

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH
EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS ACCESS TO THE GENERAL
EDUCATION CURRICULUM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Hanna Leigh Kiser

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Given the need for research that emphasizes age and grade-appropriate content in authentic settings, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. The research addressed the essential research question: What are teachers' experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum? Bandura's social cognitive theory, concept of self-efficacy, and the associated achievement goal theory and guided the study and provided context for findings. All participants were teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, who have been selected through purposeful, outlier, and criterion sampling methods. Data was collected through questionnaire, focus group interviews, and semi-structured interviews. Data was analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) processes of *epoche*, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. Four themes emerged from data analysis: positive perspectives of self-efficacy, relativity of defined success, creation of student success experiences, and embracement of pragmatism. The results of this study will provide educational stakeholders with an increased understanding of the challenges of authentic implementation of instructional interventions with grade-appropriate content for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Keywords: emotional and behavioral disorders, efficacy, general education curriculum

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. Without the love, support, sacrifice, and encouragement of my family this endeavor would not have been possible.

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List of Abbreviations

Emotional and Behavioral (EBD)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In spite of the growing variety of evidence-based academic interventions and increasing emphasis on academic intervention in working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Garwood, 2018; Mulcahy, Krezmien, & Maccini, 2014), this population of students continues to experience poor school performance, severe academic deficits, and high rates of dropout (Gage, Adamson, MacSuga-Gage, & Lewis, 2017; Siperstein, Wiley, & Forness, 2011). Historically, interventions with students with emotional and behavioral disorders have emphasized social skills training, behavior management, and specific behavior interventions (Mulcahy et al., 2014), while neglecting students' often severely impaired academic abilities (Wanzek, AL Otaiba, & Petscher, 2014). More recently, there is a growing research base in remediating academic skill deficits as a means to reducing behavior (Kamp, 2013). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require challenging academic content standards for all students, including those with disabilities; however, most of the academic intervention research does not address age and grade appropriate standards (Kamp, 2013; Mulcahy et al., 2014). Specially designed instruction in grade-appropriate content curriculum is mandated by federal regulation and necessary for students with emotional and behavioral disorders to experience improved outcomes (Mulcahy et al., 2014).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. The chapter is organized in the following sections: background, situation to self, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and summary.

Background

Through the provision of historical, social, and theoretical contexts, this section presents a summary of literature regarding special education teachers' experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum.

Historical Context

While the field of special education devoted to educating students with emotional and behavioral disorders emerged in the 1950s, "teachers have always been challenged by the problem of disorderly and disturbing student behavior" (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018, p. 54). The field of special education devoted to students with emotional and behavioral disorders has historically emphasized behavior management through behavioral interventions, instruction in social skills, and behavioral competencies (Mulcahy et al., 2014). However, effective instruction is now generally accepted as the foundation of effective behavior management and special education (Hirsch, Lloyd, & Kennedy, 2014). Given the relatively recent shift in emphasizing instructional procedures over purely behavioral models (Alberto & Troutman, 2012), there is significantly less research targeting instructional interventions as compared to behavioral interventions (Garwood, 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2014). Furthermore, within the body of research that addresses instructional approaches and academic interventions for students with emotional and behavioral disorders, most research emphasizes basic and remedial academic content (Garwood, 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2014). The research extended the existing knowledge by emphasizing special education teachers' experiences in supporting general education content with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The teacher perspective provided

authentic accounts of intervention and the emphasis on grade-appropriate content expanded the current body of knowledge beyond basic and remedial skills.

Social Context

The likelihood of problems with social adjustment in adulthood is increased by the presence of academic failure and antisocial behaviors (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018), which are both characteristic of emotional and behavioral disorders (Mulcahy, Krezmien, & Travers, 2016). Children who exhibit problem behaviors at an early age very often grow into more serious behaviors as adults (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018). Society at large is negatively impacted by school failure, which is prevalent among students with emotional and behavioral disorders, as school failure is often a prerequisite of personal failure (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018). Additionally, incarceration and homelessness, significant societal concerns, are common outcomes for people with serious mental illness (Warner, 2010). By gaining an understanding of teachers' experiences of authentic intervention and grade-appropriate instruction for students with emotional and behavioral disorders, the field of special education can enhance the effectiveness of intervention, which will improve individual outcomes and subsequently decrease the negative societal impacts of school failure.

Theoretical Context

Special education teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders serve a population who frequently challenges teachers (Wagner Kutash, Duchnowski, & Epstein, 2006). Teachers working with this population of students face the pressure of high academic standards coupled with students with severe academic skill deficits (Gresham, 2015). Teachers working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders have expressed extreme feelings of pressure to achieve unrealistic growth expectations (Wanzek et al., 2014) amid inadequate and

stress inducing working conditions (Bettini, Cumming, Merrill, Brunsting, & Liaupsin, 2017). The lived-experience of this population of teachers is a valuable perspective that has the potential to inform practice. Given the high burnout rates for teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014) and the tendency for teachers who remain in the field and experience success to “go their own way” by deviating from standard curriculum and management strategies (Buttner, Pijl, Bijstra, & van den Bosch, 2015a), exploring the lived experience of the identified population of teachers has the potential to provide valuable insight. By applying Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1993), the concept of self-efficacy, and achievement goal theory to teachers’ lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum, new perspectives for informing teacher preparation and intervention in the field of educating students with emotional and behavioral disorders may be identified.

Situation to Self

Moustakas (1994) described the phenomenological researcher as being “intimately connected with the phenomenon” (p. 59). As a result of experiencing the difficulty of the task of delivering grade-appropriate content to students with emotional and behavioral disorders in a self-contained setting, I am personally driven and interested in describing the lived experiences of special education teachers as they provide students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum. In the classroom, as a special education teacher for students with emotional and behavioral disorders in a self-contained setting, I employed instructional methods that were effective at both minimizing behavioral disruptions and supporting individual student progress; however, my instructional practices often fell short of providing grade-appropriate instructional content. As a teacher coach, I have supported teachers

in self-contained EBD classes who often feel inadequate in light of the seemingly impossible task of managing extreme behaviors while also delivering rigorous general education content. As a special education administrator, I have witnessed the prevalence of below grade-level content that is utilized in classroom instruction as a means of decreasing student feelings of inadequacy that often lead to disruptive behaviors.

From an ontological philosophical perspective, this study attempted to extract multiple realities of the identified phenomenon in efforts to “describe the common meaning for several individuals” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.75). In describing the shared experience of special education teachers who provide students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum, the goal of this study was to develop an understanding of the nature and meaning of their shared experience (Van Manen, 1990).

From an epistemological philosophical perspective, I got “as close as possible to the participants being studied” (Cresswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21) to collect firsthand information for knowledge construction. Knowledge claims in this study were justified by participant quotes and direct observations from my time spent with participants in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Knowledge in the research came from the “subjective experiences of people” (Cresswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21).

From an axiological perspective, I admitted and made known the values and social positions that I bring to the research. I actively engaged in *epoche* so that I may “gaze upon” the shared experience of special education teachers as they provide students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum and describe their shared experience “naively and freshly through a purified consciousness” (Cresswell & Poth, 2018, p. 85).

A social constructivist paradigm guided the study, as I relied on the socially and historically negotiated subjective meanings, as expressed by special education teachers, as they describe their experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, both the notion of disability and special education are inseparable from their social and historical contexts; Kauffman and Landrum (2018) underscored the importance that practitioners and researchers in the field of special education recognize that they are “enmeshed in the context of current sociopolitical trends” (p. 75).

Problem Statement

The problem of the study is the little progress and poor post school outcomes experienced by students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Gage et al., 2017; Grisso, 2008; Kauffman & Landrum, 2018; Mulcahy, Krezmien, & Travers, 2016; Siperstein et al., 2011). Adding further complexity to the identified problem, the field of special education devoted to students with emotional and behavioral disorders employs minimal usage of evidence based practices (Losinski, Maag, Katsiyannis, & Ennis, 2014), has access to little research emphasizing general education curriculum (Garwood, 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2014), and has a general lack of research in authentic conditions (Losinski et al., 2014; Mulcahy et al., 2016). The current body of knowledge consistently finds that students with emotional and behavioral disorders make little academic progress and show poor post school outcomes (Gage et al., 2017; Grisso, 2008; Kauffman & Landrum, 2018; Mulcahy, Krezmien, & Travers, 2016; Siperstein et al., 2011). There continues to be disheartening rates of student progress in light of the field’s low usage of evidence-based practices (Losinski, Maag, Katsiyannis, & Ennis, 2014), little research emphasizing general education curriculum (Garwood, 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2014), and a general lack of research in authentic conditions (Losinski et al., 2014; Mulcahy et al.2016). These gaps

in the research for this area of education established the need for this study. Students with emotional and behavioral disorders, who comprise one-fifth of the population of juvenile detention centers (Grisso, 2008), have the highest risk for school failure, dropping out, and unemployment (Mulcahy et al., 2016). Students with emotional and behavioral disorders tend to experience success at a rate that makes grade-level proficiency a fleeting target (Wanzek et al., 2014). They generally fail to achieve academic success across time (Gage et al., 2017; Siperstein et al., 2011), and are known to frequently challenge teachers (Wagner et al., 2006). There is a national shortage of teachers to work with this population of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), wherein working conditions have been found to be inadequate and stress inducing (Bettini et al., 2017). In addition to a national teacher shortage in the field of education devoted to students with emotional and behavioral disorders, there is low utilization of evidence-based practices (Losinski et al., 2014) and a general lack of interventions that emphasize grade-appropriate academic content (Garwood, 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2014). There are conflicting findings regarding the effectiveness of separate class and separate school settings (Garwood, 2018), and a need for research that emphasizes age and grade-appropriate content in authentic settings (Garwood, 2018; Losinski et al., 2014; Mulcahy et al., 2014; Mulcahy et al., 2016). In the desperate efforts to improve the outcomes of this population of students, there is currently little research giving voice to the special education teachers' lived-experience of supporting grade level academic expectations among students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. At this stage in

the research students with emotional and behavioral disorders are defined as students with “an emotional disorder characterized by excesses, deficits or disturbances of behavior. The child's difficulty is emotionally based and cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, cultural, sensory general health factors, or other additional exclusionary factors” (Georgia State Department of Education, 2010, p. 8). In addition, at this stage in the research, general education curriculum was defined as what students should know and be able to do at each grade level while learning academic content (Georgia Department of Education, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The theory guiding this study is Bandura’s (1993) social cognitive theory. Bandura’s social cognitive theory relates to special education teachers serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders as special education teachers serving this highly challenging population of students (Brunsting et al., 2014) have the capacity to positively impact achievement, given the effective personal and environmental factors to do so. Given that expert teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders tend to “go their own way” (Buttner, Pijl, Bijstra, & van den Bosch, 2015a), Bandura’s (1993) concept of self-efficacy is relevant to understanding the authentic classroom experience of teachers who serve highly challenging students.

Significance of the Study

In discussing the reality of the implications of emotional and behavioral disorders, Kauffman and Landrum (2018) stated:

Too often, we forget to consider the lives of the parents and families as well as the lives of the teachers and students involved. We forget to consider what it’s like to have a disorder and what it’s like to have and be responsible for parenting or teaching a child or youth with a disorder. (p. 22)

The study provided significant empirical, theoretical, and practical contributions by examining emotional and behavioral disorders from the perspective of the special education teacher and in the context of grade-appropriate academic instruction.

Empirically, the study expanded the current research base and addressed a gap in the current literature in two specific ways. First, the study examined the teacher perspective of lived-experiences from daily classroom interactions with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. This provided knowledge rooted in authentic conditions, that was sparse in the current body of knowledge (Mulcahy et al., 2016). Secondly, the study emphasized age and grade-appropriate content, that was also minimally addressed in the current body of knowledge (Mulcahy et al., 2014).

Theoretically, this study expanded upon Bandura's (1993) social cognitive theory by applying the concept of self-efficacy specifically to the lived-experience of teachers who serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Given that a child with serious EBD "may be highly effective in frustrating and bringing out the worst in just about anyone" (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018, p. 146), this study provided an increased understanding of the contextual challenges (Losinski et al., 2014) and experiences of efficacy (Bandura, 1993) for special education teachers as they provide students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum.

Practically, exploring the lived experiences of teachers supporting grade-level academic expectations for students with EBD was important in order to gain an informed understanding of the instructional barriers that hinder academic progress for students with EBD (Garwood, 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2016). The study provided an increased understanding of the challenges of authentic implementation of instructional interventions with grade-appropriate content for

students with emotional and behavioral disorders through the thick descriptions of the lived-experience of special education teachers. With increased understanding of teachers' challenges and experience of academic intervention with grade-appropriate content, the field of special education specializing in emotional and behavioral disorders can increase the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions to improve student outcomes (Mulcahy et al., 2016).

Research Questions

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. Given Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory framing of the human experience as being defined by its proactive and self-regulating nature, the central research question for this research is directly aligned to social cognitive theory as it targets teachers' self-reflective lived experiences. The sub-questions are devised to both capture the self-efficacy construct of social cognitive theory and address gaps in the current literature from the field of special education that serves students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The following central question and sub-questions were the focus of the study.

Central Research Question

What are special teachers' experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum?

The central question establishes the phenomenological design of the study (Moustakas, 1994) and focuses the study to fill the current literature gap regarding interventions that address age and grade-appropriate content for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Mulcahy et al., 2014). The central question emphasizes teacher experiences in authentic

circumstances (Losinski et al., 2014) and seeks to capture the nature of the challenge teachers face (Mulcahy et al., 2014).

Sub-Questions

SQ1. How are special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy affected by the challenges of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum?

Research has found that teachers depend on their students for measures of personal success and overall satisfaction in their profession (Kraft et al., 2015). Given this finding, the first sub-question focuses on the fact that environmental factors, such as students with emotional and behavioral disorders that challenge and frustrate teachers (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018; Wagner et al., 2006), significantly affect teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Zee & Koomen, 2016), which in turn has direct implications for future teacher behavior (Bandura, 1993).

SQ2. How do special education teachers, serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders, describe changes in their pedagogical approach over time?

Empirical studies have found that teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders confidently deviate from standard curriculum and management strategies in their efforts to meet the needs of their students (Buttner et al., 2015a). Additionally, there is little research investigating why teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders have rarely utilized evidence-based practices (Walker, 2014). Sub-question two guides the study to better understand if there is a change that transpires in teachers who work with students with emotional and behavioral disorders or if the findings are inherent to the nature of the individual drawn to this field of work.

SQ3. What do special education teachers identify as challenges to providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum?

Sub-question three targets increased an understanding of high burnout rates among this population of teachers (Brunsting et al., 2014). In considering the experience of burnout for the identified population of teachers, characteristics of the population must be considered. Teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders are generally younger, have fewer years of teaching experience, and are less likely to be fully certified than general education teachers or other special education teachers (Gage et al., 2017). Additionally, these teachers work in stress inducing conditions (Bettini et al., 2017) and serve students who challenge teachers (Wagner et al., 2006).

SQ4. What do special education teachers identify as successful practices for providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum?

By requiring special education teachers to intentionally reflect on past success and identify effective practices, sub-question four emphasizes the core features of personal agency as delineated by Bandura (2001) to understand the agentic teacher-student transactions that take place in authentic classroom environments. Furthermore, this question has the potential to help understand potentially bidirectional-determining influences (Bandura, 2001) that impact student outcomes.

Definitions

1. *General education curriculum*- Students must have meaningful participation and interaction with the curriculum that results in the achievement of learning standards and graduation requirements; the curriculum must be delivered with an array of supports; and

barriers to access must be removed while still ensuring that the curriculum is challenging students (IDEA, 2004)

2. *Emotional and behavioral disorders*- A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance: (a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. (b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. (c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. (d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. (e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. (f) Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.8(c)(4).
3. *Grade-appropriate content*- The same curriculum as for non-disabled children (IDEA, 2004)

Summary

The research focus and background information framed the need for the study. A gap in the literature concerning special education teachers' experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum was identified. The study provided a unique and insightful perspective on grade-appropriate instruction for students with emotional and behavioral disorders from the perspective of special education teachers, that expanded upon Bandura's Theory of Social Cognition and Self Efficacy

and also had implications for improved outcomes for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review provides a theoretical understanding of the work of educating students with emotional and behavioral disorders as well as related literature regarding educational service delivery for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The available body of knowledge regarding emotional and behavioral disorders and the teachers that serve this challenging population of students is beneficial to researchers and practitioners; however, a distinct literature gap exists concerning the disconnect between the empirical research and classroom practice. The literature review reveals the concentration of quantitative perspectives pertaining to students with emotional and behavioral disorders; in establishing the need for qualitative inquiry in the field, Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al. (2016) suggested, “gaining insight into the unruly daily practice of special education seems to be an important aspect” (p. 82). In accordance with prior research findings, Vannest, Harrison, Temple-Harvey, Ramsey, and Parker (2011) concluded that the elimination of the current disconnect between the empirical research and classroom practice is the best opportunity to improve the outcomes of student with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory provided perspective for the inquiry. Bandura (1993) argued that efficacy beliefs “contribute significantly to the level and quality of human functioning” (p. 145). This review of the literature summarizes the current knowledge base regarding the nature of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, the characteristics and tendencies of teachers serving this student population, and the research base of effective interventions for the population. Additionally, by framing the literature review in the perspective of social cognitive theory, self-efficacy, and achievement goal theory, the need for perspective

from the teachers who serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders was illuminated as vital in the work to bridge the disconnect between the current available empirical research and classroom practice.

Theoretical Framework

Creswell and Poth (2018) defined theoretical orientation as providing “a general explanation as to what the researcher hopes to find in a study or a lens through which to view the needs of participants and communities in a study” (p. 18). Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory, that encompasses the constructs of self-efficacy, personal agency, reciprocal determinism, along with the closely related achievement goal theory will provide the theoretical framework to guide this qualitative research inquiry. By gaining perspective from multiple theoretical constructs within social cognitive theory, this research is situated within a greater theoretical context and positioned to make productive contributions to the field.

By gaining perspective from the general constructs of social cognitive theory as well as the more specific theories of self-efficacy, reciprocal determinism, and achievement goal theory, theory triangulation was utilized. Patton (2015) described theory triangulation as “examining the data through different theoretical lenses to see what theoretical framework (or combination) aligns most convincingly with the data (best fit)” (p. 673). Triangulation will aid me in understanding how differing perspectives affect interpretations, reducing bias and distortion, and ultimately increase the credibility of the study (Patton, 2015), by providing “alternative theoretical schemes” (Denzin, 1978, p. 102). Furthermore, the use of triangulation has been embraced as a means of overcoming the skepticism of single-perspective theories; Patton (1999) described the logic of triangulation in general and, for the purposes of this study, theory triangulation as he summarized:

The logic of triangulation is based on the premise that no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival explanations. Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of data collection and analysis provide more grist for the research mill. (p. 1192)

In support of theoretical triangulation, Mathison (1988) charged researchers to “make sense of what we find” (p. 17) and suggested that there was a convergence, inconsistency, or contradiction of the data from which it is the researchers role to construct a credible analysis of the findings.

Social Cognitive Theory

Introduced by Albert Bandura in 1986, the re-conceptualized social cognitive theory was founded on the premise that individuals cognitively process information regarding perspectives of self, the environment, and potential consequences before making a direct choice to engage in a behavior (Bandura, 1986). Kauffman and Landrum (2018) described the social-cognitive theory as an “attempt to explain human behavior from a natural science perspective by integrating what we know about behavioral psychology, physiology, the effects of the environment, and the role of cognition (thinking and feeling)” (p. 11). Triadic reciprocity is a term introduced by Bandura to describe the interconnected nature of an individual’s behavior, environment, and personal factors; Bandura coined the resulting causal relationship between behavior, the environment, and personal factors as reciprocal determinism (Bandura 1986). Bandura stressed the importance of an individual’s anticipated expectations, given a specific situation. An individual’s estimation of obtaining a desirable outcome, as a result of a specific behavior, is referred to by Bandura (1986) as an outcome expectation. Furthermore, an individual’s belief in his or her ability to obtain a desired outcome, through the execution of a specified behavior, is referred as one’s efficacy

expectation (Bandura, 1986). Input from the environment has significant affective implications for an individuals' engagement in specific behavior (Bandura, 1986); conversely, individuals have the capacity to affect their environment with behavior (Bandura, 1989). Ultimately, social cognitive theory recognizes that individuals are not thoughtlessly responding to reinforcement and punishment but are engaging in a cognizant process of interpreting their surroundings and self-regulating their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Cook & Artino, 2016).

Given the proactive and self-regulating nature of the individual in Bandura's social cognitive theory, this theory will inform the description and understanding of the lived experience of special education teachers serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The identified group of special education teachers serve a highly challenging population of students (Brunsting et al., 2014) and have a challenging role for many reasons. The social cognitive theory provides a framework to understand the multi-faceted phenomenon of teachers' experiences. Bandura (2001) explained the basic premise of his theory as he stated, "sociostructural influences operate through physiological mechanisms to produce behavioral effects" (p. 6). Social cognitive theory has been frequently used as a framework to advance the literature base in the areas of both teacher effectiveness and working with students with behavioral disorders. In addition to engaging in fewer conflicting interactions with students, Zee and Koomen (2016) found that teachers with high self-perceptions of the sociocognitive construct of self-efficacy utilize more effective strategies for responding to problem behaviors and implement proactive, student-centric behavior management practices when compared to teachers with lower self-perceptions of efficacy.

Cook and Artino (2016) captured the reciprocal influence of social cognitive theory when they described individuals as being "both products and producers of their own environments" (p.

1005). Miller, Ramirez, and Murdock (2017) applied the multi-directional and reciprocal impact of social cognitive theory to the classroom in the following description:

In the classroom environment there are many facets of social cognitive theory at work. Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs influence their behaviors; students' perceptions of these behaviors will in turn influence their behaviors according to social cognitive theory. Moreover, teachers' views of their own students may influence and be influenced by their personal beliefs, which also contributes to the learning environment. (Miller et al., 2017, p. 261)

Many recent studies related to the field of emotional and behavioral disorders have utilized the social cognitive theoretical framework as a conceptual model (Bruhn, McDaniel, & Kreigh, 2015; Feil et al., 2014; Gumpel, Wiesenthal, & Soderberg, 2015). In an examination of the effectiveness of self-monitoring interventions for students with behavior problems, Bruhn et al. (2015) emphasized the social cognitive concept of personal agency as they concluded that the functions of replacement behavior are critical for the sustainment and generalization of positive behavioral for students with behavioral disorders. In a study of intervention for students with antisocial behaviors, Feil et al. (2014) emphasized home and school social contexts in their examination of the efficacy of social skills interventions for preschoolers. With an emphasis on interpersonal relationships and relational roles, Gumpel et al. (2015) found assigned social roles to influence aggressive behavior. In the sections below, the social cognitive theoretical concepts of personal agency, self-efficacy, and reciprocal determinism are discussed in further detail.

Personal agency. Central to social cognitive theory is the premise of personal agency (Bandura, 1986). Kauffman and Landrum (2018) defined personal agency as “the ability of humans to use symbols for communication, to anticipate future events, to learn from observation

or vicarious experience, to evaluate and regulate themselves, and to be reflectively self-conscious” (p. 11). The concept of personal agency provides a social context for understanding human behavior in a more complete manner (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Malone, 2003). From philosophical, psychological, and educational perspectives, personal agency has been conceptualized as a multifaceted construct that consists of the qualities or elements of intentionality (Bandura, 2001; Giddens, 1979), mindfulness (Greene, 1978a), perceived control (Zimmerman, 1995), perceived empowerment (Danielewicz, 2001), perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001; Wheatley, 2001), persistence (Bandura, 1997), initiative (Arendt, 1958; Bandura, 2001), self-reflection (Paris & Lung, 2008), self-regulation (Bandura, 2001), sense of moral responsibility (Greene, 1978a), flexible thinking (Greene, 1978b; Giddens, 1979), and the will to act (Danielewicz, 2001). The core features of personal agency are central to the human experience and in accordance with his social cognitive perspective, are delineated by Bandura (2001) as intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness.

Intentionality. Intentionality has been conceptualized as being goal-oriented action that is thoughtful, has a purpose, and is the result of an executed plan (Epstein, 2007). Bandura (2001) elaborated on the construct of intentionality as he stated, “An intention is a representation of a future course of action to be performed. It is not simply an expectation or prediction of future actions but a proactive commitment to bringing them about” (p. 6).

Forethought. Forethought is based in an anticipated perspective of a time in the future; Bandura (2001) stated, “a forethoughtful perspective provides direction, coherence, and meaning to one’s life” (p. 7). Cook and Artino (2016) delineated individuals’ pursuance of personal futuristic goals as essential to the concept of motivation.

Self-reactiveness. Self-reactiveness is a collective term that encompasses the ideas of monitoring one's self and engaging in self-correction that aligns with self-imposed expectations (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (2001) described the self-reactive linkage between thought and action as he stated, "Agency thus involves not only the deliberative ability to make choices and action plans, but the ability to give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution" (p. 8).

Self-reflectiveness. The ability to engage in metacognition and reflect upon one's own actions and thoughts and examine their sufficiency is a core feature of personal agency (Bandura, 2001). In examining the alignment of intentions and outcomes, the perceived ability to exert control over the events in a one's life leads to efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

The construct of personal agency and the associated core features will provide a framework to describe the agentic transactions of special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum. In a study of novice teachers' practices Paris and Lung (2008) described the responsiveness and necessity of teacher agency as they stated:

In developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive approaches, teachers are positioned as creators of curricula that reflect the strengths, needs, interests, experiences, and values of a particular group of children and families as opposed to implementers of a curriculum intended for a generic group of children by someone outside of the classroom. Teachers are seen as architects of the learning environment, as creators of opportunities for children to explore, examine, question, theorize, and test their emerging knowledge. They actively create, critique, and adapt curricula and adopt, reject, or initiate practices in order to support their particular children. (p. 254)

Self-efficacy. Within the broader social cognitive theory, Bandura developed the concept of self-efficacy to conceptualize a person's perception of his or her own ability to complete a task or activity (Bandura, 1993). Within the construct of personal agency there is no greater or more influential mechanism than personal efficacy (Bandura & Locke, 2003). The concept of self-efficacy is founded in the self-organizing, self-reflecting, and self-regulating nature of individuals, established by the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Bandura emphasized the impact that a person's perceived self-efficacy has on performance as he stated, "Ability is not a fixed attribute residing in one's behavioral repertoire. Rather, it is a generative capability in which cognitive, social, motivational, and behavioral skills must be organized and effectively orchestrated to serve numerous purposes" (Bandura, 1993, p. 118). Individuals who have low or negative perceptions of their ability to complete a task, frequently envision failure and dwell on potential negative outcomes; in describing this effect of low perceptions of self-efficacy, Bandura argued (1993), "It is difficult to achieve much while fighting self-doubt" (p. 118). Bandura (1993) further described ability as requiring skill in "managing aversive emotional reactions that can impair the quality of thinking and action" (p. 119); Bandura (1993) clearly delineated the difference between the acquisition of knowledge and skills compared to the ability to employ those skills under stressful conditions, which is affected by perceptions of self-efficacy.

Bandura's concept of self-efficacy is critical to the experience of special education teachers serving student with emotional and behavioral disorders as this population of teachers has the highest burnout rates (Brunsting et al., 2014) of all special education teachers and serve students who generally fail to achieve success over time (Gage et al., 2017; Siperstein, et al., 2011). Given that Miller et al. (2017) found that teachers who see their students as lower

achieving are likely to perceive a greater challenge and call to question their ability to be instructionally effective, the construct of self-efficacy has direct implications for describing the experience of teachers who serve a population of students who are known to have extreme academic deficits (Wanzek et al., 2014) and challenge and frustrate teachers (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018; Wagner et al., 2006). Teachers depend on their students for measures of personal success and overall satisfaction in their profession (Kraft et al., 2015); while students are commonly a teachers' source of intrinsic reward and measure of effectiveness, students with emotional and behavioral disorders do not provide teachers with frequent opportunities to experience significant student gains (Gage et al., 2017; Siperstein, et al., 2011; Wanzek et al., 2014). Self-efficacy allows teachers a manner of compensating to meet their needs when they are not sufficiently satisfied by the progress of the students they teach (Holzberger, Philipp, & Kunter, 2014). While self-efficacy is typically constructed as an inherent characteristic of a person, evidence suggests that environmental factors, such as school culture, significantly affect teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Given the tendency for teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders to experience burnout at significantly higher rates than other teachers (Brunsting et al., 2014) and the extensive research regarding self-efficacy as a key factor influencing teacher job satisfaction (Chesnut & Burley, 2015), self-efficacy has significant implications for understanding the lived-experiences of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Given that expert teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders tend to "go their own way" (Buttner et al., 2015a), the construct of reciprocal determinism is relevant to understanding the frame of reference from which expert teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders operate.

Reciprocal determinism. Social cognitive theory employs the construct of triadic reciprocal causation in explaining human behavior (Bandura, 1986). Within social cognitive theory's model of reciprocal causality, personal factors (cognitive, affective, and biological) interact with behavioral patterns and environmental factors to exert a bidirectional-determining influence (Bandura, 2001). The construct of reciprocal determinism adds context to the conceptualization and impacts of self-efficacy. Bandura (1982) situated self-efficacy within the reciprocal determinism model of social cognitive theory:

Self-percepts of efficacy are not simply inert estimates of future action. Self-appraisals of operative capabilities function as one set of proximal determinants of how people behave, their thought patterns, and the emotional reactions they experience in taxing situations.

(Bandura, 1982, pp. 122-123)

Given that situational reductions in teacher self-perceptions of instructional efficacy has been found to directly impact student perceptions of teacher confidence (Miller et al., 2017), the construct of reciprocal determinism was utilized to situate descriptions of teachers' experiences within a greater context. Additionally, the construct of a reciprocal determinism is vital to describing the experience of special education teachers, who serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders, as there are a multitude of factors that contribute to their unique experience. Teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders generally have fewer years of experience than other teachers (Gage et al., 2017), work with students who challenge them (Wagner et al., 2006), experience the pressure of high academic standards (Gresham, 2015) and unrealistic growth expectations (Wanzek et al., 2014) amid inadequate and stress inducing working conditions (Bettini et al., 2017). Given the general characteristics of teachers of students with emotion and behavioral disorders and the students themselves, the personal factor of

motivation is critical component of the social cognitive construct of reciprocal determinism. Motivation models are discussed in the context of achievement goal theory in the following section.

Achievement Goal Theory

Although not cited by Bandura, achievement goal is a representation of the personal factors of reciprocal determinism, but not directly included in Bandura's social cognitive theory. Achievement goal theory provides a framework for the discussion of student motivation as it relates to goals and behavior (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck, 1986). In an extension of Bandura's (1982) finding that classroom experiences and specific student characteristics such as prior experience and perceptions of self-efficacy influence how student perceive, approach, and respond to learning tasks, Ames and Archer (1988) found that student perceptions of classroom goals influence how students approach, engage with, and respond to learning tasks. Furthermore, Ames and Archer (1988) found "How students approach tasks, engage in the process of learning, and respond to the situation may be related to their own perceived ability as well as to the perceived goals of the environment" (p. 261). Within the construct of achievement goal theory, which is also referred to as goal orientation theory, Cook and Artino (2016) delineated the difference between the subconsciously established learning goals of learners who ascribe to mastery goals opposed to performance goals. Learners ascribing to mastery goals are theorized to be driven by a growth attitude and a desire to attain knowledge, while learners ascribing to performance goals are theorized to be driven by an attitude of preservation and a desire to avoid failure (Cook & Artino, 2016). Learners ascribing to mastery performance goals believe "people get smarter by studying or practicing. This mindset leads people to seek learning opportunities because these will make them smarter" (Cook & Artino, 2016, p. 1008). In contrast, Learners

with unconsciously established performance goal are described in detail by Cook and Artino (2016):

Easy, low-effort successes make them feel smarter and encourage continued study; challenging, effortful tasks and poor performance are interpreted as indicating low ability and lead learners to progressively disengage and eventually give up. Learners with this entity mindset magnify their failures and forget their successes, give up quickly in the face of challenge, and adopt defensive or self-sabotaging behaviors. A strong belief in their ability may lead them to persevere after failure. However, low confidence will cause them to disengage into a 'helpless' state because it is psychologically safer to blame failure on lack of effort ('I wasn't really trying') than on lack of intelligence. (p. 1007)

Given the goal of the study, a rich description of teachers' experiences of supporting access to the general education curriculum, achievement goal theory will provide the study with a contextual framework to discuss teachers' experiences of students' approach to academic goals within the classroom setting. In turn, by situating the research in the context of a social-cognitive perspective, and more specifically within the context of achievement goal theory, the study has the potential to improve outcomes of students with emotional and behavioral disorders through an increased understanding of teachers' experiences.

Related Literature

The purpose of this section is to provide a thorough presentation of the existing literature related to special education teachers' experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum. This section will present the current knowledge base on the characteristics of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, the teachers who serve this population of students, the nature of the educational

settings in which this population of students are served, and the interventions that are utilized with this population of students. The information presented in this section will expose the current gap in the knowledge base and establish the need for the study.

Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Students with emotional and behavioral disturbances demonstrate features of mental health disorders combined with significant academic problems and inferior skills in maintaining interpersonal relationships (Wagner et al., 2005; Van Loan & Garwood, 2018). Given the nature of the disability, students with emotional and behavioral disorders are among the most challenging students to serve (Brunsting et al., 2014). Emotional disturbance (ED) is one of the 13 categories of disabilities specified in federal special education law, and under IDEA.

Emotional disturbance is defined as:

a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- (a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- (b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- (c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- (d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- (e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.
- (f) Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance. (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.8(c)(4))

The state of Georgia further defines emotional and behavioral disorders as “an emotional disorder characterized by excesses, deficits or disturbances of behavior. The child's difficulty is

emotionally based and cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, cultural, sensory general health factors, or other additional exclusionary factors” (Georgia State Department of Education). According to the most current IDEA Part B Child Count, less than 1% of the total school enrollment population was found to be eligible for services under the eligibility category of emotional disturbance. Furthermore, based on data from the 2016-2017 school year approximately 337,700 students ages 3 to 21 received special education services under the eligibility category of emotional disturbance, which represents less than 5% of all students served by special education services (U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts Data Warehouse, 2017). It is important to note that the relatively small number of students served through the eligibility category of emotional disturbance is considered by many to be an underrepresentation of the disability category, which has been attributed to faults in the identification process (Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004; Walker & Gresham, 2014). In justifying further research and advancement in the area of emotional disturbance, Mitchell, Kern, and Conroy (2018) stated, “Attention to this specific category of disability has been warranted because outcomes for those affected by ED continue to be among the worst when compared with both typically developing children and children eligible for services in other categories of disability” (p. 2). Details associated with academic achievement, post-secondary outcomes, and school experiences are described in the sections below.

Academic achievement. Students with emotional and behavioral disorders tend to challenge teachers and teaching (Wagner et al., 2006), experience success at a rate that makes grade-level proficiency a fleeting target (Wanzek et al., 2014), and generally, fail to achieve academic success across time (Gage, et al, 2017; Siperstein et al., 2011). Gage et al. (2017) reported findings from a five-year longitudinal study suggesting that achievement levels for

students with EBD are below the population mean and also fail to increase over time when compared to other students without EBD. Given that students with emotional and behavioral disorders are assessed and held to the same academic standards as their non-disabled peers, “pressures for higher academic standards and outcomes for all students are reaching nearly unattainable levels for many students with severe emotional and behavioral challenges” (Gresham, 2015, p. 100). In addressing the question of growth expectations for students with disabilities and the appropriateness of measuring students with emotional and behavioral disorders against the same academic proficiency standards as their non-disabled peers, Wanzek, et al. (2014) stated, “for students with disabilities to meet the grade-level standards they must grow at a faster rate than their peers without disabilities, despite the fact that the student’s disability has been determined to impact learning” (p. 200).

Negative post-secondary outcomes. Students with emotional and behavioral disorders have devastatingly negative academic, social, and emotional outcomes (Wagner 1995; Wagner et al., 2006). Students with emotional and behavioral disorders have the highest risk for school failure, dropping out, and unemployment (Mulcahy et al., 2016). Students with emotional and behavioral disorders comprise one-fifth of the population of juvenile detention centers (Grisso, 2008) with some studies showing that 40% of students with emotional and behavioral disorders engage in criminal behavior within several years of leaving school (Peacock Hill Working Group, 1991). Long-term outcomes for students with emotional and behavioral disorders are also generally negative, with high rates of substance abuse, unemployment, and criminal arrest (Kauffman & Landrum, 2013).

In a recent study, Mitchell et al. (2018) found students served under the special education eligibility category of emotional disturbance to fare significantly less favorably in their

preparation for life after school. Only 52% of students with emotional disturbance expected to obtain a 4-year college degree or higher compared to 80% of students without IEPs (Lipscomb et al., 2017a). As of the 2014-2015 school year, 58% of students eligible for special education services under the category emotional disturbance graduated with a regular high school diploma compared to 70% of all students with disabilities that graduated with a regular high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, OSEP, 2017). Consistent with the high school graduation data for the 2014-2015 school year, 6% of all students dropped out of school while 18% of students identified as having a disability dropped out of school and an alarming 36% of students identified as having an emotional disturbance dropped out of school (U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, OSEP, 2017). Kern (2015) described the limited improvement in the outcomes of students with emotional and behavioral disorders as he stated, “Although students in other disability groups have made encouraging gains over the past several decades in many dimensions related to school status and outcomes, we have not achieved parallel progress with students with EBD” (p. 24).

School experiences. State and Kern (2015) found that students with emotional and behavioral disorders generally report an average self-rating of life satisfaction, with the exception of the school domain in which this population of students consistently reports low levels of satisfaction. Students with emotional and behavioral disorders often live in disadvantaged communities and attend under performing schools (Mitchell et al., 2018). Furthermore, students identified as having problem behavior are generally provided fewer opportunities to respond and more negative feedback than their peers who are not identified as having problem behavior (Scott et al., 2017). Further impacting this student population’s experience of school is an increased likelihood for suspension or expulsion from school (Losen,

Hodson, Ee, & Martiniz, 2014) and the resulting likelihood of denial of access to a free appropriate public education (Lhamon & Samuels, 2014). Across all subgroups of students receiving special education services, Lipscomb et al. (2017a) found students in the eligibility categories of intellectual disability and emotional disturbance to be the most socioeconomically disadvantaged. Furthermore, students served in special education under the eligibility category of emotional disturbance were often from impoverished households with low rates of employment and a low rates of post-secondary education (Lipscomb et al., 2017).

Teaching Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Teachers of student with severe disabilities, such as emotional and behavioral disorders, face unique challenges while working to provide an equitable education for students with severe disabilities (Ruppar, Roberts, & Olson, 2017). Students with emotional and behavioral disorders “present intense needs, requiring the intervention and instruction of well-trained and qualified teachers who work with them in the classroom” (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2014, p. 306). However due to shortages in the field of special education and more specifically significant nation-wide shortages in the specialization of emotional and behavioral disorders (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), Giangreco, Suter, and Hurley (2013) found that 76% of special education services provided to students with emotional and behavioral disorders are provided by paraprofessionals.

Bettini et al. (2018) conducted a transcendental phenomenological study in which they found that teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders experience cognitive dissonance due to the distraction of emergent responsibilities that pull teachers from their core responsibility of promoting students’ behavioral and academic growth. In this study, Bettini et al. (2018) quoted a teacher participant who described the scheduling challenges of a self-contained

EBD setting: “I don’t get a lunch...I get frustrated... I basically have maybe two minutes to myself... that’s one of the worst things about this job, is I have to be with them the entire time they’re on campus” (p. 11). Teachers in the study conducted by Bettini et al. (2018) were conflicted between their ideal role of facilitating behavioral and academic growth in their students and the actual role of their daily work.

The experience of professional inadequacy is common among teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Buttner, Pijl, Bijstra, & van den Bosch, 2015b). Furthermore, the burn-out rates of special education teachers working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders is the highest among all disability categories (Brunsting et al., 2014; Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2014). Additionally, the cultivation and retention of special educators capable of serving student with the extreme behavioral manifestations characteristic of the disability category of emotional and behavioral disorders has shown to be consistently challenging (Bettini et al., 2018).

Mitchell et al. (2018) explored historical problems in the field of educating students with emotional and behavioral disorders and found that some including lack of personnel to serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders to be a persistent barrier over the last 25 years. Mitchell et al. (2018) summarized the field’s historical personnel problem as they stated, “scarcity of qualified personnel was associated with general failure to use effective practices, which in turn, led to low levels of success for student with ED in typical school programs” (p. 2). In their analysis of the current state of the field, Mitchel et al. (2018) describe the shortage in “qualified personnel with expertise in addressing problem behavior” (p. 12) be to a “vexing challenge” that is a significant barrier to implementing an integrated delivery model to meet the needs of this student population.

To further compound the implications for teacher burn-out in the field of emotional and behavioral disorders, Ruble and McGrew (2013) found that students are less likely to meet the goals established in their individualized education plans and are less likely to experience success emotionally, behaviorally, and socially when served by an educator experiencing burnout. Bettini et al. (2018) summarized the findings of their transcendental phenomenological study that explored the roles of special education teachers in self-contained EBD classes, and concluded:

To address the long-standing challenges of cultivating and retaining a skilled workforce for students with EBD, teacher educators and school leaders must understand what special educators' roles entail, and coordinate their efforts to prepare special educators for their actual roles in self-contained classes, and create conditions that support special educators in fulfilling their roles effectively. (p. 14)

Specific aspects associated with experience of teaching students with emotional and behavioral are described in the sections below. Teacher qualities, working conditions, and educational settings are discussed in detail.

Teacher qualities. Teachers have been found to generally respond to students with ongoing behavioral concerns in a more negative manner when compared to their responses to similar behavior from students not identified as having behavioral concerns (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Historically, teachers have reported little to no training in behavior management (State et al., 2011) even though the management of student behavior has long been reported as contributing to teacher burn out (Billingsly, 2004). More recently, teacher preparation programs have increased efforts to “develop teacher’s fluency with empirically supported practices” (Myers, Sugai, Simonsen, & Freeman, 2017, p. 128), however research shows that the fidelity of

implementation of evidence-based practices is not sustained over time (Nelson, Oliver, Hebert, & Bohaty, 2015; Reinke, Herman, Stormong, Newcomer, & David, 2013).

Teachers of student with emotional and behavioral disorders are generally younger, have fewer years of teaching experience, and are less likely to be fully certified than general education teachers or other special education teachers (Gage et al., 2017), however empirical studies have found no association between academic growth among students with emotional and behavioral disorders and teacher age, experience, or certification (Gage et al., 2017). Expert teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders tend to “go their own way” and generally lack modesty as they deviate from standard curriculum and management strategies (Buttner et al., 2015a). Buttner et al. (2015a) described expert teachers of student with emotional and behavioral disorder as “stepping aside from the guidelines of curriculum since they are convinced about the efficacy of their classroom incentives to enable students to achieve” (p. 581).

Working conditions. A significant research base has concluded that working conditions are positively correlated with the quality and efficacy of teacher practices (Bettini, Corckett, Brownell, & Merrill, 2016; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). Special education teachers serving students in self-contained classrooms often serve multiple grade spans of students and, by-nature of self-containment, instruct students in all subject areas (Smith, Poling, & Worth, 2018). The service delivery model requires teachers to plan for multi-grade level instruction across all subjects areas, however, teachers are often not provided a planning period or access to the same instructional resources as general education teachers (Smith et al., 2018). In their study of professional educators providing special education services for students with emotional and behavioral disorders in self-contained settings, Bettini et al. (2016) described working conditions as inadequate and stress-inducing. Additionally, teachers working with students with severe

disabilities, such as emotional and behavioral disorders, must advocate for the unique needs of their students across various school settings despite common aversion to the practice of inclusion for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Gidlund, 2018) and a general lack of understanding regarding the needs of students with severe disabilities (Ruppar, Roberts, & Olson, 2017).

Educational settings. Nation-wide, approximately 38% of students eligible for special education under the eligibility category of emotional and behavioral disorders spend more than 40% of the day outside of the general education setting, in self-contained classrooms and separate school settings (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 2014). Specialized settings such as self-contained classes and separate school settings are educational placement options on the continuum of special education least restrictive environments, which are described by Bettini et al., (2017) as settings in which “students with significant behavioral needs can benefit from the most intensive, individually tailored academic and social evidence-based practices” (p. 83). Within the research, there are conflicting findings regarding the effectiveness of separate class and separate school settings (Garwood, 2018). While students with emotional and behavioral disorders are generally characterized as making little academic progress across time (Gage et al, 2017; Siperstein et al., 2011), Mattison (2011) found students in self-contained schools achieve higher rates of behavior improvements than students in lesser restrictive settings and attributed the success to the availability of intensive supports. Additionally, Mitchell et al. (2018) summarized their findings in a recent “State of the Field” article as “a more restrictive placement may be necessary for students with ED simply because the typical classroom does not provide minimal levels of effective instructional strategies to maintain academic and social success” (p. 5).

There is a general deficiency of empirical evidence regarding the impact of inclusive practices on academic, social, and emotional outcomes of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Harrison, Soares, & Joyce, 2018). Few empirical studies exist that address the effectiveness of inclusion of students with emotional and behavioral disorders in the general education setting (Harrison et al., 2018). “Research needs to be conducted to understand the influencing factors, barriers, and facilitators of successful inclusion” (Harrison et al., 2018, p. 19). Given the current movement for greater inclusion of students with emotional and behavioral disorders in the general education settings, schools must be equipped to offer students with emotional and behavioral disorders the intensive behavioral and academic supports needed for success in the general education setting (Gottfried, Egalite, & Kirksey, 2016).

In a recent analysis of typical classroom instruction, Scott, Hirn, and Cooper (2017) found low rates of key teaching practices such as teacher modeling, peer modeling, positive specific praise, and scaffolding supports. Furthermore, Scott et al. (2017) found that students identified as having problem behavior were provided fewer opportunities to respond and more negative feedback than their peers who were not identified as having problem behavior. Students identified as having problem behavior were also less engaged with instruction and more likely to engage in off task and disruptive behavior than students who were not identified as having problem behavior (Hirn & Scott, 2014; Scott et al., 2017). Compounding this finding of a lack of basic instruction strategies, Stitche et al. (2009) found teachers in high poverty schools, which students with emotional disturbances tend to attend, fail to maximize instructional time and use high rates of negative feedback. These findings are concerning for this population, as the general-education classroom may be ineffective for students identified as eligible under the category of emotional disturbance. Additionally, these findings echo previous findings that

teachers in general education settings are unlikely to alter their management strategies to meet the needs of students with emotional disturbances (Meadows, Neel, Scott, & Parker, 1994).

Interventions

The field of special education serving students with emotional disturbances has long suffered from a shortage of qualified personnel to employ effective practices, which has in turn partly contributed to the general lack of success for students with emotional disturbances (Peacock Hill Working Group, 1991). More recently Mitchel et al. (2018) described the status of effective supports for students with behavioral disorders as they stated, “the field is not short on effective interventions; rather, the current dual systems of general and special education often create barriers, especially related to early intervention, and maintenance and generalization of improved student outcomes” (p. 11). In the development of effective interventions and supports for students with emotional and behavioral disturbances, professional organizations such as the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders and the Council for Exceptional Children have worked to establish high standards of evidence to identify evidence-based practices for the field (Cook et al., 2015). The requirement of the scientific standards such as rigorous methodologies and peer-review has increased the validity of the empirical research regarding effective practices and interventions for this population of students (Cook et al., 2015). Southerland et al. (2018) provided support for the increased methodological rigor in the field and found that high quality interventions minimize problem behaviors and enhance adaptive skills.

Evidence based practices are defined as “practices and programs that have been rigorously tested and shown to improve student outcomes” (Bettini et al., 2017). Given the significant academic deficits of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Gage et al., 2017; Lane, Barton-Arwood, Nelson, & Wehby, 2008), the utilization of evidence-based

practices is essential in the efforts to alter the academic and social trajectories of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Cook & Odom, 2013). While Maggin, Wehby, and Gilmour (2016) concluded, “The reasons student with EBD have such deleterious outcomes is undoubtedly complex, and there is no single intervention or program that can successfully address the full range of needs of all these students” (p. 138). A significant body of research has found that special education teachers, serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders, rarely employ evidence based practices (Maggin, Wehby, Moore Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2011; Scott, Alter, & Hirn, 2011). Furthermore, the field of special education devoted to educating students with emotional and behavioral disorders has little insight as to why evidence-based practices are so infrequently implemented (Walker, 2014). Kern (2015) stressed the implementation of interventions as he described the field of education devoted to serving students with emotional and behavioral disorder as having a

repertoire of interventions that could successfully reduce the fundamental issues of many students with EBDs. One failure, however, is with treatment fidelity, or the extent to which those interventions are implemented as designed. It is my experience that many (if not most) interventions fail to show treatment effects because they were not fully or accurately implemented. (p. 25)

Behavioral interventions. Historically, most research regarding emotional and behavioral disorders has emphasized solely the behavioral needs of this student population (Dunn, Shelnut, Ryan, & Katsiyannis, 2017). The development of social-emotional learning is linked to positive academic and psychosocial outcomes as social-emotional learning function as academic enablers that allow students with emotional and behavioral disorders to participate in and benefit from classroom instruction (Gresham, 2015). Given that students with emotional and

behavioral disorders have difficulty establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, it is not surprising that student with emotional and behavioral disorders have difficulty establishing and sustaining positive relationships with their teachers; however, sustained positive student-teacher relationships have been empirically shown to improve social and academic outcomes for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Reinke, Herman, & Newcomer, 2016).

The recent emphasis on school wide positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) behavior instruction and the utilization of “positive environmental support strategies” (Mitchell et al., 2018, p. 9) has widely broadcast evidence-based practices and strategies that support effective classroom management (Simonsen & Meyers, 2015) and in turn “are likely to evoke success for students with emotional disturbances” (Mitchell et al., 2018, p. 9). Research has indicated that the multi-tiered behavioral support approach of PBIS has a positive impact on students with and at risk for emotion and behavioral disorders (Carr, 2002; Lewis, McIntosh, Simonsen, Mitchell, & Hatton, 2017). Among other strategies, PBIS has publicized the effectiveness of maximizing structure, actively engaging students in instruction, and reinforcing appropriate behavior, which are each discussed in further detail below. Kern (2015) described the transformed perspective of the field of education as he stated, “the emphasis on prevention, instruction, and acknowledgement of appropriate behavior represents a fundamental change in the way we manage behavior” (p. 25).

Maximize structure. By attending to both the routines as well as the physical arrangement of the classroom, teachers can minimize crowding and distractions within the learning environment. Research has found that the minimization of distraction and crowding are directly linked to desirable student outcomes (Simonsen et al., 2008). In creating classroom structure, the development and implementation of consistent classroom routines support effective

classroom management (Simonsen & Meyers, 2015). In the management and planning of classroom structure, the intentional integration of student choice into classroom structure has been shown to increase academic engagement and decrease undesired student behaviors (Dunlap et al., 1994).

Actively engage students. Simonsen and Meyers (2015) define an opportunity to respond as “any teacher behavior (e.g., asking a question, making a request, presenting a task) that solicits an observable response from a student (e.g., verbal answer, written response)” (p. 106). MacSuga-Gage and Simonsen (2015) found that an increase in opportunities for students to respond is positively correlated with desirable student outcomes such as increased accuracy in responding and decreased frequency of undesirable behaviors.

Reinforce appropriate behavior. One of the most basic forms of reinforcement for appropriate behavior is the use of specific and contingent praise. Simonsen and Meyers (2015) define the specificity of praise as indicating “the behavior being praised and is directed toward a certain learner or learners” (p. 135). Furthermore, Simonsen and Meyers (2015) discussed the contingency of effective behavioral praise as being delivered immediately after the student exhibits the appropriate or desirable behavior. The utilization of praise that is delivered as the result of appropriate behavior and is both student and behavior specific has been directly correlated with increased rates of appropriate student behavior (Chalk & Bizo, 2004; Ferguson & Houghton, 1992; Sutherland et al., 2000).

Academic interventions. Understanding the evidence-based strategies and associated academic progress of student with emotional and behavioral disorders is critical. Beyond the increased risk for school failure, dropping out (Mulcahy et al., 2016), and contact with the juvenile justice system (Grisso, 2008), students with emotional and behavioral disorders

generally fail to demonstrate growth “that would allow them to meet grade-level expectations” (Wanzek et al., 2014, p. 202), and ultimately experience academic success across time (Gage et al., 2017; Siperstein et al., 2011). Of the approximately 350,000 students in the United States identified with emotional and behavioral disorders, approximately 36.3% spend more than 60% of the day in self-contained special education settings (Office of Special Education Programs, 2016) in which academic instruction is described as “seldomly adequate” to meet the needs of students (Conroy, 2016).

Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al. (2014) concluded that the teaching of academic skills to students with emotional and behavioral disorders as potentially protective and curative; the authors summarized their findings in the following statement: “offering students with EBD appropriate tasks, provided with substantial environmental support (scaffolding) seems to help them to be successful in academic learning” (p. 41). In effectively teaching academic skills to students with emotional and behavioral disorders, captivating and sustaining student attention is critical to their learning (De Lugt, 2007). In order to minimize disengagement and other off task behaviors, lessons are most effective when highly engaging with frequent possibilities for teacher-student interaction (De Lugt, 2007).

In an observational study of 49 classrooms serving student with emotional and behavioral disorders, Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al. (2017a) found that teachers were forced to make choices as they divided their instructional time across students, and teachers were in turn faced with the reality that “they cannot achieve optimal outcomes for each and every student” (p. 551). Recent empirical studies have summarized the dilemma faced by special education teachers working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders: “On-going interaction, which is necessary to achieve an optimal outcome for one student, will inevitably be at the expense of

other students” (Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2017). If students are not provided the individualized teacher-led instruction they need, adequate academic progress is not feasible (Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2017); additionally, as teachers work to provide direct individualized instruction, students are left waiting, which is often a trigger for problem behaviors (Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2017), which require teacher intervention and further interrupt instruction.

Drawing from federal special education regulations, Vannest et al. (2011) characterized students with emotional and behavioral disorders as having “an ability to achieve academically but demonstrate a failure to do so” (p. 521). Additionally, further impacting students’ failure to achieve, Vannest et al. (2011) described the field of special education specializing in emotional and behavioral disorders as “a field that lacks a large body of instructional intervention research with this population and demonstrates a chronic inability to adopt and maintain best practice conditions” (p. 523). Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al. (2016) described the state of academic intervention with students with emotional and behavioral disorders as being primarily individualized interventions which results in academic engagement being limited to only a fraction of the students in a classroom at any given time. In concluding their investigation of the improvement rate difference of selected academic interventions for students with emotional and behavioral disorders, Vannest et al. (2011) summarized, “The academic and general school achievement that is critical for lifelong success is significantly in jeopardy for students with EBD without the actual use of evidence-based practices in the classroom” (p. 531). Confirming the findings of previous empirical studies, Dunn et al. (2017) examined 24 studies of academic intervention for students with emotional and behavioral disorders and described a “paucity of research” to examine academic needs of students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

When compared to the body of research targeting the behavior of students with emotional and behavioral disorders and associated behavioral interventions, there is a considerably less expansive body of research that emphasizes academics and instructional interventions (Garwood, 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2014; Mulcahy et al., 2016). Furthermore, rarely in the body of academic intervention and instruction practices is there an emphasis on grade and age appropriate content or the general education curriculum (Garwood, 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2014). The terms grade and age appropriate content as well as general education curriculum are defined as what students should know and be able to do at each grade level while learning academic content (U.S. Department of Education; Georgia Department of Education). While the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandate rigorous academic content standards for all students, including those with disabilities, the current body academic intervention knowledge generally emphasizes individualized student-centric basic and remedial content with disregard for age and grade appropriate content (Garwood, 2018; Kamp, 2013; Mulcahy et al., 2014).

Summary

Students with emotional and behavioral disorders have significant academic and behavioral needs (Maggin et al., 2016), significant relational needs (Reinke, Herman, & Newcomer, 2016), are served by a population of teachers with the highest burnout rate of all special education teachers (Brunsting et al., 2014), and an education service delivery model that often has little infrastructure for success (Smith, Poling, & Worth, 2018). Empirical studies have found academic interventions to have positive influences on short and long-term outcomes for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2014; Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2016; Wanzek et al., 2014); however, empirical studies have also

found that academic expectations are often unreasonable and unrealistic, given the nature of special education (Wanzek et al., 2014) and are especially unreasonable for students with emotional and behavioral disorders, who are characterized as being resistant to teachers and teaching (Wagner et al., 2006).

Students with emotional and behavioral disorders tend to experience success at a rate that makes grade-level proficiency a fleeting target (Wanzek et al., 2014) and generally, fail to achieve academic success across time (Gage et al., 2017; Siperstein et al., 2011). The current body of knowledge boasts significant improvements through small-group intervention for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Wanzek et al., 2014); however, the practical application and transfer to the classroom setting has not yet been actualized (Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2017). Potentially contributing to the failed transfer to classroom setting, researchers have found that evidence-based academic interventions for this population of students generally do not emphasize grade-appropriate content (Garwood; 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2014), and special education teachers for this population of students rarely utilize evidence-based practices (Maggin et al., 2011; Scott et al., 2011). In order to improve student outcomes, there is a significant need to understand teachers' lived-experiences in authentic classroom conditions. Despite research that describes the experiences, characteristics, and working conditions of teachers that serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders, there are few studies that emphasize grade-appropriate content, and no studies, known to me, that examine special education teachers' experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum.

The empirical literature examining the work of teachers working with student with emotional and behavioral disorders has two significant gaps that require future research. First,

the experience of the teachers serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders must be understood with greater clarity: “To ensure students with EBD experience effective academic and behavioral instruction, the disparity between special educators’ ideal roles and their reality must be better understood and systematically addressed” (Bettini et al., 2018, p. 14). Second, the vast responsibilities of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders that often interfere with the delivery of instruction must be clearly identified; “There is limited knowledge about the specific roles and responsibilities carried out by special education teachers who have student with severe disabilities on their caseloads” (Ruppar, Roberts, & Olson, 2017, p. 121). The goal of the phenomenology was to fill the current gap in the literature by describing special education teachers’ experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in efforts to provide perspective for the effective transfer of empirical findings to the classroom and ultimately improve student outcomes.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Students with emotional and behavioral disorders have the highest risk for school failure, dropping out, and unemployment (Mulcahy et al., 2016); these students also comprise one-fifth of the population of juvenile detention centers (Grisso, 2008). Students with emotional and behavioral disorders tend to experience success at a rate that makes grade-level proficiency a fleeting target (Wanzek et al., 2014) and generally fail to achieve academic success across time (Gage et al., 2017; Siperstein et al., 2011). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2017) special education is a federally designated area of teacher shortage, with most states, including Georgia, reporting shortages of teachers to work with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Within this area of teacher shortage, there is also a shortage of evidence-based practices (Losinski et al., 2014) and conflicting findings regarding the prescribed emphasis of behavioral or academic interventions (Harrison et al., 2013; Kamp, Pijl, Bijstra, & Bosch, 2014). In the desperate efforts to improve the outcomes of this population of students, there is currently little research giving voice to the special education teachers' experiences of supporting grade level academic expectations among students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Empirically, the study will expand upon the currently limited research base regarding the maintenance of grade level expectation in working with student with emotional and behavioral disorders to include an exploration of teacher perspectives and lived-experiences from daily classroom interactions. Theoretically, this study aims to expand upon Bandura's (1993) social cognitive theory by applying these theories specifically to the lived-experience of teachers who serve students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Practically, this study hopes to provide practitioners with insights from teachers' lived-experiences that can facilitate effective

implementation of strategies and interventions to both retain and prepare teachers to work in the field and more importantly improve outcomes for student with emotional and behavioral disorders.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. This chapter provides a detailed description of the procedures, research, and analysis for the research. Additionally, this chapter addresses trustworthiness and ethical issues related to the study. The chapter is organized in the following sections: design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, the researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Design

This qualitative study utilized a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of supporting grade level academic expectations among students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Qualitative inquiry favors "contextualized complexity and offers an alternative to the Information Age trend of reducing knowledge to numbers" (Patton, 2015, p. 34). With an emphasis on contextual sensitivity, qualitative inquiry permits "inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance" (Patton, 2015, p. 257). A qualitative study is appropriate because a contextually-informed understanding of the experience of supporting grade level academic expectations among students with emotional and behavioral disorders from the teacher perspective is necessary. A qualitative design utilizing a phenomenological approach allowed me to describe and understand what special education teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders experience and how they experience it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A

phenomenological study allows me to explore the experience of a phenomenon, through the study of the individuals who experience it (Creswell & Poth, 2018) by taking into account “the experiencing person and the connections between human consciousness and the objects in the material world” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 43). The goal of phenomenology is to “focus on descriptions of what people experience” (Patton, 2015, p. 117) in order to describe the essence of a lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2015).

Within the general phenomenological approach to inquiry, transcendental phenomenology relies on experience for the derivation of knowledge by emphasizing “the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49). A transcendental phenomenology was the appropriate research design to investigate special education teachers’ experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum because the goal of the study was to “understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). Given that the lived-experience of the teacher is seldom considered in the literature regarding students with emotional and behavioral disorders, the selected phenomenological design will explore how teachers “make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness” (Patton, 2015, p. 115). Moreover, the transcendental type of phenomenology was appropriate given that the goal of the research was to present a description of the phenomenon from a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The following research question and sub-questions were addressed in this study:

Central Research Question:

What are special teachers' experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum?

The sub-questions are as follows:

SQ1. How are special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy affected by the challenges of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum?

SQ2. How do special education teachers, serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders, describe changes in their pedagogical approach over time?

SQ3. What do special education teachers identify as challenges to providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum?

SQ4. What do special education teachers identify as successful practices for providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum?

Setting

This transcendental phenomenological study was conducted at Second Street Academy (pseudonym) a large behavioral program in the Southeastern United States serving students ranging in age from 5 to 21 years with behavioral manifestations characteristic of the eligibility category of emotional and behavioral disorder. Second Street Academy is one of 24 programs of its kind in the state of Georgia that support local school systems' continuum of services for students with disabilities. Second Street Academy supports students from eight local districts by providing comprehensive educational and therapeutic support services to students who might otherwise require residential or other more restrictive placements, due to the manifestations of their disability. Rubicon School District (Pseudonym) serves as the fiscal agent for Second Street

Academy and provides direct oversight and support for the program. Second Street Academy provides a variety of service delivery options, from separate class settings to separate school settings, and is therefore comprised of three main centers and classrooms that are distributed across the eight-county service area. Second Street Academy employs 50 teachers and serves approximately 320 students. Second Street Academy is led by a director, assistant director, and program coordinators.

Second Street Academy was selected as the site for the study as the program's placement on the Georgia continuum of services for student with disabilities offers a high concentration of the phenomenon of interest. By serving students in one of the most restrictive special education service delivery options in Georgia, teachers at this site had "intense manifestations" (Patton, 2015, p. 267) of the experience of teachers' experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum. The site selection facilitated purposeful sampling as it provided me with a concentration of "information-rich cases for in-depth study" (Patton, 2015, p. 264).

Participants

Purposeful, criterion, outlier sampling was utilized to select participants for the research study. Purposeful sampling, which is defined by Patton (2015) as the selection of cases from which the research "can learn a great deal" (p. 264), was employed to capture a base of approximately 12-15 participants who will be able to share knowledge that is of "central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (p. 230). Criterion sampling narrows the variation of the sample by requiring specific of participant similarities and is effective for the purposes of this study as it allowed me to study a specific subgroup, teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, in great detail (Patton, 2002). To be included in the study, each participant was

required to be currently working as a classroom teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders at Second Street Academy or have worked as a classroom teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders at Second Street Academy in the past three years. Outlier sampling, defined by Patton (2015) as being able to “reveal a great deal about intense manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 267), was used to identify participants for the study. The selection of a separate school setting, which is considered one of the most restrictive service options on the continuum of services for students with disabilities in Georgia, provided access to “cases on the tails of a distribution that would have little or no visibility in a statistical analysis” (Patton, 2015, p. 267).

Procedures

Before submitting my IRB application, I identified experts to review my interview and focus group questions for face and content validity. Experts were practitioners from the field of education who work with teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Individuals identified as experts earned a doctoral degree in special education, behavioral disorders, or a related field. Based on feedback from the expert reviews, I altered interview questions to enhance clarity and to ensure that the interview and focus group questions adequately addressed my identified research questions. This process was implemented to increase the trustworthiness of my study.

During the Spring of 2019, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained (Appendix A). Prior to seeking IRB approval, permission to conduct research was obtained from the Rubicon school district as well as building-level permission from the director of Second Street Academy. Once IRB approval was granted, I conducted a pilot study. A pilot study is a mini-version of a larger research study that allows a researcher to test procedures and

instruments (Baker, 1994). Conducting a pilot study increased the likelihood of the success for the larger research study because the pilot study helped to identify potential problems or complications (Holloway, 1997). Two administrative staff members at Second Street Academy that have been out of the classroom environment for more than three years were the participants in the pilot study. This population of pilot study participants had teaching experience that allowed me to test the data collection instruments, while not diminishing the potential participant pool for the actual study. The procedures of the pilot study mirrored the planned procedures of the actual study. Based on the developments of the pilot study, I modified the procedures of the actual study to avoid potential problems and increase the effectiveness of procedures.

After completing the pilot study, I requested to be added to the agenda of the next full-staff faculty meeting. At the faculty meeting, I introduced my study and myself. I provided staff members with a recruitment letter (Appendix B) that provided an overview of the study and details regarding the established participation criteria. Those interested in participating in the study were asked to complete a screening survey (Appendix C). This screening tool verified that interested individuals meet the established participant criteria, obtained general contact information, and collected potential dates for focus group and individual interviews. Following the full staff meeting, I sent a follow up email to all staff members with the recruitment letter and link to the screening survey attached. The data collected by the screening survey was used to identify potential candidates. Once candidates were identified, those who met the participation criteria and expressed interest in participating were contacted via email (Appendix D) and provided the consent form (Appendix E). Once all participants were identified, contacted via email, and provided with the consent form, face-to-face meetings were scheduled. At the scheduled face-to-face meeting I answered participant questions, obtained a signed consent form,

and provided each participant with a copy of the signed consent form. Consent forms and other sensitive documents related to this research were scanned and electronically saved under password protection; the original was locked in a secure filing cabinet under key control in my locked office at school.

After receiving the signed consent form from selected participants, I emailed participants a Microsoft form link to the qualitative adaptation of the short form of The Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Appendix F). Participants were asked to complete the survey within 5 days. I followed up with participants via email.

Once potential dates of availability were coordinated for homogeneous focus groups, the focus group sessions were scheduled. Focus groups took place in the school conference room and were audio and video recorded. I utilized a MacBook Air as the primary recording device and an iPad as the back-up recording device for focus group interviews. All recordings were securely stored under password protection. All individual interviews were scheduled to take place after the focus group sessions. Individual interviews took place in the same conference room and were audio recorded. I utilized a MacBook Air as the primary recording device and an iPad as the back-up recording device for individual interviews. All recordings were securely stored under password protection. I conducted member checking by providing transcriptions of participants' respective focus group and individual interviews to participants for verification and clarifying or additional comment. Verifications and comments were returned to me.

After all data collection methods were employed and audio recordings of focus groups and interviews were transcribed, I prepared all collected data for analysis. Participant verifications and comments were reviewed and organized. Questionnaire data were exported to an excel spreadsheet. Notes from focus groups and interviews were organized.

The Researcher's Role

I am currently the Assistant Director of a special education program that serves students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Due to the nature of my current position, I have existing professional relationships with many of the potential participants; however, I do not directly supervise any of the potential participants. I hold a Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GAPSC) endorsement in Teacher Support and Coaching, and I have prior experience coaching teachers to utilize evidence-based practices in working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. However, I have not coached any of the participants, nor would any of the participants be aware of my coaching endorsement or background. I engaged in *epoche* and the process of bracketing in order to gaze upon the phenomenon of interest from a perspective that is free of my administrative and coaching biases as well as any other presuppositions (Moustakas, 1994).

In this transcendental phenomenological study, as the researcher, I was the human instrument that collects data, analyzes findings, and presents descriptions and interpretations. In describing how my background matters Patton (2015) stated, "Qualitative inquiry is personal. The researcher is the instrument of inquiry" (p. 3). As I implemented the transcendental phenomenological design, I made sure to "set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 315). I have devoted my career to working with students who have severe manifestations of behavioral disorders, and I have witnessed the heart-breaking progressive failure of these students to achieve academic success. In my experience, the progressive nature of the under-achievement experienced by these students makes success an abstract and unachievable notion and school a perpetual place of failure. As a practitioner in the

field, I am oriented towards increasing positive outcomes for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

I ascribe to an interpretive lens rooted in pragmatism. In the work of educating children, “what works” and the practical implications are ultimately more important than methodology. The socially constructed nature of the concept of disability guided the action of my research. The disability category of emotional and behavioral disorders, and therefore my chosen population of study, is a social construction that is bound by historical and cultural norms. In adherence to the social constructivist framework, the goal of this research was to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24).

Data Collection

Multiple forms and sources of data were collected in the study in order to achieve triangulation. Patton (2015) described the importance of triangulation as he stated, “Triangulation of data sources within and across different qualitative methods means comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means” (p. 662). Data was triangulated through the collection of data in the form a questionnaire, focus groups, and standardized open-ended interviews. Through the use of these three data collection strategies, I was able to provide a rich description of teachers’ experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum.

Questionnaire

In an effort to gain insight into participants’ self-perceptions of efficacy and gain initial detailed descriptive information regarding the phenomenon of interest, the first method of data collection was a questionnaire (Appendix F). The questionnaire that was utilized for the study is a qualitative adaptation of the short form of The Teacher’s Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES),

developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). Participants received a Microsoft form link via email that allowed them to electronically access the survey. Participants were asked to complete the survey within five days. I followed up with individual participants via email until all questionnaires were complete.

Before utilizing my qualitative adaptation of the short form of the TSES in this research, I acquired written permission from Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (Appendix G). In order to elicit qualitative, not quantitative data, the original versions of the TSES required minor modification. As such, the interpretation of my modified version resided in participants' verbal descriptions opposed to the quantitative score elicited by the original TSES. I substituted quantitative prompts such as "How much" with prompts that elicited a verbal description of experiences such as "What do you do," "How do you," and "To what extent do you." I also altered the response format of the questionnaire; I substituted closed, fixed-response options ranging from "Not at All" to "A Great Deal" with free response text boxes that allowed participants to respond in their own words and "minimize the imposition of predetermined responses" (Patton, 2015, p. 446). In an effort to draw out extended participant responses with great detail, the presentation of the survey was altered to include large free-write response boxes and the directions were reworded to state, "Please express your opinion about each of the questions below. Elaborate as much as possible regarding the reasons for your beliefs". Lastly, in an effort to elicit any additional thoughts and experiences prompted by the questionnaire, I included an additional prompt that stated "Describe additional challenges from your experience as a special education teacher providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum".

Focus Groups Interviews

After initial collections of qualitative survey data, in an effort to gain insight into participants' lived-experience of supporting grade-level academic expectations among students with emotional and behavioral disorders and inform the individual interview phase of data collection, the second method of data collection was moderated focus groups (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) described the effectiveness of focus groups as he stated, "By bringing together people who share a similar background, focus groups create the opportunity for participants to engage in meaningful conversations about the topics that researchers wish to understand" (p. 477). Focus groups are an effective initial method of data collection as they are cost effective, highlight multiple perspectives, facilitate researcher insights, provide for participant interaction which can enhance data, and are a generally enjoyable experience for participants (Patton, 2015). Focus groups took place in an empty conference room and were video recorded so that I was able to analyze both verbal and nonverbal communication. I utilized a MacBook Air as the primary recording device and an iPad as the back-up recording device for focus group interviews. All recordings were securely stored under password protection. For the purposes of the study, there were two focus groups consisting of five to eight participants each, as recommended by Patton (2015). Focus groups are most effective when groupings emphasize homogeneity (Patton, 2015); therefore, groups of participants were formed based on grade-bands, so that the shared experience across members of the group drew from similar classroom experiences and student characteristics. Given that the interaction between members of focus groups draws on the cognitive processing and discussion that will transpire in the group, Patton (2015) recommended no more than 10 questions for a one-hour focus group of five to eight individuals.

Standardized Focus Group Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about the struggles of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum.
2. Tell me about how special education paraprofessionals support academic instruction.
3. Describe your approach to balancing academic instruction and behavior management.
4. Describe how prepared you feel to meet the instructional needs of your students.
5. How do the academic expectations for students with emotional and behavioral disorders differ from the academic expectations for general education students?
6. How do students with emotional and behavioral disorders respond to grade level academic content?
7. In what ways does off-grade level academic content benefit students with emotional and behavioral disorders?
8. Discuss the time you spend on grade level academic instruction in a day.
9. How does it make you feel when students make little to no academic progress over the course of a school year?
10. When students fail to make academic progress or achieve desired outcomes, how does this affect your view of your capabilities as a teacher?

Question one was an experience and behavior question that targeted the empirically supported fact that students with emotional and behavioral disorders frequently challenge teachers (Wagner et al., 2006). This question was sequenced as the opening focus group question as it would likely spur descriptive conversation from all focus group participants.

Question two invited participants to reflect on his or her experiences working with special education paraprofessionals, who provide 76% of special education services provided to

students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Giangreco et al., 2013). Responses to this question provided insight into service delivery models.

Question three was the first value question of the focus group and was reserved until conversation had been facilitated through two less invasive questions. Expert teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders have been found to “go their own way” and confidently deviate from standard curriculum and management strategies (Buttner et al., 2015a). Responses to this question had the potential to share insight into unconventional classroom approaches.

Question four was the first feeling question and was crafted to elicit descriptive responses regarding teacher efficacy. Given that self-appraisals of capability contribute to subsequent behaviors and emotional reactions (Bandura, 1982), responses to this question, combined with elaboration probes, provided insight into the common experience of professional inadequacy among teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Buttner et al., 2015b).

Question five was a knowledge question that sought to “inquire about the respondents factual information” (Patton, 2015, p. 444). Given that teachers of student with emotional and behavioral disorders are generally younger, have fewer years of teaching experience, and are less likely to be fully certified than general education teachers or other special education teachers (Gage, Adamson, MacSuga, & Lewis, 2017), there was a strong possibility that respondents would not know the legal requirements for the instruction of students with disabilities. Since student perceptions of classroom goals influence how students approach, engage with, and respond to learning tasks (Ames and Archer, 1988), responses to this question had the potential to reveal instances of reciprocal determinism.

Questions six, seven, and eight target the underlying fact that students with emotional and behavioral disorders have significant academic deficits (Gage et al., 2017; Lane et al., 2008);

however, special education teachers, serving student with emotional and behavioral disorders, rarely employ evidence based practices (Maggin et al., 2011; Scott et al., 2011). Questions six and eight required participants to recall observable experiences, while question seven was an opinion question that aimed to elicit teachers' reasoning for deviating from the standard curriculum.

Questions nine and ten addressed the fact that students with emotional and behavioral disorder experience success at a rate that makes grade-level proficiency a fleeting target (Wanzek et al., 2014), and generally, fail to achieve academic success across time (Gage, et al, 2017; Siperstein et al., 2011). Question nine was a feeling question that was crafted to elicit the emotional experience of working with a student population who faces expectations that are generally unattainable (Gresham, 2015). Question ten required a high degree of vulnerability and targeted perceptions of self-efficacy based on the empirically based sense of failure that teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders experience (Van der Worp-van der Kamp et al., 2017).

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

After gathering initial insights into participant experiences from the questionnaire and focus group interviews, the third point of data collection was individual semi-structured interviews. Patton (2015) outlined the purpose of qualitative interviewing being “to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences” (p. 442). The interviews consisted of standardized questions with probes utilized as necessary to further explore the experience of the participant by drawing out greater detail, elaboration, clarification, and contrast (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) described probing as “a skill that comes from knowing

what to look for in the interview, listening carefully to what is said and what is not said, and being sensitive to the feedback needs of the person being interviewed” (p. 466). A portion of the interview questions were modified open-ended questions inspired by The Teacher’s Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). Prior to the interview process the research engaged in the *epoche* process by setting biases aside to ensure I did not “color or direct the interview” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 116). The interviews were conducted in an empty conference room and audio recorded for transcription and analysis. I utilized a MacBook Air as the primary recording device and an iPad as the back-up recording device for individual interviews. All recordings were securely stored under password protection.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. What academic content are your students currently working on in class?
2. Discuss the time you spend on grade level academic instruction in a day.
3. Please give me an example of what I would see if I observed you leading a lesson in grade level academic content.
4. Tell me about the struggles of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to grade level academic content.
5. How do behavioral disruptions affect grade level academic instruction?
6. How do students respond to grade-level academic content?
7. In what ways does the academic instruction in your classroom differ from the instruction students receive in general education settings?
8. Describe your approach to balancing academic instruction and behavior management.
9. How do special education paraprofessionals support academic instruction in your classroom?

10. How do you define success for students with emotional and behavioral disorders?
11. What are the academic instructional goals for students with emotional and behavioral disorders?
12. How do the academic expectations for students with emotional and behavioral disorders differ from the academic expectations for general education students?
13. In your opinion, what is the most effective emphasis of academic instruction for students with emotional and behavioral disorders?
14. How has your instructional approach changed since you first started working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders?
15. Describe how you balance individualized student academic goals with providing access to grade level content.
16. Describe how you balance behavior support and intervention with providing access to grade level content.
17. Describe how prepared you feel to meet the needs of your students.
18. In what ways does below-grade level academic content benefit students with emotional and behavioral disorders?
19. How does it make you feel when students make little to no academic progress over the course of a school year?
20. When students fail to make academic progress or achieve desired outcomes, how does this affect your view of your capabilities as a teacher?
21. What else is important for me to know about your experience as a special education teacher providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to grade-level academic content?

22. Tell me about your teacher preparation program.

The interview questions began with noncontroversial questions targeting present behaviors and experiences. The questions gradually progressed to opinion and feeling-based nature, once participants had an opportunity to recall and describe to the experience of inquiry (Patton, 2015). Questions two, five, six, eight, nine, 12, 17, 18, 19, and 20 were replications of focus group questions. Given that focus groups have limitations in the areas of expressions of minority views and hesitancy to discuss issues deemed personal to the participants (Patton, 2015), the focus group questions were replicated in the semi-structured individual interviews to allow for individual prompting to elicit greater detail to individual responses and to present the question in a setting in which confidentiality could be assured.

Questions one and two were experience questions that were designed to get the respondent to immediately begin providing descriptive information and to capture an understanding of the current academic focus of the special education teachers' classroom instruction. Question one purposefully did not use the language of grade or age appropriateness in efforts to obtain honest descriptions of classroom tasks. Given that research has found that interventions with students with emotional and behavioral disorders rarely emphasize age-appropriate academic content (Garwood, 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2014), responses to question one were cross-referenced with the general education curriculum to determine if grade and age-appropriate content was currently being delivered in the classrooms of the participating teachers. Question two built upon the rationale for question one, by straightforwardly requesting estimates of time devoted to grade-level academic instruction.

Given that students with emotional and behavioral disorders are known to challenge teachers (Wagner et al., 2006) and have significant academic deficits (Gage et al., 2017; Lane et

al., 2008), questions three, four, and five were additional behavioral questions that progressed in specificity and crafted to draw out extended descriptive responses. Question three openly prompted the participant to describe what would be observed in a grade-appropriate academic lesson; this question was intentionally crafted in a broadly open-ended fashion to “allow the person being interviewed to select from that person’s full repertoire of possible responses that are most salient” (Patton, 2015, p. 447). Question four built on the observable factors of the lesson and required respondents to focus on the struggles of the classroom experience. Given the behavioral manifestation of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018) question five prompted respondents to discuss the specific challenge of behavioral disruptions.

Question seven was crafted to elicit both past experiences of participants’ own classroom and participants’ knowledge of general education settings. Given that teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders are likely to have fewer years of teaching experience and be nontraditionally certified (Gage et al., 2017) ascertaining teachers’ perspectives of the difference between the educational services provided in a separate school setting and those provided in the general education environment helped to establish an understanding of the knowledge base of the participants.

Given that students with emotional behavioral disorders generally achieve low rates of progress and success when compared to grade level expectations (Wanzek et al., 2014) and that teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders experience internal conflict regarding their ideal teaching roles and actual work responsibilities (Bettini et al., 2018), the opinions elicited by questions ten and eleven provided direct insight into classroom goals and the potential influence of reciprocal determinism (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck, 1986). While

question ten broadly elicited definitions of success, with a more narrowed focus, question 11 targeted goals and expectations specific to academic instruction. Building from the knowledge-basis of question 11, question 13 prompted the participant for his or her opinion regarding “what works” for academic instruction of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Responses to this question provided insight into the empirical finding that teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders seldom utilize evidence-based instructional strategies (Maggin et al., 2011; Scott et al., 2011).

Given the inadequate and stress inducing work conditions (Bettini et al., 2017) high burnout rates (Brunsting et al., 2014) and unconventional instructional and management strategies (Buttner et al., 2015a) of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, questions 14, 15, and 16 were value questions that were crafted to elicit “the cognitive and interpretive processes” (Patton, 2015, p. 444) of participants. By eliciting the thought processes of participants, questions 14, 15, and 16 were crafted to provide much-needed information regarding the impact that authentic conditions have on teachers’ experiences (Garwood, 2018; Losinski et al., 2014; Mulcahy et al., 2014; Mulcahy et al., 2016).

Question 21 provided participants an opportunity to provide any additional details or information that participants deemed important about their experience but may not have been explicitly addressed in the structured interview questions and prompts. Question 22 was a background and socio-demographic question, which was utilized to ascertain categorical information of the person being interviewed. This more routine and generally uninteresting question was reserved until the end of the interview so that participants could “become actively involved in providing descriptive information as soon as possible” (Patton, 2015, p. 446).

Data Analysis

For the purposes of this study, data collected from questionnaire, focus groups, and standardized open-ended interviews were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) approach. sWithin the method of transcendental phenomenology, knowledge is derived from three core processes, which ultimately result in a synthesis of the experience of the phenomenon: *epoche*, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). I articulated the step-by-step process of phenomenological data analysis, that was utilized in the study, in the following sections: *epoche*, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis.

Epoche

Before analyzing data, I engaged in the process of *epoche*, the setting aside of “prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85), so that I was positioned to view special education teachers' experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access from a fresh perspective. I suspended suppositions and preconceptions, by engaging in the process of *epoche*, in order to examine my own personal biases so that I was inclined toward receptiveness. I dedicated myself to periods of self-reflection in a quiet, uninterrupted location to explicitly delineate my predispositions and biases regarding the phenomenon of interest in written format (Moustakas, 1994). I repeatedly engaged in this process until I was “Ready for an authentic encounter” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 89). I engaged in reflexive journaling; in doing so, I created a written delineation of personal biases and prejudgments (Appendix H).

Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction

To facilitate the process of transcendental-phenomenological reduction, I collected and organized the data from the questionnaire, focus groups, and individual interviews. I transcribed recorded focus group interviews and reviewed transcriptions for accuracy. Detailed focus group interview notes were organized. I transcribed recorded interviews and reviewed transcriptions for accuracy. I conducted member checking by providing transcriptions of participants' respective focus group and individual interviews to participants for verification and clarifying or additional comment. Verifications and comments were returned to me (Patton, 2015).

Once the interviews have been transcribed, checked for accuracy, and all data was available in text format, I engaged in transcendental-phenomenological reduction which includes: bracketing, horizontalization, deletion of overlapping statements, thematic clustering of horizons, and the final task of organizing horizons and thematic clusters into lucid textural descriptions of the identified phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Bracketing. The first step of phenomenological reduction, bracketing, allowed me to analyze the data without intrusions, in its pure form (Patton, 2015). Moustakas (1994) defined bracketing as a process in which “the focus of the research is placed in brackets, everything else is set aside so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question” (p. 97). Furthermore, Denzin (1989) described bracketing as allowing the researcher to interpret the phenomenon of study without the “standard meanings given to it by the existing literature” (p. 55). The process of bracketing was captured in the reflexive journal that I kept throughout the research process (Appendix H).

Horizontalization. Within this process Moustakas (1994) defined horizontalization as treating every statement “as having equal value” (p. 97). I listed each statement that was relevant

to the phenomenon of interest and placed each statement in preliminary groupings. I delimited horizons to identify those that were constituent descriptors of the phenomenon or “invariant qualities of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 180), by testing each statement for the presence of two requirements: “Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it? Is it possible to abstract and label it?” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Overlapping statements were eliminated and vague statements were revised in terms that meet the requirements of constituency.

Thematic clustering. The core themes of the experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum were identified by clustering the identified invariant constituents into thematic labels (Moustakas, 1994).

Textural description. Patton (2015) defined a textural description as an “abstraction of the experience that provides content and illustration but not yet essence” (p. 576). An all-inclusive textural description of the conscious experience of the phenomenon, including thoughts, feelings, and ideas was the goal and final product of phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative Variation

Once I completed phenomenological reduction and constructed textural descriptions of the experience, the next step in the phenomenological research process was imaginative variation. Patton (2015) compared imaginative variation to walking around a statue to view it from multiple perspectives. The ultimate goal of imaginative variation is to construct a structural description of the experience that answers the question of “How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is?” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). Structural descriptions are defined as how participants experience the phenomenon “in terms of the conditions, situations,

or context” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78) or as phrased by Moustakas (1994), the “underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced” (p. 98).

Synthesis

Lastly, after engaging in phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation, I synthesized the resulting descriptions into a synthesis, which Moustakas (1994) described as an “intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the experiences of the phenomenon as a whole” (p. 100). In synthesizing the findings, I sought answers to my identified research questions. The resulting synthesis was a unified statement of the essence of the identified experience as a whole, which was reflective of the time, location, and vantage point of myself (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the qualitative or naturalist equivalent to the quantitative constructs of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The construct of trustworthiness was a response to a demand for constructivist specific quality criteria for constructivist research that fit scientific inquiry of a social nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). To confirm the trustworthiness regarding the description and interpretation of the phenomenological essence that was produced by this study, I used the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is conceptualized as a qualitative equivalent to internal validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Patton (2015) described credibility as addressing “the issue of the inquirer providing assurances of the fit between the respondents’ views of their life ways and the inquirer’s reconstruction and representation of same” (p. 485). To increase credibility in the

research the use of triangulation, engagement in *epoche*, conducting of a pilot study, and expert reviews were employed.

Multiple theories were utilized to frame the understanding of the multidimensional phenomenon of emotional behavioral disorders and the associated experience of supporting grade level academic expectations among this population of students. Multiple sources of data (participants with various backgrounds and experiences) and data collection methods (questionnaire, focus group interview, and individual interviews) were employed to capture an accurate essence of the essence of the phenomenon of interest.

Additionally, I engaged in *epoche* in order to suspend suppositions and preconceptions, through the process of bracketing, to incline me toward receptiveness, which according to Moustakas (1994) will “enable us to find a clearing and light to knowledge and truth” (p. 90). While a perfect and pure “presuppositionless state” (p. 90) is rarely achieved, “The value of the *epoche* principle is that it inspires one to examine biases and enhances one’s openness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 61).

Practitioners from the field of education that have earned a doctoral degree in special education, behavioral disorders, or a related field will conduct expert reviews of the data collection tools to ensure face and content validity. A pilot study, or a mini-version of the larger research study, was conducted. This allowed me to test research procedures and instruments (Baker, 1994). By incorporating feedback and findings from the expert reviews and pilot study I enhanced clarity and ensured that my research questions were adequately addressed by my data collection methods.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is parallel to the construct of reliability in quantitative research (Patton, 2015) and involves the assurance of a logical, traceable, and well-documented process or research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To increase the dependability of the study, I kept an audit trail (Appendix I) as it provided a detailed description of data collection methods and a record of and basis for decision-making in conducting the research (Merriam, 2009).

Confirmability in a qualitative research study was established by substantiating inferences and interpretations with data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Patton (2015) described the construct of confirmability as being “concerned with establishing the fact that the data and interpretations of an inquiry were not merely figments of the inquirer’s imagination” (p. 685). I confirmed the findings of the study by engaging in reflexive journaling (Appendix H), digitally recording interviews, and member checking. Direct quotes from participant interviews were provided to support findings.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the findings of similarities within a study that can be transferred to a different context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or stated another way case-to-case generalization (Patton, 2015). Transferability was increased in the study by providing detailed descriptions of the setting of the inquiry as well as thorough portrayals of the participants; thick verbal descriptions of the experience were also provided to allow the reader the contextual information to apply similarities to other settings (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, participants were ethnically diverse, came from a range of educational backgrounds, and had varying levels of experience in education.

Ethical Considerations

Much consideration was given to ensure that all possible ethical considerations were considered and appropriate actions were taken to minimize the potential for any harm to the participants in the study. Specific steps were taken to avoid ethical concerns in the areas of consent, confidentiality, and data security. First, participants were provided full disclosure as to the “nature, purpose, and requirements of the research project” (van Manen, 1990, p. 109) and signed documentation of informed consent was collected from all participants. In regard to confidentiality, the research site and participants in the study were assigned pseudonyms and were referred to as such throughout the research. Participants were assured that all identifying information would be removed from data. To further protect participant confidentiality, interview recordings, interview transcripts, survey responses, and all other research artifacts were kept private and confidential. All records and data (including survey responses, interview recordings, interview transcriptions, and all other research artifacts) were securely stored. Electronic files were password protected and paper documentation was locked under key control in a secure filing cabinet in my locked office at school. All records will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

I conducted the focus groups and interviews at times and in a manner that minimally interfered with instructional schedules. Precautions were taken to allow participants to feel as comfortable during the focus groups and interviews. Participants were informed that the questionnaires, focus groups and interviews were not evaluative and sought to understand the lived-experience of special education teachers who served students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. This chapter provided a detailed description of the procedures, design, and analysis for the research, as well as methods for increasing trustworthiness and addressing ethical considerations. This chapter began with a justification of the transcendental phenomenological design that was employed in the study. The central research question and supporting sub-questions were presented. The setting, participants, and procedures were thoroughly described and data analysis procedures were delineated in replicable detail. Lastly, I presented considerations and corresponding action steps that were taken in regard to trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. Chapter four provides a detailed description of those who participated in the study and of the dialogue that resulted from data collection methods. Additionally, common themes and participant descriptions are presented in alignment with the identified research questions in order to provide a description of participants' lived experiences. In order to maintain confidentiality, participants in the study were assigned pseudonyms and are referred to as such throughout the discussion of research findings. All quotes from participants are presented verbatim, which included verbal ticks and grammatical errors in speech and writing to more accurately depict participants' voices. This chapter is organized in the following sections: participants, results, and summary.

Participants

Two types of participants were involved in data collection; participants who at the time of data collection were currently working as a classroom teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders at Second Street Academy and participants who have formerly, within the past three years, worked as a classroom teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders at Second Street Academy.

Current Teachers

Six classroom teachers were selected to participate in the study. At the time of the study, all six teachers were employed by Second Street Academy and taught grades ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade. Of the current teacher participants, there were five females and one

male. The teachers varied in age (26-47), years of teaching experience (3-18), and teacher preparation pathway (traditional or non-traditional). A brief description of each current teacher is provided below. Additionally, free written responses collected from the electronic questionnaire utilized in the study are included with each description in order to present each participant's individual voice alongside the description.

Tammy. Tammy is a current teacher at Second Street Academy. As a mother of a child with special needs, Tammy cited her child and her desire to better serve her child as her motivation for entering the field of special education. She came to the field as a non-traditional teacher, completed a certification program, and has devoted her entire 14-year career to serving students with severe manifestations of emotional and behavioral disorders. Tammy has taught in both separate class and separate school settings. At the time of data collection, Tammy was serving as the teacher in a self-contained class of second through fifth grade students. Tammy emphasized the mismatch between provided resources and student ability levels as she described her greatest challenges:

Lack of curriculum, textbooks, teacher editions. Also, the individual student issues that change from minute to minute. Before teaching can begin, the teacher has to build a sense of community and family. Respecting each child, getting to know each child. building trust and sense of safety. The majority of our students not only have emotional and behavioral issues, but they are one or more grade levels below their actual grade. It is very important not to embarrass the student. It is also not realistic to give these students general education curriculum and expect them to be successful. The teacher needs resources that can actually be used; high interest, low readability, graphic novels, math manipulatives, science experiments, social studies videos.

Lexie. Lexie is a current teacher at Second Street Academy. At the time of data collection, Lexie was in her fifth year of teaching. For all five years of Lexie’s teaching career, she has served students with severe behaviors in separate school settings. Lexie has a unique perspective as she is the only participant who has taught in two separate programs within the Georgia state-wide network that supports students with severe manifestations of emotional and behavioral disorders. In discussing her desire to work in separate school setting, she stated, “It’s the greatest area of need, and I want to meet the need.” At the time of data collection, Lexie was a middle-school teacher serving students in grades six through eight. In describing her greatest challenge, Lexie stated:

We cannot teach to the pace that the general population students are taught. My students are required to take benchmarks that are based on the pacing guide and how much is covered in the general education, the ones that care about learning feel defeated when they assessed on areas that they have not been taught. It is hard to teach an 8th grade student how to solve linear equations when they do not know their basic math skills, or to have them read grade level text independently when they have a deficit in reading for understanding. We are setting our students up for failure when they have to take a milestone state assessment that is not based on their learning needs or styles, or that they have to take the same test that a student in gifted or AP classes take. There is so much content in the general education curriculum that needs to be covered that my EBD students become overwhelmed and tend to shut down, give up or escape the entire learning proves in general.

Meredith. At the time of data collection, Meredith was serving as a teacher at Second Street Academy. Meredith has 13 years of experience as a teacher in the separate school setting

and has never taught in any other setting. She is adamant that she “could never do regular school.” Meredith volunteers many hours of her time to coordinate cooperative social-emotional learning activities as well as horticultural activities to provide students with the “hands on experience they really need.” For the last two years, Meredith has served as a lead teacher, which is a position without a case-load or homeroom that is designed to provide support to classroom teachers. Due to a teacher being terminated in the middle of the year, for the second half of the school year of data collection, Meredith served as both the lead teacher and a classroom teacher for middle school homeroom ranging in grades from six to eight. In describing the challenges of her work serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders, Meredith stated:

The challenges I see is the consequences. These students seem to get away with hurting others, hurting staff or being a disruptive all day and there are no true consequences.

Later, when they are older they will not understand why they are being punished for behaviors they have been getting away with for years. It is not necessarily the school but the court system in our city.

Henry. Henry is a current teacher at Second Street Academy. At the time of data collection, Henry was in his 18th year of teaching, all of which have been at separate school programs for students with severe behaviors. Henry has a unique perspective on separate school settings given that he attended a separate state-sponsored school as a student. He described himself as being “difficult to work with when I was a kid” and uses his childhood experiences to empathize with students. Henry stated that he is able to reach kids with behavioral disorders “Because I have been in their shoes.” Henry is a elementary teacher serving students with autism at the time of the study, but has served students with emotional and behavioral disorders within

the last year. Henry describe the universal challenge of all of special education as the greatest challenge of his work; he stated:

The mandate to give general education content to special education students often precludes spending class time on the social and life skill development that they continue to require. This is a huge problem and a challenge for any special education teacher, but it is of particular difficulty in a setting that serves student with severely challenging behavior.

La'Trice. La'Trice is a current teacher at Second Street Academy. At the time of data collection, La'Trice was in her 3rd year of teaching, all of which have been at separate school programs for students with severe behaviors. La'Trice is an elementary teacher serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders ranging from kindergarten to second grade. La'Trice has been teaching on a provisional certificate for her first two years, and at the time of the interview, had recently acquired full teacher certification through a state-sponsored alternative educator certification program. La'Trice cited negative experiences with past teachers as her driving reason for entering the field of education. La'trice stated that she did not plan to work with students with emotional and behavioral disorders, but has found that she has a passion for social emotional learning with young students. La'Trice highlighted her students' feelings of inadequacy as she described the challenges she faces. She stated:

Many students are working below grade level in the EBD program. Requiring these students to work on grade level standards when they are no\where near that level is heartbreaking. When students do not try because they know they aren't capable of doing the task it creates behavior problems. As human beings, we become upset when we feel

inadequate. Children are no exception! We seem to see these children either shut down, cry, curse, throw items, hit others, and/or run to escape this difficult work.

Samantha. Samantha is a current teacher at Second Street Academy. At the time of data collection, Samantha was in her 13th year of teaching, all of which have been at separate school programs for students with severe behaviors. At the time of data collection, Samantha was an elementary teacher serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders ranging from third to fifth grade. Historically, Samantha has taught middle school students with emotional and behavioral disorders in both the separate classroom and separate school settings. Samantha is a traditionally trained educator who obtained teacher certification through completion of a bachelor's degree in education. She is the daughter of two educators and has always known that she wanted to work in education. She did not intend to work in the field of special education, but cites student teaching experiences as the reason she chose the field. Samantha described student skill deficits as the most significant challenge she faces. She stated:

My students are often so low and so behind that they can't do anything. Students often can't read, can't count, and can't get along with peers. My students are often behind in every aspect of learning. The challenge in breaking the content down to their level, when they should not be in the current grade in which they are placed.

Former Teachers

Six former classroom teachers, who have served as a classroom teacher for Second Street Academy within the past three years, were selected to participate in the study. At the time of the study, all six former teachers were employed by Second Street Academy, but in a capacity other than that of classroom teacher. Of the former teacher participants, there were four females and two males. The former teachers varied in age (29-60), years of teaching experience (4-33), and

teacher preparation pathway (traditional or non-traditional). A brief description of each former teacher is provided below.

Charles. Charles is a diagnostician who assists with program-wide psychological assessment of students. At the time of the interview Charles had not served as a teacher of record for two years. Charles has 11 years of experience in the continuum of services for students in the identified specialized behavioral program. Charles has served as paraprofessional, a crisis interventionist, and a teacher for elementary students ranging in age from kindergarten to fifth grade in both the separate classroom and school settings. Charles has served in a role supporting teachers and students outside of the classroom for the past two years. He is currently enrolled in an educational leadership certification program and desires to serve students and teachers as a special education administrator. Charles described the maintenance of a grounded and positive approach as his greatest challenge. He stated:

Teaching children with emotional and behavioral disorders can be extremely tough. It is essential to remember that fostering and rewarding positive behavior has proven to be vastly more effective than attempting to eliminate negative behavior. Punishment and negative consequences tend to lead to power struggles, which only make the problem behaviors worse. The challenge that special education teachers face is multifaceted in its nature. There is a challenge to keep a balance within the classroom, but also a challenge to keep balance within themselves.

Jeff. At the time of the interview, Jeff was serving as lead teacher who supports teachers and students, by providing case management, behavioral intervention support, and academic intervention support. At the time of the interview Jeff had not served as a classroom teacher of record for two years. Jeff is a 14-year veteran of education with 12 of experience in the identified

specialized behavioral program and two years serving as an educator in the juvenile justice system. Jeff cites his work in the juvenile justice system as his motivation for entering the field of special education; he stated, “I wanted to be positioned to reach these kids before they entered the system. I feel like my experience helps me offer kids insight into the consequences of their actions.” Jeff has a unique perspective as he has served as both a teacher for students with severe manifestation of emotional and behavioral disorders and a lead teacher at two of the three separate school sites. Jeff described his greatest challenge as he stated:

We are treated as the peons of the educational world while we are the ones doing the heaviest lifting. Often I feel that I am blamed for the academic failures of my students. I often feel that I cannot be honest with my students, parents, staff, or administration for fear of retribution or blame. In working with a severe population of students, I am held to a higher expectation in regards to student growth than even general education teachers.

Anna Grace. Anna Grace is a diagnostician who assists with program-wide psychological assessment of students. At the time of the interview, Anna Grace has served in a role supporting psychological assessment outside of the classroom for one year. Anna Grace has 7 years of experience in education and all have been in the identified separate school program for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Anna Grace comes from a family of educators and has always known that she wanted to work in the field of education; she has a nephew that receives special education services and cites this a one of the reasons she was drawn to special education. She is a traditionally trained educator who majored in education at a four-year university. Anna Grace completed her student teaching in a separate school behavioral program, working under the supervision of multiple teachers with years of experience serving students with severe behavioral disorders; due to this experience, she has unique insight regarding

separate school practices. Anna Grace also holds a Master's degree in curriculum and instruction and is working toward a Specialist degree in school psychology. Anna Grace emphasized the multi-grade level classes as she described the challenges and stated:

Teaching several grade levels at once is very challenging, especially when you add in disruptive and aggressive behaviors. The most difficult part of this job is simultaneously differentiating the instruction while also constantly teaching social skills and replacement behaviors. It is also difficult to understand that due to the nature of the environment, and the severity of the behaviors, these students are not going to grasp concepts as quickly and easily as their general education peers. It can be frustrating to teach the same concept day after day because the students have not mastered the skill, but it's what these students require.

Monique. Monique is a lead teacher who supports teacher and students. At the time of the interview Monique had not served as a teacher of record for a year. Monique is a four-year veteran of education with experience in the identified specialized behavioral separate school program, the prison system, and school based separate class setting for students with severe disabilities. Monique has served as both a teacher for students with severe manifestation of emotional and behavioral disorders and a lead teacher at two of the three separate school sites in the behavioral program selected for this study. She described herself as a high achieving student that loved school and as someone who always knew she would work in the field of education. Monique states that she loves working with students in the specialized separate school setting because she is positioned to be an "agent of change." Monique described the challenge of managing behavior and preparing students to transition back to mainstream settings with less support, while being able to maintain behavioral and academic progress:

There are several challenges that I have experienced as a special education teacher as it relates to teaching students with EBD. The major challenge is minimizing student behavior necessary for the student to access the general curriculum in other settings. This takes a TEAM because once the behavior is minimized or non-existent in your setting it does not guarantee that it will be in a different setting.

Peggy. Peggy is a special education coordinator who assists with program-wide IEP development for students. At the time of the interview, Peggy has served in a role supporting psychological assessment outside of the classroom for two years. Peggy has 15 years of experience in education as a paraprofessional, teacher, and coordinator all of which have been in the identified separate school program for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Peggy is a non-traditionally trained educator who completed a state-sponsored alternative educator preparation program, after serving as a paraprofessional for eight years. Peggy also holds a Master's degree in curriculum and instruction and a Specialist degree in educational leadership. Peggy is currently pursuing an endorsement in teacher support and coaching and has a desire to work with new and struggling teachers. Peggy emphasized the lack of training as she summarized the challenges she has faced:

Some of the challenges have been having accessibility to the same resources as the general education teacher. This includes academic content training with how to use effective strategies and delivery methods so that you can write more effective lesson plans with engaging assignments and activities. Home schools are often very disconnected once a student enters into the separate school setting and do not have a clear understanding about the process of returning to a less restrictive setting. Separate school settings are often not seen as effective or a valuable part of the special education

continuum, I often feel that our teachers are not recognized for the highly skilled and challenging work they do each and every day.

Heather. Heather is a retired educator who spent her entire career-serving students from Second Street Academy. At the time of data collection, Heather has been retired from teaching for 1 year, but supports teachers at Second Street Academy in a part-time capacity. Heather has a unique perspective as she has worked with Second Street Academy for more than 30 years and has experienced several state-sponsored overhauls of programming for students with severe emotional and behavioral disorders. In her career, Heather served elementary and middle school students in both the separate classroom and separate school settings. Heather also served as a teacher support coach and mentor for induction level teachers at Second Street Academy. Heather holds a teacher support and coaching endorsement and has served as a vital member of new teacher support teams at Second Street Academy for the past ten years. Heather described the multi-faceted nature of her greatest challenge as a special education teacher serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders in a separate school setting:

The biggest challenge for me is meeting the emotional and academic needs of my students at the same time. Dealing with behavior problems and emotional issues makes it difficult to progress through the standards at the same pace as the general education students. Also, many of my students are below grade level, some of them significantly. This makes it difficult for them to learn the grade level standards. Extensive preparation is needed to cover the standards and remediate the deficits that keep the student from performing at grade level, while also implementing behavior intervention plans, providing classroom instructional and behavioral supports, and responding to students in crisis.

Results

Through an in-depth review and analysis of data collected from questionnaires, focus groups, and standardized open-ended interviews predominant themes of the experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum were identified by clustering the identified invariant constituents into thematic labels. Four predominant themes represent the shared experiences and perspectives of the current and former teacher participants. This section relies on the words of the participants to present an in-depth description of special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting.

Theme Development

Historically, research has found that students with emotional and behavioral disorders generally fail to achieve academic success across time (Gage, et al, 2017; Siperstein et al., 2011) and the teachers of student with emotional and behavioral disorders face unique challenges (Ruppar, Roberts, & Olson, 2017). In addition, studies indicate that research rarely emphasizes grade and age appropriate content or the general education curriculum (Garwood, 2018; Mulcahy et al., 2014). In response to this identified gap in the literature concerning special education teachers' experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum, this study focused on the experiences of current and former classroom teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders at a separate school setting, Second Street Academy. Through the process of data analysis and transcendental phenomenological reduction, four major themes, directly related to the research questions and focus of the study, resonated across participant responses and collected data. As seen below,

Table 1 provides a graphical depiction of how constituent descriptors were organized and grouped into thematic clustering. The identified themes were: positive perspectives of self-efficacy, relativity of defined success, creation of student success experiences, and embracement of pragmatism. An in-depth description and explanation of each theme, supported by participant quotes and questionnaire responses, is included in this section.

Table 1

Development of Thematic Clustering

Thematic Clustering	Constituent Descriptors
Positive Perceptions of Efficacy	People wouldn't believe the stuff we deal with We are charged with an impossible task that most wouldn't do We teach kids with low school readiness We are highly skilled at differentiation and specially designed instruction It takes a skilled teacher to serve multi-grade level classes Our teachers do a tremendous job preparing for what we are dealing with Most people don't understand how we do the job we do
Relativity of Defined Success	Each kid has their own level of progress Progress has to exist on a sliding scale I look for individual growth and independence Expectations have to change Academic abilities versus grade level expectations Success looks different for different kids The establishment of relationships is success Success for our kids is often behavior based
Creation of Student Success Experiences	I make sure students are successful I make sure my students don't get discouraged by failure Sometimes they just can't do it These kids don't have the prerequisite skills Delicately present the content Promote feelings of success I recognize that kids often prefer to appear bad rather than dumb
Embracement of Pragmatism	Flexibility is key Reevaluate strategies and implement new ones Different approaches work for different teachers I favor a shotgun approach I am always willing to change You have to do what works An intervention might work one day and not the next I constantly tweak my system and make adjustments What strategies will work best for my students

Positive Perspectives of Self-Efficacy. Based on interview responses and questionnaire responses, all participants had generally positive perceptions of their self-efficacy and effectiveness. Participants expressed high levels of perceived self-efficacy, with the majority of participants providing a justifying reference to the context and conditions of the separate school setting. While self-efficacy is conceptualized by Bandura (1993) as a perceived ability to complete a task, participants in this study expressed a resounding notion of perseverance in the task of educating students with extreme behaviors as the basis for their perceptions of efficacy. In large, participants describe themselves as outsiders in the world of education who provide a thankless under-recognized service to students who were failed by the general education setting.

In his individual interview, Jeff provided a vivid, collectively representative description of the context from which efficacy is measured by participants of the study: “I don't think anybody would believe some of the stuff that we see on a daily basis. I just don't think they would believe it.” He went on to state:

The teachers in this program are highly effective in the task they are charged with. Most every teacher I work with is highly prepared, well-educated to the nature of the work, and dedicated to doing this work. We are given the gigantic, impossible, insurmountable of a task getting these kids on grade-level and it's not fair or realistic. It's just not the same work and the expectation is unrealistic. A kid with EBD, engaging in acting out behavior to the extent that it prevents him from being served in his zoned school, is not gonna have the same seat time, the same experiences, or feel the same way about school as a general education student. In this job you have kids spitting at you, punching you, and cursing at you. Most people would be a little bit standoffish, unwilling to jump in there, build

relationships, and work with these kids. But our teachers do a tremendous job preparing for what we're dealing with.

Henry further described a positive perspective of teacher efficacy in the context of the nature of the disabilities and students served in the program. In his questionnaire response, Henry emphasized the academic deficits of the students as he stated:

We teach kids with low school-readiness. We juggle a tremendous workload of teaching the standards to multi-grade level classes, while also managing extreme behaviors. In a separate school setting like this, we have to be highly skilled and effective at differentiation and specially designed instruction in order to survive. I think that the majority of public education doesn't understand how we do the job we do. Some people never get it. We are exposing these kids to high quality instruction, but regardless of teacher effort or skill, we cannot manufacture student outcomes. Some kids are only going to retain so much and some kids growth rates will be slower than others.

In her focus group interview, Anna Grace echoed the highly skilled sentiments of Henry as she emphasized the challenges of teaching not only multi-grade level classes but also serving students of various developmental levels. Anna Grace stated:

Each year, my students are typically all on different development levels. It is not uncommon for some of my fourth and fifth grade students to developmentally be working on a kindergarten level. Managing such a diverse caseload is not an easy task, and not something that just any teacher can do or is willing to do.

Relativity of Defined Success. The relative nature of success resounded as a key theme across responses from all 12 participants. Participants were adamant that the growth expectations and demands of the general education curriculum are unrealistic and often inappropriate for

students with severe behavioral disorders. While meaningful engagement with grade level general educational curriculum reverberated throughout participant narratives, participants expressed the necessity for student-specific measurements of success and growth.

Charles captured the echoing theme expressed by all participants as he described the relative nature of success for each individual student. In the focus group interview, Charles stated:

Each kid has their own level of progress. It's about how far they are able to travel. Each student starts at their individual level of academic ability and progresses at their own pace. At the end of the year, we celebrate the distance they have travelled. In a typical middle school class in the separate school setting, you may have a student who is a non-reader and another student who reads above grade level. "Progress" for these two students is going to look drastically different, and that's okay. Your conception and measure of progress has to exist on a sliding scale.

In alignment with individualized measures of relative success, in her individual interview, La'Trice articulated the common teacher mindset regarding success with students who show little academic progress across a school year:

I look for individual growth. In my mind, the first year I was going to be a miracle worker and everybody's going to achieve grade level proficiency and pass the state assessments. When you have kiddos that are in second grade and struggle to spell their name, your expectations have to change. Even more so, expectations are typically going to be behavior-based. I might have had a kid that ran out of the room every three to five minutes at the beginning of the school year. If at the end of the year, they're only running out of the room once a day, that is significant progress. State assessments may not

measure or recognize behavioral progress, but behavior shaping teaching students how to “do school” is the hardest work and greatest success.

In her individual interview, Meredith extended upon the notion of relative student-specific success and provided an additional narrative describing the importance and relative success of shaping school-readiness behaviors. Meredith stated:

When we talk about general education curriculum, I immediately think state testing and the Milestones assessment. This is a time of year in which the ugly truth of the discrepancy between our students’ academic abilities and the grade-level expectations is revealed in an often-humiliating fashion for students. For our kids, success on the Milestones is often accepting the challenge of even sitting down to attempt the test. I don’t know that I have ever had a student pass, but I feel I have succeeded if I can get them to comply and attempt the test, which is a task that is intimidating and often well beyond their academic capabilities.

La’trice echoed a similar notion as she described her academic expectations for her students; in completing the questionnaire she wrote, “I think one thing that I look for is independence. If I have taught a skill over and over and over again, I celebrate each step towards student independence.”

Creation of Student Success Experiences. The intentional creation of experiences designed to provide students with the familiarity of success was discussed by 10 of the 12 participants in the study; as such the creation of student success experiences emerged as one of the thematic cornerstones of special education teachers’ lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. Participants expressed the importance of acknowledging student success in order

to reinforce desired behavioral and academic outcomes; however, participants were also very transparent regarding the fact that providing acknowledgement can be difficult when students have major academic and behavioral deficits. Teachers overcome this difficulty by creating opportunities for success.

In responding to the questionnaire, Jeff explained that he strategically designs instruction to allow for student success, and responds to his students' experience with the content. He stated:

I meet the student where they are. I design my tests and questions around their ability.

Simply put, I make sure they are successful. I don't keep giving tests that I know they are going to fail. I make sure they experience success, and then I slowly increase the rigor while making sure my students don't get discouraged by failure.

In her focus group interview, Meredith discussed her struggles in planning and expressed the same response to student needs and provided extension by elaborating on the opposing forces of professional expectations and meeting students' needs. Meredith stated:

I feel like I was having to fluff up these lesson plans, because that's what I was supposed to do. I spent all this time, making the lesson plans look okay, you know, compliant with standards, pacing guides, and growth expectations, but it's not realistic. I would have to do two separate things. I would have to make a standard's based lesson plan, but then I'd also have to have my notes over here saying, "This is what the kids really need, and this is what you are actually going to do."

In her individual interview Samantha described her perception of student tension and her efforts to present academic content in a non-threatening manner that facilitates student success:

You know? I feel bad for the kids, because a lot of times they just can't do it. When I present the standard and the learning target, I can feel the tension build in the classroom.

These kids have such deficits because of the impact that their behavior has had on their learning. They just don't have the prerequisite skills to access the grade level standard. I feel like much of my job is to delicately present the content in a way that allows for student success and doesn't cause my kids to immediately shut down and refuse to engage.

In similar fashion, in her individual interview, Anna Grace described her approach to individualizing instruction and emphasizing success as a means of motivation:

Each lesson is catered to the individual needs of the student to promote feelings of success. If the students feel that they are failing, they will become discouraged and not be motivated to do well. If they feel successful, they will be more motivated to continue to be successful.

La'Trice empathized with her students' experience and provided an understanding of the reality of academic deficits that resonated across the majority of participants. In her questionnaire response, La'trice stated:

Many students are working below grade level in the EBD program. Requiring these students to work on grade level standards when they are nowhere near that level is heartbreaking. When students do not try because they know they aren't capable of doing the task it creates behavior problems. As human beings, we become upset when we feel inadequate. Children are no exception! We seem to see these children either shut down, cry, curse, throw items, hit others, and/or run to escape grade-level work.

Embracement of Pragmatism. Pragmatism and practicality were resounding ideologies that were woven throughout participant responses. Participants not only acknowledged the use of diverse and ever-changing classroom methods to meet student needs, but participants also

expressed the necessity of a pragmatic and flexible approach. This theme emerged across all participant interviews and questionnaire responses.

Charles' narrative provided a representative summary of participant responses. He described his pragmatic instructional and management style in his questionnaire response as he stated, "I favor a shotgun approach, where you try a whole bunch of strategies and find out which ones are most effective for students." Heather echoed a similar approach, with an emphasis on flexibility and willingness to change. In her individual interview she stated:

When my system seemed to become ineffective, I would tweak it to make adjustments. I have even changed my system in the middle of a school year because it did not seem to be working. Flexibility to make changes when things aren't working is important.

Corresponding with responses of other participants and the theme of pragmatism as a necessity to effectiveness, in her focus group interview, Anna Grace explained:

The first few weeks of every school year, I get to know the personalities in my classroom, and determine what strategies and techniques will work best for my students. This is generally effective, but if it begins to seem ineffective, I reevaluate the strategies and implement new ones. Flexibility is key in this setting.

Research Question Responses

The four themes that emerged through transcendental-phenomenological reduction connected directly back to both the central research question and associated sub questions that were designed to guide the inquiry. The central research question of the study was: What are special teachers' experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum? Sub-questions were devised to increase the specificity of the central research question in order to both capture the self-efficacy construct of

social cognitive theory and address gaps in the current literature from the field of special education that serves students with emotional and behavioral disorders. In this section the identified themes, descriptions of participant experiences, and supporting participant statements are aligned to the central research question and associated sub-questions.

Sub-Question 1. The first research sub-question queried: How are special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy affected by the challenges of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum? The theme that emerged from this sub-question is positive perspectives of self-efficacy. In spite of the clear recognition, that typically only small academic gains are achieved, teachers expressed strongly positive perceptions of efficacy. In her focus group interview, Samantha discussed the management and instructional skills that are strengthened out of the necessity of the job. She stated, "If I didn't have a solid approach to classroom management and small group instruction, I couldn't survive in this setting." Similar to Samantha's response, most all teacher expressions of efficacy were coupled with a strong sense of pride for their perseverance, given the challenging nature of the work of educating students with emotional and behavioral disorders in a separate school setting. In his individual interview response, Jeff described the foundation of efficacy as being rooted in willingness to do the job. As he described the challenging nature of the student population, his description of effectiveness was presented in close association with the acknowledgement that "Most people would be a little bit standoffish, unwilling to jump in there, build relationships, and work with these kids." In discussing the required efficacy of the role of teacher serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders in a separate school setting, Monique extended upon the expectations and requirements of the role of teacher. In her individual interview she stated:

We're not just a teacher to our students. We are their only teacher. We teach them every subject and spend all day together. We fill a lot of roles other than teacher. We are their counselor. We are their crisis manager. With some of the tough life situations my students bring to me, I feel like I am their social worker. We are their social skills model. We are their case manager. With the time we invest and the many roles we serve, we are often times the first teacher that our students are able to relate to and build a relationship with.

Sub-Question 2. The second research sub-question probed: How do special education teachers, serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders, describe changes in their pedagogical approach over time? The theme, relativity of defined success, emerged as a response to this sub-question. Participants described an “individualizing” of the concept of progress. Participants discussed a sense of “coming to terms with” a new construction of progress in addition to increasing levels of frustration for an educational system that does not acknowledge the unrealistic expectations for student growth that are placed on the teachers of students with severe manifestations of emotional and behavioral disorders. Participants all expressed general changes in their understanding of progress and their associated expectation for success. As Heather reflected over her career in her individual interview, she stated:

In my early years of teaching, I often stressed over standardized testing or grade level content mastery. In my later years as a teacher, I came to see it was about improving outcomes for students. An improved outcome may be increased reading comprehension and it may be learning to disagree with a peer without becoming physically aggressive. They are both improved outcomes. To be effective with this student population, you have to realize that improvement and success are going to look different across students.

In her focus group interview, Anna Grace reflected upon her understanding of student progress and how it evolved over her career. She elaborated upon her experience of and expectations for student progress. She stated:

Any progress was progress to me. If I had a kid who increased their reading fluency by ten words over the school year, that, to me, was still something to be celebrated. These kids are served by special education for a reason. They're not learning like their peers. You can't expect them to make leaps and bounds and catch up to their peers in one year. To do this they would have to progress faster than their nondisabled peers. It's not realistic. It was frustrating for me but I also had to kind of take it with a grain of salt and understand that each kid was different.

Sub-Question 3. The third research sub-question explored: What do special education teachers identify as challenges to providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum? As a result of this sub-question, the theme creation of student success experiences emerged. Participants discussed the challenge of presenting the general education curriculum in a manner that makes the content accessible to students and conducive to student success experiences, given students' extreme academic deficits. Participants expressed a deep concern for the dignity of students and creating an environment in which success was attainable, regardless of academic level. In her questionnaire response, La'Trice emphasized her empathy with the human experience of facing expectations that one is not equipped to meet. She stated, "As human beings, we become upset when we feel inadequate. Children are no exception!" La'Trice elaborated in her individual interview and stated:

Pushing my students to take academic risks while also making sure they realize that they are safe to do so is my greatest challenge. One experience of failure can lead to acting out

student behavior that can disrupt instruction for the rest of the day. I have to manage my students' experience of failure, and make sure they have enough successes to withstand the blow of failure.

Further adding to the challenge of managing student perceptions of self and student experiences of failure by creating student success experiences is the teacher's obligation to prepare students for the academic pressure of their grade and age appropriate academics. Most all participants addressed the difficult task of balancing of the two objectives of creating success experiences while also pushing students to handle more rigorous and challenging content. Participants described the process of increasing academic rigor as difficult due to students exhibiting extreme escape and avoidance behaviors. In her focus group interview, Anna Grace elaborated on the challenge:

It's hard because you don't want to instill a falseness of confidence. The academic rigor of many of our classrooms is reduced because teachers are working to boost student confidence. I think that as you build confidence in that student's abilities, you also need to pull in some more difficult work or academic pressure. You kind of have to build the pressure. You do that on an individual basis, looking at how the kid is behaving, how the kid is doing academically. You just really have to have an individual relationship with the child and understand the child's needs before you can go about doing anything like that. It's hard.

Sub-Question 4. The fourth research sub-question investigated: What do special education teachers identify as successful practices for providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum? From this sub-question, the theme embracement of pragmatism emerged. Participants expressed a common understanding

that successful teachers read the room and do what works. Pragmatism was a resounding theme regarding success in the separate school setting, serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders. In his focus group interview Jeff summed up his pragmatic and flexible approach as he stated, “You don't have as much control as you would like to. You just do the best you can.” He describe a student-centric instructional delivery style in which he is constantly seeking feedback and cues from students as to the success of the lesson. He provided an example of using flexible management to both manage and engage students in classroom instruction as he stated:

You might spend longer than planned on a subject that they enjoy, or part of the instruction that they are really buying into. Just to get them a little bit more interested. You have to pay attention and be very aware of when your lesson is engaging to kids and really deliver rich instruction when you ‘ve got them hooked. You also have to be very aware when kids are checking out and disengaging. That’s when you will have your behavior problems.

In addition to flexible planning, the necessity of flexibility regarding the pragmatic delivery of supports and interventions was also a key aspect of successful classroom practice among teachers. Peggy captured the central theme of participant responses as she discussed her willingness to “try whatever works.” In her individual interview, Peggy stated:

Even when I had interventions in place and working, I was always planning what I would do next, because I knew there would come a day when it would stop being effective and I would have to implement something new. An intervention might work one day and not the next. It’s the same with kids; an intervention might work for one kid and not the next.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. Twelve teachers participated in the study; six of the participants were current teachers and six of the participants were former teachers, who had served as a classroom teacher within the last three years. Data collected from questionnaires, focus group interviews, and standardized open-ended interviews were analyzed. The established themes of positive perspectives of self-efficacy, relativity of defined success, creation of student success experiences, and embracement of pragmatism were supported with participant narratives and discussed in light of the central research question and associated sub-questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this the transcendental phenomenology was to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. This chapter is organized in the following sections: summary of findings, discussion, implications, delimitations and limitations, recommendations for future research, and summary.

Summary of Findings

A transcendental phenomenological design was utilized to explore the lived experiences of special education teachers who provide students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. This study revealed four clear themes that capture teachers' experiences and directly answer the research questions of the study. Findings are discussed below in terms of each sub-question.

The first research sub-question queried: How are special education teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy affected by the challenges of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum? Based on participant responses, teachers experience high levels of efficacy and tend to view their efficacy in light of the difficulty of the task. Per participant narratives, teachers consider the challenging behaviors exhibited by students, the multi-faceted nature of their role, as well as the necessary dispositions that are required for effectiveness as they make positive self-efficacy evaluations. Teachers acknowledge the challenging nature of both the student population and the behavioral program setting. Teachers' efficacy ratings appear to be positively influenced by both their willingness to work in the field as well as their survival and perseverance in the challenging work. Lastly, teachers are

aware that students have been unsuccessful in previous educational settings and take into account minimal degrees of student progress as they consider their efficacy.

The second research sub-question probed: How do special education teachers, serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders, describe changes in their pedagogical approach over time? In considering teachers' pedagogical changes over time, teachers reported that their perspective and understanding of success has changed. Most all participants described an individualizing of success and progress that arose from necessity as they realized that traditional blanketed measures of success were unrealistic for the student populations they serve. Teachers define and celebrate success and progress in light of development levels, school readiness levels, social skill deficits, and prerequisite academic skills. Over time teachers cultivate an acute awareness of skill progression across both academic and social domains. Based on participant responses, teachers' understanding of success changes over time due to increased understanding of developmental skill progression. Teachers adapt to be able to celebrate progression in skill regardless of grade and age appropriate expectations.

The third research sub-question explored: What do special education teachers identify as challenges to providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum? Teachers acknowledge the challenging nature of the student population they serve. Teachers are keenly aware of the gentle touch that is required to manage fragile emotions in working with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Specifically, teachers of this study emphasized the specially crafted lessons that the challenging nature of the student population requires. Teachers are challenged to create an environment in which students are able to build confidence by experiencing behavioral, social, and academic success, in spite of lagging prerequisite academic skills and social skills. Teachers work to balance the creation of a

confidence-building environment while applying the delicate pressure required to push students to new tasks, with which they are less confident. Teachers are challenged to push students to build confidence in new areas without triggering aggressive acting out escape and avoidance behaviors. Ultimately, teachers are challenged to promote academic risk taking and growth while also providing a sense of safety and preservation of students' often-fragile evaluations of self.

The fourth research sub-question investigated: What do special education teachers identify as successful practices for providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum? Lastly, regarding successful practices, teachers embrace frequent change and flexible classroom practices informed by student academic and behavioral feedback. Teachers possess a wide variety of options for intervention and are not hesitant to change or reset their approach. Flexibility is valued as one of the fundamental dispositions of an effective teacher in this setting. The intentional implementation of flexibility and pragmatism, in response to student cues, is the root of successful practice in providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum. Teachers implement flexibility and pragmatism by analyzing student triggers and engagement levels and responding accordingly with an array of instructional and intervention options.

Discussion

In this section, the findings of this study are discussed in light of the theoretical framework and related literature presented in Chapter Two. This study was framed by Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory as well as the closely aligned achievement goal theory (Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck, 1986). This research was conducted in light of the current research base regarding students with emotional and behavioral disorders, teaching students with emotional and behavioral disorders, and interventions for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Discussion of Theoretical Framework

The thematic findings of this research extend the application of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory to provide a vantage point to better understand participants' positive experiences of efficacy despite indicators that might predict negative perceptions of efficacy. In accordance with Bandura's (1993) triadic reciprocity, participants in this study discussed the process of altering their personal definitions and meanings of student success based on their experiences and outcome expectations. This study found participants to hold positive perceptions of self-efficacy despite serving a student population that does not provide the typical indicators of teacher success (Kraft et al., 2015). Miller et al. (2017) found teachers who perceived their students to be low achieving to tend to have lower perceptions of their instructional effectiveness. The participants of this study serve one of the most challenging populations (Brunsting et al., 2014) that generally fail to achieve academic success over time (Gage et al., 2017; Siperstein et al., 2011); however, all participants in this study expressed overwhelmingly positive perceptions of their efficacy. This finding appears to be directly linked to participants' alternative definitions of student success, recognition of the challenge the students present, embracement of a pragmatic approach, and overt acknowledgement of the difficulty of the job. Bandura (1993) discussed the importance of positive self-efficacy and the unilateral relationship that positive perceptions of efficacy have on one's ability to employ an identified skill under stress. In extension, participants' positive perceptions of efficacy, in the midst of typically efficacy negating circumstances, suggests that the mental construct of self-efficacy might be strengthened through exposure to and endurance under stressful conditions or in a challenging environments. This finding of this research suggest a bidirectional relationship

between stress and self-efficacy in which positive perceptions of efficacy prepare an individual to perform under stressful circumstances and conversely participants' endurance and employment of a skill in stressful environment increases perceptions of efficacy.

Previous research has indicated that student perception of educational goals influences student engagement with learning tasks (Ames & Archer, 1988). The findings of this study confirm achievement goal theory as an accurate description of student motivation as well as a potential influencing factor regarding teacher self-efficacy. Specifically, the findings of this research confirm performance-based motivation as an appropriate characterization within achievement goal theory to describe participants' experiences of motivation among students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Previous research describes students ascribing to performance based learning goals as valuing preservation of self and the avoidance of failure (Cook & Artino, 2016). Based on their experience of this student characteristic, participants in this study emphasized their experiences of coming to understand the relative nature of success and the importance of creating student success experiences. In the findings of this research, preservation and avoidance of failure can be identified as clear subthemes within participants' stated challenge of crafting student success experiences in spite of significant social and academic deficits. Additionally, participants' experiences of preserving students' perceptions and therapeutic navigation of academic risk and failure appear to impact participants' understanding of the relative nature of success. The findings of this research suggest a reciprocally deterministic relationship between the forces of student motivation and self-efficacy evaluations of the professionals who serve these students. Based on the findings of

this study, working with students who ascribe to performance based motivation models appears to drive professionals to reconsider their understandings of success as well as the importance of success experiences. Participants' experiences of reframing their perceptions of success appear to make them inclined to lean on non-traditional self-efficacy indicators as they evaluate their effectiveness.

Discussion of Related Literature

The thematic findings of this study offer confirmation, extension, divergence, as well as novelty in light of the prior existing knowledge of the identified field of study. In this section, each thematic finding is discussed in relation to the related literature presented in chapter two.

The findings of this study suggest that teachers possess a keen awareness and recognition that the student population they serve, students with emotional and behavioral disorders, are considered one of the most challenging student populations (Brunsting et al., 2014).

Additionally, teachers are acutely aware that inclusive settings often lack the intensive supports that students with emotional and behavioral disorders often require for success (Gottfried, Egalite, & Kirksey, 2016) and that students are often suspended or expelled from school at high rates prior to being served in the separate school setting (Losen, Hodson, Ee, & Martinez, 2014). Contrary to previous findings of internal confliction regarding teachers' perceptions of their ability to produce behavioral and academic growth (Bettini et al., 2018), the participants of this study presented their positive perceptions of self-efficacy in direct relation to the challenging nature of the task and the failure of less restrictive settings to adequately serve students.

Participants in this study held deep-seeded perceptions of effectiveness regarding separate school settings and their personal approaches. This finding aligns with previous literature supporting separate school settings as beneficial placement options due to their intense and individualized

nature (Bettini et al., 2017) as well as literature supporting restrictive placements as a superior placement option compared to typical classrooms that do not provide adequate support to promote social and academic success for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Mitchell et al., 2018).

The second thematic finding of this research captures participants' expressed conception of the relativity of measures of student success. While outcomes regarding academic achievement, school experiences, and post-secondary schooling or career for students with emotional and behavioral disorders are among the worst when compared to other students with and without disabilities (Mitchell et al., 2018), the findings of this study do not suggest that the participants of this study experience professional inadequacy, as suggested by prior research (Buttner et al., 2015a). Instead, participants characterized the general education curriculum as promoting unattainable expectations (Gresham, 2015) and unrealistic growth rate requirements (Wanzek et al., 2014), resulting in an embracement of relative measures of student success. Once such relative measure of student success was identified as relationship building; emphasizing a students' ability to build trusting relationships with their teachers was both a thematic finding of this research and indicated as a school success predictor in previous research (Reinke et al., 2016).

Previous research established that students with emotional and behavioral disorders challenge teachers (Wagner et al., 2006). This research identified one of the greatest challenges of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders as the creation of experiences in which students can be socially and academically successful. Participants of this study expressed an awareness of the increased likelihood of their students to fail school, drop out, and face unemployment (Mulcahy et al., 2016). Participants expressed their challenge to create

opportunities for students to be successful and receive praise. This study expands upon previous research findings to add the creation of a positive success environment to the established challenges of instructing multiple subjects across multiple grades (Smith, 2018). This study found that teachers acknowledge the stressful nature of the job (Bettini et al., 2016), but push themselves to create opportunities for their students to experience the rewards of success.

Prior research has outlined the challenges of teaching students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Meadows et al., 1994; Scott et al., 2017; Stitche et al., 2009). The findings of this study confirm the prior established difficulties of providing high rates of positive feedback and opportunities to respond (Scott et al., 2017) as well maximizing instructional time in classrooms serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders. All participants of this study emphasized pragmatism and the fundamental requirement of flexibility regarding success in their setting. Participants' narratives aligned with previous findings suggesting that expert teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders are inclined to deviate from standard curriculum and student management strategies (Buttner et al., 2015a), while teachers in general education setting are not likely to alter established classroom strategies, regardless of student needs (Meadows et al., 1994).

Implications

This study was designed to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. The findings of this study suggested that teachers serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders in separate school settings view their efforts as effective as they actively deviate from standard and evidence-based practices in order to create opportunities for student success and meet the ever-changing range of student needs in their classrooms. Based on the findings of this study, the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications

that can be drawn are discussed in the following sections.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study expanded upon Bandura's (1993) social cognitive theory by examining participants' constructions of self-efficacy as well as the self-efficacy indicators that they rely upon as they make evaluations of themselves. In addition, this study expanded upon achievement goal theory (Ames & Archer, 1988) to consider the impact that student motivation models have on teachers' perceptions of themselves and their effectiveness. This study confirmed the achievement goal construct of performance-based motivation (Ames & Archer, 1988) to align with participants' perceptions of student motivation. Given the finding that teachers serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders appear to alter their indicators of efficacy based on their experience of student motivation patterns, the interconnected nature of social cognitive theory and achievement goal theory has been further established.

Empirical Implications

Empirically, the research base was expanded by the findings of this study. With the goal of examining lived experiences of teachers supporting grade-level academic expectations for students with EBD, this study collected narratives from teachers based on their experience in authentic settings and directly emphasized teachers' experience with grade and age appropriate content for their students. Previous research has identified studies addressing authentic conditions (Mulcahy et al., 2016) and grade-level academics (Mulcahy et al., 2014) to be sparse in the literature on students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The participant experience, narratives, perceptions, and thematic findings of this qualitative study provide empirically-based support to the call for additional research that addresses authentic classroom conditions and

grade appropriate academic content. This study provided a teacher-centered perspective and narrative to support the previously proposed impact that authentic conditions and academic content have on interventions and interactions in classrooms serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Practical Implications

Practically, the findings of this study have multiple implications for application in the field. Given that teacher self-efficacy is often a predictor of job satisfaction (Chesnut & Burley, 2015), an increased understanding of the factors that contribute to self-evaluations of efficacy has the potential to lead to increased teacher retention and greater job satisfaction. Additionally, given the findings of this study indicating that student motivation models shape teacher experience, practice, and perceptions, ultimately impacting efficacy ratings, the findings of this study have implications for including additional student motivation content in teacher preparation programs. Lastly, given the bidirectional findings regarding challenging work environment and efficacy perceptions, teacher preparation programs could improve teacher perceptions of efficacy by strategically exposing teachers to guided practice sessions with highly stressful and challenging student populations.

Delimitations and Limitations

This phenomenological study has delimitations and limitations that are typical of qualitative research designs. Several purposeful delimitations were inherent to this research study. Delimiting the setting and participant pool of this study to Second Street Academy and the teachers and former teachers of Second Street Academy, this study was designed to precisely examine a specific phenomenon. By serving students in one of the most restrictive special education service delivery options in Georgia, teachers at Second Street Academy had “intense

manifestations” (Patton, 2015, p. 267) of the selected experience under investigation. In addition, the setting and participant pool was delimited to employ purposeful sampling so that I could isolate “information-rich cases for in-depth study” (Patton, 2015, p. 264).

The first limitation of this study is the setting. The selection of Second Street Academy, a large behavioral program in the Southeastern United States serving students ranging in age from 5 to 21 years with behavioral manifestations characteristic of the eligibility category of emotional and behavioral disorder, as the setting limits the generalizability of the findings of this study. The second limitation of this study is the participants. The 12 participants of this study may provide experiences that are not typical or representative of other teachers serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders in restrictive settings, further limiting the generalizability of this study. Lastly, the self-report nature of the data collection is a third limitation of this study. The utilization of questionnaires, focus group interviews, and individual interviews as data collection methods allowed for participants to control what data they expressed; therefore, the data collected in this study may not be fully representative of participants experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research collected data in the form of questionnaire, focus group interview, and individual interview in order to describe special education teachers’ lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. While this study provided a rich description of the phenomenon of interest, based on participant self-report, the utilization of naturalistic observation in future research studies could further address the research gap between intervention and classroom implementation. By incorporating naturalistic observation, future

research will be positioned to provide further depth to this description of teachers' experiences as Patton (2015) described observation as providing the inquirer with the "opportunity to see things that may routinely escape awareness among the people in the setting" as well as the opportunity to observe "things that people would be unwilling to talk about in an interview" (p. 333).

This study utilized formal interview and questionnaire prompts to capture the expressed perspectives of special education teachers regarding their lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum. While questions and prompts were designed to illicit rich verbal descriptions from participants, participants are likely to filter the information that they share in order to manage perceptions. Future studies should incorporate document review as a data collection method in order to capture contextual information and analyze a historical data source that is not reliant upon self-report. Patton (2015) described document review as being able to provide "a behind-the-scenes look" (p. 377).

Lastly, the findings of this study are representative of the cultural and demographical characteristics of a large behavioral program in the Southeastern United States. While the site selection for this study provided "intense manifestations" (Patton, 2015, p. 267) of the identified experience, findings may not be representative of other regions or less restrictive settings. Future studies should emphasize teacher experiences in self-contained separate class settings in geographical regions other than the Southeast in order to identify themes that are not bound to the setting and region selected in this study.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access

to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. A qualitative design utilizing a phenomenological approach allowed me to describe and understand what special education teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders experience and how they experience it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data was triangulated through the collection of data in the form a questionnaire, focus groups, and standardized open-ended interviews from 12 current and former special education teachers. The findings of this study provided insight into the authentic experience of teachers serving one of the most challenging student populations. The thematic findings of this study include positive perspectives of self-efficacy, relativity of defined success, creation of student success experiences, and embracement of pragmatism. Rooted in social cognitive theory and achievement goal theory, the discussion of findings emphasized the interconnected nature of teacher self-efficacy and teacher adaptation to student motivation models. The reciprocal effects of student motivation and self-efficacy are suggestive of implications for teacher preparation programs to emphasize student motivation models and embrace exercises of guided pedagogical practice with stressful student populations and environments.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 26, 2019

Hanna Kiser

IRB Approval 3789.042619: Special Education Teachers' Experiences of Providing Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders Access to the General Education Curriculum: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Hanna Kiser,

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.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

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
Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX B: Participant Recruitment Letter

Teacher Recruitment Letter

March 15, 2019

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

As a doctoral student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. I am conducting research to better understand a process or phenomenon. The purpose of my research is to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

I am seeking teachers who are currently serving as a classroom teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders or individuals who have worked in this capacity in the past three years. If you are willing to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a web-based open-ended questionnaire, an audio and video recorded focus group interview, and an audio recorded individual interview. The time required to complete the questionnaire should take no longer than 30 minutes and the focus group and interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes each. Your name as well as other identifying information will be requested as part of the participation process; however, I will provide you with a pseudonym to ensure the confidentiality of your information and responses.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please complete the participant screening survey by visiting this link. The screening survey will take no longer than 5-10 minutes to complete and should be completed within the next 5 days. You will be contacted via email and informed if you have been selected for participation in the study. If you are selected to participate in the study, you will receive further instructions via email and will complete a consent form prior to participation in the study.

If you choose to participate, you will receive a \$25 Visa gift card as compensation for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Hanna L. Kiser

APPENDIX C: Participant Screening Survey

An electronic copy of the survey can be found at the link below:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=jiH4ugKzZUSpk0o5yXJRslFIBxHr9H5IuBlcYU9ZTWZUMU1NNlpEVzdZMjVUR1JESki0SIQ2N0JMNS4u>

Potential Teacher Participant Screening Survey

A tool for identifying potential research participants

* Required

1. First Name *

2. Last Name *

3. Email address

4. Phone number

5. Do you currently work as a teacher for students with emotional and behavioral disorders served in a separate school setting?

Yes

No

6. Have you worked as a teacher for students with emotional and behavioral disorders served in a separate school setting in the last 3 years?

Yes

No

7. How many years of teaching experience do you have? *

Enter your answer

8. What grade level do you currently teach or have you most recently taught? *

- K-2
- 3-5
- 6-8
- 9-12

9. Would you be willing to participate in a study that will seek to describe teachers' experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum?

- Yes
- No

10. If you are selected to participate in this study, please select the two best dates for a focus group interview.

- Date TBA
- Date TBA
- Date TBA
- Date TBA
- Date TBA

11. If you are selected to participate in this study, please select the two best dates for an individual interview.

- Date TBA
- Date TBA
- Date TBA
- Date TBA
- Date TBA

Submit

APPENDIX D: Acceptance Email

Acceptance Email

March 15, 2019

Dear Mr./Ms. _____,

This email is to inform you that you have been selected to participate in my study. After completing the participant screening survey and expressing interest in participating in my research, it has been determined that you meet the participant criteria and have been selected to participate. The purpose of my research is to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting. Attached you will find the consent form for the study. Please review the consent form and use this [link](#) to schedule a face-to-face meeting during which I will answer any of your questions, review the consent form, obtain a signed copy of the consent form, and provide you with a copy of the signed consent form.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Hanna Kiser

APPENDIX E: Consent Form

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
4/26/2019 to 4/25/2020
Protocol # 3789.042619

CONSENT FORM

Special Education Teachers' Experiences of Providing Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders Access to the General Education Curriculum:

A Phenomenological Study

Hanna Kiser
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of special education teachers' experiences. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a classroom teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders in a separate school setting or have worked as a classroom teacher of students with emotional and behavioral disorders in a separate school setting in the past three years. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Hanna Kiser, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe special education teachers' lived-experience of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum in a separate school setting.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a questionnaire regarding your beliefs and practices as a teacher. The questionnaire will be completed online and should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.
2. Participate in a focus group interview. The focus group interview will be audio and video-recorded. The focus group interview will take approximately 60 minutes.
3. Participate in a semi-structured individual interview. The individual interview will be audio-recorded. The individual interview will take approximately 45 minutes.
4. Review the transcripts of your part in the focus group interview and your individual interview to ensure that they accurately represent your contributions. You may note any additions or deletions necessary. This should not take more than 15 minutes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, it is possible that participants may benefit from the collaborative conversation with other special education teachers who teach students with emotional and behavioral disorders that will take place in the focus group conversation.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
4/26/2019 to 4/25/2020
Protocol # 3789.042619

Benefits to society include informing the intervention efforts of teachers serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders and ultimately improving outcomes for this population of students.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Upon completion of the study, participants will receive a \$25 Visa gift card as compensation for participation in this 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. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and hard copies of data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Conflicts of Interest Disclosure: The researcher serves as the assistant director at Elam Alexander Academy. In an effort to disclose any potential conflict of interest, I want to reveal that in my role as assistant director of the site where this study will take place, I have professional relationships with many of the potential participants; however, I do not directly supervise any of the potential participants.

This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

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 Elam Alexander Academy. 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 email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
4/26/2019 to 4/25/2020
Protocol # 3789.042619

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Hanna Kiser. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at 478-361-7766 or hkiser@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Gail Collins, at gcollins2@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 Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information 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.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX F: Qualitative Adaptation of TSES

An electronic copy of the survey can be found at the link below:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=jiH4ugKzZUSpk0o5yXJRslFIBxHr9>

H5IuBlcYU9ZTWZURDI5TTJOUUVVNDZMVzdMMUNRSldHV1JQRC4u

Adapted TSES questionnaire

Teacher Beliefs A qualitative adaptation of Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's Teacher Sense of Efficacy Survey

This questionnaire is designed to gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create challenges for teachers. Your answers are confidential.

Directions: Please express your opinion about each of the questions below. Elaborate as much as possible regarding the reasons for your beliefs.

Please respond to each of the questions by considering the combination of your current ability, resources, and opportunity to do each of the following in your current position.

Hi Hanna, when you submit this form, the owner will be able to see your name and email address.

* Required

1. What do you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom? *

Enter your answer

2. What do you do to motivate your students who show low interest in school work? *

Enter your answer

3. What do you do to calm your students who are disruptive or noisy? *

Enter your answer

4. What do you do to help your students value learning? *

Enter your answer

5. How do you craft good questions for your students? *

Enter your answer

6. What do you do to get your students to follow classroom rules? *

Enter your answer

7. What do you do to get your student to believe they can do well in school work? *

Enter your answer

8. How do you establish a classroom management system? How well has this worked with your students? What do you do when your classroom management system seems ineffective? *

Enter your answer

9. Please tell me about the assessment strategies you use with your students? *

Enter your answer

10. When your students are confused or struggling with specific academic content, what do you do to provide alternative explanations or examples? *

Enter your answer

11. How do you assist families in helping their children do well in school? *

Enter your answer

12. What alternative teaching strategies do you implement in your classroom? How well do you feel that these work for you and your students? *

Enter your answer

13. Describe the challenges of your experience as a special education teacher who provides students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum. *

Enter your answer

Submit

Adapted from Tschannen-Morna, M. & Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 783-805. Retrieved from <http://u.osu.edu/hoy.17/research/instruments/>

APPENDIX G: Permission to Modify and Use TSES

Re: Permission to adapt and use TSES

1 message

Tue, Feb 19, 2019 at 5:38 PM

You are welcome to use the TSES in your research as you describe below. This website might be helpful to you:

<http://u.osu.edu/hoy.17/research/instruments/>

Just describe the procedures you used to adapt the items into prompts for interviews.

Best wishes in your work.

anitahoy@mac.com

415-640-2017

<http://u.osu.edu/hoy.17/>

On Feb 19, 2019, at 1:21 PM, Kiser, Hanna L <hkiser@liberty.edu> wrote:

Dr. Woolfolk Hoy,

I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University and I am writing to request permission to adapt and use the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale in my doctoral research. I will be investigating special education teachers' experiences of providing students with emotional and behavioral disorders access to the general education curriculum. The qualitative nature of my study requires open ended question formatting. In order to adapt the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale to meet the needs of my study, I plan to substitute quantitative prompts such as "How much" with prompts that will elicit a verbal description of experiences such as "What do you do," "How well do you," and "To what extent do you." I will also alter the response format; I will substitute closed, fixed-response options ranging from "Not at All" to "A Great Deal" with free response text boxes that allow participants to respond in their own words.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement indicating your approval.

Hanna Kiser

APPENDIX H: Reflexive Journal

Date	Self-Critical Introspection: What do I know and how do I know it?
4/23/19	<p>Personal Perspective on Importance of the Study As I am awaiting IRB approval, I am actively reflecting upon my personal motivations for conducting my study. I will be the main instrument of data collection for my study and I must acknowledge that I am biased and bring my own baggage to the study. As a current administrator for a behavioral program serving students in a separate school setting and as a past special education teacher in separate school settings, I believe in the work of specialized behavioral programs and empathize with teachers' perspectives. I am aware that I am likely sympathize with err on the side of teachers in these settings.</p>
4/30/19	<p>Preparing for Participant Recruitment As I prepare to present my research tomorrow in the full staff meeting in efforts to recruit participants, I am keenly aware of the importance of participants not in any way feeling pressured to participate. I have practiced my presentation to staff in order to ensure that I openly and honestly convey my potential conflict of interest, as a program administrator, so that participants can decide if this relationship affects their willingness to participate in this study. I will assure participants that no action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.</p>
5/19/19	<p>Preparing to Conduct Interviews As I prepare to conduct my focus group interviews, I am mentally balancing my need to both guide and prompt the group interaction with my established questions and my need to allow the group interaction to facilitate emergent conversations.</p>
5/30/19	<p>Conducting Individual Interviews I am more comfortable conducting individual interviews. I also feel that participants talk in a less restricted more free-flowing manner. However, because I have already interacted with each participant in the focus group context, I feel that I am now better equipped to prompt and probe participants for rich responses</p>
6/28/19	<p>Transcription The process of transcribing the interviews has given me a second experience of each interview. While I experienced the participant responses during each interview, the experience of transcribing the words of each participant has provided me with an intimate experience of participant responses. I feel that the process of transcription has mentally prepared me for data analysis by giving me an experience with the data.</p>
7/10/19	<p>Data Analysis The process of data analysis intimidates me. I am keenly aware that I could project themes that are not present. I could find what I am looking for. Because of this concern of false findings, I am steadily acknowledging my views in efforts to mute them through acknowledgement. I have an enhanced</p>

	understanding of the process of Epoche. The setting aside of presuppositions in order to increase my openness is not a one time event but a constant effort throughout the process of data analysis.
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APPENDIX I: Audit Trail

Date	Events
10/1/18	Select and Define a Research Problem for Examination
12/1/18	Select a Research Framework
5/1/19	Participant Solicitation
5/13/19-6/7/19	Data Collection
5/13-17/19	Questionnaires
5/20-24/19	Focus Groups
5/27/19-6/7/19	Individual Interviews
6/17/19-7/20/19	Organization and Analysis of Collected Data
6/17-28/19	Transcription
7/1-26/19	Phenomenological Reduction
7/29/19-9/1/19	Development of Narrative Description of Findings