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Behavior Specialist Experiences of Roles and Responsibilites in Inclusive Trauma Informed Schools

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BEHAVIOR SPECIALIST EXPERIENCES OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITES IN INCLUSIVE TRAUMA-INFORMED SCHOOLS

by

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ABSTRACT

With the implementation of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Act (SB-7026) and the introduction of the Trauma Informed Schools Act of 2019 (H.R. 4146), the need for well-prepared behavior specialists is critical as well as, difficult in inclusive public school settings. Improving structures within the trauma-informed schools model that address challenges that individuals in these roles face will require a better understanding of the ideal day-to-day roles and responsibilities that behavior specialist have. Specifically, their roles need to be understood by school-based administrators who will support them. The purpose of this qualitative investigation was to explore how five female behavior specialists, who work with students that identify with emotional/behavioral disabilities (E/BD) in inclusive trauma informed middle school settings, defined, and experienced their roles. This dissertation sheds light on the actual contextual factors at the middle school level that shape their work regarding how they spend their time. Participant selection was done with purposeful, criterion sampling. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews and field observations. Findings consisted of behavior specialists identifying their primary roles as promoting students' behavioral growth as well as, supporting teachers in the academic environment. They also described experiencing dissonance between their ideal roles and their actual daily work. Emergent responsibilities unrelated to their roles accounted for a substantial amount of effort and time. Behavior specialist also experience challenges such as a lack of collaboration with general education teachers and being assigned extra-unrelated responsibilities, resulting in participants experiencing isolation and a feeling of not being valued. Implications for improving the overall quality of special educator's workforce are noted.

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Brad, and our four brilliant fortuitous children, Jada, Laila, Nia, and Noah. Each of you have pushed me towards excellence, without your encouragement and support I would not be where I am today. Thank you, your love means the world to me. Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all behavior specialist who struggle daily with fulfilling multi-faceted roles and responsibilities in inclusive educational settings.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Child and adolescent mental health disorders are a major social and public health problem in the United States, as is evidenced by the many mass school shootings and suicide attempts of adolescent students. Approximately 80% of United States children and adolescents have experienced childhood trauma in the form of victimization (Turner, Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2010). Consequently, many children and adolescents who have been exposed to severe trauma struggle in school, displaying emotional and behavioral difficulties that may include (a) physical aggression, (b) engagement in sexually risky behavior, and/or (c) substance use. According to the Florida Department of Children and Families (2017), one in five youth have a diagnosable mental health disorder, which may contribute to severe lifetime impairment. Nevertheless, up to 70% of youth with mental health disorders do not receive mental health services with minorities and lower socioeconomic youths disproportionately not receiving treatment (Merikangas, He, Burstein, Swanson, Avenevoli, Cui, Benjet, Georgiades, & Swendsen, 2010). Untreated mental health disorders can lead to severe disabilities, deprivation of educational and employment opportunities, and in some cases, death. For those reasons, schools are an important point of contact for prevention, identification, and treatment of trauma that result in mental health issues and disorders. With the recent acts of school violence across the country, schools have become the focus for mental health and behavioral interventions because of their availability and accessibility to students. As major societal institutions, schools provide an organizational structure that reaches more children with more continuity than primary healthcare or any other child and family service setting (Strolin-Goltzman, 2010).

Childhood trauma exposure is highly pervasive and a significant public health issue associated with physical and psychological consequences across a person's life span (Fondren, Lawson, Speidel, McDonnell, & Valentino 2020). Trauma exposure for adolescents and children is associated with a range of other psychological consequences, with up to 20% of trauma exposed youth displaying behavioral problems that may interfere with functioning in other cognitive, socioemotional, and academic domains (Hardaway, Larkby, & Cornelius, 2014). Childhood trauma exposure disrupts academic functioning and negatively predicts educational achievement (e.g., Hardaway et al., 2014). Perfect, Turley, Carlson, Yohanna, and Saint Gilles (2016) concluded that children exposed to trauma tend to have impairments in cognitive, socioemotional, and academic domains such as grade retention and lower academic grades, in comparison with their peers without trauma histories. Romano, Babchishin, Marquis, & Frechette (2015) had similar findings, reporting that children with traumatic histories often experience impairments in both their academic performance (e.g., special education and or grade retention) and mental well-being. In addition, students with traumatic histories are often rated by their teachers as demonstrating more externalizing behaviors such as aggression, hyperactivity, and defiance and more internalizing behaviors such as sadness, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem than students who have not been exposed to trauma (Perfect et al., 2016). Further, children affected by trauma are more likely to display problematic behavior that lead to more school suspensions and referrals for disciplinary action within their schools setting (Fantazzo, Perlman, & Dobbins, 2011).

Current federal policy for the treatment of behavioral issues in the classroom is influenced by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (Plumb, Bush, & Kersevich, 2016) and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004

(IDEA). Together, these pieces of legislation mandate teachers in public education to be highly qualified and use evidence-based practices to increase academic achievement and mainstreaming of students with disabilities (Yell, Shriner, & Katsivannis, 2006). Collectively, both are intended to provide greater school accountability for providing a free and appropriate public education to all students regardless of disability status or behavioral needs. As an initial attempt to support students, and as a predecessor to the trauma- informed schools model, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) was added to the 1997 amended version of IDEA to proactively address behavioral needs and emotional disabilities of students (Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP], 2015). In October of 2013, a new five-year funding cycle for PBIS began, that included competitive grant money for, among other things, training all faculty and staff members in schools in the implementation of PBIS (OSEP, 2015). While PBIS is a promising reward-based program, district and school officials argued that this intervention lacked critical components: addressing the root cause of extreme and erratic classroom behaviors as well as, the impact that trauma may have on the brain.

On February 14, 2018, a horrific act of violence carried out by a former student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School further validated the need for trauma-sensitive practices and reform in public school settings. As a result, Florida legislators passed the Marjory Stoneman Public Safety Act (SB-7026) and introduced the Trauma- Informed Schools Act of 2019 (H.R. 4146); both items include extensive training school wide in recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into school curriculums, policies, procedures, and practices across all secondary schools in the state of Florida. As school personnel increase their understanding of trauma exposure and use universal screening to identify the needs of trauma-exposed students, the movement toward trauma informed service

delivery in schools will continue to be a focal point for district and school-based leadership. Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, and Santos (2016) offered an implementation blueprint based on guidelines provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2018) that outlines general best practices regarding content knowledge, implementation features, and action planning for trauma informed service delivery in schools. The blueprint is based on a multi-tiered service delivery framework that is familiar to schools and can be used to weave targeted, data-driven, trauma informed services into the existing service delivery model. Schools using this whole-school approach of trauma-responsive practices elevate the voices of all members of the school community and promote healthy relationships and resilience in children (Blitz, Yull, & Clauhs, 2016). SAMHSA identified trauma informed organizations as those that realize the impact of trauma; recognize the signs of trauma; respond by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and seek to actively resist re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2018). SAMHSA also identified six key principles of a trauma informed approach to school: "safety, trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and cultural, historical, and gender issues" (SAMHSA, 2018, p. 10).

To assist schools with meeting the legislative and federal mandates outlined within SB-7026 and H.R. 4126, school districts implemented the role of behavior specialist as a part of their model for trauma-informed schools implementation in many of their secondary school settings. Within this model, administration has charged behavior specialists with the task of primarily providing behavioral support to students with disabilities in K–12 settings. Ideally, behavior specialists in the district of study are responsible for: (a) assisting Exceptional Student Education

(ESE) teachers and acting as a classroom facilitator to assess best learning practices for teachers to use in the classroom, (b) monitoring functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention programs, (c) conducting one-on-one social skills lessons with ESE students, (d) processing ESE discipline referrals and assist with Professional Learning Community (PLC) compliance issues, (e) maintaining contact with teachers and parents in conjunction with the administrative team through teacher/parent conferences and Individualized Education Parent (IEP) team meetings, and (f) determining the appropriate methods to use in resolving student behavior problems (Sporleder & Forbes, 2019). Based on legislation passed within the last two years, the school-based role of behavior specialist is a relatively recent construct. Additionally, there is no written policy at the state level or federal level about the role of behavior specialist despite its adoption across districts throughout the state of Florida.

Under the current model of trauma-informed schools and the Marjory Stoneman Public Safety Act of 2019, it is necessary for school administration to have a better understanding of the actual roles and responsibilities behavior specialists have so they can adequately provide behavioral interventions, which take place inclusively for students with the disability classification of Emotional Behavioral Disorder (E/BD) (Shoulders & Krei, 2016). While the district of study has defined responsibilities of behavior specialists, federal and state legislation does not define their role, which may lead to role dissonance in their ideal role and responsibilities compared to their actual roles and responsibilities across school settings. Thus, the researcher in this study is seeking to explore how five behavior specialists in inclusive trauma informed middle schools defined and experienced their roles.

Statement of the Problem

A student with emotional/behavioral disability (E/BD), as defined by the Florida State Board of Education Rule 6A-6.03016, F.A.C., "has persistent (is not sufficiently responsive to implemented evidence based interventions) and consistent emotional or behavioral responses that adversely affect performance in the educational environment that cannot be attributed to age, culture, gender, or ethnicity" (Florida Department of Education, 2009). According to IDEA sec.300 (c)(4), emotional disturbance is defined as "a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

1. an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factor,
2. an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers,
3. inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstance,
4. a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, and
5. a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (IDEA, 2017).

E/BD is not a psychiatric or clinical diagnosis and is widely used in education settings to provide services required under IDEA legislation (Kauffman & Landrum, 2009). While the direct cause of E/BD is not clearly defined, some suggest that it is linked to childhood trauma (McIntyre, Simon, Petrovic, Chafouleas, & Overstreet, 2016) or neuropsychological disorders (Mattison, 2015). As the result of the aforementioned behaviors and potential psychological issues, students with E/BD spend more time outside the general education classroom than their non-disabled peers (Kauffman & Badar, 2013).

As a resource for inclusive trauma-informed schools that have high populations of students diagnosed with E/BD, behavior specialists have been added as an integral resource knowledgeable in interventions that support students' behavioral and academic success (Sporleder & Forbes, 2019). However, cultivating and retaining skilled special educators such as behavioral specialists to serve students with E/BD in inclusive settings have been persistently challenging because of the variation in job roles and responsibilities across schools within the district of study, resulting in role dissonance between what behavior specialists actually do versus what they are expected to at their school sites (Bettini, Wang, Cumming, Kimerling, & Schutz, 2019). Like many other professionals in exceptional education, behavioral specialists report experiencing challenging working conditions in inclusive settings for students with E/BD (Bettini, Cumming, Merrill, Brunsting, & Liaupsin, 2016). Second, behavior specialists serving this population tend to experience more stress (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012) and more burned out (Embich, 2001) because of role overload (too many responsibilities), curricular demands, lack of administrative support, and challenging student behaviors. Brunsting, Sreckovic, and Lane (2014) found that special educators working with students diagnosed with E/BD are experiencing higher burnout at crisis proportions than their peers in general education. As a result, special educators, in their position as behavior specialists, tend to leave teaching more rapidly than their general education peers (Gilmour, 2017). Collectively, these studies suggest that educational systems are currently struggling to recruit, educate, and retain special educators for the role of behavior specialists capable of serving students with E/BD effectively (Conroy, Alter, Boyd, & Bettini, 2014). To develop behavior specialists within the K–12 public school workforce with the capacity to serve students with E/BD effectively in inclusive settings, administration must ensure that behavior specialists have the knowledge, skills, and support to enact effective behavioral

practices within schools' political and social structures (Youngs, Frank, Thum, & Low, 2012). Furthermore, to retain and sustain competent behavior specialists, school systems must provide the necessary conditions (e.g., clear and consistent roles and responsibilities, time for planning, instructional and behavioral resources, collegial support) that are salient to achieving student success (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010). Accomplishing this task will first require a shared understanding of behavior specialist roles and a shared concept of what behavior specialists should be prepared and supported to do (Brownell et al., 2010). However, the research to date documenting the nature of behavior specialist roles and responsibilities in secondary trauma-informed inclusive school settings that service students with E/BD is minimal. Therefore, there is a need to address this gap, specifically by providing research that explores their daily roles and responsibilities as behavior specialists experience them. Without understanding their true daily roles and responsibilities, teacher educators and leaders may not be equipped to adequately provide the necessary resources and support required under SB-7026 to meet the mental and behavioral needs of students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of behavior school specialists working in inclusive trauma-informed schools to service students diagnosed with E/BD. More specifically, the researcher sought to provide a rich and descriptive voice for behavior specialists who share the phenomenon of working with students diagnosed with E/BD in inclusive settings that implement trauma-informed service delivery models by identifying their thoughts, feelings, and experiences as they relate to their actual roles and responsibilities (Creswell, 2013). Examining and clarifying behavioral specialist perceptions of their roles and responsibilities working in this type of setting provides an opportunity to better

inform school administrators on how to utilize this resource effectively to improve academic and behavioral outcomes for students and teachers.

Research Question

This research study was guided by two questions: (a) How do behavior specialists who work with students that identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed school settings define their roles and responsibilities?; and (b) How do behavior specialists experience their roles and responsibilities servicing students that identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed middle school settings?

Research Design

A qualitative method (Creswell, 2018) was employed in the collection of data to better understand the phenomenon of the behavior specialist. Data were gathered through use of semi-structured interviews and field observations. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Central Florida and the school district involved, candidates that met the criteria established were recruited. The study utilized a descriptive phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2018; van Manen, 1990) to address the research questions. Van Manen (1990) described descriptive phenomenology research as "oriented toward lived experience" and "interpreting the text of life" (p. 4). Phenomenology examines the phenomena as it is perceived; such that "the reality of a concept or object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of the individual" (Creswell, 2018). This methodology is grounded in a central concept that includes the researcher analyzing data by omitting preconceived ideas to understand the phenomenon through an unbiased perspective, thus allowing the meaning of the identified phenomenon to emerge using only the perspective of the study participants (Creswell, 2018). The lived experience of the behavior specialists will be the

phenomenon studied; the data reported were used to identify and define their role in inclusive middle school settings. Furthermore, in this phenomenological study, the researcher reported the data collected and analyzed the data through "horizonalization" and by establishing "clusters of meaning" from significant statements, sentences, or quotes gathered from interviews and field observations that have led into themes (Moustakas, 1995).

This study used a purposive, criterion sampling method to select behavior specialists who serve in inclusive middle school settings in a large urban school district (Creswell, 2018). Criteria for the behavior specialist participants include (a) current employee at an inclusive middle school in an urban school district, (b) certification in Exceptional Student Education to include at least a bachelors' degree in education, and (c) minimum of one year of experience working at their school site in the behavior specialist's role. These criteria were established to ensure that all participants selected had experience of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2018).

Operational Definitions

Behavior Specialist – School-based behavioral trained staff member who provides consultation and direct coaching interventions to students with disabilities based on behavioral difficulties to include students who identify with E/BD. (Cappella, Jackson, Bilal, Hamre, & Soule, 2011).

Descriptive Phenomenology – Descriptive phenomenology calls for exploration of phenomena through direct interaction between the researcher and the objects of study . . . it calls upon investigators to set aside preconceptions through the procedures involved in bracketing . . . . The lived experience itself, as described by participants, is used to provide universal description of the phenomenon (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 20). Further, descriptive phenomenology

studies provide a universal representation of phenomena (as opposed to contextual representations, as may be the case with interpretive phenomenological study, and findings seek to illuminate gaps in previous research on phenomena by "presenting a theoretical model representing the essential structures of phenomenon under study" (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 177).

Emotional Behavior Disability (E/BD) – a student with an emotional/behavioral disability "has persistent (is not sufficiently responsive to implemented evidence based interventions) and consistent emotional or behavioral responses that adversely affect performance in the educational environment that cannot be attributed to age, culture, gender, or ethnicity" (FDOE, 2019).

Epoch – a phase in which the researcher illuminates or clarifies preconception or bias (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010).

Exceptional Education Student – "refers to students who have been evaluated and duly classified with exceptionality and are receiving the appropriate special education services" (Conroy, Conroy, Katsiyannis, & Yell, 2013, pg. 689).

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) – consists of the provision of regular or special services designed to meet the student's individual educational needs as adequately as the needs of nondisabled students are met (FDOE, 2019).

Individual Education Program (IEP) – refers to a legal document mandated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that serves as a *written statement of the educational program designed to meet a child's individual educational needs,* as well as the scope of services and projected duration section (SEC 602 14 IDEA).

Inclusion – refers to the provision of services to students with varying degrees of disabilities in the general education classroom with appropriate special education support (Lamport, Ward, & Harvey, 2012). Inclusion allows students with disabilities to learn alongside their same-age peers with access to the same educational experience and curriculum as their peers.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – indicates the maximum extent appropriate to which children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled (IDEA, 2004).

Lived Experiences – a collection of human phenomena experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1995).

Phenomenology – a methodology that uses research methods such as interviews, participant observation (examination of and discussion with study participants while they are involved in the 'experience'), protocol writing (self-reported writing or journaling by study participants), artifact analysis, and bracketing to understand the essence/s of the experience being examined, toward obtaining a more holistic view or understanding of the experience itself (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Key strengths of phenomenological research include rich, deep understanding of the experience or phenomenon under investigation because of the multiple methods used to gather data on that experience (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

Responsibilities – tasks through which individuals seek to fulfill their role (Parker, 2007).

Roles – a set of expectations and obligations that determine behavioral responses which are considered appropriate and are inherent in a position (Parker, 2007).

Organizational Role Theory – focuses on the roles related to the achievement of organizational goals; these roles are pre-planned, task-oriented, and based on the needs of the organization (Biddle, 1986; Parker, 2007).

Trauma-Informed School – a framework for systems-change strategies that weaves foundational knowledge of trauma into the staff knowledge base, school culture, and student support systems for the purpose of providing school-wide mental health supports (Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia, 2013).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

In phenomenological research there exists the potential limitation of researcher bias. Generalizability is also a limitation in this study because all of the participants came from the same district, which likely differs greatly from other school districts in how they are being used and the types of schools that are expected to service.

Summary

This phenomenological study explored the responsibilities, perspectives, and lived experiences of middle school behavior specialists. The purpose was to examine the subjects lived experiences and define their roles to understand how behavior specialists best serve students and teachers in providing supports that lead to improved academic and behavioral outcomes.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter two explores the existing literature concerning trauma-informed schools and defining the role of the behavior specialist within inclusive trauma-informed schools that provide services for students identified as having emotional behavioral disabilities (E/BDs). Creswell (2018) described the need for a literature review as a source for providing direction for both the problem and position the researcher takes while developing the study. This study will provide a summary and synopsis of the pertinent research surrounding inclusive practices within the trauma-informed schools model. The first section of this chapter provides an overview of current and historical events in special education as it relates to inclusive education. The second section addresses the education of students with E/BDs and legislation that ensures that students with disabilities have access to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Finally, a review of literature analyzes the trauma-informed schools model and introduces the inconsistencies and challenges that exist in the roles and responsibilities of behavior specialists that work in trauma-sensitive inclusive secondary settings, as well as the potential implications of these inconsistencies and challenges for students' behavioral and academic success.

History of Special Education Legislation

Segregation Versus Inclusion

In the early 1950s, public school systems across the nation were segregated by color; White students were assigned to one school while Black students were assigned to another. This segregated system was primarily due to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case (1896), which stated that

public schools had the right to segregate as long as the facilities were equal. As a fighting force against segregation, leaders of the National Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), led by attorney Thurgood Marshall, represented a young Black girl in Topeka, Kansas, who was denied access to her local school based on race, a seminal court case that went to the Supreme Court. This monumental case became known as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954*).* As a result, in 1954 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Brown, stating that the doctrine of "separate but equal" educational facilities is constitutionally unacceptable; thus, the racial segregation of children in public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (*Brown vs. Board of Education*, 1954).

As the United States moved into the 1960s, American public schools faced obstacles in several areas. Specifically, political uproar and court rulings regarding social and economic inequality resulted in intense scrutiny of how the nation's children were being educated (Redfield & Kraft, 2012). In 1965, Congress enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to address the inequality of educational opportunity for underprivileged children (ESEA, 1965). Under President Lyndon Johnson's administration, this landmark legislation was created to combat poverty by providing resources to help ensure that disadvantaged students have access to quality education (Casalaspi, 2017). To encourage states to develop educational programs for individuals with disabilities, in 1966 Congress amended ESEA to establish a grant program to help states in the initiation, expansion, and improvement of programs and projects for the education of handicapped children (Moffitt, 2016). The disadvantage of this legislation included a lack of specifics regarding how the funds were to be used; in addition, there was no supporting evidence to suggest that these grant-funded programs had significantly improved the learning outcomes of students with disabilities. Following the ESEA legislation, as the fight

continued for equal education for all students, several landmark cases such as *Pennsylvania Assn. for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* (1972) would lead to the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). Both cases provided outcomes that have proven pivotal in the decision-making process for defining the types of services provided for special education students and their families in all public-school settings.

Federal Legislation

Current federal policy for the treatment of behavioral issues in school settings are influenced by the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). As mentioned above, in the early 1970s, the American judicial system recognized the rights of students with emotional, physical, and educational disabilities to a free public education based on their civil rights in notable cases such as *Pennsylvania Assn. for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* (1972). In 1975, educational legislation incorporated these rights when Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P. L. 94-142). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) became law and provided the basis for Congress to appropriate federal funding for special education. Provisions in P.L. 94-142 also mandated a free appropriate public education for all children, ensured due process rights, mandated Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and stated that all students must receive an education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Education for all Handicapped Children Act, 1975). Eleven years later, in 1986 IDEA was amended to allow states to serve children under the age of three who were experiencing learning delays, provided for expanded IEP teams, and required schools to maximize the inclusion of students with

disabilities (SWDs) into the general classroom. By 1990, the EAHCA had been modified and reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under the revised reauthorization in 1990, legislators outlined specific requirements and guidelines regarding the education, remediation, and assessments of students recommended for special education services (Lewis & Doorlag, 2003).

Inclusion

Perhaps one of the most controversial issues in special education is the idea of inclusive placement of SWDs in the general education instructional environment (Beacham & Rouse, 2012). The term "inclusion" is often confusing and is undefined by the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA). Based on research by Twachtman-Cullen and Twachtman-Bassett (2011), IDEA addresses two basic requirements: the expectation that a child receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and a child's placement in the LRE. Inclusive education is based on the principle that schools provide education services for all students regardless of social, cultural, intellectual, or emotional differences or disabilities (Armstrong, Armstrong, A. C., & Spandagou, 2011; Florian et al., 2010). While the debate continues regarding what is appropriate education, IDEA mandates that SWDs be provided with an education comparable to their nondisabled peers. Therefore, to ensure appropriateness, the school-based Individual Education Plan (IEP) team must determine placement and methodology when providing services to students with special needs.

Although the literature on inclusive practices is exhaustive concerning inclusive education for students, there remains an overall silence on the complex dynamics of inclusive practices within trauma-sensitive schools and the role that behavior specialists play in this model of schooling that provides behavioral services to students diagnosed with E/BD.

Partial inclusion provides students with social integration in specific academic settings while allowing for special education services in pull-out resource classrooms (Runswick-Cole, 2011). Within the school setting, partial inclusion gives students with disabilities the opportunity to engage in partial participation in the general education environment. Often, partial inclusion is funneled through elective classes from which the student can choose. As of 2009, No Child Left Behind legislation included core academic areas where the student can perform at grade level as well (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2019). This form of inclusion also promotes student placement that gives students with disabilities access to the general education environment for as little or as much of their instructional day as decided by the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) while also being serviced with instruction that is non-inclusive in a sheltered classroom with a special education teacher who provides a curriculum that is accommodating to the student's needs.

Finally, full inclusion is defined as a unified system of public education that incorporates all children and youth as active, fully participating members of the school community, that views diversity as the norm, and ensures a high-quality education for each student by providing meaningful curriculum, effective teaching, and necessary supports for each student (Thompson, 2015).

Least Restrictive Environment

In compliance with IDEA (2004), placement for students with disabilities must be in the least restrictive environment (LRE), which IDEA describes thus "to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled" (Section 300(A)(2), *IDEA*). The responsibility of the school district and the IEP team when serving students in the LRE is to

determine the specific program setting placement and services for each student. While IDEA requires that students with disabilities be placed in the LRE, it does not prescribe that this placement be in general education (DeMatthews, 2015). The law has created a supposition that presumes that students with disabilities should be educated with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible, and they should not be removed from the general education setting unless the placement is deemed inappropriate, following implementation of all possible interventions, supports, and services (Shogren, Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2013).

Behavioral and Safety Issues in the Instructional Environment

One of the greatest challenges in the instructional environment is teaching students with E/BD (Bettini et al., 2016). Students with E/BD display a variety of academic and behavioral challenges within the instructional classroom, although they represent the fewest number of students with special needs (Niesyn, 2010). Students can potentially display aggressive behavior, or withdraw, or they may present both of these behaviors at different times (Cheney, Cumming, & Slemrod, 2015). Culotta, Davis, and Levine (2011) found that E/BD students display a wide variety of externalizing and internalizing behaviors that can dramatically impede their ability to succeed in the classroom. Thus, it is common for students with E/BD to display poor work habits and social skills, which are often categorized as disrespect or rudeness (Kutash, Duchnowski, & Green, 2015). Heflinger, Wallston, Mukolo, & Brannan (2014) found that middle school students with E/BD were more likely to experience academic failure even in inclusive settings. Socially, these students exhibit higher levels of behavioral problems that detract from the learning environment. Notably, students with E/BD can present bizarre and disruptive behavior in the classroom. Thus, they are more likely than their non-disabled peers to receive disciplinary measures that include exclusion (Forness, Freeman, Paparella, Kauffman, & Walker, 2012).

Exclusion for many of these students involves placement in an alternative school setting. However, this may not be the most effective support. Rose, Espelage, Aragon, and Elliot (2011) concluded in a previous study that more restrictive educational placement served as a direct predictor for violent behavior concerning students identified with E/BD.

The most common behavioral problem in schools is the intentional harm of other students (Zabel, Kaff, & Teagarden, 2011). For adolescents in the most extreme cases, this type of violent behavior is often carried out in school shootings such as that in Columbine High School in Colorado, which took place in 1999; Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut, which took place in 2012; in Santa Fe High School in Texas, which took place in 2018; and, most recently, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School located in Florida, in 2018, all resulting in the deaths of ten or more people. Pellegrini (2010) defined school violence as behavior that has been primarily associated with direct physical aggression, which is a form of proactive aggression and is intended to achieve, demonstrate, or maintain social dominance. Commonly referred to as bullying, this type of behavior is characterized by an imbalance of physical or psychological power generally repeated over time. Considering the research above, state legislators and school districts are now taking a much more proactive and vigilant approach to supporting the behavioral and emotional disabilities of students by providing holistic behavioral interventions, facilitated by behavior specialists who support both the student and teachers in inclusive trauma-informed settings.

The Need for Trauma-Informed Schools

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) was added to the 1997 amended version of IDEA to proactively address behavioral needs and emotional disabilities (OSEP, 2016). In October of 2013, a new five-year funding cycle for PBIS was initiated. This funding

included allocations for competitive grant money towards training all faculty and staff members on the implementation of PBIS (OSEP, 2016). The initial implementation of PBIS requires that school principals identify a leadership team to attend PBIS trainings and oversee implementation. PBIS is a three-tiered system of support that has been implemented by more than twenty thousand schools nationwide (OSEP, 2016). School teams participate in a three-year cycle of training based on the three tiers of PBIS (OSEP, 2016). The first tier involves behavioral interventions at a school-wide level. For students that do not respond favorably to tier one interventions, a second tier is implemented. In the event that students do not respond to interventions such as working in small groups, they then progress to the third tier and receive individual, personalized interventions (OSEP, 2016). Within this model, schools find success in focusing on the students' significant emotional and behavioral needs rather than their academic needs (Benner, Kutash, Nelson, & Fisher, 2013). However, PBIS is used primarily to manage classroom behavior; although the outcome may produce immediate external benefits for teachers, it does not effectively target the underlying causes of student behavior or long-term student outcomes. Thus, PBIS does not address the root cause of negative classroom behavior or the impact of complex trauma on the developing brain (Bui, Quirk, & Almazan, 2010). Under these circumstances, for students who deal with E/BD, traditional measures of punishment such as school referrals are often ineffective and are not practical for helping students overcome the impact of trauma so that they are able to engage productively in their own learning (Kutash et al., 2015). Instead, a trauma-sensitive school is needed to address the underlying causes of inappropriate classroom behavior (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016).

(H.R. 4146) Trauma-informed Schools Act of 2019

To address the mental and behavioral needs of students, in 2019 House Representatives Quigley, Clark, and Fitzpatrick introduced the Trauma-informed Schools Act of 2019 (H.R. 4146) for the purpose of amending the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to provide criteria for use of federal funds to support trauma-informed practices in schools. According to the Trauma-informed Schools Act of 2019, the term "trauma-informed practices" is defined as evidence-based professional development that promotes a shared understanding among teachers, teachers' assistants, school leaders, paraprofessionals, specialized instructional support personnel, and other staff that:

(i) traumatic experiences are common among students;

(ii) trauma can impact student learning, behavior, and relationships in school;

(iii) traumatic experiences do not inherently undermine the capabilities of students to reach high expectations in academics and life;

(iv) school-wide learning environments where all students and adults feel safe, welcomed, and supported can enable students to succeed despite traumatic experiences; and

(v) services, supports, and programs provided to meet individual student needs should be trauma informed, where appropriate, and increase student connection to the school-wide learning environment. (Trauma-Informed Schools Act, 2019, p. 2)

Utilizing this framework, Overstreet and Chafouleas (2016) integrated trauma informed elements with a service delivery approach to school supports that span universal prevention to interventions (2016). Specifically, the framework (Figure 1) below is used to detect and treat trauma-related problems that students may have by providing additional

funding to schools for the addition of resources such as a behavior specialist and professional development for teachers and administrators (Kataoka et al., 2018). Within the trauma informed schools model, implementation research has found that school leadership and policies, procedures, and financing can be important to sustain trauma-informed practices (Sporleder & Forbes, 2019). National policy recommendations have also emphasized implementing evidence-based interventions across a continuum of services with evaluation, progress monitoring, and quality improvement of services, focusing on outcomes relevant to education stakeholders. Today's schools can be seen as a public health model "hub," playing a critical role of prevention and early intervention for students who have experienced traumatic stress, to include students with E/BD. Within this model, behavior specialists work with teachers and administration to create a school culture that influences a positive school climate, such as a safe school environment and strong school engagement with students and families (Kataoka et al., 2018). For all students, especially those with E/BD, implementing trauma-informed practices promotes a positive school climate that is associated with less bullying and harassment on campus, as well as improved school achievement, attendance, and better student behavioral outcomes.

In Figure 1, the key components that span the whole school and district can be found in the corners of the outer parts of this diagram. Frequent detection and treatment of trauma-related mental health problems in students is the focus of trauma-informed services in schools. At this level, school leadership and policies, procedures, and financing are important factors in sustaining trauma-informed practices.

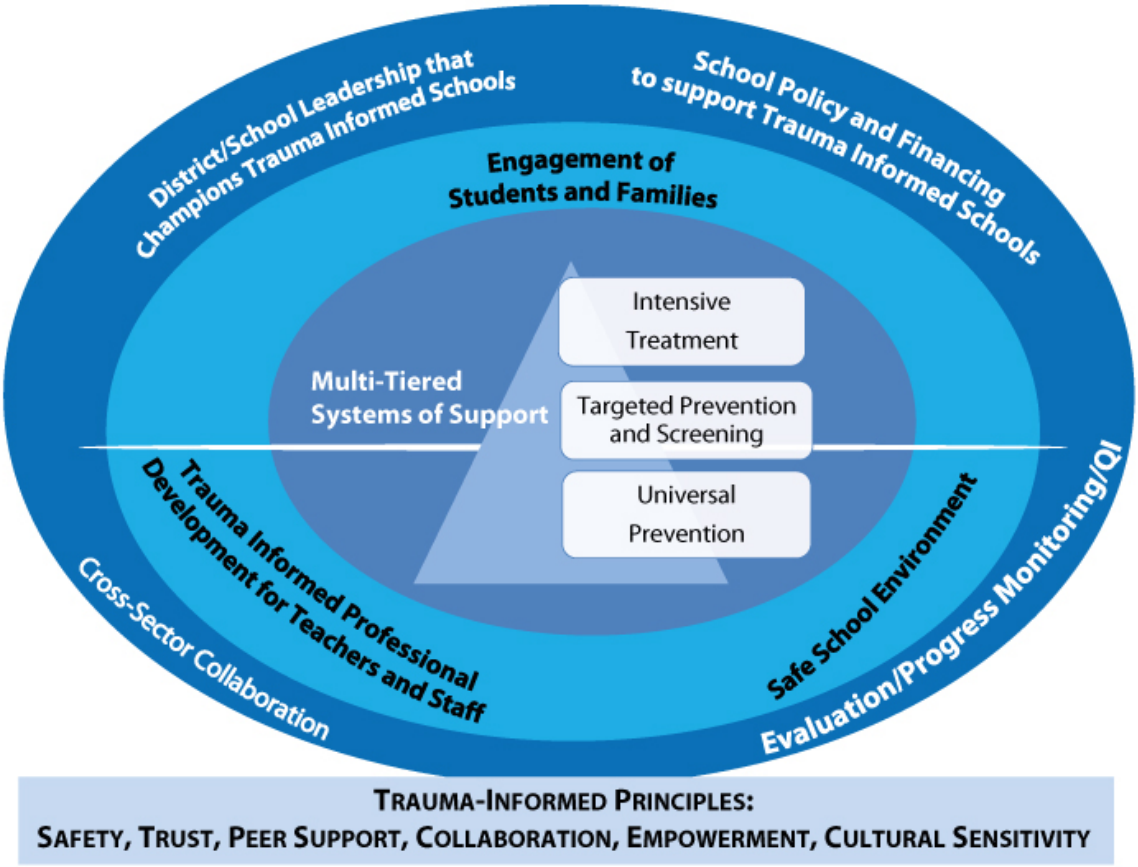


Figure 1. A Systems Framework for Trauma-informed Schools

Note: This figure is from Kataoka, S. H. (2018) and adapted from SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.

The next inner circle in Figure 1 illustrates trauma- informed practices within a school that influences a positive school climate, such as a safe school environment and strong school engagement with students and families, collectively promoting less bullying and harassment, as well as improved school achievement, attendance, and better student mental health (Thapa, Cohen, Guffrey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). The next component of H.R. 4126 is the provision of training and professional development for all school staff to increase staff awareness and knowledge about how trauma can affect students' social, emotional, behavioral, and

academic functioning (Florida School Board Association, 2018). Finally, the innermost circle of Figure 1 represents the trauma-informed social–emotional supports for students on a school campus, organized in a multi-tiered system of supports from universal prevention (tier 1) to targeted prevention and screening (tier 2) to treatment (tier 3) (Kilgus, Reinke, & Jimerson, 2015).

A part of trauma-informed practices within the school setting is providing emotional literacy and problem solving, two of the most recommended resiliency-building capacities for treating childhood trauma (Payton et al., 2008)). Emotional literacy, based on the theory of emotional intelligence, is a pedagogical approach concerning teaching style and learning environment that can be developed with students as a community approach to inclusion (Roffey, 2005). Walkley and Cox defined this approach as a type of "social intelligence" which enables people to differentiate between emotions and the resulting actions, where the teacher's role is then to provide a safe but rich and challenging learning environment where students are free to grow socially and emotionally while being nurtured academically (2013). Problem solving is defined within this approach as the ability of students to engage in the process of finding solutions to difficult or complex issues (Kivunja, 2014). One example of a school that has successfully implemented trauma-informed practices is the Momentous School, a laboratory school located in Dallas, Texas. The Momentous School serves six thousand students and family members per year (Momentous School, 2020). Within the trauma-informed schools model, school-based leadership implemented professional development that led to a school culture that focused on current social and emotional learning practices and current brain biology research. As a school, this institution took an evidence-based, trauma-sensitive approach to education that included brain-based social emotional curriculum for students and robust training for faculty and

administration, as well as family counseling and parent education (Fondren et al., 2020). Schools such as this that apply current evidence-based trauma-sensitive practices create the groundwork upon which to build trauma-informed schools. While the Momentous School's service model is robust, a meta-analysis of 213 school-based trauma-informed programs demonstrated that effective programming can be achieved by simply utilizing current school personnel, and it can be embedded into the existing school day curriculum (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Another school that began adopting a trauma-sensitive approach was Lincoln High School in Walla Walla, Washington (Stevens, 2012). Before implementing this approach, Lincoln High School had 798 suspensions, 50 expulsions, and 600 office discipline referrals over the course of one school year (Stevens, 2012; Walla Walla Public Schools, 2013). After implementing training and a curriculum that was trauma-informed with existing school personnel and their student body, student suspensions were down to 135, and expulsions were down to 30 (Stevens, 2012). Longitudinal data showed that over the course of five years, the number of office discipline referrals decreased to 95 (Walla Walla Public Schools, 2013). Ultimately, these results demonstrate that the trauma-informed schools approach is more efficacious in meeting the behavioral and mental needs of students in the school setting.

Implementing trauma-informed practices bolsters children's protective factors, coping skills, and pro-social behaviors (Schonert-Reichl & Lawler, 2010). Furthermore, this approach better equips staff and school administration to manage challenging classroom behaviors displayed by students. As a residual benefit, once schools are trauma-sensitive, research shows that the number of students misdiagnosed as exceptional education decreases from the use of more holistic interventions (Belfield, Bowden, Klapp, Levin, Shand, & Zander, 2015). Consequently, school districts can reduce spending in the area of special education. In a cost-

benefit analysis of trauma-informed school-based programs, there was an $11 return on investment for every $1 spent implementing trauma-sensitive approaches (Belfield et al., 2015). As schools continue to struggle with the turmoil of educational funding, empirical evidence suggests that investing in trauma-informed approaches to meet the academic and behavioral needs of students is an effective cost-saving intervention approach that not only reduces the level of student behavior issues that take place on school campuses but also reduces long term costs.

Senate Bill 7026 Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Act

The events of school violence that occurred on February 14th, 2018, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school resulted in state legislators passing the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act (SB-7026) to address the extreme mental and behavioral needs of students. Components of the bill include provisions to address improvements in school safety policies, procedures, and personnel at the state and local level. In addition, this law seeks to improve and expand mental and behavioral health services and to revise laws and empower law enforcement and the courts to limit access to firearms by young adults or by individuals exhibiting a risk of harming themselves or others (Florida School Board Association, 2018). A critical component of SB-7026 is to assure provision of services to all students, particularly students with emotional and behavioral disorders (E/BD). Importantly, behavior specialists primarily serve students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and/or individuals who receive accommodations under their 504 plan. General education students not receiving services or accommodations are generally referred to the school Safe Coordinator. Considering the requirements of SB-7026, meeting the behavioral needs of students, behavior specialists serve as a critical resource for advocacy and interventions for both students and teachers as they work to implement appropriate services and placement for students with E/BD in inclusive settings.

However, under the current law, the role of school-based behavior specialists is not currently defined, and very little research in this field provides a definition for individuals who operate in this role.

Role of the Behavior Specialist

This research explores a model of behavioral support within the trauma-informed schools framework that includes school-based teams of individuals collaborating with one behavior specialist who is trained in behavioral theory and function-based support. Scott, Anderson, Mancil, & Alter (2009) define function-based support as an "approach that is used when considering behavior supports for students whose behaviors have not responded to primary or secondary tier interventions" (pg. 421). A function-based approach to prevention is also an essential feature of Positive Behavior Systems (PBS). At the primary tier, consideration of predictability of failure is a fundamental component of understanding who, what, when, and where student failures occur, for determining why they occur, and provide a direction for intervention (e.g., effective rules, routines, and arrangements to maximize the probability of student success) (Scott et al., 2009). As a process, function-based support can be considered in two phases: assessment and hypothesis development and intervention planning. Collectively, the behavior specialist and the team assess the student's behavior, design a behavior support plan, implement the support plan, and monitor its effects (Crone & Horner, 2003). Within this framework, the role of behavior specialist is critical. The behavior specialist is often responsible for organizing and implementing empirically supported practices along a three-tiered continuum of behavioral supports. Additionally, many see this role of behavior specialist as assisting all staff members with implementing the universal practices of trauma-informed schools to support students who receive behavioral and emotional services (Lewis, McIntosh, Simonsen, Mitchell,

& Hatton, 2017). For students whose behaviors continue to warrant additional services, the behavior specialist should be participatory by guiding teachers and leadership teams in implementing Tier-II-targeted supports such as self-management strategies, social skills instruction, structured mentoring, and other similar empirically supported approaches (Lewis et al., 2017). For students whose behaviors are minimally responsive to Tier-I and -II supports or are chronic and severe, behavior specialists are then responsible for developing and implementing intensive individualized Tier III educational practices driven by a functional behavioral assessment to design function-based individual positive behavior intervention plans (Lewis, Jones, Horner, & Sugai, 2010).

Research suggests that in self-contained and inclusive classes for students with E/BD, a behavior specialist's primary roles and responsibilities should include using evidence-based practices to (a) provide effective behavioral interventions, (b) teach social emotional skills, (c) use group management practices, and (d) implement function-based intervention plans (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012). However, studies examining behavior specialists' time used during the instructional day find that their actual responsibilities may be more complex and more extensive than researchers' recommendations suggest (Bettini, Kimerling, Park, & Murphy, 2015). These studies have documented that special educators such as behavior specialists working in inclusive school settings spend limited time on supporting the behavioral and emotional needs of students because they are often charged with many additional tasks unrelated to students' academic or behavioral needs. For example, Vannest and Hagan-Burke (2010) analyzed 2,200 hours of time-use logs from 36 special educators, including behavior specialists. On average, special educators spent only 37% of their time providing behavioral and emotional support for their students (Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010). Instead, the remaining 63% is spent on tedious administrative

tasks or in fulfilling obligations such as hallway monitor and covering for absent teachers (Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010). Prior research also showed that in addition to the limited time spent directly supporting students, pivotal stakeholders including teachers, teacher leaders, and administration often did not understand the extent of special educators' responsibilities (Bettini et al., 2016). Specifically, in terms of behavioral support time and administrative tasks, Franz and colleagues discovered that school administrators underestimated the time that these special educators needed within the contracted instructional day to complete administrative tasks while providing services to students, engaging in meetings with colleagues, and participating in planning sessions with teachers (Frantz, Vannest, Parker, Hasbrouck, Dyer, & Davis, 2008). Collectively, these studies suggest that there is a disconnect between school-based administrators and their employees who work in special education regarding the perceptions of their roles and their actual daily work (Bettini et al., 2015; Franz et al., 2008; Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010). Although these studies present provide insight into barriers that special educators such as behavioral specialists face, none of the studies explored the behavior specialists' experiences of their roles and responsibilities in inclusive settings (Bettini et al., 2016). Thus, within the secondary setting, current research suggests that conflicts may arise between their expected role and responsibilities and their actual roles and responsibilities that they experience within the school setting as they work to meet students' behavioral needs.

Having a better understanding of the actual lived experiences of the behavior specialists' role and responsibilities could ultimately help school and district leaders support these members of their staff more effectively by removing aspects of their roles and responsibilities that lead to frustration and burnout for those who operate in school settings.

Theoretical Underpinnings

In this study, role theory is used as a framework to analyze the actual role and responsibilities of behavioral specialists compared with their expected role and responsibilities within the district of study. School-based behavior specialists have a primary role of directly supporting students who identify with E/BD and the teachers that instruct them, all while working collaboratively with school administration. However, behavior specialists who work in secondary settings may experience a range of role stressors (Gersten, Keating, & Yovanoff, 2001). Role stressors include role conflict, where inconsistent behaviors are expected from an individual; role overload or having more to do than is reasonable; and role dissonance, or the collective account of fulfilling many roles that are incompatible with one another (Marsman, 2014). Role conflict specifically refers to instances when an employee must fulfill two or more conflicting roles. For school-based behavior specialists, role conflict occurs when role expectations differ from their actual job duties (Bettini et al., 2016). The most common role conflict for behavior specialists is that of being utilized to manage discipline for students rather than an interventionist (Bardhoshi, Schweinle, & Kelly, 2015). Role conflicts such as role dissonance for behavior specialists occur when their expectations of how to perform their role and responsibilities conflicts with the reality of their roles and responsibilities (Marsman, 2014). If not addressed, these conflicts, coupled together, can result in role overload. Research shows that special educators, including behavioral specialists, who experience extended and excessive role problems such as those stated above are more likely to report greater stress, less job satisfaction, less commitment, and greater intent to leave than their colleagues in general education (Wehby, Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2011). In 2016, the special task force of the Council for Exceptional Children Commission (CEC) released a report on the crisis in working

conditions for special educators: specifically, researchers emphasized the importance of clarifying job designs by defining and redefining the role of special educators (Office of Special Education Programs, 2016). This same report also highlighted the feeling of isolation that special educators, including behavior specialists, experience because of role problems that reduce time available to engage in meaningful interactions with their general education colleagues and school administration.

Role Theory

Biddle's role theory (1986) is the primary construct used in this study to inform how behavior specialists in social organizations, such as schools, fulfill a particular role in the organization. Role theory suggests that roles are defined by an agreed-upon purpose and by "patterned and characteristic" behaviors that are purpose directed (Biddle, 1986). Biddle's research suggests that roles are inherently emergent, not static; they evolve in response to demands that arise from one's daily efforts to fulfill expectations within a particular context (Biddle, 1986). Biddle summarized how most role theorists assume that the primary force in determining roles arises from social expectations formed through experience and awareness of the expectations for particular roles (Walker & Shore, 2015). For example, according to this theory behavior specialists may take on new responsibilities to remove barriers for the purpose of fulfilling their role or responding to others' expectations. Thus, the roles and responsibilities that behavior specialists fulfill in practice may differ from those specified in their job description and may include tasks invisible to others (Biddle, 1986). Roles are purposes (or functions) individuals fulfill in an organization; responsibilities are tasks through which individuals seek to fulfill their role (Parker, 2007). Role theory also discusses the idea that one person can assume many roles and responsibilities at once within an organization. The behavior specialists studied

as a part of this research assumed roles that are vast, diverse, and multidimensional and that were subject to change depending circumstance, position, social status, and knowledge or skill level (Youngs et al., 2012). Within this study, role theory is also used to examine the behavior of each behavior specialist in their various social settings and situations (Biddle, 1986).

Role Strain

Bond and Bunce (2003) stated that role conflicts occur between the roles enacted by a single individual with the simultaneous enactment of contradictory role obligations that contribute to role strain. Every role that an individual is responsible for fulfilling within an organization has some form of role expectations, responsibilities, and obligations. Within the school setting, these obligations can and often do overlap, resulting in conflicts with one another that lead to role strain. Coverman (1989) defined role strain as being the product of role stress which is a result of role conflict. Bond and Bunce (2003) provided a more recent definition by stating that role strain is the simultaneous enactment of contradictory role obligations. Goode (1960) addressed the theory of role strain, suggesting that role conflict and role overload both correlate with role strain. Sieber (1974) confirmed this research by further suggesting that role strain is related to both overload and conflict as well. In general, role strain occurs when multiple roles push an individual beyond reasonable limits. For employees who execute multiple roles within an organization, the results of this type of stress lead to conflicts among role responsibilities and put pressure on their ability to manage their various role obligations. The presence of conflict does not automatically suggest role overload; however, role overload does lead to role conflict. Collectively, role conflict, role dissonance, and role overload are the catalysts for role strain. Special educators such as behavior specialists are confronted with a critical dilemma when their role responsibilities and role obligations contradict organizational

policies, as well as when the physical cognitive or psychological demands from one role interferes with the enactment of other roles (Bond & Bunce, 2003).

Role Conflict

Role conflict is defined as a conflict between the internal organizational expectations of the individual and their role behaviors (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). In a past empirical study, researcher Lopoplo (2002) stated that role overload occurs when an employee perceives that too much is expected of him or her to complete the job successfully. For many special educators, role conflict occurs when simultaneous and competing role expectations are experienced when complying with one set of expectations interferes with complying with others (Kraft & Papay, 2014). In the role of behavior specialist, these individuals engage in work that leads to a relatively high degree of stress as they struggle to cope with all the demands placed upon them (Conroy & Sutherland, 2012). Bettini et al. (2015) argued that behavior specialists under the umbrella of special education, experience role conflict in the multiple roles in which they operate; they further argued that this conflict is largely due to the role expectations of their school administration being in opposition to the work they value. Although the research contribution from special education in the perspective of role conflict has helped to inform discussions regarding minimizing the level of stressors that perpetuate role conflicts in schools, a rich understanding of the lived experiences conceptualized by those in the role of behavior specialist working in inclusive trauma-informed schools remains incomplete.

While the research exploring behavior specialist experiences is extremely limited, collectively the research presented as part of this review of literature suggest that role conflicts are an obstacle for behavior specialists in secondary trauma-informed schools that are inclusive, consequently resulting in a misuse of the behavior specialists' skills at full capacity as well as

causing burnout from work overload (Kraft & Papay, 2014). Thus, there is a need to examine the phenomenon of the behavior specialist working at the secondary level through a comprehensive exploratory lens for informing school leaders on how to utilize the talents of these individuals effectively to provide behavioral supports for students and teachers.

Summary

The role of school-based behavior specialists within the Trauma-informed School Model needs examination. Specifically, the need for additional research resides in understanding their roles and responsibilities in secondary inclusive settings that support effectively serving students with E/BD by addressing their behavioral and academic needs. Sadly, the need is significant, as the alarming number of school violence incidents increases. The need for consistency in the manner in which behavior specialists are utilized on school campuses to address students with behavioral disabilities may be the preventive factor that is needed to potentially save the lives of students and teachers by implementing well-structured positive behavior intervention systems for students with E/BD (Albrecht, Johns, Mounsteven, & Olorunda , 2009). This type of purposeful job focus builds a sense of community and acceptance for behavior specialists when working with students that identify with E/BD (Sporleder & Forbes, 2019).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study focused upon the lived experiences of behavior specialists in a secondary school setting to gain a better understanding of their role in providing services to students with E/BD in inclusive settings. Using a qualitative approach to explore this phenomenon provided each behavior specialist the chance to share their experiences of addressing the needs of students with E/BD in inclusive settings in an unencumbered and detailed manner (Creswell, 2018).

The current study focused on a contemporary phenomenon, middle-school behavior specialists, enabling the use of a variety of methods to collect data that included direct observations of the behavior specialists and interviews. To gain insight regarding how the participants experienced the phenomenon was vital, therefore the researcher obtained data from those who directly experienced the phenomenon. “Dialogue and critical self-reflection” with participants allowed the researcher to delve into the conceptual meanings that the participants had constructed (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 98).

Research Questions

Research questions that informed this phenomenological study of the lived experiences of behavior specialists included the following: (a) How do behavior specialists who work with students that identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed middle school settings define their roles and responsibilities? (b) How do behavior specialists experience their roles and responsibilities servicing students that identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed middle school settings?

This chapter provides summarizes the methodology used to describe the roles and responsibilities of behavior specialists who work with students, identified as E/BD, in inclusive trauma-informed middle school settings. This chapter also includes the purpose of the study, research questions, and a rationale for the design study. The final components of this chapter consist of the population of the study, sampling procedures and recruitment, the sample participants in the study, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, bracketing process, and validity and reliability measures.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the lived experiences of behavior specialists who work with students identified as E/BD in trauma-informed inclusive middle school settings. The purpose of the study was to determine collectively how they define and experience their roles and responsibilities working within trauma-informed inclusive schools. Interviews and extensive field observations were used to identify emergent themes and meanings. Results will be used to inform the fields of education on the roles and responsibilities that behavior specialists defined while in inclusive settings. Improving the overall quality of workforce resources utilized in special education to support the advancement of students with disabilities is also discussed.

Research Design

A qualitative method using the descriptive phenomenological approach, defined by Patton (2002), was used to guide this research process. Phenomenology is an exploration "through which the lived experience of a small number of people is investigated" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 97). Phenomenology research allows for a deep understanding of what people experience and how they make sense of that experience as a particular phenomenon to develop "a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2013). Using phenomenology, the researcher

was able to examine the lived shared experiences to understand the core meanings and essences the participants experienced—what were they thinking, feeling, remembering, and understanding about the phenomenon. Utilizing a phenomenological design also "provided a logical, systematic, and coherent resource" necessary "to arrive at essential descriptions of experience" (Moustakas, 1995, p. 47). Creswell (2018) defined a phenomenological study as one that "describes the meaning of individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon" (p. 57). Thus, the researcher in this study sought to understand the personal lived experiences of five individuals who experienced the phenomenon of working in inclusive middle school settings serving students that identify with E/BD. The qualitative data were collected by interviewing each behavior specialist and conducting extensive field observations at their respective school sites. Moustakas (1995) observed that by, "examining entities from many sides, angles and perspectives…the essence of a phenomenon or experience is achieved" (p. 58). Based on the essence of the descriptions that participants expressed during the interviews and field observations, the researcher developed a description of the roles and responsibilities these individuals shared.

Rational for Research Design

The rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach was that it would provide a strong philosophical component missing from much of the literature on behavior specialists and their roles and responsibilities within inclusive secondary settings. Choosing a qualitative, phenomenological approach best met this need and contributed to the conversation of seeking "to reveal more fully the essences and meaning of the human experience" (Moustakas, 1995, p. 105). Specifically, qualitative studies, such as this one, allow the reader to explore perceptions as derived from experience, which allows the reader to understand the phenomenon of learning

from the learner's perspective. This statement is consistent with Leedy's and Ormrod's (2010) research stating that a phenomenological design is relevant and appropriate when researching the needs, perceptions, and lived experiences of individuals. In this study, behavior specialists from schools that differ in demographics and academic achievement levels where asked to describe their perceptions and experiences working in an inclusive school setting to address the behavioral and academic needs of students with E/BD. A phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study because qualitative research is naturalistic and broad; it keeps the participants within their natural setting with little interruption (Patton, 2002). This allowed the researcher in this study to develop understandings and truths regarding each participants' role and responsibilities within their contexts, which is often referred to as going in the field or fieldwork (Creswell, 2013). Thus, it was important to obtain data from those who had directly experienced the phenomenon to gain insight for the purpose of developing rich and thick descriptions on the roles and responsibilities of behavior specialists at the middle-school level. In these interviews, "dialogue and critical self-reflection" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 98) with participants allowed the researcher to delve into the thinking and meaning that has been constructed by the participants. Finally, this study employed a qualitative design because of its ability to inform the field of special education on challenges that might be encountered when implementing new resources to address the needs of students with disabilities and provide insights into contextual variables that influence the effectiveness of these resources.

Research Questions

Foundational to the purpose of this qualitative study was the investigation of the experiences of behavior specialists who work in inclusive trauma-informed schools servicing students diagnosed with E/BD. Two questions emerged from reviewing the related literature.

These questions are used to establish an overall sense of behavior specialists' challenges and lived experiences in inclusive settings as it relates to their actual role and responsibilities compared with their stated roles and responsibilities. As the emphasis of the study was that of the lived experiences of behavior specialists working in inclusive secondary trauma-informed school settings with students that identify with E/BD, the research questions below focused on illuminating their experiences in a deep and rich manner.

The research questions developed were as follows:

RQI. How do behavior specialists define their roles and responsibilities in inclusive trauma-informed schools that service students with E/BD?

RQ2. How do behavior specialists experience their roles and responsibilities when working with students that identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed schools?

Sampling Methods and Recruitment

This study utilized a purposive criterion sampling method (Creswell, 2018) to select participants ($N = 5$) that work in inclusive middle schools within a large urban school district, located in the state of Florida. Using a purposive criterion sampling method allowed the researcher to identify and select groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The five participants selected were representative of five different schools that had varied levels of student behavioral needs. According to Van Manen (2016), saturation is not normally an aim in phenomenological analysis because there is no saturation point with respect to phenomenological meaning. In phenomenological inquiry, the researcher explores a question that becomes bottomless; thus, every phenomenological topic can always be taken up again

and explored for dimensions of authentic meaning of a specific experience. Participants were selected based on their level of experiences, as well as recommendations from the school district office and school principals. To recruit the participants, the researcher solicited and identified candidates to give their feedback by explaining the purpose and intent of the research via email and through personal meetings. The researcher then designated a time to meet each behavior specialist personally to conduct the interviews and the field observations. The face-to-face interviews were held in a private setting, off campus, thus promoting confidentiality; and the field observations were held in the home school of each behavior specialist. The participants' names are confidential and known only to the researcher. Finally, Biddle's role theory (1986) was used as a construct to establish how the behavior specialists fulfilled a particular role within their respective school settings and defined their responsibilities. The procedures in this descriptive phenomenology study closely align with those created by experts such as Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1995). With participant permission, the researcher used a digital recording device to record the interviews and a transcription service to transcribe for the purpose of coding responses with the intent to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of serving as behavior specialists in inclusive trauma-informed middle school settings. Participants' identities were kept confidential through multiple means. Voice recordings of the participants sent to the transcription company did not include names of the participants, school districts, schools of employment, or any other identifying information. In addition, before voice recording the interviews, participants were instructed to omit their names when speaking, names of colleagues, their schools, students, or other identifying data during the interviews. Participant voice recording files submitted to the transcription service were

assigned numbers to further ensure confidentiality. For validation purposes, the interview data were triangulated with observation field notes that pertained to the phenomenon of behavior specialists serving in inclusive trauma-informed middle school settings.

Participant Criteria

Because of the specific characteristics of the participants involved and the desire to explore lived experiences (Creswell, 2018), purposive criterion sampling was used. Patton (2002) explained that criterion sampling allows the researcher to investigate samples that meet "predetermined criterion" (p. 238). For this study, all participants met the following criteria: (a) hold a state certification in Exceptional Student Education (K-12); (b) be currently employed as a behavior specialist in an inclusive middle school setting; (c) hold at least a bachelor's degree in education; and (d) have at least one year of experience in their current role as behavior specialist. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative studies are not based upon probability sampling; therefore, the study employed a purposive, non-probability sampling for exploring emergent themes and patterns surrounding behavior specialists that work in inclusive trauma-informed middle school settings.

Participant Demographics

Five participants ($N = 5$), all selected from a large urban school district located in the state of Florida, were included in this study. All participants were female. Collectively, among the five participants, the average number of years working in special education was 10 years. All participants were full-time, certified special education teachers; three of the five hold a master's degree in Exceptional Student Education. All but one of the participants had experience working in the private sector and in a K–12 public educational setting. Participant demographics are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

P	Years as behavior specialist	Part-time/ Full-time employee	Areas of Certification	Highest level of Education	Gender
1	4	Full-time	ESOL, Science, Elementary Ed., Gifted, and ESE	Masters	F
2	1	Full-time	Math 5-9,ESOL,and ESE	Bachelors	F
3	2	Full-time	Elem Ed., ESE	Masters	F
4	1	Full-time	ESE, ELA 6-12, Reading Endorsed K-12, Intervention Specialist Certificate	Masters	F
5	2	Full-time	ESE, Elementary Ed., ELA 6-12, and Journalism	Masters	F

Role of the Researcher

To protect human subjects in this study, the researcher obtained permission from the University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the participating school district to conduct the study (Appendix A). After obtaining permission, the researcher wrote a positionality statement as a structure to bracket her preconceived thoughts and feelings regarding the phenomenon of study. Next, before conducting the interviews and field observations, the researcher sought written approval from the school principals who had personnel involved in the study. When permission was given, the researcher then asked identified participants to complete a screening survey to retrieve the following data: (a) current employment status, (b) education, (c) certification(s), and (d) years of employment as a behavior specialist at their current work location (Appendix B). After participants who met the criterion were identified, verbal and written consent was obtained from each of the participants after the purpose of the study and potential minimal risks were disclosed and confidentiality was assured (Appendix C). Careful attention was given to ensuring that consent letters were provided to the behavior specialists

before the study commenced. The researcher then facilitated interviews through the use of semi-structured open-ended interview questions that allowed the researcher to assume the role of participant rather than observer. Next, to collect data the researcher employed "prefigured techniques," including semi-structured interviews and "open-ended techniques" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, pp. 175–176), which allowed the researcher to make on-the-spot changes to capture the rich data that emerged as the study progressed. An important factor in gathering candid data from participants is that of trust. According to Smith, Flower, and Larkin (2009), the researcher's development of a rapport with the participant at the onset of the interview is critical for establishing trust. Therefore, the researcher sought to build a rapport with the participants through established relationships and professional acquaintances while simultaneously working to keep a professional distance to remain objective to the phenomena observed. Finally, the researcher presented the information to the participants individually in a private setting and answered any questions they had about the research. The researcher maintained confidentiality all participants, schools, and data by creating and implementing password protections for all digitally stored data and securing locked locations for all hard copies of data. An alphanumeric code was used in place of identifying information such as personal and school names to assure data confidentiality. Finally, the researcher did not collect or use any identifying data such as personal names, school names, or any other identifiable data in this study or for publication purposes. At the conclusion of this study, the researcher ensured a sense of closure for all participants in a cordial and professional manner (Creswell, 2013).

Instrumentation & Bracketing

Interviews

Patton (2002) explained that qualitative inquiry in nature is emergent and inductive. As a result, it requires "openness to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change" (p. 40). Semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions were used to allow participants (*N=5*) to tell their stories in their own words, with as much information as possible (Appendix D). All questions within the protocol were vetted using the Adelphi Method, in which an expert panel comprising three experts reviewed the interview questions created by the researcher to ensure that they were open-ended questions allowing each behavior specialist the opportunity to share as much information as possible. With participant permission, a digital recording device was used to record the interviews that required the behavior specialist to discuss their role, duties, and responsibilities as they related to supporting students that identify as E/BD and teachers who provide service in inclusive settings. The researcher's goal was to gain an understanding of each behavior specialist's feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of serving as a middle school behavior specialist in a trauma-informed inclusive setting. Each interview lasted an estimate of one hour in length. Subsequent informal follow-up interviews were shorter in length, lasting approximately 20–35 minutes. During each interview, the researcher recorded information on an interview protocol to include researcher comments as well as key words and phrases. Due to new findings in the data, three additional questions were added after the initial interview for each participant. These questions were included during the follow-up interviews and can also be found on the interview protocol located in the appendices.

Field Observations

In addition to the interviews, field observations (Appendix E) were used to triangulate data for establishing common themes and clusters of meaning. The field observations are critical to the triangulation process because, the data captured provided a layer of rich data that allowed the researcher to validate the responses given by participants during the interviews. Structured observations of the behavior specialist *(N=3)* were conducted over several school days (8:35 am – 4:05 pm), totaling a maximum of 90 hours (30 hours per subject), to document and describe how they engaged in their job activities and responsibilities. Participants for the observations were selected based upon their years of experience as behavior specialists. Based upon their years of experience, the researcher selected one participant to represent a novice level (0-1 year), one to represent the intermediate level (1–2 years), and one to represent the expert level (3 + years) to ensure a diverse sample. Patton (2002) noted that, "observational data are to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed" (p. 262). During these observations, the researcher served as an observer who was separated from the setting to allow for accurate depictions of what was seen, not seen, and heard. The researcher observed activities and interactions in which each behavior specialist interacted with (a) teachers, (b) students and (c) members of administration. The researcher also observed other activities conducted by the behavior specialists that yielded information as to the allocation of their time in supporting students and teachers. These observations led the researcher to ask additional interview questions and introduce topics with the behavior specialist to better understand what was seen and heard (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) as well as what was not seen. Overt observations were conducted with the assumption that with the presence of a researcher, this would not influence participants

to change their behavior but rather continue with business as usual. Procedures for logging data from the observations consisted of using a two-column protocol (Creswell, 2013). The first column of the observational protocol was used to make descriptive notes about events, activities, actions, and speech of the participants to develop an understanding of how each behavior specialist supports students and teachers. The second column was used to record researcher reflections to separate the researcher's own thinking and reactions from the raw data described in the column labeled "descriptive notes". This process, also known as bracketing, allowed the researcher to suspend her own judgment by separating her thoughts, judgments, and perceptions from the raw data. Creswell (2013) expounded upon the work of Moustakas to explain bracketing as a process in which the researcher "sets aside, as far as is humanly possible, all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of participants in the study" (p. 235).

Field Notes

The researcher in this study utilized field notes as a form of data. Sagor (2000) defined field notes as a "retrospective understanding of why things transpired in a particular fashion" (Sagor, 2000, p. 80). Creswell (2014) concurs by suggesting that field notes should be used to capture the participant's emotion, behavior, setting, and mood by recording notes in an unstructured or semi-structured way for various activities at the research site. Field notes in this study also include the researcher's personal reflections, such as the researcher's frame of mind, interpretations, thoughts, and perceptions. In addition, the researcher in this study also used field notes to facilitate the bracketing process by suspending or redirecting attention towards the phenomenon throughout the study (Lewis & Staehler, 2010). Furthermore, the field notes also provided retrospective understanding to the principal data collection instrument, the interviews.

The data collected from the field notes guided the researcher's thought process and helped to construct and modify the questions used for the interview process (Mills, 2003). During this study, field notes were completed within 24 hours of each interview to more accurately portray the events that were recorded.

Document Analysis

A document analysis (Appendix H) of the participating district's job description posting for behavioral specialist was used to compare their stated specific roles and responsibilities with what was actually reported and observed. Categories and codes were created to document these items.

After completing each day of interviews and observations, the researcher reconvened in a quiet place to record in-depth field notes and memos to capture descriptions of the observations and interviews. Patton (2002) explained that this is a necessary process for qualitative researchers to capture data that are believed to be rich in helping to "understand the context, the setting, and what went on" (p. 303). During this time of reflection, the researcher relied heavily on field notes to detail information that included direct quotations of participants and documented notes of perceptions and thoughts.

Data Analysis

Screening Survey

Each participant completed a screening survey, which included five questions related to the participants' (a) current position title, (b) classification of employment (full-time or part-time and duration of working in current role), (c) education (e.g., number of years teaching, subject(s) and grade level(s) taught), (c) minimum level of education, (d) areas of certification, and (e) gender. All participants were given a paper copy of the survey before conducting the interviews

and field observations. Descriptive statistics collected above are included on the demographics table.

Interviews and Field Observations

The researcher analyzed the transcribed interviews provided by rev.com and observational notes, reflecting on the relationships of each part and their relevance, omitting redundancy, and synthesizing insights about the lived experiences (Wertz, 2005). Guided by Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step process for analyzing phenomenology data, the following steps were taken:

1. The researcher became familiar with the data by reading the original data multiple times to ensure that participants were the sole focus of the analysis.
2. The researcher identified significant statements.
3. The researcher formulated meanings and reflectively bracketed her presuppositions to minimize bias.
4. The researcher clustered meanings into themes.
5. The researcher developed an exhaustive description using all of the themes in step 4 of the phenomenon.
6. The researcher condensed the exhaustive description down to a short statement that captured the essence of the ideas that were essential to the phenomenon.
7. The researcher returned the fundamental structure statement to all participants as a form of member checking and validity to ask whether the statement created captures their experience. Based on participant responses in this step, the researcher made revisions to the analysis from previous steps.

The researcher facilitated each of the interviews personally. This personal facilitation by the researcher was done to gain a sense of the whole experience of each participant (Sanders, 2003). After the interviews were transcribed using the rev.com transcription service, the researcher then listened to the audio recordings and read the transcripts multiple times to gain a sense of each participant's lived experience of their roles and responsibilities as behavior specialists in middle schools that are inclusive and trauma-informed (step 1). To assist with bracketing for minimizing researcher bias, during this step the researcher recorded all thoughts, feelings, and ideas that related to the phenomenon while listening to the interviews. The second step of this process required the researcher to read and reread the transcripts to identify and highlight the participants' experiences as behavior specialists in their respective trauma-informed inclusive school sites. Colaizzi (1978) suggest that significant phrases and statements should be extracted from the transcripts and field observations that together form the whole meaning of the experience of being a behavior specialist in an inclusive secondary setting. During this phase, the researcher specifically highlighted items that told each participant's story of their lived experience. To capture this data, the researcher created an Excel file that contained a six-column spreadsheet for each individual participant. Column A (labeled as Significant Statements and Actions) was used to represent all significant statements, phrases, and actions that were highlighted from the transcripts and field observations. Participants' accounts were documented verbatim in Column A to ensure trustworthiness that all information was being recorded and interpreted in a candid manner (Sanders, 2003). Identifying the information in Column A allowed the researcher to view the data captured with a new sense of openness that promoted identifying early themes that were emerging in the data.

After identifying all significant statements and actions, to complete phase 3 of Colaizzi's data analysis process, the researcher formulated more general restatements or meanings for each significant statement and action that was highlighted in Column A of the spreadsheet. Each significant statement and action relating to the roles and responsibilities, as well as the experiences of each behavior specialist, was studied carefully to determine a sense of its meaning. All formulated meanings were developed and recorded in Column B (labeled as Formulated Meanings), taking into account the statement preceding and following each significant statement, which was recorded to ensure that the contextual meaning was not lost (Sanders, 2003).

Moving into step four of this process, after formulating meanings for all of the significant statements listed, the researcher then arranged the formulated meanings into clusters of themes (Colaizzi, 1978). All interpretations of clustered themes were recorded in Column C (labeled as "Theme Cluster") on the Excel spreadsheet. After categorizing each formulated meaning into a theme cluster, the researcher then established emergent themes (Column D labeled as "Emergent Themes") by collapsing the clustered themes based on commonalties of their meanings. The last two columns (Columns E and F) of the Excel spreadsheet were reserved for peer-debriefer feedback. Once all data were recorded for each participant and emergent themes were established, the researcher submitted the original transcripts, significant statements, and the Excel file for each participant through email to a peer-debriefer to determine whether the researcher's interpretive processes were clear and auditable (Sanders, 2003). To assist the peer-debriefer, step-by-step instructions (see Appendix G) were provided that outlined their respective role in this research study and guidelines for providing meaningful feedback in Column E. Column E was used by the peer-debriefer to agree or disagree with the researcher's interpretation

of the formulated meanings (Column B) taken from the significant statements (Column A) which were synthesized into emergent themes (Column D). The peer-debriefer who was used in this study holds a doctorate in education and is familiar with conducting and analyzing research that utilizes qualitative methods. Finally, Column F was used for the peer-debriefer to provide their notes. In the event that a disagreement was made, the peer-debriefer utilized this column to provide a clear explanation detailing the reasons for the dispute. This information was then emailed back to the researcher for review and modifications if needed.

In the fifth stage of analysis, Colaizzi (1978) states that the researcher should integrate all the resulting ideas into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. To address this step, the researcher created another Excel file; the first tab was used to compile all of the formulated meanings from step 4 (Column B) from each participant into one place. Tab two, labeled "Themes", contained a compiled list of all of the emergent themes (step 5) established in Column D for each participant. Items that were similar in meaning were grouped together and condensed to provide broader themes that were used to provide a narrative account of the lived experiences that behavior specialists working in inclusive settings reported in their interviews and displayed during the extensive field observations (step 6). This narrative account was achieved by incorporating the emergent themes, theme clusters, and formulated meanings into the description to create its overall structure and ensure that it contained all of the elements of the experience (Sanders, 2003). The exhaustive description was then returned to the peer-debriefer for validation. The researcher shared this information with the peer-debriefer and expert to build trustworthiness and credibility of the data findings.

Step 7, the final stage in Colaizzi's (1978) data analysis, suggests that the final validation stage of data analysis should involve member checking to elicit views on the essential structure

and exhaustive description of the phenomenon to ensure that it represents the participant's experience (Sander, 2003). After interviews were transcribed, the researcher provided each interviewee with a copy of the transcribed interview for member checking and met with them individually during a follow-up session to allow each participant the opportunity to clarify and add additional needed information. The researcher also used this time to ask additional questions about new thoughts that were generated after reading the transcribed interviews. This same procedure was followed with participants after observations had been conducted.

Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

The extensive time in the field (observations), coupled with interview data, provided a cohesive triangulation of data that supported credibility of the research findings (Creswell, 2013). As mentioned in previous sections, member-checking techniques were used to ensure credibility and validity. Creswell (2013) states that "member checking involves taking data, analyses and interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that the researcher can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (p. 253). For this study, after interviews were transcribed, the researcher provided each interviewee with an original copy of the transcribed interview and then met with them as a follow-up session, to allow each participant the opportunity to clarify and add any additional information needed. This process was also done with the reflective notes taken during the field observations. The researcher used this time to ask additional questions about new thoughts that were generated. This same procedure was used after the field observations were conducted. This procedure was incorporated into step seven of the data analysis process to ensure that the fundamental structure statement created by the researcher candidly captured the participant's experience. To ensure trustworthiness, bracketing was used to remove the researcher's own pre-existing biases and beliefs regarding the

phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Finally, investigator triangulation (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014) was used to incorporate multiple perspectives when reviewing data findings. This process was conducted by using a peer-debriefer to verify evidence and establish common themes and meanings.

Researcher Positionality

The positionality statement was written at the beginning of this study in an attempt to minimize judgments and presuppositions about the investigated phenomenon. Therefore, the researcher used this section to describe her experiences with the given phenomenon and to describe her experiences in education to further expound upon her interests in this topic as well as on potential biases (Creswell, 2018).

Positionality Statement

I am a school-based administrator at a suburban middle school in a large southeast state. While employed by the school district, I actively serve on various committees that require me to collaborate with special education teachers, resource staff, and paraprofessionals. As a school-based administrator, I also hire and evaluate individuals who work in these areas to support the students and teachers at my own assigned school. I also work very closely with special education staff and students with disabilities, including students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder (E/BD) on a daily basis.

I am currently a doctoral candidate at a large public university in the southeast United States, studying curriculum and instruction education with a specialization in urban leadership and special education. The program of study in which I am involved was made possible through a federally-funded grant that focuses on the preparation of doctoral-level administrators for special education leadership. I also have a Master's in Educational Leadership K–12 education.

Having been in education for over 10 years, especially within these last few years, I have witnessed the need for services that are provided to students with mental health disorders from some form of disability. As a critical resource to address the needs of these students, a certified behavior specialist was hired at my school. Because this was a new position, my greatest concern was determining the best use of this behavior specialist's knowledge and skills in serving serve the students. Although the district of study provides a guideline that states that a behavior specialist should spend majority of his/her time working directly with teachers and students, this guideline was not necessarily being implemented at my school. Although the behavior specialist did spend time with teachers and students, she was unable to devote majority of her time because of other responsibilities such as covering transitions during student passing time, covering multiple breaks for staff members, and completing enormous amounts of paperwork, which seemed to isolate her from the teachers and students. Thus, I began to think deeply about her role and responsibilities and wondered if this were the case at other schools. What exactly is the role of a behavior specialist and how does the context of an inclusive trauma-informed middle school shape their role and responsibilities? From this personal inquiry, I began this research study. As the researcher, I understood that my current experiences in education and previous work with special educators, including my own school-based behavior specialist, could raise liabilities and biases throughout the study. To mitigate these potential biases, I followed a rigorous protocol promoted in qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research requires researchers to suspend all judgments of what they think they may know about the given phenomenon and any preconceived notions they may have for the purpose of allowing rich insights to unfold as data are presented that gives meaning to the truths of reality based on the data (Creswell, 2018). This type of suspension is referred to as "epoch," a term created by Husserl (Creswell, 2013), who stated that

"the only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible for ourselves"(p. 106). Thus, I did not engage in any phase of this study with preconceived notions regarding behavior specialists within secondary inclusive schools. Rather, I approached the study as being completely new to the topic, taking into account only of what I observed and recorded in my time at the school during the observation periods and interviews. This created an authentic culture within my study of allowing the data to reveal itself.

Limitations

The position of the researcher in the participating district is a potential limitation, as participants may not have candidly answered interview questions and/or displayed their normal behaviors during field observations (Creswell, 2013). In addition, there is a concern for the potential of bias related to the fact that the researcher was the sole person responsible for data collection and analysis in this study and the researcher's position as an employee in the district that provided subjects for this study. As a result, this may have had an effect on the reliability and validity of the data collected and reported. There is also a concern that all participants came from the same district, which may not represent the experiences of those in other districts. Data collected are limited to the subjective views of the participants. However, their role and responsibilities may be defined differently from the viewpoint of other stakeholders, such as school administration, general education teachers, and students. Participants only serviced students in inclusive trauma-informed school settings; therefore, results cannot be applied to behavior specialists who work only in self-contained classes or in an alternative setting. Finally, the last limitation was the unexpected termination of data collection because of school shutdowns resulting from the COVID-19 virus.

Summary

This chapter described the processes that the researcher used to answer the research questions developed for this study. A phenomenological study design was used to guide the methods and procedures used in the collection and analysis of data. The rationale for the selection of the site and the participants was also presented. Finally, this chapter also presented the researcher's positionality, as well as the procedures used for bracketing, validity, and reliability.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of behavior specialists working in inclusive trauma-informed middle school settings that serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders (E/BD). The study sought to provide a rich and descriptive voice of behavior specialists who described the phenomenon of servicing students that identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed school settings by identifying their thoughts, feelings, and experiences as they related to their roles and responsibilities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This chapter presents the findings, from analyzing data from interviews and field observations, of five participants who work in inclusive trauma-informed middle schools with students that identify with E/BD. Analyzing the data revealed three central themes of the phenomenon that express the shared essence of the participants and were cited by majority of the participants in this study: (a) supporting the behavioral needs of students; (b) supporting the needs of teachers; and (c) challenges affecting behavior specialists working in inclusive trauma-informed middle school settings.

Two research questions were used to guide this study:

RQI. How do behavior specialists define their roles and responsibilities in inclusive trauma-informed middle schools that service students with E/BD?

RQ2. How do behavior specialists experience their roles and responsibilities working with students that identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed middle schools?

To provide the reader with background knowledge of each participant, the first part of this chapter includes a participant summary. The second portion of this chapter provides data

addressing the research questions stated above by provided detailed descriptions through data analysis that include direct quotes from the participants and field observation findings. Data from the interviews provides insight regarding how behavior specialists experienced and understood their role, duties, and responsibilities. The structured observations were used to record how most of the behavior specialists fulfilled roles identified in the job description created by the district of study that specifically identified roles that behavior specialists should assume. Finally, vignettes were used to illustrate hindrances that most of the behavior specialists faced in fulfilling their role at their school sites.

Participant Summary

The participants for this study were selected from urban public middle schools (grades 6–8) according to time of service and experience within the phenomenon. Five total participants volunteered and completed the study. The participants' experiences working in exceptional education ranged from 10 to 20 years. Their experience in working as a behavior specialist in inclusive trauma-informed settings ranged from 2 to 4 years. All participants held an Exceptional Education Certification, and all participants were female. For the purpose of this study, all participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Table 2

Participant Overview

Participant	Gender	Years Working as a Behavior Specialist
Anna	female	1
Martha	female	2
Beatrice	female	4
Katherine	female	2
Tonya	female	1

Description of Participants

Individual descriptive synopsis of the participants for this study are offered to provide the reader with detailed background information of the five participants in this study. Additional participant information can also be found in Table 1, Chapter 3. The descriptive synopsis below includes additional information not found in Tables 1 and 2.

Anna

Anna is in her 10th year at the middle school level, in which she has taught reading, language arts, and math to students in exceptional education. Her experiences with inclusive school settings began back in 2006 while working in a private school. During this time she was assigned to an exceptional education unit, servicing students who were diagnosed with OHI, SLD, and identified as E/BD. Anna then transitioned from private to public school in 2008 working with ESE middle school students as well as students who were within the lower 25% in reading and math. At the time of this study, Anna was in her second year as a behavior specialist at a middle school while working to complete her doctoral degree in educational leadership. Anna is employed as a full-time behavior specialist at a non-Title I school within a large urban school district in America. Student enrollment for the 2019–2020 school year in this district was 213,095 (FLDOE, 2020).

Martha

Martha is a middle-school behavior specialist with 20 years of experience working with students who have disabilities. She has a master's degree in special education. Her experience with inclusion started 20 years ago, when she was assigned a job as a substitute and later as an exceptional education paraprofessional. After working as a paraprofessional, she stated that "she loved the job so much that she ended up taking the certification to become a teacher and she has

been working with ESE students ever since." During her time as a paraprofessional, she worked exclusively with students with severe physical and mental disabilities. This is Martha's second year as a behavior specialist at her school site, where she works primarily with students that identify with E/BD and have behavior plans. At the time of this study, Martha was employed as a full time behavior specialist at a non-Title I school in a large urban school district in the U.S. Student enrollment for the 2019–2020 school year in this district was 213,095 (FLDOE, 2020).

Beatrice

Beatrice is a 15-year education veteran who began her career as a program assistant at the elementary level. Beatrice states that her passion is mental health, in which she holds a state certification in mental health counseling. Currently, she is working in her second career, having served five years as a mental health therapist for a government family agency. For the last three years, Beatrice has been employed as a full-time behavior specialist in the middle school setting, working with ESE students who are mainstreamed and those that are not who identify with E/BD. At the time of this study, Beatrice worked in a Title I school within a large urban school district in the U.S. Student enrollment for the 2019–2020 school year in this district was 213,095 (FLDOE, 2020).

Katherine

Katherine has been an employee in the district of study for a little over four years. She has eight years of experience working with both students that have disabilities as well as those that do not. Her area of expertise is autism, in which she first worked extensively in the private sector with autistic children and adults. She moved into her current position as a behavior specialist one year ago. At the time of this study, Katherine worked in a non-Title I school in a

large urban school district in the U.S. Student enrollment for the 2019–2020 school year in this district was 213,095 (FLDOE, 2020).

Tonya

Tonya is in her ninth year of education, with four years in high school, one year in elementary, and four years in middle school. Tonya began her career as a Pre-K Extended Student Year (ESY) summer camp teacher; from there she continued her career and education with ESE students by participating in a dual bachelor's/master's program. Tonya has worked in a variety of inclusive settings as a co-teacher with a general education teacher as well as at the high school level servicing students with intellectual disabilities who were sheltered in unit classrooms. For the last two years she has been a behavior specialist at her current school, working with students that identify with E/BD both in sheltered unit classrooms and those that are mainstreamed. At the time of this study, Tonya worked in a Title I school within a large urban school district in the U.S. Student enrollment for the 2019–2020 school year in this district was 213,095 (FLDOE, 2020).

Data Analysis Results

A screening survey was administered to each behavior specialist to identify candidates that met the criteria for this study. To answer the research questions, interviews were conducted with each of the behavior specialists. Participant interviews ranged in length from 25 to 56 minutes, with the average interview taking 38 minutes. Each interview was digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. To develop a better understanding of how the behavior specialists in this study experienced their role, the researcher immersed herself in extensive days directly observing activities in which three of the behavior specialists engaged during the day. Direct observations of three behavior specialists were conducted over a 3-week period that included 9

days of observations for a total of 30 hours. These observations included both open and structured observations. As a result of triangulating data taken from the interviews and observations, 362 significant statements were identified. From these statements, three themes were found:(a) supporting the behavioral skills of students, (b) supporting the behavioral needs of general education teachers in the academic environment, and (c) challenges affecting behavior specialists working in inclusive trauma-informed middle school settings. Finally, nine sub-themes emerged from each of the three main themes.

Research Question One

How do behavior specialists define their roles and responsibilities in inclusive trauma-informed middle schools that service students with E/BD?

Two themes emerged when examining the roles and responsibilities of the behavior specialist. Data analysis of the extensive interviews and observations focusing on the phenomena of this study revealed that each behavior specialist felt that her core roles working in inclusive trauma-informed settings with E/BD students was to develop the behavioral skills of students and to support teachers in general education settings. The themes will be addressed individually and will include sub-themes that emerged as well as the observation data related to the specific theme.

Research Question One: Supporting Data

Theme One: Supporting the Behavioral Skills of Students

In a formal interview with the behavior specialists, I asked them to describe their roles and responsibilities. They replied:

Martha:

I'm an advocate for the student first. That's how I see my role as a behavior specialist.

I come to work and that I come with an attitude of supporting the students, supporting the learning environment and as far as my actual role, just making sure that I'm available to offer behavior support and strategies to the students as well as the teachers, being able to go into the classroom if needed.

Beatrice:

I think it's more of a person who is flexible and doing what I need to do in order to serve the students.

Anna:

Behavior specialists primarily service ESE students that have behavior intervention plans. Now the teacher, she has more stuff, but I handle the behavior. First of all, being a specialist in behavior, being able to diagnose it. Well, you don't diagnose it. You're able to identify it.

Katherine:

I can work with other students if they're having a meltdown or with a behavioral issue, I can definitely work with them. But my main position here is for the students with behavioral disabilities.

Using a structured observation protocol (Appendix I) adapted from Blamey, Meyer, and Walpole (2010), the researcher conducted nine structured observations of three behavior specialists to detail and describe how they engaged in activities and responsibilities identified by the stated job description crafted by the district of study specifically for this position. Based on the stated description for secondary behavior specialists, the researcher was able to record some of the behavior specialist's time (50%) during the instructional day as supporting the behavioral needs of students by engaging in the roles outlined in the stated job description: classroom

facilitator, monitor of behavior intervention programs for individual students, communicator linking all stakeholders, behavioral interventionist, and MTSS team member.

Theme One Observation Data

Katherine, Beatrice, and Martha all started their contractual day at 8:35 a.m. I arrived on each of their campuses by 9:30 a.m. and would report directly to the administrative offices located in the front of the school to check-in. I then proceeded to their respective offices, which were all equipped with a desk, table, bookshelves, a filing cabinet, and a school-issued laptop. After our morning greetings, we would then review their posted schedules of student check-ins and goals for the day.

Katherine *(Student Check-in)*

> By 9:50 a.m. we would meet with our first student to conduct a check-in. We met with an eighth grade student that was mainstreamed in general education classes. Katherine stated to the student "she had spoken to his teachers regarding his behavior and that she wanted to review the point sheet with him". From 9:50 a.m. - 10:00 a.m. they engaged in conversations regarding his progress, drawbacks, and next steps towards achieving his goals. At 10:00 a.m. we walked the student back to class. Katherine made a stop to mailroom before our second check-in with a 6th grade student. At 10:05 a.m. we arrived at the student's class and pulled the student into the Media Center.

Beatrice *(Student Check-in & Unit Support)*

> Promptly at 9:40, her first student arrived for a morning check-in. The check-in conversation took about 15 minutes. Beatrice discussed the goals for the week, how the student's night was, and offered the student the opportunity to share anything that they wanted to discuss or just kind of get out in the open. After the student shared their

thoughts and feelings regarding where they were mentally, they then confirmed their understanding of the goals and what they need to do for the day in order to earn their reward. The student was dismissed at 9:55 and two other students entered. Beatrice finished her day by supporting the teachers and students in the unit. She began at 2:35 and ended at 3:40. At 3:45, students were prepared for dismissal and walked down to the busses.

Tonya *(Unit Support)*

At 2:32 p.m, Tonya left her observation period supporting the teacher and student and reported back to the unit to cover for the teacher who had left. Tonya remained there until 3:40 in which she then transitioned the students from their class to the bus for afternoon dismissal. At 3:55 she reported to her normal afternoon dismissal supervision spot until 4:15 p.m.

Katherine *(Unit Support)*

From 2:35–3:40 p.m., Katherine supported teachers in the E/BD unit. At 3:45 she helped the students in the unit prepare for dismissal and walked them to their bus. After students were safely on the bus (which can take anywhere from 10 minutes to 35 minutes, depending on the needs and compliance of students) she then reported to dismissal duty in the courtyard where she remained until 4:20.

Subthemes

The theme "Supporting the Behavioral Skills of Students" included five subthemes: (a) Managing Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs), (b) Building relationships, (c) Teaching social and emotional skills, (d) Role of school counselor and, and (e) Implementing structured monitoring systems.

Theme One Sub-theme One: Managing Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs)

Four out of five participants reported their role of creating, managing, modifying, and monitoring (BIPs). BIPs are defined as a detailed description of the redesign of the student's environment that the team believes will promote appropriate behaviors and decrease or extinguish inappropriate behaviors (Sugai, Homer, & Gresham, 2002). Interventions that are implemented are specifically designed for the environment in which the student is operating and is based on the function that the student's behavior is serving in that setting (Homer, 2000). Martha states:

> And then we track it and then if I see the student or I will be seeing the student once they get an FBA BIP, I meet with the student and I go over their weekly sheets or their daily sheet and say, okay look, you did this and this, what happened here? If they are a student with an IEP and they require that level of support, they're going to either have an FBA for creating a BIP, or I'll do behavior contract.

Tonya explains:

> And then I also do all the data collection with helping the team, the teacher and the assistants to make sure they're collecting the data accurately because they have a point sheet, and they also have anecdotal where they have to do the ABC antecedent, the behavior and the consequence.

Beatrice states:

> I will go over the behavioral plan with them. I do work on behavioral plans I work on social emotional goals like I do my independent functioning, I do my observations on our students. I create behavior plans based on the individual's behavior and personality. So, I create plans that are really geared towards that student.

Katherine:

So that interferes with me being able to check in with teachers to make sure that the behavior intervention plans are being implemented with fidelity. I first actually would have to do an FBA, a functional behavioral analysis. Then I create the BIP.

Theme One: Sub-Theme One Observation Data

Beatrice *(Managing Behavior Intervention Plans)*

From 10:35-11:05, Beatrice conducted classroom observations of two students that she had been working with. She began with a 7th grade student who struggled with social cues and adaptation. Beatrice was using the observation sheet that she created to take notes. She remained in the class for a total of 20 minutes recording data regarding his behaviors. She walked around to see what the student was doing, how he was interacting with others during group work, and his level of accountability in completing the group work. She then returned to her seat and jotted comments. We left at 10:55 a.m. We discussed her thoughts about the student's observed behavior during this class. She felt that he was implementing a few strategies that they had worked on during their social emotional learning time and that she would more than likely provide a reward for him during their afternoon check-out period. Specifically, she stated, "He followed our goal of giving personal space. Also, when I walked around, I noticed that he used language that was respectful and non-threatening to his peers". From 10:55-11:05 she observed a 6th grader in a science class following the same observation process and protocol that was used for the 7th grade student.

Later that afternoon at 1:40, Beatrice sent a quick email to the ESE teachers reminding them of their scheduled planning sessions. After completing her email, she

began to work on her laptop to complete those tasks that were assigned to her by the staffing specialist to complete for this upcoming meeting. She explained, “I am going to focus on how to use student data to create behavioral goals for this student. Now that the student is back from suspension, we need to look at it to decide next steps for his behavior plan with the goal of keeping him here and not suspended.” Beatrice met with her team from 1:45 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Tonya *(Push-in observation to support BIPs)*

Following an IEP meeting, Tonya tried to pick-up with her schedule and conduct a few observations of students and teachers that she needed to check-in on regarding their implementation of the content in the BIPs. Our first teacher and student were in a math class. We entered the room by 2:25. However, by 2:32 Tonya was called back to unit because they were now short staffed because one of the individuals who were injured during a student restraint left for the day.

Theme One Sub-Theme Two: Building and Fostering Relationships

Four out of five behavior specialists emphasized the importance of putting intentional energy in relationships with students for the purpose of students feeling a sense of belonging and safety. Beatrice stated that to accomplish this, she has created an environment where her students see her as a confidant when they have a problem and they don't know who else to turn to. Students view her as a resource who will be that listening ear to help them sort out whatever it is, whatever emotional anxiety that they're going through or fear that they have for anything. Beatrice intentionally makes herself available to listen, allowing students the opportunity to express their thoughts and emotions in a safe place.

Anna and Martha define their role with students as being one that exercises sensitivity and empathy in order to build relationships. Specifically, Anna tries to make herself approachable so that people can feel comfortable verbalizing what they feel. Anna further states that, “her job is to not have any opinion but, with sensitivity and care, get the student in a better place.” In addition, Martha stated that she is “very empathetic to people.” In Katherine’s interview, she explained the importance of building relationships with students by being a re-enforcer. She mentioned that there are students who run up to her and hug her. For those students she is able to be the re-enforcer. The significance of building relationships by being a re-enforcer was best described by Katherine:

> Which is technically what your job is. You're supposed to be the reinforcement for when they see you.

Theme One: Sub-Theme Two Observation Data

Beatrice *(Building and Fostering Relationships)*

> At 11:15 Beatrice reported to the cafeteria to fulfill her daily lunch duty. During this time, she walked around the cafeteria ensuring students were following the appropriate lunchroom procedures while eating. Lunch duty lasted 25 minutes. After students were dismissed Beatrice remained after to clean up her section of the cafeteria where the students she supervised were. Specifically, she engaged in conversations with students that prompted them to open up about their day and at times their struggles, all while picking up trash from the floor. Lunch duty concluded at 11:40 and she returned to her office at 11:45 and remained there to prepare for her upcoming professional development at 12 noon.

Theme One Sub-Theme Three: Working with Students on Social and Emotional Skills

Working with students to build their social and emotional skills is a theme that emerged under the construct of identifying the roles and responsibilities of behavior specialists that work with students that identify with E/BD and or simply displayed inappropriate behaviors on a consistent basis. All participants were involved in some way with working with students on their social and emotional skills, either by way of teaching a social emotional class that was assigned to the student or by way of conducting pull-outs during the student's electives period. Participants stated that being able to provide this support as an intervention was largely a part of many of their student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

As Martha stated:

> I teach a learning strategies class first period. Most of the students that are in that class have a high social emotional needs so a lot of the focus is done on behavior, appropriate school behavior, appropriate classroom, and picking up on social cues.

Beatrice also states:

> I will go over the behavioral plan with them because I do work on behavioral plans I worked on social emotional goals like I do my independent functioning I do my observations on our students.

Anna further explains her experience as:

> In the afternoon, on certain days I have social skills one-on-one with a student.

Katherine includes her remarks regarding this aspect of her role by stating:

> I do social skills. I do if it's under the student's BIP". Now, I do also pull out students that don't have a BIP, or don't have it under their IEP, for social skills as well. Especially if

> they have a lot of behavioral problems in a specific class. I can pull them out of an elective to do so. But yes, I do pull outs in my room for social skills.

Theme One: Sub-Theme Three Observation Data

Martha *(Working With Students on Social and Emotional Skills)*

> Two students entered the media center at 10:00 am and Martha began working with them on social and emotional skills (SES). She concluded her SES lessons at 10:30 and immediately walked both students back to their classes.

Theme One Sub-Theme Four: Role of a School Counselor

Three out of five behavior specialists mentioned that their roles involved practices similar to those of a school counselor, such that many of the students viewed them as a resource on campus with whom to share their problems and trusted them enough to provide adequate feedback that would help them process their situations. The participants described their school-counselor roles thus:

Beatrice:

> I do a lot of counseling, and that is part of being a behavioral specialist. I will let them release because in order for them to heal, they have to release it first.

Martha:

> And then sixth and seventh period is more behavior periods to see, pull out kids who get social emotional support then weekly counseling or independent functioning or it's to maybe have a meeting for somebody that just popped up or new kid that's enrolled.

Tonya:

> They see me as two things as a counselor and an authoritative person. I do a lot of counseling even though that it not my title, and that is part of being a behavioral specialist.

Theme One: Sub-Theme Four Observation Data

Beatrice *(Role of a School Counselor)*

> Beatrice has daily transition duty in between each class change (five minutes) per class change. As mentioned above, during this time many of the students and teachers would approach her to debrief or state that they were having issues. On several occasions I observed her counsel/deescalate students regarding their issues. I also observed her providing impromptu feedback/suggestions to teachers in passing.

Theme One Sub-Theme Five: Implementing Structured Monitoring Systems

As a part of the multi-tiered systems of support process, behavior specialists primarily use point sheets as a form of documentation to track, reinforce, modify, and conference with students regarding their behaviors. They also structure their schedules to have daily check-ins throughout the instructional day to monitor student's behavioral, emotional, and social needs based on the information documented on the point sheets. Data collected from this study revealed that all participants use a point sheet with students, teachers, and parents to communicate, monitor, and reinforce behavior skills. For instance, Tonya explained that at her school,

> A lot of them are on point sheets where teachers are asked to track behaviors by rating the behavior in the classroom that day. A few are on a weekly sheets. And then we track it and then if I see the student or I will be seeing the student once they get an FBA BIP, I

meet with the student and I go over their weekly sheets or their daily sheet and say, okay look, you did this and this, what happened here?

Anna states,

Students have a daily point sheet that... If I can find one. This is it. They have a daily point sheet that they take home. I keep a copy.

Katherine explains:

Checkout systems with the students in their point sheets. So I would just see what kind of day they've had. If they had a bad day, we go over it and then talk about what we're doing for tomorrow.

Martha states:

That I've emailed teachers to say, Hey, we're going to go on a point sheet for this student. You have to fill it out. I want to support you.

Tonya explains:

So I have those sheets customized for each student, where they may have three or four target behaviors we're looking to decrease… and so the students that are in seventh and eighth grade, they have something called the Digital Daily Point Sheet. So I have to make sure that the teachers are completing those, and then follow up with the students on how they did throughout the week, either to reward them or talk about what they can do better next time, to make sure that they're complying with the rules and everything.

Theme One: Sub-Theme Five Observation Data

Katherine *(Student Point Sheet Review)*

Katherine made a stop to the mailroom before our second check-in with a 6th grade student. At 10:05 am we arrived at the student's class and pulled the student into the

Media Center. Katherine reviewed this student's point sheet with them, during which, before leaving, she asked the student what type of day are you having? As the student was responding, Katherine documented their conversation on the student's point sheet.

Theme Two: Supporting the Behavioral Needs of General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classroom Settings.

Simultaneously, as participants addressed the importance of providing services and supports to students in the general education classroom settings, they also stated that a core part of their role is to provide behavioral supports to general education teachers through coaching, modeling, and professional development. When asked by the researcher to give specific examples of these supports, participants responded:

Martha:

> Just making sure that I'm available to offer behavior support and strategies to the students as well as the teachers, being able to go into the classroom if needed. Then I go in and I model how the teachers should be implementing the plan. If teachers need support, advice, my day starts.

Beatrice:

> I do think that my supervisor would like for me to also definitely coach teachers on how to work with their students, and I have done so. I've done quite a bit with teachers.

Anna:

> I go ahead and go in those classes and support the teacher with any behavior that... A lot of times, it's not really much. If you just sit there, the kids behave. Behavior specialists primarily service ESE students who have behavior intervention plans. Now the teacher,

she has more stuff, but I handle the behavior. That's really my job, is to be able to identify it and help the teacher.

Katherine:

So I try to work one-on-one when I'm able to with those teachers.

Theme Two Observational Data

During the researcher's three days of using the structured protocol to observe the behavior specialists, the researcher recorded the majority of the participants engaging in at least two settings providing support to teachers. These two settings included providing coaching on behavioral interventions that would meet the diverse needs of students during impromptu conversations that were face-to-face and via email, as well as working with teachers individually to observe their classes and provide feedback on behavioral interventions outlined in their student's Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs).

Beatrice *(Coach-Teacher Conferences and Conversations)*

I arrived Wednesday at 8:45 a.m. After checking in at the front office, I headed down to Beatrice's office. When I entered, she was there with a first-year reading teacher (Mrs. Smith). Mrs. Smith was discussing her concerns with a student who was suspended returning to class. She asked Beatrice how she could effectively implement a reward system similar to that in the student's BIP. She also asked what calm-down strategies she needed to try in the event that the student became aggressive. This meeting took 24 minutes during the teacher's morning planning period. Beatrice provided direct instruction on implementing strategies.

Katherine *(Teacher Observations and Coaching)*

From 12:15–12:35, Katherine is allotted time to eat. However, because she was not able to attend planning meetings with teachers, Katherine agreed to observe a teacher on their approach and progress with implementing behavioral strategies for one of her students. She left the lunchroom at 12:15, and she made an interesting comment, "I feel I am not servicing anyone the way they need to be because I am being pulled to cover so many areas. By covering so many breaks and keeping up with the expectation for duty assignments, the demand ends up pulling me from the students and teachers who need me the most." After arriving at the teacher's classroom, Katherine was able to monitor for a total of 10 minutes before she was called on the radio to assist with another staff member break. Her level of frustration and a slight feeling of defeat were apparent on Katherine's face.

Tonya *(Follow-up with teacher)*

At 4:15, Tonya attempted to follow-up with the teacher's class that she had attempted to observe; however, that teacher had already left for the day. At 4:20, Tonya and I debriefed regarding her day until 4:42. At 4:42, Tonya and I ended the debriefing session, and I departed the school.

Subthemes

The theme *Supporting the Behavioral Needs of General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classroom Settings* included one sub-theme: (a) Planning for and handling crisis situations.

Theme Two: Sub-Theme One Planning for and Handling Crisis

Three out of five participants shared that the students placed in sheltered classes (units) were their primary focus. Two out of five participants mentioned during their interview that if a

level (crisis) is called for inclusion students or students in the restrictive classes it was their responsibility to physically restrain students when necessary.

Katherine explained,

> We can go into crisis, and that's when levels are called. Levels can be called in both my room and intensive unit. So because I'm the only behavioral specialist at this school right now. We had two, so I'm doing one right now. If a level is called an intensive unit, if I don't have a student, then I have to drop what I'm doing and then run to the level. I respond to every call. That's my job. So we'll try to diffuse the situation, but if we're not able to, if they have a lot of physical aggression towards staff, or high magnitude of property destruction, then we have to perform a restraint and then the checkout.

Katherine felt that this aspect of the job was perhaps the most demanding, as she was the only person on her school campus who was trained to physically restrain students when crisis situations occurred. In contrast, Anna's school team had multiple people trained to conduct a restraint, in which her primary role was to report to the site of the crisis and document the event. Anna said:

> Also, if there's a crisis down at the unit, you have to go there and support if there's a crisis with a student on my list, but the unit is the main thing because I'm kind of connected with the unit.

During the field observations the researcher recorded three participants (Beatrice, Katherine, and Martha) all responding to crisis situations, which resulted in a total of five restraints that were performed on students over the course of the 9-day observational period.

Theme Two: Sub-Theme One Observation Data

Tonya *(Student Restraint)*

I arrived at Tonya's school by 11:30 a.m. After checking in, I proceeded to the unit where I was told to report. When I entered the unit, I was informed that an ASD student went into crisis, two staff members were injured, and Tonya was now moving into restraining the student. The total event from the moment I began observing lasted 25 minutes.

Research Question Two

How do behavior specialists experience their roles and responsibilities working with students that identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed middle schools?

To examine contextual factors that contributed to and/or hindered the ability of each of the behavior specialists to work with students and teachers, triangulated data, again taken from direct observations of the three behavior specialists and interviews from all five of the behavior specialists, provided insight that helped shape the findings in this section. Two of the behavior specialists in this study described experiencing consistent success at promoting students' behavioral growth (their first core role) and supporting teachers (second core role). However, most of the behavior specialists in this study experience constraints on their ability to provide consistent behavioral supports to students and teachers at the level they feel these individuals deserved. There are several causes that are highlighted in the data as sub-themes, which led to the third emerging theme of *Challenges Impacting Behavior Specialist Working in Inclusive Middle School Settings.*

Research Question Two: Supporting Data

Theme Three: Challenges Affecting Behavior Specialists Working in Inclusive Middle School Settings

The theme *Challenges Affecting Behavior Specialist Working in Inclusive Middle School Settings* included three sub-themes: (a) role dissonance due to extra responsibilities; (b) isolation and lack of value; and (c) lack of planning and collaboration time with general education teachers.

Theme Three: Sub-Theme One Role Dissonance Due to Extra Responsibilities

Within the framework of the stated job description for this position provided by the school district of study's human resources department, participants stated that, because of short staffing, their roles and responsibilities extended far beyond the primary roles of providing behavioral interventions and behavioral evaluations for students and teachers. Most participants working in Title I school settings (three out of five) felt that providing adequate supports to students was challenging because of their ideal roles of supporting teachers and students conflicted with what they are actually doing. These obstacles influenced the participants' feelings about remaining at their current school sites working in their current positions. Participants felt as though their ability to provide students and teachers with behavioral supports was hindered by the need to cover breaks and duty responsibilities, which limited their focus and capabilities in providing services.

Interviews coupled with observational data exposed role dissonance that the behavior specialists experienced in their roles and responsibilities. Participants felt that these conflicts were a difficult part of their role and were hopeful that the administration would eventually make adjustments that would work in their favor.

Katherine stated:

> If I didn't have to cover breaks, I could definitely perform better at my job. Right now all I hear is what students can't do, but I can't see why they can't do it." And the biggest barrier, not just for me, but, it's what I just said. It's covering the breaks. PM is a duty. That's a duty. The other ones aren't duties. It's just we're so short staffed that I have to cover those lunch breaks. But yes, I do also have sixth grade duty. So yes, that's tough too because that's a period now that I have students in that I can never observe.

Tonya explains her added duties as the following:

> Well, I know my principal expects me to do all my duties. I have to do morning duty where I supervise in the courtyard, and then I do lunch duty where I supervise in the lunch room. And then I have to provide supervision when the students are transitioning to the classes after lunch. Then every time the bell rings, I have a duty location that I'm supposed to be at, to make sure the students are following the rules. So those are my day to day expectations, and then my principal expects me to be on call with the radio in case a student is having a behavior problem.

Finally, Beatrice expresses her frustration by stating that:

> So whenever I'm needed for breaks and duty my supervisors expect for me to cover those and still be able to cover my responsibilities with students.

Participants stated that this disconnection between their ideal roles and those that were of reality to them were very difficult and seemed to have manifested over time. By being forced to limit their ideal roles, participants felt that their presence was less valued, and they felt isolated.

Theme Three: Sub-Theme One Observation Data

Katherine *(Providing Breaks/ Extra Responsibilities)*

By 10:15 a.m. Katherine was called into the unit classroom to provide a break. This caused Katherine to quickly wrap up her time with the student and rush to the unit to provide a contractual break for a paraprofessional. While she was providing time for this employee's break, Katherine gave me a brief overview of the challenges she encounters on a daily basis with having additional responsibilities of providing breaks on top of her normal expected duty assignments. She highlighted that on a daily basis she is expected to provide breaks for several different staff members, on top of managing student behaviors and supporting teachers. She also informed me that because of the multiple obligations of providing staff with breaks it had become impossible to teach the social–emotional learning classes in over a month.

Additional Break Coverages

After the first break mentioned above at 10:15 a.m., Katherine then had two additional breaks to give: one at 10:30 a.m. and another at 10:45 a.m. At 11:05 Katherine was then called into the unit to support the behavior of students there. Thus, our morning schedule to meet with three other students did not occur. Katherine stated that "I looked at that schedule, and I thought that someone else was assigned to breaks today." We continued to remain in the unit until 11:35 although we had three remaining students to service based on their IEPs. At 11:35 a.m., Katherine had to leave to supervise lunch duty.

Lunch Duty

Katherine had daily lunch duty from 11:35–12:05 p.m. During this time, I went to her office instead of observing her during lunch duty.

Beatrice *(Providing Breaks)*

> Beatrice was called at 1:00 to cover breaks for two staff members. This lasted a total of 40 minutes (each staff member's contractual break was 20 minutes).

Theme Three: Sub-Theme Two Isolation and Lack of Value

All of the participants in this study reported feeling disconnected, overlooked, and isolated multiple times throughout the school year by administration and their general education peers. Martha described her experiences as the following:

> And so I think sometimes just collectively as a whole, we feel overlooked. I just say across the board, county-wide, that's something that may be how a lot of special education people feel. Almost like, "Well, you signed up for that? That's your job to do And it's true. We did sign up, but we're still teachers. Sometimes I feel like there's not an understanding that we are certified teachers. Behavior specialists do not feel as if they are a part of the general team of teachers, isolation is common.

Tonya stated:

> As far as the disconnect, like you said, ESE is often very disconnected and separated or looked over. It was unfortunate for our students because they weren't invited to attend the field trip. All the other teachers got invites, but the ESE team didn't.

Beatrice commented:

> I feel as though in the beginning I had more input and more say. Now I feel as though it's more of an admin thing where, and I don't know if it's admin's decision for it to just be like, just call us and that's it instead of following the IEP or the behavior plan. But I feel that I have been set to the back like the last resort so to speak. So I think it's dwindled a bit.

Anna briefly stated that she felt:

> But, the relationship is not like when I first started because I was right there in the unit and they see me all the time. I try to do what I can to let them know. But, it's a little different than what it used to be. I just try to go with the flow with it. New leadership, they have different expectations on who does what.

Katherine wraps up her experience by stating in her follow-up interview as being:

> ESE teachers are often the last people to receive information in the school. Our jobs are tough and yet we are rarely treated as equals to our counterparts.

Theme Three: Sub-Theme Two Observation Data

Katherine *(Expressed Frustration and Lack of Feeling Valued)*

> After arriving at the teacher's classroom, Katherine was able to monitor for a total of 10 minutes before she was called on the radio to assist with another staff member break. Katherine's level of frustration and a slight feeling of defeat were apparent on her face. During this last break, I remained in Katherine's office. I did not observe her during this time. When she returned, we had an informal conversation during this time. We talked until 2:30. As we talked, Katherine began to express her frustrations. She was overwhelmed with her job. It seemed that her expectations of what she thought her job would entail contradicted her actual reality. Katherine shared that she had expressed her frustrations with district staff and her principal; however, nothing had changed. Ultimately, she expressed that she loved her job (or what her job was before the school was short staffed); however, these new responsibilities that had been added caused her to experience burnout and a feeling of not being valued.

Theme Three: Sub-Theme Three Lack of Planning and Collaboration Time With General Education Teachers

The dissonance in roles and responsibilities that most participants experienced from covering multiple breaks and fulfilling duty expectations inadvertently decreased the level of collaboration and communication with general education teachers even more than what already had been the case. Despite the need for purposeful time allotted towards collaboration and communication, participants in this study stated that many of the supports (e.g., professional learning community time) to facilitate effective collaboration regarding implementing strategies found in BIPs, as well as processing data for IEP plans, were not provided during the instructional day. As a result, collaboration often translated to nothing more than short impromptu communication in hallways during transition or in passing because intentional structured planning time was lacking.

Tonya expressed her experiences regarding this challenge as the following:

> My principal asked if I would follow up with teachers weekly and have an academic PLC just to check in with them asking, "What are you teaching this week?" Then she asked them to fill out a planning sheet, a brief summary of what their day to day activities will look like. That just hasn't been as successful as her and I would like it to be, so it's an attempt. We do try. I would have it on the calendar, they know what's expected, but it just doesn't always follow through. So the barrier is that we are not getting all the information that the general education teachers get because those teachers are constantly meeting with each other. Does that make sense?

Beatrice states:

> I don't, really, speak a lot through email. It's more of a face-to-face type of thing and it's like when they see me, "Oh I need to get their opinion", and I tell them and then that's it, so I don't know if they have taken my advice actually, which I should actually follow up and say, "Hey, how'd it go?

Katherine explained her experience as the following:

> I always have an understanding with teachers, but it is frustrating, especially when I know I'm doing everything I can. I know I can get this student either the one-on-one or just the accommodation that he needs. If I can't prove it, I don't have the right data, I'm not having it. And then that's when I get really upset. I get really frustrated. So for me to even be able to communicate with them, it's at the moment... Hey, how was he? Usually when the student's being removed or if they see me in the hallway that day, that's the best communication I get from teachers.

Theme Three: Sub-Theme Three Observation Data

Tonya *(Lack of Planning Time)*

> At 12:00 Tonya headed to the bathroom to clean herself up after having to restrain a student, back to her office to complete the required restraint paperwork and notify the parents of the student who was restrained. At 12:45 she then headed to a scheduled IEP team meeting for a student who was moving from the unit into general education classes. During the meeting, I observed Tonya requesting the completed point sheets from two teachers. One teacher stated that they did not have time to complete the document, whereas the other had completed the document, but the data provided was incomplete. The staffing specialist proceeded to the one teacher who came prepared, in which

Tonya's decision with the team regarding the types of support the student would need were primarily based on the documentation from the one teacher who was prepared. The IEP meeting concluded at 2:15. Afterwards, Tonya expressed her frustration with the general education teachers and stated that "if there were a scheduled time to have a Professional Learning Community (PLC) just for collaboration purposes, she could have ensured that these teachers came prepared."

Beatrice *(Lack of collaboration time)*

While working with a first-year teacher (Mrs. Smith), Beatrice expressed to Mrs. Smith that, unfortunately, she would not be able to stop by and model because of other obligations that she had for the day. Mrs. Smith mentioned that she really did not feel comfortable with implementing what they had discussed and that she thought it would work better if Beatrice modeled during the actual class how to do what they had just discussed. Beatrice restated that her schedule for the day did not permit modeling for her; however, if Mrs. Smith had time during her planning period, they could touch base again. Mrs. Smith stated that unfortunately that would not work as she was scheduled to plan with her grade-level team, and she had a 504 meeting to attend. Mrs. Smith stated that due to her uncertainty, she would wait to implement the items outlined on the student's BIP until Beatrice could model during instruction with the student how to implement the strategies. After Mrs. Smith left, Beatrice expressed disappointment. She mentioned that she was disappointed because she really wanted to support this teacher and the student in this situation; however, there were no planning times included in the instructional day for her to collaborate with those general education teachers who instruct her students. In addition, her schedule was already so full with student check-ins, break

coverages, district trainings, and push-ins that she just did not have time to support this teacher until later in the week. At 9:20 a.m., she finished checking and responding to emails and used the remaining time to head down to the buses to assist with morning transition of students that are placed in the E/BD and ASD units.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the lived experience of five urban middle school behavior specialists who work with students that identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed settings. Data gathered through observations and interviews revealed the participants' perspective and emphasized the participants' own voices. The use of the Colaizzi method to establish thematic analysis resulted in the emergence of five textual themes. Each thematic theme addressed the research questions, which were developed from the related literature and which framed the investigation. By providing an authentic recount of the participants' own words that were supported by events during the observational period, the researcher accurately represented the experiences of the participants.

The primary finding of this study, across all five participants, was the emergence of two themes that were established as their core roles. The first thematic theme established by the behavior specialists was supporting the behavioral needs of students, and the second was supporting the behavioral needs of general education teachers in the academic classroom. The behavior specialists established these two core roles as the foundation of their ideal job responsibilities and duties as specified in their stated job descriptions. Of the three themes that emerged in this study, the construct of providing behavioral support to students and support to teachers was the most widely shared experience with the most commonalities across participants. In defining their roles, most participants identified several sub-themes that supported their

primary roles of behavior specialist. The supporting sub-themes identified as defining their roles were implementing monitoring systems, creating and modifying student BIPs, building relationships, planning for, and handling crises, serving in the role of a counselor, and providing social emotional services to students.

The third finding of this study shed light on challenges that behavior specialists face by uncovering shared participant experiences related to role dissonance in their duties and responsibilities. Participants shared their experiences of role dissonance resulting from extra responsibilities assigned by administration to cover multiple breaks for fellow staff members as well as transition duties before school, during class changes, and after school. Supporting tertiary themes that participants experience as result of these challenges consisted of expressing an overwhelming feeling of isolation and not feeling valued. The final finding of this study consisted of participants reporting frustration due to a lack of intentional planning time to collaborate with general education teachers for discussing behavioral strategies and support as stated in IEPs and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs).

In chapter five, the researcher analyzed the findings and made connections to the literature to further understand the role of middle school behavior specialists working in inclusive trauma-informed settings. Several discussions were used to present themes found in this study that expounded upon the overall experience of the behavior specialists. The researcher further utilized the findings to discuss actions that must be taken by school-based administration to better streamline the work and support of behavior specialists as well as make recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This final chapter includes an interpretative analysis of the findings presented in chapter four to discuss conclusions connected to existing literature. Specifically, in this chapter, the researcher reviewed the statement of the problem and purpose of the study, restated the research questions that guided this inquiry, and discussed study findings within the conceptual framework provided by Biddle (1986). Implications for future research and recommendations for the school district of study took are also provided.

Statement of the Problem

The school-based behavior specialist phenomenon is rapidly sweeping across the state of Florida as a promising educational reform that could help schools address the behavioral and emotional needs of students who have been affected by trauma and/or who have been diagnosed with E/BD. As a result of the horrific mass shooting that took place on February 14, 2018, at Marjory Stoneman High School claiming the lives of 17 students and teachers, Florida legislation passed the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Act of 2019 and introduced the Trauma-informed Schools Act of 2019. Collectively, both pieces of legislation hold school districts accountable for providing services that address the mental health and behavioral needs of students in K–12 public education settings. To fulfill this mandate, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Act provided funding to state educational agencies for the purpose of incorporating resources that would support the behavioral needs of students. Simultaneously, the Trauma-informed Schools Act of 2019 sought to provide funding for mental health curriculum and

additional allocations for behavior specialists. As a part of their job responsibilities and duties, behavior specialists were expected to engage in several activities, not limited to providing scientifically based professional development opportunities, demonstrating effective strategies for implementing behavioral interventions, providing behavioral support to students, consulting with teachers on a one-to-one basis or facilitating teams of teachers to model classroom strategies addressing the behavioral needs of students, maintaining Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPS), and assisting with discipline procedures and issuing consequences for students who identify with E/BD.

Schools throughout the state of Florida began employing behavior specialists, although there was limited research that supported how behavior specialists are actually being utilized, how they supported students and teachers, and whether they were effective in decreasing behavior issues in students diagnosed with E/BD within the school setting (Bettini et al, 2016). As the need to address the complex issues of trauma in young people continues to manifest in horrific ways, such as mass school shootings and heightened occurrences of adolescent suicides, the effectiveness and impact of their work, including their roles and responsibilities, must be closely examined in the middle and/or high school levels.

Purpose of Study, Research Questions, and Methodology

Research Questions

1. How do behavior specialists who work with students that identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed school settings define their role and responsibilities?
2. How do behavior specialists experience their roles and responsibilities servicing students that identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed school settings?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was designed to draw more attention to those unaddressed questions by examining the role of behavior specialists in inclusive trauma-informed middle schools to understand how they define and experience their roles.

Methodology

A qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach was used to define the roles and responsibilities as well as the lived experiences of five middle school behavior specialists who work in a large urban Florida school district. Several qualitative procedures were followed to gather data. To understand the role of the behavior specialists and how they spent their time in the school setting, the researcher conducted five semi-structured interviews in addition to spending 30 hours (10 per participant) observing the behavior specialists in their natural environments, using both structured and unstructured observation protocols.

Digital voice recordings of the interviews were transcribed using transcription services provided by rev.com. Qualitative data analysis techniques, specifically those used in conducting a phenomenological study, were used to make sense of the data. The researcher drew upon the work of Colaizzi (1978), who provided a seven-step process for data analysis and interpretation: becoming familiar with each transcript through multiple reads, extracting significant statements, formulating meaning statements, organizing formulated themes into clusters of themes, exhaustively describing the investigated phenomenon, describing the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, and, finally, returning to the participants as a form of member checking. Correspondences and patterns from the field observations were used to examine the connections among the data to further corroborate findings. Finally, a descriptive narrative (step 6) was written to illustrate the overall experience of middle school behavior specialists giving insight

into the role's challenges, as well as how behavior specialists collectively experienced them. Several interpretations were drawn from the findings.

Discussion of Findings

In this study, three themes of the phenomenon were identified and presented with data in Chapter Four. The three central themes included: (a) developing the behavioral skills of students, (b) supporting the behavioral needs of general education teachers in inclusive classroom settings, and (c) challenges affecting behavior specialists working in inclusive trauma-informed middle schools. Additionally, nine sub-themes emerged within the three themes. This section will provide a brief summary of the findings within each theme followed by a discussion of the sub-themes, with a final connection to Biddle's (1986) role theory.

Summary of Themes One and Two

Theme 1: Developing the behavioral skills of students

Theme 2: Supporting the behavioral needs of general education teachers in inclusive classroom settings

Behavior specialists felt that their primary role within each of their school settings was to support their students' behavioral growth as well as support the general education teachers with behavioral strategies. This identification of their core roles is consistent with the job description provided by the district of study. All participants explained that several factors contributed to defining their core roles. These findings were also consistent with findings in previous studies (Bettini et al., 2016). As a sub-theme, each behavior specialist felt that supporting students was primarily done by implementing structured monitoring systems such as daily point sheets and daily check-ins throughout the day. Additionally, most of the behavior specialists reported and were observed holding daily progress monitoring meetings with the students whom they

serviced. This measure of progress monitoring was done on a consistent basis to discover and monitor the behavioral and emotional needs of students with E/BD (Bakken, Obiakor, & Rotatori, 2012). Next, behavior specialists cited evaluating and monitoring Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs) to establish goals for students and as a coaching document for teachers.

Another sub-theme included the importance of building relationships with students. Notably, researchers found that students identified with E/BD are five times as likely to have intensified academic and behavioral problems because they lack connection and support in the educational setting (Simpson et al., 2011). Most of the behavior specialists noted the importance of relationship building in their interviews by describing their efforts in this area with an intense focus on investing energy in relationships so that students would feel a sense of belonging (Bettini et al., 2019). This was coupled with the experience of functioning as a school counselor. Each participant wanted students to feel that they were physically and emotionally present when working with them. Likewise, each behavior specialist described the importance of building relationships with teachers and parents for ensuring effective communication and support systems for the students being serviced. Participants also felt that by establishing trustworthy relationships with parents they were able to gain access to outside service providers such as social workers and psychologists for collaborating on services and strategies to best support the students.

Managing and handling crisis is another sub-theme that behavior specialists felt was a strong factor in defining how they fulfilled their core role of directly supporting teachers. Behavior specialists shared that, in their role, restraining students happened quite frequently. Thus, it is important to maintain the proper training in this area to ensure that students who do go into crisis are handled appropriately so that the teachers who service them are not harmed. Finally, teaching social emotional skills to students that identify with E/BD was the last sub-

theme reported. The goal of these social emotional lessons taught to students with E/BD is to assist students with addressing their feelings and perspectives that influence social behavior, with an outcome of building a positive and inclusive classroom climate that promotes both effective learning and student well-being (Roffey, 2014).

Summary of Theme Three

Theme 3: Challenges Affecting Behavior Specialists Working in Inclusive Trauma-informed Middle Schools

The final theme in this study identified challenges that behavior specialists encounter in fulfilling their core roles mentioned above. These challenges included (a) role dissonance due to extra responsibilities, (b) isolation, and (c) lack of planning and collaboration time with general education teachers.

The findings in this study showed that the role of behavior specialist was multifaceted, often making it difficult for each behavior specialists to concentrate on their primary role of supporting students and teachers. The behavior specialist role was defined by the stated job description authored by the school district in which they worked; yet, the description "represents an ideal of the work needed" (Conroy et al., 2014). Consistent with the findings in this study, Albrecht et al. (2009) found that the nature of secondary schools added more complexity to resource positions in exceptional education. Vannest and Hagan-Burke (2010), in another previous study, further reported that ESE teachers described many administrative and supervisory responsibilities unrelated to core roles, such as covering for other teachers when they are absent, as well as other non-related task such as covering multiple lunch duties. When analyzing how participants in this study accomplished the ideal roles identified within their job description, the reality showed that it was quite arduous; thus, they spent very limited time

working directly with teachers and students on a consistent basis. This disconnection alludes to role dissonance in the aspect of extra responsibilities and emergent responsibilities that occupied substantial energy, distracting each of the participants from their core roles (Bettini et al., 2019). Collectively, most of the behavior specialists observed and interviewed in this study felt extra responsibilities interfered with core roles by occupying limited time for conducting pull-outs with students, observing and coaching teachers, and for planning and collaborating with general education teachers on implementing behavioral strategies embedded throughout their lessons that effectively meet students' needs. Furthermore, having to fulfill these additional and emergent responsibilities indicates a potential misuse of their time and expertise in the area of servicing students with intense behavioral needs before crisis occurs.

Finally, participants also reported a feeling of isolation and not being valued for their expertise. The researcher in this study found that during the nine days of structured observations, behavior specialists spent very little time collaborating with teachers and meeting with students. During this time, she was able to document only one brief instance showcasing intentional collaboration with a general education teacher for the purpose of addressing behavioral needs within their classroom. Findings from this study indicate that the role of behavior specialist is quite complicated and multifaceted depending on the context of the school in terms of actual implementation of roles and responsibilities (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2010). Implementation of the district's expectations (ideal job description) and the principal's expectations (reality role and responsibilities) caused frustration (role dissonance) for the behavioral specialists when trying to fulfill any one role with fidelity. Figure 2 depicts a synthesis of these conflicts and challenges as they are experienced.

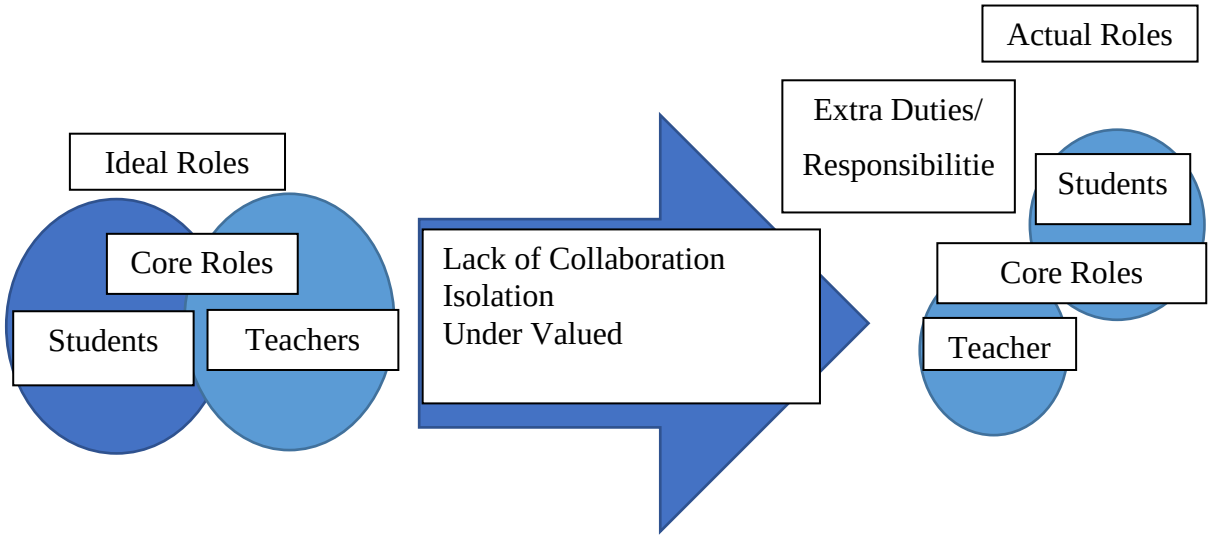


Figure 2. Behavior Specialists' Experiences of Their Roles and Responsibilities

Note: Adapted from (Bettini et al., 2019)

Theoretical Underpinnings: Biddle's 1986 Role Theory

Behavioral specialists' responses to dissonance between ideal and actual roles varied. Consistent with role theory (Biddle, 1986), some responsibilities were emergent, arising from the disparity between the capacity of resources and the level of instructional and organizational needs of each school. Each added responsibility was a noted need of the organization; however, the behavior specialists felt that they were not connected to their primary role of implementing evidence-based behavioral practices. For example, as mentioned above, all behavior specialists reported supervising students during multiple school lunch shifts, as students required constant supervision. Although the behavior specialists acknowledge that this responsibility provides valuable time to build relationships with students, ultimately, this was eliminated because of the requirement of supervising multiple students in the lunchroom, as opposed to simply the students they service. As a result, the time needed to intentionally connect with their students and teachers specifically on improving behavioral outcomes is drastically minimized.

One of the most demanding emergent responsibilities was providing breaks to paraprofessionals throughout the day. In a prior research study, Giangreco, Suter, and Doyle (2010) found that special educators were often used to cover administrative tasks that were tedious. Thus, special educators sacrificed limited planning, coaching, and observation time to provide co-workers with contractual breaks throughout their day. Examining role dissonance in the ideal roles of behavior specialists compared with their reality roles resulted in a clear disconnection that behavior specialists state had manifested through excessive responsibilities that led to their roles becoming more focused on retroactively providing supports when students entered into crisis, as opposed to proactively implementing behavioral strategies that eliminated episodes of crisis. In light of this research, findings raise the possibility that the lack of support that participants receive may have further implications resulting in attrition and burnout; however, the researcher did not explore these phenomena as a part of this study.

Study Limitations

First, using a phenomenological approach that concentrated on five participants located in one school district did not allow for generalizations to a larger population. Majority of participants had at least one year of experience as a behavior specialist, and they may differ in important ways from more experienced behavior specialists who have been in this position longer than three or four years. Similarly, all participants came from one district, which likely differs greatly from other districts. Therefore, findings in this study primarily addressed the concerns for the schools and the district in which they were located. However, Stake (1995) described how naturalistic generalizations are formed when a reader has vicarious and direct experience with a phenomenon, which allows the reader to determine how they can apply information presented in the phenomenology study to their own lives and situations. Thus, while

the findings from this research are not generalizable, those who have interest in the phenomena of study can make naturalistic generalizations regarding their own situations.

The second limitation of this study is that the researcher's presence during the observations and position within the district of study may have influenced the data. To address this limitation the researcher implemented bracketing to reduce the possible impact that this might have had on the data observed and reported.

A third limitation was that behavior specialists provided experiences through interviews and observations that were subjective as a lens into their work that has been absent from previous research studies (Bettini et al., 2016). However, additional data containing the perspectives from general education teachers, administrators, and students should be considered to fully understand behavior specialist roles and responsibilities working in inclusive trauma-informed settings. Finally, the early termination of data collection resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic was also a limiting factor in this study.

Implications of Findings and Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher in this study provides the following implications and recommendations for how to effectively utilize behavior specialists in secondary trauma-informed settings based on this study's conclusions. Implications and recommendations are offered for (a) the school district of study, (b) school-based administrators, and (c) the field of special education.

Implications for the School District of Study

Compared to their actual roles and responsibilities in the school-settings, schools need to provide an environment that supports the alignment of behavior specialists' ideal roles and responsibilities as stated in their job description,. The following recommendations for

improving monitoring accountability are provided and based upon findings and conclusions of this study:

1. Provide professional development at the administrative level for school-based principals and assistant principals on how to effectively utilize behavior specialists in secondary trauma-informed inclusive settings. A coherent understanding of the intended roles and responsibilities that behavior specialists have requires continued and sustained professional development for school-based administrators.
2. Adopt accountability procedures designed to assess, monitor, and improve how principals are utilizing their behavior specialist as stated specifically in the district of study's job description for this position.

Implications for School-Based Administrators

Recommendations made in this section are provided for school leaders who are directly responsible for effectively assigning human capital resources in their schools, by ensuring that the behavior specialists' knowledge and expertise are directed toward supporting the behavioral skills of students and supporting the behavioral needs of teachers within the classroom (Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2014). In extracting data from the rich descriptions provided in participant interviews and findings from observational data gathered from this phenomenological study, the researcher recommends that school administrators should consider the following:

1. Limit the amount of extra duties and responsibilities assigned to behavior specialists that are unrelated to their core primary roles. This will minimize the number of occurrences where behavior specialists are forced to abandon their work with students and teachers to address providing breaks and supervision (Bettini et al., 2015).

2. Ensure that behavior specialists have an intentional planning and collaboration time with general education teachers and school counselors to collaborate on behavioral support strategies, as collaboration is essential to implementing effective Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) for students and building relationships with general education teachers (Kraft & Papay, 2014).
3. Create and foster an inclusive school culture that values all stakeholders by avoiding assigning tedious tasks to special educators as well as, ensuring that special education teachers and students are provided with the same academic and social opportunities as their general education peers.

Recommendations for Future Research in the Field of Special Education

Future research that could extend beyond this study might seek to include males and examine whether the participants' experiences are common among all middle school behavioral specialists using methods that permit generalization (Bettini et al., 2015). For example, future studies might use surveys to examine whether behavior specialists in these settings often experience dissonance between the roles they feel they should be fulfilling and their actual daily work as well as, how this dissonance is influenced by conditions that emerged in this analysis. Suggested studies could also utilize teacher log data (Franz et al., 2008) to better understand the nature of the discrepancy between their ideal and actual roles. Additionally, future research might also explore how behavior specialists' experiences differ from the middle school level to the high school level, as well as use quantitative methods to examine the effects that role dissonance has on student academic achievement and behavioral data of students identified as E/BD.

Conclusion

Addressing the mental and behavioral needs of students remains an educational issue. One attempt to address the needs of students who have experienced trauma and/or who identify with E/BD in the school settings is to employ behavior specialists as a part of the trauma-informed schools model. The unique phenomenon of behavior specialist is a promising and practical approach to improving the unpredictable behaviors of these students who have often initiated extreme cases of school violence, as evidenced by the historic mass school shooting that took place on February 14, 2018, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School located in south Florida. The thought process behind this popular school reform suggests that behavior specialists will provide ongoing, sustained behavioral supports for students and professional development for teachers to help them build their behavioral interventions repertoire with the overall purpose of improving student behaviors in the general education classroom setting.

This study explored how middle school behavior specialists define and experience their roles. Participants in this study spent very little time supporting students with behavioral disabilities and the teachers who instruct them. At times, they were observed as providing coaching support or progress monitoring point sheets; however, these efforts were not consistent, and they never included more than three students or teachers a day. The greatest factors that hindered the behavior specialists were extra responsibilities, isolation, and lack of feeling valued. The behavior specialists' own frustrations and dissatisfaction with multiple responsibilities and the inability to authentically connect with students and teachers have led to many of the participants questioning their sense of belonging within their current school settings. Findings in this study reveal that behavior specialists experience dissonance between their ideal roles and their lived reality and that their working conditions contribute to this dissonance. In the future, if

schools and districts continue the use of behavior specialists as a reform to improve behavioral outcomes of students that identify with E/BD, they must first address the ominous, long-standing dissonance between the behavior specialist ideal roles and lived reality; specifically, school leaders must understand what the behavior specialist roles entail and coordinate their efforts accordingly to create conditions that support them in fulfilling their ideal roles effectively.

The researcher in this study (a) contributed to the literature on the roles and responsibilities of behavior specialists working in inclusive trauma-informed settings, (b) provided a starting point for research exploring the behavioral skills necessary for working with students who identify with E/BD in inclusive trauma-informed school settings, and (c) initiated research on the organizational supports necessary for behavior specialists to provide behavior interventions effectively to students and teachers within the trauma-informed schools model. As the need for mental health reform continues to influence legislation and policies, the role of the behavior specialist will undoubtedly continue to be an essential school position addressing the behavioral needs of students with disabilities in public education nationwide.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board
FWA00000351
IRB00001138
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

December 10, 2019

Dear Stephanie Jackson:

On 12/10/2019, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Category 2
Title:	Behavioral Specialists Perceptions: Working with Secondary Students in Inclusive Settings
Investigator:	Stephanie Jackson
IRB ID:	STUDY00001209
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Racine Jacques, Ph.D.
Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX B: SCREENING SURVEY

Behavior Specialist Screening Survey

Instructions: Please answer the following questions.

START HERE

1. What is your current position title? _____

2. How do you classify your position at your current school of employment?

   - o Full-time
   - o Part-time
   - o How many years have you been in this role? _____

3. Do you hold at least a bachelor's degree in Special Education? _____

4. In what areas are you certified? _____
   _____

5. What is your Gender?

   - o Female
   - o Male

Thank you for participating in this survey, your response is very important to me.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH (Interview)

Title of Project: Behavioral Specialists Experiences of Roles and Responsibilities in Inclusive Trauma Informed Schools

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Jackson, Doctoral Candidate

Faculty Supervisor: Suzanne Martin, Ph.D.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

- This research projects seeks to answer the following questions:
    - How do behavioral specialists that work with students diagnosed with E/BD in inclusive school settings define their roles and responsibilities?
    - How do behavior specialists experience their roles and responsibilities servicing students diagnosed with E/BD in inclusive middle school settings?
- You will be asked to participate in an interview. The interviews will take place in a setting of your choosing or via Adobe Connect (or through other similar videoconferencing software).
- The expected duration of the interviews will be one hour and will take place during the 2019-2020 school year
- A second interview will take place as part of the member-checking process in qualitative data analysis. Specifically, this follow-up or second interview will be conducted to clarify participant's responses and elicit further response and clarification if needed. This follow up interview will take approximately 10-30 minutes.
- Audio voice recordings will occur for each interview session only. No students will be voice recorded and all sessions will be password protected.
- Any tapes that the researcher would like to share will only be used with your written expressed permission, and no school or student names or information will be a part of any recordings that is shared. As mentioned above, all data will be destroyed one year after the conclusion of the study.

You must be 18 years of age or older, have certification in Exceptional Student Education, be an employee that serves as a Behavior Specialist in an inclusive middle school setting, hold at least a bachelor's degree, and have at least one year of experience serving in the capacity of behavior specialist within an inclusive middle setting to take part in this research study.

Please note that all participation is voluntary, non-evaluative (will not affect evaluation scoring), and participants can discontinue at any time without negative effects.

This study does not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact Stephanie Jackson, Doctoral Candidate at 407-953-9455 or by email stephanie.jackson3@knights.ucf.edu or Dr. Suzanne Martin, NUSELI Chair at 407-823-4260 or by email at suzanne.martin@ucf.edu.

IRB contact about your rights in this study or to report a complaint: If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or have concerns about the conduct of this study, please contact Institutional Review Board (IRB), University of Central Florida, Office of Research, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901, or email irb@ucf.edu.

_____ _____

(Participant Signature)

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH (Field Observation)

Title of Project: Behavioral Specialists Experiences of Roles and Responsibilities in Inclusive Trauma Informed Schools

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Jackson, Doctoral Candidate

Faculty Supervisor: Suzanne Martin, Ph.D.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

- This research projects seeks to answer the following questions:
    - How do behavioral specialists that work with students diagnosed with E/BD in inclusive school settings define their roles and responsibilities?
    - How do behavior specialists experience their roles and responsibilities servicing students servicing students diagnosed with E/BD in inclusive middle school settings?
- You will be asked to participate in a field observation. The field observations will not exceed 10 hours and will take place at your school setting during timeframes that are convenient for you between the hours of 8:35am – 4:05pm. All field observation will take place during the 2019-2020 school year.

You must be 18 years of age or older, have certification in Exceptional Student Education, be an employee that serves as a Behavior Specialist in an inclusive middle school setting, hold at least a bachelor's degree, and have at least one year of experience serving in the capacity of behavior specialist within an inclusive middle setting to take part in this research study.

Please note that all participation is voluntary, non-evaluative (will not affect evaluation scoring), and participants can discontinue at any time without negative effects.

This study does not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact Stephanie Jackson, Doctoral Candidate at 407-953-9455 or by email stephanie.jackson3@knights.ucf.edu or Dr. Suzanne Martin, NUSELI Chair at 407-823-4260 or by email at suzanne.martin@ucf.edu.

IRB contact about your rights in this study or to report a complaint: If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or have concerns about the conduct of this study, please contact Institutional Review Board (IRB), University of Central Florida, Office of Research, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901, or email irb@ucf.edu.

_____ _____

(Participant Signature) (Date)

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH (Screening Survey)

Title of Project: Behavioral Specialists Experiences of Roles and Responsibilities in Inclusive Trauma Informed Schools

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Jackson, Doctoral Candidate

Faculty Supervisor: Suzanne Martin, Ph.D.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

- This research projects seeks to answer the following questions:
    - How do behavioral specialists that work with students diagnosed with E/BD in inclusive school settings define their roles and responsibilities?
    - How do behavior specialists experience their roles and responsibilities servicing students servicing students diagnosed with E/BD in inclusive middle school settings?
- You will be asked to participate in a short screening survey. The survey contains five short questions and should take no more than five to 10 minutes to complete.

You must be 18 years of age or older, have certification in Exceptional Student Education, be an employee that serves as a Behavior Specialist in an inclusive middle school setting, hold at least a bachelor's degree, and have at least one year of experience serving in the capacity of behavior specialist within an inclusive middle setting to take part in this research study.

Please note that all participation is voluntary, non-evaluative (will not affect evaluation scoring), and participants can discontinue at any time without negative effects.

This study does not involve any physical or emotional risk beyond that of everyday life.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact Stephanie Jackson, Doctoral Candidate at 407-953-9455 or by email stephanie.jackson3@knights.ucf.edu or Dr. Suzanne Martin, NUSELI Chair at 407-823-4260 or by email at suzanne.martin@ucf.edu.

IRB contact about your rights in this study or to report a complaint: If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or have concerns about the conduct of this study, please contact Institutional Review Board (IRB), University of Central Florida, Office of Research, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901, or email irb@ucf.edu.

_____ _____

(Participant Signature) (Date)

APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

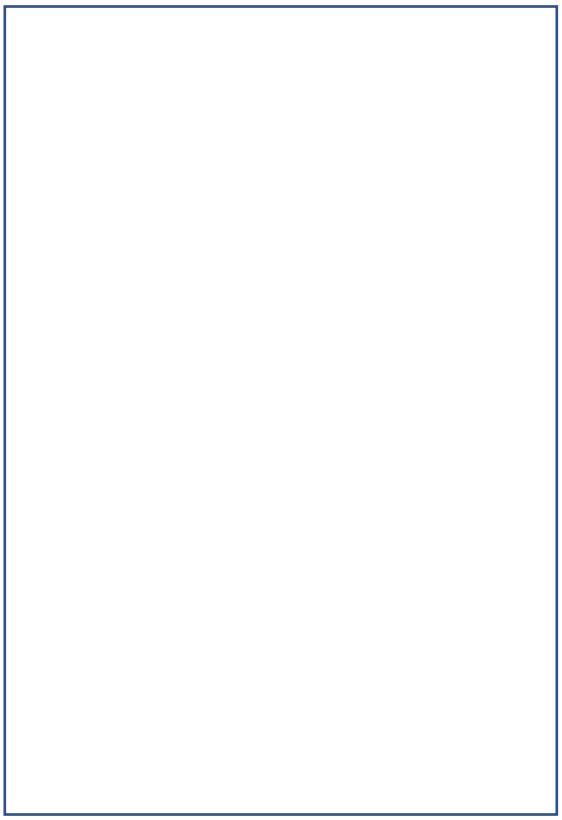
Interview Questions for Behavioral Specialists

Data Type	Interview Questions	Probing Questions
Participant's Professional Experiences, Training, & Development	1. Tell me about yourself and your teaching experiences	
Overarching Description of Support Roles & Responsibilities	1. Describe your average workday	1. Describe the daily expectations your supervisor has for you.
Role Theory	1. Describe how you provide specially designed behavior interventions to students and supports to teachers. 2. Discuss your current roles and responsibilities in comparison to the stated job description for behavioral specialist in your current district. 3. Have you seen changes in your role and responsibilities as a behavior specialist since you started? 4. What factors challenge your work as a behavior specialist? 5. What structures in place for collaborating with colleagues? 6. Describe your communication with other professionals regarding student behavioral needs and outcomes.	How do you modify interventions to meet student needs and teacher needs? 1. What are the most important aspects of your job? 2. Describe these changes in the services you provide to students and teachers. 3. How often do you collaborate with colleagues
Conclusion - Is there anything else about your current roles and responsibilities as a behavior specialist that I have not asked you that you would like to share?		

APPENDIX E: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Protocol

Sketch of Observation Location



Field Notes

Activities

Behavior Specialist Input (coaching/observation/modeling)
Behavioral accommodations
Pull-outs
Push-ins
Crisis

APPENDIX F: PEER DEBRIEFER INSTRUCTIONS

Peer Debriefer Instructions

Deer Peer-Debriefer,

I greatly appreciate your assistance in helping me with my dissertation.

To ensure validity and reliability of the data, I am using the peer-debrief method. I interviewed a total of 5 participants and conducted three field observations. As the peer debriefer, I am asking you to review my coding, categorization, and development of themes. To do this, I have included in this email documents that you might find helpful for this process.

1. I have included one original transcript from each of the five interviews.
2. I have included a excel document with my coding analysis.
    a. The first column in the document has the significant statements I extracted from each interview transcript,
    b. The second column has the coded meaning I assigned that statement,
    c. The third column has the subsequent category I clustered meanings into.
    d. The fourth column includes my interpretation of the emerging theme.
    e. The last column is left blank for your feedback
3. Also included in this email is the data analysis process I used from my dissertation.
4. I have also included my interview questions for the individual face-to-face interviews.

Here is a list of the steps I need you to take, please.

1. Read the significant statement (first column) and the code I assigned (second column). In column five, indicate your agreement or provide feedback in the column that says, “Your agreement or feedback”. If you decide to write feedback, please include what you do not agree with and why. Also, include an option for a different coded meaning.
2. Read the formulated meanings (second column) and the category I assigned (fourth column). In the fifth column, indicate your agreement or provide feedback in the column that says, “Your agreement or feedback”. If you decide to write feedback, please include what you do not agree with and why. Also, include an option for a different category.
3. Read the clustered meaning column (third column) and the category I assigned (fourth column). In the fifth column, indicate your agreement or provide feedback in the column that says, “Your agreement or feedback”. If you decide to write feedback, please include what you do not agree with and why. Also, include an option for a different category.

Again, thank you so much for your assistance. If you have any questions, please let me know.

APPENDIX G: RECRUITMENT EMAILS TO PARTICIPANTS

Recruitment Emails

First Contact – sent via email

Dear {title} {last_name},

Within the next ten days you will receive a request by email to participate in a face-to-face interview and field observations for an important research project being conducted by a doctoral candidate in the College of Community Education and Innovation at the University of Central Florida.

The interview concerns exploring the lived experiences of behavior specialist that currently work in inclusive middle settings.

I are writing to you in advance because I have found that many people like to be informed prior to being contacted. The study is important because the current opinions and perceptions of behavior specialist may influence the level of support currently offered for individuals in this position.

Thank you for your time and consideration. It is only with the generous help of people like you that my study can be successful.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Jackson
stephanie.jackson3@knights.ucf.edu
Doctoral Candidate

Second Contact – sent via email

Dear {title} {last_name},

I am writing to ask your help in a study that explores the lived experiences of Behavior Specialist that currently work in inclusive middle settings.

You have been selected to participate in the interview and field observations because you are currently a Behavior Specialist working in an inclusive middle school setting. Thus, I am inviting a total of five behavior specialist to participate in this interview and three to participate in the interview and field observations. The interview includes questions related to your roles and responsibilities as a Behavior Specialist at your current setting. The field observations at your current setting will consist of three half-day sessions for a total of 10 hours.

Results from the interview and observation will be used to help district and school based administrators to better understand your positions and address organizational factors that may have limited the current support offered to those in your position

Your answers are completely confidential. No personally identifying information is being collected. After I analyze the data, those data will only be reported as summaries in which no individual's answer can be identified. This interview is voluntary. No one will require you to participate. However, by taking about 40 to 60 minutes to share your lived experiences and perceptions during your initial interview, followed by an estimated 20 minutes for the second interview which will be used a follow-up. You may be able to help contribute to the level of understanding that currently exist regarding your roles and duties as it relates to servicing students effected with Emotional Behavior Disorder and the teachers that instruct them.

If for some reason you prefer not to participate in the face-to-face interview or the field observation, you can unsubscribe to this mailing list by clicking here.

To schedule a time and location that is convenient for you within ten calendar days of receiving this email. Please contact lead researcher, Mrs. Stephanie Jackson at 407-953-9455. Or by way of email using the address below.

Thank you very much for helping with this important study.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Jackson

Third Contact – sent via email (only sent to non-respondents)

Last week you received an email asking you to participate in an interview and field observations exploring the lived experiences of Behavior Specialist that currently work in inclusive middle settings. You were selected to participate in the interview and field observations because you are currently a Behavior Specialist working in an inclusive middle school setting. The initial interview will last approximately 40 to 60 minutes, during which we will explore your lived experiences and perceptions serving in this role. This will be followed by a second 20-minute interview, which will be used as a follow-up to ensure that your initial responses were captured accurately.

We are sending this final contact because we want to ensure that people who have not yet responded have the opportunity to do so. Hearing from all of those selected in this sample helps assure that the interview and field observation results are as accurate as possible.

We also want to assure you that your response in this study is voluntary, and if you prefer not to respond, that is fine.

If you are willing, please respond to this email with a convenient date, time, and location that I might be able to sit with you to administer the initial and follow-up interviews. I am especially grateful for your help because perceptions and lived experiences help in understanding your roles and responsibilities as it relates to this position within the secondary school settings.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Jackson
stephanie.jackson3@knights.ucf.edu
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX H: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS CODES

Codes with Job Descriptions from Sunshine School District

Category	Code	Description
Behavior Specialist Activities	Whole Faculty PD	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Small Group PD	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Planning	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Participate in PD	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Modeling Behavior Strategies	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Coaching Teachers	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Coach-Teacher Conference and Conversations	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Managing Student Behavior Assessment Plans	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Managing Behavior Intervention Plans	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Data Analysis	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Progress Monitoring Students	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Managing Crisis Situations	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Teaching Social Skills Lessons	
Behavior Specialist Activities	ESE Discipline Referrals	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Work with outside agencies to develop community resources	
Behavior Specialist Activities	Facilitating Student Pull-Outs	
Challenges to Behavior Specialists	Administrative Interference	
Challenges to Behavior Specialists	Frustrations of Behavior Specialists	
Challenges to Behavior Specialists	Lack of Collaboration and Time	
Challenges to Behavior Specialists	Unrelated Responsibilities	
Challenges to Behavior Specialists	Impromptu Aspects of Job	
Challenges to Behavior Specialists	Lack of Feeling Valued	
Challenges to Behavior Specialists	Isolation	
Challenges to Behavior Specialists	Role conflicts	

Category	Code	Description
Role of the Behavior Specialist	As Defined by District	
Role of the Behavior Specialist	As Defined by Behavior Specialist	

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