discomfort answering questions and/or minimum time away to participate in the interview. The potential benefits of the study are an increased understanding of the day to day lived experiences of special education teachers' burnout and turnover risk. The only alternative to this study is not to participate. Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by Jane Doe as part of their Dissertation. This project aims to understand how graduate students perceive the process for completing the EDA 591 Final Project. Your participation will take about 60 minutes to take a questionnaire and complete an interview. There is a minimal risk that Participants may be concerned they will be graded based on their answers to the survey. Participants may feel slight discomfort or anxiety while answering the questions. All responses will be gathered through an electronic database that does not record email addresses. Responses to the survey will not be viewed by the professor until after grades have been completed. There are no benefits to you as a participant. Suggestions made by the participants may lead to improvements in the course design and expectations and can be integrated when the course is offered in fall 2020. The research project is being done by Erika M. Thomas, M.A., BCBA as part of her dissertation. If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask Erika M. Thomas any questions to help you understand this study. If you don't want to be a part of this study, it won't affect anything in regards to your employment. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

1. **What is the purpose of this study?**
  - This project aims to understand the implications of emotional labor on special education teachers as it relates to their burnout mental health and likelihood to remain in the field.
2. **If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:**
  - Answer a survey (no longer than 20 minutes)
  - Participate in an interview (no longer than 60 minutes)
  - In total, this study will take no longer than 90 minutes of your time

3. **Are there any experimental medical treatments?**
  - No
4. **Is there any risk to me?**
  - Discomfort answering questions
  - Minimum time away to participate in the structured interview
  - If you become upset and wish to speak with someone, you may speak with Erika Thomas
  - If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time.
5. **Is there any benefit to me?**
  - Benefits to you may include: There are no benefits to the participant.
  - Other benefits may include: An increased understanding of the day to day lived experiences of special education teachers' burnout and turnover risk.
6. **How will you protect my privacy?**
  - Your records will be private. Only Erika Thomas, her dissertation chair, Dr. David Backer and the IRB will have access to your name and responses.
  - Your name will **not** be used in any reports.
  - Records will be stored:
    - In a locked cabinet in Erika Thomas's office, which also always remains locked when she is not present
    - Password Protected File/Computer
  - Survey responses are collected using an anonymous survey media, Qualtrics. All responses will also be coded. No identifying demographic information will be collected. The names of participants will not be used for the dissertation or any corresponding publications or presentations.
  - Records will be destroyed three years after study completion
7. **Do I get paid to take part in this study?**
  - No
8. **Who do I contact in case of research related injury?**
  - For any questions with this study, contact:
    - **Primary Investigator:** Erika Thomas at 609-575-0420 or Et921916@wcupa.edu
    - **Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. David Backer at 203-917-7416 or mstaulters@wcupa.edu
9. **What will you do with my Identifiable Information?**
  - Your information will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the Office for Research and Sponsored Programs at 610-436-3557.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject/Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B

### IRB Approval

Date: 3-15-2022

**IRB #:** IRB-FY2022-63

**Title:** The effects of emotional labor on special education teachers and their likelihood to remain in the field

**Creation Date:** 9-14-2021

**End Date:**

**Status:** Approved

**Principal Investigator:** Erika Thomas

**Review Board:** West Chester University Institutional Review Board

**Sponsor:**

#### Study History

<b>Submission Type</b>	Initial	<b>Review Type</b>	Expedited	<b>Decision</b>	<span style="color: #800000;">Approved</span>
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#### Key Study Contacts

<b>Member</b>	David Backer	<b>Role</b>	Co-Principal Investigator	<b>Contact</b>	DBACKER@wcupa.edu
<b>Member</b>	Erika Thomas	<b>Role</b>	Principal Investigator	<b>Contact</b>	et921916@wcupa.edu
<b>Member</b>	Erika Thomas	<b>Role</b>	Primary Contact	<b>Contact</b>	et921916@wcupa.edu



## Appendix C

### Emotional Labour Scale

A typical interaction I have with a [student] takes about \_\_\_\_\_ minutes.

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

On an average day at work, how frequently do you:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Display specific emotions required by your job. (FREQUENCY)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Adopt certain emotions as part of your job. (FREQUENCY)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Express intense emotions. (INTENSITY)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Express particular emotions needed for your job. (FREQUENCY)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Use a wide variety of emotions in dealing with people. (VARIETY)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Resist expressing my true feelings. (SURFACE ACTING)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Pretend to have emotions that I don't really feel. (SURFACE ACTING)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Display many different emotions when interacting with others. (VARIETY)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display toward others.  
(DEEP ACTING)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Show some strong emotions. (INTENSITY)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Express many different emotions when dealing with people. (VARIETY)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Hide my true feelings about a situation. (SURFACE ACTING)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Try to actually experience the emotions that I must show. (DEEP ACTING)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Really try to feel the emotions I have to show as part of my job. (DEEP ACTING)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Display many different kinds of emotions. (VARIETY)

## **Appendix D**

### Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Do you feel like you have to hide your true emotions when in the classroom with students? If so, can you provide some examples?
2. Does this impact any part of your personal life (e.g., increased fatigue, increased burnout)?
3. Do you find that you take work home a lot related specifically to your special education duties?
4. How does that also impact your mental health?
5. Are you likely to leave the field of Education?
6. What contributes to feelings of wanting to leave?