A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF TEACHING "BUBBLE STUDENTS" FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RURAL GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN SOUTH-CENTRAL VIRGINIA

by

Wanda Price Carter

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe 10 rural third- through fifth-grade general education teachers' experiences with teaching "bubble students" in south-central Virginia. Bubble students were defined as those students who were projected to come close to achieving test cut scores. The theories guiding this study were Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and the self-determination theory as they provided an understanding of how attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs could impact the self-efficacy and experiences of teachers. The following research questions framed the study: How do rural third- through fifth-grade general education teachers in Virginia describe their experiences with teaching bubble students? How do participants describe their feelings of efficacy and perceive professional aptitude after teaching bubble students? How does the presence of bubble students in a classroom impact the teaching practices of participants? What are the classroom challenges described by participants after teaching bubble students? Data collection included blog responses, individual interviews, and reflective journaling. Data analysis included bracketing, reading, memoing, coding, imaginative variation, and the keeping of a researcher's journal. Findings of this study showed four themes: relationships, beliefs, challenges, and expansion of personal knowledge. The results of the study provided data to help determine whether current educational practices in Virginia are positively impacting the achievement gap. Further research is recommended with a larger population, review of the relationships of the general education participants with their collaborating colleagues, and of teacher preparation for teaching bubble students.

Keywords: achievement gap, bubble students, educational triage, gap group/subgroup, No Child Left Behind Act, self-efficacy

Copyright Page

Dedication

I have to first thank God for the courage, perseverance, and creativity to complete this degree. I pray that the completion of this journey is a testament to His faithfulness and presence in my life.

This entire degree would not have been possible without the support of my mother, Penelope Price, my husband, Jerry Carter, my daughters, Kaitlyn and Kellsey, my sisters, Paula Lea and Paulette Intemann, and my father, Carlton Jones. My mother and husband have been my backbone. They have prayed, pushed, encouraged, and have been my support through this entire process. My daughters have been my motivators. They've been patient and gave me the time and space I needed to complete "my work." My sisters are my cheerleaders. They always reminded me that the sky was the limit and with Christ, I could do all things. My father has always had confidence that I would achieve my dreams. The love, support, kindness, and encouragement I've received from these six people have not gone unnoticed. You all have been a true blessing in my life and I could not have asked for a better family. I love you all beyond measure.

This study is also dedicated to all educators who teach "bubble students." You show up every day with a new strategy and a commitment to help them succeed. Your dedication to your students and your profession is commendable.

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List of Abbreviations

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO)

Data-driven Decision-making (DDDM)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

PowerSchool Assessment and Analytics (PA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA)

Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Race to the Top (RTTT)

Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP)

Response to Intervention (RtI)

School Improvement Grant (SIG)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Standards of Learning (SOL)

U.S. Department of Education (USDOE)

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)

Virginia Tiered System of Supports (VTSS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This research study describes 10 third- through fifth-grade rural general education teachers' experiences with teaching "bubble students" who do not qualify for additional services such as special education. Bubble students are those students who are projected to come close to meeting state-mandated achievement test cut scores (Springer, 2008). Bubble students are identified through the presence of some or all of the following qualifiers: failing scores on previous end-of-year state assessments; poor performance on weekly PowerSchool Assessment and Analytics (PA) (scores (69 or below)); poor performance on Student Growth Assessments taken three times a year in PowerSchool Assessment and Analytics; not meeting assigned benchmarks on Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests in reading and math; not meeting the grade level benchmark for the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS); and, poor grades. Due to federal and state proficiency and accountability requirements, bubble student achievement is emphasized. The first chapter of the dissertation discusses the study, provides background information, and discusses the basis for choosing the experiences of third- through fifth-grade rural general education teachers who teach bubble students. The problem statement and significance of the study are present, along with the research questions. Key terms are defined and conclude the chapter.

Background

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law in 2002 to raise academic standards and student achievement. African American, Students with Disabilities, Hispanics, Limited English Proficiency, Economically Disadvantaged, White, and Asians represent subgroups of students who are required to score specific pass rates on assessments in reading and

mathematics and are required to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) (United States Department of Education (USDOE), n.d.). The purpose of NCLB is to ensure that all children have an opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach proficiency on state academic standards and assessments (USDOE, n.d.). Meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children, closing the achievement gap between high and low performing children, and the holding of schools and their districts and states accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students are all objectives of the law (USDOE, n.d.). NCLB was an indication of the shift in education from compliance to performance-based accountability (Dee & Jacob, 2011; Koyama, 2012; Lauen & Gaddis, 2012).

The publishing of annual report cards of academic standards and the assessments performance of school districts and the individual schools of which they are comprised are part of the requirements of NCLB (2002). Schools receive specific designations depending upon the level of proficiency displayed by their students on the state assessments. Districts and schools that do not meet all requirements are required to take steps to eradicate the deficiencies through the development, implementation, and monitoring of state-approved improvement plans to raise the achievement of students or else risk sanctions that may include the loss of federal aid (USDOE, n.d.).

In Virginia, the standardized assessments are the Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments (Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), 2015). In 1998, Virginia implemented the SOL assessment in Grades 3, 4, 8, and high school in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, history, and science. Proficiency standards for students were established based on the 1998 results. Tests are administered yearly or at the end-of-course, with reading and math scores used to determine AYP. The assignment of accreditation ratings to schools is based on

student achievement on the SOL tests. SOL proficiency requirements also impact diploma type. Standards are revised throughout the years to increase rigor through a demonstration of more-in-depth mastery of content and to add a technological component (VDOE, 2015).

School evaluations and accountability for the level of mastery attained on state-mandated achievement tests is based upon student performance, thus increasing the need to maximize student proficiency on these assessments (Heilig, Young, & Williams, 2012). The task of teachers of students who appear close to not passing the assessments is to find new ways to address deficit areas and remediate them. As a result, educators must evaluate and determine where best to appropriate resources through educational triage, a process of distributing needed resources to those students who have the most potential to benefit (Marks, 2014). Previous research does indicate positive benefits from educational triage, with bubble students, those students who are projected to come close to achievement test cut scores (Springer, 2008), and slightly lower achieving students being the focus of resources (Aguilar, 2013; Marks, 2014; Payne-Tsoupros, 2010; Springer, 2008).

Bubble students, sometimes referred to as borderline students, are on the border of passing or failing achievement tests. Research indicates teachers feel compelled to group these students and provide extra instruction to prepare them for the end-of-year achievement tests (Minarechová, 2012). Indications are, in some cases, that the school day of bubble students has been altered for these students to have extra practice until the testing cycle begins. It is the thought that, as a result of the achievement testing, exposure to pressures that hold direct consequences are felt by teachers as they strive to improve the performance of their students on these tests (Minarechová, 2012). Teachers feel the tension as they make decisions that are a result of accountability policies and their knowledge and beliefs about students and teaching.

Some teachers feel as if they must choose between providing instruction that is age and grade appropriate or focus instruction on test preparation (Palmer & Rangel, 2011). The decisions concerning the allocation of instructional resources are thought to limit learning opportunities for the academic growth of all students, not just bubble students (Diamond, 2012).

The theories prevalent throughout the research were Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and the self-determination theory. These theories provided an understanding of how attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs can impact the lived experiences of teachers through their ability to organize and execute actions to perform in different capacities and settings. Addressing how motivation, development, and wellness or self-determination can be predictors of individual performance outcomes has the potential to be impactful in the educational setting. Relating the stories of the 10 third- through fifth-grade general education teachers in rural south-central Virginia gives voice to their experiences of teaching bubble students and is the purpose of this phenomenological study.

Situation to Self

Having worked in education for 27 years as a special education teacher and administrator, I saw students struggle academically and take state-mandated standardized assessments that everyone, including them, knew they would fail. As a special education teacher, I provided resources or direct instruction services along with accommodations that were written in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for these students to help them master required skills and increase their chances of passing the assessments. My focus was strictly on special education students and their educational needs.

As a principal in a small, rural elementary school in south-central Virginia, I am held accountable for the academic progress of approximately 260 students. During my career as an

educator, I have seen the passing of NCLB (2002), which mandated the assessment of all students in Grades 3 through 12 in reading and math.

The percentage of students demonstrating proficiency on specific assessments determines school accreditation. At this point, I cannot help but feel that the retention of my job is based upon the proficiency level the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students will demonstrate on these assessments. The stakes are high.

Currently, I meet weekly with teachers to review the data, test scores, and grades of the students in their classes. During these meetings, the discussion of student progress takes place and in Grades 3, 4, and 5 much of the time is spent discussing strategies that will best help the bubble students. These students do not qualify for specialized services or accommodations that are available through special education. Limited resources cause concerns about whether these students will pass the state-mandated assessments in the spring. A range of emotions are displayed during these meetings, but the welfare of students is always at the forefront.

Testing requirements that affect policy decisions cannot be overruled. However, all efforts are made to compensate for those students who, for whatever reason, are having difficulty achieving and demonstrating mastery of required skills. Telling the story of the teachers who teach these students daily and who are continually trying to find a way to get them where they need to be academically is my goal. My lived experience inspired the topic that describes the lived experiences of the teachers who teach these students daily through the phenomenological research design. By examining the experiences of these teachers, I have discovered how the encounters impact the feelings of self-efficacy of these teachers as they teach bubble students and reveal related themes that emerge. To guide the study, I approached the research from an epistemological, philosophical assumption of knowing and a social constructivist paradigm

obtained through blog responses, semi-structured open-ended interviews, reflective journaling, and a researcher's journal (Creswell, 2013).

Problem Statement

NCLB (2002) requires districts and schools that do not meet all requirements to take steps to eradicate the identified deficiencies through the development, implementation, and monitoring of state-approved improvement plans to raise the achievement of these students or risk sanctions that may include the loss of federal aid (USDOE, n.d.). School evaluations are based upon student performance, and schools are held accountable for the level of mastery attained on state-mandated achievement tests, thus increasing the need to maximize student proficiency on these assessments (Heilig et al., 2012). The problem is there appears to be very few qualitative studies that provide a voice to the lived experiences of third- through fifth-grade general education teachers of bubble students who appear close to not passing the assessments, in south-central Virginia. These teachers are tasked with finding new strategies to address deficit areas and to remediate those areas. Educators have to evaluate and determine where best to appropriate resources through educational triage, a process of distributing needed resources to those students who have the most potential to benefit (Marks, 2014).

Previous qualitative research indicates positive benefits from educational triage, with bubble students and slightly lower achieving students being the focus of resources (Marks, 2014; Payne-Tsoupros, 2010; Springer, 2008); however, the need exists for future studies that tell the story and offer support to those teachers who are attempting to determine those practices that lend positive benefits. A benefit can be the evaluation of assessment requirements and practices that cause teachers to feel they should only provide adequate instruction for those students who are assured to pass or fail end-of-year state required assessments, while providing additional

instruction and strategies to those students who are considered to be bubble students and are projected to come close to reaching achievement test cut scores. Another benefit can be the development of a support network within the study setting of participants who share instructional strategies that have the possibility of improving instruction for all students and thus possibly limiting the need for the bubble student focus.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe third- through fifth-grade rural general education teachers' experiences of teaching bubble students in south-central Virginia. Bubble students are characterized as students who do not qualify for additional services, such as special education, but who also function below grade level and require additional resources to be academically successful. At this stage in the research, bubble students are defined as those students who are projected to come close to reaching achievement test cut scores but who may or may not pass the assessments (Springer, 2008). Bubble students are identified through the presence of some or all of the following qualifiers: failing scores on previous end-of-year state assessments; poor performance on weekly PA scores (69 or below); poor performance on Student Growth Assessments taken three times a year in PA; not meeting assigned benchmarks on NWEA MAP tests in reading and math; not meeting the grade level benchmark for the PALS; and, poor grades. The theories guiding this study are Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and the self-determination theory, which help support the research for this study. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy explains how the perceived beliefs of teachers in their ability to deliver instruction impacts instructional practices and affected academic achievement (Urton, Wilbert, & Hennemann, 2014).

Significance of the Study

This transcendental phenomenological study is significant as it allows an overlooked aspect of the teaching experience to be represented in a body of research about teaching students who are deemed close to passing end-of-year state-mandated assessments. According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory, how people view themselves and their abilities is directly related to their task completion effectiveness (Bandura, 1977). Teachers are charged with the education of their assigned students. Student achievement results on state-mandated standardized assessments are the current evidence used to indicate whether students have learned specific objectives and if the teacher has done his or her job effectively. Educator effectiveness is a factor in academic gain (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Studies show that there is a link between teacher quality and increased student achievement (Akinfe, Olofinniyi, & Fashiku, 2012; Oni, 2014). Research provides a link between student success and teacher self-efficacy (Jahanian & Darky, 2013; Mausethagen, 2013; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012); therefore, it is critical to describe the experiences of teachers of bubble students. How teachers view their ability to convey knowledge to students successfully and their beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives impacts student achievement (Bandura, 1977; Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Muijs & Reynolds, 2002).

A goal of NCLB (2002) is to decrease the achievement gap and raise academic standards and student achievement. The components of successful student performance and teacher self-efficacy should go hand-in-hand. More research is needed to determine if self-efficacy and student performance are indeed correlated and may be warranted if this suggestion is valid. This study focuses on the lived experience of 10 rural third- through fifth-grade teachers of bubble students. By focusing on the experiences of third- through fifth-grade rural general education

teachers of bubble students, attention is also placed on those students who require additional services to be academically successful, but who do not qualify for traditional programs. The results of this research study can provide leaders, educators, parents, and community members with data to help determine whether current educational practices in Virginia are positively impacting the achievement gap. If current practices are not positively impacting the achievement gap, then educators must revisit them to begin the change process. The qualitative design allows the voices of those most affected by these practices to be heard. It brings to life the experiences of general education teachers in critical need of being heard so as not to discourage their future educational contributions.

Research Questions

The goal of conducting this transcendental phenomenological research is to describe rural general education teachers' experiences with teaching bubble students who do not qualify for additional services such a special education. Bubble students are those students who are projected to come close to state-mandated achievement test cut scores. Thus, the Research Question (RQ) 1 used to guide this study is:

RQ1: How do third- through fifth-grade general education teachers describe their experiences with teaching bubble students?

According to Johnson, Kraft, and Papay (2012), teachers tend to stay employed longer in schools where they view the work environment as positive and supportive. Such an environment also has been shown to be a predictor of higher rates of student academic growth. Job satisfaction is found to matter to teachers and to influence their decisions to leave after two or three years. Work stress and self-efficacy are significantly correlated with job burnout (Yu, Wang, Zhai, Dai, & Yang, 2015). Students who may or may not pass state-mandated

assessments are a reason for concern. These high stakes tests are sometimes used to make significant decisions about grade promotions and graduation (Gannon-Tagher, & Robinson, 2016).

With a goal of incentivizing teacher effectiveness and student achievement, these tests are used to evaluate teachers and students (Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2012). Achieving teacher quality is a result and requirement of the NCLB Act of 2001. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2016 includes student performance targets and school ratings, teacher and leader evaluation and support systems, including learning and observations, and a competitive program to evaluate and reward effective educators based on student learning in high-need schools (USDOE, 2016). The purpose of this question is to gain insight into perceptions of third- through fifth-grade educators as they describe their experiences of teaching students who are projected to come close to achieving test cut scores, but have possibly had failing scores on previous end-of-year state assessments; poor performance on weekly PA scores (69 or below); poor performance on Student Growth Assessments taken three times a year in PA; have not met assigned benchmarks on NWEA MAP tests in reading and math; have not reached the grade level benchmark for PALS; and, may have had poor grades. I used this question to describe the lived experience of the classroom teacher who taught bubble students.

The guiding questions to support RQ1 are as follows:

RQ2: How do participants describe their feelings of efficacy and perceive professional aptitude after teaching bubble students?

Teacher effectiveness and positive student outcomes have been linked to teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Gibbs & Powell, 2011). Teachers develop confidence as they become more proficient as evidenced by desired outcomes in designated competencies. Identified dimensions

of teacher self-efficacy are classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement (Gibbs & Powell, 2011). According to Bandura (1977), mastery experience is one of the four sources of self-efficacy. Successful repetitive performance of tasks defines the mastery experience. By the defining characteristics of bubble students, it may be difficult for the teacher to have a mastery experience. Students who may not have academic success or do poorly on high stakes testing may have low learning motivation, poor grades, chronic absenteeism, and parents with weak educational backgrounds (Salleh, Abdullah, Mahmud, Ghavifekr, & Ishak, 2013). It is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to have those students ready to test no matter what their past performance indicates. I used the findings from this research question to identify the participants' perspectives of efficacy and professional aptitudes and to determine if they are impacted by the challenge of teaching bubble students. RQ2 relates to RQ1 as the responses are helpful in explaining their experiences and how the presence of bubble students impact their feelings of efficacy and how they view their professional aptitude.

RQ3: How does the presence of bubble students in a classroom impact the teaching practices of participants?

Bubble students have an academic history of poor performance. These students are, however, capable of succeeding; if they are behind academically, they can catch up, and they may not require specialized instruction (Gutknecht & Gutknecht, 1997). Diverse learning needs in the classroom require teachers to create flexible learning environments that often provide individualized instruction for weaker students (Zydney & Hasselbring, 2014). Schoolwide instructional programs and practices that are integrated into content area subjects that are assessed may be implemented for students who experience challenges in understanding and

learning from text (Reed & Vaughn, 2012). Plans must be made to adjust for students who are out of the classroom because of their participation in intervention programs. The classroom teacher must determine strategies that are research-based and that will assist in a multi-tiered approach to instruction. While addressing the general curriculum, attention must be paid to any deficits or gaps in learning exhibited by the bubble student.

Diverse teaching methods that involve direct instruction and cooperative learning, along with strategies that incorporate direct, exploratory and cooperative learning should be utilized (Kyriakides, Creemers, & Antoniou, 2009; Swanson, 2012; Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016). Motivating and encouraging students, clarifying instructional goals, and assuring that suitable formative and summative assessments are given with accurate feedback, while addressing potential challenging behaviors of students, can be a consuming task (Brownell, Billingsley, McLeskey, & Sindelar, 2012; Ko & Sammons, 2013; Sledge & Pazey, 2013; Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016). The desire is to demonstrate teaching strategies that meet the needs of all students. However, with accountability requirements for all students, it is important that all students meet yearly benchmark requirements. Therefore, the rationale for the inclusion of this question is to gain specific information about additional teaching practices that participants perceive to be helpful when teaching bubble students.

RQ4: What are the classroom challenges described by participants after teaching bubble students?

The responses obtained from this research question provide insight on the unique challenges of teaching bubble students. Noting the needs of students who experience academic challenges can be helpful in planning interventions for future difficulties. The provision of a learning environment that promotes active, critical, and collaborative learning is thought to reach

and engage learners (Little & Page, 2009). Students who do not automatically experience academic success may need extra time to complete assignments or exhibit mastery, along with small group instruction. By incorporating fast-paced instruction, student interest can be sustained and potential behavior problems avoided. The educators involved must determine how and where intervention based instruction should occur (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). Students with academic challenges may have to have high expectations communicated to them. Knowing that their best is the only acceptable end product may help motivate them to perform acceptably (Boynton & Boynton, 2005). Students who have academic challenges may be reading below grade level, English language learners, diagnosed with learning disabilities or behavioral issues, and underachievers. They may be frustrated and possibly overlooked before testing years (Echevarria, Frey, & Fisher, 2016). They will need access to the core curriculum, assessments to inform instruction, English and academic language development, and a supportive classroom climate to have a chance at being successful (Echevarria et al., 2016).

Definitions

To clarify the keywords of the proposed qualitative study, the following definitions of terms are included.

1. *Achievement Gap* – The educational attainment of low-income students and students of color compared to their more affluent, White peers (Lauen & Gaddis, 2012).
2. *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* – Adequate yearly progress is a measurement defined by the United States government that determines how every public school performs academically according to results on standardized tests. AYP established a timeline for meeting state academic assessments with gradual increments that increase to 100% by the 2013-14 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

3. *Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO)* – Annual measureable objectives are unique yearly targets in reading and mathematics for each subgroup, school, and district (VDOE, 2015).
4. *Bubble students* – Students who are projected to come close to achievement test cut scores (Springer, 2008).
5. *Educational triage* – A process of distributing needed resources of those students who have the most potential to benefit (Marks, 2014).
6. *Gap Group/Subgroup* – Students who historically have had difficulty meeting the Commonwealth's achievement standards (VDOE, 2015).
7. *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* – Originally known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush, NCLB sought to focus attention on accountability, scientifically research-based instruction, and enhancement of teacher qualifications. It has been highly criticized for its unintended negative consequences to educational practices due to administrative emphasis on test outcomes (Deville & Chalhoub-Deville, 2011; Price, 2010; Runswick-Cole, 2011).
8. *Rural* – Any population, housing, or territory not in an urban area.
9. *Self-efficacy* – Self-efficacy is an individual's belief and ability in their performance for a certain situation, or how effective they feel in being able to accomplish a certain situation (Bandura, 1977).
10. *Standards of Learning* – The Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools establish minimum expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade or course in English, mathematics, science, history/social science, and other subjects. SOL tests in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and history/social science

measure the success of students in meeting the Board of Education's expectations for learning and achievement. All items on SOL tests are reviewed by Virginia classroom teachers for accuracy and fairness, and teachers also assist the state Board of Education in setting proficiency standards for the tests (VDOE, 2015).

Summary

The teaching of bubble students is a common occurrence in classrooms. Educators must practice educational triage in an attempt to determine which resources will best meet the needs of these students. Very little research is available, however, that describes the experiences of these educators who have to make these decisions.

The lived experiences of rural, south-central Virginia general education teachers are different from educators in urban areas. The socio-demographic characteristics of the students being addressed and the subgroup that these students are classified in also affects the interactions and experiences of the teacher participants. The voices of these teachers have yet to be described systematically and qualitatively.

A transcendental phenomenological research design was chosen since the purpose of this study is to describe rural general education teachers' lived experiences with teaching bubble students who do not qualify for additional services such as special education. Bubble students were those students who were projected to come close to reaching state-mandated achievement test cut scores. The third- through fifth-grade general education teachers in rural south-central Virginia have unique experiences that have been overlooked in past research. Allowing their experiences to be heard will provide valuable information about the level of supports offered to teachers of bubble students. This research study provides leaders, educators, parents, and community members with data to help determine whether current instructional practices in

Virginia are positively impacting the achievement gap. If they are not positively impacting the achievement gap, then educators must revisit current educational practices to begin the change process.

Chapter One provides an overview and background for this transcendental phenomenological study. The lived experiences of 10 third- through fifth-grade general education teachers in rural south-central Virginia are the focus of this study. Chapter One provided the situation to self of the researcher, the problem and purpose statement, and the significance of the study. The research questions have been identified along with the definitions. Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two explores the theoretical framework of the study and discusses the two theories supported throughout the research. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy serves as the primary theory, and the self-determination theory serves as the secondary theory. The existing literature concerning the experiences of general education teachers of bubble students is explored. The literature review gives directions for the problem and position that are developed by the researcher during the study (Creswell, 2013). A summary of the pertinent research surrounding the teaching of bubble students is also included. The literature relays the findings of the research as it relates to the self-efficacy of teachers who teach bubble students and the challenges faced by rural general education teachers of these students. Finally, the study seeks to connect the existing literature to educational practices, particularly those associated with the experiences of general education teachers of bubble students.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study includes the theories prevalent throughout the research, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and the self-determination theory. These theories provide an understanding of how attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs impact experiences. The theoretical framework embodies the character of the study and solidifies the methodological phase of inquiry.

Self-efficacy Theory

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy enhances the validity of this phenomenological study and is used as a conceptual lens to explain teacher feelings of self-efficacy after teaching bubble students. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy is based on the premise that personal belief is one's

capability to organize and execute a course of action that is required to attain designated types of performance. According to Bandura, learning through various mechanisms, including the interaction between individuals, the environment, and their behaviors is the basis for self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is a determining factor in how individuals approach goals or challenges in life.

There are four sources of self-efficacy, mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and psychological responses (Bandura, 1977). Successful repetitive performance of tasks defines mastery experiences. Social modeling involves witnessing peers completing tasks successfully, and social persuasion consists of receiving encouragement from peers that are successful. Psychological responses refer to moods, psychological reactions, emotional states, and stress levels that affect personal feelings of ability. Adverse responses in any of those sources can weaken self-efficacy.

Strong self-efficacy allows individuals to be interested in their activities, to be firmly committed to their interests and activities, allow problems to be viewed as challenges to be mastered, and recover from disappointments quickly (Bandura, 1977). Personal self-efficacy grows throughout the life of an individual as they acquire understanding, new skills, and experiences. The way individuals view themselves and their belief in their abilities impact how effective they are with tasks, whether they are learning a new sport or teaching students with low academic achievement.

Teacher beliefs as they relate to the ability of students to learn regardless of environmental factors can be considered to be self-efficacy (Jennett, Harris, & Mesibov, 2003). According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014), activities required to attain goals that include planning, organizing, implementation, and the belief in carrying out goals is self-efficacy. It is

thought that teacher and student morale improve if teachers believe they can make a difference with their students (Covell, McNeil, & Howe, 2009). Perceptions about self-efficacy are essential contributors to performance success (Moen & Algood, 2009). The attitudes of teachers may have a significant effect on the attitudes of students and as a result on the learning process (Finch, 2012).

According to Albert Bandura (1959) and Walter Mischel, hypothetical traits do not control behavior; rather, behavior is controlled by the external stimuli one experiences. As a result, external environmental changes can cause the personality traits of individuals to vary. Bandura (1978) identified the concept of the self-system. The self-system consists of the ability of an individual to respond to situations as they have daily interactions with others and their environment, with emphasis on one's cognitive skills in conjunction with ability and attitude. Self-efficacy is a driving force in this self-system.

Self-efficacy is the beliefs a person has in his or her abilities. These beliefs affect how they behave, think, and feel (Bandura, 1977). Life goals set by individuals depend upon self-efficacy. How the achievement of these goals is approached is the result of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the component that causes the individual to have the necessary fortitude to realize daily tasks that help achieve life goals.

Teacher self-efficacy is a variable that should be considered when determining teacher accountability. According to Henson (2014), teacher efficacy and accountability are proportionally related. Research indicates that efficacious teachers are more dedicated to dealing with students who struggle, such as bubble students. For teachers and other educators, when determining the best solutions for helping students, such as bubble students who do not immediately master desired standards, attention should be paid to dimensions of self-efficacy as

identified by Bandura (1994). These dimensions include but are not limited to the mastery experience, psychological responses, social modeling, and social persuasion of the teachers affected. Fully understanding the perceptions and experiences of teachers of bubble students and how these perceptions and experiences impact feelings of self-efficacy create opportunities for educators to make recommendations that will support teachers as well as students during the learning process.

Self-determination Theory

The second theory recognized throughout the research is the self-determination theory. Self-determination is a theory of human motivation, development, and wellness. Types of motivation, such as autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation are the focus of this theory (Ryan & Deci, 2008). These types of motivation are thought to be predictors of outcomes as they relate to well-being, relating, and performance. Autonomous motivation and controlled motivation differ in that autonomous motivation intrinsically endorses the actions of an individual at the highest level of reflection; controlled motivation involves acting with a sense of pressure (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Amotivation involves a lack of intention and motivation. Determining the type of motivator felt by a classroom teacher holds implications for impacting student learning and achievement outcomes.

Self-determination theory proposes that for the psychological needs of individuals to be supported, the environment they are functioning in must allow them to feel competent, autonomous, and relatable. Once these feelings are obtained and balanced, optimal task motivation will be achieved (Vallerand, Pelletier, & Koestner, 2008). Teacher autonomy is also positively related to job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Teaching students who may require additional instruction to be successful may impact feelings of competency and in some

cases autonomy, if there is a formally prescribed method of instruction in place for teaching these students. Optimal task motivation in the form of increasing student achievement is the perceived goal. However, consideration of teacher psychological needs and the teaching environment are a must for true optimal task motivation.

Autonomy for teachers may be impacted by their ability to have the freedom to choose goals and to choose teaching methods and strategies that reflect their personal beliefs and values as they relate to education (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010), perceived teacher autonomy was negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion, feelings of reduced accomplishment, and depersonalization, which are known contributors of teacher burn out (Friedman, 2003; Yazdi, Motallebzadeh, &Ashraf, 2014). According to research, the satisfaction of the need for autonomy is universal and thus equally vital for all teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Proficiency standards for students are currently in place that are designed to demonstrate content mastery. School evaluation and accountability are based on scores attained. Teacher autonomy is possible, but with caveats, as dictated by standards.

Related Literature

The content contained in the following section includes details about how the concept of the bubble student has come into being and the potential challenges that are faced by these students and the general education teachers who teach them. Information will be highlighted on the educational practices of general education teachers along with interventions and practices such as response to intervention and differentiated instruction. Effective teaching methods and school and teacher accountability will be discussed. The tenants of Virginia Tiered System of

Supports (VTSS) as it relates to teaching and the rural education setting will be examined. Finally, the achievement gap and data-driven instructional decision-making will be reviewed.

Teaching Bubble Students

In the current climate of accountability and the acquisition of specific educational standards, educators may feel the need to provide one-size-fits-all instruction through tiered interventions to increase learning (Allington, 2012). Decisions have to be made as to how to best allocate available resources. Bubble students, who are close to reaching proficiency, can become the focus, as their passing scores may mean the difference between schools obtaining an acceptable achievement rating. The pressure felt from the requirements of NCLB to improve or obtain passing test scores at the expense of students well below and well above mandated cut scores may be an incentive for teachers and administrators to practice triage, with bubble students being the recipient of needed services (Lauen & Gaddis, 2012). As school performance is evaluated using specific metrics that render rewards or consequences depending upon the results, the pressure is inevitably felt to have bubble students and students of specific subgroups to perform proficiently (Fisher, Frey, & Pumpian, 2011; Logan, 2011; Pitre, 2014). Self-efficacy of teachers who teach bubble students may also be impacted as they are forced to make decisions that may cause them to operate with new strategies, values, and paradigms (Aguilar, 2013).

High stakes testing that is highly consequential for teachers and administrators can, in some cases, illicit acts of resistance, the breaking of standardization procedures associated with testing, despair, or cheating (Berliner, 2011). The pressure to have students demonstrate targeted achievement scores can prompt educators to make decisions about students who may or may not meet the required benchmarks. Some students have been moved to different classes or schools, or even retained in their grade, to give them more time to improve their academic performance

before they have to take the designated tests (Berliner, 2011). Bubble students who experience early academic difficulty are at an increased risk for problems in school and potentially dropping out of school (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011). As a result, new strategies to intervene in required skill acquisition are necessary to improve student achievement. In addition to focusing on specific grade level standards, attention to classroom context must be made.

For students such as bubble students, who are deemed at risk for failing mandated testing, three aspects of classroom context, instructional quality, the socioemotional climate of the classroom, and student-teacher relationship quality, should be examined when determining remediation strategies (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011; Lain, 2016; Levine & Levine, 2012). According to research, classroom environments that are thought to be enriching and supportive allow bubble students to engage behaviorally and mentally (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011). The need for struggling students to feel supported and socially connected is thought to be met in high-very quality classrooms. Academic achievement is promoted once these aspects of classroom context are strengthened.

Students differ in their level of classroom participation and how quickly they acquire new skills. All students, including bubble students, may require supports that modify the content or change the methods of content delivery. Students who are close to demonstrating proficiency may require various resources that address academic and extra-academic factors to help them succeed (Marchard & Furrer, 2014). In an attempt to shore up deficit skills and get the bubble students where they need to be academically, changes may have to be made to the school climate, curriculum, instructional support, and classroom activities (Marchard & Furrer, 2014).

Any student may be viewed as a bubble student if they appear to have the potential to pass the test. If educational triage is practiced, all available resources must be considered,

including the differential transfer of advantage from parents to children, as it relates to different forms of cultural, social and economic assets and experiences. Students who have parents who will help them academically or hire tutors may also have access to educationally enriching opportunities and culturally enriching experiences. These experiences and assets influence the learning advantages of children (Corak, 2013). Class advantage significantly influences student achievement (Schmidt, 2014). Bubble students who have families that are unable to provide educational supports outside of school, require every opportunity for remediation that is offered during the school day.

If educational triage is practiced, all available resources must be considered, including the differential transfer of advantage from parents to children, as it relates to different forms of cultural, social and economic assets and experiences (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Morales, 2010). It is very crucial that stereotypes are not allowed to inhibit students from performing to their full ability. Often, stereotypes affect individuals in learning and building abilities (Appel & Kronberger, 2012). Stereotype threat, an extra pressure experienced by members of a negatively stereotyped group, in testing environments may increase vulnerability and prevent individuals from performing to their full potential and demonstrating achievement proficiency (Appel & Kronberger, 2012). Due to mandated testing requirements, it is imperative that every student is given an opportunity to perform optimally and be free of negative stereotypes. Ethnic minorities may meet the criteria for a specific subgroup and school accreditation and in some cases, school funding, may be dependent upon their proficiency.

Educational Practices of General Education Teachers of Bubble Students

High stakes testing and federally mandated accountability have changed how educational practices are viewed (Murnane & Papay, 2010; Polikoff, McEachin, & Wrabel, 2013; Scherrer,

2012). Attention has been given to adapting new curriculum and organizational structures that involve the planning and delivery of academic instruction and overall teaching strategies. Time is spent by teachers to determine how to incorporate new strategies, values, and paradigms in classrooms (Aguilar, 2013). Teacher practices have evolved to accommodate and facilitate the learning of all students. Resources are reviewed and in many cases, educational triage is enacted to focus on students who are on the threshold of passing state-mandated assessments, bubble students (Marks, 2014; Springer, 2008). These students do not qualify for special education services. However, because of their questionable academic proficiency, additional resources are needed to facilitate the advancement of skill mastery and academic achievement.

Students who have failed previous high stakes testing or who perform poorly on predictor assessments may have diverse experiences with school, linguistics, social, gender, political, socioeconomic, and racial identities (Kearns, 2011; Reardon, Arshan, Atteberry, & Kurlaender, 2010). Understanding how teachers interpret and implement policy mandates will allow policymakers to understand how accountability policies shape implementation and actual instructional policies. Emphasis is placed on identified low performing students to increase their likelihood of passing testing requirements (Payne-Tsoupos, 2010). Questions may arise as to what is to be done with students that do not cause concern or alarm. This questioning is especially true when plans are made to remediate low performing or bubble students. It has to be determined if the on level students should continue with instruction or participate in enrichment exercises. Teachers are charged with the task of maximizing the potential of all students, regardless of if these students may or may not pass the end of year state-mandated assessments. As a result, the instruction is differentiated to address the varied needs.

Response to Intervention

The NCLB Act mandates that states implement scientifically and research-based methods for their programs and teaching practices, to bring all students up to a proficient level in reading and math. Response to intervention (RtI) is thought by some to be the answer to this requirement. Response to intervention involves general education supports that may include minor instructional adaptations or more intensive interventions (Atkins, Duhon, Greguson, Mesmer, & Olinger, 2009). Acquiring specified skills and fluent responses are the desired outcomes of RtI. However, maintenance of the defined skills is also desired. Interventions without lasting effects are not as relevant and indicate a need for more intense and continued interventions (Brown-Chidsey, Bronaugh, & McGraw, 2009).

Response to intervention is a multi-tiered approach designed to help students who are struggling academically, such as bubble students. The core components of RtI are a scientifically-based curriculum, universal screening, progress monitoring, and instructional decisions based upon progress in the designated tiers (Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Early intervention and tiered interventions are characteristic of RtI. Early intervention allows for the implementation of strategies and services that may alleviate the challenges that special education students experience. A multi-tiered model of instruction takes into account the strengths and weaknesses of all students, including special education students. Differentiated instruction, consistent core instruction, and curriculum are possible results of RtI (Baldwin, Omdal, & Pereles, 2009). RtI offers a framework that when used consistently for assessments can provide data that is used for making instructional decisions. RtI is thought to have the capabilities of reducing the disproportional amount of culturally and linguistically diverse students (ethnic minorities) who receive special education services (Finch, 2012). Progress-monitoring data, a record of specific interventions, and any diagnostic information may be used as concrete material

for a possible special education referral or to help guide decisions about student services (Brown-Chidsey et al., 2009).

Differentiated Instruction

School divisions are required to evaluate teachers. Through the evaluation process, exceptional teaching strategies are recognized, with guidance and suggestions for professional development to improve practices and student academic performance (Apthorp, Wang, Ryan, & Cicchinelli, 2012; Dixon, Yssel, Mconnel, & Hardin, 2014). To best meet the varied needs of students, instructional methods will have to be differentiated through accommodations or modified assignments (Bautista & Castaneda, 2011). Instructional diversity through different formats is necessary to adequately meet the academic needs of students (Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, & Walker, 2002).

According to Aldridge (2010), tiered models of instruction are a tenant of the differentiated instructional models to address the different levels of ability and understanding in academics. Tiers are one way to differentiate the levels of intensity of instruction. Students bring specific needs to classrooms as evidenced by the level of knowledge, motivation, self-efficacy, and behavior displayed individually and collectively. Differentiated instruction models take into consideration the learner styles, interests, needs, and actual student levels of achievement (Tomlinson, 2005).

In almost any classroom, it can be expected to find a wide range of learning needs, and a variety of skills, abilities, and interests as well as varying levels of proficiency levels in English (Apthorp et al., 2012; Finch, 2012; Hedrick, 2012). However, the goal remains for every student to meet or exceed grade-level reading expectations. Differentiation is one means that used to assist students in meeting those expectations. Differentiation tailors instruction to the current

level of the individual student's knowledge and skill (Honig, Diamond, & Gutlohn, 2000). Instructional, socioeconomic, experiential, physiological, and neurological characteristics bring differential and possible additional requirements for instruction and curriculum. However, differentiation does not change the content or the standards to be learned. It just presents material in a different way, such as in the content, the process, or the product, while making the necessary adjustments to pave the way to successful learning (Bowgren & Sever, 2010). School leaders and administrators must communicate a vision that articulates the philosophy of differentiation and how it relates to instruction in the division or individual school. This articulation assists in the changing of practices that will enable rigorous, engaging, and authentic curricula that modifies instructions when needed (Hedrick, 2012). It also provides students with a chance for success.

Differentiation addresses the learning needs of all students in any classroom (Tomlinson, 2005, 2016). Much focus has been on teachers acquiring strategies that will continue to address the required standards while meeting the needs of the students. However, the curriculum modification process should also strongly consider the preferred ways of learning of students, deferential differentiation, as opposed to strictly using teacher judgment (Kanevsky, 2011). Deferential differentiation of curriculum and instruction gives credence to the need of students to engage in educational activities that recognize their zones of proximal development in their learning preferences (Kanevsky, 2011). Differentiation strategies that consider these components, along with student wants, have been found to be useful in previous research (Bowgren & Sever, 2010; Hedrick, 2012; Kanevsky, 2011; Tomlinson, 2005).

Effective Teaching Methods

Effective teaching methods that render positive outcomes in learners are research-based (Alemu, 2014; Borich, 2011). Key behaviors that contribute to effective teaching are lesson clarity, instructional variety, teacher task orientation, and student success rate (Alemu, 2014; Borich, 2011). Lesson clarity refers to making ideas clear to learners regardless of their level of understanding, explaining concepts in a step-by-step order that allows students to follow along, and the usage of an oral presentation that is direct and free of mannerism that may be distracting. Effective teachers who demonstrate lesson clarity, inform the learners of the lesson objective, provide advanced organizers and check for prior learning relevant to the concepts presented. Effective teachers are also deliberate and distinct and will repeat directions when needed, know the ability levels of the students and try to teach slightly above that level. Finally, effective teachers use examples to make the concepts relevant and relatable and summarize each lesson (Borich, 2011).

Instructional variety entails delivering lessons that are flexible and offer various questioning formats (Borich, 2011; Record, 2015). Questioning that renders answers ranging from factual recall to higher order thinking responses provide opportunities for students to be challenged or to create by combining ideas to make a new one as an answer, provide meaningful variation. Instructional variation may also be achieved by using an attention getter or hook at the beginning of the lesson. Rewards and reinforcers, such as verbal praise or the incorporation of student participation or ideas, help add variety. Enthusiasm and animation during lesson presentation are also useful teaching strategies that demonstrate instructional variety (Borich, 2011).

Another essential behavior for effective teaching is teacher task orientation (Alemu, 2014; Borich, 2011; Oketch, Mutisya, Sagwe, Musyoka, & Ngware, 2012). This behavior refers

to how much time is spent in the classroom teaching a specific academic subject. By developing lesson plans that are reflective of specific standards and objectives, teachers are better positioned to provide opportunities for learning effectively. Allowing for the maximum instructional time through the minimization of distractions due to misbehavior or clerical interruptions increases teacher task orientation, resulting in improved learner outcomes. The establishment of routines and procedures and a set schedule are also strategies used by effective teachers (Borich, 2011).

Student engagement in the learning process is a critical behavior that contributes to effective teaching (Borich, 2011; Hayal, 2014; Turner, Christensen, Kacker-Cam, Trucano, M., & Fulmer, 2014). This behavior relates to the percentage of time students are on task, engaged with materials relevant to the objective, and learning or benefiting from the instruction provided. Students are involved cognitively, tactically, and are using what is being taught.

To facilitate student engagement, the teacher should establish rules, procedures, and routines that minimize disruptions (Borich, 2011; Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). The teacher should monitor student engagement. By moving around the classroom and decreasing time-consuming activities such as giving directions through the use of displayed schedules, an atmosphere for student engagement can be fostered. Interesting independent assignments coupled with the use of resources and activities that are at or slightly above the ability level of the student are also strategies that may be used to facilitate student engagement.

Student success rate, the rate at which students correctly comprehend and complete an assignment, is the result of effective teaching behavior (Borich, 2011). To provide opportunities for student success, teachers should provide group or individualized tasks or activities that are immediately after the lesson for students to be successful. Give feedback and when appropriate, meaningful verbal praise (Conroy, Sutherland, Snyder, Al-Hendawi, & Vo, 2009). Frequent

individual progress checks of independent practice should take place to increase student success rates (Borich, 2011; Clark, 2015; Dixson & Worrell, 2016).

School and Teacher Accountability

Educators are held accountable for the educational proficiency of students through specific statutes such as NCLB (USDOE, 2002). The goal of NCLB is for every child to be proficient in reading and mathematics. Annual progress must be made towards stated goals with consequences in place for those schools who do not meet these progress targets. Student academic progress is tracked and recorded to determine if growth is being made toward assigned targets. Goals and objectives of accountability directly are imposed upon schools and thus indirectly the responsibility of the classroom teacher to ensure that the set targets are achieved. Quality education is thought to be the duty of the school system, which includes the classroom teacher. Many educators feel the pressure for their students to perform successfully on the high stakes assessments. This pressure has the potential to impact teacher self-efficacy and their perception of the field of education (Mausethagen, 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Exceptional or poor student performance can change the attitudes of teachers and in turn affect teacher competency and self-efficacy (Jones & Egley, 2004).

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (USDOE, 2016). ESSA includes provisions that are designed to help students and schools be successful. In an attempt to provide equity in education, protections were put into place for disadvantaged and high-need students. All students are required to be taught to high academic standards that prepare them to be college and career ready. ESSA requires annual statewide assessments to measure student progress towards established high standards. These state-designed accountability systems must include reading and math assessments. Struggling schools

will be identified as Comprehensive Support and Improvement or Targeted Support and Improvement. School improvement plans must be developed for schools identified in these categories and must include evidence-based interventions and address resource inequities. The law increases access to preschool. It also continues the expectation of accountability for all schools with a focus on actions that will affect position changes in low performing schools, who are not demonstrating student progress or have low graduation rates. States are required to develop their own goals and to review different factors to determine school performance, not just test scores. Annual yearly progress requirements and proficiency requirements are eliminated. All ESSA provisions went into effect in the Fall of 2017 (USDOE, 2016).

Teacher accountability has received support and criticism. There is concern that teacher accountability is linked to student outcomes and achievement as demonstrated through high stakes testing (Mausethagen, 2013). Factors other than the role of the teacher are not always thought to be taken into consideration. Curriculum design, supports in place at the school and district levels for teachers and students, and school policies also have to be considered (Mausethagen, 2013). The challenges of meeting accountability requirements while finding solutions for addressing the individual needs of low achieving students who may be classified as bubble students have the ability to add to the pressure to meet accountability requirements and thus threaten perceived self-efficacy. This dynamic at a minimum affects perceived self-efficacy (Mausethagen, 2013).

It has been hypothesized that pressure from accountability requirements impacts the effort and productivity of teachers; cause educators to review curriculum and better align content and curriculum frameworks with what is actually taught; cause some teachers to only teach to the test or testing format; allow for the differentiation of instruction; and, compels some to use

educational triage (Lauen & Gaddis, 2012). Practicing educational triage due to accountability requirements can have a negative impact on students on the high or low spectrum of achievement, according to research (Lauen & Gaddis, 2012). Students of color and low-income students may be the recipients of educational triage in an attempt to meet subgroup accountability pass rate requirements and to close the achievement gap.

Virginia Tiered System of Supports

In the state of Virginia, the Virginia Tiered System of Supports (VTSS) has been developed. The VTSS is "a data-driven decision-making framework for establishing the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports a school needs to be an effective learning environment for all students" (VTSS Research and Implementation Center, 2016).

VTSS is a systematic approach with a clearly defined process. This process allows for numerous levels of supports that are designed to be efficient and effective for students. System-wide evidence-based practices to address academic, behavioral, or social and emotional needs of students are used. These practices must be used with fidelity and are frequently progress monitored. Frequent progress monitoring provides the data teachers need to make instructional decisions. Data, practices, and systems are integrated to affect student outcomes. The VTSS framework consists of the following elements: data-informed decision-making, evidenced-based practices, family, school and community partnerships, monitoring student progress, which included universal screening, and evaluation for outcomes and fidelity (VTSS-RIC, 2016).

VTSS has a three-tiered framework of student supports. Students receive different tiers of support to meet benchmarks and achieve success. Support services are tiered, not students. Tier I is the core or universal supports that all students receive. The goal is for 100% of students to achieve at a high level, but Tier I is usually effective with at least 80% of students. When

determining which research programs and practices will produce good outcomes for the majority of students, affected educators determine what students are expected to learn. Once the core curriculum is determined, mastery requirements must be set, along with the required responses when mastery is not achieved.

Tier II includes supplemental or targeted supports that approximately 20% of students will need in addition to the core curriculum to be successful. Additional available resources to aid in skill acquisition may be needed during this level of support. Tier II interventions are considered successful if 70-80% of students show improvement or if they are close to reaching their progress monitoring goal.

Tier III is intensive or individualized supports. It is estimated that 5% or less of the student population will require intensive, individualized instruction in addition to core Tier I, or supplemental Tier II, instruction to attain specified benchmarks. Tier III interventions are considered effective if 70-80% of students improve performance. At this stage, it must be determined if the goals set are realistic and attainable for the student.

The VTSS integrates academic and behavior supports to develop an effective learning environment. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is the behavioral component of VTSS and is designed to support positive academic and behavioral outcomes for all students (TTAC-ODU, 2016; VDOE, 2016). PBIS uses a positive approach to discipline through the implementation of techniques that reduce disruptive student behaviors. Instructional time loss is reduced for students by a decrease in office referrals and in-school or out of school suspensions. Stakeholders with a vested interest in the individual school, collaborate to define acceptable behaviors along with rewards and consequences for each. Schoolwide lesson plans are developed, and all acceptable behaviors are modeled for the students. It is not assumed that

any student automatically knows the correct behaviors to display. PBIS is proactive and uses evidence-based prevention and intervention behavioral strategies. These strategies are used to develop a positive school culture (PBIS, 2016; VDOE, 2016, VTSS-RIC, 2016).

The VTSS operates with the goal of developing college and career ready students. By integrating academics and behavior, a foundation for learning, building relationships, and problem solving is established. School-level goals that can promote skill development are as follows,

> Integrate academic standards with school-wide behavior expectations; integrate academic and behavior instruction in lesson plans; integrate assessment information and data sources; develop interventions using integrated problem-solving practices; integrate learning practices and membership; integrate implementation practices across multiple initiatives adopted for improving student outcomes. (VTSS-RIC, 2016, p.1)

By specifying these targets, different strategies can be aligned to support schools.

Rural Educational Settings

The research of this study was conducted in a rural setting. The Williams School District (pseudonym), which is located in rural south-central Virginia, was the setting for the study. The school district contains a large percentage of low-income families that have been impacted by high levels of unemployment: Williams School District (4.8%), Virginia state average (3.9%), and the National average (4.9%) (Unemployment Rates and Workforce Employment, 2016). There is some lack of consensus around the concept of rural (Stelmach, 2011). Educational policies and practices are affected by the way rural is defined and portrayed. The U.S. Census (2016) defines rural as any place that is not urban. Rural areas vary in how they appear visually. Rural areas may be remote, have average school and district sizes, various poverty rates, have

racial and ethnic minorities, and experience growth or decline in school district enrollment (Greenough & Nelson, 2015; Stelmach, 2011). Urban areas are partly defined as areas that have a population density of 1,000 persons per square mile. There are 978 square miles in Williams County, and the total population is 61,687 (U.S. Census, 2016), thus meeting the rural criteria.

Rural communities and schools face the challenges of poverty, out-migration, gender inequity, declining enrollment, staffing, remoteness, and curriculum relevancy (Stelmach, 2011; Yettick, Baker, Wickersham, & Hupfeld, 2014). These challenges impact efforts to maintain and improve rural schools. Geographic location, race, and ethnicity intersect with rural poverty (United Nations, 2010). Education is implicated concerning rural poverty by it being used to address antecedent conditions; when poverty is determined to be responsible for absenteeism conditions that require students to work instead of study are attempted to be changed; joint partnerships with additional organizations are formed to address learning needs of quality and access. Attitudes toward school can be shaped by poverty. In some cultures, the values of the school that are dominant are misaligned with the cultural values of the student. This misalignment may cause students to reject the legitimacy of school relevancy (Stelmach, 2011; Yettick et al., 2014).

When students choose to leave rural areas and live elsewhere, they are choosing out-migration. Out-migration is usually due to a lack of real or perceived economic opportunities (Stelmach, 2011). When people leave rural areas, financial resources are depleted because the tax base has been lessened. These financial resources are needed to sustain the schools.

Education has allowed women to explore interests and realize potential (Stelmach, 2011). Gender inequalities have roots in social relations, community infrastructure, and in history. Citizens of rural communities are statistically more likely to live in poverty. Gender issues are

often intertwined with cultural, social, and political influences and are not always resolved by providing economic and educational opportunities (Stelmach, 2011). Traditionally rural areas have had a more patriarchal and conservative nature. Although time has caused a shift in female roles, rural educators must be aware of the gendered construction of the community as they offer instruction and also play a role in identity formation.

School funding is often tied to student enrollment. Rural areas have seen a decline in population as individuals move to more urban areas looking for employment. This decline impacts and, in some cases, causes a financial shortfall for rural school divisions. The NCLB Act (2002) included policies aimed at rural schools with the Rural Education Achievement Program and the Small Rural School Achievement Grant that provides additional funding to rural schools and allows for more flexibility with how the available funds are spent (USDOE, 2004). Supplemental funding is often needed in rural areas with declining enrollment for their schools to succeed. Rural teachers and students are directly impacted.

Staffing is an area of concern for rural school divisions (Stelmach, 2011; Yettick et al., 2014). Recruiting and retaining highly qualified or certified teachers, while including those who represent ethnic minority groups are specific challenges for rural schools. Recruiting teachers for high-need positions, such as special education, mathematics, and foreign languages, is also difficult. Teachers who reside in rural areas before college or who are more mature are more likely to seek employment in rural settings. Students who have internships in rural areas are also more willing to teach in rural areas.

The remoteness of some rural locations may cause concern for rural education (Stelmach, 2011). Remoteness is determined by the actual distance of rural communities relative to urban communities. Some rural communities have physical barriers relative to their location that

impact access to education. These barriers are especially evident in the area of technology access.

Curriculum relevancy in education is of concern in rural communities (Stelmach, 2011; Waller & Barrentine, 2015). Parent beliefs about the relevance of schooling are directly related to student school attendance (United Nations, 2010). Place-based education, a concept that "requires teachers to engage with local culture and community and to incorporate its value and resources into the curriculum" (Stelmach, 2011, p. 38) is also influential. This concept allows students to develop and accept their identities as it relates to their rural upbringings as well as confirming the value and worth of their communities. By heeding the needs and concerns of the local, rural community, the curriculum is made relevant, and student attendance, self-identity, and ownership improve (Stelmach, 2011).

Rural schools have strengths that can often be found in their smaller sizes and strong community attachments and relationships. Challenges can include opportunities for professional development, fiscal adequacy, and specialized services. Professional development opportunities may be more difficult because of the actual location of rural areas and the tendency for suppliers of these services to be located in cities. Fiscal challenges that are a result of lower property values, declining enrollment, smaller organizational scale, and pupil transportation logistics also impact rural schools (Johnson & Howley, 2015). It should be noted that the smaller organizational scale impacts the provision of specialized courses and services as staffing may not be available to serve the populations in needs as private agencies may not be close to rural locations.

Federal policies drive school improvements such as the Race to the Top grant program, the School Improvement Grant (SIG), and the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP).

The Race to the Top and SIG are Federal policy initiatives that are available to any school that applies and meets the qualifications. The Race to the Top grant was established in 2009 as a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). States awarded these funds are required to demonstrate alignment with federal objectives, priorities, and preferences and to propose plans to implement innovative reforms. In the initial grant dispositions, the grants mostly benefited urban states.

In 2012, the Race to the Top District program (RTT-D) and the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) were established (USDOE, 2016). RTT-D included a new provision intended to benefit rural areas by making them one of four absolute priorities. Some think that this grant has not been as beneficial to rural states as expected. States who receive this grant are required to allow a large number of charter schools. Many rural areas lack the facilities, personnel, and a large number of students to support charter schools. States that are grant recipients have to develop teacher evaluation models that heavily rely on student achievement. Value-added systems are welcomed by some and causes of concern for others (Scherrer, 2012). Finally, recipients of the Race to the Top grants have to turn around low performing schools by using one of four specific strategies. The four strategies to be used are turnaround, restart, school closure, and transformation (Scherrer, 2012). Transferring students may be challenging in rural areas due to the remoteness and terrain, which could cause issues with transportation. Schools, such as the Williams School District, are major employers in rural communities. Closing schools in these systems can trigger economic and social destabilization. Transformation, which also includes firing staff and employing new teachers, may be hard for rural school divisions, due to difficulties recruiting teachers for these areas (Scherrer, 2012; Stelmach, 2011).

Title I SIGs are awarded by the USDOE to poverty-stricken school districts to raise test scores in the lowest performing schools (USDOE, 2010). When applying for this grant, schools have to identify which schools will be targeted and which of the four strategies will be used to turn around the schools. Of the rural schools, 18% have been awarded these grants (National Center of Education Statistics, 2015).

When teaching bubble students in rural environments that have high poverty levels, such as are evident in the research setting, the effects of poverty must also be considered and addressed. Students who live in poverty can perform and learn as well as middle or high income families. They may, however, require more supports to be successful (Brendle, 2015).. Rural poverty is similar to urban poverty in that they are both a result of not having access to jobs or a living wage that allows for the provision of the necessities of life. In rural, remote areas, this may also be influenced by smaller, less diverse job and labor markets and by when the native industries disappear. When students experience poverty in early childhood, they are more likely to have significantly lower incomes in adulthood, higher incarceration rates, higher pregnancy rates, behavioral problems, and lower educational achievement (Payne, 1998, 2009). Rural poverty rates in the United States are higher in minorities. Child poverty rates are also higher in rural areas (Rural Poverty Portal, 2016).

Students who live in poverty may not have been exposed to learning experiences outside of their communities. They may have low self-esteem and feel a sense of hopelessness. They may not have access to the internet, computers, books, or other forms of printed materials in their homes. They may come to school without requested school supplies. Students who live in poverty may not always display appropriate behaviors. They may have a different set of social norms in their homes from what is expected at school (Payne, 1998, 2009).

Bubble students who are classified as disadvantaged may be concerned with the fact that their basic needs (food, shelter, and clothing) are not being met. Due to the financial situation of their families, they may have underlying health concerns that have not been addressed or nutritional deficiencies because of a lack of food in the home or poor food quality. The parents of these students may not have the resources to help with homework or remediate deficit skills at home. As a result of these factors, schools have to design operating systems that offer assistance that will bridge the gap between home and school that has been made by poverty (Payne, 1998, 2009).

Building relationships with students, according to Hattie (2012), is a significant factor in helping educators make connections and teach more effectively. By prioritizing getting to know students, relationships are built, students are shown that someone cares, and the teacher can discover what motivates the students (Elias, White, & Stepney, 2014). When instructing bubble students who are close to proficiency but who also live in poverty, in addition to the academics, the students may have to be taught the strategies or hidden rules that help students be successful in schools (Payne, 1998, 2009). Systematic interventions that address the amount of time allotted for learning the concept, the actual interventions used by the teacher, the clear focus of instruction, and the prior knowledge of the student, allow for optimal learning and increased student achievement (Payne, 1998, 2009).

The Achievement Gap

The Achievement Gap is defined as the educational attainment of low-income students and students of color compared to their more affluent, White peers (Lauen & Gaddis, 2012). This gap in achievement is evident through disparities in standardized test scores, grade point averages, graduation rates, dropout rates, and college admission (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

Achievement gap explanations may compare culturally diverse students with White students without determining the causes of the disparities between the groups. Students of color may be viewed from a deficit perspective. Achievement gap explanations may frame White students as the norm and cause a focus to be placed on students as opposed to the inequities, structures, policies, and practices that caused the gaps (Milner, 2013). By using available data, instructional decisions may be made to address achievement gap deficits.

Achievement gaps must be addressed if students are to be prepared for college and career readiness. The differential performance of students of lower socioeconomic status (SES) as compared to peers of higher socioeconomic status and the comparison of Black and Latino students to their White peers should be examined (Elias et al., 2011; Powell, 2012). Race and ethnicity impact student test scores significantly as schools with high poverty, high minority populations face combined factors that make showing progress difficult on high stakes academic performance tests (Elias et al., 2011). The low performance of students on these assessments impact the evaluations of teachers who teach high percentages of low SES and Black and Hispanic students, if test scores are included as part of the evaluation process (Elias et al., 2011).

When addressing the achievement gap and trying to determine appropriate interventions for students who are underperforming, racial microaggressions, which may be subtle but are addressed toward racial minorities, must be considered. Internalized oppression of any group of students that makes them feel devalued or inferior, contributes to student academic achievement and a feeling of academic defeat (Elias et al., 2011). Perceptions of a culture and climate of a school can influence student learning (Thapa, Cohen, Geoffrey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). To succeed, students must believe they can succeed and realize the benefits of success. If this change in mindset does not take place, curriculum revisions and the changing of assessments will

not matter (Farrington et al., 2012). By empowering students and increasing their sense of self-worth, a foundation that is suitable for academic skill acquisition can be built.

Data should be reviewed by stakeholders and strategies identified to best address indicated needs to close achievement gaps (Gullo, 2013; Gummer & Mandinach, 2015; Stronge & Grant, 2009). Possible strategies to consider are enhanced cultural competence, comprehensive support for students, outreach to families of students, extended learning opportunities, classrooms that support learning, supportive schools, strong district support, access to qualified staff, and adequate resources and funding. The strategy of enhanced cultural competence requires the educator to be sensitive to the home culture of the student and to consider the diversity of the student to be an asset. Faculty cultural competence should be increased, and an effort should be made to understand and capitalize on the culture and abilities of the students (Fisher et al., 2012; Mark, 2013; Mendoza-Denton, 2014). Comprehensive support for students is a strategy that allows for early screening of children. Educators in conjunction with community agencies are enabled to provide multi-disciplinary services to help students become ready to learn. Students are identified who may need additional instructional support to be successful through tutors, peer support networks, or mentors.

To close the achievement gap, a strategy that allows for outreach to the families of students can be put into place, thus making the school environment more welcoming (Beatty, 2013). The main office of the school should appear family friendly with the possibility of the establishment of a school-home family center. If funding is available, staff should be hired who speak the home languages of the students to aid with home-school communication and transportation to and from school events should be provided for those in need. Adult education and parenting classes offer an opportunity to strengthen parenting skills and to improve the basic

education skills of the parents. These services help reach out to families and offer opportunities for parental engagement and the building of homeschool partnerships (Beatty, 2013; Franco & Seidel, 2014;).

Extended learning opportunities, such as full-day kindergarten and before and after school or summer programs, are strategies that can strengthen needed academic skills (Diamond, 2012; Elias et al., 2014). Students have an opportunity to have deficit skills remediated or to be exposed to material of interest through enrichment opportunities provided through extended learning. Classrooms that support learning use wide-ranging and effective strategies during instruction. Data from tests and other assignments are used to determine student performance and to plan instruction. Instructional time is protected, and literacy and math instruction is targeted. Instructional practices and decisions are research and data-driven. Supportive schools have high expectations and provide rigorous curricula. They focus on academics and identify strategies and programs that are designed to increase achievement. They develop schoolwide leadership teams and offer ongoing professional development on effective teaching strategies. Instruction is informed by test data and research related to student performance. Supportive schools provide safe, orderly learning environments with the main schoolwide priority being the closing of the achievement gap (Diamond, 2012; Elias et al., 2014).

In order to close the achievement gap, supportive schools need supportive school districts that have closing the achievement gap a high priority (Diamond, 2012; Elias et al., 2014). At the district level, an effective leadership team must be developed that is active in disseminating research on effective strategies to schools. School districts should involve teachers in the planning and design of professional development opportunities while also engaging teachers in

curriculum strengthening and student assessments. Class sizes should be reduced and additional resources and supports allocated for students experiencing achievement gaps.

School districts that have closing the achievement gap a high priority need access to qualified staff (Diamond, 2012; Elias et al., 2014). This access begins with improving teacher education programs. Procedures should be in place for the recruitment, development, and retaining of qualified teachers and para-educators. Highly qualified and quality staff should be assigned to work with students who have the most significant needs. A time during the school day should be provided for teachers to meet and plan, with those teachers who agree to take on extra duties being compensated for their time and effort. Teachers should be supported through the provision of data-driven professional development and with their efforts to work with families effectively. Strategies to close the achievement gap require adequate resources and funding. Educators should actively seek funding and target resources to expand the school capacity and to close identified gaps in student learning. By involving educators, parents, and outside agencies in the improvement process, learning for all students should be improved, thus closing the achievement gap (Diamond, 2012; Elias et al., 2014).

Through the communication of high expectations, schools can close the achievement gap Fisher et al., 2012). Leaders who have a clear focus on increasing student achievement and who foster an environment that insists on high-quality teaching that uses research-based academic approaches help facilitate the closing of the achievement gap. This effort also requires regular monitoring of student progress and data analysis to modify strategies to meet student needs and improve accountability. Opportunities for professional development allow educators to grow professionally and become life-long learners. What is learned can be incorporated into classroom best practices that can work towards closing the achievement gap. The engagement of

parents and community members, allows schools to be a priority, and to reach out to their diverse students and communities, along with educators and other stakeholders who commit to action. This collaboration creates an environment where innovative strategies can be devised and used to close the achievement gap (Beatty, 2013; Diamond, 2012; Elias et al., 2014; Franco & Seidel, 2014;).

Data-driven Instructional Decision-making

With the enactment of federal and state accountability measures, instructional practices, policies, and student outcomes have become the focus in schools. Students who experience difficulties in elementary school, when basic academic foundations are being laid, have great difficulty closing the gap between them and their classmates. As a result of NCLB, data-driven decision-making (DDDM) has become more prominent in response to the poor academic performance of weaker students. Narrowing the gaps in academic performance between students requires the collection and interpretation of data that can be used to improve student and teacher performance and outcomes, especially on test scores (Gullo, 2013). The data should be easily accessible and not difficult to understand. By having an understanding of the context in which it was collected, and the selection of high-quality, valid information will help schools and districts maintain or achieve student academic performance. Data should be used to inform, identify, or clarify, and then be used to take action (Farrell, 2015). This data can be used to make curriculum changes or in the reallocations of resources (Gullo, 2013). Teacher effectiveness, the improvement of the quality of programs, the narrowing of gaps in academic performance, and the ability to effectively communicate with educational stakeholders are all benefits that can be realized through data collection.

Data-driven decision-making (DDDM) is a strategy used to aid instruction and thus improve student achievement (Marsh & Farell, 2015). Administrators and teachers have access to various data points such as formative assessments, grades, district assessments, classwork, observations, summative assessments, and state standardized assessments when analyzed. For this information to be used successfully, all parties involved must have the ability to interpret the data generated. Understanding the purpose and usage of the available data and how to analyze said data is needed to improve instructional strategies (Brookhart, 2011; Gummer & Mandinach, 2015). Data literacy is needed to make sense of the information that is obtained.

Data literacy is defined as "the ability to transform information into actionable instructional knowledge and practices by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting all types of data (assessment, school, climate, behavioral, snapshot, longitudinal, moment-to-moment, and so on) to help determine instructional steps" (Gummer & Mandinach, 2015, p. #2). These formal or informal assessments are used by educators to inform instructional practices (Jimerson & Wayman, 2015). Teachers are required to administer benchmark assessments to students to determine student progress toward goal attainment. This data is then analyzed, and the academic strengths and weaknesses are identified. Students who have not acquired the necessary skills at that point are given interventions or services to help them acquire the needed skills.

For teachers to effectively gather, analyze, and implement relevant practices, they must know how to utilize the information presented. Opportunities for professional development should be provided to assist teachers in the process to build data literacy and instructional knowledge (Marsh & Ferrell, 2015). According to Means, Chen, DeBarger, and Padilla (2011), it is thought that in some cases teachers are capable of gathering data but have a limited understanding of test validity, score reliability, and measurement error. This information along

with content and instructional knowledge, play an essential role in identifying problems and matching them with instructional responses that are accurate.

When using data to drive decision-making, teachers should have structured times to collaborate. In a study of Australian math teachers (White & Anderson, 2011), teacher instruction and student achievement improved when teachers had the opportunity to discuss data and strategize about pedagogy. These professional learning opportunities were arranged with the intention to maximize building the capacity of the teachers to use data.

Teachers need the tools, data, and ability to interpret the information given, to analyze the information acquired when collaborating about data. Protocols for analyzing, reflecting on, and assisting in the process of data use are recommended (Christman et al., 2009). These tools assist teachers in identifying trends in the data, reflecting on the results, and developing improvement action plans (Datnow, Park, & Kennedy-Lewis, 2013).

Summary

An analysis of the literature indicates a wealth of research on student achievement, teacher and school accountability, and self-efficacy. This chapter describes key components, theories, and relevant research that are used to provide a foundation for the study on the experiences of rural general education teachers of bubble students. The literature review includes a discussion of the theoretical framework used to guide the study, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and the self-determination theory. These theories provide an understanding of how attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs can impact experiences. There exists significant literature documenting the achievement gap, strategies to address student areas of weakness, the effects of living in a rural setting, and on how to make data-driven academic decisions. Creating effective schools may become more challenging if the specific needs of teachers are not considered.

Teachers need to feel more supported in their efforts to promote improved student performance and success. Increased accountability and an increased need for differentiated instruction to address diverse student learners have intensified scrutiny of the instructional ability of classroom teachers. A review of the current literature reveals an absence of information related to the lived experience of general education teachers of bubble students in a rural environment. This study seeks to fill the existing gap within the body of the research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of third- through fifth-grade rural general education teachers who teach bubble students who do not qualify for additional services such as special education. Bubble students are students projected to come close to reaching state-mandated achievement test cut scores (Springer, 2008). Studies about the achievement gap exist with strategies identified to address specific subgroups such as African Americans (Collopy, Bowman, & Taylor, 2012; Pershey, 2010; Vasquez, Young, & Williams, 2012). However, few qualitative studies describe the experiences of teachers who teach bubble students who did not fit a particular subgroup and are in danger of not passing state-mandated achievement tests. Phenomenological studies about the lived experiences of teachers of bubble students are necessary to hear the voice of those influenced by these experiences. The Williams School District, located in rural south-central Virginia, is the research setting.

Chapter Three includes information that relates to the selected research method and the procedures necessary to support the research. This chapter presents the research design and research questions. Chapter Three includes information about the population, research site, data collection, and analysis procedures. Also present are issues related to trustworthiness, confidentiality, ethics, and the role of the researcher in the chapter.

Design

To gain an in-depth understanding of the perspective of rural general education teachers in south-central Virginia, I chose to use a qualitative method of inquiry. The researcher is the key instrument in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). This method of inquiry attempts to

describe people in their natural settings and derive meaning from their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher answers questions through direct communication and interaction with the participant through data collection. The process of data collections entails considering all factors. The use of complex reasoning provides an accurate account of what is studied.

Phenomenology is a qualitative approach to research that describes the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013). The voices and perspectives of the participants seek understanding who experience a phenomenon during this phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). Once data is collected, a description of the experience and how the individuals experienced it is developed (Moustakas, 1994). Choosing phenomenology for this study allows for the development of a description of the essence of the lived experiences of ten rural general education teachers in south-central Virginia. The focus is to determine what the participants experience during the teaching of bubble students and how they perceive the experience.

Hermeneutical phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology are two approaches to phenomenology research (Creswell, 2013). Transcendental phenomenology focuses on the descriptions of the experiences provided by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Any prejudgments, in order to conduct a study free of preconceived beliefs from any prior experiences, will be set aside, which is characteristic of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Suspending or bracketing viewpoints is the epoche as defined by Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician (Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutical phenomenology directs research towards interpreting the texts of life and the lived experience (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1990). An interpretive process to reflect on the lived experience of those studied is more the focus of hermeneutical phenomenology as opposed to using description alone (van Manen,

1990). I used a transcendental phenomenology approach, which required me to bracket my viewpoints about teaching bubble students while suspending previous experiences toward the phenomenon to conduct a study free of preconceived beliefs from any prior experiences.

The theoretical framework of this study contains the main theories prevalent throughout the research, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and the self-determination theory. The theories provide an understanding of how attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs can impact experiences (Bandura, 1977). The theoretical framework embodies the ontological and epistemological character of this study and solidifies the methodological phase of inquiry.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do third- through fifth-grade general education teachers describe their experiences with teaching bubble students?

RQ2: How do participants describe their feelings of efficacy and perceive professional aptitude after teaching bubble students?

RQ3: How does the presence of bubble students in a classroom impact the teaching practices of participants?

RQ4: What are the classroom challenges described by participants after teaching bubble students?

Setting

The Williams School District is located in rural south-central Virginia and is the setting for the study. The school district contains a large percentage of low-income families that have high levels of unemployment. In 2014, the Williams School District had a 6.3% unemployment rate (Virginia Community Profile, 2016). The Williams School District has 54.10% of its students on free or reduced lunch (SNP October 2014 Eligibility Report, 2016). Free and

reduced lunch eligibility is based on income and poverty guidelines. The total enrollment for the 2014-2015 school year was about 9,230 in the Williams School District (VDOE, 2015). The Williams School District employs approximately 470 teachers in Grades 3 through 12 with a 15:2 student-teacher ratio (Public Schools K12, 2016). Although the average state high school dropout rate is 6.1%, the Williams School District has a current dropout rate of 8.7% (VDOE, 2015). The school district did not meet the Federal Annual Measurable Objectives for the 2014-2015 school year (VDOE, 2015). Bubble student qualifications and rates are determined by classwork and standardized assessment scores and are available to individual teachers and may be reported by these teachers.

Participants

The purpose of phenomenological research is the discovery of the human experience by describing the voice of its participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013). The 10 participants of this study were selected based upon their being a general education teacher of reading or mathematics in the Standards of Learning tested Grades of 3, 4, and 5. A list of possible participants was assembled from the directories of the school division. From those lists, 10 candidates were chosen to participate from the division in the study (Creswell, 2013). The determination of eligibility for this study required all participants to have five or more years of instructional experience in the field of education. Participants were selected through purposeful and convenience sampling. Criterion sampling was used (Creswell, 2013).

Participants in the study were asked to participate if they met inclusive criteria (Creswell, 2013). The qualifying criteria for this study were:

1. General education teachers with five or more years of experience instructing third- through fifth-grade students

2. Participants must teach reading or mathematics.

3. Participants must indicate that they have taught or are currently teaching bubble students and be able to confirm this with classwork and mid-year and end-of-year standardized testing data.

Procedures

The study incorporated a blog, semi-structured, open-ended interviews, and reflective journals as forms of data collection (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Systematic data analysis procedures were used to establish guidelines for assembling the textual and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2013). In phenomenology, the primary instrument of data collection and data analysis is the researcher, so the potential for research bias exists (Creswell, 2013). The researcher is forthright in describing her own experiences, beliefs, and relationship to the shared phenomenon. The researcher also believes that providing a personal biography is essential to the integrity of the study, establishing dependability and confirmability of the research data (Creswell, 2013).

Pursuing and obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that the risk to subjects will be minimal and in compliance with all ethical principles. The superintendent of the school division granted permission to conduct the study. I contacted the principals of the elementary schools in the district and described the research design. I assigned participants pseudonyms with no surnames, to ensure confidentiality (Moustakas, 1994), and sent a digital mailing to all eligible participants as an invitation to participate. The mailing also provided the details of the study stipulated by the IRB (Yin, 2012). Participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and subjects had the right to remove themselves from the research at any

time. Selection of participants was through purposeful and convenience sampling. Criterion sampling was also used (Creswell, 2013).

I sent out 25 recruitment emails to elementary teachers requesting potential volunteers who might be eligible and interested in participating in the study. I asked potential participants to contact me by email or phone to identify their eligibility or interest in participating in the study. Respondents were asked to participate if they met inclusive criteria (Creswell, 2013). The qualifying criteria for this study were:

1. General education teachers with five or more years of experience instructing third- through fifth-grade students.
2. Participants must teach reading or mathematics.
3. Participants must indicate that they have taught or are currently teaching bubble students and be able to confirm this with classwork and mid-year and end-of-year standardized testing data.

The Researcher's Role

The role of a researcher in this transcendental phenomenological study was to function as a human instrument. While quantitative methods of inquiry seek to identify variables and measure relationships, qualitative phenomenology aims to describe a shared experience (Moustakas, 1994). I immersed myself in the experiences of the participants through interviews and careful, accurate examination of the interview transcripts. According to Moustakas (1994), "Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses" (p. 58). My current employment is as an elementary school principal in a south-central school district in Virginia. I am the instructional leader in a school with approximately 250 students, 25 general education teachers, and 3 special education teachers. I was also a special education

teacher for 23 years. During that time, I taught students with various disabilities who took the end-of-year state-mandated assessments, and who were in a specific subgroup. I felt the pressure for them to pass.

Currently, I see and hear the concern expressed by teachers and other administrators about what they can do to get their bubble students to pass the end-of-year assessments. As my career has progressed, I have come to question some of the academic practices and requirements that appear to increase yearly. The pressure put on all involved for students to demonstrate proficiency in end-of-year or end-of-course state-mandated assessments causes much stress. Since acquiring my new position as principal, I see teachers who seem to have embraced various teaching strategies, but who are concerned weekly about those students who may not pass the assessments. The focus on year-end standardized testing appears to have taken on a life of its own. I have witnessed the unintentional and negative consequences on students at the attempts of programs, or strategies tried, and decisions made whether to increase the duration, frequency, or intensity of the program or strategy, to get the students to demonstrate mastery. The pressure placed on students to perform has caused some to lose interest and others to rebel. Evidence of this behavior is through poor grades and office referrals for misbehavior. All of these factors have caused me to want to give voice to those teachers who are working day in and day out, trying to help bubble students acquire the skills necessary to pass.

Due to my past teaching experience, it was essential for me to bracket myself out of the study so my research would remain unbiased. According to Moustakas (1994), the setting aside of preconceived ideas along with prejudgments and biases is a process called epoche. During this process, one's beliefs are identified and admitted and then looked at again as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche was done through journaling and reflective writing, to let the

voices of the participants be heard, as opposed to my own. Also, as an administrator, I was aware that teachers in these settings might not be honest if interviewed by me out of fear of negative repercussions; therefore, I asked teachers with five or more years of experience who have acquired tenure to participate in the study.

Data Collection

I collected data to better understand and describe the experiences of rural general education teachers of bubble students through three methods, a blog, semi-structured open-ended interviews, and reflective journaling. When multiple sources of data are used to increase credibility and evidence, the validation strategy of triangulation is employed (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation was used in the study by the incorporation of a blog, semi-structured open-ended interviews, and reflective journaling as forms of data collection (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The study employed systematic data analysis procedures that established guidelines for assembling the textual and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2013). Online blogging allowed participants to express their true feelings and thoughts through writing and to gain insight into the initial impressions of the participants about their self-efficacy. Interviews allowed for face-to-face interaction and for an opportunity for participants to relate their experiences with the phenomenon through their responses to the questions asked. Reflective journaling by the participants allowed for the documentation of experiences and feelings during the natural context and framework of specific experiences.

Blogs

The first method of data collection used was blogs. Blogs are used in this study to better understand the teachers' perception of self-efficacy in teaching bubble students. Once the participation agreement was obtained, I provided access to a password protected blog that I

served as the administrator of through Word Press©. Participants made posts about their experiences.

The questions for the blogs involved information about the individual and how they felt when they first started teaching versus how the individual felt as they were answering the blog questions. If the participants indicated they believed that how they felt about teaching keeps them in the profession and that their beliefs impact their self-efficacy in teaching, then individuals will report how their self-efficacy can be improved. Participants were asked to write a narrative of 500 words or less in response to specific prompts collectively. The purpose of the blog was to gain insight and understanding into how the participants perceived their experience of teaching bubble students. The basis for using a blog was to provide an opportunity for participants to disclose their thoughts and feelings. Blog responses structured additional questions for the interviews. The data from the blogs were used to answer the research question: How do participants describe their feelings of efficacy and perceive professional aptitude after teaching bubble students?

Interviews

Interviews are the primary means of data collection in phenomenological qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of the interview is to discover the meaningful, personal perspective of participants. Phenomenological interviews should involve an informal process of interactions that are formulated around open-ended comments and questions (Moustakas, 1994). The exploration of the experiences of the participants with a desire to uncover meaningful structures can be accomplished with open-ended interview questions (Hatch, 2002). Established guidelines for data collection were followed. The author was the only person responsible for data collection. This study utilized an interview form as a conventional guideline to keep the

interview focused and on track and to ensure that each participant was asked the same set of questions.

This study utilized a semi-structured interview model as a data collection method (see Table 2 for interview questions). The interview describes the context of the participants' lived experiences, allows participants the opportunity to reveal specific details of their experiences, and encourages participants to reflect on the essence of their experiences. A pre-determined set of 25 questions was developed with the understanding that additional questions could emerge from the dialogue that could arise between the interviewer and the participant. The pre-determined questions gave insight into the participants' experiences and feelings of self-efficacy after teaching bubble students. The questions were developed based on information from the literature. After obtaining IRB approval, the questions were shared with three local content experts in the field of education. They provided feedback on the content validity of the questions. I also conducted a pilot interview with a non-participant educator to ensure clarity. Detailed notetaking during the pilot interview allowed for the identification of any confusing questions.

I contacted participants by email to schedule a time and public location to conduct the semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Videophone conferences (FaceTime or Skype) or phone interviews were scheduled if in-person interviews proved too difficult to schedule. The I informed the participants of the intent to give voice to their experiences teaching bubble students. I let the participants know the potential benefits their responses may yield. I also took notes during the interviews. At the conclusion of the interviews, the participants were thanked and told that they would receive a transcript of the interview. Member checks, peer review, and confirmability audits were conducted to provide accuracy for each participant. Participants were

provided with copies of their transcribed interview, by the researcher, to give them an opportunity to make sure the intent of their responses was transcribed accurately. Interviews were recorded using multiple audio digital voice recording devices. All participants' voice recordings were coded, and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. Table 1 lists the research questions and the corresponding interview questions.

Table 1

Research Questions and Alignment with Interview Questions

Question Number	Research Questions	Interview Questions	Blog Questions
Research Question 1	How do third through fifth-grade general education teachers describe their experiences with teaching bubble students?	1-4	1, 2
Research Question 2	How do participants describe their feelings of efficacy and perceive professional aptitude after teaching bubble students?	5-14	3-9
Research Question 3	How does the presence of bubble students, in a classroom, impact the teaching practices of participants?	15-17	
Research Question 4	What are the classroom challenges described by participants after teaching bubble students?	18-23	

Table 2

Codes Related to Themes

Themes	Codes	Participant quotes
Relationships	Nurturing	I try to be nurturing to these children.
	Balance	For me, I create a safe environment that I create and based on fun learning experiences for me.
	Close	They're failing and they may act out, so it's kind of a fine balance you have to find within that classroom.
	Encourager	I would say my relationship with my bubble students is a little bit closer than all my other students.
	Consistent	These are the ones that I push harder, the ones that I encourage more and um, the ones that usually I feel most proud of I think, at the end of the year
	Empathy	
Beliefs	Perseverance	Don't give up on them.
	Excited	I was just so excited and motivated to do well and to help these students.
	Pride	I know that, I still want to be a very good teacher, an encouraging teacher and I want to work hard and the presence of bubble students in my classroom, and those who struggle academically, just motivates me to work harder and try harder and be better.
	Support system needed	
	Meant to be a teacher	
	Hard work	
	Hope	You know, even though they may seem that way, hopefully, all children have a desire to learn. You just have to find.
	Capable	It's a challenge and when you see the lights go off and they master it, it's a wonderful feeling. And, sometimes it makes all that exhausting worth it.
	Flexible	It affects my relationship because I know they can do it. They just need that little bit more push than other students in the classroom.
		You have to adjust and you have to be very, very flexible.
Challenges	Gray area	Bubble students are students who, I like to sometimes call the gray area children.
	Lack of support	It requires extra work, extra time, but in the end it can be very rewarding when you see the success.
	Parental support	I would definitely desire more support from the parents of my bubble students.
	Disappointment	It's a lot more hard work and there are some disappointments along the way.
	Time	I just feel that there's not nearly enough time in our daily schedule to give them the support and assistance that they need.
	Need of assistance	It's hard to put in an intervention, in where you are only one person, and so, I would have someone else to help and assist.
	Slower	
	Discouraged	
	Frustration	

		They are just a little bit slower picking up the material than others. You get discouraged when you can't do it all. I mean it's definitely and it's frustrating to have to work with children that are like that but they're not all that way.
Expansion of personal knowledge	Needed professional development Relevance	I need more within myself. I need more help within myself to deal with those students in my opinion. Well, I'm always up for any training. That's never an issue I think the more you talk, the more conversations that you have with other teachers. I think that increases your ability to perform at a higher level and understanding so I think you would benefit from that. I feel like you can always benefit from learning new techniques and tricks but often I feel like that the training and stuff we have to go to are repetitive and not productive as to the things that we need. Yes, as long as the professional development is what we need. It needs to be relevant.

RQ1: How do general third- through fifth-grade general education teachers describe their experiences with teaching bubble students?

1. What is your current classroom placement and how many years have you been teaching? What is your highest level of degree? (Please do not state your job location)
2. Describe how you define bubble students.
3. Describe the relationship you have with bubble students in your role as teacher.
4. How do the characteristics of bubble students affect the relationship between you and these students or the other students in the classroom?

RQ2: How do participants describe their feelings of efficacy and perceive professional aptitude after teaching bubble students?

1. How did you become interested in teaching?

2. When you first became a teacher, how would you have described your thoughts, feelings, and experiences about teaching?
3. How have these thoughts, feelings, and experiences changed throughout the years?
4. Describe one of your most positive experiences as a teacher of bubble students.
5. Describe one of your most difficult experiences as a teacher of bubble students.
6. How did you feel about your professional aptitude after these experiences?
7. How, if at all, did these experiences alter your perception of bubble students?
8. Do you think you would benefit from additional training in addressing bubble students or students who struggle academically?
9. Do you feel that bubble students or students who struggle academically make your job more difficult? How or how not?
10. Explain your convictions about your future in education. Has the presence of bubble students or students who struggle academically changed those convictions?

RQ3: How does the presence of bubble students in a classroom impact the teaching practices of participants?

1. In your role as educator, what accommodations, or support systems have you put in place for your bubble students to help them be successful academically? How often are these accommodations or supports used?
2. Describe the relationship between the bubble students or students who struggle academically and other students in your classroom? Does that relationship add or detract from your classroom in attention, student performance, or discipline?

3. What kind of support do you receive from the caregiver/parent of your bubble students or students who struggle academically? Would you desire more parental support? How does this impact the classroom?

RQ4: What are the classroom challenges or rewards described by participants after teaching bubble students?

1. In your day-to-day experience with bubble students, how has your understanding of how to meet the needs of these students evolved?
2. Based upon past experiences, including the most positive and negative experiences, what advice would you give an individual who has bubble students in their classroom? What type of identification procedures should be used? What type of basic supports should be put into place immediately?
3. What would you do to improve interventions for your bubble students if you had the power and resources to make changes?
4. Do you have further comments you would like to add in relation to teaching bubble students?

The purpose of the research questions concerning the teaching of bubble students is to formulate a framework upon which to gather information. The interview questions are designed to allow teachers to relate their experiences and tell their stories.

Research Question 1 was developed to put the experience of teaching bubble students in the words of the general education teachers. The question gives others the opportunity to see and derive meaning from experience through the eyes of the teachers in their natural setting (Moustakas, 1994).

The first interview question under RQ1 is designed to start building the foundation of their experience. The responses to the questions will be the first stage in capturing their narrative.

The second interview question was designed to understand how the teacher identifies bubble students. The third and fourth interview questions were designed to pull out the personal feelings towards bubble students. Teachers' emotional feelings and responses toward these students may influence how the teachers teach and how they see themselves as teachers. The fourth question was designed to discover how the characteristics of bubble students impact their relationships with their peers and the teacher.

Research Question 2 was designed to understand better how the teachers felt about their ability to teach after teaching bubble students. Teacher effectiveness and positive student outcomes are linked to teacher self-efficacy, and teachers develop confidence as they become more proficient as evidenced by desired outcomes in designated competencies (Bandura, 1977; Gibbs & Powell, 2011). Due to teacher accountability requirements, teachers may experience feelings of stress and inadequacy when students experience difficulty in their classrooms. Interview questions one, two, and three give teachers an opportunity to reflect upon why they entered the profession and to relate how their perceptions have evolved through the years.

Interview questions four through seven give teachers the opportunity to voice experiences, whether positive or negative, and determine how effective their performance was. They also can judge if these experiences altered how they viewed bubble students.

Interview question allows the teacher to self-evaluate and determine if they are in need of professional development to best meet the needs of the bubble students in their classrooms. Interview question nine addresses the level of job difficulty viewed by teachers of bubble

students and allows them to elaborate on how this phenomenon is present. Interview question ten gives the teachers an opportunity to reflect on how they have been impacted personally and professionally by teaching bubble students.

Research Question 3 offers teachers an opportunity to relate successful strategies that may be helpful to other teachers of bubble students. It can be expected to find a wide range of learning needs, with a variety of skills, abilities, and interests as well as varying levels of proficiency levels in English in classrooms (Apthorp et al., 2012; Finch, 2012; Hedrick, 2012). However, the goal remains for every student to meet or exceed grade-level reading expectations. Differentiation is one means that may be used to assist students in meeting those expectations by tailoring instruction to the current level of the individual student's knowledge and skill (Honig et al., 2000). Interview question one offers teachers an opportunity to relate successful strategies that may be helpful to other teachers of bubble students. Interview question two gives voice to how the teachers see their students' ability to interact with their peers on a personal level. Teachers are also able to describe how bubble students are individuals that may require similar supports and may or may not impact the classroom in the same way, in regards to attention, performance, and discipline. Interview question three allows the teacher to discuss the level of parental/guardian support and the impact this has on the academic progress of the bubble students. Parents and guardians have a different perspective and a broader view of all the interventions that their child has encountered through their educational experience. The teachers can also elaborate on their views on the importance and relevance of parental support for academics. Students who have parents who will help them academically or hire tutors may also have access to educationally enriching opportunities and culturally enriching experiences. These experiences and assets influence the learning advantages of children (Corak, 2013).

Research Question 4 is a capstone question, which allows the teachers to relate actual rewards or challenges that they have experienced teaching bubble students while determining what can be learned from these experiences. Educational settings that create complex, challenging learning environments and opportunities are more apt to produce students capable and better prepared for the real world students (Roberson, 2014). By relating the classroom experiences of the participants, the knowledge learned from various strategies can be passed on to others, thus helping other students who may be struggling.

Interview question one gives a perspective from personal experience that may offer new teachers a more positive viewpoint as to how attitude impacts their insight of how to address of the needs of all students. Interview question two empowers the teacher to relate information that can be used by other teachers immediately to offer proactive measures to identify students who struggle academically and are considered bubble students, along with factors to be on guard against, when teaching these students. Interview question three provides feedback that could be used to influence policies and programs. Successful methods are sought to improve systems and supports for all students. First-hand accounts can be used as evidence of what does and does not work with students who may or may not demonstrate mastery of specific objectives tested on end-of-year standardized assessments. Finally, question four allows the teacher to give voice to any related aspect of their experience that has not been addressed. They have the freedom to express what they want with anonymity honestly.

Reflective Journal

The final phase of data collection was reflective journaling. The participants wrote in a provided journal, for 10 days, after their interview. Writing in a reflective journal makes individuals write sincerely about themselves in a collective manner (van Manen, 1990). The

journal was a place for the participants to record any thoughts, feelings, or experiences as they related to their daily contact with bubble students. The teachers had an opportunity to think about their experiences alone without feeling rushed, which has the potential to provide a more detailed picture of their daily interactions. This information was used to contribute to the my understanding of their experiences. Participants collected any documentation, such as lesson plans, they felt could support the study in any way. Participants wrote at least a five-sentence paragraph. I collected and thoroughly reviewed the journals and coded for the various ideas. Themes were determined within each journal and shared themes across all participants were identified.

Data Analysis

The phenomenon to be described in the research study was the experience of rural general education teachers with teaching bubble students as explored by conducting a transcendental phenomenological process. The transcendental phenomenological method generated rich data about their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Participants consisted of 10 general education teachers of reading or math in Grades 3 through 5. Recognizing the importance of confidentiality, the author assigned a pseudonym to each participant throughout the data analysis process. The author bracketed her experiences and feelings as a past special education teacher and as a principal who is continuously addressing student achievement concerns. Bracketing is what Creswell (2013) referred to as separating a qualitative researcher's feelings and experiences so that those experiences do not influence the study.

Data analysis included reading, coding, journaling, horizonalization, and imaginative variation. Atlas.ti was used for data analysis. A component of phenomenological research is the epoche or bracketing process (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) considers the epoche an

essential first step, while bracketing continues throughout the study by expanding the process. Due to the researcher's experience in education, the epoche stage was conducted with great deliberation. Information was analyzed, and personal experiences were rejected. Journaling was incorporated to identify personal beliefs and convictions about the teaching of bubble students, and this process continued throughout the study. A systematic technique was adhered to analyze the data.

After completion of data collection, the data was read through as a whole to get an understanding of the data before looking for key ideas or phrases (Creswell, 2013). The material was reread for a minimum of five times. Keywords and phrases were highlighted pink. Memos, or notes, were made of key ideas or phrases that helped the researcher begin to develop or identify themes. Significant statements were coded by assigning information to different categories. The process of horizonalization was used to determine commonalities or differences in the data to eliminate overlapping statements. This process also highlighted significant comments, phrases, or words expressed by participants (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). After preliminary grouping, through the process of horizonalization, the information was reviewed and any repetitive statements removed. The statements that remained were reread to identify any common phrases. Similar codes were grouped to further disaggregate the data into emerging themes that was recorded. This process was referred to as imaginative variation by Moustakas (1994) and required the researcher to vary the frames of reference and perspectives to derive themes. Transcript rereading was necessary during this process. Textural and structural descriptions of emerging themes were identified. Textural descriptions refer to what the participants experience and include verbatim examples (Creswell, 2013). Structural descriptions refer to how the setting influenced the phenomenon experienced by the participants (Moustakas,

1994). Triangulation was obtained through the cross-checking of information and conclusions through the use of multiple procedures of sources and identifying themes and ideas that were shared in those sources (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation methods were used to ensure the integrity of the information and to reduce the amount of researcher bias. The information was synthesized and the essence of the phenomenon extracted. Data were analyzed for each method after all participants had completed each task.

Blog Analysis

Each participant completed a blog where they were asked to write a narrative in response to a set of nine questions. Once all participants had completed the blogs, the researcher printed all of the raw data. The researcher then read through all of the responses in their entirety, for a minimum of five times. Pink highlighting of keywords and phrases was used. Memos were made of key ideas or phrases that helped the researcher develop or identify themes. Through the process of horizonalization, the information was reviewed and any repetitive statements removed or significant statements, phrases, or words expressed by participants highlighted (Creswell, 2013, Moustakas, 1994). Meaningful statements were coded by assigning information to different categories. The process of coding involves disaggregating the data into smaller categories of information (Creswell, 2013). The researcher created a code list for the blog. After looking at the coded data in the blog post, the researcher highlighted the text that represented the same ideas among participants that were considered positive in their perceptions of their self-efficacy, using the color yellow for each statement. Finally, the researcher highlighted the text that represented the same ideas among the participants that were considered negative in their perceptions of their self-efficacy, using the color blue for each statement. Textural and structural descriptions of emerging themes were identified. Textural descriptions refer to what the

participants experience and include verbatim examples (Creswell, 2013). Structural descriptions refer to how the setting influenced the phenomenon experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Themes are developed whenever several codes are placed together to form a common idea (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2009). Themes are short, abstract statements that ultimately pull together recurring ideas (Saldaña, 2009). After completion of the codes from the interviews, the researcher combined the open codes for the blog and interview together and conducted two-tiered coding.

Interview Analysis

Upon completion of all the interviews, transcription and printing of tape recordings, which included notes of facts and running thoughts throughout the interviews was completed by the researcher. Keywords or phrases were highlighted in pink. Through the process of horizonalization, the information was reviewed and any repetitive statements removed or significant statements, phrases, or words expressed by participants highlighted (Creswell, 2013, Moustakas, 1994). Significant statements were coded by assigning information to different categories. Once coding had taken place, textural and structural descriptions of emerging themes were identified. Textural descriptions refer to what the participants experience and include verbatim examples (Creswell, 2013). Structural descriptions refer to how the setting influenced the phenomenon experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher conducted two-tiered coding by combining the open codes from the blogs and interviews. Textural and structural descriptions of emerging themes were identified, after the two-tiered coding. Textural descriptions refer to what the participants experience and include verbatim examples (Creswell, 2013). Structural descriptions refer to how the setting influenced the phenomenon experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher developed a textual description of what

the participants experience and a structural description of how they have experienced the phenomenon, from the themes identified.

Reflective Journal

Each journal was transcribed professionally or by the researcher. The researcher then read through all of the responses in their entirety, for a minimum of five times. Keywords and phrases were highlighted pink. Memos of key ideas or phrases that helped the researcher begin to develop or identify themes were made. Through the process of horizonalization, any repetitive statements were removed any significant statements, phrases, or words expressed by participants highlighted (Creswell, 2013, Moustakas, 1994). Significant statements were coded by assigning information to different categories. The process of coding involves aggregating the data into smaller categories of information (Creswell, 2013). The researcher created a code list from the ideas that emerge from the journal entries. After completion of the codes from the journals, the researcher compared them with open codes from the blogs and interviews. Specific themes were noted from individual responses first and then between journals of multiple individuals. Once coding had taken place, textural and structural descriptions of emerging themes were identified. Textural descriptions refer to what the participants experience and include verbatim examples (Creswell, 2013). Structural descriptions refer to how the setting influenced the phenomenon experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). After completion of the codes from the journals, the researcher compared them with open codes from the blogs and interviews. The researcher developed a textual description of what the participants experienced and a structural description of how they have experienced the phenomenon, from the themes identified. Synthesis took place when the textural and structural descriptions were united to form a representation of the essence of the phenomena as a whole, a composite description

(Moustakas, 1994). The detailed explanation included all aspects of the themes, stating the essence of what general education teachers in rural south-central Virginia experience when teaching bubble students.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness entails the researcher honestly representing the reality of the situation and the persons studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Strategies for trustworthiness utilized in this study included triangulation, detailed (rich and thick) description, reflexivity, researcher's journal, confirmability audits, and peer review. Member checks or informant feedback were also utilized to uphold the external validity of the study (Moustakas, 1994). Research participants were allowed to review the transcriptions and the summary of the final results of the inquiry. Documentation used in the member checking process was stored and available upon request. The data for the validation strategy of triangulation to be compared for commonalities to establish credibility consisted of responses to the blog, responses to the interview questions, and responses to the reflective journals.

Interviews were transcribed by the researcher to maintain confidentiality. The transcriptions were used to gather and report the information given by the various participants. The recorded and transcribed interviews were kept on a jump drive, printed, and locked in a closet, and also kept on the hard drive of the computer of the researcher that is password protected.

Credibility

Accurately describing the reality or truth of the information received is credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By gathering rich information during data collection and analyzing the data received with integrity, credibility will be attained (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation is the

cross-checking of information and conclusions through the use of multiple procedures of sources and was the process used to establish credibility in this study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used multiple research methods to record data, to study the phenomenon. The research methods were blog results, interview results, and reflective journaling. Rich, thick descriptions provided opportunities for the reader to make decisions regarding transferability and to build a complex picture (Creswell 2013).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability shows that the findings from the study are consistent and could be repeated by another researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consistency was addressed through having the same types of questions asked during the blogs and interviews. Participants wrote their feelings and experiences related to the teaching of bubble students and pertinent to the research, in their journals. Member checks or informant feedback were also utilized to uphold the external validity of the study (Moustakas, 1994). Research participants were allowed to review the findings and interpretations, along with the transcriptions and the summary of the final results of the inquiry for accuracy. These member checks and data analyzation were completed. Participants had the option to amend the transcripts to document their correct perceptions. The themes discovered were also shared with the participants for each research question. The participants had the opportunity to indicate if they agreed with the findings presented. Documentation used in the member checking process was stored and available upon request.

Confirmability relates to the research being grounded in the literature and relates to conclusions that match the views of the respondents more than the views of the researcher. Performance of confirmability audits to ensure that the study's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the

researcher were conducted. Reflexivity involves self-awareness and critical self-reflection by the researcher of potential biases and predispositions, as these may affect the research process and conclusions. Reflexivity was obtained by recording the narratives of the participants in an attempt to connect their voice and story. Memoing was used during the interview process. Once the notes were written, the researcher reviewed them and separated what a fact is and what were thoughts of the researcher. Peer reviews were conducted and allowed for external checks of the research process (Creswell, 2013). An audit trail was maintained with a log of actions taken during the research investigation (Creswell, 2013).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the showing that the findings have applicability in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data saturation helped meet transferability, by the exploring of each aspect and each angle of the thorough and detailed data retrieved. A detailed description of emerging themes and patterns that are supported by the voices of the participants helped provide a basis for reader generalization and transferability (Creswell, 2013). Elaborate details were provided, along with direct quotations from the participants describing the phenomenon. Using details from the study, individuals were able to determine if there were shared characteristics and if it could be transferred to their situation.

Ethical Considerations

Each teacher was asked to read over and to sign an informed written consent form before participation in an interview or survey. Participation was entirely voluntary, and there was no risk of danger. The documentation and data were kept confidential. The information was kept either with the researcher at times (either in a file or on a thumb drive) or locked in a secured file cabinet. A password-protected individual blog site for each participant was created and was

accessible only to the participant and the researcher. The blog site information was retrieved, printed, and the content analyzed. The information on the computer was under strict password-only availability. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher to maintain confidentiality. The participants had the opportunity to listen to their interviews and were given the opportunity to withdraw comments or erase the interviews. The researcher used pseudonyms for the names of the participants and the school district to protect the identity of those involved.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of rural general education teachers' experiences with teaching bubble students who do not qualify for additional services such a special education. Bubble students were those students who were projected to come close to reaching state-mandated achievement test cut scores. The voices of the teachers of these students were lacking. The qualitative research method using a phenomenological approach is appropriate for this research. Interviewing participants was the primary method of data collection. Participants also responded to questions in a blog and kept a reflective journal. Phenomenological data analysis was conducted to describe the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Chapter Three provided the methods used in conducting this proposed transcendental phenomenological study. An overview was given of the study along with the design and research questions. The setting and participants were reviewed, and the procedures to be completed were included in Chapter Three. The role of the researcher was discussed, and data collection procedures were documented, with each procedure detailed. Chapter Three also included data analysis techniques, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations as part of the transcendental phenomenological study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe third- through fifth-grade rural general education teachers' experiences of teaching bubble students in south-central Virginia. This chapter presents the participants, demographics and introductions, the findings for the research study, and a summary. The focus is on the lived experiences of third- through fifth-grade rural general education teachers as they taught bubble students, through the use of a phenomenological methodology. Interviews, blog responses, and reflective journals are the selected methods of data collection. The four guiding research questions provide a starting point for analyzing the data and providing evolving themes for the study.

The research questions explored during this study are:

RQ1: How do third- through fifth-grade general education teachers describe their experiences with teaching bubble students?

RQ2: How do participants describe their feelings of efficacy and perceive professional aptitude after teaching bubble students?

RQ3: How does the presence of bubble students in a classroom impact the teaching practices of participants?

RQ4: What are the classroom challenges described by participants after teaching bubble students?

The data is collected and analyzed according to the data analysis procedures defined in Chapter Three. Once the analysis was completed, I developed a composite description of the meaning and essence gathered from the participants' lived experiences teaching bubble students. The emergent themes of relationships, beliefs, challenges, and expansion of personal knowledge,

along with sub-themes are presented. I discuss the findings as they pertain to the themes and conclude with a chapter summary.

Participants

Participants were purposefully selected but volunteered after receiving emailed invitations to participate in the study. The 10 participants in this study ranged in experience from 5 years to 27 years. All of the participants were females. The participants were either a reading or mathematics teacher. Two participants had earned advanced degrees. All participants taught at Title I designated schools. Even though specific attributes are presented for each participant, a pseudonym is used for each participant in this study.

Penny

Penny is a white female teacher who teaches fifth-grade Language Arts, Science, and History. She has six years of teaching experience. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education, PreK-6. Penny has taught in four different schools in two different school systems. Penny is enthusiastic and appears unafraid to voice her opinion, during the interview. Penny expresses that she likes to see the difference in kids from where they start. She likes to build closer relationships with the struggling students and to see their personal and academic changes.

Marie

Marie is a black female teacher who teaches fourth-grade mathematics. Marie holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education, PreK-6. She has taught for seven years. During the interview, Marie reveals that she prefers teaching older elementary aged children. She realized this after teaching kindergarten and second-grade students. Marie indicates she feels it is essential to establish a one-on-one relationship with students and to get to know their strengths and weaknesses.

Beverly

Beverly is a white female teacher who teaches third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade reading as a Title I teacher. She holds a Master of Education degree. Beverly has taught for six years. She projects confidence in her teaching abilities during the interview. Beverly also reveals that she thought her job was important and that she felt she could make a difference.

Kaitlyn

Kaitlyn is a white female, fifth-grade teacher. She teaches mathematics. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education, PreK-6. Kaitlyn is very open and enthusiastic during the interview. She states that she is still a very excited teacher who tries to pull in resources and anything from outside her school to provide kids with opportunities they would not have otherwise.

Paulette

Paulette is a white female teacher. She teaches third- and fourth-grade reading as a Title I teacher. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education. Paulette is in her 18th year of teaching and has taught in two school divisions. Paulette appears confident and presents as being very matter of fact in her approach to responding to the questions asked. She states that she always tries to be very positive and encouraging and loving toward the children so that they feel like they want to do better.

Paulina

Paulina is a white female teacher. She is a fifth-grade mathematics teacher. She has taught second, third, and fourth grade. Paulina's highest degree held is a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education. She has taught for 27 years in the same school division. Paulina exudes patience and wisdom. She expresses that she tries to be nurturing to the children because she feels that

for some of them somewhere in their development, the students lacked something and they continue to lack something. She feels the students are always going to be playing catch up.

Cynthia

Cynthia is a white female teacher. She teaches fifth-grade reading and mathematics. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Education with teaching licensure certified in PreK-6. Cynthia has taught nine years. She began teaching later in life. Cynthia presents as being compassionate as well as passionate toward teaching. She states that half of the battle of teaching is building a rapport and letting students know someone cares and believes in them.

Olivia

Olivia is a white female teacher. She teaches third- and fourth-grade mathematics. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education. Olivia has taught for 14 years. Olivia appears nervous at the beginning of the interview but quickly seems to relax as the conversation progressed. Olivia states that teaching is a very challenging job, and one does not understand how challenging and exhausting it all is, but she could not imagine doing anything else.

Louise

Louise is a white female, self-contained fourth-grade teacher, who teaches reading and mathematics. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education. She has taught for seven years in two school divisions. Louise presents as being very confident and knowledgeable of the content discussed. Louise says that she tries to encourage the students and she tries to make sure that they know she is on their team.

Paula

Paula is a black female third-grade teacher. She teaches reading. Paula has taught for 25 years. Paula's highest degree held is an Educational Specialist. She appears excited to express

her opinions about the topic. Paula is especially passionate about teaching reading and literacy. She describes a positive moment as when there is a twinkle in the student's eyes when the light bulb comes on; then, to see the results on the benchmark assessments affirms what is evident, that you are an awesome teacher.

Themes

Upon conclusion of the data collection process, the general education teacher interviews, the journals, and the blog questions were transcribed and coded. I read through all of the data five times. Next, I highlighted words, statements, and phrases related to the participants' experiences of teaching bubble students. I developed those statements into groups and provided codes using the ATLAS.ti software. This process allowed themes to emerge, thus linking the ideas and concepts of the participants together (Moustakas, 1994). Four major themes emerged. These important themes regarding the teaching of bubble students included: (a) building relationships, (b) beliefs, (c) challenges, and (d) expansion of personal knowledge. All four themes were present with each of the participants. All participants indicated the need for building relationships with bubble students to facilitate the learning process. Their belief that they were doing what they were called to do and that their bubble students could succeed was evident in their responses. Many indicated the daily challenges faced in their classroom and the need for further training or the expansion of their knowledge. Regardless of the positive experiences or challenges faced, as the themes emerged, participants noted the benefits of teaching bubble students.

Theme One: Relationships

Each of the rural general education teacher participants expressed their ideas regarding building relationships with the bubble students in their classes. Based on their interviews, their

journal entries, and the blog questions, the participants all expressed the necessity of building relationships with bubble students in the general education classrooms, for the students to experience academic success.

General education teachers are held accountable for the educational proficiency of students through specific statues, especially in the subjects of reading and mathematics. Annual progress must be made toward these goals with consequences for those schools that do not meet set benchmarks (USDOE, 2016). In the locality in which the study took place, student performance is part of the evaluation process for all teachers. Cultivating a relationship with the bubble student, parents, and co-workers can help facilitate the learning process and hopefully increase the probability of meeting the annual benchmarks. Five of the general education participants, Kaitlyn, Paulette, Cynthia, Beverly, and Louise, cited instances where they felt that they had closer relationships with their bubble students than with the other students in their classrooms. Many expressed pride when the students succeeded and extreme disappointment when they did not.

Eight participants, Paulette, Beverly, Cynthia, Penny, Beverly, Kaitlyn, Paulina, and Paula, indicated positive relationships with bubble students in their classrooms were imperative to success, and the evidence gathered from the data supported this point. Positive relationships with parents and collaboration with co-workers were also indicated as factors that contributed to bubble student success. Participant #6, Paulina, indicated she

> Tries to be nurturing to these children because I feel that somewhere in their development, they have lacked something and they are always going to be playing catch up. I try to give them that nurturing, you know, a special time to let them know they are valued when they feel that they are not accomplishing what they need to be with others.

Participant #4, Kaitlyn, said,

> I would say my relationship with my bubble students is a little bit closer than with all my other students. These are the students who get pulled during resource and recess. So, I spend the majority of my time instructing them, whether one on one or small group. So these are my students that I have high expectations for. These are the ones that I push harder, the ones that I encourage more and um, the ones that usually I feel most, proud of I think, at the end of the year.

Participant #3, Beverly, described the relationship as, "My bubble students typically are the ones that if I can build a relationship with them and build their trust, um those are the ones that can move throughout the year."

Theme Two: Beliefs

Each of the third- through fifth-grade general education teacher participants expressed their beliefs regarding the teaching of bubble students. Based upon their interviews, reflective journals, and blog responses, the participants related positive experiences with the students that helped form their beliefs toward teaching bubble students. They expressed hope that their students would learn the needed material and show progress academically. According to Kaitlyn, "They are capable of meeting the expectations you set for them inside the classroom. It may take more work and more time, but they are very capable."

Secondly, 4 of the 10 general education teacher participants, Paulina, Kaitlyn, Beverly, and Paula, expressed a belief that they were called or meant to be a teacher. Paulina described her decision to become a teacher in the following manner,

> Since I was a little girl and I used to play teaching all of the time with dolls and I was always, you know at a young age, I had nieces and nephews and I was always taking care

> of them and working with them so that just led to right on to when I went to college to pursue teaching,

Beverly indicated,

> I had actually turned down a paid scholarship for teaching three years before I went into education. I was actually a nursing major and in my junior year realized that that wasn't my calling and that education was and switched over, so it was in a round-about way that I landed where I'm at.

Four of the ten participants, Paulette, Louise, Penny, and Paula, had relatives that were educators and expressed always having a love for children. They enjoyed working with students and would continue to dedicate their lives to educating students of all types. Six of the ten participants, Paulette, Cynthia, Beverly, Penny, Marie, and Paulina, believed their students were capable of learning no matter what the obstacles.

Theme Three: Challenges.

Challenges of working with bubble students when reading the interview transcripts, journals, and blog question responses were prominent. Many of the challenges were related to not having enough time to catch the bubble student up academically and cover the new material required. Paulina felt that teaching bubble students required extra work and extra time, but the end was rewarding when they were successful. According to Kaitlyn, "I do have to spend more time with them instructing them and making sure they understand but no because if I didn't have to work really hard, then my job wouldn't seem worth it?"

Marie, in her reflective journal, mentioned that her class had worked on a skill for three days one week. After the weekend, the bubble students appeared to have forgotten the skill. She and the tutors then worked with the bubble students one on one. She indicated she felt

discouraged. She also indicated, during her interview, it was difficult to put in an intervention in where you are only one person and she needed someone else to help and assist. Louise echoed the need for additional assistance in the classroom. It should be noted that 5 of the 10 participants, Paulina, Kaitlyn, Louise, Olivia, and Marie expressed a need for extra help in the classroom to help with small group instruction and the remediation of skills when teaching bubble students.

Legitimate challenges were evident in the findings. Six of the ten participants, Kaitlyn, Penny, Cynthia, Louise, Olivia, and Paula, expressed concern about the amount of time allotted to cover needed material, and three of the ten participants, Olivia, Beverly, and Penny, felt pressure because of the yearly benchmarks students, including bubble students are required to meet. I found that, in most instances, the teachers were frustrated with the limitations that were considered challenges, but it did not stop them from continuing to have hope and to try to help the students be successful academically. All of the participants indicated they would continue in the field of education. However, the challenges should be noted and the pressure that is felt by the participants to have their students meet benchmarks on the end-of-year state testing should be recognized.

Theme Four: Expansion of Personal Knowledge

Expansion of personal knowledge gives insight into the approaches used by the third- through fifth-grade general education teachers to increase their knowledge of how to teach the bubble students in their classrooms. Participants in the study have been required to attend professional development training yearly on various topics, most recently teaching students who live in poverty and on PBIS.

Professional development training is used to improve skills, effectiveness, professional knowledge, and competence of educators in a school system (EdGlossary, 2018). Paulina stated that she,

> Would benefit from additional training in addressing bubble students always because you're always, each child is different and each one requires a different strategy, so it's always a learning experience and that's what teaching is. You're learning with your kids and you need to always find better ways of teaching and so that to help them become better learners.

According to Paulette,

> You can always benefit from learning new techniques and tricks, but often I feel like that the training and stuff we have to go to are repetitive and not productive as to the things that we need. I feel like prior knowledge and working with our peers is the, you know, most beneficial for working with these students because you can find out what works for that child and what you need to do to get them there.

Finally, Beverly stated,

> Well, I'm always up for any training. That's never an issue. I think the more you talk, the more conversations that you have with other teachers, I think that increases your ability to perform at a high level and understanding. So, I think I would benefit from that.

All participants, except for Olivia, felt the need for further professional development or training. However, as indicated by Paulette, the training should be more relevant.

Results

I addressed four research questions in this study using 10 rural third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade general education teacher participant interviews, participant journals, and online blog, and my researcher journal.

Research Question One

How do third- through fifth-grade general education teachers describe their experiences with teaching bubble students? I answered RQ1 with data from the general education teacher participants, their journals, and the online blog questions. The participants were positive regarding their experiences with bubble students in their classrooms. The participants described experiences teaching bubble students that were meaningful. Each participant indicated there were challenges and a range of different emotions that occur when teaching bubble students. In their experiences, the participants emphasized the importance of forming relationships with their bubble students, the parents of the bubble students, and their co-workers.

Research Question Two

How do participants describe their feelings of efficacy and perceive professional aptitude after teaching bubble students? General education teacher participants stated that that the presence of bubble students required extra work but was rewarding. This rewarding experience was a result of the desire to see these students do well, especially academically. In each of the interviews, student performance was linked to the participants' sense of success or failure or failure.

The presence of bubble students reinforced the belief many participants had that they were meant to be teachers and they were the teacher these particular students needed. Participants spoke of feeling disappointed, sad, and of actually crying when their students were

unable to show mastery of schools on required tests. Participants also spoke of feeling effective, encouraged, and proud when skill mastery was displayed by bubble students. One participant, Marie, expressed that she needed more within herself or more help within her to deal with bubble students. All participants, even after experiencing a range of emotions, noted they would continue in education, especially as long as they felt they were continuing to be effective.

Research Question Three

How does the presence of bubble students, in a classroom, impact the teaching practices of participants? All participants relayed the need for a variety of strategies that were necessary to facilitate the learning process of bubble students. All participants mentioned small group instruction and assistance within the classroom. Collaborating with an additional teacher or paraprofessional helps identify the strength and weaknesses of bubble students. Title I services, when provided consistently by competent teachers, was viewed as a positive resource. The use of skill-specific centers was encouraged.

Secondly, the participants noted the value of different academic computer programs. These programs help reinforce skills taught in the classroom. They also are a medium that appeals to a generation of learners that have had access to technology since infancy, in some cases. Programs that are research-based are used to remediate and reinforce skills within the classroom. Participants, in some cases, can print reports indicating student strengths and weaknesses, thus enabling them to address areas of weakness more accurately.

Finally, the need to interpret data and to track student progress impacts teaching practices, as student data mostly drives instruction, was a point that emerged from the data. Student data is used to identify bubble students. One participant, Marie, indicated the need for teachers to know from one grade to the next the strengths and weaknesses of the students. This

information would be used to help the teacher know what is going on, according to the participant. All of the participants spoke of weekly testing that was used to determine remediation needs. They indicated that teachers need to use the testing data. The participants appeared comfortable with collecting and interpreting data and were accepting of this process.

Research Question Four

What are the classroom challenges described by participants after teaching bubble students? Challenges emerged from the data including time constraints and limitations, poor parental support, and limited resources were the major classroom challenges noted. Multiple participants indicated a need for more time needed to cover the expected objectives, during the school day. All participants spoke of small group instruction offered throughout the week. Time is needed to catch up the bubble students in their classrooms. The need for resources, especially human resources, was a challenge all participants expressed. Additional services such as Title I were helpful, but time restraints also limited those teachers.

Finally, poor parental support emerged from the data as a challenge expressed by all participants. Having parents demonstrate an interest in developing a partnership with the teacher of their child was critical to most participants. Reviewing and assisting with homework, drilling math facts, and signing important papers were all parental responsibilities that the participants have found to be lacking, thus presenting as a challenge in the educational process. Some participants relayed negative and in some cases hostile relationships with the parents of their students. In the case of the hostile parents, the teacher had been automatically blamed for any difficulties that were experienced in the classroom. All participants wished to have a more positive relationship with the parents of all of their students. Developing positive relationships were thought to be a beneficial and desired aspect of the participants' experiences with bubble

students. When all stakeholders were communicating, it was thought the benefits of teaching bubble students would surpass the challenges.

Summary

For this phenomenological study, 10 third- through fifth-grade rural reading or mathematics general education teacher participants who have taught bubble students provided information regarding their experiences. I provided descriptions of each participant, along with information from their journal writings, and blog postings in this chapter. Four themes emerged from the data analysis. Those four themes included: (a) relationships, (b) beliefs, (c) challenges, and (d) expansion of personal knowledge. I described each of the four themes in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived of experiences of rural third- through fifth-grade general education teachers who teach bubble students, students who do not qualify for additional services such as special education. In this chapter, I provide the conclusions drawn from the study in addition to possible contributions to the fields of research and education. I also include limitations and recommendations for future research in this chapter. Lastly, I present the findings as they relate to the research questions, the implications, and the recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The research study investigated the lived experience of 10 rural third- through fifth-grade general education teachers who teach bubble students. I followed the guidelines given by Moustakas (1994) for this phenomenological study. I collected data from the participant interviews, journals, blog responses, and my researcher's journal. I analyzed the data from the 10 female participants by identifying significant statements and themes. The following research questions guided this research study:

RQ1: How do third- through fifth-grade general education teachers describe their experiences with teaching bubble students?

RQ2: How do participants describe their feelings of efficacy and perceive professional aptitude after teaching bubble students?

RQ3: How does the presence of bubble students in a classroom impact the teaching practices of participants?

RQ4: What are the classroom challenges described by participants after teaching bubble students?

Four themes emerged from this process. I identified the following themes: (a) relationships, (b) beliefs, (c) challenges, and (d) expansion of personal knowledge. I explained these themes in the answers to the research questions.

Research Question One

How do rural, general education third- through fifth-grade teachers describe their experiences with teaching bubble students? The 10 participants described their experiences in their interviews, their journals, and their blog responses. Overall, all 10 participants shared that they enjoyed their interactions with bubble students. Most participants felt that teaching was their calling. They took the successes and failure of their students personally. Additionally, the 10 participants indicated they would stay in the profession as long as they felt they were continuing to be effective in the classroom.

Research Question Two

How do participants describe their feelings of efficacy and perceive professional aptitude after teaching bubble students? The teaching of these students allows the participants to be better teachers for all of their students. They have researched strategies and best practices to meet the educational needs of their bubble students better and have, as one participant expressed, developed a toolbox of strategies that allow them to think outside the box and thus help their students meet required benchmarks. The need to develop a positive relationship with their students as they worked closely with them has enhanced the learning experience of their bubble students and has proven to be a benefit of teaching these students.

Research Question Three

How does the presence of bubble students in a classroom impact the teaching practices of participants? General education teacher participants indicated the need to try a variety of strategies to help bubble students overcome academic areas of weakness. They recognized the benefit of additional resources such as Title I and of having an additional person in the classroom in the form of a teacher or paraprofessional. The importance of small group instruction was stressed and of having opportunities to collaborate with other teachers to share ideas and strategies.

Research Question Four

What are the classroom challenges described by participants after teaching bubble students? Rural, general education teacher participants recognized many challenges, such as time restraints and limitations, limited resources, and poor parental support. All of the participants expressed a feeling of not having enough time to complete the needed instruction or remediation to catch up the bubble student. Limited resources, especially human resources, were mentioned by all participants. Small group instruction was highly regarded as a method to improve bubble student outcomes. This instruction was viewed as trying to implement without assistance in the classroom. Having access to computer programs that were evidence-based and having the time to use these resources were challenging consistently. Finally, poor parental support was indicated as a challenge for all participants. Each participant indicated a wish for more parental support, more home/school communication, and for the development of more positive partnerships with parents.

Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of rural, third- through fifth-grade general education teachers who teach bubble

students (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon investigated was to understand the deep, rich value of elementary general education teachers' experiences with teaching bubble students. The theories guiding this study were Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy and the self-determination theory as each of these theories provide an understanding of how attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs can impact the experiences of rural elementary general education teachers. The following discussion will provide information regarding the empirical and theoretical findings. I include the four themes: (a) relationships, (b) beliefs, (c) challenges, and (d) expansion of personal knowledge derived from interviews, journals, and an online blog, in the discussion below.

Empirical Discussion and Findings

Relationships. Building relationships with students, according to Hattie (2012), is another factor in helping educators make connections and teach more effectively. The experiences of the general education teacher participants indicated the need for teachers to develop positive relationships with bubble students to facilitate the learning process of these students. When reviewing the findings of the data collected, participants expressed the importance of developing relationships with parents to aid skill acquisition. Poor parental support was an area of concern, and by building these positive working relationships, student success was a much more probable outcome. Bubble student relationships with peers were seen as a positive characteristic in most of the classrooms. Peers of bubble students often acted as peer tutors within the classroom in five of the classrooms of the participants. In four of the classrooms, it was thought that students that were not bubble students did not even recognize bubble students having academic difficulty. Building relationships with colleagues was a vital aspect noted by the participants. These relationships serve as the basis for learning new

strategies and resources that may be used for the common good of all students in the classroom. According to Bandura (1977), the basis of self-efficacy is learning through mechanisms including the interaction between individuals, the environment, and their behaviors.

The review of the literature in this study revealed that students, such as bubble students who are at risk for failing mandated testing, the classroom content, instructional quality, socioemotional climate of the classroom, and student-teacher relationships, are recommended to be examined as it is thought that classroom environments that are enriching and supportive allow bubble students to be engaged (Dotterer & Lowe, 2011). Seeing this common theme from the participants proved to be a practical implication.

Beliefs. In order to succeed, students must believe they can succeed and realize the benefits of success (Farrington et al., 2012). This belief also has to be shared by the teachers that teach these students. According to Bandura (1977), the way individuals view themselves and their belief in their abilities impact how effective they are with tasks, including teaching students with low academic achievement. The experiences of the rural general education teachers voiced their belief that they were making an academic difference in the lives of their students. This belief encouraged the teachers to continue to search for strategies that will help bubble students successfully master state-mandated standards and objectives. The participants were compelled to believe that they could close their gaps in the learning of the bubble students thus enhancing their learning and enable them to succeed on end of the year state testing. Compassion and understanding for bubble students is an essential component that is thought to aid in achieving academic success.

Challenges. The participants noted several challenges; however, none of the challenges were enough to make the participants stop trying to instruct the bubble students or change

professions. Dealing with the education challenges gave the participants a better understanding of how to work with students who have low achievement, such as bubble students, who do not qualify for special services such as special education. It should be noted the challenges did not subvert the positive outcomes of the rural general education teacher participant experiences. All of the participants indicated the need for more instructional time, more resources, and more parental support. The exclusion of support activities, such as library or even recess, has been used intermittently to offer remediation or extra instructional time, when needed, during the school day. Financial restrictions often limit the material resources the rural general education teacher can access. These restrictions also may limit the human resources available to the rural general education teacher. Having an additional teacher or paraprofessional to assist with small group instruction was viewed as a need in most situations by the participants. Bubble students may need more academic support in the classroom. Increased parental support and the development of a positive home-school relationship was also a desired state of the participants. However, the challenges presented did not change the convictions of the teachers about their futures in education. One participant responded in the online blog to be the best, which is why she continues to teach. The benefits of the teaching of bubble students outweigh the challenges according to the participant responses.

Expansion of personal knowledge. The expansion of personal knowledge gave insight into the approaches that rural general education teachers used to increase their knowledge of how to teach bubble students. Participants have been required to participate in professional development opportunities offered through the school system. Penny indicated she had attended offerings from the school system on differentiation and small groups. Professional development training offers teachers the opportunity to become more skilled in the teaching of various

subjects. These trainings can be productive, but the participants indicated the offerings given were not always what was needed in the classroom.

Additional ways to expand the personal knowledge of the individual were through individual research and practice and the collaboration with other educators. Most of the participants indicated they used various resources to research strategies to address the educational needs of their bubble students. One participant also indicated the need for peer collaboration as a professional development offering. She stated that learning strategies from fellow teachers and sharing information were always more helpful in the classroom than listening to a speaker.

Theoretical Discussion and Findings

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Bandura's self-efficacy is based on the premise that personal belief is one's capability to organize and execute a course of action that is required to attain designated types of performance. From the findings of this research, this premise was evident in the experiences of the rural general education teacher participants as they worked with bubble students. The participants' personal belief in their capability to further the learning of the bubble students in their class as evidenced by their continued efforts to help the students reach mandated benchmarks is noted. Participants frequently related researching new strategies to help the students learn. They demonstrated the ability to organize and execute a course of action to attain the goal of acceptable student performance.

According to Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, the basis for self-efficacy is the learning through various mechanisms such as the interaction between individuals, their behaviors, and the environment. The participants have learned through experiences with bubble students, professional development, and collaboration with colleagues how to best meet the needs of the

bubble students in their classes. The participants' desire to learn and apply strategies to transform their teaching practices allowed them to facilitate change in their classrooms and their mindsets. They believed they could make a difference in the lives of children, which influenced their approach to the task of teaching bubble students. The participants' strong self-efficacy allowed them to view the challenges in their classrooms as obstacles to be mastered (Bandura, 1977). Many participants discussed disappointment when students did not pass weekly tests, but they were able to recover and try a different strategy to help the students master the concepts in the future. An indicator of strong self-efficacy is this ability to bring about this desired outcome and is part of the participants' belief that they have the ability to help bubble students, regardless of environmental factors.

Self-determination theory. In self-determination theory, optional task motivation is achieved when the psychological needs of individuals are supported and the environment allows them to feel competent, autonomous, and relatable. The general education participants' motivation and personal character traits were the considerations given as their experiences were described in their teaching of bubble students.

The well-being, relatability, and performance of the rural general education participants are influenced by intrinsic autonomous motivation or controlled motivation that result from a sense of pressure for a particular action. Bubble student successful performance is the ultimate academic goal. As found in the data, autonomous and controlled motivation is displayed by all participants. The individual participants expressed a desire for their students to do well, which would indicate that they had done well. All participants, however, were aware that the end of the year SOL tests were to be taken and the bubble students were expected to meet required benchmarks. The work of all stakeholders in the classroom directly influences the outcomes of

the bubble students. Teacher burnout is related to feelings of autonomy and human motivation and must be recognized as a possible part of the lived experiences of the rural general education teachers of bubble students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

The theories guiding this study were evident in the results of the interviews, the blog responses, and the participant journals. Each theory as it related to self-efficacy, relationships, and the environment was demonstrated in the findings. General education participants agreed that bubble students can be successful in meeting the end of the year benchmark goals. They require additional supports, but they believe they can create a learning environment that promotes positive academic growth and interactions.

In reviewing the findings of this research, a relationship was evident between the theoretical and empirical literature in Chapter Two. This research provided empirical evidence to help close the gap in research regarding rural third- through fifth-grade teachers' experiences of teaching bubble students. Teaching bubble students was found to be a challenging, yet rewarding experience for the teachers. The benefits of the constant strategy review, self-reflection, personal knowledge expansion, and collaboration with colleagues have affected the learning of all students, especially bubble students. There was limited research describing the lived experiences of rural third- through fifth-grade teachers of bubble students. This study contributed to the field of research regarding rural third- through fifth-grade general education teachers and their experiences instructing bubble students. The data from this study contributes to the teaching of bubble students in regular education, third- through fifth-grade classrooms, in a rural area. Influencing pedagogical practices could be a direct result of the research conducted.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. The rural general education teacher participants and the bubble students are the persons whose attitudes, perceptions and beliefs are impacting their experiences. Teacher participant beliefs as they relate to the ability of students to learn regardless of environmental factors can be considered self-efficacy. This self-efficacy is a determining factor in how the rural general education teachers approach the goals and challenges present when teaching students who are projected to come close to achievement test cut scores, or bubble students. The attitudes of the teacher participants have a significant effect on the bubble students and the learning process of those students (Finch, 2012). Positive outcomes promote self-efficacy for all persons involved (Moen & Algood, 2009).

Self-determination theory. The rural third- through fifth-grade general education teachers were the participants whose psychological needs were to be supported through an environment that allows them to feel competent, autonomous, and relatable as they attempt to achieve optimal task motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2008). This sense of autonomy is highly correlated to job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). As found in the data, the participants have an integral part in achieving the optimal task of bubble student successful performance. Their environment required them to improve their teaching ability continually, thus increasing their feelings of competence as their students progressed. Although the participants had specific standards to teach, they had been given autonomy to choose various strategies and materials to teach the bubble students in their classrooms. All participants expressed a desire to stay in the field of education and would do so as long as they felt they were effective in their positions. The teacher participants have a direct role in the experiences of their bubble students. The work of all stakeholders in the rural general education classroom directly influences the outcomes of bubble students. Data should be reviewed by stakeholders and strategies identified to best

address indicated needs (Brookhart, 2011; Gummer & Mandinach, 2015). Self-determination and the intrinsic motivation of the participants to be successful in their instructing of bubble students is evident in the rural general education teachers' classrooms as they influence the bubble students.

Empirical Implications

From this study, the empirical implications were evident in the voices of the 10 participants. As stakeholders in educating students deemed to be bubble students, the participants ultimately bore the responsibility of ensuring the education of all the students in their class **(**Mausethagen, 2013). As rural general education teachers, the participants understood their responsibility and influence as teachers of bubble students **(**Hattie, 2012; Payne, 1998, 2009**).** Although challenges were noted, the participants described their experiences teaching bubble students as being positive with benefits applicable to all students.

Finally, the empirical implications of this study helped in closing the gap of describing experiences of rural third- through fifth-grade reading or mathematics teachers of bubble students. The majority of participants felt positive about their classroom experiences with bubble students. Nine of the participants felt the need for more relevant training, especially on the topic of the instruction of these types of students. Further implications indicate the need to train general education teachers in more intense strategies to address the educational needs of bubble students or more opportunities for teachers in the district to collaborate and share techniques to address their needs. Understanding the needs of bubble students and believing in the need for additional teacher and student support was described as an integral part of this study.

Practical Implications

Empirical and theoretical implication exist and are evident in this study, along with practical implications. The findings from this research can be useful to general education teachers who have bubble students in their classrooms. General education teachers need more assistance in the classroom. Each participant spoke of working with small groups. Small group instruction is difficult to accomplish and not as effective when the teacher is alone in the classroom with students of varied abilities and needs. General education teachers need opportunities to collaborate with other teachers and share strategies and techniques that have been found to be successful when teaching bubble students. This collaboration will bring about positive outcomes for bubble students as effective procedures, general practices, and instructional practices are provided to ensure success. Also, as noted by the participants, further relevant professional development regarding bubble students would be an implication to explore further.

Delimitations and Limitations

For this study, the participants were third- through fifth-grade reading or mathematics general education teachers in rural south-central Virginia. The rationale for choosing third- through fifth-grade reading or mathematics teachers was based on their direct contact with bubble students in their classrooms, which correlates with the gap in the literature. The purpose of this study was enhanced by this rationale to look specifically at the phenomenon of rural elementary general education third- through fifth-grade teachers and their experiences with teaching bubble students. I chose this district because I am familiar with the bubble student identification process and the services offered by the school district.

Limitation occurred in this research study. The research of the phenomenon can be affected by limitations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The first limitation of the study was using

10 participants. A larger population of participants may have enhanced the study; however, a significant amount of data was collected. Ten participants were indicated in the research plan. It is possible that a larger participant group may have changed some of the findings.

Second, the participants were all employed at schools that qualified for Title I services. Title I schools are identified based on student poverty. These identified schools are distributed federal funds that can be used to fund supplementary programs, materials and staff, and services that support students with the greatest academic need (VDOE, 2018). This parameter limited the group of schools that could be selected. This limitation also limited the diversity of the student populations and programs. However, the teacher participants were diverse.

Finally, all of the participants in the study were females. The experiences of the participants were voiced through their interviews, blog responses, and journals; however, I would have wished to have as much diversity as possible in the sampling process (Creswell, 2013). Having a male point of view would have added to the diversity. Males are often not found in elementary settings as teachers (Men Teach, 2018), and having them describe their experiences would have been beneficial. Male teachers as role models in elementary schools according to research are advantageous (Boe, 2013). Male teachers would be favorable in the school system selected, as 83% of its single parent families are headed by single women (City-Data, 2018). The varied years of experiences, professional backgrounds, and teacher preparation programs offered the need for diversity in the sampling.

Recommendations for Future Research

The 10 rural third- through fifth-grade reading or mathematics participant experiences teaching bubble students was the phenomenon explored in this research study. The study sought to provide a voice to the experience of the teachers through the review of the participant

experiences from the interviews, blog entries, and journal entries. I recommend further research, based on the findings of this research study. A larger population that contains males, a population that considers the relationships of the general education participants with their colleagues that they frequently collaborate with, and further research of teacher preparation for teaching bubble students are recommendations.

A larger population that included male teachers would be a natural expansion of this study. This study consisted of 10 female teachers from Title I schools, in a rural area. The school student populations were all similar. Expanding this study to include schools in a more urban area or with males only, or a mix of male and female, general education teachers would offer more diverse findings. Research that includes the experience of middle or high school general education teachers of bubble students could bring further insight into the phenomenon. A comparative case study would be one consideration for a study of this phenomenon.

Further research into the types of relationships that are formed between the collaborating general education teachers of bubble students would enhance this study. Determining if true collaboration is taking place or if one teacher is more dominant or the lead in the instructional process would add to the research. A case study approach that follows the experiences of general education teachers in this position would contribute to the phenomenon of general education teachers' experiences with teaching bubble students.

Finally, further research into the preservice preparation of general education teachers would be recommended. This research could also include better practices in professional development selections. Based on the data from the study, general education teachers acknowledge the need for more training to better meet the needs of the bubble students in their classrooms. As educational accountability becomes more pervasive, the field of education must

include more training programs for teaching bubble students as this population of students continues to increase.

Summary

This phenomenological study provided a voice to the experiences of rural third- through fifth-grade general education mathematics or reading teachers. After reviewing the literature, there was a gap found in the research regarding the lived experiences of rural third- through fifth-grade general education teachers and their work with bubble students.

The study findings contributed to closing the gap in the literature by expressing the experiences of the rural general education teachers of reading or mathematics to bubble students in their classrooms. The rural general education teacher participants recognized the importance of building positive relationships with the bubble students and all other stakeholders, including the parents, and any collaborating general education teachers. The beliefs of the participants that bubble students can be successful and that they possess the ability to help them be successful academically is another aspect of this study. One of the general education teachers expressed her experiences in this passage:

> These students typically need more patience, understanding, differentiation, and attention. They are often hungry to learn but don't know how to ask for help. They lack confidence and self-esteem. Half of the battle is building a rapport and letting them know someone cares and believes in them. I love this part of the job because kids need me the most. These kids need me the most and I need them.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 2, 2017

Wanda P. Carter
IRB Approval 2930.080217: A Phenomenological Examination of Teaching "Bubble Students" from the Perspective of Rural General Education Teachers in South Central Virginia

Dear Wanda P. Carter,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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Dear Wanda P. Carter,

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Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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APPENDIX B: Permission from School Division

School Division Address

July 28, 2017

Ms. Wanda Carter

Dear Ms. Carter:

This letter is written in response to a request you made for permission to conduct a research project in Pittsylvania County Schools as part of your doctoral program at Liberty University. The title of your research study is A Phenomenological Examination of Teaching "bubble students" from the Perspective of Rural General Education Teachers in South-central Virginia. Specifically, you are requesting approval to perform the following tasks:

1. Interview teachers;
2. Invite teachers to respond to questions posed on your blog;
3. Ask teachers to journal their thoughts and experiences while they work with selected students; and,
4. Provide participating teachers an opportunity to review their responses.

It is my understanding that students who meet the definition of "bubble student" in each class will not be identified and that student-specific data will not be used. Participating teachers will only respond that they have "bubble students"" in their classrooms and will not identify students by name. Also, teachers' and the School Division's names will not be disclosed.

Based on the information included in your letter to me and clarifications made in this response to you in this letter, I am approving your request. Your request conforms to School Board Policy JHDA Human Research. This policy states, "Research or student learning outcome assessments conducted in educational settings involving regular or special education instructional strategies, the effectiveness ofor the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods, or the use of educational tests, whether cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, or achievement, if the data from such tests are recorded in a manner so that

subjects cannot be identified, directly or indirectly, are exempt from the requirements of this policy." Because your study does not involve or identify students, a review by a human research committee and signed parent permission are not required.

I wish you the very best as you complete this research project. If you should have a question relating to the contents of this letter, please contact me.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Mark R. Jones
Division Superintendent

TELEPHONE NUMBERS: (434) 432-2761 • (434) 793-1624 (Danville) • (434) 656-6248 (Gretna) • FAX (434) 432-9560

APPENDIX C: Recruitment Letter

August 24, 2017

Dear Educator,

My name is Wanda P. Carter, Ed. S., and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study of teaching "bubble students" from the perspective of rural general education teachers in south-central Virginia. You were selected as a possible participant because you meet the criteria as an elementary teacher of students in third, fourth, or fifth-grade. You also may teach mathematics or reading. Finally, you have five or more years of teaching experience and have taught "bubble students". "Bubble students" are those students who are projected to come close to meeting state-mandated achievement test cut scores (Springer, 2008). "Bubble students" will have been identified through the presence of some or all of the following qualifiers: failing scores on previous end of year state assessments, poor performance on weekly PowerSchool Assessment and Analytics (PA) scores (69 or below), poor performance on Student Growth Assessments taken three times a year in PowerSchool Assessment and Analytics, not meeting assigned benchmarks on Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests in reading and math, not meeting the grade level benchmark for the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), and poor grades. The study is targeted to add to the literature on factors that contribute to student success. If you agree to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Respond to this e-mail with your intention to participate or to ask related questions
2. Participate in an audio-recorded, one-on-one interview about the topic
3. Participate in an online blog
4. Keep a reflective journal for ten days
5. Review my conclusions for accuracy as the study concludes

The study is completely voluntary. There are no associated costs attributed to participation, nor are there any penalties for not participating.

Please reply to this email or email me at wcarter4@liberty.edu if you agree to participate. Thank you.

APPENDIX D: Principal's Notification Letter

August 24, 2017

Dear Mr. Shields,

As a graduate student in the department of education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree. The title of my research study is: *A Phenomenological Examination of Teaching "Bubble Students" from the Perspective of Rural General Education Teachers in South-Central Virginia.* The purpose of my research is to gain a deeper understanding of the perspective of teachers of "bubble students".

I am writing to inform you that I will be conducting my research in Pittsylvania County. I will be contacting elementary teachers within the county to invite them to participate in my research study.

As part of the research, teachers will be asked to:

1. Be interviewed privately, which should take 30 minutes to an hour at an agreed upon time and place, and the interview will be audio-recorded.
2. Participate in an online blog responding to specific questions which may take 30 to 60 minutes.
3. Journal their thoughts and experiences describing their experiences teaching "bubble students" for ten days.
4. Once their interview is transcribed, they will be given the opportunity to review their interview and double check the interpretation of their words; they can make changes or comments to their written interview using a red ink pen.

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. The information provided will be confidential: The data will be linked to names through a coding system and I will use pseudonyms for the teachers and the school system.

If you desire more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Wanda Carter, Ed. S.

APPENDIX E: Statement of Consent

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

A Phenomenological Examination of Teaching "Bubble Students" from the Perspective of Rural General Education Teachers in South-central Virginia

Wanda P. Carter
Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of A Phenomenological Examination of Teaching "Bubble Students" from the Perspective of Rural General Education Teachers in South-central Virginia. You were selected as a possible participant because you are teaching in a school that has transformed its teaching practices from traditional instruction to the theory of Multiple Intelligences. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Wanda P. Carter, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study will be to describe the perceptions of teachers of elementary students who are considered to be "bubble students".

Procedures: As part of the research, I would ask you to

[redacted]e interviewed privately, which should take 30 minutes to an hour at an agreed upon time and place and be audio-recorded.

[redacted]articipate in an online blog by answering a series of questions, which should take 30 to 60 minutes.

[redacted]ver the course of ten days, journal your thoughts and experiences, describing your transformation process.

[redacted]nce your interview is transcribed, you will be given the opportunity to review your interview and double-check the interpretation of your words; you can make changes or comments to your written interview using a red ink pen.

It should be noted that each participant will be given a pseudonym, along with the name of the school division. No personal identifying information of any participant will be shared. **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:** The risks of being in the study are no more than you would encounter in everyday life. Participants should expect no direct benefits from their participation.

Compensation: Participants will not receive compensation for participating in the study.
Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Each participant will be given a pseudonym, along with the name of the school division. Research

records will be stored securely, and only the researcher or chair will have access to the records.
Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Pittsylvania County Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.
How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. The audio tape and reflective journal may be given to you if you so choose. The online blog will be deleted.
Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Wanda P. Carter. If you have questions, **you are encouraged** to contact me at wcarter4@liberty.edu or 434- You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Michelle Goodwin, at mbgoodwin@liberty.edu If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall Suite 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.
Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)
The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Signature Date

_____

Signature of Investigator Date

Please submit a signed copy of this Consent form to any of the following:

a. Email: [redacted]
b. Fax: 4
c. Mail:

APPENDIX F: Participant Reflective Journal Transcript Sample

Reflective Journal
Participant #2
Day 1
October 10, 2017
This is the first day back from a three-day weekend. The students are excited. I have to prepare them for a test on the meaning of multiplication. I begin reviewing the students on the distributive property. The classes are all worked on this skill three days last week. My "bubble students" most had forgotten the skill. I reviewed with a simple worksheet and a smart board lesson. I was able to work with the students one on one and so did the tutors. The students were also given a study guide to complete for homework. I was discouraged by I knew the best would be to continue to review and review.

Day 2
October 11, 2017
Today I began with thoughts of reviewing all the different ways to prepare the students. I did not have concerns about the test and the timed needed to take it. I began reviewing using the smartboard because after reviewing the worksheet on distributive property of multiplication, I knew the students needed extra attention on the skills and others on the test, such as arrays, groups, and writing a repeated addition sentence and a multiplication sentence correctly to related to the arrays and groups. The students were allowed to use their dry erase boards and use the smartboard to prepare for the test. Skip counting patterns and the properties taught last week were also reviewed. Reviewing the study guide seemed to help at the end. Some "bubble students" were pulled into small groups to review, others during computer lab were able to use the IXL math program to help with more practice with the skills on the test. The test began but was not completed.

Day 3
October 12, 2017
I reviewed how to use a T-chart for my students who were still struggling with multiplication. The students tested and looked to be more confident than on Tuesday. There some that needed to be tested in small groups. During math remediation, I was able to assign IXL Math lesson in the lab, on the computer in my classroom, and on the smartboard. I will continue to remediate the skills, especially multiplication throughout the year in their morning work, remediation, and homework. The students tested well. I am able to keep up with their progress through good docs and their upcoming nine week assessments. All "bubble students" passed with a "C" average or better. Some were able to score a 105/A. I will continue to work on their multiplication skills. This is what seemed to hurt them during testing and them not following directions.

Day 4
October 13, 2017
Today was only more evident that multiplication would need to be reviewed more often. Morning work, remediation, smartboard lessons, and IXL will be used to help close the gap. Along with weekly multiplication drills and strategies taught, along with incentives to help them

to be motivated to learn. Estimation with multiplication seems to be OK for the students. The recall and it seems the gap for "bubble students" has been closed for rounding, not multiplication.

Day 5
October 16, 2017
Multiplication 2-digit by 1 digit was modeled today. The students are still weak. Some will not study. I will continue teaching strategies and remediating multiplication. The IXL math site will also be stressed. The students will take their 9 Week assessment. I had planned next week. The "bubble students" along with others are encouraged over and over to use the strategies taught for multiplying.

Day 6
October 17, 2017
3-digit by 1-digit was introduced today and a workbook page from their math book was for assigned for homework. I modeled the first problem on their dry erase boards. The 9 week assessment is tomorrow. I did explain to the students the 2-digit by 2-digit has not been taught. I only learned yesterday (reminded) that the window for testing closes tomorrow. I did show the students with an example, one problem, but I was forced to continue to let them practice problems for 3-digit by 1-digit. I stressed again for them to use their multiplication strategies and that they should be OK. They will be informed so they will not be too shocked when they saw a 2-digit by 2-digit multiplication problem. I will simple pray that they will do their best.

Day 7
October 18, 2017
Today was the 9 week assessment. The students averaged 90%. 2-digit b 2-digit was not on the test. I read the pacing guide incorrectly. Multiples were on there and I had shown and discussed multiples, but I have not taught a lesson on multiples that was like the questions. 48% of the students answered incorrectly. Rounding seemed to be the problem that most students could not do correctly because of place value. There were 25% who struggled. I feel confident moving forward and I know during remediation and IXL practice math will continue to ensure the students will do well in the future. Multiplication is still a large part of remediation.

Day 8
October 19, 2017
Today was an opportunity to allow the "bubble students" to review. I had an hour to allow the students to take turns practicing their multiplication skills using IXL math and smartboard lessons. 8 students did not attend an event at school called "The Wacky Olympics". This gave me a chance to try different methods to solve for multiplication. I was able to work one-on-one and in small groups for an hour. The students practiced math in my classroom taking turns on the smartboard in groups and working on the two computers in the classroom. Tomorrow they will take a test on Chapter 5 on estimating and solving 3 and 2-digit by 1-digit multiplication. I gave a study guide that will allow them to practice in the classroom and at home.

Day 9

October 20, 2017
Today I reviewed the study guide for Chapter 5. The students began the test and will complete the paper/pencil test on Monday. The IA test does not offer what is needed to assess students for me. The day did begin with remediation. All the students worked on multiplication skills either on IXL, smartboard, worksheets, and one-on-one with me. I hope this will help with those "bubble students" who need a push before the test. I did use the smartboard to review different strategies to solve multiplication problems. I explained and asked for ways to solve if they did not know. My first student explained distributive property of multiplication, another T-charts, another student said an array and also counting on their figures. I added modeling. I hope the get it.

Day 10
October 24, 2017
Today the students continued and completed their Chapter 5 test on multiplying 3 and 2-digit by 1-digit numbers and also estimating 3 and 2-digit by 1-digit numbers. Most of the students did well. Many used the strategies taught to help solve the multiplication that they have yet to learn. For those students who failed and for those ""bubble students""" who passed with an average of C or below, the Title 1 Math teacher, SOL tutor, and myself sat with them one-on-one and reviewed the problems they missed. I am confident with practice with IXL math, remediation, and practicing at home the students should improve.

APPENDIX G: Participant Blog Response Transcript Sample

Blog Questions

1. Please tell me what subjects you teach, and how many years you have been teaching.
2. Think back to when you first started teaching. Did you feel as if you were making an impact on the students' lives? Why or why not?
3. How did you feel the first few weeks of teaching?
4. Do you think your that your self-efficacy, or how effective you feel that you are in the classroom, determines whether or not you remain in teaching? Why or Why not?
5. Why do you continue to teach?
6. What personality characteristics do you feel impact a teacher's level of self-efficacy about teaching? Think of a teacher who believes they make a difference in the students' lives. Describe their personality.
7. What do you think that teachers would say impacts their self-efficacy in teaching? Having a mentor? Seeing grades improve? Students listening to them? Students coming back to visit them? Various personality traits within the teacher? What makes someone's self-efficacy in teaching improve?
8. How does that affect your feelings of self-efficacy?

Participant #6

1. I teach fifth-grade math, science and US History. I have taught for 27 years in 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th.
2. When I look back, I felt like I was making an impact on the student's lives. This was well before SOL's and I made learning fun while teaching units that appealed to the students while still teaching the necessary skills.

3. I felt scared that I was in charge of these children's learning but excited for the challenge.
4. Yes, it does. When I feel I am not learning and helping others then I might need to retire or find a change.
5. I continue to teach because I love working with young people and hope I can make a positive difference in their lives.
6. An effective teacher is one who is caring, loving, knowledgeable but also willing to try new things. They are willing to change the way they teach to help the student.
7. Our changing society with the changing technology and the societal changes of each new generation. Having a mentor guide you helps one's self-efficacy. When I started the other second grade teachers really helped me and guided me. Seeing the children learn and become successful, especially "bubble students" impacted me. I also believe one's traits have an impact on self-efficacy. Knowing your material is one thing but getting it across to others takes a special gift.
8. The willingness to learn new things and to adapt so that you can meet the children's needs is our every changing world.
9. It has a great impact on me because I am driven to always do my best so that I can help others become successful.

APPENDIX H: Participant Interview Transcript Sample

Participant #9

November 20, 2017

1. What is your current placement and how many years have you been teaching please do not state your job location what is your highest degree held? I've been teaching for seven years. I teach fourth grade and I teach Virginia Studies, Language Arts, Math, and Science. I have a Bachelor's Degree.

2. Describe how you define on "bubble students". I would define the "bubble students" as a child that was right on the bubble passing so like in the sixties range, almost to seventy, um and any ethnicity.

3. Describe the relationship that you have with "bubble students" in your role as teacher. Um, I try to really give them encouragement. I try to make sure that they know I'm on their team. I'm there for them and I'm trying to help them build just their confidence level to help them be able to move forward.

4. How do the characteristics of "bubble students" affect the relationship between you and these students or the other students in the classroom? It affects my relationship because I know they can do it. They just need that little bit more push than other students in the classroom and sometimes the other students will see those "bubble students", getting the extra help and they kind of wonder why. We kind of had to have a conversation I mean you're Ok right now and when you need the help, you will get the help that you need.

5. How did you become interested in teaching? I've always wanted to teach. My aunt was an educator of course, my mother was an educator, um, and I've always played school and always like played with school books when she came home and it's just a passion that I have. I really enjoy watching the kids grow and learn from everything that we teach them.

6. When you first became a teacher, how would you have described your thoughts, feelings, and experiences about teaching? I felt like I was not prepared for what I was thrown into with my education. Um, I was like, where was this at, I didn't learn this at all in school. It was very overwhelming at first, but once you got your feet into it and you see what's going on, it was easy to adjust to it.

7. How have these thoughts, feelings, and experiences changed throughout the years? I would say, I'm more confident in what I'm doing and with my delivery of things. I've been able to fine tune the things that I'm doing and that I've done and I feel like I'm more effective now than I've been in teaching.

8. Describe one of your most positive experiences as a teacher of "bubble students". I've had one student that was severely ADD and his parents hadn't really like went down that route and found a diagnosis and he was a child that would score in the sixties, you know, be the "bubble student" and he had like a really hard time and he, you know, I implemented strategies for him. The parents were on board and they took him and they got his diagnosis and he was a student that with extra help and the extra push to get caught up, soared, passed phenomenally that year.

9. Describe one of your most difficult experiences as a teacher of "bubble students". Having a child that I know can do it and I've been working and pushing them all year and then it comes to time for delivery and they're just, they can't pull it out.

10. How did you feel about your professional aptitude after these experiences? Um, the positive one, it really made me feel good about myself because that was my first year of teaching. Um, so, I felt like, oh my gosh, I can do this and then when you have those students who don't pass like what did I do wrong? What can I do better? How can I fix this? How can I help more students?

11. How, if at all, did these experiences alter your perception of "bubble students"? Um, it made me realize that not all approaches with every child can be the same. You have to adjust and you have to be very, very flexible.

12. Do you think you would benefit from additional training in addressing "bubble students" or students who struggle academically? I think any further education or knowledge on anything that I'm doing or teaching is always beneficial and will always help.

13. Do you feel that "bubble students" or students who struggle academically make your job more difficult? How or how not? I don't think they make it more difficult. I think it just puts more work, kind of, on you to find a different delivery method for them, but I wouldn't say that it is more difficult.

14. Explain your convictions about your future in education. Has the presence of "bubble students" or students who struggle academically changed those convictions? You know, I want to continue to teach. I want to continue to push those students. I wouldn't say that anything has necessarily changed. I just want to push and try harder.

15. In your role as educator, what accommodations or support systems have your put in place for your "bubble students" to help them be successful? I like to use, um, of course we have aides that push in the room, so I like to use them on a one on one basis, on a very small group basis of three students maybe four, depending on kind of what we are doing. Um, and then, I will take students, I will work with them personally, sometimes one on one, sometimes in a small

group as well, um, even smaller than what we would do for a rotation. You know we'll do the rotation. The smaller group is about one maybe twice a week and the rotations are two to three times a week.

16. Describe the relationship between the "bubble students" or students who struggle academically and other students in your classroom? Does that relationship add or detract from your classroom in attention, student performance, or discipline? Um, I think those "bubble students" that see other students achieving and scoring well and accomplishing kind of what they want to accomplish. It pushes them. It drives them. They want to do better. Um, they want to work harder on what they're doing and I've notices a drive in them.

17. What kind of support do you receive from the caregiver/parent of your "bubble students" or students who struggle academically? Would you desire more parental support? How does this impact the classroom? I do have some "bubble student" parents that will want to help and you know, hey, can you send me some notes on how to do things or can you like, let me know what they're struggling in, I want to help them. Um, not every parent does that of course, um, it would be great, if they all did. Um, but you know, I try to work with those kid a lot more in the classroom. Um, and you know it would be great if more parents would be move involved.

18. In your day-to-day experience with "bubble students", how has your understanding of how to meet the needs of these students evolved? Um, I've really realized that you know of course, each child is different. We know that you know just because you teach this way to the group of twenty doesn't' mean you're going to teach it the same way, when you reteach it to a child. You have to be flexible in what you're doing and be willing to adapt and change with the child. I think that's something that takes time to realize, takes time to really hone in on that skill.

19. Based upon past experiences, including the most positive and negative experiences, what advice would you give an individual who has "bubble students" in his or her classroom? What type of identification procedures should be used? What type of basic supports should be put into place immediately? Um, I think the small group is something that especially a "bubble student" would really strive with like a really small group with three kids. Um they get more one on one attention than they would in a group of seven. Um, I think that can be implemented immediately. I have a particular student that I did that with in my classroom and immediately I've seen their results with that child and with their confidence level and which is how they improve. The advice that I would give another educator would be, you know, really get to know that child. You know their strengths, their weaknesses, even academically and at home becomes sometimes that really affects them and what they do and how they perform and respond to you. So, I feel like you kind of have to take all of that into account before you can help. I would say a student that, where you see the potential, you see

what they're doing, they're working really hard, they're trying their best, but they just can't get over that seventy mark. They just can't quite get there.

20. What would you do to improve interventions for your "bubble students" if you had the power and resources to make changes? Um, I would have more time to be able to do like one on one. Um, I would have like another extra person in the room with me where I would make a group even smaller or get even extra support with that. Um, I would just like to have more support with that. Um, I would just like to have more support like more people in the classroom at one time to help.

21. As a teacher, do you feel that extra services such as Title 1 impact achievement? Yes.

22. As a teacher, do you feel extra services enrich instruction and are relevant? Which services have you found that are enriching and relevant? Um, yes. I think the Title 1 Program is a really enriching, I mean it really helps the struggling readers that can't decode well or that have that trouble being able to read. Um, it gives them the foundational skills that they may have missed somewhere along the way. And, um, at one time I had Title 1 Math that we had where kids would get pulled out and get some for extra services in math and that was amazing. It was so nice to have them know kind of go work on skills not necessarily the skill you were working on in the classroom, but something they missed along the way before they came to you.

23. Do you have further comments you would like to add in relation to teaching "bubble students"? No.