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DEFINING EFFECTIVE TEACHER PRACTICES AMONG STUDENTS WITH
EMOTIONAL BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the College of Community Innovation and Education
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

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Major Professor: Suzanne Martin

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of special education teachers who worked with students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD) across various urban settings and educative environments. Given that the overall percentage of students receiving special education services has increased, the overall percentage of students with EBD served among all school-aged children and youth has remained below 1% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The current failings of reform efforts to improve the academic achievement of students with EBD brings the roles, responsibilities and practices of teachers and their preparation into view. This study examined the impact of culture on the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of special education teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants (N = 8). A thematic analysis resulted in three overarching themes. The three themes included: (a) the essentials: keys to student engagement, (b) the frustrations regarding effective program implementation, and (c) elements of an effective program. This study exposed multiple factors affecting the effectiveness of special educators' practices as well as offered recommendations for teachers, schools, districts, policies, and future research.

This dissertation is a product of grace and is dedicated to my wife, Charese, and my children, Raeya, Keane, Declan, and Ellianna. Each of these individuals have contributed to my growth, development, and drive. I am eternally grateful for the sacrifices you each of you made that I might complete this journey.

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God –Thank you. Together, we did it. You led me to take on this challenge. I love You, FOREVER. Thank you for eternity. I will need every ounce and moment I can spend with you to express the gratitude I have toward you because of your love, grace, and goodness to me. You love me, You saved me, and favored me for this moment. I will live the rest of my life to make the goodness of your name known in all the earth. Where to, next? Wherever it is, I say, YES! For your glory.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Providing appropriate needs-based services for students with disabilities (SWDs) has proven to be a complex problem of practice. Although affirmed by two components of educational law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (34 C.F.R. Part 104.4) and the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975) now reauthorized to be titled Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) the concept of the “free appropriate public education” (FAPE) is not without scrutiny. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) requires provision of a (FAPE) for all eligible students through the development of an individualized education program (IEP) (Zirkel, 2013). A FAPE, as defined in the IDEA, is “special education” and “related services” that promote “specially designed instruction...to meet the unique needs of a child” and provision of “support services to assist and permit a child to benefit from that instruction” at public expense (§1401(9); §§1401(26)). Furthermore, in the Supreme Court’s recent decision in *Endrew*, a new standard for FAPE was established requiring “an educational program reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress in light of the child’s circumstances” (p. 14-15). Still, measuring whether SWDs are making sufficient educational progress to the satisfaction of the Act’s requirements is a persistent challenge.

Despite a well-established framework of criteria (e.g. educational program, reasonably calculated, progress, child’s circumstances, timely and evidenced-based decisions) by which a determination of whether FAPE has been provided, the issue of

appropriateness in special education law persists. In part, this persistence is due to intractable lagging outcomes, especially among students eligible under specific disability categories (i.e. intellectual disabilities, emotional behavioral disabilities, autism spectrum disorder). The persistence of underperformance among SWDs continues to sound the alarm for steady reaffirmation of the law until solutions are sufficient. Although extensive research has been dedicated to identifying relevant practice, there remain those who argue that specific objectives of IDEA are not being fulfilled as evidenced by achievement gaps that continue to exist, in light of the Act's standard for assisting *all* unto benefit.

Blackmore (2009) highlights that the advent of IDEA presented educators with auspicious objectives in terms of FAPE, however, the persistence of educators' inabilities to implement with equity across SWDs substantiates a problematic residual. While affirming the law, its intentions, and implications, the author also addressed the reality of issues surrounding achievement among SWDs, emphasizing that the challenges of their achievement are enhanced by complexities that cannot often be disassociated from the disability. This intersectionality therefore, renders provision of specialized education programs that meet the students' particular needs ineffective (Blackmore, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The U.S. Department of Education (2018) substantiates that achievement among diverse student populations varies, as evidenced by, exiting the K-12 system with a high school diploma. Specifically, students of color (e.g. African-Americans (78%) and Hispanics (80 %)) tend to have lower graduation rates than their White counterparts (89

%). Amidst discrepancies, historically, one subgroup, students with Emotional Behavioral Disabilities (EBD), have a 57.0% graduation rate and a 34.8% dropout rate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Additionally, while less than 5% of general education students and 12% of SWDs face suspension and expulsion, among the entire SWDs population students with emotional disturbance accounts for 25% of such disciplinary action (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Over the past ten years, more than two million students have been identified as having EBD in the United States (Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health, 2005, 2006). Steadily, research is dedicated to understanding the plight of students with EBD and similar phenomena. Statistics like these have led some researchers to discuss a “culture of failure” that permeates special education programs (Christenson, 2004; Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Williams, 2006; Noguera, Pierce, Ahram, 2015). Within this discussion, various interrelated factors (e.g., urban violence, victimization, poverty, efficacy, mental health, social disorganization) have been identified as possible contributing agents to the lack of success among these populations (Freudenberg et al., 2006; Goodman et al., 2013; Pellino, 2007; Smith, 2012). While special educators cannot “make” students learn or behave, they can create environments to increase the likelihood that students do both (Lewis, 2009). It is the aim of this dissertation to explore the practices of special educators in mitigating the effects of culture across various settings on the academic achievement of students with EBD. Further, it should be noted that some authors use emotional disturbance (ED) in line with the IDEA wording when referring to what is called EBD. For consistency’s sake and ease of understanding, this dissertation uses EBD in line with typical language for the state in which the study was situated.

Significance of the Study

The current failings of our school systems to meet the needs of students with disabilities (SWDs) should have been addressed long ago as the requirement to provide a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) was set forth in *Mills*, *PARC*, *EAHCA*, each successive reauthorization of *IDEA*, *Rowley*, and now *Endrew*. That we have yet to do so meaningfully and universally emphasizes a critical shortcoming in the field that must be addressed. One of the possible reasons we have not yet addressed the issue meaningfully is due to a lack of understanding of the cultural contexts in which success can occur. This study seeks to examine these cultural contexts to shed light on how the field may, at long last, fulfill its legal obligations and, more importantly, ensure FAPE for all.

Regarding students with EBD, significant attention has been given to factors impacting achievement (Morris, McGuire, & Walker, 2017). Numerous studies in special education have identified evidenced-based interventions for students with EBD (Gimpel & Collett, 2010; Sreckovic, Common, Knowles, & Lane, 2014); however, little attention has been given to identifying components of appropriateness as identified by special education teachers that are experiencing sustained success among students with EBD. Particularly, there does not exist an adequate literature base dedicated to analyzing teachers' perceptions and beliefs, and the subsequent development of appreciative inquiry regarding effective practices for teaching SWDs in more restrictive settings. As such, this study will analyze the phenomenon of success by examining the views, opinions, and lived experiences of special education teachers of students with EBD. An ancillary goal of this dissertation is to substantiate the valuation and use of instructional practices unto

the achievement of students with EBD in a manner that can be transferred across teaching domains. Moreover, this study will examine the teachers' perceptions of the organization's culture and whether the culture promotes or hinders success, in terms of academic achievement.

Chakraborti-Ghosh (2008) emphasizes that cultural perceptions affect students with emotional behavioral disabilities in a myriad ways, including how teachers interact with them. Therefore, the discussion of appropriateness, in light of FAPE, regarding students with EBD, is only adequate to the degree culture and its influences on teachers, as well as on students and their learning, are critically considered and reformed.

Diller and Moule (2005) define culture as the perspectives through which life is perceived. Expressed differently, culture, is recognized as differences in various constructs (i.e. language, values, personality, family patterns, sense of time and space, rules of interaction, etc.) that fructify different phenomenological realities (Diller & Moule, 2005). Culture, being related to language, is that which is also responsible for affecting organization of learning, pedagogical practice, evaluative procedures, rules of schools, instructional activities, and curriculum (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). Culture is accepted to be the force that dictates perception, thereby, influencing practice (Chakraborti-Ghosh, 2008). Additionally, Bolman and Deal (2013) reveal that culture is not a phenomenon that exists outside of the beliefs, values, and practices of the members involved. Therefore, culture formation and crystallization affects the fabric of pedagogical practices, instructional activities, and learning in educational setting.

Gallimore and Goldenberg (2001) offer models and settings as units of analysis to further understand the construct of culture within school settings. Cultural models and

settings as concepts define the way things are or should be whenever two or more people gather, over time, with the intent of accomplishing a set goal (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001; Sarason, 1972). Certainly, deconstructing culture across settings can be beneficial to the existing contribution educators have wrought for the benefit of students with disabilities.

Osher and colleagues (2007) indicated that the misidentification, mistreatment, and misrepresentation of students with EBD could stem from cultural breakdowns. The idea of cultural discontinuity that contributes to disproportionality is manifested in excessive punitive action (i.e., suspensions, expulsions, discipline referrals) (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000; Webb-Johnson, 2003). Moreover, research confirms that disproportionality stems from institutional racism, racial bias, and inequity (Lehr & McComas, 2006). Persisting disproportionality, due to cultural discontinuity, further suggests the need for research deconstructing cultural responsiveness and competence among teachers in practical ways. Cultural competency is necessary to bridge the gap that exists due to cultural discontinuity (Osher et al., 2007; Diller & Moule, 2005). Teachers can contribute nothing to educational reform that supports achievement among students with EBD if ignorant to the overall phenomena of culture and its intersections. Regarding school culture, teacher preparation must consist of a culturally-responsive component. Absent of cultural responsiveness training and opportunities to achieve competence, teachers may blindly continue cycles of disproportionality and mistreatment of students with EBD.

Therefore, teachers of students with EBD must become culturally competent as a safeguard against irresponsible behaviors toward students with EBD (Chakraborti-Ghish,

Mofield, & Orellana, 2010). Increasingly, research is discovering that there are populations of students who are more prevalently unidentified, as having a disability because of the invisible nature of some learning challenges (Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2002). When students are not identified, educational needs are left unmet and overall achievement inevitably spirals downward. Disproportionality and under-identification persist due to the blindness of cultural influences as causative agents. Teachers tend to fail to identify student needs accurately because of beliefs and values that are mediated and espoused by the greater culture (Chakraborti-Ghish, Mofield, & Orellana, 2010).

Research substantiates that understanding culture and its impact on pedagogy are necessary to facilitate change. Miller (1998) asserted that organizations should reinforce existing resources for change as an alternative to attacking areas of resistance. The rationale is that organizations can build and strengthen a culture of success by identifying individuals who have already adopted congruent values as evidenced by student progress. Change agents within these organizations can capitalize on the commitment and competency these individuals have for supporting change, supporting them as they promote change through coaching, education, networking, and mentoring efforts, and as they embed similar values throughout the system (Chrusciel, 2006; Miller, 1998; Villegas, 2007).

Organizational change is not optional; it is inevitable (Haridimos & Robert, 2002), essential (Bridges & Mitchell, 2008), and significantly impacts organizational performance (Chawla & Kelloway, 2004). As an organization's greatest asset, people provide the talent and energy necessary to achieve organizational objectives successfully

(Cable & Derue, 2002; Bolman & Deal, 2014). Therefore, insight into what motivates those who demonstrate a commitment toward change efforts (Chrusciel, 2006) is paramount.

Vellegas (2007) stated that attending to the dispositions of teachers who enact inclusive practices is of value and may serve an important function for organizations in identifying ways to overcome obstacles that prevent the creation of inclusive classrooms, cultures, and ultimately success. It is evident that a level of resistance (Kauffman, 1995; Kauffman et al., 2002; Kavale, 2010; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Mock & Kaufmann, 2002) exists in teachers embracing progressive concepts (e.g. appropriateness, success, inclusion) of students with disabilities in specific classroom setting (Corbett, 2001; Ford, 2007; Lalvani, 2012). However, there are teachers who work to enact practices to transform the status quo. These teachers connect with students who have disabilities and view their abilities over their limitations, enacting instructional strategies to help the students learn and succeed (Gerrard, 1994; Skrtic, 1991) as is their civil right (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). Henderson referred to teachers with these characteristics as *champions of inclusion*:

Champions of inclusion are people who exemplify that they can exact appropriateness by connecting, communicating, challenging, and collaborating effectively with students who have disabilities. They are people who have developed and/or creatively implemented specialized skills but recognize that this expertise must be accompanied by appropriate beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in order for the skills being utilized to prove most beneficial. Indeed, what makes

champions of inclusion extraordinary is that they are demonstrating on a regular basis how ordinary it can be for students with disabilities to participate successfully in a wide range of activities with their peers. (Henderson, 2007, p. 12)

“Crafting an appropriate education is a fact-intensive exercise that results in a plan focused on student progress” (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018, p. 127). With culture as an inescapable context within which teacher practices and student engagement must be mitigated, what becomes imperative in this study are the teacher practices and experiences across settings that garner success among students with EBD. Reasonably, the elevation of such practices afford opportunity and means of detangling this problem within our practice.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to search for meaning, upon examination into and analysis of the nature of success (Van Manen, 1990) or, success defines as academic achievement among students with EBD as it is experienced among special education teachers. This study is designed to investigate the phenomenon of success among students with EBD, primarily in urban school settings, through the lived experiences of teachers and/or support personnel who possess the corresponding knowledge, skills, and competencies. Further, to substantiate the lived experience of the special education teacher, this study will examine the teachers’ experiences with regard to their professional practices, school-wide programming, and global recommendations that may

serve to provide clarity to the roles and responsibilities of special education personnel serving students with EBD in various special education settings (Van Manen, 1990).

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of special education teachers among students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD)?

Research Design

The study will utilize a descriptive phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2013; Englander, 2013, Moustakas, 1994) to answer the research question. The experiences belong to special education teachers who have provided instruction to students with emotional behavioral disabilities in various classroom settings. Further, the study utilized qualitative methods of data collection via purposive, criterion sampling techniques over a six week period. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to describe teachers' espoused values and pedagogy, standards practiced, perceptions of programming, and common school-based colloquialisms, across various content areas to infer a sense of culture from the evidence. Utilizing the phases of thematic analysis, the emergence of themes were captured and coded to provide evidence to accurately depict effective practices as espoused by teachers educating students with EBD and additional components that facilitate success in diverse educative environments.

Definition of Terms

Emotional Behavioral Disabilities – characterized by 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; must demonstrate an inability to maintain adequate performance in the educational environment that cannot be explained by physical, sensory, socio-cultural, developmental, medical, or health (with the exception of mental health) factors (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Emotional Disturbance – The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA):

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: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. (ii) Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance under paragraph (c)(4)(i) of this section. (34 C.F.R. § 300.8(c)(4))

Highly Qualified – According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004), which is directly aligned with *No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001)*, to be

considered “highly qualified” teachers must hold a Bachelor’s Degree, have full state certification or licensure, and must prove that they are knowledgeable in subject area(s) they teach. Further, special education teachers

“who do not directly instruct students in core academics or who provide only consultation to highly qualified teachers in adapting curricula, using behavioral supports and interventions or selecting appropriate accommodations, do not need to demonstrate subject-matter competency in those subjects” (USDOE, 2004)

Inclusion – “students with disabilities are in general education classrooms and settings with their same age peers without disabilities; special education instruction, supports, and services follow the student to the general education setting rather than the student going to a separate classroom; all students with disabilities are full members of the school community and have the chance to participate fully in school activities; education is based on the needs of each individual student, not on his/her disability label” (Florida Inclusion Network, 2018).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) -“continuum, and ordered sequence of placements that vary according to degrees of restrictiveness” (Taylor, 2004, p. 220)

Transition - “ a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be a results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; and is based on the individual student’s needs, taking into account the student’s strengths, preferences

and interests; and includes: instruction, related services, community experiences, employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Urban communities - central areas, often in large cities, that are disproportionately funded federally, statewide, and locally (Henderson, 2015) and are branded by high rates of crime, poverty, racial diversity, and low-achieving students (Kincheloe, 2010; Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlily, 2002)

Mainstreaming - “placement in general education classes, with some time spent in a separate resource room placement” (as cited by Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995, p .87).

Progress - “moving forward or not regressing as rapidly as might predictably occur” (p. 131, Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018).

Special Education, aka *Exceptional Student Education (ESE)* - specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability provided at no cost to the parents and includes the related services a student to needs to access their educational program (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

Special Education Teacher -A special education teacher is one who works with students from early/preK-12 with low-high incidence disabilities, emotional behavioral disorders, or autism spectrum disorders. Special education teachers work with children mild to moderate using or modifying the general education curriculum to meet the students’ individual need (Council for Exceptional Education, 2016).

Student(s) with a disability - A student who has been diagnosed with intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments,

visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, (orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

Teacher/Specialist: Emotional or Behavioral Disorders - Special education teachers who specialize in emotional or behavioral disorders work with students who exhibit a wide range of characteristics, including but not limited to aggressive behaviors, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, depression, and anxiety or conduct disorders. Teachers serving these students may do so in the inclusive classroom, in a pull-out/resource model, or in a self-contained classroom environment depending on the nature of the behavioral characteristics being exhibited (Council for Exceptional Children, 2016).

Limitations

1. Generalizability: Results will not be representative a national sample of teachers in an urban special education setting.
2. Researcher Bias: Due to the researcher working with the population under investigation.
3. Teacher responses, conceptualizing and articulating the school culture in context.

Assumptions

In completing this study, the researcher has made the following assumptions:

1. The representative samples of teachers accurately shared the experiences that led to the development of their pedagogical stance and actions as proponents of inclusion and effective practice.
2. Study participants accurately shared their lived experiences as special education teacher of students with EBD and practices that promotes inclusion as a mission promoted or hindered by the organizational culture.
3. Study participants provided reliable insight into how they facilitated the implementation of inclusive practices and addresses the resistance of other teachers to the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms.
4. Study participants will have valid insight into how their espoused dispositions might be cultivated in other educators, as well as the ways in which organizations can cultivate these dispositions in those who are resistant to success.
5. The selection of participants allowed the researcher to study the phenomenon of interest in-depth and receive multiple perspectives which helped inform the research questions.
6. The researcher will be granted access to participants in order to conduct needed data collection.
7. Participants in the study will honestly and candidly share information reflective of their views, beliefs, and opinions.

8. School leadership (principals, assistant principals, deans, etc.) contributes to the overall school culture in a manner that is conducive to the academic achievement of students with EBD.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study. The background of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions that guided the researcher were presented. The conceptual framework was introduced. Additionally, an overview of the qualitative phenomenological approach used to conduct the study was provided. This chapter also provided definitions for important terms, limitations of the study, and assumptions held by the researcher. In chapter 2, the researcher provides a review of the literature related to topics relevant to the problem of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Emotional Behavioral Disabilities: The Profile

An emotional behavioral disability (EBD) is characterized by emotional or behavioral responses that cannot be attributed to age, culture, gender, or ethnicity yet adversely affect a child's academic performance (Florida Department of Education, 2018). Students with EBD comprise the fifth most prevalent category within special education (U.S. Department of Education, 2012) and are frequently described as behaviorally disruptive, noncompliant, verbally abusive, and aggressive (Reid et al., 2004). Further, researchers argue that youth with EBD develop as an integrated whole with behavioral, biophysical, cognitive, psychological, and sociological variables operating together to contribute to individual functioning (Farmer, Gatzke-Kopp, Lee, Dawes, & Talbott, 2016). This conglomerate of variables suggest that problematic outcomes, including school failure, school dropout, involvement in substance use, criminality, and adolescent and early adulthood mental health disorders, tend to reflect a system of correlated or interconnected factors (Bergman, Andershed, & Andershed, 2009; Cicchetti & Toth, 2009). Moreover, this population is disproportionately male (Bean, 2013) and African American (Kauffman, 2009).

The overrepresentation of black students with EBD is sourced to unresolved racial tensions that saturate American culture (Feagin, 2006; Kauffman, Hallahan, & Pullen, 2009; Wright, 2012). Students with EBD are more likely to experience disciplinary exclusions (Department for Education, 2016; Smith, Katsiyannis & Ryan, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014), are at greater risk for placement

in more restrictive settings than students with other disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) and experience higher levels of criminal justice involvement (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, et al., 2009). School failure often leads to a succession of negative life outcomes, including increased rates of unemployment or underemployment (Sanford, Newman, Wagner, et al., 2011) and institutionalization in correctional facilities both as juveniles and as adults (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015; U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Analysis of school success reveals that, in most cases, students with EBD are considered to be at high risk for many of these negative long-term outcomes because they currently have the highest dropout rate (38%) of any disability category (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Academic Achievement and Performance

Peering into the classroom and school environment reveal academic difficulties across multiple content areas, chronic noncompliance, inappropriate behaviors (e.g., aggression, antisocial, and disruptive classroom behaviors), and unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships as common among students with EBD due to the lack of self-management and self-regulation skills (Popham et al., 2018). Bowers, Spratt and Taff (2013) note that academic failure is of particular concern as research has shown that low or failing grades is a strong indicator for dropping out of high school. Though comprising about six percent of SWDs served in special education, students with EBD are identified

as emotionally disturbed (Samuels, 2018), and “have been shown to have the worst outcomes” (p. 14).

Historically, researchers found that students with EBD experience bleak academic outcomes (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008; Mihales et al., 2009; Siperstein, Wiley & Forness, 2011) and fare worse than any other subgroup (Gage et al., 2017). Having the highest dropout rate (44.9%) and the second lowest high school completion rate (36.7%) compared to students served under other disability categories (Zolkoski, Bullock, & Gable, 2016), students with EBD are among the nation’s lowest performers. Meta-analysis of academic achievement among students with EBD and found that most students with EBD performed at or below the 25th percentile in general academic functioning and found a moderate to large negative effect (-0.69) in terms of academic achievement when compared with nondisabled students. This poor academic achievement is despite the fact that, according to the IDEA and state of Florida eligibility criteria, students with EBD are, at minimum, cognitively typical. The intellectual ability required for grade level academic achievement necessarily exists in students with EBD; yet, their academic achievement lags.

Outcomes among students with EBD are exacerbated by disparities relating to underidentification, misidentification, service, gender, and ethnic differences (Forness et al., 2012). Further frustrating progress is the lack of preventative interventions prior to a student’s induction into special education and strategies for early identification (Zirkel & Thomas, 2010). Such phenomena pervade academic achievement and make efforts to align effective instructional practices with the educational needs of students with EBD contentious and challenging (Forness et al., 2012).

Examination of outcomes among students with EBD reveals heterogeneity among students' experience with achievement (Popham et al., 2018). Examination of the relation between school context, particularly school-level socioeconomic status (SES), and the academic achievement of students with EBD revealed that students with EBD in high-SES schools performed better than those in low-SES schools (Wiley et al., 2008). However, in a follow-up study, Siperstein, Wiley, and Forness (2011) discovered no statistically significant finding when examining outcomes in light of SES among students with EBD. Further, research identifying contributors to the achievement gap of students with EBD is often met with mixed findings.

Lloyd and colleagues (2019) assert that greater attention is needed to address racial, cultural, contextual, and gender differences within studies for students with EBD and those charged with identifying, serving, and evaluating these students. Additionally, researchers emphasize the need to mitigate the effects of disproportionality among culture, context and gender asserting that failure to do so leads to overrepresentation, which can subsequently exacerbate segregation and stigmatization, or underrepresentation, which can result in denied access—both of which are problematic (Skiba, Artiles, Kozleski, Losen, & Harry, 2016). Understanding, then, how demographic variables are related to issues of access and the perpetuation of racial tensions is imperative to achieving equity (Lloyd et al., 2019).

Amidst national and global efforts to identify the forces of culture influencing the achievement gap of students with EBD, researchers have established that teachers have the most influence on the achievement gains of their students (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb,

Rockoff, & Wyckoff, 2008; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2006; Master, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2014), and that this contribution is greater than that of any other school influence (e.g., instructional group size, per-pupil expenditure).

Unfortunately, it is also well-documented throughout literature that the students who need the best teachers are least likely to have them due to effects of poverty (Grossman, Beaupre, & Rossi, 2001; Boyd et al., 2008; Fall & Billingsley, 2008). Max and Glazerman (2014) noted that students in high-poverty areas are more likely to have teachers with lower value-added scores than teachers in affluent areas because districts have insufficiently strategized and are insufficiently structured to ensure more quality and effective teachers are assigned to high-poverty schools. Due to poverty, teacher quality is frequently associated as contributor to low student achievement among students.

Teacher Preparation on Student Achievement

Gage et al. (2017) note the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA as the historical events that precipitated the requirement for *highly qualified teachers*. Grasping the exactness of this concept and defining specific characteristics in training, quality, and qualifications that allow a teacher to meet this status has been difficult (Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002). Carlson, Lee, and Schroll (2004) associate certification type, education level, and years of experience as components that distinguish highly qualified teachers from others. For students with EBD, guaranteeing access to highly qualified teachers has been problematic (Gage et al., 2017). Since access to highly qualified teachers is limited due to national shortages (;

Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016; Simon & Johnson, 2015), teachers of students with EBD tend to be emergency certified with fewer years of teaching experience than other special education teachers (Gable, Tonelson, Sheth, Wilson, & Park, 2012; Gage et al., 2017). However, preparation beyond that required for all teachers (i.e. education, certification, and years of experience) is necessary to improve the academic achievement of students with EBD (Gage et al., 2017). The provision of effective instructional practices in light of evidenced-based behavior management approaches could improve these students' academic performance (Gage et al., 2017).

In contributing to quality student achievement, teachers have two responsibilities: (1) to participate in collaborative efforts to improve overall school effectiveness, and (2) engage the community in educating students (Gallimore & Goldberg, 2001). Researchers have documented that teachers who teach students with EBD tend to forego these responsibilities and are in dire need of becoming proficient in positively impacting student achievement (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Oliver & Reschly, 2007). For instance, in one study, only 25%-33% of teachers of a sample of students with EBD had received at least 8 hours of in-service training regarding issues related to working with students with disabilities (Wagner et al., 2006). Furthermore, a minority of teachers across grade levels reported receiving adequate training for working with students with disabilities (Wagner et al., 2006). The data reveal that teachers are insufficiently prepared, lack intervention integrity, and improperly implement interventions because documented essentials are nowhere to be found (Oliver & Reschley, 2010; Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003, Lewis & Thomas, 2014).

These deficits, disparities, and inequities as commonly experienced by both teachers and SWDs are the result of traditional lack of equity and equality within America's schools.

Historical Context

Important to examine is the historical context related to educational equality and equity in special education. Delving into the history immediately reveals the unique interplay and societal conflict that legislative implementations, racial ideals and ideologies, and the appropriation of inalienable rights cause.

Since the mid to late 1800s, grappling with ideals of social justice, social rights, race relations and its contentions have been pervasive. Harris (2017) suggests that the tensions that exist precede the irresolution surrounding the abolishment of slavery in 1865, the enforcement of the Thirteenth Amendment, and implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1866. Considering the impact of Jim Crow laws between race relations of African-Americans and their White counterparts, a growing number of scholars and scientists are accepting that race is a legal construct (Haney Lopez, 2006). Yet, the effects of these laws have served as the catalysts for numerous seminal events within special education history.

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

Plessy v. Ferguson case encapsulates the expansiveness of race-related tensions throughout the nation in its earlier years (Harris, 2017). In this case, ruling in favor of racial segregation, the court established a precedent that constitutional requirements for

equal protection under the law have been met if separate, equal systems are established for different groups of people. This ruling further entrenched the nation into 60 years of racially destructive patterns that affected every sector of public life, including schools, until the doctrine was reprovved in 1954 (Harris, 2017).

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)

The segregative philosophy of “separate but equal” that emerged from *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision was revisited by the Supreme Court in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (Young, Dolph, & Russo, 2015). In this decision, the court ruled that “separate but equal is inherently unequal” and schools must initiate and implement desegregation of schools “with all deliberate speed”, as the previously upheld racially divisive practices were unconstitutional under the equal protection clause. Though the ruling was interpreted sluggishly, it served as the catalyst that would reform how education had been understood. Particularly, the ruling by the Supreme Court determined that education was in fact the most important governmental function at the state and local levels (Wright, 2012). However, two court decisions, *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* (Wright, 2012, 1972) and *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Wright, 2012, PARC, 1971, 1972), illumined specific shortcomings in state and local efforts to facilitate FAPE, as set by federal legislature and sufficient to the need that students with disabilities exhibit (Wright, 2012).

Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
(PARC, 1971, 1972)

Mead (2008) explains that the *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (PARC, 1971, 1972) case entailed 13 students with cognitive disabilities that were labeled “un-educable” and “untrainable” according to the terminology used to describe children with disabilities and 13 school districts that failed to provide the children with a public supported education (Chinn, 2004). The rulings between the commonwealth of Pennsylvania and its schools led to the creation of three provisions: (1) the identification of children with disabilities, (2) a system of care designed to meet student’s educational needs, and (3) the creation of opportunities for parents to dispute with school districts through a third party and be included in all aspects of educationally-relevant decision making. Furthermore, the court rulings that developed from *PARC* as well as *Mills v. Board of Education* are widely accepted as the landmark court cases and lifeblood of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) (Mead, 2008). *PARC* served as the establishment and baseline for all children between the ages of 6 and 21 to be provided a free public education (Chinn, 2004). Furthermore, the *PARC* ruling underscored that a disability, regardless of its severity, does not abrogate the local education agency’s (LEA) responsibility to provide FAPE.

Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia (1972)

The facts in *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* (Wright, 2012, 1972) surround seven students who had been identified as having behavioral problems, emotional disturbance, and/or some form of hyperactivity and therefore excluded from public school or prevented from receiving appropriate services to address their needs (Mead, 2008). In their decision, the Supreme Court addressed the District of Columbia's failure to provide FAPE and further established the standard of service delivery necessary to be practiced if students' rights and educational requirements would be adequately supported in light of the law. The motions set forth in this case further required greater accountability of the educational system to provide services to children that had generally been suspended, expelled or excluded on the basis of exceptionality (Chinn, 2004).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142)

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act or EHA (Public Law 94-142), signed into law in 1975, serves as the foundation of special education policy. As the predecessor of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Public Law 94-142, was the first legislation that required public schools that accept federal funds to provide equal access to education for students with physical and mental disabilities (Chinn, 2004). Public Law 94-142 was purposed to assure: (1) "that all children with disabilities have available to them...a free appropriate public education", (2) that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents...are protected (3) assistance to States and localities to provide for the education of all students with disabilities, and (4) to

assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to education all students with disabilities” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Furthermore, this legislative action further serves to ground the following concepts in special education: (1) free appropriate public education, (2) least restrictive environment, (3) individualized education program/plan, (4) due process, (5) non-discriminatory assessment, and (6) parental involvement (US Department of Education, 2007). Since its initial authorization, the EHA has been reauthorized as the IDEA.

Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley (1982)

Rowley marks the Supreme Court’s first decision interpreting the standard of “appropriate education” as required by the IDEA (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018). The facts in *Rowley* consist of the Supreme Court investigating whether an LEA was required to provide additional support services (e.g. interpreter services) to a child with a disability who demonstrated educational progress based on services (e.g. special tutor, hearing aids, and speech therapy) already provided. Furthermore, the Court substantiated that “a student’s individualized education program (IEP) ...is to be reasonably calculated to enable the child to receive educational benefit” (p. 125, Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018). The Court ruled that the LEA had met the standard as evidenced by the student advancing through grades (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The IDEA is the educational reform act that served to herald the needs of students with disabilities. IDEA is built on the philosophy that students with disabilities, from birth-age 22, have the right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). IDEA also binds the ideal of an appropriate education to the least restrictive environment (LRE) philosophy by documenting the extent to which a child will not participate in the general education classroom setting, in extracurricular, and other school activities (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018). Additionally, IDEA provides the framework for which educators and policymakers can measure progress and smooth transitions of students with disabilities as well as the lack thereof (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). IDEA sets forth extensive provisions and services related to the movement and transitioning of students with disabilities, whether one is examining student needs in terms of the whole of the educational system or specifically, for example, in the elementary, secondary, or post-secondary context (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). The public law was last revised and reauthorized with the intent of expanding provisions for students with disabilities in specific ways, including, but not limited to, the identification of children with special needs, the improvement of educational outcomes for at-risk youth, developing individualized programs (IEPs), mainstreaming students with disabilities, accountability for school expectations, parental involvement, decreasing administrative burdens of educators that teach student with disabilities, and distinguishing secondary and postsecondary facets of education (McGuire, Madaus, Litt, & Ramirez, 1996).

Further, there is literature to suggest that dualisms emerge as educational reforms are developed. For example, magnet schools serve as a viable, innovative approach to the provision of educational services to students with disabilities, yet challenges associated with such schools regarding the phenomenon of appropriateness cannot be eliminated (Young, Doplh, & Russo, 2015). Specifically, the creation of magnet schools serves the purpose of answering the call to integration, yet they also serve to weaken efforts and the quality of neighborhood schools, particularly in regard to staffing and teacher quality (Young, Doplh, & Russo, 2015). Teacher quality remained strongly associated with affluence of the school and its surrounding community (Brown, 2015). Reform in one area of special education policy exposes shortcomings in another, which then requires further steps in formulating solutions.

No Child Left Behind

No Child Left Behind serves as the 2001 reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). The impetus of NCLB was increased school accountability as evidenced by high-stakes testing (Desimone, 2013). Further, NCLB underscored the need and use of scientifically-based instruction in classroom settings by “highly qualified” teachers. Under NCLB, the definitions and standards to be considered highly-qualified were by state-developed education and certification requirements. However, teachers of special education were required to possess more. Special education teachers, to be considered highly-qualified, needed to possess knowledge of academic content as delivered in the general education curriculum and effective strategies for

instruction with regard to students with disabilities (Sayeski & Higgins, 2014). Further, special education teachers need to have knowledge of their specific content area as well as the associated standards, but depending on their role (e.g., co-teaching) within service delivery the need to demonstrate competency in a content area varied. Ultimately, NCLB serves as the legislative action under which teacher evaluation was most directly connected to student achievement as measured by students' performance on state assessments (NCLB, 2001).

Every Student Succeeds Act (P.L. 114-95)

The importance of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) underscores the legislation's reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (ESEA) and replacement of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (Darrow, 2015). ESSA is generally regarded as an improvement over NCLB in its provision of equal education opportunities to all students regardless of income, English proficiency, race, ethnicity or disability (Darrow, 2015). Specifically, states are granted more flexibility with regard to teacher accountability measures (Saultz et al., 2017). Additionally, states were given choice in their adoption and alignment of high standards to college and career goals, the design of state assessments for accountability, the application and implementation of instruction and evidenced-based and placed-based intervention, and accountability measures to promote positive changes in low-performing schools (ESSA, 2015).

ESSA established changes in the federal role in teacher policy from credentialing and qualifications, as enforced under NCLB, to effectiveness and practice, by placing

emphasis on understanding student outcomes that teachers produce (Saultz, 2017; Darrow, 2015). Additionally, teachers' preparation and responsibility in providing rigorous instruction was underscored. ESSA recognized the need to address teacher's ability to provide quality instruction. While removing the highly-qualified requirement and teacher evaluations models as set forth by NCLB (CEC 2015), ESSA emphasized recruitment, preparation, and retention of teachers and other school personnel.

Experts in education report that the law also require states to develop plans to reduce the overuse of disciplinary practices and aversive behavioral interventions (ASAH, 2016; Samuels, 2015). To accomplish this feat, the legislation affirmed teachers' use of "multi-tiered systems of support and positive behavioral interventions and supports" to increase their capacity to assist students with disabilities toward satisfying requirements set by state academic standards (Section 2103(b)(3)(f), ESSA). Further, alternative programs were made acceptable as special education teachers were permitted to be professionals possessing a non-education related Bachelor's degree (ESSA, 2015). Teacher induction programs and professional development were funded through Title II initiatives as legislated by ESSA (CEC, 2015). Though the ESEA has undergone numerous changes over the course of its 50-year history, the bill, in light of ESSA, is considered the most expansive in its philosophy of providing children with equal access to education (Essex, 2015), teacher quality, distribution, and equity (Saultz et al., 2017). Expanding philosophies, regarding giving children equal access to education, not only demanded reform in legislation but in the use of language. Darrow (2015) emphasized that ESSA was not merely a motion of the federal government in the right direction in

terms of reauthorizing landmark legislations, but also the federal government demonstrating its stance concerning the progressive use of the right language.

It has been the intent of legislative reauthorizations to further guarantee all students, including students with disabilities, a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent appropriate. However, Conner and Ferri (2007) revealed that, in subsequent years, what was genuinely intended to grant students with disabilities greater access to public education led to the establishment of “an increasingly segregated service system, entrenched in clinical models, with its own practices, regulations, staff, and sets of assumptions” (p. 15). Recognizing this phenomenon, ESSA attempted to further blur the lines between seeking to provide educational equity to all regardless of race, income, background, or zip code (Obama, 2015).

Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1 (2017)

The *Endrew* case highlights the contention surrounding the standard of FAPE at the hands of an LEA. Endrew failed to make progress over a four-year period despite the LEA’s creation of an IEP. Following a series of appeals and arguments over IDEA’s appropriate education requirement, the Supreme Court rejected interpretations presented by the plaintiffs, as well as the LEA, highlighting the inconsistency between the intent of IDEA and a FAPE standard that requires an educational program to provide “merely more than *de minimis*” education and the impracticality of expecting “substantially equal” achievement for all students with disabilities to that of their non-disabled peers.

Subsequently, the Court affirmed a FAPE standard in the IDEA which requires an “educational program reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances” (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018, p. 126). The *Endrew* case further reveals the degree to which assumptions over appropriateness negatively impact the provision of FAPE to all. Furthermore, *Endrew* provides that “progress, not benefit, is a metric for appropriateness” (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018, p. 134).

Endrew on Teacher Preparation

Currently, the institutions of general education and special education exist as concurrent systems (Lalvani, 2012). Teacher education programs provide teachers with distinct and isolated instructional skills for two kinds of learners (Linton, 1998). Historically, such approaches have led to teacher preparation practices that impact the learning environment and teaching experiences associated with FAPE (Lalvani, 2012; Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018).

Billingsley, Fall, and Williams (2006) examined characteristics of teachers of students with EBD and general special education teachers utilizing the Study of Personal Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) database. The authors discovered that teachers of students with EBD were statistically significantly younger, had fewer years of teaching experience, and were less likely fully certified (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006). Additional research revealed that teachers of students with EBD were less likely to have obtained a Master’s degree, accepting teaching assignments that were not congruent with

their main teaching assignment, more likely emergency certified, and were more often credentialed through alternative certification programs than other special education teachers (Henderson, Klein, Gonzalez, & Bradley, 2005).

The Endrew case emphasized the critical role that teachers and other service personnel play in stewarding FAPE, particularly after having established robust partnerships with parents in making decisions (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018). Focusing on progress and its implementation, as a measure of appropriateness, requires strong considerations be given to teacher preparation. In light of some of the odds faced by teachers of students with EBD, curriculum enhancement and pre- and in-service education (e.g. professional development) are two integral aspects of teacher preparation that must be examined if the redefinition of appropriateness is to be ensured (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Cooper, 2018).

Federal Legislation and Teacher Preparation

Continued reauthorizations of federal legislation (e.g., *IDEIA*, *NCLB*, *ESSA*) have influenced and changed the roles and responsibilities of special educators. Teacher preparation programs for special educators prior to *IDEA* emphasized knowledge and skills that were associated with the category of disability, were more clinical in nature, and often based on behavioral approaches to instruction (Shepherd et al., 2016). Now teacher preparation programs, including those in special education, have progressed from providing teachers with knowledge, skills, and competencies to effectively work in specialized, self-contained settings (Brownell et al., 2010) to that necessary to effectively collaborate and teach in inclusive classrooms (Fuchs et al., 2010).

Each reauthorization of legislation expanded philosophies that were established at the legislations' inception. Generally, changes with each re-authorization were prompted by the need to address persisting issues that were not resolved by earlier reauthorizations. Requirements for special education teachers were expanded to reflect the additions in legislation that include the need for teachers to further develop the knowledge and skills to meet the changing needs of students with disabilities. Moreover, in response to federal legislation, special education: (a) shifted practices of service provision in the self-contained setting to the general education classroom to the greatest extent possible; (b) emphasized increased collaboration with service delivery approaches being provided in the LRE (Shepherd et al., 2016); (c) increased the knowledge base of strategies for instruction to include content area proficiency; (d) required an outcomes-based approach to instruction delivered using evidence-based practice; and (e) placed a greater emphasis on teacher quality.

Significance of Teacher Quality

The emphasis on teacher preparation by federal legislation influenced associated movements within education focusing on teacher quality. The significance of teacher quality became increasingly clear and gained momentum as its direct relationship with student achievement was more understood (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Rockoff, 2004). With respect to teacher preparation, teacher quality garnered acclaim as a greater indicator of student performance (Feng & Sass, 2013; Matsumura & Wang, 2014; Rivkin et al., 2005) than

class size or other extraneous variables (Beare et al.,2012). The correlation between student performance and teachers' instructional practices is strong and direct (Feng & Sass, 2013; Matsumura & Wang, 2014; Pressley et al., 2001; Rivkin et al., 2005; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampton, 1998). McLeskey and Billingsley (2008) stressed that "less effective teachers can have a devastating effect on achievement outcomes for students" (p. 296). With that, teachers' need for preparation programs that provide them with the knowledge, skills, and experience in evidence-based instructional practices is paramount.

Special education teachers need to be submersed in professional development programs that will improve their teaching and, subsequently, student outcomes across content areas (Boardman et al. 2005; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Jones, 2009; Pressley et al., 2001; Rock et al., 2016; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). Such improvements will empower special education teachers to meet the instructional demands and learning needs of students with disabilities, even those within that group that are considered at-risk (Fang, 2014; Fang & Pace, 2013; Fang, Schleppergrell,& Moore, 2014; Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Kiely, 2015). Leko and colleagues (2015) asserted that, for success in school contexts driven by evidenced-based practices and federal legislation, special education teachers need to have extensive knowledge of how to support students with disabilities in conquering rigor. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2012) reiterated these sentiments asserting that "setting high expectations for students require changes in the delivery of instruction (p.26). Further, the CCSSO (2012) stressed that teacher preparation programs should be rigorous since setting "higher expectations of students have led to higher expectations for teaching and

leading” (p. 27). Therefore, researchers have laid a strong basis for argument requiring teacher preparation programs to: (a) provide teachers with the knowledge necessary to be effective in their teaching practices (Boardman et al., 2005); (b) equip teachers with the skills necessary to evaluate, select, and implement evidence-based instructional strategies directly aligned with student needs (Batsche, 2014; Cook & Cook, 2013; Little & Houston, 2013a); (c) develop teacher’s ability to collaborate, communicate, and consult with various professionals (Brownell et al., 2010; Leko et al., 2015); and (d) make data-driven instructional decisions (Daly et al., 2007), and (e) advise teachers on increasing student engagement and aligning classroom instruction with objectives, goals, and standards (Fuchs et al., 2014) .

Teacher Preparation

Given the responsibilities of the special education teacher in response to legislative reform, researchers and educators stress the growing need for policies “that address and resolve issues related to the roles of special educators” (Shepherd et al., 2016, p. 92). Several trends in education have influence the preparation of teachers (Fisher, Frey & Thousand, 2003). Early trends in teacher preparation focused on normalization (Wolfensberger, 1972), which are a set of principles that were mostly applied to individuals who lived in residential institutions. Normalization focused on teaching students with disabilities basic skills in socialization, recreation and self-care (Fisher, Frey & Thousand, 2003). Simultaneously, movements to deinstitutionalize and increase students with disabilities’ access to public education increased (Fisher, Frey &

Thousand, 2003). Specifically, teachers were required to grow in professional competency by creating adaptations to activities and environments for students with disabilities. The normalization of student access to more general education activities demanded new tenets (e.g. community-based instruction, inclusion). Current research continues in the spirit of reform, providing recommendations for teacher training and preparation for students with disabilities (Ravitch, 2015; Strauss, 2013, 2015; CCSSO, 2015; CTQ, 2014).

Today, recommendations are not exclusive to placement, but to complex processes that are inclusive of special education service delivery. Shepherd and colleagues (2016) presented six recommendations for teacher preparation programs, researchers, and policymakers emphasizing: (a) the development of a clear vision regarding the roles of special educators acknowledge the complexities in providing specialized instruction in the context of MTSS, high-stakes accountability, advances in technology, increasing student diversity, increased need for collaboration, and advancements in the learning science; (b) the reformation of teacher preparation programs to ensure effective preparation of all educators; (c) the development of common evaluation tools that can measure preparedness of special educators; (d) the revamping of state licensure and credentialing systems; (e) increased accountability of special educators and (f) support through funding for research on the preparation and development of special educators at all levels (Shepherd et al., 2016).

Generally, current special educators focus on intensive individualized instruction and intervention, cite skills related to tailoring instruction through increased time or

grouping strategies as essential, and place a stronger emphasis on the organization and structure of the learning environment (Pullen & Kennedy, 2018; Lignugaris-Kraft & Harris, 2014). Historically, general education teachers' expectations, beliefs, and teaching practice exclusively tailored around the specialization of content aligned with grade level standards in large groups (Ripley et al., 1997). Subsequently, federal legislation emphasized the need for special education teachers to specialize in *both* content knowledge and individualized instruction knowledge (NCLB, 2001). To accomplish this feat, teacher preparation programs considered shifts in their approach to preparing special educators for their new roles. As early as 2005, researchers believed teacher preparation could be enhanced by collaboration between special educators and educators of the general curriculum that "is conducted in joint fashion, in teams comprised of teacher educators from special and general teacher education, across content areas" (Pugach, 2005, p. 578). Pugach, Blanton, and Boveda (2014) asserted that "by working together across general and special education at the preservice level, teachers will be better prepared to address the wide diversity of students they reach, including those who have disabilities" (p. 144).

At-Risk Students and Students with EBD in the Classroom

Known struggles exist for teachers working with students with or at risk for EBD in the classroom (Farmer, Reinke, & Brooks, 2014). Often reported from teachers at the end of the student-teaching experience has been knowledge and experience in classroom management (He & Cooper, 2011). The concept of classroom management has evolved

from a narrow focus on discipline to including all teacher actions inside and outside of direct instruction that set the stage for both academic and social-emotional learning to occur (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015). As early as 2001, educators proposed the use of “advanced teaching practices” for the improvement of educational outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities (Palincsar, Magnusson, Collins, & Cutter, 2001). For at-risk students and students with disabilities educators noted especial progress within classrooms and instruction that were research- and evidence-based (Boardman et al. 2005; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Jones, 2009; Little & King, 2008; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998). Teachers who created classrooms characterized by high-quality emotional and organizational supports helped increase the academic achievement of children with or at risk for EBD by improving their on-task behaviors and engagement (Fruth, 2014; Korterling & Christenson, 2009). Since then, evidenced-based strategies contributing to improved educational outcomes for students with EBD have been identified within specific content areas (e.g., reading, literacy, writing), yet gaps between research and implementation still exist within the field (Wang and Lam, 2017). Teachers still resort to punitive and reactive practices (e.g., removal from the class) resulting in less time for learning (Garwood et al., 2017). Evidence suggests that the procurement of quality teacher preparation programs may increase teacher access and capacity to adequately implement specially designed instruction and benefit these students in meeting general education curriculum standards as enforced by legislation (Elish-Piper, 2016; Fuchs et al., 2014).

Effective Instruction and Evidence-Based Practices

In light of philosophical variations among teachers, the impetus of federal legislatures has been to prevent exclusions of students with disabilities from public spaces entirely and to increase access to all by providing an integrated and inclusive learning experience within general education settings (Batsche, 2014). Effective implementation of integrated learning experiences includes collaboration, data-based decision-making, and evidence-based instructional strategies and materials for each level of support demanded by students' specific needs (Harn, Chard, Biancarosa, & Kame'enui, 2011; Harn et al., 2014). Data-based decision making and evidence-based practices are required by legislation (e.g., *ESSA*, *IDEIA*, *NCLB*) to ready students for college and career upon graduation (Cusumano, Algozzine, & Algozzine, 2014). Additionally, research in educational pedagogy, evidence-based practices, and intervention has focused on instruction within the continuum of placement settings in special education and general education to improve learning outcomes of students with and without disabilities (Boardman et al., 2005; Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Jones, 2009, Wang & Lam, 2017).

In the field of special education, research has informed classroom practices and has strengthened the understanding of effective practices for students with disabilities (Boardman et al., 2005). *NCLB* (2004) previously defined scientifically-based practices (a.k.a., evidence-based practices) as those that involve “the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs” (Title IX, Part A, Section 9101[37]). Researchers have

extended the definition of EBPs as practices that are “supported by empirical research and professional wisdom so that research-based instructional methodologies could be implemented in the unique systems represented by each preK-12 public school” (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009, p. 3). Further, evidence-based instructional practices (EBPs) are shown to be critically important when working with diverse students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, students with disabilities, and English learners (Matsumara, Garneir, & Spybrook, 2012).

Research related to special education interventions has advanced the knowledge of what constitutes an effective classroom practice (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009; Cochran-Smith, 2004) as well as informed the field of empirical strategies that support improvement among student learners. By employing a variety of instructional methods, e.g. assistive devices, services and supports, environmental arrangements student outcomes improve (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001). Simultaneously, the employment of various instructional methods allow teachers to engage students with the acquisition of new skills, the development of problem solving and critical thinking skills, increased engagement and motivation (Mustafa & Cullingford, 2008).

High Leverage Practices and Students with EBD

Historically, effective instruction was defined as a set of behaviors “picked up” through the accumulation of on the job experiences (Jackson, 1986; Murray, 1989). Today, effective instruction is understood as a product of specialized knowledge and skills (Windschitl et al., 2012) as well as a teacher’s capacity to provide specially

designed instruction(SDI) as enforced by federal legislation. Federal legislations (e.g. *EAH, IDEA*) define SDI as

“adapting as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability; and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of public agency that apply to all children (34 C.F.R. §300.39[b][3]).

Windschitl and colleagues (2012) assert that when a historical view is held that effective teaching is solely the accumulation of on the job experiences, and this belief serves as the culture within which teacher preparation is incubated, the result is “well-intentioned beginners who enact inherited rituals of classroom activity and routinely underestimate what students are capable of” (p. 881). Alternatively, SDI serves as the means whereby effective instruction is prescribed and specified to students [with disabilities] according to their unique need by adapting instructional content, methods, or delivery to meet that need (Ricomini, Morano, & Hughes, 2017). An aspect of SDI intended to assist teachers in their ability to effectively teach and meet student needs is high-leverage practices (HLPs). Much early research was dedicated to defining HLPs to enhance special education teacher preparation and classroom practice. Ball and Forzani (2011) defined high leverage practices as, “those activities of teaching which are essential that if not discharged competently will cause teachers to face significant problems” (p. 19). HLPs were also described as “a set of research-based core practices for beginning educators that are ... broadly applicable instructional strategies known to foster important kinds of student engagement and learning” (Windschitl, Thompson, Braaten, & Stroupe,

2012, p.879). Additionally, HLPs are understood as practices teachers use regardless of content or grade-level taught (Pullen & Kennedy, 2018). HLPs are, therefore, a teacher's beginning point for selecting evidence-based instructional behaviors that can be used to design and deliver effective instruction and support to students with disabilities (Ball & Forzani, 2011; Pullen & Kennedy, 2018).

HLPs reflect a compilation of “frequently-used” practices that “have been shown to improve student outcomes” (McLeskey & Brownell, 2015, p. 7) by addressing: collaboration, assessment, social-emotional-behavior supports, and instruction – each aspects of special education service delivery (Riccomini, Morano, & Hughes, 2017). Further, HLPs include selection criteria specifying that each must

- (a) focus directly on instructional practice, (b) occur with high frequency in teaching in any setting, (c) be research based and known to foster student engagement and learning, (d) be broadly applicable and usable in any content area or approach to teaching, and (e) be fundamental to effective teaching when executed skillfully (McLeskey et al., 2017, p. 21).

Further components of HLPs included

- (a) collaboration with school professionals; (b) interpreting and communicating assessment data to education programs; (c) using explicit instruction flexible grouping; (d) providing intensive instruction; (e) adapting curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals; and (f) using strategies to promote active student engagement (McLeskey et al., 2017, p.21).

There are 22 identified HLPs for special education teachers as identified and developed by The Professional Standards and Practice Committee (PSPC) of the Council for

Exceptional Children (CEC) working in collaboration with the CEEDAR Center and the Teacher Education Division (TED) of CEC (McLeskey et al., 2017). Table 1 provides a list of HLPs reprinted from McLeskey and colleagues (2017).

Table 1:

The 22 High-Leverage Practices (HLPs).

Aspect	High-Leverage Practice
Collaboration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaborate with professionals to increase student success. 2. Organize and facilitate effective meetings with professionals and families. 3. Collaborate with families to support student learning and secure needed services.
Assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Use multiple sources of information to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student’s strengths and needs. 5. Interpret and communicate assessment information with stakeholders to collaboratively design and implement educational programs. 6. Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes.
Social/ Emotional/ Behavioral	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment. 8. Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students’ learning and behavior. 9. Teach social behaviors. 10. Conduct functional behavioral assessments to develop individual student behavior support plans. Instruction 11. Identify and prioritize long- and short-term learning goals. 12. Systematically design instruction toward specific learning goals. 13. Adapt curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals. 14. Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence. 15. Provided scaffolded supports. 16. Use explicit instruction. 17. Use flexible grouping. 18. Use strategies to promote active student engagement. 19. Use assistive and instructional technologies. 20. Provide intensive instruction. 21. Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings. 22. Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students’ learning and behavior.

Note. Adapted from McLeskey et al., 2017

Effective instruction requires teachers to know about their students with EBD, “their intellectual habits, misconceptions, and interests”, as well as the “ways in which students’ personal and cultural backgrounds bear on their work in school” (p. 20). If this knowledge is lacking, teachers will be unable to provide appropriate instruction designed to meet their students’ specific needs (Ball & Forzani, 2011). Adopting HLPs enable teachers to ensure clarity of language and purpose, the reduction of cognitive load, the promotion of active student engagement accompanied by feedback that is appropriate, affirmative and corrective, and utilizes purposeful practice strategies that assists in long-term retention (Hughes, Morris, Therrein, & Benson, 2017). Ultimately, the intent of using HLPs is to promote the use of effective specially designed instruction which will lead to success for SWD.

Federal Legislation and Placement of Students with Disabilities

From PL 94-142 to *Endrew*, the federal government has mandated provisions for special education services to students with disabilities, in terms of adequately providing students their right to FAPE. One of the mandated provisions of the government to students with disabilities was for instruction to be provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Depending on the unique needs of each student, placement can range from the most restrictive (e.g. hospital bound care) to the least restrictive (e.g. the general education setting) to the most restrictive (e.g. hospital bound care) (Deno, 1970).

The concept of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in special education follows Cascade logic (Deno, 1970). Cascade logic emphasizes that placement options should be chosen and designed to maximize integration (Fisher, Frey, & Thousand, 2003). During

the inception of PL- 94-142, the LRE construct was heavily influenced by early reformers (Wolfensberger, 1972; Baumgart et al., 1982) and reinforced the principle of partial participation asserting that students with disabilities gain access to important activities regardless of their mastery of independent skills (Fisher, Frey, & Thousand, 2003).

During the early years of implementation of the LRE principle, students with disabilities were often provided services in segregated settings within the public schools (Yell et al., 2011). However, the concept of segregated settings received increasing criticism. Early researchers asserted that the practice of removing students with disabilities from the general education classroom was flawed because it attributed poor student performance to characteristics of the student rather than to the quality of the learning environment (Wang et al, 1986). Further, researchers described service delivery when provided in segregated settings as disjointed, inefficient, and inadequate for meeting the diverse needs of students (Bauwens et al., 1989; Glover & DiPerna, 2007). Educators, advocates and researchers continued to explore practices for including students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers, such as community-based instruction (CBI).

Community-Based instruction (CBI) (Falvey, 1986) established the precedent for students with disabilities to receive education and support services in natural environments (Fisher, Fey, & Thousand, 2003). CBI consists of providing instruction of functional skills in the setting of which they naturally occur (Rowe, Cease-Cook, and Test, 2011). Through CBI, SWDs practice skills in the same environment that they will ultimately have to use those skills (Barczak, 2019). However, during its early implementation, the provision of instruction was foiled due to disproportionality (Fisher,

Frey & Thousand, 2003). Simultaneously, the concept of the neighborhood school and inclusive education were gaining increased emphasis, ultimately, causing students with significant disabilities to increasingly be taught on general education campuses (Fisher, Frey, & Thousand, 2003)

Inclusion has traditionally been regarded as the educating of students with disabilities in general education settings rather than segregated placements (Cook, Semmel, and Gerber, 1999). More than location, though, inclusion is “the practice of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms...that have been restructured...with the provision of supports needed to meet the needs of all its students” (Baglieri et al., 2011, p. 16). Inclusion is understood and implemented variably depending on educative placements (Cook, Semmel, and Gerber, 1999).

Though often used interchangeably with mainstreaming, the concept of inclusion has significant distinctions. Kauffman, Gottlieb, Agard, and Kykic (1975) defined mainstreaming as the “temporal, instructional, and social integration of eligible exceptional children with normal peers based on an ongoing, individually determined educational planning and programming progress” (p. 3). Lalvani (2012) defines mainstreaming as the practice of “providing students with disabilities varying levels of interaction with their non-disabled peers during the school day” (p.16). Though inclusion is argued by some researchers as the reification of assumptions that the “natural” (p. 2123) position of students with disabilities is one of disbelonging (Baglieri et al., 2011), the distinctions between mainstreaming and inclusion is the difference between visiting a classroom and being fully assumed as a permanent member of that classroom (Lalvani, 2012).

Beyond the practical variances of inclusive education, there are teacher conceptualizations that vary regarding inclusive education. Winzer (2000) highlights that a continuum of perspectives exists relating to teachers' conceptualization of inclusion but, most commonly, the fundamental concern revolves around the issue of placement. Further, varying philosophical perspectives that proceed from teachers' fundamental conceptualization of educative practices are believed to influence their personal positionality and situatedness in practice (Winzer, 2000). However, from the passage of Public Law 94-142 until recent years, dominant conceptualizations had remained unexplored (Lalvani, 2012). Researchers posit that inclusive education is more about democracy and the assertion that inclusive practices be grounded in general education reform and framed in the context of social justice (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006; Slee 2001; Ware 2003; Ballard 2003). Social justice encompasses principles of inclusion and equity (Bell, 2016). Viewing inclusion from the social justice framework requires teachers to reflect and rethink approaches, beliefs, views, and opinions of inclusion on the basis of civil rights and practices embraced by democratic societies (Lalvani, 2012). Its goal is to eliminate injustices that occur when differences are categorized and ranked in a manner that unequally distributes cultural, social, and economic power (Adams, 2014).

Researchers suggest that teachers tend to subscribe to a dominant, yet outdated, view of inclusion favoring the practice for students with mild disabilities yet maintaining the belief that self-contained classrooms (or schools) is best practice for students with severe, more complex disabilities (Dupoux, Wolman, and Estrada 2005; Sze 2009). Lalvani (2012) emphasizes that maintenance of views supporting segregated school settings proceeds from the medical model, which frames disabilities as limitations to be

overcome. Disabilities, when conceptualized in the medical model, leads to practices of sorting the “normal” from the others – that is, students identified as normal remain in the general education setting and those identified with disabilities are segregated (Baker, 2002; Slee, 2004). The social model exists as an alternative.

Perspectives on the experience of disabilities as a sociocultural construct is offered by the social model (Linton, 1998; Davis, 2002; Hahn, 1997). Lavlani (2012) emphasizes that adherence to the social model view requires educators to view the education of students with disabilities as issues of civil rights and equity. Furthermore, she notes that viewing inclusion through the social model allows teachers to focus on institutional practices and policies as well as their attitudes as predictors of successful inclusion (Lavlani, 2012). Olyer and Hamre (2006) emphasized that “most teachers, having had few meaningful relationships with persons with disabilities, lack awareness of their own complicity in perpetuating oppressive educational practices and ableism in school, and like most non-disabled people, consider their own able-bodied status the norm” (p. 17). Unexamined beliefs tend to be latent and later manifest as obstacles to creating inclusive environments and engaging in effective practicing of inclusive education (Villegas, 2007). Considering the impact that teachers’ awareness and beliefs can have on inclusion, researchers also platform the evolution of inclusion through various arguments posed in response to the demands of reform efforts.

Fuchs, Fuchs, and Stecker (2010) argued that the continuum of services and placements originally proposed by Deno (1970) had been blurred by advocates who called for all special education services to be delivered in the general education classroom. Fuchs and colleagues (2015) contrasted their initial arguments about best

inclusive practices noting better academic outcomes for students receiving intensive special education services delivered outside the general education classroom for specific area content. Zigmond (2015) raised concerns regarding the ways in which data on inclusion is reported to the federal government prioritizing the location of services (i.e., the general education classroom) over the nature of the services provided and not addressing the extent to which individualized, intense, and special education services are and can be delivered within the inclusive classroom.

Other researchers argued that the intent of IDEA was to promote inclusion to the greatest extent possible and believe that more restrictive options on the continuum should seldom be used (Doyle & Giangreco, 2011; Sailor & McCart, 2014). Black-Hawkins and Amrhein (2014) argued that best practice research on inclusion take into account the experiences of every student in the classroom to understand the rich and complex context in which learning occurs. Still, others propose that inclusion take on a more expanded meaning, in order to accommodate the increasingly diverse make-up of today's classrooms (Florian, 2014). For instance, Gallagher (2014) proposes that effective instruction for students who have high incidence disabilities may reduce the need for identification, noting that interventions should be applied to all children whose performance is below age expectation due to socio-economic hardships, race, ethnicity, or immigrant status. Researchers also reason that social inclusion and academic accountability can no longer be considered mutually exclusive (McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner, & Algozzine, 2014). Shepherd et al., (2016) emphasizes that strong consideration be given to approaches that balance the goals social inclusion and improved academic achievement in light of reform efforts and culture. Further, defining the

contexts in which inclusion yields positive social and academic outcomes remains especially critical in clarifying the roles of special educators of students with EBD within each cultural shift.

Roles and Responsibilities of Special Education Teacher

Techniques of special education can be, and are sometimes, used in general education. Yet, Fuchs and colleagues (2010) emphasize that there is a “different, distinctive, and important role for special education” (p. 301). Historically, special education teachers have assumed the responsibility of designing and differentiating instruction to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. Since the introduction of initiatives driven by federal legislation (e.g. IDEA, NCLB, ESSA) to address challenges that have emerged due to changes in reform and associated concerns (i.e. changes in placement, activities, and expectations for SWDs) more dilemmas than solutions have arisen for the special education teacher, in light of inclusion (Fuchs et al., 2015; McCray et al., 2014; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). With each legislative revolution, researchers set out to illumine areas of ambiguity in the role of the special educator.

Cummings and colleagues (2008) posited that the role of the special educator changed within four primary domains: (a) assessment, (b) testing instruments, (c) intervention, and (d) professional environment. Considerable attention had been given to identifying the skills, knowledge and dispositions that enable teachers to embrace and successfully implement inclusive educational practices (Ryndak, Jackson, & Billingsley, 2000). Special attention should be given by teachers to embrace their role as a lifelong

learner. Specifically, teachers “need to acquire through preservice and in-service experiences a common disposition, conceptual framework, language, and a set of technical skills to work with diverse learners who enter the schoolhouse door” (Villa, Thousand, & Chapple, 2000, p. 533). Considerable efforts through in-service preparation for inclusive education contributed to several innovations believed to enable special educators to excel within inclusive education: instruction, assessment, communication, leadership, and record keeping (Cross & Villa, 1992; Falvey & Villa, 1997; Fisher, Sax, & Grove, 2000). In spite of the changes in the roles of special educators, the belief remains of specialized instruction as a core function that should be given priority with each redefinition and clarification of what special educators need to know and be able to do (Lignugaris-Kraft et al., 2014).

Pullen and Hallahan (2015) assert, specialized instruction varies, depending upon the unique needs of the child, and may include supports, such as assistive technology, expanded opportunities to practice and master concepts, evidence-based practices (EBP), as well as frequent monitoring of the child’s progress. Additionally, significant responsibilities for special educators exist that fall outside of instructional time, including assessing students for eligibility, developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), collaborating with families and community agencies, facilitating transition services, supervising paraprofessionals, and managing large caseloads of students (Leko & Smith, 2010; Duke, Darling, & Doan, 2014).

Table 2 outlines the roles and responsibilities of the special educator in inclusive settings.

Table 2:

The Role of the Special Educator in the Inclusive Setting

Roles	Responsibilities
Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructing individual students • Adapting materials and instruction • Providing small group instruction • Teaching the whole class • Monitoring students' academic work • Coordinating support for individual students (including medical and behavioral needs)
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grading students' performance • Developing appropriate exhibitions and demonstrations of student work • Administering educational tests • Eligibility
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending planning meetings • Collaborating with parents, families, and community agencies • Attending problem solving meetings • Providing information about inclusion
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and supervising paraprofessionals • Coordinating peer tutors • Facilitating the use of related services professionals • Encouraging natural supports and friendships record keeping • Developing the IEP • Maintaining records of student performance • Maintaining records of curriculum accommodations and modifications • Facilitating transition services

Note. Adapted from Fisher, Frey, & Thousand, 2003; Leko & Smith, 2010; & Duke, Darling, & Doan, 2014.

Culture and School Climate

Culture is defined as “the complex elements of values, language, tradition and purpose” (Peterson & Deal, 2011, p. 9), and in terms of a school, is constructed in such elements as “the unwritten rules and assumptions, the combination of rituals and routines,

the array of artifacts, symbols, the special language that staff and students use, and the expectations about learning that saturate the school's world" (Peterson & Deal, 2011, p. 9). While there is considerable variation in the definitions of school culture, most contain the following characteristics: observed behavioral regularities, norms, dominant values, philosophies, rules and feelings (Lunenberg, 2010; Schein, 2010a).

Culture affects teachers' rules of engagement (i.e. organization of learning, orientation to teaching, evaluative procedures, rules of schools, instructional activities, and curriculum) (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). Nemet (2018) notes school culture as one of the most critical factors to students' achievement. Within the context of culture, researchers cite the importance of (a) trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2014); (b) administrative leadership style on school culture and partnerships (Auerbach, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2001, 2014), (c) attributes of positive partnerships between teachers and families (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Tschannen-Moran, 2001), (d) parental involvement at school (Epstein 2001; Haines et al., 2013), and (e) the beneficial outcomes of inclusion for students with and without disabilities (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Kalambouka, Farrell, & Dyson, 2007). Analysis reveals that school culture and school climate are often used interchangeably, however, researcher note the dynamic differences that merit attention (Kane et al., 2016).

School climate is a concept that is situated as building block of school culture (Kane et al., 2016). School climate is a multidimensional construct with critical features and various definitions (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Thapa et al. (2013) defined school climate as the quality and character of school life that is based on the patterns of students', parents', and school personnel's experiences of school

life. Kane et al (2016) outline the following as dimensions of school climate that affect students' behavior and sense of belonging to school: school safety, interpersonal relationships, school connectedness and school physical plant characteristics and size. A positive school climate is determined by the standards, goals, ideals, interpersonal relationships, instructional practices, and organizational structures within a school, and supports the individuals within the respective environment on feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Cohen et al., 2009; Thapa et al., 2013). Conversely, schools with negative climates are associated with teacher dissatisfaction, poor student outcomes such as higher discipline incidents, lower student achievement, social, emotional, and behavioral problems, and a lack of caring and trusting relationships among students and teachers (Thapa et al., 2013; Low & Van Ryzin, 2014). Measuring and evaluating school climate is often facilitated through examining the role of administrators (Doll, 2010), conducting climate surveys (Doll, et al., 2014; Kohl, Reccia, & Steffen, 2013), and analyzing perceptions (Doll et al., 2014). O'Malley et al., (2014) noted perception as particularly important in promoting academic achievement among students identified as high-risk.

Regarding students with EBD (SWEBD) researchers note that this group may have more negative perceptions of school climate than their counterparts without disabilities, in part because they struggle to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships, are often rejected by their peers and teachers, and may not appropriately seek the academic, social, emotional, or behavioral supports that they need (La Salle et al. 2018). Further, characteristics that warrant a diagnosis of EBD (e.g., emotional

dysregulation, inappropriate behaviors under normal circumstances, problems with interpersonal relationships (Council for Exceptional Children, 2017) simultaneously make students with the diagnosis more likely to experience school culture as negative. As such, researchers emphasize supports for SWEBD focusing on mitigating the negative impact of social and emotional problems so that SWEBD have the opportunity to engage with other students, feel like an important member of the school, and get their needs met in targeted and appropriate ways (La Salle, et al., 2018).

Theoretical Underpinnings

DiGiacomo and colleagues (2016) note that the purpose of all reform is to promote equity. Reform ideas, no matter how conceived, are often inevitably reshaped during the adaptation of that reform to a local context. Scholars note these adaptations are partially due to inertia — the difficulty of changing the status quo (Berman & McLaughlin, 1987; McLaughlin, 1998; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Scholars have noted, with each successive reauthorization of federal legislation, concerns about implementation at the school level (e.g., Thorius et al., 2014; McKinney, Bartholomew, & Gray, 2010.). In response, scholars have utilized theories to critically analyze, understand, and better mitigate concerns that change efforts bring. School culture and its connections with teacher practices in this study was examined within features of the dynamic systems theory (DST) and the framework of Welner's (2001) *Zone of Mediation* (ZOM).

DST is rooted in developmental science. Developmental science is an interdisciplinary framework that merges related disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, neurobiology, education) to identify factors that contribute to pathways and critical

outcomes in a student's life (Magnusson & Cairns, 1996). This theory recognizes that social-interactive processes dynamically link individuals to their context in ways that impact stability, adaptation, and growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cairns, & Cairns, 1994; Farmer, Gatzke-Kopp, Lee, Dawes, & Talbott, 2016). DST suggests that (a) multiple variables operate as an interconnected system and have the continual potential to change each other and the trajectory of the development of the individual; (b) patterns of growth are probabilistic and linear, while, adaptation and outcome for individuals may diverge significantly from central tendencies; (c) there may be multiple causes and pathways to the same outcomes; (d) the same variables and pathways may produce distinct outcomes for different youth; and (e) development involves the ongoing adaptation of the individual and the context to each other (Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Farmer, 2013; Sameroff, 2000; Smith & Thelen, 2003).

DST provides a framework for the outcomes of students with EBD to be understood. Considering the various forces that contribute to the outcome of a student with EBD, DST serves as a lens through which educators may process a student's development and disposition toward academic achievement. However, Farmer and colleagues (2016) cautions that the intervention needs of students with EBD are "moving targets" (p. 180) and that teachers, to be effective, must "make nuanced but data-informed in-stream modifications to strategy to get out front of an emerging problem or to promote new competencies" (p.180). In addition to utilizing DST, scholars frequently engage Welner's (2001) Zone of Mediation (ZOM) to analyze and mitigate forces that effect school systems and constituents involved.

ZOM is a theoretical tool used to analyze how local policy appropriation may actually contribute to inequitable outcomes in light of equity-minded policy (Sullivan & Artiles, 2011). Since policy reform tends to stimulate intensely rooted issues of power, privilege, status, and difference on the basis of race, language, and class, Welner (2001) theorized that four forces intersect to create a ZOM shaping reform in local schools: (a) inertial, (b) technical, (c) normative, and (d) political. Inertial forces refer to cultural practices of schooling in local contexts, including understandings and routine practices developed over time. Technical forces reflect operational functions and organization of schooling, including resource (e.g., time, personnel) allocation. Normative forces reflect ingrained beliefs about people including “such matters as conventional conceptions of intelligence and deep-seated racist and classist attitudes and prejudices,” (p. 93). Political forces stem from actors’ concerns as affected by power imbalances across educational systems (Thorius et al., 2014).

Scholars argue that policy is never simply implemented (Thorius et al., 2010). Instead, it is interpreted, negotiated, and appropriated by multiple constituents in educational environments (Brown, Maguire, & Ball, 2010; Levinson et al., 2009). Specifically, new versions of policy are informed and influenced by various aspects, including personal history, contextual circumstances, and institutional and historical forces) (Oakes, Welner, Yonezawa, & Allen, 2005). Changes brought about by these factors, which include school culture, can result in unanticipated and unintended impact of the policy when implemented at a local level (Levinson et al., 2009). The ZOM framework (Welner, 2001) offers a way to highlight these and other dynamic forces affecting school reform efforts in various local contexts. Specifically, the zone helps

explain how larger technical, normative and political forces shape a reform's context and illustrates how the local institutions' culture reproduce or counteract these larger forces throughout the implementation process (DiGiacomo et al., 2016).

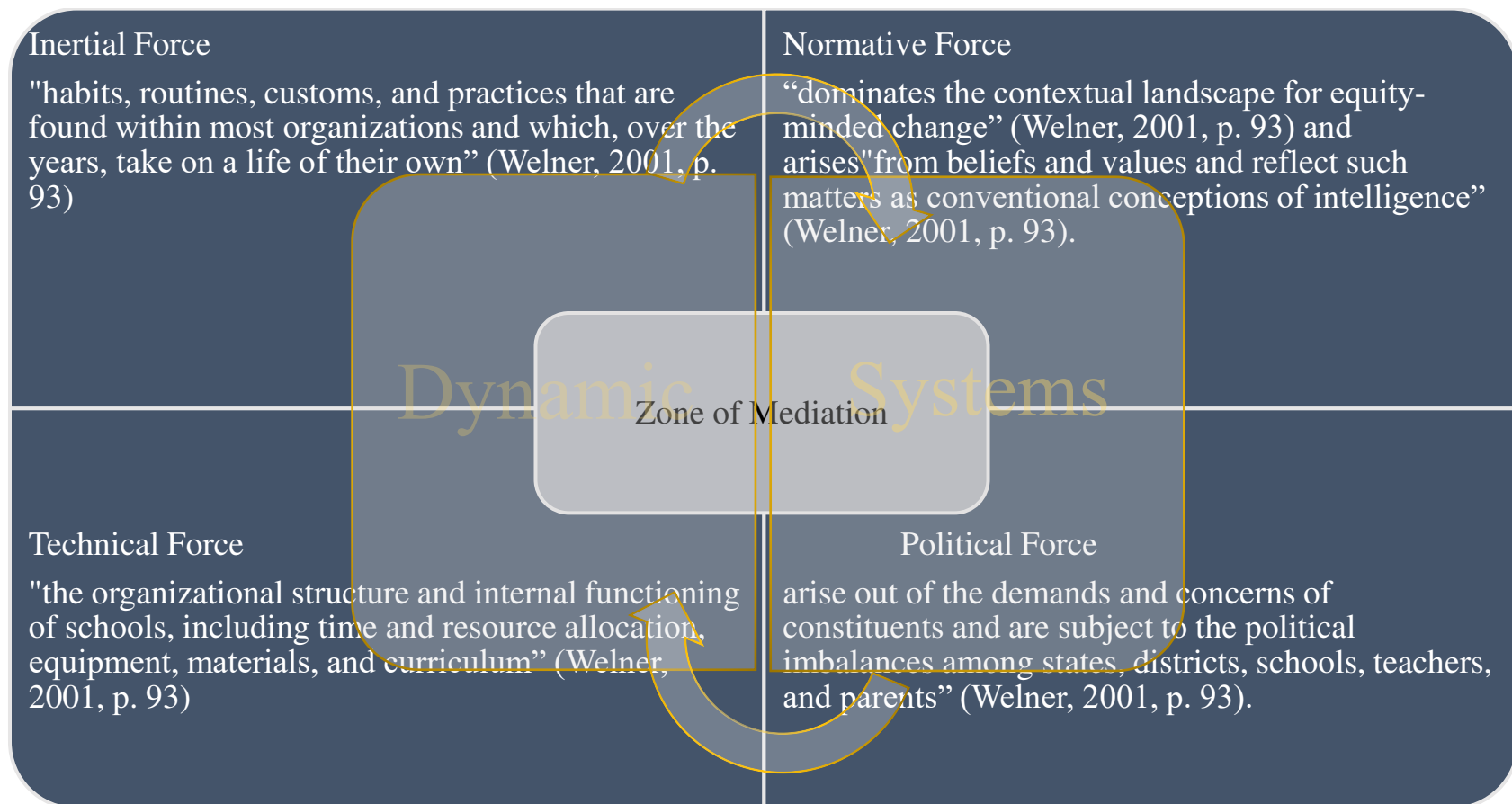


Figure 1: Forces Creating the ZOM (Welner, 2001) and Dynamic Systems Theory

Summary

This literature review has provided the foundation for the development of the research question and the design methodology for the current study. Specifically, the profile and the performance of students with EBD as well as the role of the teachers who provide instruction to this group was examined to establish a foundation for the necessity of the research. Additionally, incorporated is a detailed focus on the history of special education, its impact on teacher practices, how these practices support or hinder achievement of students with EBD as well as theoretical underpinnings. Key aspects of the previous research findings were integrated in order to extend current research and inform future research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research study is being conducted to investigate the phenomenon of achievement among students with EBD through the lived experiences of special education teachers of students with EBD across various school settings. In light of recent reauthorizations of federal legislation (e.g. IDEA, NCLB, ESSA) and educative reform following landmark court cases, the need for special education teachers to effectively implement quality evidence-based, high leverage practices (HLPs) as the foundation of their teaching process, have been emphasized. This chapter details methodology used to answer the research question and includes a discussion of the research design, a restatement of the research question, the criteria for the selection of participants, a description of the instruments and procedures employed to collect participant data, and the approach to data analysis. From this point on, the concepts of achievement and progress as targeted in this study will be referred to as “success” and participants will be referred to as special education teachers.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to search for meaning, through the examination and analysis of participants’ lived experiences, into the nature of success (Van Manen, 1990), or academic achievement for students with EBD as it experienced by their special education teachers. This study was designed to investigate this phenomenon of success among students with EBD, primarily in urban school settings, through the lived

experiences of teachers and/or support personnel who possess the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies to facilitate their students' success. Further, to substantiate the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990) of the special education teacher, this study examined the teachers' experiences with regard to their professional practices, school-wide programming, and global recommendations that may serve to provide clarity to the roles and responsibilities of special education personnel serving students with EBD in various special education settings.

Research Question

The research question explored in this study guided the type of qualitative method utilized to describe and explain the phenomena investigated. Accordingly, this study utilized a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013) to illumine the lived experiences of special education teachers who work with students with EBD. The following research question served as the fundamental inquiry of the study:

What are the lived experiences of special education teachers among students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD)?

Research Design

Background of the Methodology

Phenomenological research is rooted in twentieth-century philosophy and bears an extensive history of practice in social sciences, health sciences, nursing, and education

(Creswell, 2013). Edmond Husserl (1859 – 1938), a German mathematician and philosopher, is described as the “fountainhead of phenomenology” (Vandenberg, 1997, p. 11). Further, Husserl coined and defined “phenomenology” as the science of phenomena (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological methodology can be separated into two main streams: descriptive (eidetic), which draws more heavily on the work of Edmund Husserl and Amadeo Giorgi, and interpretative (hermeneutic), drawing from the work of Martin Heidegger and Max Van Manen (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2014).

Moustakas (2004) echoes Husserl in asserting that the essence of a phenomenon could be drawn from data related to one’s own experience, perception, and memory. As a “study of the essences” and “an attempt to define an essence, the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness” phenomenology examines phenomena as it currently exists (Merleau-Ponty, 1956, p. 59). Additionally, phenomenological research allows the reader to understand the phenomena as it exists without manipulation on the part of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). In terms of the researcher, phenomenological research permits the researcher to examine the phenomena as an individual experiences it in its unprocessed form in which its basis is captured before it has been defined, categorized, classified, analyzed, or reflected upon (Husserl, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1956; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973; Valle & King, 1978; van Manen, 1990). Fundamentally, phenomenology is a research practice that offers the insights of a participant to a researcher connecting both to the world in which we live (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990) for purpose of informing scientific inquiry.

Phenomenology allows data to emerge without the researcher providing guidance or controlling variables in the environment. Moreover, phenomenology provides a way

to describe an experience as lived without attributing causal explanations for the existence of that experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1956). Merleau-Ponty (1956) affirmed a Husserl's approach to phenomenology when he defined the original philosophical intent of a phenomenological application as a "question of description, and not of explanation or analysis" (p. 60).

Considering the nature of phenomenology, philosophers, including Husserl, emphasized the need for phenomenological studies to be "reduced" due to bias. A level of "reduction" is required for proper management and monitoring of personal biases since it is impossible to remove bias from perception and perception from description (Chenail, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 1956). Bias is inherent to all humans since all human experience is informed by our understanding of the surrounding world (Merleau-Ponty, 1956). Therefore, the researcher must engage the process of reduction, in order to set aside those biases by acknowledging their existence. The reduction process includes questioning the data, identifying and noting common patterns in the data, creating codes that describe the patterns, and assigning these codes to categories of the researcher's conceptual framework (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Further, the process of *reduction* (Merleau-Ponty, 1956) as described by Moustakas (1994) uses the Greek word epoché. Epoché is a process in which the researcher sets aside their "prejudgments, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).

Epoché requires the researcher to set aside their previous knowledge, which may affect the experience as described by the participant. The norms or standards with which a person would usually view the world are deliberately unapplied in phenomenology to

allow for receptiveness and transparency (Moustakas, 1994). Incorporating these ideas, van Manen (1990) stated the importance of examining pedagogy through a phenomenological lens as it permits the interpretation of one's lived experience with certain sensitivity to that lived experience.

Phenomenology

There are a myriad of methodological approaches that are accepted as means to conduct educational research. Phenomenology is one instance of an established methodology (Creswell, 2007). Researchers must be aware of the ontological, epistemological, and axiological questions that underpin the varied methodological approaches (Creswell, 2007). Further, he advised that, when choosing a methodology, researchers must begin by clarifying their positions on these questions. There are five paradigms researchers can use to accomplish this feat: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, interpretivism, and postmodernism (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). In describing how one might approach this process, Nazir (2016) shared an example of a researcher "with understandings of reality as multiple; understandings of epistemology as constructed; and [who] sees values as embedded in the research process falls into an interpretive paradigm containing hermeneutic and dialectical elements" (p.181).

In light of the acceptance of phenomenology across contexts, Embree (1997) identified seven different approaches. Phenomenology is descriptive, naturalistic, constitutive, existential, generative historicist, genetic, hermeneutic, and realist (Embree, 1997). With regards to educational research, descriptive and hermeneutic approaches are most often utilized when exploring inquiries (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). Descriptive

phenomenology allows the researcher to describe a phenomenon while allowing the reader to interpret the data described. The researcher makes meaning of the data by interpreting and examining the language used during data collection (Wasser & Bresler, 1996).

Van Manen (1997) asserted that interpretation permits the researcher to translate lived experiences into textual expression of essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is a reflexive and reflective appropriation of something meaningful. Once the lived experience is described, the researcher engages in a process of clarifying and making explicit the meaning of that lived experience (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1997).

Engaging in a process of interpretation allows the researcher to make pedagogical meaning of that experience as the researcher mediates between different meanings of those experiences (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1990; van Manen, 1997). Gadamer (1989) emphasized that phenomenology must be a deliberate activity in which misinterpretation is avoided by the researcher. Further, the researcher must view data with objectivity and not use their own experiences or presuppositions to interpret the participant's experiences (Wareing, 2011). As such, for this study, the researcher examined and stated positionality prior to beginning the study through a bracketing interview. Participating in bracketing prior to data collection and utilizing peer-debriefing was used to validate findings. These actions permitted the researcher to become aware of and set aside preconceived ideas of the phenomenon and, thus, take strides to avoid misinterpretation of the data.

Phenomenology is a philosophical research tradition and approach utilized to develop a greater understanding of individuals' experiences (Giorgi, 2009). In the context

of phenomenology, understanding is not a “fixing of meaning, but how meaning is generated and transformed” (Chan et al. 2013, p. 1). Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2014) assert that phenomenological approaches are inclusive of descriptive and interpretive methodological approaches. Generally, phenomenological approaches rely on interpreting paradigms and human beings from inside their subjective experiences (Todres & Holloway, 2006). Further, phenomenological research explores human lived experiences in a manner that can be utilized as a source of qualitative evidence (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015).

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenology is a foundation for interpretive research (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2014). One dimension of phenomenology is interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborne, 2015). IPA is used to engage in detailed examinations of personal lived experience within the context of topics that are “complex, ambiguous, emotionally laden... elusive, and difficult to articulate” (Smith & Osborne, 2015, p.41). IPA involves high-level interviewing skills, strong empathic engagement, and probing into emerging aspects that become available throughout the research process (Smith & Osborne, 2015).

Rationale for the Methodology

There exists various philosophical assumptions that shape the best approach for understanding the given research problem. Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, and Walker (2014) emphasize that research, as conducted by most researchers, will be described as

quantitative or qualitative. The authors provide insight into quantitative research, disclosing that historically, it was education's research approach of choice. Quantitative research, which proceeds from positivism, is a traditional approach that relies on hypotheses testing and the gathering of data to arrive at systematic, replicable, and generalizable findings (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2014). Creswell (2018) provides depth to quantitative research stating that objective theories are tested by examining relationships among variables.

Qualitative research, in contrast, tends to shy away from interpreting significance through numbers and focuses on meanings and making sense of phenomena in social contexts. Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, and Walker (2014) emphasize that qualitative approaches allow researchers to see individuals and their interconnectedness to the world around them. Further, the authors emphasize that qualitative research results in rich, comprehensive narratives that provide a basis for readers to understand reality as experienced by the participants. Quantitative research tends to be more deductive while qualitative research is inductive and emergent.

Through inductive reasoning, qualitative research provides data that has the potential to reveal insight to complex systems and processes (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). Qualitative research has the potential to capture and communicate experiences in a way that illuminates practices, processes, and outcomes crucial for decision-making by practitioners and policymakers (Patton, 2002). Further, qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to gain a detailed understanding of a complex issue, a problem, or a phenomenon in its natural setting (Creswell, 2013) and achieve the goal of learning from the data and revisiting data extracts patterns and explanations become visible and

understood. Therefore, through the use of phenomenological methodology and analysis of the multidimensional facets of special education teachers' lives (e.g. their "voice, processes, emotions, motivations, values, attitudes, beliefs, judgments, microcultures, identities, life course patterns, etc." (Saldana, 2013, p. 38) among students with EBD was conducted and served to provide the researcher with a more comprehensive understanding of the complex phenomenon as it exists through the development of theories sensitive to the setting within which it existed (Khan, 2014).

Individual Interviews

Special education teachers/personnel will be individually interviewed to gather a deeper understanding into their lived experiences. The purpose of the interviews is to explore the experiences and moments that influenced their views and opinion regarding students with EBD and led their exercise of progress-oriented practices and embracing of congruent values, in order to establish characteristics that have made them *effective* in teaching students with EBD. The interviews will also provide recommendations that other special education practitioners can follow to establish effective practices and ensure success in their organization, in their role as agents of culture mitigation and to promote their organizations' role in establishing and/or advancing an organizational culture conducive to student success.

Instrumentation and Qualitative Research Protocols

Human Research Procedure

The research design for this study was informed using procedures offered for implementing a phenomenological study by experts in the field including the procedures proposed by Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994). The approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Central Florida was obtained prior to beginning the study (see Appendix A). Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

The confidentiality of participants, students, and data was protected through means consistent with guidelines set forth by the UCF IRB office. Access to data was limited using password protections for digital data. Each participant and participant file was assigned a unique alphanumeric code used in lieu of identifying information such as names. Further, names of individuals, schools, or other identifying data were not collected in this study and will not be used in any subsequent publication(s). Data will be disposed of after the prescribed amount of time.

A transcription service was used to transcribe participant interviews. Additionally, identities were kept confidential through multiple means. Prior to audio recording the interview, participants were instructed to omit names of colleagues, administrators, schools, students, or other identifying data during their responses. Consequently, audio recordings of the participants sent to the transcription company did not include identifiable data (e.g. names of the participants, school districts, schools of employment, student data).

Researcher's Role

The researcher served as the main instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2013). The researcher stated positionality in the study and participated in a bracketing interview prior to beginning data collection (Creswell, 2013; Slavin, 2007) to mitigate adverse effects of preconceptions that could potentially bias the research process. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher ensured closure and the relationships ended harmoniously (Creswell, 2013).

Bracketing

Prior to beginning data collection, the researcher participated in the bracketing process. Bracketing is a process of deliberately “putting aside one’s own repertoire of beliefs, knowledge, and values about a phenomenon under investigation or what one already knows about the subject prior to and throughout the phenomenological investigation, in order to accurately describe the participants’ life experiences” (Chan et al., 2013, p. 1). Further, bracketing requires the researcher to identify and report their personal experiences, cultural factors, vested interests, biases, and assumptions that could unfairly influence their approach and the interpretation of data collected (Creswell, 2013; Chan et al., 2013; Fischer, 2009; Tufford & Newman, 2010).

In a qualitative study, bracketing is prioritized as it directly related to the role of the researcher. As the researcher is the instrument for data collection and data analysis (Chenail, 2011; Creswell, 2013), subjectivity warrants consideration. Though subjectivity can have an impact on data analysis, the researcher’s role is, in fact, subjective (Chenail,

2011) and the researcher's preconceptions can influence the data from collection to interpretation (Tufford & Newman, 2010); there are mechanisms employed in phenomenological studies that serve to mitigate the effect of the researcher's subjectivity. To reduce the potential influence of the researcher's preconceptions on the data collected and to increase the rigor of the study, the process known as bracketing was conducted.

Starks and Trinidad (2007) reveal the bracketing process allows the researcher to discover personal assumptions, examine personal perspectives, and participate in an ongoing reflective process throughout the research study (Fischer, 2009). Additionally, bracketing illuminates the researcher's personal assumptions and allows the reader the opportunity to gain an understanding for the researcher's perspective and positions (Fischer, 2009; Tufford & Newman, 2010; Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this way, bracketing was not a one-time event. Bracketing is an ongoing process of bringing coherence to perspectives and experiences that might otherwise be different between the researcher and reader. For the researcher, the process begins at the inception of the research study and continues throughout (Fischer, 2009), yet the reader becomes a participant in the process as the study is explained.

Several procedures were used in the bracketing process in this study, including a statement of positionality, bracketing interview, audit trail, and a peer-debriefer (Creswell, 2013; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Tufford & Newman, 2010). The positionality statement is a statement of the researcher's educational and professional background with respect to the phenomenon of this study. The statement provides the reader with an understanding of the researcher's perspective of the construct and allows the reader to learn through lens of the researcher, in relation to the phenomenon and to draw their own

conclusions about the similarities and differences between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2013, Wareing, 2011).

The bracketing interview was conducted prior to data collection by a colleague of the researcher. The interviewer was a graduate student at the same university as the researcher and is pursuing a Doctorate of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration on Urban Special Education. The interviewer was selected because she did not serve in a managerial or clinical position over the researcher (Rolls & Relf, 2006; Tufford & Newman, 2010) and possessed understanding and experience with the qualitative research process. The bracketing interview included questions about the researcher, educational and professional background, and experiences with the phenomenon. The bracketing interview will be included in the appendices.

The researcher will keep an audit trail (Hycner, 1985) which included (in digital format): (a) the original audio recordings of the interviews; (b) verbatim transcriptions of the interviews in Word format; and (c) Microsoft Excel data files with selected participant verbatim statements, researcher interpretation of each statement, and identified meanings of the statements. This audit trail allowed the researcher to reference the audio recordings throughout the data analysis process, analyze and report verbatim statements made by the participants, and keep detailed records of meanings, themes, and essences as they emerge.

A final component of the bracketing process is peer-debriefing (Hycner, 1985). A peer-debriefer was used to participate in the data analysis process to provide reliability to the researcher's findings and assignment of meanings and identified themes (Hycner, 1985). The peer-debriefer was selected because of her knowledge of qualitative

researcher methodology and her expertise in exceptional student education policies, procedures, and practices. The peer-debriefer was provided digital copies of the transcripts for each participant and the Excel data analysis files. Detailed instructions were provided to the peer-debriefer to conduct inter-coder reliability (see Appendix D). For each participant, the peer-debriefer will stated their agreement or disagreement with the assigned unit of relevant meaning and related theme. In the event of disagreement between the researcher and peer-debriefer, the disagreement was reconciled with the reasoning for the disagreement and the specifics of the reconciliation noted and included in subsequent analysis.

With regard to timing, debate exists concerning the appropriate time to engage in the bracketing procedures (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Giorgi (1997) reveals that some researchers postpone the bracketing process until data analysis has commenced; while others engage the bracketing process before data collection begins (e.g., Chan et al, 2013). Hycner (1985) suggested that bracketing be woven throughout the process of data analysis so researchers are never absent of reflecting on their positionality as they move throughout the research process. By employing three means of bracketing (e.g., bracketing interview, audit trail, peer-debriefer), for this study the researcher engaged in an ongoing bracketing process (Hycner, 1985). The bracketing interview was conducted prior to data collection. The audit trail served as a continuous process that extended through the duration of the study. The peer-debriefer was used after data are collected and initially analyzed. Employment of these methods allowed the researcher to identify preconceptions throughout the research process that may have influence the study findings.

Participant Criteria

Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) emphasized that utilizing certain characteristics when selecting participants is integral in informing and ensuring quality inferences be made by the researcher from research findings. The sample population consisted of educators from various urban school districts, who were recognized as effective in their provision of instruction or support among students with EBD.

Criteria to be met in order to be chosen as a participant included: (a) held certification in exceptional student education (ESE), (b) served as employee of a school site, (c) had successfully completed a minimum of two (2) years teaching, (d) experience providing direct instruction/support to students with EBD, and (e) was deemed to be an effective educator of students with EBD by a nominating educator. Researchers advise that phenomenological studies be designed with stipulations that create a cadre of participants who are similar (e.g., special education teachers, secondary, direct instruction or support to students with EBD) when considering selection criteria but not so limiting that the data collected is affected (Creswell, 2013; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). In contrast to other experimental study designs, Starks and Trinidad (2007) emphasized that criteria for participants should not be too strict since it is “through close examination of individual experiences” (p. 1374) that “meaning and common features or essences of an experience or event” (p.1374) emerge and are interpreted. Additionally, the authors advised that “purposeful sampling methods [be] used to recruit participants who have experienced the phenomena under study” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1374).

Participant Sampling and Recruitment

In qualitative research, misperceptions regarding sampling are common, relating to but not limited to data collection procedures, sample designs, and size (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). The general guideline is that data collection, design, and sample size should be informed by the research objective and questions sufficient enough to ensure that data and theoretical saturation into the specific phenomenon is achieved. Gathering insight into the specific practices that contribute to the phenomenon of success is the goal of this study, therefore, individuals and settings will be purposefully selected (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Purposeful sampling is preferred as it allows for the collection of in-depth research by selecting information-rich cases aligned with the purpose of the study and the meeting of certain criteria (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2014).

For this study, participants (N=8) were recruited utilizing purposive, criterion sampling (Creswell, 2013; Gall et al., 2007; Kuzell, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through a collaborative process with school personnel and through recruitment, referrals, and/or recommendations from other colleagues, participants were selected based on their experience with the phenomenon (i.e. teaching/or having taught students with EBD). Further, participants were comprised of a purposive sample of special education teachers varying in gender, age, school level assignment(s), settings (e.g., inclusive and/or separate class settings), level of education, years of teaching (experience), and path to teaching (i.e., traditional teacher preparation or alternative preparation program) aiding in

the researcher's exploration of their lived experiences as a teacher of students with EBD. The sampling technique was repeated until saturation was reached.

Data Collection

For phenomenological study designs, participant selection is the initial step in the process of data gathering (Englander, 2012). The researcher began the process of selecting participants by engaging a process of self-reflection and asking: "Do you (select participants) have the experience that I am looking for" (p. 19)? Beyond participant selection, data collection was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews. Interviewing is seen as a specific mode of data gathering that is integral to the research process in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research (Englander, 2012). Morse and Richard (2002) emphasized that the semi-structured interviews are preferred techniques for generating qualitative data and are characterized by open-ended questions developed and prepared in advance. Semi-structured interviews are the instrumentation of choice as the "main aim is to gain a deeper understanding of or the nature of everyday experiences" (Munhall, 2007, p. 4).

Interview Process

Each participant (N = 8) in this study participated in a semi-structured interview with the researcher (Colaizzi, 1978; Sanders, 2003). Consistent with interview within phenomenological research, the interview was guided by a schedule rather than dictated by it and the researcher was free to probe interesting areas that arose from participants'

interests or concerns (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Following the interview, the participants were invited to engage in a “validity check” (Hycner, 1985, p. 291). The “validity check” provided the participant the opportunity to review the verbatim transcription of their interview (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Further, the “validity check” process included determining if the participant agreed with the content of the transcription. The participants were asked if the content of the transcripts captured their experience accurately, or if clarification or additional information was warranted. As necessary, the participant was provided the opportunity to provide clarifying information or revise. According to Creswell & Miller (2000), providing the participants with copies of the verbatim transcripts of the interview allowed them to “confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (p. 127).

The data collection process (i.e., interviews) began May 1, 2019 and concluded May 22, 2019. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, via video-conferencing technology, and over the phone. When face-to-face, the interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed upon public location (e.g., restaurant, or other location closest to the participant’s work or home for convenience). Interviews that were conducted via video-conferencing technology were scheduled and conducted according to the participants’ request. Interviews were scheduled at the participant’s convenience on the time and day of the week most amenable to their schedules. Since interviews were facilitated to most accommodate the participant, the times and days of the week included mornings, afternoons, and evenings. While the majority of the interviews took place on weekday evenings, the researcher conducted a few in the morning. The length of each interview varied and depended on the length of the participant’s responses to interview questions.

Interviews ranged in length from 16 minutes to 55 minutes, with the average interview length of 35 minutes.

Having obtained consent from the participants, each interview was audio-recorded (Slavin, 2007) utilizing a recording application on the researcher's cellular device. Recordings were downloaded to the researcher's computer and were sent digitally through a secure website to a transcription service to be transcribed verbatim (Creswell, 2013; Poland, 1995). The transcriptions were returned to the researcher from the transcription company via email. Upon receipt of the typed, verbatim transcriptions, the researcher reviewed each transcript for accuracy. The process of ensuring accuracy involved the researcher listening to the audio recordings of the participant while simultaneously reading the digital transcript line-by-line making corrections, where warranted. Minimal corrections were necessary and were related to phonetic inconsistencies (e.g., "gendered" versus "gen. ed.").

After the researcher made corrections as warranted, participants were provided with their original interview transcripts to review as part of the validity checking process. Original transcripts were sent to participants via email. (See Appendix F for email template sent to participants.) Data collection was continuous and served to inform the researcher of the need to conduct additional interviews. The data collected enabled the researcher to answer the research question. High-quality digital recordings were used for audio recording. Additionally, predetermined interview protocols were used (Creswell, 2013).

For this study, generally advised phenomenological methods from the literature were followed (Colaizzi, 1973; Sanders, 2003, Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Data from the

semi-structured interviews were collected and coded. Although there are levels to coding, the data was coded descriptively. Several themes were expected to emerge throughout the data collection process. While emergent themes might provide insight into effective classroom strategies and quality cultural components, the degree of commonality that present among themes and confirmability of the data is yet another facet that will be explored through data analysis.

Interview Questions

The interview questions in this study were developed to capture the lived experiences of the participants. Interview questions were designed to elicit in-depth responses from the participant as well as build rapport between the researcher and participant (Moustakas, 1994). Open-ended questions were asked to allow the participant to answer questions in detail. The researcher used semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews permitted the researcher to establish interview questions that could answer the research questions while remaining flexible enough to allow the researcher to ask probing and clarifying questions. A semi-structured format was responsive to the participant and allowed the data to guide the process (Creswell, 2013). Table 3 provides an overview of the semi-structured interview questions.

Table 3:

Semi-Structured Interview Matrix

Data	Question	Prompts & elicitations	Probing Questions
Participant's Professional Background, Experiences	"Tell me about yourself."	How long have you been teaching in special education?	
Description of Teaching Strategies, Responsibilities, and Commitment	Describe your teaching experiences working with students with EBD.	Tell me about the demographics of your typical student. What are your expectations of students with EBD? What strategies do you use when working with students with EBD? What kept you working with students with EBD?	How do you manage or maintain your expectations of students with EBD?
Types and quality of programming	Describe the programming for students with EBD.	Describe the successes and challenges of working with students with EBD? Describe how school culture contributes to those successes or challenges.	
Recommendations	What recommendations do you have for teachers working with students with EBD?		How important is authenticity?
Conclusion	Is there anything else regarding your role as an EBD teacher that I have not asked you that you want to share?		

Data Analysis

Individual Interview

The data analysis phase of this study employed facets of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2008) to explore the details of the participants' lived experience. Based on a review of the literature, the recommended sample size for a phenomenological research design is 6 to 10 interviews (Creswell, 1998; Langford et al., 2002; Morse, 1994; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). However, for researchers new to interpretive phenomenological analysis and its data collection methods, Smith and Osborn (2008) recommended interviewing as few as three individuals, in order to achieve detailed, case by case analysis (Smith & Osborne, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). While as few as three participants is recommended for new researchers, this study presented the need for the researcher to exceed the smaller recommendation. The hugely varied contexts within instruction of students with EBD informed the researcher that alignment with the larger recommendation was pertinent for saturation.

IPA is particularly suited to this exploration and analysis of the phenomenon due to the ability it gives the researcher to collect individual, yet collective perspectives. Interpretive analysis is an iterative, inductive process of decontextualization and recontextualization (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003; Morse & Field, 1995). Decontextualization allows the researcher to separate data from the original context of individual cases and assigns codes to units of meaning in the texts (Stark & Trinidad,

2007). Recontextualization consists of the researcher examining the codes for patterns, reintegrating organizing and reducing the data around central themes and relationships that emerge across all the cases and narratives (Stark & Trinidad, 2007).

Each participant's interview was reviewed for words or phrases that were transcribed verbatim to facilitate the identification of themes and coding. Saldana (2013) defines a theme as "a phrase or sentence that identified what a unit of data is *about* and/or what it means (p. 139). Themes were identified by recognizing concepts and common threads, some of which were subtle (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012), that reoccurred throughout and/or across transcripts (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Once the data was thematized (Saldana, 2013; Brinkman & Kvale, 2015), the researcher engaged in the winnowing process (Seidman, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Guest et al., 2012) to organize the data in a useful way. Coding is one of the common means to analyze and organize qualitative data. Some researchers argue that quantitative research engages coding processes to reduce the data, while qualitative research engages coding for data retention and a means analysis facilitation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Bazely, 2014).

Saldana (2013) provides a comprehensive definition of a "code":

A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data....In qualitative data analysis, a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory-building, and other analytic processes. Just as a title represents and

captures a book, film, or poetry's primary content, so does a code represent and capture a datum's primary content and essence. (pp. 3-4)

Essentially, coding is a system of classifying and noting what is of interest or significance, identifying different segments of data, and labeling the data for organizational purposes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Further, coding is more than counting, as it requires deep reflection on the meanings of every piece of data, and when done well, leads to complete immersion and closeness with the data, in order that nuances, subtleties, and details might emerge. Given the various definitions, instructional practices, interpretations of the influence that emotional behavioral disabilities have on students, and perspectives regarding effective instruction among this group, IPA lent to in-depth insights as opposed to the mere production of objectifying statements of the phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Figure 1 provides key features of qualitative data analysis by Bloomberg (2007). According to Bloomberg (2007), these steps should be followed if researchers are to engage in qualitative data analysis with fidelity

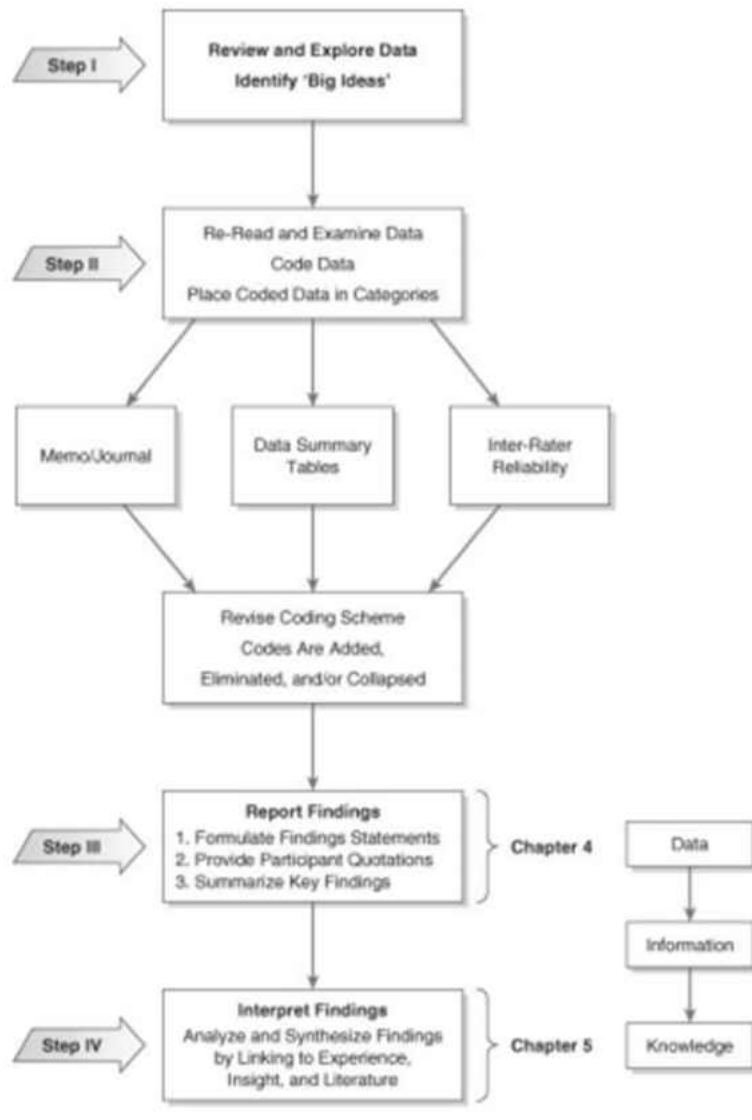


Figure 2: Road Map for the Process of Qualitative Data Analysis: An Outline adapted from Bloomberg (2007).

Interviews

The data analysis procedures for analyzing the interview data were further organized and guided by Colaizzi (1978) who offered a seven-step process. Sanders

(2003) established Colaizzi's method as a guideline for researchers in phenomenological study designs. Table 4 outlines the data analysis process.

Table 4:

Guidelines for Interview Analysis

Guideline	Description
1 Obtaining the Experiences of Each Participant's Transcript	The audio/video recordings and transcripts will be listened to and reviewed multiple times to gain an understanding of the participant's feelings and ideas. The participant will be involved in this stage of analysis by reviewing their transcript to verify their experiences. The participants can add comments or make clarifications to ensure that the transcript "accurately represented what was said during the interview and was true to their experience" (Sanders, 2003, p. 295).
2 Selecting Significant Statements or Phrases	Specific statements or phrases will be selected from the transcripts that provide the broad meaning and that captures the participant's story of their lived experiences.
3 Describing Components of Meaning	The transcripts and recordings will be read and listened to multiple times to gain context for themes that may emerge. Researcher will review every word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, and non-verbal notation to elicit participant meaning paying attention to literal meaning. Researcher will address the research questions in relation to the general meaning. In this phase, the researcher extracts the data that directly answers the research questions and notes statements that are irrelevant.
4 Organizing Units of Relevant Meaning	Common threads of meaning will be clustered together and categories of relevant meaning will be united. The clusters of meaning will be used to find central themes that exemplify and define the essence of the clusters.
5 Describing the Phenomenon	This step in the process requires the researcher to use the relevant meanings to provide a comprehensive description of the phenomena under investigation.
6 Describing the Fundamental Structure of the Phenomenon	The comprehensive description of the phenomena will be reduced to an essential structure.
7 Member-Checking	The researcher will return to the participant to conduct a "validity check" (Hycner, 1985, p. 291). During this step, the researcher will have the participant review the verbatim transcripts of the interview to illicit clarification and provide the participant with an opportunity to provide feedback on their accuracy (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Note. Adapted from Slanda, 2017.

To ensure proper data analysis according to the seven-step process, a spreadsheet was created for each participant. Each spreadsheet included six columns. The first four columns aligned with steps two through five of the data-analysis process as Colaizzi (1978) outlined. The fifth column was used for feedback from the peer-debriefer. The sixth column was used by the researcher to reconcile any discrepancies in findings by the peer-debriefer, if warranted. Specifically, the six columns included: “(a) Significant Statements (made by the participant); (b) Description of the Components of Meaning; (c) Organization of the Units of Meaning; (d) Description of the Phenomenon (Themes); (e) peer-debriefer comments; and (f) reconciliation of peer-debriefer comments (if applicable)” (Slanda, 2017, p. 127).

The first step in the data analysis procedure required the researcher to read the transcript multiple times while simultaneously listening to the audio recording of the interview simultaneously and multiple times. This process allowed the researcher to get a sense of the whole before breaking the data into parts (Creswell, 2013). After listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts, the researcher selected significant statements and placed them in the first column of the Excel spreadsheet (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Carspecken, 1996; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Fetterman, 2010; Poland, 1995). Significant statements were copied verbatim from the transcript. This step corresponded with Colaizzi’s (1978) Step Two (Slanda, 2017). Subsequently, the significant statements were entered in a separate cell. Inclusion of the verbatim statements allowed the researcher to preserve the integrity of the statement, capture the participant’s perspective and lived experience, aided in data reporting, and assisted the process of peer-debriefing.

Further, verbatim statements allowed the researcher to present the data as matters of fact by incorporating detail and extensive quotes from participants (Slavin, 2007).

Once all significant statements were selected and transferred to Column A of the spreadsheet, the researcher reviewed each statement and described its component of meaning. This step corresponded with Colaizzi's (1978) Step 3. The description was written in the corresponding cell in Column B. To obtain and describe the meaning, the researcher paid attention to the words, phrases, and sentences used by the participant to illustrate their lived experience. Descriptions of meaning were provided for each significant statement before the moving on to the next step. To complete Colaizzi's (1978) Step 4, *Organizing Units of Meaning*, the researcher repeatedly read and reviewed the significant statement and description of its meaning (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researcher then categorized and reduced the statements and their descriptions into *clusters* of meaning (Slanda, 2017). The description of the unit was written in Column C. For Colaizzi's (1978) Step 5 of the process, the researcher used the relevant meanings reported in Column C to provide a comprehensive description of the phenomena and reported that description in Column D. Essentially, the researcher provided a narrowed description the phenomenon by assigning a theme to relevant meaning in this step (see Appendix E).

The first five steps were repeated for each participant. Upon completion of the first five steps for all participants, the researcher provided each file to the peer-debriefer. The peer-debriefer was provided with detailed instructions on the type of feedback and their role in the process. To complete the task, the peer-debriefer was provided with the original transcript and data analysis file for each participant. While Column A included

verbatim, significant statement made by the participant, in order to provide the peer-debriefer with context for the content, the researcher sent the original transcript for the peer-debriefer. For each statement, the peer-debriefer noted their agreement or disagreement in Column E for the assigned descriptions, meanings, and themes. If the peer-debriefer disagreed with the researcher, the peer-debriefer provided an explanation of the disagreement to communicate the difference of perspective. Once feedback was received from the peer-debriefer, the researcher reviewed the comments. The explanation in Column E from the peer-debriefer was used by the researcher in the reconciliation process. In the event of disagreements, reconciliation was achieved through a consensus process and the outcome was included in the final column (Column F). All statements were reconciled prior to moving on to Colaizzi's (1978) Step 6, describing the fundamental structure of the phenomenon.

Colaizzi's (1978) Step 6 requires the researcher to reduce the comprehensive themes (Column D, Colaizzi Step 5) into an essential structure. To complete this step, the researcher created another spreadsheet. This spreadsheet included several worksheets. The first worksheet, Sheet 1, was labeled *Units of Relevant Meaning*. Every unit of meaning, developed in line with Colaizzi's Step 4, from each participant was included in this sheet and then alphabetized. The second worksheet, Sheet 2, was labeled *Themes*. Every theme (Colaizzi Step 5) that appeared in participant data analysis files was included in Column A of Sheet 2, *Themes*. Related items from Column A were grouped together, condensed, and a reduced theme was provided in Column B. These "overarching" themes were then reorganized, labeled *Overarching Themes*, and

categorized into broader themes and another spreadsheet. This new spreadsheet was emailed to the peer-debriefer for feedback (Slanda, 2017).

The final step of Colaizzi's (1978) process included member checking procedures. Member checking is a process used to ensure reliability of data (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The member checking process in this study was informed using Creswell and Miller's (2000) "validity checking" procedure. After interviews were transcribed by the transcription service, all participants were provided digital copies of their verbatim transcripts and asked to confirm for accuracy of the transcript. Participants were encouraged to make additions or edits as they wished (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Establishing Trustworthiness

In phenomenological studies, the primary instrument is the human researcher. Credibility, commonly referred to as validity, is a concern for this study as it is for all qualitative research. In educational research, validity is understood as the degree to which evidence and theory support interpretations of [performance] yielded by proposed use of tests (Ary, et al., 2013). Creswell (2007) notes that "verification of data is the first step in achieving validity of a research project" (p. 270). Verifying data require judgments be made about coding, categorizing, de-contextualizing, and re-contextualizing the data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). As such, "validation strategies" (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Morse et al., 2002) were utilized to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Consistent with phenomenological study designs, ensuring trustworthiness of the data in

this study began with a bracketing process. Through engagement of the bracketing process the researcher set aside assumptions and pre-existing biases of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; van Manen, 1997, Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). For detailed information about the bracketing process, see the bracketing section of Chapter 3.

Additionally, this study used triangulation. (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016) to corroborate data obtained from the participants. The units of meaning and themes that emerged from this study occurred across participants and were varied (Creswell, 2013; Patton 2002; Patton, 2015). Descriptions of participants' backgrounds and lived experiences were reported using verbatim statements and phrases from the semi-structured interviews. These descriptions provide the reader with the ability to draw individual conclusions about the data collected. Triangulation of data was also established utilizing a peer-debriefer and relying on consultation with a faculty supervisor. This process of utilizing two peer-debriefers is referred to as *investigator triangulation* (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014).

Investigator triangulation is a process in which multiple perspectives are sought to review the data findings. Further, an external audit was conducted (Hycner, 1985) utilizing a peer-debriefer who independently verified the findings. The peer-debriefer was not involved in the data collection process. The peer-debriefer reviewed the data and provided feedback on the analyses of the data. In addition, the researcher gained the assistance of Dr. David Boote in the data review process, which allowed for the validation and confirmation of the study findings and themes (Carter et al., 2014).

Consulting with others, who were independent of data collection the researcher gained different perspectives on the data collected (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Carter et al., 2014).

Finally, the researcher used “member-checks (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Relying on Creswell and Miller’s (2000) “validity checking” process, consultation was facilitated with each participant during the process of member-checking (Creswell, 2013). Through validity checking, the researcher was able to clear misconceptions, clarify responses and interpretations, and include additional information as warranted to ensure that the transcriptions accurately reflected the participants’ attitudes, beliefs, and values (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Hycner, 1985). Validity checking was completed by providing each participant with a copy of the original, verbatim transcript via email (see Appendix F). Provision of verbatim transcripts allowed participant to clarify meaning or include pertinent information for the sake of preserving the essence of (Creswell & Miller, 2000) to their own transcripts.

Researcher’s Positionality

Bracketing procedures in this study included a detailed statement of positionality (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000). While there is a lack of consensus among researchers as to when to conduct bracketing, in order to mitigate unacknowledged preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2010), bracketing was conducted prior to data analysis (Giorgi, 1998). Included in the following positionality statement is the researcher’s educational and professional background with respect to the phenomenon of

this study. The following statement provides the reader with information about the researcher's perspective of the construct (Creswell, 2013).

Positionality Statement

I am a black male who has spent the majority of his career serving students in special education as a school social worker. After graduating with my Master's degree in social work, I served as a children's therapist at a local mental health hospital in the urban context. Shortly after, I began serving exceptional student education (ESE) students, primarily students with emotional behavioral disabilities, grades 6-12 at an ESE Center Site in one of the largest southeastern urban school district. The center site is considered one of the district's most restrictive placements. At the center site, my students were primarily considered to be in Tier 3 of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and received the most intensive support services. The whole of my professional career has been centered on serving students with disabilities in this urban context.

I am currently a doctoral candidate at one of the nation's largest universities with more than 68,000 students enrolled. My research has focused on the impact of culture on the education of students with emotional behavioral disabilities, the achievement gap, the research-to-practice gap, effective teacher practices, and leadership in urban special education. As a doctoral student, I am a scholar of the National Urban Special Education Leadership Initiative (NUSELI), a federally-funded grant through the Office of Special Education Preparation (OSEP) for doctoral preparation of urban school educators in educational leadership and special education.

I believe that the roles, responsibilities, and dexterity of teachers of students with disabilities, matters and must be considered in light of culture. Special education, as well as the culture-at-large, is evolving and the effects of change places onus on special educators to intentionally develop and expand their pedagogical and social competence and consciousness, in order to reach a generation of students who have been long misunderstood, misdiagnosed, mislabeled and mistreated. It is my belief that reach of special education teachers must reach beyond the barriers and baggage that students with EBD present within the classroom, in order to affect the positive achievement of these students.

I am responsible for the development of this research study by conducting the literature review, identifying the gap(s) in literature, formulating the research question(s), developing the interview questions and protocols, and data collection and analysis procedures. I conducted this research study to identify the effective practices unique to the special education teacher in working in with one population in various settings. It could be argued that my past experiences as an educator and current research focus could impact various aspects of this study. However, researchers emphasize the need for educators to have experience related to the focus of their research (Brantlinger et al., 2005), especially when conducting qualitative studies. My experiences with students with EBD, the teachers who teach them, the policies and procedures that affect them, and the social injustices that they meet provide me with the qualities necessary to investigate this phenomenon.

Limitations

Ary et al. (2013) note that generalization in educationally-oriented research should be accounted for as a limitation. Concerning dependability, participant responses to the interview questions must be considered for their accuracy and truthfulness in regard to the mental and emotional state of the participants at the time. Additionally, comprehensiveness of the participants' responses, as well as the researcher's ability to ask the relevant questions, may limit the findings. A considerable limitation is other confounding, extraneous variables that may influence the phenomenon of success across settings.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of special education teachers who work students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD). The central phenomenon was the ambiguity surrounding the skills, knowledge, and competencies required for these teachers to be effective in their practice, which is mainly the provision of instruction and/or support to students with EBD. A better understanding of this phenomenon will allow educators to more effectively support this population of special education students. This chapter presents key findings obtained from eight in-depth interviews. Four major findings emerged from this study: (a) essential keys to student engagement, (b) characteristics of an effective program, (c) frustrations regarding effective program implementation, and (d) the promoters of effective service provision. A total of 15 tertiary themes were identified and each are presented.

The following research question served as the fundamental inquiry of the study:

What are the lived experiences of special education teachers among students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD)?

Chapter 4 consists of the background information relating to the study participants, followed by a discussion of the findings with details that support and explain each finding. By way of “thick description” (Denzin, 2001) and Colaizzi’s (1978) seven-step data analysis process, the researcher set out to document a broad range of experiences, and thereby provide an opportunity for the reader to enter into this study and

better understand the reality of the research participants' lived experiences. The emphasis throughout is on the participants' "processes, emotions, motivations, values, attitudes, beliefs, judgments, microcultures, identities, [and] life course patterns" (Saldana, 2013, p. 38). Illustrative quotations taken from interview transcriptions attempt to portray multiple perspectives and capture the richness and complexity of the phenomenon.

Participant Backgrounds

Linda

Linda served as a support facilitator, at the time of the interview, but provided insight into her teaching background:

... this is my sixth year teaching in [school district's name omitted] public schools. I am 32, I'm white, I'm a female. I have been working in ESE for the past six years. I started in this district as a ... I guess you can say, non- traditional school social worker. And then moved into be[ing] an ESE teacher shortly after that. My internship year and my first three years as a paid employee, I was working at an EBD center school. ... During that time I was the transition coordinator, so essentially I was a case manager for students that were exhibiting progress in their behaviors enough to attempt a transition back to a general ed environment, instead of a self-contained separate day school. That role encompassed being a guidance counselor, being a mentor, being a tutor, being the liaison between the center school and their regular gen ed zone school. I worked with them on a daily basis at their gen ed school, as well as at the center school. And then would provide

some guidance and support and encouragement for all the students at the center school as needed. I was also part of the [crisis] team for our younger students. That involved crisis management, sometimes physical if needed for obviously training for students in crisis. And I also taught ... one year I taught social personal skills. I taught a high school grade level class, and then a middle school grade level class of the social personal.

Wendy

Wendy is an African-American woman, in her 30s, who felt the calling to become a special education teacher very early in her life. She described her journey to championing special education students, specifically students with EBD:

I am originally from Western Kentucky. Always, since before I can remember, I wanted to be an educator. Being a special ed teacher came about in my teenage years. My experience [with a young girl] at Girls Incorporated... just inspired me. And I was just like, well, she has the support and that network around her, and she had this, some of it was her personality, too. But it was like, here she is, she's looking at odds against her, stereotypically, with the society, and use of women, the thing on top of that, have a disability, and then with the disabilities, have an intellectual disability. But yet, and still, you could not tell her no. So for me, it was like, you know what, I know that some of the reason for why she has this much confidence and is so successful is because of the people around her that are telling her, "Yes, you can." For me, that was my inspiration to become a special ed teacher. And just to help people in general...so I got my undergrad in

Kentucky, at the [university name omitted], and we have a dual qualification program there. I got my certification in elementary ed, and in Kentucky it's LBD, so Learning and Behavioral Disorders. And after I got the dual certification, I went straight into the classroom. Well, I said I ... I didn't pass the test right away, but got my certification in general ed. So I was an elementary general ed teacher, second and third grade, split classroom. I did that for three years, and then...I got my masters at Georgia State, in early childhood and special education...I was an inter-related resource teacher, so I taught students with learning disabilities, and students with emotional behavioral disabilities. That was 2nd all the way up to 5th grade students. I think it was probably, it was my last year in 5th grade where I started co-teaching. And then that year was where I started to see that progression. Started out as 2nd grade teacher, now I'm seeing these students in 5th grade, and I'm wondering, you know what, I want to see how they transition into middle school. What does this look like at this level? I went to middle school, became an 8th grade teacher, co-taught middle school, language arts, and I had...12 students that I would work with, when [inaudible], half of my day was small groups, students in resource setting. And then the other half of my day, I would co-teach...out of my whole co-teacher career, that was probably the most experience I had with students with EBD, and it was what really pushed me towards getting my doctorate...so I ended out here through HESE, the Higher Education Special Education Consortium. It's a group of universities that provide funding for teachers or, at least three years of teaching experience just to get your doctorate in special education. I got into a program here, and now am focused on inclusion and

transition. So it marries what my passion is...my interest is on females with EBD, and their experiences, more specifically with exclusionary discipline and the disproportionality of that.

Allison

Allison is a woman, in her early 40s, of Jamaican descent who taught students with EBD for six years. She recalled her journey into special education, specifically to teaching students with EBD stating:

In high school I knew that I wanted to work as a teacher in the special education population. I started volunteering at a foster home where the foster parents only accepted medically fragile kids and kids who had some type of special disability.

It was at that point I knew I wanted to work with special education students.

When I went into school and did my internship, I realized that even though I want to work in the field of special education, the lower functioning students weren't as challenging. I felt that I needed more of a challenge, and I wanted to work with a higher functioning population, and I felt that at the time that area really needed more people. And so I remained in the area of special education, but then I gravitated more towards students with EBD.

She dedicated three of her six years of teaching students with EBD to self-contained classrooms, while the other three were dedicated to supporting students with EBD in the general education setting. At the time of the interview, Allison had received her Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership. She serves as a special education

administrator in one of the largest school districts in the nation, with an enrollment of more than 200,000 students (FLDOE, 2019).

Margaret

Margaret is a Hispanic woman, in her early 30s, and exhibited a robust history in both the general education and special education settings. She possessed years of experience in a number of settings in multiple roles. At the time of the interview, she was enrolled in a doctoral program in exceptional education. She recalls her teaching experience stating:

I began teaching students with disabilities as an exceptional education teacher, working as a resource teacher. They call it different things in different areas. So, I was pulling students out of the classroom to provide services, and I was pushing into the classroom to provide the core services in elementary schools.... Then I started working as an intermediate general education teacher—in an inclusive setting—because the students with disabilities were being excluded from the general education curriculum because of their academic and behavioral needs. I didn't like pulling out and providing services when I could provide services all day long. I tried to give students access to the general education curriculum, so I had gotten permission to have the classroom setup where my students were 50% [students] with disability (including EBD and ASD, SLD, gifted [*sic*], etc.) and 50% without. Then after that, I started coaching, working as a literacy coach and providing professional development to the teachers at the school. And I was also the leader and coach of our positive behavior support team, where I served in that

role for four years. I helped with the MTSS/RTI system, functional behavior assessments, and the creation of school based behavior plans. I helped teachers with Tier 1 supports as well as individualized supports for specific students in their class. I'm also working on becoming a board certified behavior analyst. I started the doctoral program because I was just not making the progress with the teachers, and really, really frustrating that I'm giving you all of the tools, I'm giving you the support. My job as a literacy coach kind of stopped being the job of a literacy coach, and the job of a non-certified behavior analyst. Just going in and supporting them every single day, and still change was not happening. That's why I'm continuing and...going into applied behavior analysis. I feel like if you don't walk in the teachers' shoes, then you can't expect teachers to be receptive to help. I can't expect teachers to put on interventions for students with EBD if I've never taught a general education classroom and I only see students for 30 minutes at a time. I don't know the struggles that they have throughout the day. So, by stepping into the general education teaching position, it gave me a little more buy-in with teachers. Going the ABA route, I'm getting a little bit more evidence-based practice and becoming more of an expert.

Diana

At the time of the interview, Diana served students in special education and general education settings as a school social worker. She is a Caucasian woman, in her late 40s, having taught and served in the special education setting for 18 years. Diana described her teaching experiences of students with EBD:

I graduated in 2001 with my Master's. I had interned at [school name omitted] prior, and then I started as a teacher at [school name omitted] for the first eight months, and then a position became available at [school name omitted]. Then I was at [school name omitted] for quite a number of years. I actually went back to school to be...Well I didn't know really what. In [county name omitted] County there was a unique program, I'll call it, but they had an ESE teacher and the psychologist [inaudible], you know, not school, but the psychologist that would transition with children from DJJ and [facility name omitted]. I was subbing in that classroom, and I just remember that I wanted to be like Dr. [name omitted]. That's how I ended up in the social work field. I loved it. Trust me. I loved everyone. I would be like, "Give me a hug." That's my social work background.

She further describes her experiences as a teacher stating:

I just remember I had very well written [Behavior Intervention Plans], so that helped. I remember setting up my classroom. I was not a teacher. I was learning as I went. I think my class roster was 11 but most days I had nine students. ...I was eighth grade with the EBD students, and that was basically the year that incompetent me finally got educated.

Korey

Korey is an African-American man, in his early 40s, who primarily taught students served through special education, Korey described his teaching experience:

I've been in education for going on 13 years. Actually going on, 14 years and in my 14 years of my teaching experience has been with special education students...I started as a sub, I was substituting in special education and it was then that I got my certification and got all the things I needed to become a teacher from varying exceptionalities to various...classes on the spectrum for special education students. My teaching experience has been middle school and high school. I haven't any experience with elementary kids. Sorry, I can't talk about that. But my experience with middle school and high school, EBD students and so my experience, they all of the same, I don't know if qualities is the word I'm looking for but they all of the same mannerisms, they all have the same, I guess issues. From my experience is all, they all have the same challenges...Regardless of race, color, gender they all have the...EBD students all have the same issues.

Ziesha

Ziesha is an African-American woman, in her 50s, who has taught students with various disabilities in multiple settings. She reported:

My first teaching experience was at a school in Hawaii. I taught on [name of military base omitted]...my classroom would not only have students who may have been EBD. But there are also SIOP, or ELL. So I had for my first experience it was, "Wow, okay." I did notice that in the classroom, in most of my classrooms that I did have the kids labeled as Zs, because they were on tracks, X, Y and Z. Most of my kids were the Z kids. Those were the kids who had identifiable learning disabilities, they had behavioral issues, and they also had issues with

language. That was my first experience with it. Then I didn't teach for a while because as a military family you have to go with the flow... So I started teaching again when we got here, and I've been in Florida for 19 years now...since I've been here, my current district has been my only public school experience in Florida. I've mainly been in the private sector...in my previous county, I had the experience of working with [school and district names omitted]. My first experience was in [district name omitted] and it was a K through 12 school...the kids did have IEPs, but we weren't privy to the information believe it or not. So I had to go on just my teaching experience to really help the students, do the best that I could with the students. Then I was able to get into a position working at another private school, and this one was a total shock, total shock. There were close to 400 students at the school and every last one of them were EBD and every last one of them had IEPs, but they weren't being serviced. I would be in a classroom with 25 kids and behind a locked door. I didn't know what I was getting into, I just saw the school and said, "Okay great, this'll be awesome."... I was the only one in the school that had the credentials to really teach. So a lot came out of that. But we just shut it down. So that gave me an opportunity to work on my master's degree...So I got my master's degree in educational leadership ...The director that asked me, "to come in, just consult." So ... I started working in [county name omitted]. We used their IEPs... We kept it small. ... We had roughly 60 kids and they were all K through 12, and we were able to attend the meetings group...and get the accommodations our kids were supposed to receive ...Unfortunately the director, she took on so much that...she became ill.

...and [omitted school name] hired me and that's how I wound up in my current district.

Melodie

Melodie is an African-American woman, in her 40s, teaching students in a self-contained classroom. She describes her experiences:

I have a master's degree in special education. That was my draw into education. That ground comes from raising a son with a disability. And having to learn by day-to-day experiences and school experiences, failures and having to dig in. I came in hungry to learn more about what I didn't do right, so that I can right it. Right the wrong I guess. I've been teaching since 2007 all in special education in one variation or another. I tend to be drawn to the more severe students, and it doesn't really necessarily has to be any particular disability. It's just when I see the greater need, I am just drawn there. I have basically been working with students with EBD primarily in the middle school level for over ten years. Before that it was probably EBD and including other types of disability. Or multiple disabilities, I should say. Specifically in the school district it was having coming into the school district as varying exceptionalities. Teacher, resource teacher, and that was EBD is, I think the most prevalent in the public school system that we run across. So that was, in the general education setting, I should say. So basically, I was introduced to EBD specifically.

Data Analysis Results

Participant interviews ranged in length from 16 minutes to 55 minutes, with an average interview length of 35 minutes. Across all eight participants, approximately five hours (277 minutes) of interview data were recorded and transcribed. Based on the data that emerged in this study, three main themes were constructed utilizing a modification of Colaizzi's (1973) method of analysis. The researcher obtained from the verbatim transcripts a full description of the experience of the phenomenon (Colaizzi Step 1), considered statements with respect to significance in describing the experience, recorded all relevant statements (Colaizzi Step 2), listed each non-repetitive, non-overlapping statement, related and clustered the invariant meaning units into themes (Colaizzi Step 4), and synthesized the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience (Colaizzi Step5) (Moustakas, 1994). This analysis resulted in 15 tertiary themes. From the 15 tertiary themes, three overarching themes emerged: (a) essential keys to student engagement, (b) frustrations regarding effective program implementation, and (c) elements of an effective program. A table was constructed to organize the major themes and represent the frequency of each associated tertiary theme. Themes were characterized as typical, frequent or variant (Nelson, Englar-Carlson, Tierney, & Hau, 2006) based upon mention across participants, in order that the reader might ascertain a deeper understanding of the study's themes in relation to the participant's lived experiences.

Table 5:

Frequency of Themes

Research Question	Theme	Tertiary Theme	Typical	Frequent	Variant	
RQ 1	The Essentials: Keys to Ensure Engagement	Relationship Building	X			
		Developing Trust	X			
		Developing student's social/coping skills		X		
		High Expectations		X		
		Compartmentalizing				X
	Frustrations Regarding Effective Program Implementation	Disproportionality of Minorities		X		
		Challenges Surrounding Effective Programming			X	
		School Culture		X		
		Lack of Collegiality (Professional Development, Collaboration between GE and SE)		X		
	Elements of Effective Programs	Collaboration with Other Professionals			X	
		Parent Involvement/Family Engagement				X
		Evidence-Based Practices & Interventions			X	
		Importance of Ongoing Learning			X	
		Consistency			X	
			Full Inclusion		X	

Note. Adapted from Nelson, Englar-Carlson, Tierney, & Hau, 2006.

Research Question

The research inquiry serving to ground this phenomenological study was, “what are the lived experiences of special education teachers among students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD)?” The researcher relied on the power of the interview to probe facets of the teachers’ and/or support personnel’s history (e.g. “voice, processes, emotions, motivations, values, attitudes, beliefs, judgments, microcultures, identities, life course patterns, etc.” (Saldana, 2013, p. 38), given their considerable contact with this subgroup of special education students.

Collectively, participants shared the belief that a variety of strategies were vital to educating students with EBD. The participants discussed a need for teachers and support professionals to avoid one-size-fits-all approaches suggesting that one approach could grossly overlook components requisite for students’ development of wholeness. Instead, teachers and support personnel of students with EBD should persistently strive to professionally diversify in knowledge, skills, and competencies related to instructional practices. Participants found that differentiation of practice increased their experiences of student engagement over the years, ensured their evolution as professionals, and preserved their relevance in the learning environment. Participants emphasized that incorporating and engaging student’s everyday interests into instruction promoted their potential to achieve.

Participant data, emerging from the interviews, revealed that all of the participants felt a deep sense of connectedness to students with disabilities, specifically students with

EBD. The beginnings of participants' careers in special education varied. Some began as support-facilitators in self-contained classrooms or resource settings while others began in general education settings. Regardless of what led the participants to working with students with EBD, the majority of the participants shared a collective experience of a life-altering event, whether personally or vicariously, that began to color their perceptions and serve as the impetus behind their championing students with EBD. For example, the educators were asked to describe events that led to their working with special education students, specifically students with EBD:

Allison stated,

I started volunteering at a foster home where the foster parents only accepted medically fragile kids and kids who had some type of special disability. It was at that point I knew I wanted to work with special education students. When I went into school and did my internship, I realized that even though I want to work in the field of special education, the lower functioning students weren't as challenging. I felt that I needed more of a challenge, and I wanted to work with a more higher functioning population, and I felt that at the time that area really needed more people. And so I remained in the area of special education, but then I gravitated more towards students with EBD.

Margaret provided greater depth stating,

... my younger sister...was misdiagnosed growing up. She was misdiagnosed with having ADHD, bipolar, just a bunch of different things. She was put on

antipsychotics. She was in a separate class for students with disabilities throughout her entire elementary school, and then tried to mainstream in middle school. Middle school couldn't handle her in the mainstream and wouldn't give her the supports and services she needed. She couldn't write, like physically couldn't write, and on her IEP it said she had to use a laptop to be able to take notes. We didn't have WiFi back then either, so it's just the laptop. It was a laptop provided from my family. Her English teacher would not let her type, and forced her to write. Then she ended up getting pulled out of the school and going to different private schools. You know? And so, her experiences were difficult there, too. I mean, they wouldn't provide additional services,... The school just closed one day. They didn't say anything. They were outside of a ... they were working out at a church, and then everybody shows up for school and nobody is there. There was no notification that the school had shut down, people had left. It's just not the way we should be treating your students with disabilities and behavioral challenges. My sister would tantrum, too, and scream and all this stuff, because of a lack of communication and understanding. So, that really pushed me into it. It's really personal.

When asked to describe what led her to working with students with EBD, Wendy shared that,

...I think it was probably, it was my last year in 5th grade where I started co-teaching. And then that year was where I started to see that progression. Started out as second grade teacher, now I'm seeing these students in 5th grade, and I'm

wondering, you know what, I want to see how they transition into middle school. What does this look like at this level? I went to middle school, became an 8th grade teacher, co-taught middle school, language arts, and I had ... I think all in all, there were 12 students that I would work with, when [inaudible], half of my day was small groups, students in resource setting. And then the other half of my day, I would co-teach. Now that is where I had, out of my whole co-teacher career, that was probably the most experience I had with students with EBD, and it was then I knew I wanted to get my doctorate to explore my passion and my interest on females with EBD, and their experiences, specifically with exclusionary discipline and the disproportionality of that.

Research Question One: Supporting Data

Theme One: The Essentials: Keys to Student Engagement.

Emergent data taken from the interviews in this study revealed that effective teachers integrated a variety of strategies in educative settings resulting in diverse form of engagement. Participants mentioned several strategies, providing positive examples of the impact on students with EBD. Allison explained,

You have to have a bag of tricks, so to speak, to be able to deal with this population. I've found that there were a lot of different tools and interventions that I've had to intertwine into my lessons to ensure that they are engaged. You have to have a bag of tricks ... to be able to deal with this population.

Linda, also alluded to this theme, stating that,

students have to feel like they're a part of something. And we know, the research shows that students that are having issues with emotional behavioral challenges, when they're surveyed or asked about different things related to their experience at school, they often times say that they feel disenfranchised, or indicate that they don't feel like they're connected to anything. And not just students that have emotional behavioral problems, but any students if they are connected and tied into something, some kind of activity, some type of group at school. They are statistically less likely to have any kind of issues, or serious issues relating to behavior, drugs, depression, etc.

Participants in this study acknowledged the impact that various factors had on their students' achievement and courage to engage in the classroom environment. Considering the nature of these factors, teachers' ability to engage with students was frequently diminished. Subsequently, students' exhibited corresponding negative behavior. In light of this barrier, participants placed great emphasis on their personal/professional responsibility to connect and engage students with EBD positively by any means and to as great extent as possible. Further, participants accentuated the pertinence of connecting with students, in order to bridge the gaps between their interest in classroom content as well as their sense of belonging to the school environment and its processes.

Tertiary Themes

The Essentials: Keys to Student Engagement emerged as the broader category to the following tertiary themes: (a) developing trust (b) building relationship, (c) developing students' social/coping skills, (d) right use of high expectations, and (e) compartmentalizing.

Tertiary Theme One: Developing Trust

Trust emerged as a tertiary theme that was a strong indicator and impetus for student engagement. This finding is significant in terms of the overwhelming number of participants (7 out of 8 [88%]) who reported trust as a major component and indicator for student engagement and classroom performance. Participants made a significant connection between their establishing a sense of trust with their students and the students' corresponding engagement. As an example of this, Linda expressed the impact of this trust as follows:

The key, first and foremost, is relationships. If, you know, I think the quote is, "they don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." And I think that that is huge, especially with students that have emotional behavioral issues. It's all about that relationship, that trust, that confidence that you have in them, and that unconditional positive regard, "Hey look, I'm not going to like everything that you do. I'm going to hate some of the decisions that you make, and some of the actions that you take. But my value for you as a human being is not dependent upon those things. You still have value, you still deserve to be safe,

you still deserve to be loved, you still deserve to learn. All those things. So just because you're acting out and you have poor behavior, doesn't mean those things go away.”

Wendy provided insight on the critical nature of building enough trust that students with EBD were able to connect, stating, “I found that almost, probably more than 50% of the time, you know, the students that I worked with, they have that, why trust an adult?...they're always apprehensive about letting others in.”

Once that trust is earned with students with EBD, Allison shared that, it can be maintained by honesty, truth, and characteristics of healthy rapport:

Well, the thing that I learned while working with students with EBD is trust is a big thing for them. So, once you get to learn who they are and try to earn their trust make sure that you say what you mean and mean what you say, and you just stick to it. Just be truthful. They don't necessarily have to like it, but as long as you're honest with them, and you're able to develop that type of rapport in which they can trust you, you are usually able to work more easily with them. They'll open up to you, and are able to work with you. You're able to get more out of them.

Margaret provided a practical strategy to cultivate trust between the educator and the student with EBD, emphasizing the benefits of providing students the opportunity to express themselves freely, stating: “Give them the opportunity to be heard and to vent without being censored. Chances are no one else is doing that for them.”

Diana further affirmed the responsibility of the special educator and the related benefits of developing trust, stating: “if you’re fair, they’re going to trust you”.

Additionally, Diana disclosed the comradery and the “embracing” nature of students with EBD who feel trusted within a healthy relationship context.

Korey affirmed the notion that students with EBD will grow in trust, comply with instructions and engage in learning provided that educators will focus on relationship-building:

So for me it's all about, as cliché as it may sound, it is to build your relationship because if they trust you, if they think you're there for them, that's all they really want. If they think you're really there for them, they'll run through a wall for you. You know, with all the EBD students, it's not academic. A lot of times it's not academic. Academics may be low due to a lot of other issues. But once a lot of the relationships are built and they trust you and they know you have their best interest at heart, they'll pretty much listen to pretty much what you need them to do. They'll listen to you and that's the thing, you need them to listen. Once they start listening to you and not just hearing you, you need them to listen. Once they start listening to you, then they start really believing in you, then all of the other stuff will fall into place.

Ziesha further revealed that trust is seized when structure is coupled with routines and clear procedures that students can buy into:

If you have structure and something that the child can really get into the routine of and the procedures, what's going to happen when I hit that door, you don't have those issues. Then the child has to trust you. If you're just throwing work at them and they don't understand, "Okay, she just does this and she sits down and she does..." They know, every child that I've ever taught, they know, "If I raise my hand, [she] is right there. If I say, '[teacher name omitted], I need help,' she's going to be there. It's not like, 'I'm going to fail this, I'm going to fail this.'" No you're not, because I'm here. So it's a balance of structure and trust to me.

Tertiary Theme Two: Building Relationships

Similar to developing trust, the tertiary theme of building relationships resonated across interview data. Nearly universally (7 out of 8), participants explicitly highlighted the need to build relationships with students with EBD as a means of ensuring success and providing effective practice. When asked about strategies that are utilized when working with students with EBD, several educators immediately began to focus on the barriers to relatability and relationships. Wendy reluctantly admitted that "juggling the relational aspect...when teaching is a challenge". Further, she shared the likelihood of seeing students as a number instead of a name or reducing them to their label, in light of teachers having to manage behaviors without sacrificing sacred instructional time, stating, "I think teachers see their list of who's going to be in [their] class this year, and they're like, 'oh my gosh, I don't know how...'" it can all be managed. Participants revealed that building relationships holds the power to make behaviors manageable in such a situation.

Equally, the lack of relationship building can prove to be a barrier to effective instruction and student learning. Margaret shared issues that preclude special education teachers from providing effective service delivery to students with EBD, reporting that often disability, race, gender, and other things that present prevalently in the classroom can take primacy over relationship building. She commented that “getting to know the students as people...regardless of disability, race, gender, or anything” often takes the backseat. Korey expanded the conversation and provided insights on engaging effectively with students with EBD, stating,

my number one, the number one strategy is being relatable. Because, again, there's a lot of emotions going on with EBD kids. So I have to be – one of the strategies is building relationships. If they don't trust you, if they don't think you have their best interest at heart, they're not going to listen to you. They're not going to pay attention to you because they, in their mind, you see them already as a problem. You see them already as an issue and once that wall as built, you might as well go ahead and cuts it off and find something else to do. Again, bearing in mind, I'm not trying to be your best friend, I don't want to be your best friend, I have enough of those. What I'm trying to do, is I want you to understand that I do look at them with respect. You have to understand that ... I tell every student I am not smarter than you, I'm just older. Being older builds more experience and my experience has led me to say, “Hey maybe you shouldn't be doing what you think you should be doing because I've seen it and I've seen the consequences of that.”

Ziesha also offered her experiences having engaged with students utilizing the strategy of relationship, stating:

I have so many of the kids, who call me mama. I have another student who calls me mama. I have a student, who barely says two words, yet she makes sure to come and see me. I couldn't get her to hold my hand or even look at me, now she comes back there and she'll hug me.

Though each participant did not explicitly mention the strategy of relationship building and the need for teachers to develop a sense of expertise in this area, this belief seemed to be a quality underlying the participants' fondest memories of working with students with EBD. Participants regularly associated relationship dynamics to the successes or challenges of working with students in various educational settings.

Tertiary Theme Three: Developing Social Skills

Amidst strategizing to develop trust and establish relationships, special educators often contend for the overall well-being of students with EBD by addressing deficits in social skills and undertaking the development of social dexterity within this group. Linda highlighted the need for social dexterity among students with disabilities emphasizing that a frequent strategy she used to engage in a process of developing appropriate social skills was critical conversations. She facilitated critical conversation that focused on specific skills that could aid students in successful navigation of dynamic, or conflicting environments, stating:

...we would talk about [social skills] in terms of social expectations, behavioral expectations, roles, language, body language. Sometimes it was just giving them

examples of how to talk about certain things, what to say. If you need help, use these exact words. To try and make that transition. So we talk a lot about those kind of two different roles, two different languages, two different behaviors. We talked a lot about focusing on the future and developing those skills for, you know, short term actions, long term consequences.

Wendy added to the discussion, noting that:

one of the things that can make or break that projection of success, is having those skills that could fall under self-determination, regulation of emotions, being able to set goals for ourselves... one of the biggest challenges that students with EBD have is the ability to navigate those relationships in a way that is not abrasive and not even abrasive, to be physically aggressive all the time, but verbal aggression, too.

Korey added his thoughts from his experience working with students with EBD and the development of social skills toward navigating difficult relationships, stating that

most of the time they're running away from something. They're running away from something, something at home, something at school and you're trying to get them to confront what they're running away from [by] looking for a new positive, where the emotions are, [in] the anger...[in] the outburst issue..., in order to confront it positively...and that is very, very hard with.

Wendy highlighted the demands of “transitions” as enough to trigger students with EBD, explaining the need for “good transitions”, to get students in the mode to learn. This reference further emphasized the need for social skills development.

As interview data about social skills emerged, a connection to student success and their active development of social skills became increasingly salient. While the researcher explored the experience with success, as personal to teacher's experience, facets of success as tied to students unexpectedly emerged. According to participants, success could be measured through various means relating to their development of social skills. For instance,

Linda defined success as

[a] kid running down the hall, and saying, "Miss, so-and-so tried me but I didn't beat his ass." ..that's success because...because they recognize it too, and they care enough to tell you....sometimes it was "I didn't curse out a teacher at all today." That's success. I didn't get into a fight today, that's success. Maybe, in the gen ed environment, "I didn't skip any classes today. I did my work in English, and I never do my work in English." So, success is small, and then the big successes are built up from all of those small successes.

Wendy described success as "engagement in the classroom." Yet, she emphasized that engagement was more than academic achievement. Wendy internalized success, with respect to student engagement, as moving beyond the indoctrination of "test scores and academics" to harness the power of learning, stating, "academic success is wonderful, but the [fulcrum] of that is the motivation to learn...". Allison also offered her experiences to the nature of success among student with EBD, stating

It's going to look different for each student depending on how they came to you.

For example, I had a student once that she was adopted, but prior to being adopted she experienced serious trauma. There were molestations. She in turn started

dealing with that by harming animals, harming herself, and by the time she got to me and I had to earn her trust, and by the time she left she was able to be open and honest with me. She still had some issues, of course, but for me in that instance, the fact that she was able to trust someone else after being harmed and not trusting for a long time, that in itself is a success. So, you're going to find, depending on who the child is, what their needs are, the success is going to be different. So, whatever it is that they need, if they're able to attain that, ultimately I would say that that's a success. It could [be] something as small as not having an outburst in the middle of class or something as big as getting over sexual trauma. So, success is going to be different based on the child's needs.

Korey explained that

“success is when the kids are being proactive in their emotions, understanding that “hey, I can't just be upset and go off.” You know, [them going] through the process, the process of understanding, from the beginning of the situation and finding a positive situation.”

According to Margaret, success resulting from the intentional focus on social skills development consisted of, but was not exclusive to, “kids that I had worked with that were previously not being included in the classroom...yet, were now working on grade level, making gains, and exhibiting skills that they did not [previously] possess.”

Inherent to the development of social skills is the need for students to learn strategies for social success. As teachers, each participant expressed the need to teach students such strategies. For instance, Margaret embraced the challenge of teaching

students strategies, even integrating consequences into the training, in order to boost to students' capacity to achieve, stating that teachers should

teach them socially appropriate ways to vent and respond to others when they are calm. Teach students strategies for dealing with adults who are disrespectful, demeaning, or yelling about something they feel is unjust (nod your head, say yes ma'am/ sir, say I'm sorry while simultaneously tuning them out) to prepare them for encounters with authorities who are on a power trip. Also, teach them real life consequences to their actions. If you steal and you were a little older, you could go to jail. If you punched someone, that's assault, you could go to jail and no one will really care what the other person said to you to make you angry.

Tertiary Theme Four: Having High Expectations

While all participants provided insights into their views on expectations, many participants (5 out of 8) expressed the need to maintain high expectations when working with students with EBD. This notion, though seemingly inherent to the beliefs, attitudes and values of the majority of participants can be understood explicitly in content shared by a few. Diana reflected on her experiences teaching students with EBD and could not recall encountering students who were unmotivated to achieve. When asked about expectations, Diana described hers as high, explaining that, "I haven't met one student who didn't want to achieve". Ziesha, possessing strong values, beliefs and a solid stance, remarked, "I'm setting the bar high. I'm setting it there and I'm not going to lower it. You have to come up to me and I will help you get there, and that's all I do with them. That's

it.” She committed to maintaining high expectations for students with EBD because she believed that her students were smarter than what they were often given credit for.

Allison shared similar sentiments, to other participants, regarding expectations of students with EBD, stating

with my students, I've always set very high expectations because they're just as capable as any other student. EBD does not determine your ability to learn. We have students who are staffed EBD that have extremely high IQs, students with average IQs, and it's just the behavior is preventing them from reaching as high as they could.

Other participants, while not explicitly stating that they maintained high expectations, disclosed a level of regard, even frustration, in maintaining a coherent value system for expectation of students with EBD. Korey while expressed his expectation of students with EBD to be “productive citizens in the world” and his quest to “build” them into adults that could meet that vision. Contradictorily, he also expressed:

Okay, so the expectation thing. As a general practice I don't put expectations on them and I don't put any expectations on anything. Because, again, when you, again this is me, if you put effort into those things and then they don't reach that expectation, as a person you tend to be upset at them and then you tend to be upset at yourself, because you expected them to do something. You asked for something and you expected them to have it. For me, I don't expect [of them]. I have expectations for myself. I expect myself to be...to be 100% honest with them.

Like Korey, Margaret emphatically expressed her expectations of students with EBD, beginning with a focus on society and ending within the classroom, stating her expectation,

that they become functioning members of society, that they are treated like humans and talked to like they're people, and they're given access to all the curriculum, all of the activities, everything that everybody else has access to.

Tertiary Theme Five: Compartmentalizing

Participants in the study frequently referenced the practice of compartmentalizing. Students with EBD were reported to often present with a wide range of behaviors in the classroom. While all participants described a wide range of behaviors, they were not all as explicit in their description of this theme, yet each of the participants expressed persistence in working with this population. In describing the behaviors of students with EBD, Allison stated that her experience, “varied...and changes from day to day, because when dealing with that population, you're going to find that they have a lot of highs and lows, and they tend to go from one end of the spectrum to the other.”

Margaret provided further depth, referencing situations where compartmentalizing was not a quality that some teachers sought to embrace:

Teachers would not provide students with a fresh start, they would persevere and stay angry with students who lacked the emotional regulation/ skills necessary to deal with their environment. It was all...I'm probably exaggerating by saying, “all,” but for me, it felt like they were all just so negative and like, “Oh, I

don't want to have a day like I had yesterday. You better be on your best behavior.” Like.... *that was yesterday*. (*emphasis added*).

Wendy shared similar beliefs regarding this strategy as it relates to effectively working with students with EBD, explaining the skill as “being able to step back and not get caught up” conflating the child with their behavior. Allison also shared the importance of “taking it one day at a time” (treating each day as its own) and “not taking it personally”.

Theme Two: Frustrations Regarding Effective Program Implementation

During interviews, participants focused on various challenges they believed influenced their ability to provide special education services to students with EBD in various educational settings. For participants, providing services consistent with their professional beliefs, attitudes, and values legislation was impacted by extraneous factors beyond their capacity to control, such as culture and changing locales of the society-at-large.

Tertiary Themes

Frustrations Regarding Effective Program Implementation included three tertiary themes: (a) school culture, (b) challenges surrounding effective programming, and (c) disproportionality of minorities, and (d) lack of collegiality.

Tertiary Theme Six: School Culture

Participants had much to say regarding the significance of school culture. The participants shared a common belief that culture weighed heavily on their ability to engage students, provide services, and be effective in their practices as a teacher. Further, participants focused a great deal on the impact of culture on their capacity to engage with students and promote ideals of inclusion. Participants mentioned several facets of school culture providing examples of its impact on students with EBD as well as on their own practice. For instance, Linda shared that

school culture is huge, and I think that I saw more of that now in the gen ed environment at the school I'm working at now...students have to feel like they're a part of something. And we know, the research shows that students that are having issues with emotional behavioral challenges, when they're surveyed or asked about different things related to their experience at school, they often times say that they feel disenfranchised, or indicate that they don't feel like they're connected to anything. School culture can be a huge factor in that it goes back to that buy-in. If you feel like your identity lies within the school, and you feel like you have a place within that school family, that you have some people at school that you can lean on and that are part of your circle. I feel like that's a very strong indicator for students that are able to overcome whatever challenges they may have, or make progress when it comes to emotions and behavior.

Wendy also discussed the influence of leadership on school culture, noting that,

it starts with administration, and the tone that they set. Culture impacts how your team leaders interacts with you, then how the special education teacher interacts with the general education teacher that they're collaborating with, so on and so forth...I think a lot of times in my experience in every school that I've been in, it's [general education and special education are] two separate entities. And when it's presented that way, and the culture is set up, so separate. And the kids will just be like, why? They come into the classroom, this is not my class, this is a class I'm going into for a little bit, instead of, no, this is your class. You are part of this classroom community. It's not you know, the special ed kids over here, we're all on the same team. The culture of the school kind of molds and shapes their behavior.

Allison shared the importance of everyone's contribution to school culture. She noted that

school culture is a big thing, and really because it goes back to the whole "it takes a village" type mentality, and in this case the village is going to be the school, the employees, everyone from the custodian all the way up to the principal.

Most participants referred to school culture as a collective norm that could be ascertained through observation of the actions, interactions, attitudes, and beliefs of the individuals (i.e. students, teachers, and administrators) by which it was formed. Diana further affirmed the impact of culture stating,

when the culture believes in the students, we're going to see success. We're going to see some hiccups, but we're going to see success. When unfortunately, which is more of the times what you see, is people not believing in the students and not thinking they can achieve, and that they're just doing it to be mean and spiteful, you know what, that's how they don't get out of that system. Yeah. I mean it greatly impacts it. There's no if's, and's, or but's about it that...I even think about even just the classroom culture.

Melodie shared the impact of school culture, stating,

if the school is geared for success of all students, and that includes the EBD students, then that's a big deal. Because so often they get the label of “‘that student that is not successful’, ‘that’s not going to do’, ‘that's going to disrupt your class’”, and those negative feelings come back to the classroom with the teacher every day. And it could be the day that ‘that’ student wanted to do something, but that wall [of negative culture] is there. So, if it's not a whole school environment that's embracing the students in all ways and all days, then it's not successful.

Tertiary Theme Seven: Challenges Surrounding Effective Programming

Interview data also began to reveal challenges surrounding effective programming. While participants referenced evidenced- or federally-based programming as it has been created for students with emotional and behavioral challenges, they also expressed that school-wide implementation was little to none, and therefore, was of little

to no effect. For example, Margaret noted, “....it was never a specific program, just a lot of project-based learning, and then tying in the supports...I didn’t implement any specialized program for students with EBD”. Adding to the conversation, Ziesha stated,

The programs in place, there aren't any. I have to be honest with you. There are no programs in place, you just have to be a teacher that understands just how much information you should give the child at that time. You can't give it all to them at one time....if we were able to take that scoping sequence, we can create a program. But honestly? We don't really have a program. We really don't. The kids have to come in and they're doing standard diploma curriculum, because they have been identified as students who are capable of getting that diploma. So, we don't really have a program, and it's a very broad issue. It's a very broad issue. For instance, I have a cousin who is an attorney for IDEA, IEPs, business schools and disabilities. And, she said, "I just don't know what's going on. We don't have anything in place for the kids. All we can do is the best that we can do." But there's nothing in place, even in Maryland. They have the same issues. I also have a cousin in Maryland who's a judge and she's truancy, she works with truancy. Same issues across the board. They say no child left behind, excuse me. I don't understand that process, I really don't because....Because they really are still being left behind. It's just that they're watching us more and we're doing what they expect us to do. But we know Johnny needs more time. But do we have the time to get to Johnny? No, we don't. So really there's no program in place specifically for our kids, it's the same thing they've been getting out there throughout the county.

Wendy expressed her challenges with effective program implementation stating,

I think that [the] level of differentiation that you have to make, while still making the work engaging. I don't feel like the preparation for being a teacher [is] enough, I know now the pendulum is shifting, we're talking more about UDL [Universal Design for Learning] in the classroom and different ways to assess students. But I think, too, even though we have those conversations, it's hard to make it concrete for teachers. Okay, so what does that really look like? Because we're still so focused on that letter grade. Making those connections, that was what challenging to me, and whenever you have students not only with varying abilities, but varying behaviors, setting up your day in a way that's, everybody's going to be able to benefit, you know...every day's not going to be perfect, you know. It's just impractical, that movie or storybook classroom. But knowing that you have considered all students, whenever you're making your plans, is a challenge. And I think that that is something that teachers in general, that do it well, don't get enough credit for, because it takes time....[and] a rhythm to know, okay, we got "A" so we can't spend this much time on "B"...making the connection....or start[ing] the intro. You need to make good transitions, because that's a big...challenge, too, with students, and especially, I think, I would almost say, the older that they get, but it is. Even the transition from the hallway into the classroom, and get[ing] them in [the] mode, is like, oh yeah, we came here today, we got things to do...And in that relational aspect, be[ing] able to [inaudible]...is much more central to their lives in middle and high school. Addressing that

without losing your instructional time, too. So I think.. as much as I could, I try to intertwine [with] whatever we're talking about, but it's not always practical to do that.

Tertiary Theme Eight: Disproportionality of Minorities

Every participant in this study mentioned their students' demographics. In describing their typical student with disability, each participant except for one, discussed race. Allison noted,

there's a lot of research to support it but unfortunately you would find that the majority of students who were stuffed into the EBD program that a large majority or overwhelming majority were black males. Definitely, in the schools that I taught students with EBD, the majority of my class students were black males. Yeah, you find some, here or there you'll find a few. You typically don't find a lot of females in my experience that are stuffed in the EBD program. I think partly, because, unfortunately, I think sometimes the girls will get more of a pass than the boys when it comes to discipline.

Reflecting on her typical student with EBD, across different settings, Margaret revealed that, while there was a degree of diversity among students with EBD, it was not enough. Over the course of her discussion, she expressed a level of disgust, stating,

it's real different, because when I first started teaching, I was in a heavily Hispanic population, also where I grew up, where demographics were 40%

Hispanic, 40% white, and then the rest, Asian, African American, and so on. And so, there, the demographics in the school kind of mirrored. My students with disabilities kind of mirrored it. I would say for students with EBD, it's hard because of the way that they diagnose and classify the disabilities. But I would say this probably...I'd say 50% white, 25% African American, 25% Hispanic. Then I moved to a different district, a different area, and was kind of in a culture [inaudible, possibly "shock"]...both were title one schools. In the first Title one school I was working at, it was 80 something percent white, and then 10% Asian, including Indian Asian and Chinese and...less than 10% African American. But then you looked at the students that I served, and out of 80 students, they didn't all have EBD, but out of the 80 students that I served, which was 25% of the school, I had just a handful of white kids, like maybe 3. No, I had two white, two African American, males,...40% white and then 60% African American with the label of EBD, not just having behavioral difficulties. But I can tell you that of that population that I was serving, it was only the two white students, and then the rest were in the minority...They were all there because of behavior, some form of behavior that, "I can no longer deal with this child," and they're pushing them into special ed. Yeah, it's disgusting.

Like Margaret, Ziesha, shared from her history to support this trend, stating,

And this will travel through years. It seems like it's mostly African American male. Then you'll have maybe 1 or 2% female, African American. I'm starting to see an influx of Hispanic males now and I think it has to do with the shift with the

hurricanes. But our main demographic is, I would say, 95% African American males.

Tertiary Theme Nine: Lack of Collegiality

Participants affirmed the importance of establishing strong professional connections and a sense of community to promote effective provisions of special education services to students with EBD. Linda highlighted that student gains were dependent on the connections that educators built with one another, stating, “if you have a program, and you have a support system that's much meatier, you're more likely to get those gains from those students”.

Wendy contributed a similar observation, describing how camaraderie and community increases receptivity and information-sharing among teachers:

if you have somebody sitting next to you that you know is two doors down, saying, I had success with these students, and this is what I did, then I feel like either receiving that, happens more willingly [between colleagues], because it's real time, real life...as compared to the district coming in, and imposing information on you, the conversation amongst teachers, and therefore, the culture is like, well you're not in my classroom, you don't know.

Referencing collegiality, Allison positively asserted, “teachers should be able to lean on each other and help each other up when they're not feeling their best, and just help each other get through the day.”

While the majority of participants spoke idealistically toward collegiality, Wendy began to reveal shortcomings in collegiality among special education teachers, in light of compliance demands, stating,

I think we do that a lot, especially as special educators, you get on your silos, you're like, 'I got this caseload', 'I need to get this in', 'I need to set up these meetings', 'I gotta call this parent'. 'The student wants to meet with me after school', what have you. Being able to know you're not alone.

Margaret identified the negative impact on students with EBD that occurs because of collegial negligence and apathy among special educators within school settings, stating that,

the challenges really, really involve the personnel within the school, because you can give students with EBD the tools that they need to be successful. You can support them. You can get to know them. But the minute they step outside of your [class] room...if the other personnel are not trained or don't have the skills or don't care to have the skills, they can completely throw off your entire day.

Other participants also mentioned benefits of “professional development”, “professional learning communities” and utilizing various modes of building community.

Theme Three: Elements of Effective Programs

Interview data in this study highlighted components and characteristics of effective programming for students with EBD as revealed through the lived experiences of the teachers who teach them. Collectively, (7 out of 8) participants shared qualities and characteristics of effective programs that raise achievement and engagement levels

among students with behavioral challenges. Broadly, each participant stated the following as requisites, prerequisites, facets and functions of programs for students with EBD: “academic interventions”, “structure”, “strong curriculum”, “school-wide behavior systems”, “fidelity of instruction”, “well-structured”, “observable, measurable behaviors”, “being proactive”, “making things practical, “IEP”, and the capacity to “differentiate between the child and the behavior”. To elicit these responses, participants were asked semi-structured, open-ended questions. Emerging from the question was the broad theme of “Characteristics of Effective Programs” with five critical components identified as tertiary themes.

Tertiary Themes

The overarching theme *Elements of Effective Programs* emerged from six tertiary themes, or critical components, that emerged from the interview data. The tertiary themes are: (a) collaboration with other professionals, (b) parent involvement/family engagement, (c) use of evidence-based/data-driven interventions, (d) value for ongoing professional learning, (e) consistency, and (f) inclusion.

Tertiary Theme Ten: Collaboration with Other Professionals

Participants revealed that collaboration with other professionals was a critical characteristic and frequently used practice as they worked to engage and provide special education services to students with EBD. Several participants assumed a supportive stance as the interview progressed and began to provide empathetic insights as they

reflected on the challenges faced when implementing programs for students with EBD. Linda shared her experience stating that, as a teacher, “you're also more likely to feel like you're making a difference because you have a group of people, and a support around you that is reminding you of that all the time”. In considering the impact of vicarious trauma as a result of teaching students with EBD, Linda stated, “I recommend somebody, a mentor, therapist, a counselor, a pastor, whatever the case is, somebody that you can really unload on. Do not use your significant other to do that.” Allison emphasized that “it really takes a village when you're working with these types of students”. Further, she explained that “working with a team of people” is essential for students to excel and reach expectations that have been set. Diana explained that her teaching was made easier because of “very well-written behavior intervention plans” (BIPs).

Having somewhat of a different path into special education than the other participants, Wendy, in reflecting on her teaching experience, highlighted the significance of collaboration throughout her history, noting,

it was my last year in 5th grade where I started co-teaching.. I went to middle school, became an 8th grade teacher, co-taught middle school, language arts, I think all in all, there were 12 students that I would work with, when [inaudible], half of my day was small groups, students in resource setting. And then the other half of my day, I would co-teach. Now that is where I had, out of my whole co-teacher career, that was probably the most experience I had with students with EBD, and it was what really pushed me towards getting my doctorate. I started to talk to one of my mentors, at [university name omitted], and she's like,

"You need to go back to school. But you don't need to be in [city name omitted], you need to go somewhere else."

Additionally, Wendy provided insight of her personal convictions regarding collaborating with other professionals. She revealed her personal practice of "making sure that I had that teacher or couple teachers that I could reach out to, and say, 'Hey, I need help.'"

While collaboration with other professionals emerged as a positive theme across the experience of most participants, one participant shared some concerns related to collaboration. Margaret highlighted the negative impact on progress for students with EBD when collaborating with school staff of varied skill levels:

The challenges really, really involve the personnel within the school, because you can give students with EBD the tools that they need to be successful. You can support them. You can get to know them. But the minute they step outside of your room, then if the other personnel are not trained or don't have the skills or don't care to have the skills, they can completely throw off your entire day.

Tertiary Theme Eleven: Parent Involvement/Family Engagement

Interview data revealed parent involvement/family engagement to be an element of effective programs. Participants indicated a clear desire to develop relationships as important in their students' educational lives. Five out of eight participants referenced such communications and relationships established or desired by means of involving and engaging parents in students' achievement processes. Linda highlighted parent

involvement as one of the significant challenges to the work that special educators do pertaining to students with EBD. She desperately exclaimed, “if somebody can crack the code on parent involvement, look...copyright and retire. Copyright and retire.” Parent involvement is one of the facets of effective programming that many seem to covet, but few attain to the degree they desire. Wendy simply recommended, “include the parents”, further affirming the role that parents play in the effectiveness of programming as well as the achievement of students with EBD. Referencing a student that she taught, Diana stated, “I built a good, solid relationship with her mom”. Expounding on her experiences with parents, she followed-up stating,

people don't believe in the parents and they basically think that you've done nothing right. The one thing they got right is their baby. I think that's another cycle that we need to stop. Every time you call, people forget to...make those desirable phone calls.

Also, drawing from her background in social work, Diana asserted that, “providing supports for the family” is a strategy she utilized to engage with family. Of all the participants, Ziesha had the most to share regarding parent involvement/family engagement. In regards to a specific student she had taught, Ziesha noted:

I developed a relationship with his mother. He didn't even know we were communicating. She calls me by my first name, I call her by hers. And we're just emailing. I said, “By the way, he didn't do his work today.” “Send it home. I'll make sure he gets it done.” And when he gets home, “Oh, I heard you didn't do your work today, da da da da da. Here it is, I send it by email. Da da da da da.” So

he understood, “If I don't do it here I have to do it at home.” And then she said, “The stuff that you can't send via email, give it to him.” I emailed her later. I heard him saying, “I'm just going to tear it up.” So the next day, “Oh, I heard you say you were going to tear up your work.” So he knew we were communicating, the kid is an A student now because he knows we're not playing. He's going through helping all of my students...He's going to be awesome.

Tertiary Theme Twelve: Evidence-Based Practices and Interventions

Interview data revealed the belief that the presence and implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs) is a characteristic of effective programs. Regarding the implementation of EBPs, Linda emphasized that special education teachers and schools can provide structure for students with EBD by:

pick[ing]...evidence-based programs, something that has been, you know, peer reviewed, and we know that it matches the demographic that you're working with. We know that it has some successes. And just work the hell out of it. Get every single piece that you can, push yourself in there to plan and detail, and just make it fool-proof as much as you can, so that you can provide that consistency, that answer to every question, that resource, that opportunity. So that you have really put yourself into it, so you know how to make it work for no matter what kind of kid that you're getting. So whatever system you're putting in place, do your research, find a good one that matches your kids, and just invest in that program from top to bottom, backwards and forwards, mark up that book, go through all the lessons that you want to go through. Get creative with it.

Allison also echoed the need for appropriate instruction, stating, “when you’re teaching them strategies to cope and deal with their emotions appropriately, they can excel”. However, Linda shared the challenges teachers can feel to move on from an evidence-based practice prematurely stating,

I think one thing that is really a downfall in education sometimes, no matter what the realm, is that we don't see results overnight, and so schools or districts, or teachers sometimes, get rid of it. Get rid of whatever program their using before they've actually implemented it with fidelity and given it time to work. We don't like to hurry up and wait, but with students that have emotional and behavioral disabilities, they're 15 and it took them 15 years to get like this, it's going to take more than the nine weeks to help them unlearn and re-learn more constructive and productive behaviors.

Margaret stated that she had “a lot of behavioral supports in place” and that she utilized “PBIS...very proactively” when working with students with EBD in the classroom and required “very observable, measurable behaviors and rules” when gauging performance. Further, Diana also affirmed the provision of appropriate interventions explaining, “providing those academic interventions that they need” results in a decrease of negative behaviors.

Melodie revealed her regular use of self-management interventions. She stated, one of my main goals to accomplish individually with the student. Is [acceptance] that you have [a] disability. And that disability doesn't define you and it doesn't

negate the things that you do. You should be held accountable for [your actions], good and bad.

Korey similarly works on self-management with his students as evidenced by his sharing that, “I realized I'm not in the business of saving [anyone] anymore. I'm in the business of opening their eyes to understand, whatever your situation is, you are totally responsible for your actions.”

Tertiary Theme Thirteen: Value for Ongoing Professional Learning

According to participants, teachers of students with EBD have the responsibility to remain lifelong learners. Because of the elusive nature of emotions and behaviors that surround working with students with EBD, participants demonstrated the need for educators of this group to constantly be learning. As Wendy proclaimed, “it's important to not fall into that [the institutionalization] as a special educator”.

Linda, referenced the importance of ongoing learning and emphasized professionals' need to deepen practice from engaging in collaboration with peers, stating that:

it's really important to be noted that ... [special educators] are only going to be physically, financially, emotionally able to do that job for so much longer without the support that's needed. You know, you can only survive on ... you know, they talk about planting a seed and all of that. But you can only survive on seeds for so long. You need something that is substantial, and that may not always come in the form of a student making these great gains....you have [to have] a support system

that's much meatier...And you're also more likely to feel like you're making a difference because you have a group of people, and a support [system] around you that is reminding you of that all the time.

Wendy recommended that ongoing professional learning should be facilitated by school administrators that focused on

the summer planning,...professional development, [inaudible] professional development for co-teaching, professional development in behavior management. and hav[ing] teachers at [the] school, put those on, because I think too [when] the district comes in and imposes information on you, the conversation amongst teachers...is like, well you're not in my classroom, you don't know. It's easy for you to say. But if you have somebody sitting next to you that you know is two doors down, saying, I had success with these students, and this is what I did, then I feel like [they're] receiving that, willingly, because it's real time, real life.

Margaret exhibited her value system for ongoing learning, stating,

I am currently in a doctoral program, in exceptional education. I began teaching students with disabilities as an exceptional education teacher, working as a resource teacher. Then I started working as an intermediate general education teacher—in an inclusive setting— because the students with disabilities were being excluded from the general education curriculum because of their academic and behavioral needs. Then after that, I started coaching, working as a literacy coach and providing professional development to the teachers at the school. And I was also the leader and coach of our positive behavior support team...I'm also working on becoming a board certified behavior analyst. I started the doctoral program

because I was just not making the progress with the teachers, and [it was] really, really frustrating that I'm giving all of the tools, I'm giving you the support [yet] my job as a literacy coach kind of stopped being the job of a literacy coach, and the job of a non-certified behavior analyst. Just going in and supporting them every single day, and still change was not happening. That's why I'm continuing and that's why I'm going into applied behavior analysis.

Data continually emerged across interviews providing evidence of the participants' belief in ongoing professional learning. Ziesha shared that, after teaching for 19 years in multiple states and school environments that she enrolled in [university name omitted] and obtained her Master's Degree in Educational Leadership, in order to continue contributing to the learning of students with EBD. At the time of interview, Linda, Whitney, and Morgan were pursuing doctoral degrees in special education. Each participant provided voiced, in similar manners, that their experiences with students with EBD served as a primary factor that influenced their decision and affirmed their value for ongoing professional learning and development.

Tertiary Theme Fourteen: Consistency

Overwhelmingly, participants referred to consistency as an element of effective programming, in their delivery of special education. As Linda proclaimed,

consistency is key no matter what you're putting in place for a student, for interventions, for behavior. They have to learn to have a consistent routine, and consistent expectations. And that could mean a challenge when you have a

student that's going to seven different classes, with seven different teachers, who do things seven different ways in the gen ed environment. And it's not necessarily anybody's fault, we're all different people and we do things differently. But trying to develop some kind of consistency for them when they're already dealing with feelings and emotions that are erratic, you don't want to add anything else to their plate that's erratic. And so whatever program you put in place for them, it has to be consistent, and it has to be meted out with fidelity. The best that you can set expectations, behaviors, whatever it is with set consequences or you know, either positive or negative. And it has to be meted out consistently.

Allison similarly noted that

any type of program that you're going to use with EBD students, it needs to be consistent, and it needs to be implemented with fidelity. Structure is a big thing when it comes to students who have emotional behavioral disabilities. It just needs to be structured, and it needs to be consistent because if they know what to expect they'll respond accordingly. They're dealing with so many internal emotional issues that if you're constantly changing and going a different way that will also get them riled up, but if you have a program that is very well structured, and it's implemented with fidelity and it's consistent, they I think that that would be very beneficial to that population.

Margaret emphasized the need for consistency to extend throughout a program's entirety, stating, "...everything's consistent. So, reinforcement is consistent.

Consequences are consistent." Likewise, Diana reported that for programming to be

effective with students with EBD, there had to be “consistency across the board”.

Melodie stated that teachers and support personnel should, “be the same every day. Make your yeses be yes, and your no’s be no’s. Be honest, be fair.”

Also, emerging from the interview data were beliefs that the participants held regarding aspects of special education service delivery. Participants felt that provision of special education services needs to be integrated into the school systems and process in places for all students if they are going to be effective for students with disabilities, especially students with EBD.

Tertiary Theme Fifteen: Inclusion

Participants shared inclusion as an important aspect of their value system and approach to working with students with EBD. Linda revealed her beliefs about effective service delivery, stating,

students have to feel like they're a part of something. And we know, the research shows that students that are having issues with emotional behavioral challenges, when they're surveyed or asked about different things related to their experience at school, they often times say that they feel disenfranchised, or indicate that they don't feel like they're connected to anything. And not just students that have emotional behavioral problems, but any students if they are connected and tied into something, some kind of activity, some type of group at school. They are statistically less likely to have any kind of issues, or serious issues relating to behavior, drugs, depression, etc., etc.

Wendy, also referenced inclusive beliefs that she had developed over time, explaining,

you want to be the savior but it's not about being a savior. It's about letting them have a voice, and creat[ing] an environment, a school community where students feel like they're heard, and that it's reflected,..the content, the class environment, and all that, is reflective of them.

Korey described how he applied tenets of inclusion to engage students with EBD and shape a culture of belonging, stating,

we have to do these tests, yes we have to get academics in but, we're a family here, a family at this school. We're not so punitive of everything. We try to...develop...a culture of understanding, a culture of building, that is very, very important to a kid with [disabilities]...[yet, is beneficial to] any kid.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presented findings of this phenomenological study, which explored the lived experiences of special educators (e.g. teachers and support personnel) that provided some manner of direct instruction to students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Semi-structured interviews provided data from the experiences of eight individuals who shared their stories. The researcher conducted thematic analysis to answer the research question. Emerging from the analysis were fifteen tertiary themes which were further organized into three overarching themes. The researcher relied upon participants' verbatim responses to accurately capture and represent the participants' experiences.

The primary finding of this study was that special educators relied on key fundamentals to effectively engage students with EBD. Relying on their own

backgrounds, the teachers provided insight into their mindsets, teaching strategies, coping strategies, and social strategies used to advance these students toward achievement.

Further, the participants gave voice to associated challenges of managing students with emotional behavioral disabilities across various educational settings. In order to effectively respond to the needs of their students with EBD, participants described their need to rely on relationship-building skills, engage in developing student's social skills, maintain a commitment to high expectations, and treat each day as its own.

The second finding in this study revealed participants' frustrations in practice in response to challenges encountered throughout their tenure. Exploring these frustrations regarded effective program implementation included investigating participants' conceptions, perceptions, and reactions to school culture, issues of programming in schools, the prevalence of disproportionality relative to students with EBD, and the lack of collegiality among special educators. Particularly, participants expressed a range of emotions in response to insufficiencies that persist and impact the treatment of students with EBD.

The third finding in this study revealed participants' experiences and perceptions of elements of effective practice. Data emerged from the interviews revealing that participants, over their course of time in special education, developed an appreciation for specific qualities that should be integrated into special education service delivery of students with EBD, but often were not. Participants believed that these elements critically impacted effective practice as exhibited in student success as well as the climate in the school setting. Particularly, participants expressed that collaboration with other professionals, communication with parents and families, evidence-based, data-driven

interventions, the need for professional ongoing learning, consistency, and valuing inclusion as tenets to be included in effective practice. Participants' shared a common belief that effective practice would not be achieved absent of characteristic elements.

Experiences across participants converged to form the three major themes discussed in this chapter. Findings from the interviews revealed various, complex aspects associated with the provision of instruction and support to students with EBD. The findings affirmed that while meeting the needs within this group are unique and variant, the roles, responsibilities, and responsiveness of special education teachers serving them are just as dynamic.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The final chapter of this phenomenological study reviews the statement of the problem and the research methodology, presents a discussion of the findings organized by theme, and further, considers the findings within the theoretical frameworks (Welner's Zone of Mediation, Dynamic Systems Theory) utilized by the researcher. Whereas the previous chapter presented categorized findings of this study to produce a readable narrative and tell the story of the teachers' lived experiences, the purpose of this chapter is to provide interpretive insights of the findings. In so doing, this chapter, by weaving participants' comments throughout, attempts to reconstruct a more holistic understanding of the lived experiences of special educators among students with emotional behavioral disabilities. The discussion takes into consideration the literature on students with EBD, practices of educators who teach or support them, and the environments under which these activities are facilitated. The implications of the findings are intended to augment the understanding of the perceptions of students with EBD as well as provide a context for the improvement of teachers' practice toward these students. Finally, the study's limitations and recommendations for future research are presented.

Statement of the Problem

The persisting residual inability of educators to implement thorough special education service delivery for students with disabilities, in light of decisions by the Supreme Court and reform brought to education by federal legislation (i.e. IDEA, NCLB,

and ESSA), presents a substantial problem. Equally, if not more, concerning are the challenges faced by certain special educators that who provide services to still-marginalized populations. The U.S. Department of Education (2017) substantiates that achievement varies among diverse student populations. Specifically, achievement among students of color tend to be lower than the majority. Researchers describe this phenomenon as the ‘the achievement gap’. The academic achievement gap has been noted in subgroups such as, students with disabilities, students from poverty, and students with minority backgrounds (Klein, 2016).

Historically, students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD), a subgroup among special education groups, have tended to fare far worse than other subgroups of students with disabilities in terms of academic achievement (Wagner & Davis, 2006; Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008; Mihales et al., 2009; Siperstein, Wiley & Forness, 2011; Gage et al., 2017). While the overall percentage of students receiving special education services has increased slightly from 11% (1990) to 13% (2014), the overall percentage of students with EBD served among all school-aged children and youth has remained below 1% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Even as low as approximately 0.5% of school-aged children and youth receive special education services under the category of ED (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). While the prevalence students with EBD is low, some researchers posit that prevalence rates are grossly underestimated (Kauffman and Landrum, 2013). What is clear from achievement rates is that those who are identified as eligible for special education services under the EBD category are significantly underserved.

Various interrelated factors have been identified as contributing agents to the lack of success among these populations (Goodman et al., 2013; Smith, 2012). EBD is “largely subjective” (Algozzine, 2017, p. 138) and based more on cultural perceptions of “troubling” behavior than psychopathology or “internal disturbance” (Hart, Cramer, Harry, Klingner, & Sturges, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). Further, EBD refers to an administrative category, not a clinical disorder, and consists of an elusive definition determined by policy makers, not clinicians or scholars of associated practicing fields; therefore, a clear means to identify students and engage effective interventions is inconclusive (Sullivan, 2017). Further, the presence of lingering social ills (e.g. racism and bias in decision-making contexts) have led some researchers to discuss the formation of a culture of failure that buffets the best equity-oriented reforms, especially those seeking to improve behavioral outcomes of minority students (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2014; Milner, 2013; Staats, 2014; Noguera, Pierce, Ahram, 2015; DiGiacomo, Prudhomme, Jones, Welner, & Kishner, 2016). The current failing reform efforts to improve the academic achievement of students with EBD brings the role of teachers and their preparation into view. In the absence of consensus surrounding EBD identification, the role of educators is to, at least, rely on best practice recommendations, while striving to make legally defensible decisions (Sullivan & Sadeh, 2014a).

Great consideration has been given to teacher preparation in light of teaching students with EBD. Researchers affirm, in light of the academic achievement of students with EBD, preparation beyond that required for all teachers (i.e. education, certification, and years of experience) is necessary (Gage et al., 2017). However, research also affirms

the impact of more latent qualities of teachers, such as beliefs, values, and attitudes, on the academic achievement of students with EBD (Lavlani, 2012; Oylar & Hamre, 2006). In light of these dynamics, the need to explore the experiences of teachers who have been successful in improving the achievement of students with EBD proves critical.

Review of the Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2013; Ary et al., 2013; Gall et al., 2007; van Manen, 1997, Moustakas, 1994) to examine and analyze the contributors to the phenomenon of success or academic achievement among students with EBD as lived by special education teachers. This study was designed to investigate this phenomenon primarily in urban school settings with regard to the teachers' professional practices, perceptions of school-wide programming, and global recommendations for securing the academic achievement of students with EBD. The following research question guided this study:

What are the lived experiences of special education teachers among students with emotional behavioral disabilities?

Discussion of the Findings

In this study, three themes within the phenomenon were identified and presented with supporting data (Chapter Four). The central themes included: (a) the essentials: keys to student engagement, (b) frustrations regarding effective program implementation, and (c) elements of effective programs. Additionally, fifteen tertiary themes were categorized

within the overarching, central themes. This section will provide a brief summary of the findings within each theme followed by a discussion of the tertiary themes, which are grounded within Dynamic Systems Theory, using Welner's Zone of Mediation (ZOM) framework.

Summary of Themes and Interpretation

Theme One: The Essentials: Keys to Student Engagement

The primary finding of this study was teachers' and/or support personnel's principal use of effective altruism to engage students with EBD in school settings. Effective altruism is the practice of using evidence and reason to best determine how to benefit another to the greatest extent and taking action on that basis (MacAskill, 2017). In order to ensure the engagement of students with EBD, participants exhibited qualities and exercised specific values as fundamental, necessary prerequisites to their provision of instruction. As demonstrated by effective altruists, participants engaged, other-oriented tendencies to maximize the well-being of their students. Participants' use of "the essentials" (i.e. developing trust, relationship-building, developing social skills, etc.) served as the premise of their most effective pedagogy. Researchers cite the importance of trust for students' engagement and connectedness to the school setting (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Likewise, participants, drawing from their experiences with students with EBD, provided substantial evidence that absent of the principal capacity to develop trust and build relationships, engaging students for the purpose of instruction and support

would consistently fall short. For instance, Korey reiterated his value for trust development and relationship-building frequently, stating,

as cliché as it may sound, it is [vital] to build your relationship because if they trust you, if they think you're there for them, that's all they really want. If they think you're really there for them, they'll run through a wall for you.

Researchers are noticing this trend and naming classrooms as hosts for increasing cultural and linguistic diversity and the students who are instructed within as the “culturally and linguistically diverse” (CLD) (Chiu et al., 2017). CLD consists of diverse groups of students with exceptionalities characterized in numerous ways, including race, socioeconomic status, gender, language, religion/spirituality, intellectual ability levels, sexual orientation, and age (Utley, Obiakor, & Bakken, 2011). Culturally responsive instruction (CRI) is an approach to teaching CLD students which incorporates students’ culture and corresponding experiences to facilitate rich learning and deep connections between new content, skills, and prior life experiences (Aceves & Orosco, 2014; Gay, 2000; Ladson Billings, 1994). Echoing current literature acknowledging shifting locales within schools and increasing diversity within their classrooms, participants often referenced their professional responsibility to become more culturally aware and adept at utilizing fond experiences of students with EBD to increase the sense of relationship as well as relatability to students with EBD through instruction. For instance, Margaret considering the importance of utilizing culture and corresponding experiences to enrich instruction and build relationship provided insight into her practical use of CRI, stating,

really just getting to know them as people. What kind of shows do they like?

Whether they're appropriate or not, if they come in and they're watching Empire, I don't care that it's fifth grade. They're watching Empire with their parents, so let's talk about Empire for a minute.... Building *those* relationships, connecting with them and incorporating their likes into the activity. It just really helps them.

They'll perform for you. (*emphasis added*)

As evidenced by the findings, effective engagement with students with EBD required a range of strategies and approaches to accomplish engagement and, ultimately, academic instruction. Six CRI themes have been identified in current literature: (a) instructional engagement; (b) culture, language, and racial identity; (c) multicultural awareness; (d) high expectations; (e) critical thinking; and (f) social justice (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). Further, researchers affirm that teachers of youth with EBD often explicitly teach perspective taking and empathy when working on social skills and conflict resolution, including considering how the student's behaviors may affect other people (Salmon, 2015). Interestingly, the participants revealed their latent, almost inherent incorporation of similar strategies as requisites for success when working with their students.

The participants noted that (a) developing trust, (b) building relationships, (c) developing/stimulating students' social skills, (d) high expectations, and (e) compartmentalizing were consistent strategies utilized in their work with students with EBD. Participants, considering the spectrum and unpredictability of behaviors that students with EBD often exhibited in the classroom or school-wide, suggested that their allegiance to engaging these strategies developed as a reflexive response to experiencing

little progress relying on skills afforded by traditional teachings and pedagogical methodologies of the profession alone. Gojkov (2012) asserted that mastering the profession, scientific foundations, and pedagogical methodology are necessary, but not sufficient; instead, to be sufficient, teachers of students with EBD need human qualities, knowledge, abilities and skills relating to processes and interpersonal relationships, both in and out of the classroom.

While participants were forthcoming in affirming the benefit of professional development across their experiences, professional development was most frequently discussed in the absence of preparation focused on teachers' capacity to appeal to students' social and emotional intelligences. Research progressively substantiates the reality that teacher effectiveness lies beyond the science of the profession and centers on a teachers' capacity, willingness, interest, and personal investment to function as well-versed pedagogically and socially competencies professional. Pedagogical competence refers to a teacher's ability and will to regularly apply a certain attitude, knowledge and skills to promote student's learning (Nemet, 2018). Pedagogical competence is believed to occur within set goals and existing frameworks, presupposes a teacher's continual development (Giertz, 2003), and consists of a teacher's capacity to have pedagogical tact and personality (Nemet, 2018). Nemet (2018) provides the rationale and need for professional development, in regard to pedagogical competence. According to Nemet (2018), pedagogical competence,

enable[s] teachers to apply the teaching theories, practices, and skills, adopt school procedures, create teaching content in the form of short- and long-term

planning, solve educational problems, develop classroom management skills, deal with discipline, understand social and other circumstances that can influence student expression and behavior, learn to communicate and collaborate with parents, and deal with international issues. (p. 143)

Data in this study reiterated research findings that when implemented with proper training, critical thinking, intentionality and deliberation, special educators of students with EBD could provide services and supports in a more integrated fashion and enhance student engagement and achievement. In order to adequately develop trust, build relationships, develop social skills, and maintain high expectations among students with EBD, teachers must have critically considered their commitment to pedagogical competency and proficiency. Pedagogical proficiency is revealed when teachers can “in different contexts demonstrate a good ability to use their subject knowledge in research-related, practical, pedagogical actions with student learning in focus” (Olsson et al. 2010, p. 123). Pedagogical competence also consists of professional and social communication as essential preconditions for the development of certain behaviors (Previšić, 2010).

Nemet (2018) asserts that it is a teacher’s social competence or “democratically and socially integrative way of communicating” (p. 144) with students that contributes to whether that classroom, teaching environment or school is more or less favorable. Relating to student engagement, social competence further underscores “the essentials” in this study. According to Nemet (2018), social competence represents the highest, most prominent intelligence required of teachers. Social competence centers on the art of developing social skills and relationships with students, parents, colleagues, but it also

concerned with school management. As evidenced in this finding, teachers deepened the social dimension of their competence by negotiating, mediating, establishing good relationships, understanding and contemplating students' intentions, efficiently communicating with others, cooperating, and perfectly functioning in different social situations (Nemet, 2018). Findings from the current study indicated that participants engaged in activities related to each of these areas and by doing so improved their practice. While great consideration has been given to strategies that are empirical, findings from this study propose that advancing progress depends on special educators' competence and capacity to master a most fundamental human need: the interpersonal relationship.

Data in this study affirm prior research findings that suggest and embrace the notion that educators who work with students with EBD make their most significant and enduring positive progress when they are able to forge trusting and positive relationships with their students (Simpson, 2011). Furthermore, findings substantiated that power for student progress is forged when the interpersonal relationship is engaged with effective methods instead of presumed, and subsequently, practiced as counterproductive (Durlack et al., 2011). Participants affirmed assumptions offered throughout the literature that state, "it would be difficult to find a teacher of students with EBD who will not only concede this point, but will eagerly and convincingly offer examples that illustrate that it is only through constructive relationship formation that a method or curricula, independent of how allegedly effective it is, will have the potential to work most effectively" (Simpson, 2011, p. 233).

Theme Two: Frustrations Regarding Effective Program Implementation

In this study, the researcher set out to explore challenges related to the provision of special education services to students with EBD. Participants across this study affirmed previous research that noted issues relating to provision of the FAPE afforded to students with EBD by special education legislation and court decisions. Participants described great frustration surrounding their efforts in serving students with EBD . Specifically, participants discussed the impact of school culture, challenges surrounding school-based program implementation, and the issue of disproportionality.

Nemet (2018) referred to school culture as one of the most salient, teacher dependent factors in schools. Further, she noted that culture is the single factor that can stimulate or hamper students' progress and achievement (Nemet, 2018). Negative school culture and climates are characterized by low student connectedness, lack of caring and trusting relationships among students and teachers, and lack of support for students may increase rates of student aggression and victimization, and lessen the likelihood that students who are victimized will seek help (Low & Van Ryzin, 2014). In contrast, schools that have a climate that is positive and inclusive, where developmental needs and academic achievement are valued equally, document a higher sense of belonging (Johnson, 2009; Nipedal et al., 2010). Further, Thapa et al. (2013) found that schools with positive school climates tend to have better student academic outcomes and “promote cooperative learning, group cohesion, respect, and mutual trust” (p. 365). Linda, affirming this finding, noted within her experience that she witnessed the impact of school culture on achievement, in the context of students with EBD having a sense of belonging, stating,

If you feel like your identity lies within the school, and you feel like you have a place within that school family...I feel like that's a very strong indicator for [whether] students are able to overcome whatever challenges they may have, or make progress when it comes to emotions and behavior.

Much of the research to date has focused on measuring school culture from the perspective of the students (Berkowitz, Moore, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2017). Although there are measures that assess teacher and parent perspectives of school culture (see Berkowitz et al., 2017; Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2013; Waasdorp, Pas, O'Brennan, & Bradshaw, 2011), very few studies have incorporated multiple perspectives—particularly those of the administrators, other school staff, and family members (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Auerbach, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2001, 2014). Wendy, focused on administrators and other school staff and their capacity to reinforce ancient social ills, by mishandling school culture, when she stated,

I think a lot of times in my experience in every school that I've been in, [general education and special education teachers are] two separate entities. And when it's presented that way, the culture is set up, so separate....This separat[ion] is another way to segregate...unless you have an administrator that is aware.

Wendy further discussed how administrators' and teachers' awareness of school culture and climate is compromised by pressures, real or perceived, regarding compliance, stating that,

it starts with administration, and the tone that they set. And honestly, the know that they have, of special education, of IDEA, because so often, especially with teachers, you hear this, okay, we gotta be in compliance, compliance.

Culture is defined as “encompassing the complex elements of values, language, tradition and purpose” (Peterson & Deal, 2011, p. 9), and in terms of a school, is constructed in such elements as “the unwritten rules and assumptions, the combination of rituals and routines, the array of artifacts, symbols, the special language that staff and students use, and the expectations about learning that saturate the school’s world” (Peterson & Deal, 2011, p. 9). Culture affects teachers’ rules of engagement (i.e. organization of learning, orientation to teaching, evaluative procedures, rules of schools, instructional activities, and curriculum) (Aceves & Orosco, 2014). Peterson and Deal (2011) further describe culture as the phenomenon which sharpens the focus of daily behavior, builds commitment to core values, amplifies motivation, and improves overall effectiveness and productivity in the school. As reflected in the findings, culture is everywhere, in everything, and serves as a significant determinant of whether success or failure dominates the school climate. Culture encompasses school climate (Kane et al. 2016) and influences teachers’ pedagogical development, and the quality of their educational work, relationships, and working conditions (Brust, Nemet, & Mlinarević, 2016). Participants emphatically agreed that school culture impacted their work with students with EBD and, accordingly, students’ achievement describing culture as “a big deal”, “a huge factor” and the chief determinant of student engagement, instructional practices, quality of leadership, school climate, and sense of community (Kane et al., 2016; Nipedal et al 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2014) . Moreover, these findings align with

literature on the importance of school culture and climate on partnerships and teacher, family, and student outcomes (Hoy, 2012; Rose, Espelage, Monda-Amaya, Shogren, & Aragon, 2013; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013).

Schweiker-Marra's (1995) conducted a study that examined the relationship between school culture and teachers as change agents and found that certain elements that strongly influenced the school culture had to be improved to maximize positive school culture. The elements, or what the author chose to call 'the standards', included collegiality, ability to experiment, setting high expectations, establishing trust and confidence, material support and knowledge. Elements that encouraged professional cooperation between and among the staff were respect and recognition, care, a sense of humor, participation in decision making, protection, tradition, and honest and open communication (Schweiker-Marra, 1995). Reminiscent of past studies and reflective of current research, participants in this study believed that collegiality was a strong contributor to progress and success when working with students with EBD in various settings. However, participant responses across this study suggested incoherence and idealism in collegiality as a belief versus a practice. Participants believed in the archetype of collegiality, however, their frustrations surrounding collegial breakdowns manifested in their inability to have open and honest conversations (Tschannen-Moran, 2014) regarding injustices against their students with their colleagues. Particularly, facilitation of critical conversations was neglected as a frequented practice due to the absence of crucial relational infrastructure that can only be fostered by the professional collegiality mitigated within and sustained by a positive school climate. Participants frequently noted that the focus of their efforts was toward equipping and praising their students for

appropriate behaviors instead of addressing colleagues who served as their students' trigger. These findings contrast features of positive school climates suggesting that the essence of participants' frustrations rested in their experiences, ambitions, and attempts to enact effective practice within restrictive cultures produced by negative school climates (Hoy, 2012; Rose, Espelage, Monda-Amaya, Shogren, & Aragon, 2013; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013; Low & Van Ryzin, 2014).

Researchers have emphasized essential elements of effective programs; strategies for ensuring that teachers have access to utilitarian, evidence-based methods; and mechanisms for confirming the training of teachers in the correct use of appropriate effective strategies and methods; yet they have emphasized indecision surrounding effective implementation across educative settings (Lloyd et al., 2019). Data from the study revealed that participants experienced these frustrations and more regarding effective programs, implementations and their application to students categorized under the EBD subgroup. Participants were unable to identify with effective programs at their school sites with specificity. However, salient discussions surrounding the impact that discontinuity and ambiguity between participants and their colleagues has on programming was accomplished. Participants also discussed the "disgusting" reality of disproportionality as a challenge to effective service provision.

Sullivan (2017) asserted that the problematization of disproportionality is generally shared, yet divergent observations and interpretations to what it *really* is and why it *really* persists are equally shared. Perspectives of disproportionality are seen in the portrayal of underrepresentation emerging from lack of cultural competence and denial of

civil rights of CLD students with elevated risk of disability (Morgan et al., 2015; Morgan & Farkas, 2016b). So, too, are they seen in varied arguments of historic, institutionalized educational disparities that deprive CLD students of educational opportunity and pathologize their behavior (e.g., Blanchett, 2006; Chhuon & Sullivan, 2013; McCall and Skrtic, 2009; Skiba et al., 2016), particularly given the history of disability as a basis for marginalization (Artiles, Dorn, & Bal, 2016) and special education as a means for the marginalization of CLD students (e.g., Dunn, 1968; Hoffman, 1975).

There is much debate surrounding representation among racial groups under the EBD category. Some scholars argue that more White children receive special education services for emotional behavioral disorders (Morgan, 2016). However, this study, reflecting national data, affirmed that African American males are most disproportionately placed in special education under the category of Emotional Disturbance (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). This finding presented as something participants found particularly challenging and served as a shared experience and motivation to remain in special education.

Theme Three: Elements of Effective Programs

Data from this study highlighted participants' perception of qualities that made for an effective program. For instance, as data emerged and was analyzed, it became clear that participants were not ubiquitous in their responses, but were rather aligned with the research that preceded them. Researchers affirm the need for effective practices and programming relating to students with EBD, in light of changes that have resulted from

special education mandates (Lloyd et al., 2019; Simpson, 2011). Much like the research, participants' responses to effective programming in their schools varied. However, analysis revealed variations among participants' conceptualization of programming. For instance, Margaret and Diana reduced programming to interventions (e.g., PBIS). Melodie discussed programming in terms of federal components (e.g. IDEA and the IEP). Korey discussed programming in terms of Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Ziesha recognized an absence of programming altogether. Despite the variation across participants, their shared frustrations regarding the critical shortcomings of programming among in its many nuances, contributed to the participants' ability to saliently describe effective elements that they either individually practiced, or expressed as ideals for common practice.

Simpson (2011) reveals that identifying and ensuring use of effective practice methods with students with EBD is difficult. However, authorities in the field are converging over the reality of positive outcomes among students with EBD when effective methods and strategies are employed with fidelity. In fact, there is a widespread consensus that effective strategy is central to beneficial program improvement (Simpson, 2011). Little opposition exists to general notions that educators need to be more adept at identifying practices that have proven benefit (Horner et al., 2005; Shavelson & Towne, 2002; Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter & Morgan, 2008).

As echoed in the research findings, one quality indicator of effective programming is the incorporation of high leverage practices (HLPs) in the classroom. Collaboration with other professionals and families is considered by researchers (McLeskey et al., 2017) a high leverage practice (HLP) that when integrated into special

educators pedagogy increases their qualities as effective candidates for special education classrooms (Lloyd, 2019). Nearly 30 years ago, Morse (1994) noted that effective practice reform would be contingent on recognition and acceptance that effectual and successful programs for students with EBD are based on human relationships that transcend and interact with the methodologies that are used. As affirmed by the data in this study, programs and interventions for students with EBD are only as effective as the individuals who apply them and are inextricably aligned with relationships between teachers and learners (Simpson, 2011). According to the data in this study, elements of an effective program were (a) collaboration with other professionals, (b) parent involvement/family engagement, (c) evidence-based/data-driven interventions, (d) value for ongoing professional learning, (e) consistency, and (f) inclusion. These findings are consistent with the importance that researchers give to positive partnerships between teachers and families (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; TschannenMoran, 2001), parental involvement at school (Epstein 2001; Haines et al., 2013), and the beneficial outcomes of inclusion for students with and without disabilities (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Kalambouka, Farrell, & Dyson, 2007) as well as the work of McLeskey et al., (2017) and Lloyd et al., (2019).

Further, participants discussed ideas related to social justice as an element of effective programming. Social justice encompasses principles of inclusion and equity (Bell, 2016). Inclusion can be defined as “the most appropriate setting where effective instruction in meaningful tasks that are relevant to the student’s future can be assured” (Kauffman et al., 2016, p. 4). Inclusion means that all children [with support] attend the

same classes, that diversity is celebrated within the classroom and that children have a right to participate, to learn and to build social relationships (Gidlund, 2018). However, depending on backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences, inclusive practices hold different meanings to different stakeholders (e.g., parents, students, teachers, and administrators) (Reindal, 2016). These differences in belief systems impact the implementation of policies and procedures related to inclusion (Kauffman, Anastasiou, Badar, Travers, & Wiley, 2016; Kauffman & Badar, 2017). Yet, research affirms that teachers who embrace the responsibility to be inclusive demonstrate elevated quality of instruction, more effective instruction than teachers who had dissimilar beliefs concerning inclusion, greater teacher efficacy, higher rates of teacher collaboration, and an increased likelihood to differentiate instruction (Ryan, 2009). Echoing the research, participants affirmed these findings in light of their own inclusive values, beliefs, and experiences. Having provided special education delivery across settings, participants reported perspectives that were oriented to ideals of inclusion. Further, they affirmed the positive impact of creating a sense of belonging for students who were frequently rejected, an aspect of successfully educating students with EBD that was deemed essential.

Zone of Mediation and Dynamic Systems Theory

Findings and conclusions of this study are presented within Welner's Zone of Mediation (ZOM) and Dynamic Systems Theory (DST). Welner's ZOM is a theoretical tool used to analyze how local policy appropriation can contribute to inequitable outcomes in light of equity-minded policy (Sullivan & Artiles, 2011). Bearing in mind that, "the reform process for equity-minded change tends to follow a 'downward path'"

(DiGiacomo et al., 2016, p.4), the ZOM framework (Welner, 2001) offers a way to highlight how specific dynamic forces (i.e., inertial, political, normative, technical) affect school reform efforts, explains how these forces shape a reform's context, and illustrates how the local education agencies mediate—reproduce or counteract—these forces throughout the implementation process (DiGiacomo et al., 2016). The experiences captured in this study revealed that participants were particularly committed to engaging various strategies, evidenced-based interventions, even integrating their personalities as part of their pedagogical and social competence, in order to challenge and change the status quo of students with EBD.

In this study, teachers' engagement of effective practices was virtually non-existent absent of their willingness to contend with larger forces that made school reform, proceeding from federal legislation, difficult. Competing with issues rooted in power, privilege, status, and difference on the basis of race, language, and class, effective practice is a social justice issue. Welner (2001) posited ZOM as a theory to mitigate these concerns, theorizing that four forces intersect to create a ZOM that shapes reform in local schools: (a) inertial, (b) technical, (c) normative, and (d) political. Inertial forces refer to cultural practices of schooling in local contexts, including understandings and routine practices developed over time. Technical forces reflect operational functions and organization of schooling, including resource (e.g., time, personnel) allocation. Normative forces reflect engrained beliefs about people including "such matters as conventional conceptions of intelligence and deep-seated racist and classist attitudes and prejudices," (Welner, 2001, p. 93). Political forces stem from actors' concerns as affected

by power imbalances across educational systems (Thorius et al., 2014). Understanding and mediating these forces undergird the practices of special education teachers.

Inertial

Inertial forces represent the “habits, routines, customs, and practices that are found within most organizations and which, over the years, take on a life of their own” (Welner, 2001, p. 93). This study was conducted to capture the essence and meaning of practices that special education teachers engaged over the course of their experience in order to provide effective instruction and/or support to students with EBD within their school context. Participants in this study were responsible for providing direct instruction and support to students with EBD. Participants occasionally provided general education students with instruction in the same classroom environments as students with EBD. Participant data revealed that the special educators, through routine contact developed their pedagogical and social competence in serving the needs of students with EBD, and from the understandings formed, engaged in a variety of altruistic efforts that served as the lifeblood to their working with students with EBD and contributed to the classroom culture necessary to sustain student achievement. Nemet (2018) notes school culture as one of the most critical factors to students’ achievement. Closely associated with culture is the eminence of school climate. Regarding school culture and climate, participants’ exposed a daunting reality—student progress absent of intentional culture cultivation and climate improvement results in little to no progress at all. School culture and climate

depends on administrators and teachers' individual and collective regard for professional development and evolution.

Professional development is characterized as teachers' commitment to professionalism, collegiality, and self-determination (Nemet, 2018). Aligning with research from the dynamic systems theory, participants in mediating inertial forces, evolved into adaptive experts. Farmer et al., (2016) defines adaptive experts as teachers who approach their role when teaching as problem solvers who continually identify ways to adapt to the learning support needs of students, as opposed to following specific routines and expecting students to adapt to their instructional or classroom management style (De Arment et al., 2016) Adaptive expertise centers on teachers' efficient and innovative use of knowledge and has been described as the "gold standard for becoming a professional" (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005, p. 360). Further, adaptive experts identify when they need consultation, support, and collaboration with intervention specialists, behavioral analysts, mental health professionals, and other related services providers to share information and help identify the possible need for interventions in other contexts that may contribute to the adjustment of the student in the classroom (Farmer et al., 2016). Participants in this study regularly relied on a variety of practices, customs, and routines of collaboration, in order to effectively serve the needs of students with EBD while also revealing the need for more.

Technical

Technical forces “include the organizational structure and internal functioning of schools, including time and resource allocation, equipment, materials, and curriculum” (Welner, 2001, p. 93). Bolman and Deal (2013) further contribute to our understanding of organizational structure by revealing assumptions that undergird the frame: (1) organizations exist to achieve goals, (2) organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization, (3) suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts mesh, (4) organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas, (5) structures must be designed to fit an organization’s current circumstances, and (6) problems arise and performance suffers from structural deficiencies. Technical forces were evident in references to participants’ management of instructional time amidst behavioral challenges and collaboration with other professionals. Likewise, structural tensions were evident among participants. Mintzberg (1979) suggested organizing people by (1) a functional group based on knowledge or skill, (2) units based on time, or groups established around consumers (e.g. schools targeting students in specific groups), (3) groupings around place or geography, or (4) by process (a flow of work). However, when units lack continuity, suboptimization occurs, efforts fragment, and performance suffers (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, and Ortiz (2010) critiqued the issue of fragmentation and discontinuity in special education and noted differing views of culture as the culprit.

Nieto (2018) argued that “culture can mean different things to different people in different contexts” (p. 65). Further, Nieto (2018) asserted that education, in light of

culture, has lost its purpose due to the political and corporate shifts, and that educational breakdowns are the product of misunderstanding multicultural education at the structural level. Participants in this study alluded to the reality that, at many points, education has been structurally compromised. Accordingly, the educational landscape (i.e. in classrooms, across schools, and throughout communities) is lacking sufficient change to impact student achievement positively. Participants also affirmed the reality that the moment students exited their class, they were confronted with the reality of poor structure. The discontinuity that persisted was the result of the lack of process (or flow) maintained by other professionals to ensure students' stability was preserved. As previously referenced, indicators of school quality and efficiency, which require teachers' pedagogical competencies and social skills and affect the quality of educational processes, include curriculum, attainment, learning and teaching, student support, school and classroom culture, teachers' cooperation with the principal, professional service and local community (Jurić, 2007).

The issue of time caused participants' concerns of fidelity of practice to arise in the data. Specifically, participants noted that developing trust, building relationship, developing students' social skills, and engaging levels of differentiated instruction sufficient for the demands of student well-being in and beyond the classroom as well as adequately operating as a competent professional, was frustrating due to having to conform to overall school culture, in light of meeting compliance. Participants swiftly reported that due to the overall structure of their schools and classrooms, issues regarding their capacity to effectively implement evidenced-based practices (EBPs) was

compromised. Researchers purport that universal applicability and effectiveness of EBPs is a general assumption (Aisenberg, 2008) and has become a notion that is increasingly unsupported by research (Wang & Lam, 2017). Growing attention has been given to the issue of balancing implementation fidelity and adaptation in EBPs in special education (Leko, 2015). Wang and Lam (2017) assert that, “shortfalls in “tug- of-war” between fidelity and adaptation—both speak to the need for culturally responsive interventions and cultural adaptation” (p. 55). Cultural adaptation involves the process of modifying evidence-based intervention protocols to take language, culture, and context into account to make it compatible with the cultural patterns, meanings, and values of those being served (Bernal, Jiménez-Chafey, & Domenech Rodríguez, 2009). The integration of cultural adaptation can help to “clarify and specify what to adapt in order to achieve optimal balance between adaptation and fidelity and address important implementation outcomes (e.g., acceptability, appropriateness)” (Cabassa & Baumann, 2013, p. 1), but also “clarify the knowledge, skills and roles of who should facilitate the process of implementation” (Cabassa & Baumann, 2013, p. 1). While recognizing the significance of culture, and its role on the impact of student achievement and professional collaboration, the participants affirmed findings in the research that suggest a need for practices that do not forfeit fidelity over implementation, but through a constructive use of culture brings about a more solid convergence.

Normative

Normative forces arise “from beliefs and values and reflect such matters as conventional conceptions of intelligence” (Welner, 2001, p. 93). Moreover, the normative force “dominates the contextual landscape for equity-minded change” (Welner, 2001, p. 93). As Chapter 2 emphasized, in the dominant culture, long-held beliefs about education continue a status quo of marginalization for students with disabilities. In this regard, it is important to note that,

most teachers have had few meaningful relationships with persons with disabilities, and therefore, lack awareness of their own complicity in perpetuating oppressive educational practices and ableism in school, and like most non-disabled people, consider their own able-bodied status the norm (Oyler & Hamre, 2006, p. 17).

Further, teachers tend to fail to identify student needs properly because of beliefs and values that are mediated by the greater culture (Chakraborti-Ghish, Mofield, & Orellana, 2010). The danger lies in the reality that unexamined, unfronted beliefs tend to remain latent, yet manifest as obstacles to inclusion and engaging in effective practice (Villegas, 2007).

Teacher assumptions and beliefs about student ability dominate perceptions about inclusion. As evidenced by interview data, several participants communicated meaning and value to their students with EBD by creating environments that emphasized and encouraged belonging through purposeful conversation and intentional language (i.e. “this is your classroom”, “we are family”, etc.). Interestingly, in light of Oyler and

Hamre's (2006) work, the participants in this study each had personal experiences through meaningful relationship that served as their why behind championing the cause of students with EBD. Participants believed that students with EBD have too long been poorly served due to issues related to disproportionality and segregation. Further, participants exposed their own attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about student skillsets, which often focused on student potential, capacity to self-manage and ability to self-regulate.

Referencing culture, Morgan and colleagues (2015) indicated that disproportionality and exclusion of students with EBD may stem from the lack of cultural competence. Furthermore, it is believed that the phenomenon of cultural discontinuity and fragmentation stands as a major perpetuator of the phenomenon of disproportionality as evidenced by excessive punitive actions taken in school settings (i.e. suspensions, expulsions, discipline referrals) (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2000; Webb-Johnson, 2003). Moreover, disproportionality stems from institutional racism, racial bias, and the resulting inequities of these prejudicial structures (Lehr & McComas, 2006; Blanchett, 2006; Chhuon & Sullivan, 2013; McCall & Skrtic, 2009; Skiba et al., 2016). Participants' experiences affirmed plausible assumptions that disproportionality among minorities may have its origins in historical tensions, racial perceptions, beliefs and attitudes that continue to be held in many contexts.

Political

Political forces “arise out of the demands and concerns of constituents and are subject to the political imbalances among states, districts, schools, teachers, and parents” (Welner, 2001, p. 93). This study was framed within a political context that included an overview of litigation and legislation that shaped practices for educating students with disabilities, specifically students with EBD. This political framing is relevant as the origins of special education policy emerged from socio-political concerns (Artiles et al., 2010). In relation to the political force and socio-political concerns, effective practice is an equity issue and a cultural issue. As an equity issue, effective practice is an issue of power, conflict, coalition, principles and ethics (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In terms of culture and power, effective practice is a dynamic construct that “is learned, transmitted and transformed by social interactions, conflicts, and power relations” (Cabassa & Baumann, 2013, p. 2).

Considering inclusion, researchers note a gap between the rhetoric of inclusive education and school reality. Gidlund (2018) asserts that inclusive education is a social and political construction in which different discourses struggle to achieve dominance. Inclusive education is exposed to a hegemonic struggle between discourses shaped by different groups in their quest for influence and power over the content and design of school (Assarson, 2007). Researchers assert that power is not evil (Bolman & Deal, 2013) and that power should not only be described in negative terms, like exclusion and repression, but should also be described in its constructive aspect: production of reality (Foucault, 1975). Power makes things happen (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Power is “the

potential ability to influence behavior, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things they would not otherwise do (Pfeffer, 1992, p. 30). Absent of emergent demands of constituents in relation to power imbalances and lack of access, much of the progress that has been made in serving students with EBD, would be non-existent. Participants in this study were not unfamiliar with the political forces related to providing effective practice to students with EBD. As one participant stated,

the challenge is finding what that child's wants, needs and triggers are. And being able to manipulate that student. And I do say manipulation because that's just what I do to perform across settings. Not just for me, but to be able to say, when you go over there, you better do so and so and so and so. And that student can do that too. That's outstanding.

Several participants referred to the sense of satisfaction they experienced as they engaged with students for the purpose of achieving a certain outcome and accomplishing that task with the student. Participants affirmed the link and the leverage that exists between power and dependency. Students with EBD depend on the power that teachers have as well as the power that their teachers give. Teachers of students with EBD in this study utilized power multidirectionally and as a mechanism for continued social existence and coexistence, yet not without fault. Analysis of the data confirming teacher's awareness and use of power to benefit the student also served as a response to teachers' powerlessness among colleagues.

Participants across this study rarely expressed their use of power when working with other professionals. While much evidence suggested teachers' ability to collaborate

congenially, close analysis revealed the latent inability for teachers to openly and honestly communicate and deepen collaboration with other professionals regarding the provision of support and advocacy due to an unexpressed sense of guardedness, skepticism, or fear that existed in response to environmental politics. Teachers' reflexively praised their capacity to coach and de-escalate students in conflict, but often eventually deferred to pursuing advanced degrees or other means of leverage, in order to combat and navigate collegial power imbalances that they faced despite their best efforts working with other professionals. For instance, Margaret captured this sentiment, when she stated,

I started the doctoral program because I was just not making the progress with the teachers, and [it's] really, really frustrating that I'm giving you all of the tools, I'm giving you the support....and still change is not happening. That's why I'm continuing and that's why I'm going into applied behavior analysis. I feel like if you don't walk in the teachers' shoes, then you can't expect teachers to be receptive to help. I can't expect teachers to put on interventions for students with EBD if I've never taught a general education classroom and I only see students for 30 minutes at a time. I don't know the struggles that they have throughout the day. So, by stepping into the general education teaching position, it gave me a little more buy-in with teachers. Going the ABA route, I'm getting a little bit more evidence-based practice and become more of an expert.

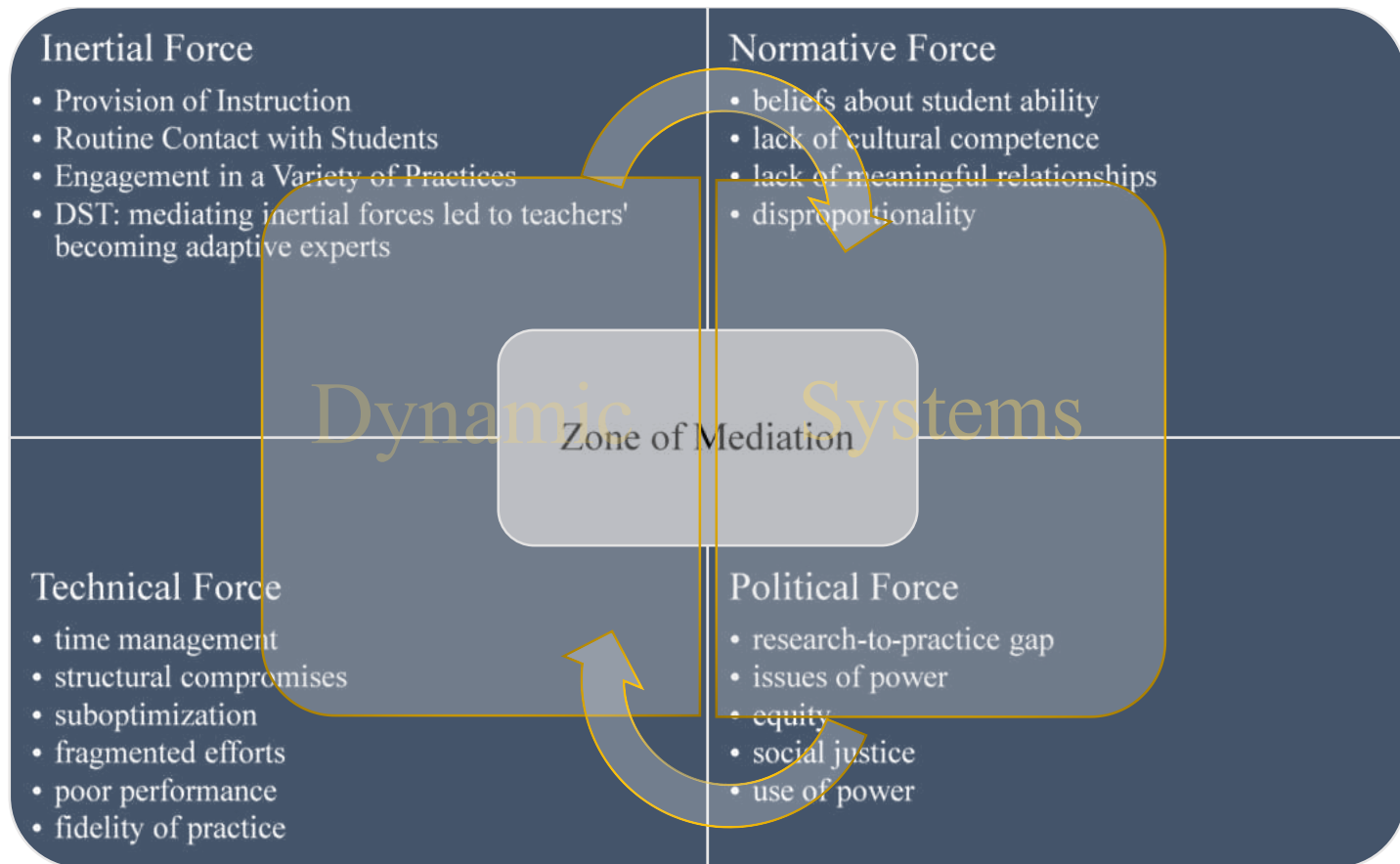


Figure 3: Theories Applied - Welner's (2001) ZOM and Dynamic Systems Theory

Study Limitations

Saturation (Creswell, 2013; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012) was achieved with this sample of eight participants from various school districts. However, there were limitations with the findings that must be mentioned. Limitations in this study included the recruitment of study participants, homogeneity of sample, participants' level of formal education in special education, and participant districts of employment.

The first limitation in this study was the recruitment of study participants. The phenomenological study utilized purposive sampling to select participants involved in the phenomenon to provide the most relevant information. Purposive, snowball sampling, though frequent in phenomenological studies, requires caution, as the selected sample may not be generalizable (Ary et al., 2013; Palinkas et al., 2015). For this study, generalizability does not present as a limitation as findings are intended for case-by-case transferability. Further, the sampling method was not intended to recruit typical teachers. Participants (N = 8) were recruited through recommendations by other teachers and/or support personnel because they were deemed effective and had direct experience with students with EBD (Babie, 1995; Crabtree & Miller, 1992).

Secondly, three of the eight participants in this study were pursuing or in the process of pursuing graduate degrees in special education. Two of three graduate school participants were attending or graduated from the same university as this researcher for their graduate degrees. The pursuit of an advanced degree in special education illustrated the participants' self-awareness and desire to improve their own skills, knowledge, and competencies to improve student outcomes. Participant self-awareness may have biased

the results as participants demonstrated they were aware of what special education should have looked like versus how it was implemented in their schools.

Implications of Findings and Recommendations for Future Research

Across the field of special education, it has become common knowledge that students with EBD can present with challenging, demanding, and unpredictable behaviors (Simpson, 2011). Likewise, as there is evidence that emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD) is an underserved disability with deleterious effects and long range impact, there is certitude that effective educational programming supported by effective teacher practices is a successful route to EBD prevention and amelioration (Lloyd et al., 2019; Landrum & Tankersly, 2013). Farley et al. (2012) identified best practice teaching interventions (i.e. following directions, honesty, maintaining boundaries, waiting to talk, etc.) and asserted that these practices, when coupled with effective teaching, can produce positive academic and behavioral outcomes among students with EBD. The results of this study confirm and extend much of what researchers have posited as the “need to know” regarding teaching practices and teaching needs for special educators providing direct instruction or support to students with EBD. Still, there remains a needed degree of progress surrounding the meaning and elements of evidence-based methods, strategies, and mechanics for teachers at-large, in terms of the adequate training in correct implementation surrounding the elements, appropriation of strategies, materials, and methods. This need is particularly pronounced for teachers who work with students with the most intensive behavioral needs, as such students tend to have more complex etiologies and require more comprehensive intervention approaches (Maggin, Wehby,

Farmer, & Brooks, 2016). Findings indicate that amidst the advancements made by special education researchers and special education teachers, often in silos, still are experiencing effective implementation of practices that result in the success of students with EBD. These findings suggest implications in regard to effective practices for the field of special education, the practice of special education teachers and related professionals, and special education policy. The researcher in this study suggests the recommendations based on the conclusions of this study.

Implications for Effective Practices for Special Education

Consistent with historical trends should be the expectation that the landscape of special education will continue to evolve, particularly in response to socio-political-cultural concerns that constantly arise. The need for the field of special education to address concerns such as policy implementation and the research-to-practice gap remains (Bettini, Cumming, Merrill, Brunsting, & Liaupsin, 2017; Carnine, 1997; Greenwood & Abbott, 2001) . Given the multiple forces that affect policy implementation, understanding, acknowledging, and mitigating connections between culture and policy implementation will support future research on the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers who teach students with EBD. Considering the impact and influence of students' disabilities on academic and behavioral needs of students with EBD, it is important for research to continue to explore best practices for the implementation of policies and procedures that influence instruction. Aspects of practice gaining priority

and steadily increasing momentum in special education are implementation science and the utilization of evidence-based practices (EBPs) (Wang and Lam, 2017).

Implementation science and EBPs, while gaining momentum, face criticism within special education. Bettini et al., (2017) maintains that teachers of students with EBD infrequently use EBPs in their instruction. Durlack (2015) noted that the large-scale effectiveness and sustainability of EBPs is a struggle across the field because of challenges that present due to identifying core components (or practice elements) of EBPs (Lloyd et al., 2019). Furthermore, teachers are noted to shy away from evidenced-based practices in the field because implementation of interventions in their standardized form is hostile and ill-fitting to non-dominant cultural groups (Castro, Barrera, & Holleran-Steiker, 2010). This tension has led research back to one of the critical findings of this study: culture and climate.

Universal applicability of interventions has not been substantially demonstrated among culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) populations (Aisenberg, 2008). Yet, cultural adaptation in implementation science seems promising in that it “involves the process of modifying an evidenced-based intervention protocol to take language, culture, and context into account to make it compatible with the cultural patterns, meanings, and values of those being served (Bernal, Jimenez-Chafey, & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2009). Students with EBD are a CLD population and researchers in EBD have begun to catalogue teacher-delivered practice elements associated with social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of young children (McLeod et al., 2017; Sutherland, Conroy, McLeod, Kunemund, & McKnight, 2018). This advancement has promise for informing dissemination and implementation efforts as well as preservice and professional

development training for teachers regarding effective practice on the secondary level. By leveraging the advances in implementation science, teachers can optimize implementation to improve outcomes for students with EBD (Lloyd, et al., 2019).

Implications for Effective Practices for Special Education Teachers and Related Professionals

Findings and conclusions drawn from this study informed the following researcher recommendations for teachers and related professionals:

1. Special educators need to develop a value system as professionals who evolve with the field of special education.
2. Amidst collaborative and communicative efforts, there is a need for a service delivery framework and specialists who can ensure that services are coordinated across multiple domains of school functioning (Farmer et al., 2016).
3. Special educators while mastering pedagogical competencies should also give attention to developing themselves as socially competent professionals considering their value systems for building relationships with students with EBD to gain a foundation for trust in the classroom.
4. By expanding their knowledge of EBPs and culturally responsive teaching, special education teachers can incorporate and increase inclusivity within the classroom climate.
5. Administrators need to clarify and clearly define the roles of all professionals (e.g., special and general education teachers) involved in the implementation of policy and procedure related to effective practices for students with EBD.

6. Administrators need to enact and engage practices that cultivate a positive school climate (e.g. sense of safety, honesty, and open communication of critical conversations) that can result in school and programmatic support.

Implications for Policy and Procedures Regarding Effective Practices

To mediate differences between policy and its implementation across diverse school contexts, professional development related to effective practices of students with EBD would be beneficial at each district and school level, and should be extended to include all professionals who work within the framework (e.g., special educators, general educators, administrators, guidance counselors, support facilitators, paraprofessionals, and social workers). Such professional development should:

1. Provide appropriate pre-service and in-service trainings to all professionals responsible for the development, administration, and implementation of policies and procedures related to effective practices for students with EBD. In this study, literature reviews revealed that the framework of evidence-based practice was developed in response to the need for policy addressing issues of inclusion on a socio-political-cultural level.
2. Occur at all organizational levels of policy implementation. The implementation of inclusive practices requires continued and sustained professional development for administrators, district officials, and classroom-based professionals.
3. Address beliefs held by those who implement policy and procedure.

4. Clarify and clearly define the roles of all professionals (e.g., special and general education teachers) involved in the implementation of policy and procedure related to effective practices for students with EBD.
5. Adopt district and school wide evaluative procedures designed to assess progress of policy and procedure implementation and address issues that may arise to improve school climate and culture.

Recommendations for Future Research of Effective Practices

1. Study various aspects of culture as manifested by teacher practices and responsiveness of students with EBD to culturally adapted EBPs.
2. A study that includes a greater diversity of special education teacher participants. Participants with diverse demographics, education levels, backgrounds, and educator roles (e.g. intervention specialists, behaviors analysts, support facilitators) will ensure a greater breadth of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of professionals who work in special education.
3. A study that investigates the lived experiences of special education teacher participants employed within the same district to provide depth to specific roles and services.
4. Research from qualitative and/or survey methodologies could include questions directed to gain more information on the insights and implementations of the critical domains of special education such as collaboration, assessment, instruction, and social/emotional/behavioral practices as highlighted by recently published high-leveraged practices (Lloyd et al., 2019).

5. A survey-based research study should be undertaken to address broader questions of experiences, roles and responsibilities across districts, states, and nationally.

Researchers could recruit survey participants using a variety of databases including those provided by teacher preparation programs, state licensure and certification entities, and school human resource departments.

6. Research needs to be extended to focus on the organizational framework of various schools and districts to implement effective inclusive practices.

Conclusion

In this study, the researcher utilized a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of special education teachers who provided direct instruction and/or special education supports to students with disabilities across various settings. A review of the literature revealed that the system of education, since its inception has been evolving and expanding to meet the changing needs of all students. In response to a very litigious history and numerous legislative reforms, the field of special education has not endured without evaluating for progress and priorities. Despite a well-established criteria for provision of FAPE, underperformance among students with disabilities continue. Students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD) are among the most underperforming subgroup of students with disabilities. Various interrelated factors and forces (Welner, 2001) have been identified as possible mediating agents to the achievement of this group (Freudenberg et al., 2006; Goodman et al., 2013; Pellino, 2007; Smith, 2012). In response to academic and behavioral needs manifested by this

group much change has emerged and been enacted, in terms of policy and practice (e.g. effective high leverage practices, culturally adapted EBPs).

This study exposed multiple facets of teacher beliefs, attitudes, and experiences that directly affected their provision of special education services, in terms of instructional practices, pedagogical and social competence, and student engagement and achievement. Special education teachers espoused essential practices (e.g. building relationships, developing trust, collaborating with other professionals) that converged to form a positive culture within their classrooms conducive to the achievement of students with EBD. However, contrasting evidence emerged across this study suggesting that teachers of students with EBD often felt frustrated, alone, and constrained in their ability to effect change and advance the progress of their students with EBD beyond the classroom. Additionally, a dynamic feature of culture was forged. Particularly, participants offered evidence suggesting that current structural, systemic, and zonal forces of culture negatively impacted and impeded their capacity to resolve professional frustrations through open, honest, critical, collegial conversation that would that would contribute to the broader progress of students with EBD. Participants felt that they exercised autonomy superbly in their classroom or when providing direct interaction with their students in the EBD category; however, there was much discrepancy, indecision, and variation surrounding the mitigation of forces causing the plight of these students with EBD beyond the participants' classroom doors.

The researcher in this study: (a) contributed to the literature on effective practices of special education teachers working with students with emotional behavioral disabilities; (b) provided a foundation for research on the beliefs, skills, knowledge, and

personality traits needed by special education teachers; and (c) affirmed the need for special educators to embrace culturally adapted evidenced-based practices as a means of advancing special education and championing the cause of one of our lowest performing and highly misunderstood groups. As the field of special education continues to respond to trends created by legislation and policies, the plight of students with EBD and the role of the special education teacher will undoubtedly continue to evolve demanding high-adaptability. Teacher preparation programs, professional development, and teachers' latent beliefs must be challenged to reflect these changes and ensure that special education teachers possess the competencies required for progress through the provision of a free, appropriate public education for all.

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

April 17, 2019

Dear Zerek Mayes:

On 4/17/2019, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Category
Title:	Defining Effective Teacher Practices among Students with Emotional Behavioral Disabilities
Investigator:	Zerek Mayes
IRB ID:	STUDY00000392
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: INFORMED CONSENT



UNIVERSITY OF
CENTRAL FLORIDA

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: *Defining Effective Teacher Practices among Students with Emotional Behavioral Disabilities*

Principal Investigator: *Zerek Mayes*

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.

The person doing this research, Zerek Mayes, is a graduate student in the College of Community Innovation and Education at the University of Central Florida. Because the researcher is a graduate student, he is being guided by Dr. Suzanne Martin, PhD, a UCF faculty advisor, professor, and project director in the College of Community Innovation and Education.

The primary purpose of the study is to explore experiences among educators teaching students with emotional behavioral disabilities to identify common practices that lead to success within this group as evidenced by academic achievement in educational settings. You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are a classroom teacher, who has been recognized as someone who understands, embraces and/or promotes the success (academic achievement) of students with emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD) in diverse classroom settings. The study will occur over the span of approximately six weeks and will be conducted in two phases: (1) a 30-minute survey and (2) a 60-90 minute individual interview. You will be asked for your consent before participating in any phase of this study. As a result of your participation in the survey (Phase 1), you may be chosen via purposive criterion sampling to participate in and an audio-recorded interview (phase 2) facilitated at the location of your choice to ensure privacy. Since random sampling of participants will be conducted at each phase, it is possible that you will have no obligation beyond the survey. The interviews will be audio recorded by the researcher to capture dialogue, however, audio-recordings will be destroyed after transcription. If you are recorded, the recordings will be password protected. You may withdraw from participation at any time, during either phase of the research study you are involved in. If you do not wish to take part in the study, your e-mail address will be removed from the list of possible participants and no further contact will occur. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in taking part in any phase of the study.

The information collected in the study is confidential, limited to persons relevant to the study's completion, and known only to the researcher. Organizations that may inspect and copy information from the study include Institutional Review Boards (IRB) and other representatives of UCF. All information and data collected in the study will be kept in a secure location, accessible only to the researcher. All data and information will be kept digitally and password protected to ensure it can only be accessed by the researcher.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints: Zerek Mayes, Graduate Student, Educational Leadership Program, (904) 476-0816, or Dr. Suzanne Martin, Faculty Advisor, (407) 823-4260 or at Suzanne.martin@ucf.edu within the College of Community Innovation and Education can be contacted.

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been determined to be exempted from IRB review unless changes are made. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please

contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

APPENDIX C: BRACKETING INTERVIEW

Sara: Will you please tell me about yourself?

Zerek: Yes. My name is Zerek Mayes, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Central Florida, focusing on, focusing my study on teaching practices of students with emotional behavioral disabilities.

Sara: Describe your teaching experiences working with students with EBD.

Zerek: In terms of working inside the classroom, my experiences I would say are very limited. However, as a social worker, I have worked with students with EBD over the last eight years at this particular point. The work is really challenging yet at the same time I think it's really rewarding. Seeing students succeed, seeing students progress that have had challenges in that area in terms of academically, feels good. It's satisfying. So yeah.

Sara: What led you initially into education, and then specifically into working with students with EBD?

Zerek: It started during the last year of my masters program in social work. I interned at an Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Center School. And it was during that year working with students providing counseling, providing therapy, in that particular setting, that I knew I wanted to work with students that were deemed either at risk or those coming out of challenging situations. So that's how it started. I interned there, and I was in the middle of deciding between, am I going to serve adults in terms of the field of social work, or youth? And so youth turned into students with various learning disabilities.

Sara: What was unique about that school where you interned?

Zerek: Particularly, the classroom sizes were a lot smaller so I was able to develop richer relationships with the students in terms of providing counseling and providing even some sense of mentoring to students there. It's a much smaller class environment, a much smaller school, and so I felt like I was able to develop more authentic relationships with the students as well as the staff. So that was one thing that kept me there.

Sara: Thinking back to kind of, originally, why did you go into education?

Zerek: Education for me was a plan B. Yeah. It didn't start off as on my radar in my future, none of that. Initially I knew that I wanted to counsel, I knew that I wanted to go into a more counseling type of fields and settings. So it started with my journey, I was at a mental hospital, working there. But the mental health hospital actually assigned me to build my caseload through reaching out to children and families, and that school was actually the Center School before I started working there. So by working with the mental health hospital and going into the Center School, on top of having interned there, it sealed the deal.

Sara: Okay. So in college, you were studying social work.

Zerek: Yes, in college, social work.

Sara: And then through your internships, that led you to education.

Zerek: Yes.

Sara: Got it. Okay. Thinking about the EBD students you work with, what are the demographics of your typical student?

Zerek: Typically students with EBD that I've served have been male. They have been predominantly African-American, although I've served students with EBD that are also of the Hispanic ethnicity, race. Very few females. And mostly all coming from lower class, lower SES status, urban communities. That's what I've tended to see of most students with EBD in my experience.

Sara: Why do you think that is?

Zerek: Hmm. I think that ... I think the home environment has a lot to play, or is a big contributor to issues that I see students with EBD having, or students who are labeled with EBD. I think, well, there's so many things I think. I think, oh gosh, I think when we talk about single parenting, when we talk about impoverished areas in the community, not having access to resources, that the majority of us tend to have food, water, lights, clothing, those types of things. I've seen those factors contribute almost to a survival mentality in parents. And of course parents then have, or adults, then they have children who also are now being conditioned and groomed under the same need to survive. And I've seen the need for survival, I think, tend to contribute the most to negative behaviors, at least as we see them on campuses, as we see them in schools. What's happening in the homes, the way they survive in the community, that comes into the school environment and the classroom environment, hinders their ability to learn. And especially if they're not taught how to navigate relationships or communications, conversations, well. I've seen that breakdown lead to, you know, blowups in the classroom, repeatedly, and then those students are then, you know, placed in more restrictive settings like my school.

Zerek: So I've seen it always kind of start outside of the school, from the community, from the home environment, it just kind of bleeds over that way.

Sara: What are your expectations of students with EBD?

Zerek: I tend to hold a pretty high standard regarding students with EBD, at least the ones that I've served. Doing so with an understanding that they have challenges and specific things that they have to overcome. But my expectation is the same for them as it is for a traditional student or a student in a general education

setting. To go into the classroom, to of course take into account their accommodations and things like that, but to go into a classroom, to be prepared to learn, to hopefully engage with the instruction, to engage with the teachers, with the intent of progressing from grade to grade to grade, and ultimately graduating with a diploma. They may not go, not all of them I will say are, not every student with EBD that I've experienced are college ready, nor are they college minded. But at least seeing them across the finish line of graduation and having a diploma. Yeah.

Sara: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What strategies do you use when working with students with EBD?

Zerek: I rely heavily on my background in counseling. Particularly I, there's a skill, motivational interviewing, that we tend to use nowadays when it comes to building rapport. Providing students with an opportunity to talk and tell of their experience. So particularly when it comes to students with EBD I tend to take a very low road. And what I mean by that is, I do my best to become where they are, or to be where they are, or to meet them kind of where they are in terms of their circumstances, their background, their history. I like to get to know that first. And then as I begin to notice that, I'm a bit more welcomed in their space. Then I'll engage more of my counseling techniques to kind of, to build. To build them. And then to build them toward success.

Sara: Got it. And what are some of the successes you've seen working with students with EBD?

Zerek: I've seen students with EBD ... how can I even say this? Transform. I think I've seen them become ... what I can describe as new individuals. And what I mean is I'm also able to see students transition from the Center School into the general ed setting. So I've seen students that have not been performing well, that have been some of our lowest achieving students in terms of grades, in terms of staying in your classroom, in your seat. I've seen those students grow, mature, become ... motivated to complete their classwork, to then earn passing grades, a C or higher, of course, enough to transition to a general education setting and then graduate from there.

Zerek: Yeah. I've seen it. And I think that that keeps me, another thing that keeps me going, I keep coming back to that, what keeps me going. Seeing students achieve lets me know that even the lowest achieving student has the potential to be better than they were before.

Sara: What are some of the challenges you've experienced working with students with EBD?

Zerek: Encountering students that I can't seem to reach. That I can't seem to connect with or provide them with the insight or the skills or the language to connect

with their own potential to succeed. Seeing students that come to school every day, however have not yet cultivated a mindset to ... what seems like a mindset to grow beyond where they are into who, at least, I feel like they can become. It's challenging seeing students possess strengths that they don't know are strengths. And not being able to guide that into a constructive manner, again, in terms of achievement. Classroom achievement, at that. That's probably the hardest thing to deal with.

Sara: Excuse me. Describe how school culture contributes to these successes or challenges.

Zerek: Culture. I think culture has the potential, has the capacity to either make or break a student's future in terms of success, in terms of progress, academic achievement. I believe culture is everything, because it's everywhere and it's hard to separate culture from, I think, our students, and our students from culture. I think about my school, and I think about the ways that we try to create a positive culture. Try to create a culture that is conducive to a student's academic and even personal achievement. I think that culture, if it is negative, will of course, could possibly contribute to a student's failure. I think culture, if it is, if it has positive facets and as a staff perhaps we can hone in on those positive aspects of what culture for our school is, I think that's also enough to motivate a student in the right direction. Yeah.

Sara: What specific steps or actions has your school taken to promote positive school culture?

Zerek: One of the things that we I think believe, and we've not necessarily said it this way, but one of the things that I see us implementing is the idea, if walls could talk. And what I mean is, we tend to plaster all over the place, whether it be positive sayings, whether it be themes for the month, themes for the week, themes in the classroom, anything that we can utilize that will engage our students are things that we tend to utilize in, again, creating that atmosphere, that environment. What's the second part of that question? There was another part, I want to make sure I hit it.

Sara: Just, action steps you've taken.

Zerek: Yeah.

Sara: To promote positive school culture. Yeah.

Zerek: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Informing the environment. Using the environment. Using, I mean, the physical layout, even. Using those things to the advantage of the student. So if a student is not engaged because they're distant, using proximity. I mean, we use anything we can to engage our students in learning.

- Sara: All right. What has kept you working with students with EBD?
- Zerek: The success stories. Seeing one student achieve gives me hope that there's possibility for every student to achieve. Perhaps not the same, perhaps not at the same level. I don't expect every student with EBD to have, you know, perfect scores, all As on everything, even Bs. But at least to excel in their own way. And honestly, I think though it doesn't gel well in a school setting, honestly I think seeing students develop skills that may contribute to their success beyond the school, even, keeps me there. It keeps me in a position to constantly provide any insight, any wisdom, any life experience that I can contribute to a student that I think one day may be for their benefit compared to their lack thereof.
- Sara: Got it. What recommendations do you have for teachers working with students with EBD?
- Zerek: Patience. There's a need to develop a capacity, and develop an appreciation for, I think, one, I'll say patience when it comes to working with students with EBD because they are a challenging group of students. I think it's also necessary that we as educators of students with EBD constantly expose ourselves to professional development. Things that will develop our capacity to understand today's student with EBD, so to speak. I recognize that students with EBD, they have a certain profile, though there are certain characteristics that relate to that group as a whole, when it comes to each individual I think it's important that as an educator myself, that I continue to submit to training, submit to anything that will keep me informed as it relates to students with EBD, their history. There's trauma informed care that we now talk about. And considering how trauma influences or impacts a student's learning. Sometimes I think when it comes to students with EBD, the first thought is, "Oh my gosh, they're just bad." But to now understand how trauma plays a role in the student's learning, in a student's capacity to engage in the classroom. I think having those tools in our belt, I think, are absolutely things that are necessary for their future.
- Sara: Wonderful. Is there anything else regarding your role as an EBD teacher that I've not asked or that you want to share?
- Zerek: Did I mention teacher preparation? I think that goes with professional development.
- Sara: Not much, yeah.
- Zerek: But I could definitely say looking back, I think one thing that would have been helpful to me earlier is just I didn't have a strong background in education. Perhaps attending or being a part of or being aware, even, of teacher preparation as it pertains to not only students with EBD but I think students with various learning disabilities. I came in not knowing very much as an

educator, how an educator would approach or should approach students with disabilities or students with EBD, even. So I think perhaps doing some outside work in terms of locating or discovering or investigating preparation programs I think would have really been helpful to me in the beginning.

Sara: Do you have any biases that may affect this study?

Zerek: I'm sure I do. I'm sure I do. I think one of the things that I have to, or that I intend to remember is relating back to the profile, or back to the typical EBD student, one thing that I've also noticed is a large number of students with EBD are African-American. And so I'm African-American. And I think there is, there is ... a sense of ... I feel like I relate to students with EBD, particularly African-American students with EBD. I feel like there is a ... how do I say that? I think that could influence or affect how objective I am in seeing the phenomenon for what it is. I tend to notice, I could tend to probably notice the African-American students before I notice any other student with EBD, and I think that could definitely impact how I saw the issue, or how I saw, you know, how I see it as a whole.

Sara: Yeah. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Zerek: I don't think so. I think that's it.

Sara: All right, well thank you.

Zerek: Thank you.

Sara: Okay. So-

APPENDIX D: PEER-DEBRIEFER COMMUNICATION

Dear Peer-Debriefers,

Thank you for agreeing to assist me with my dissertation study.

To ensure reliability and validity of the data collected, I am using several qualitative methods. One of those methods is using a peer de-briefer. I have 8 total participant interviews. I have completed analysis of the first and attached it here. I have purposefully left off my dissertation overview as I do not want to influence your interpretation of the data.

I've attached a file that includes the following:

1. Original transcript
2. Excel file of my analysis of the original transcript:
 - Column A – exactly what they said from the transcript (Significant Statements)
 - Column B – My inference based on their words/mannerisms (Components of Meaning)
 - Column C – Organizing Components of Meaning
 - Column D – Describing the Phenomenon (Theme)
3. Data analysis procedures from my dissertation [Colaizzi (1978) method]
4. Dissertation Interview Questions

MY steps:

1. I put those phrases into a spreadsheet (Column A) exactly as they appeared in the transcript
2. I then assigned meaning to them (Column B)
3. I then coded each of the components and organized them into relevant meanings (Column C)
4. I assigned overarching themes to each of the components (Column D)

What I need YOU to do:

1. Read the Excel spreadsheet and provide feedback by doing the following for EACH line:
 - a. Read Column A and Column B.
 - b. Based on what you see in Column A, do you agree with the meaning assigned in Column B?
 - c. Now look at Column C.
 - d. Do you agree with the component of meaning in Column C?
 - e. Do you agree with the theme in Column D?

2. Provide comment/feedback in Column E. If you do/don't agree. If you don't agree, WHY, and what do you think is a better match?

3. Use the original transcript if you need context or more information.
If you have any questions, comments, concerns, please let me know.

Zerek Mayes, MSW
Doctoral Candidate
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APPENDIX E: CODING

Organizing Units of Relevant Meaning (Colaizzi Step 4)

Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs	Expectations
Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs	Expectations
Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs	Expectations
Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs	Expectations
Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs	Expectations
Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs	Expectations
Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs	Expectations
Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs	Expectations
Accountability	Full Inclusion
Attendance	High-Needs
Authenticity	IEPs
Authenticity	Inclusion
Authenticity	Inclusion
Authenticity	Inclusion
Authenticity	Inclusion
Autonomy	Inclusion
Autonomy	Inclusion
Behavior	Inclusion
Bias	Institutionalization
Bias	Internalization
Boundaries	Interventions
Boundaries	Interventions
Boundaries	Language
Building Relationships	Language
Building Relationships	Leadership
Building Relationships	Marginalization
Building Relationships	Meaningfulness
Building Relationships	Mistreatment
Building Relationships	Modeling
Burn-out	Modeling
Buy-In	Modeling
Buy-In	Motivation
Changes in Role and Responsibilities	Motivation

Changes in Role and Responsibilities	MTSS
Classroom Management	MTSS
Classroom Management	Multiple
Classroom Management	Multiple
Classroom Management	need
Classroom Management	Need
Collaboration	Overrepresentation
Collaboration	Overrepresentation
Collaboration	Overrepresentation
Collaboration	Overrepresentation
Collaboration	Overrepresentation
Collaboration	Overrepresentation
Collaboration	Overrepresentation
Collaboration	Pedagogy
Collaboration	Pedagogy
Collaboration	Prevention
Collaboration	Professional Development
Collaboration	Professional Development
Collaboration	Professional Development
Collaboration	Programming
Collaboration	Progress Monitoring
Collaboration	Relationship Building
Collaboration	Relationship Building
Collaboration	Relationship Building
Collaboration	Relationship Building
Collaboration	Relationship Building
Collaboration	Relationship Building
Collaboration	Relationship Building
Collaboration	Relationship Building
Collaboration	Relationship Building
Collaboration	Relationship Building
Collaboration	Relationship Building
Communication	Relationship Building
Compartmentalizing	Relationship Building
Compartmentalizing	Relationship Building
Compassion	Relationship Building
Compassion	Relationship Building
Compassion	Relationship Building
Compassion	Relationship Building
Compliance	Relationship Building
Compliance	Relationship Building
Confidence	Relationship Building

Effective Programming	Strategies
Effective Programming	Strategies
Effective Programming	Strategies
Effective Programming	Strategies
Emotional Resilience	Strategies
Emotional Resilience	Strategies
Emotional Resilience	Strategies
Engagement	Strategies
Engagement	Strategies
Engagement	Strategies
Engagement	Strategies
Engagement	Strategies
Engagement	Structure
Environment	Structure
ESE Funding	Student Achievement
ESE Student Value	Student Achievement
ESE Student Value	Student Achievement
ESE Teacher Characteristic	Success
ESE Teacher Characteristic	Success
ESE Teacher Characteristic	Systems
ESE Teacher Characteristic	Teacher Preparation
ESE Teacher Characteristic	Teacher Quality
ESE Teacher Characteristic	Teacher Support
ESE Teacher Characteristic	Teacher Support
ESE Teacher Characteristic	Teamwork
ESE Teacher Competency	Therapy
ESE Teacher Competency	Transformation
ESE Teacher Competency	Trauma
ESE Teacher Competency	Trust
ESE Teacher Competency	Trust
ESE Teacher Competency	Trust
ESE Teacher Competency	Trust
ESE Teacher Competency	Trust
ESE Teacher Skills	Trust
ESE Teacher Supports	Trust
Ethics	Trust
Expectations	Trust
Expectations	Trust
Expectations	Trust
Expectations	Trust
Expectations	Trust
Expectations	Trust
Expectations	Trust

Expectations

Expectations

Trust

Trust

Truth

Unpredictability

Describing the Phenomenon (Colaizzi Step 5)

Phenomenon	Overarching Theme
Accountability to achievement	Accountability
Adaptability	ESE Teacher Characteristic
All are the same.	Diversity
Authentic Teaching	Authenticity
Authenticity	Authenticity
Authenticity	Authenticity
Authenticity	Authenticity
Authenticity among teachers	Authenticity
Bias	Bias
Bias	Bias
Boundaries	Boundaries
Boundary Setting	Boundaries
Boundary Testing	Relationship Building
Building Relationship	Relationship Building
Building Relationships	Relationship Building
Building relationships	Relationship Building
Building Relationships	Relationship Building
Building Relationships	Relationship Building
Building Relationships	Relationship Building
Building Relationships	Relationship Building
Building Relationships	Relationship Building
Burn-out	Burn-out
Buy-In	Buy-In
Care	Compassion
Care	Compassion
Changes in roles and responsibilities	Changes in Role and Responsibilities
changing roster of students	Changes in Role and Responsibilities
Characteristic of Effective Programs	Effective Programming
Characteristic of Effective Programs	Effective Programming
Characteristic of Effective Programs	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Program	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Program	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Effective Programming

Characteristics of Effective Programming	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Effective Programming
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Classroom Management
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Classroom Management
Characteristics of Effective Programming	Classroom Management
Characteristics of Effective Programs	Expectations
Characteristics of Effective Programs	Expectations
Characteristics of Effective Programs	Expectations
Characteristics of Effective Programs	Social Skills
Characteristics of Quality Programming	Collaboration
Characteristics of Quality Programming	Collaboration
Characteristics of Quality Programming	Collaboration
Classroom Management	Collaboration
Classroom Management	Collaboration
Classroom Management	Collaboration
Classroom Management	Collaboration
Clear Expectations	Collaboration
Clear Expectations	Collaboration
Clear Rules and Expectations	Collaboration
Clear Rules and Expectations	Collaboration
Clear Rules and Expectations	Collaboration
Code switching - Engaging	Collaboration
Emotional Regulation Skills	Collaboration
Collaboration	Collaboration
Collaboration	Collaboration
Collaboration	Collaboration
Collaboration	Collaboration
Collaboration	Communication
Collaboration	Compartmentalizing
Collaboration with Other Professionals	Compartmentalizing
Collaboration with Other Professionals	Compassion
Collaboration with Other Professionals	Compassion
Collaboration with Other Professionals	Confidence
Collaboration with Other Professionals	Consistency
Collaboration with Other Professionals	Consistency
Collaboration with Other Professionals	Consistency

Collaboration with Other Professionals	Consistency
Collaboration with other professionals	Consistency
Collaboration with Other professionals	Consistency
Collaboration with Other professionals	Consistency
Collaboration with Other professionals	Consistency
Collaboration with Other professionals	School Culture
Collaboration with Other professionals	School Culture
Collaboration with Other Professionals -Negative	School Culture
Collaboration/Collegiality	School Culture
Collaboration/Communication	Social Skills
Communication	Social Skills
Compartmentalizing	Social Skills
Compartmentalizing	Social Skills
Compassion	Social Skills
Compassion	Social Skills
Confidence	Social Skills
Consistency	Social Skills
Consistency	Social Skills
Consistency	Social Skills
Consistency	Social Skills
Consistency	Full Inclusion
Consistency	Full Inclusion
Consistency	Discipline
Consistency	Diversity
Consistency	Diversity
Consistency	Documentation
Consistency	Documentation
Consistency	Prevention
Cultural Competence	Effective Programming
Culture	Effective Programming
Culture	Effective Programming
Culture	Effective Programming
Culture	Emotional Resilience
Develop Social Skills	Emotional Resilience
Develop Social Skills	Emotional Resilience
Developing coping skills	ESE Teacher Characteristic
Developing social skills	Engagement

Developing social skills	Environment
Developing social skills	Ethics
Developing social skills	Expectations
Developing social skills	Experiential
Developing social skills	Collaboration
Developing social skills	Collaboration
Develop social skills	Collaboration
Social Emotional Regulation Skills	Collaboration
Disbelonging -not inclusive	Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs
Disbelonging/Stigmatizing	Effective Programming
Discipline	Effective Programming
Diversity of Behavior	Social Skills
Diversity of Behaviors	Building Relationships
Documentation	Building Relationships
Documentation	Building Relationships
early childhood prevention	Diversity
Effective Instruction	Expectations
effective interventions	Expectations
Effective Practice	Expectations
Effective programming	Expectations
Emotional Resilience	Expectations
emotional resilience	Expectations
emotional resilience as educators	Expectations
Empathy	High-Needs
Engagement	Effective Programming
Environmental Influences	ESE Student Value
Ethics	ESE Student Value
Expectations	ESE Teacher Characteristic
Experiential Education	ESE Teacher Characteristic
Family Engagement	IEPs
Family Engagement	Inclusion
Family Involvement	Inclusion
Family Involvement	Inclusion
Fear of Transition/Progress	Inclusion
Fidelity	Inclusion
Fidelity	Inclusion
Focus on social skills	Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs
Getting to know the student	Success
	Institutionalization
	Internalization

Getting to know the student	Interventions
Getting to know the student	Building Relationships
Heterogeneity	Building Relationships
High Expectations	Building Relationships
High Expectations	Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs
High expectations	Autonomy
High Expectations	ESE Funding
High Expectations	Interventions
High Expectations	Effective Programming
High Expectations	Effective Programming
High Expectations	Effective Programming
High needs Students	Overrepresentation
Highly Structured Classrooms	Student Achievement
Human Dignity	Teacher Support
Human Dignity	Teacher Support
Humility	Autonomy
Humility	Trust
IEPs -- Insufficient at most junctures	Trust
Inclusion	ESE Teacher Characteristic
Inclusion	Compliance
inclusion	Compliance
inclusion	ESE Teacher Characteristic
Inclusion	ESE Teacher Characteristic
Inclusion	Expectations
Inclusive Culture is a Success Culture.	Motivation
Individualized Education Programming	Expectations
Ingredients for Success	Expectations
Institutionalization	Marginalization
Internalization	Meaningfulness
Interventions	Overrepresentation
Knowing the Student	Mistreatment
Knowing your students	Modeling
Knowing your students	Modeling
Label does not determine learning ability	Modeling
Lack of Autonomy -- Differentiated Instruction	Motivation
lack of funding	MTSS
	MTSS
	Multiple
	Multiple
	need

Lack of Interventions	Need
Lack of Programming	Collaboration
Lack of programming	ESE Teacher Characteristic
Lack of programming	Programming
Lack of Representation	Overrepresentation
Lack of student achievement	Overrepresentation
Lack of support for educators (Burnout)	Overrepresentation
Lack of Teacher Preparation	Overrepresentation
Lack of Teaching Autonomy	Collaboration
Lack of Trust	Pedagogy
Lack of trust	Pedagogy
Lead with Empathy	Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs
Legal Compliance	Attendance
Legal Compliance	ESE Teacher Skills
Legal Compliance vs. Lifelong Learning	Professional Development
Legal compliance vs. Relationship	Professional Development
Lifelong learner	Progress Monitoring
Low Expectations	Relationship Building
Low motivation	Relationship Building
Managing Personal Expectations	Relationship Building
Managing personal Expectations	Relationship Building
Marginalization	Relationship Building
Meaningfulness	Relationship Building
Minorities	Relationship Building
Mistreatment	Relationship Building
Modeling	Relationship Building
Modeling	Relationship Building
Modeling	Relationship Building
Motivation wanes at secondary level	Relationship Building
MTSS	Relationship Building
MTSS Interventions	Relationship Building
Multiple areas of support	Relationship Building
Multiple hats	Relationship Building
need for Fidelity	Relationship Building

Need for professional development.	Relationship Building
Negative parent contact	Relationship Building
Negative Values	Relationship Building
no real programming in place	Relationship Building
Overrepresentation of African American	Respect
Overrepresentation of African American	Rigor
Overrepresentation of African-Americans	Roles and Responsibilities
Overrepresentation of African-Americans	Roles and Responsibilities
Overrepresentation of African-Americans	Safety
Overrepresentation of African-Americans	Segregation
Overrepresentation of African-Americans	Self-care
Overrepresentation of African-Americans	Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs
Parent Involvement	Self-Efficacy
Pedagogical Competency	Developing Students
Personalized Pedagogy	Developing Students
Placement/Services - segregated settings versus full inclusion	School Culture
Poor Attendance	Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs
Proactive	Social Skills
Process-Oriented	Social Skills
Professional Competency	Stigmatization
Professional Development	Classroom Management
Progress Monitoring	Structure
Relationship-Building	Structure
Relatability	Student Achievement
Relationship Building	Student Achievement
Relationship Building	Buy-In
Relationship Building	Engagement
Relationship Building	Engagement
Relationship Building	Engagement
Relationship Building	Engagement
Relationship Building	Engagement
Relationship Building	Transformation
Relationship Building	Success
Relationship Building	Systems
Relationship Building	Strategies
Relationship Building	Strategies
Relationship Building	Strategies
Relationship Building	ESE Teacher Competency
Relationship Building	ESE Teacher Competency
Relationship Building	ESE Teacher Competency
Relationship Building	ESE Teacher Competency

Relationship Building	ESE Teacher Competency
Relationship Building	ESE Teacher Competency
Relationship Building	ESE Teacher Competency
relationship building	Teacher Preparation
relationship building	Teacher Quality
relationship building	
relationship building	Strategies
Relationship Building	ESE Teacher Supports
Relationship Building	
relationship building	Strategies
relationship building	Strategies
Respect	Collaboration
Rigor	Teamwork
Roles and Responsibilities	Therapy
Roles and Responsibilities	Leadership
and Responses	Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs
Safety	
Segregation	Accommodating and Supporting Student Needs
Self-care	Trauma
Self-contained unit	Trust
Self-efficacy	Trust
Self-regulation	Trust
Self-regulation	Trust
Sense of Community	Trust
Small Class Sizes/Small	Trust
group Instruction	Trust
Social Skills	Trust
soft skills	Trust
Stigmatization	Trust
Strong Management Skills	Trust
Structure	Trust
Structure	Trust
Student Achievement	Trust
Student Achievement	Trust
Student Buy-In	Truth
Student Engagement	Unpredictability
Student Engagement	Language
Student Engagement	Language
Student Mindset	Expectations
Student Performance	Behavior
Student Transformation	Strategies
Success	Strategies

Systems	Strategies
Teach Strategies	Strategies
Teach strategies --	Strategies
Motivation	Strategies
Teach success strategies	Strategies
Teacher Competence	Effective Programming
Teacher Competence	
Teacher Competence	
Teacher Competence	
Teacher Competence	
Teacher Competence	
Teacher Competency	
Teacher Preparation	
Teacher Qualities	
Teacher Shortages	
Teacher Strategies	
Teacher's poor emotional regulation/skills	
teaching consequences	
Teaching Coping Strategies	
Teaching Strategies	
Team-Approach	
Teamwork	
Therapy	
Top-Down Leadership	
Transition	
Transition from elementary to secondary -- little to no supports	
Trauma	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	
Trust	

Trust	
Trust	
Truth	
Unpredictability - Behaviors	
Use of Language	
Use of Language	
Utility of Set Expectations	
Variety of Behaviors	
Variety of Strategies	
Variety of Behavioral Supports	
Variety of Strategies	
Various Teaching Strategies	
Various Teaching Strategies	
Various Teaching Strategies	
Various teaching strategies	
Well-Structured	

Theme	Tertiary Theme
<p>The Essentials: Keys to Student Engagement</p>	<p>Trust Building Relationships Developing student's social/coping skills High Expectations Compartmentalizing</p>
<p>Frustrations Regarding Program Implementation</p>	<p>School Culture Issues Surrounding School-Based Programming Disproportionality of Minorities Lack of Collegiality (Collaboration between Ge and SE Teachers, Co-Teaching, Professional Development</p>
<p>Elements of Effective Program</p>	<p>Collaboration with Other Professionals Parent Involvement/Family Engagement Evidence-Based/Data-Driven Teacher Competence --Lifelong Learning Consistent Inclusion</p>

APPENDIX F: VALIDITY CHECKING EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Hello, [Participant Name]!

I hope that all is well. It has been a few weeks since we met for the interview for my dissertation, but I have been working on various aspects of it in preparation for the next steps.

A critical part of the study is ensuring that you have the opportunity to review the transcripts from the interview and comment on them for their accuracy and completeness. To facilitate this process, I have attached the transcript here for your review.

I ask that you please review and, if you are able, return no later than 72 hours. If you wish, please feel free to make comments or additions using track changes. Track changes will allow me to quickly identify areas where you have made suggestions/edits/comments/additions etc. If you do not have any changes, please respond to this email indicating such.

Your insight has been so valuable and I deeply appreciate your time!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email, or my phone number which is listed below. Have a great week.

Zerek Mayes, MSW
Doctoral Candidate
NUSELI Scholar
University of Central Florida
College of Community Innovation and Education

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL:

Good Evening, [Participant Name],

I am sending this email as gentle reminder and follow-up to my initial email informing you to review the original transcript of our interview and make any changes (i.e. clarifications, revisions, additional information) as you see fit if you see fit.

If you wish, please review and return within the next 48 hours or so. If I receive no response, I will continue to move forward with the transcription as it is.

Be reminded, if you make changes would you enable "track changes" as this will allow me to quickly identify areas where you have made suggestions/edits/comments/additions etc. If you do not have any changes, please respond to this email indicating such.

Your insight has been so valuable and I deeply appreciate your time!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email, or my phone number which is listed below. Have a great week.

Zerek Mayes, MSW
Doctoral Candidate
NUSELI Scholar
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