A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS FROM THE

PERSPECTIVE OF RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS OF

STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

By

James R. Barr

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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March 26, 2014

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the shared experience of rural middle school general

education teachers of students diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) in

inclusive classrooms. The study began by examining related issues associated with inclusive

environments. Data analysis was structured around phenomenological organizational methods:

that there exists within the phenomenon a descriptive experience, and within that experience

there are voids of possible explanation and interpretation. The research incorporated

observations, interviews, and documents as forms of data collection. This inquiry sought to

uncover the ways in which general education teachers who serve students diagnosed with

emotional and behavioral disabilities find meaning. It utilized essential themes that characterize

the phenomenon through the use of rich and descriptive writing. Moreover, it employed

systematic data analysis procedures and established guidelines for assembling the textual and

structural descriptions. Data analysis was conducted through coding, peer review, triangulation,

and enriched description. Finally, I provided suggestions for areas of future study framed around

issues of educational practices.

     Descriptors: Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, Inclusion, Middle School, General

Education Teachers Perspectives

Dedication

To my heavenly father, who is able to do far more than we can hope or dream, I thank you for the immeasurable blessings and gifts you have bestowed upon me; the greatest gift is your Son, Jesus Christ.

To the great cloud of witnesses who have come before me in an effort to improve the lives of children with disabilities. Great teachers are a blessing to their profession and worthy of the highest laurels.

Acknowledgement

How do you begin to thank those individuals who have helped you accomplish something that you thought was impossible? Only my heavenly father knows how many times I have prayed for you, thanking Him for such a blessing.

To my chair, Dr. Gina Grogan, I wish to offer my sincere gratitude for your incredible patience, scholarly wisdom, and unfailing encouragement.

I am profoundly grateful to my committee members, Dr. Kimberly Lester and Dr. Susan Robinson, without your willing participation this study would not exist. Grateful appreciation is extended to Dr. Lester, whose quiet leadership and academic knowledge provided great insight into this manuscript.

Dr. Robinson, thank you for the many hours of conversation, advice, and kindness. I truly believe your presence was orchestrated by God. You have been such a blessing.

Special acknowledgment to extended Dr. Frederick Milacci, my research consultant, your wisdom and knowledge of quantitative research provided clarity and direction to this study.

I would also like to thank Karen Schmidt, your encouragement and support throughout this process has greatly helped in completing it. You were the best peer review a person could have, thanks!

To the participants of this study, thank you for your steadfast determination to be difference makers in the lives of your students. Your heroic efforts have inspired me. Finally, and most importantly, to my family who sacrificed both time and money to help me accomplish this goal. To my wife Bookie, who provided support, patience, and prayers.

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List of Abbreviations

American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE)

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

American Psychiatric Association (APA)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th ed. (DSM-IV-TR)

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th ed. (DSM-5).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Emotional or Behavioral disorders (EBD)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004)

Inclusion Attitude Scale for High School Teachers (ISHST)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP)

National Education Association (NEA)

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The focus of phenomenology is the exploration of how human beings find meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience as it relates to the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2007; Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 1913, 1970, 1973; Levinas, 1969, 1996; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990 2002; Sartre, 1958; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012; van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) expressed phenomenology as the search for "a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 9). Following in the tradition of qualitative research, the purpose of this study was to describe, explicate, and interpret the experiences of rural middle school general education teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD).

I used various data sources for organization and analysis including observations, semi-structured interviews, and documents as a means of data collection (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006; Yin, 2011). All these data sources were combined in an attempt to capture the voice of the participants. The study sought to reveal more fully the essence and meaning of rural general education middle school teachers toward students diagnosed with EBD in their inclusive classrooms, thus illuminating their experiences.

Background

Providing students with special education services is a fundamental right provided by law under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). An important aspect of this legislation requires that students receive instruction in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Slavin (2006) suggests that the universal interpretation of the LRE is the general education classroom. To meet the requirements of IDEA, educational institutions have implemented inclusive settings where students receive the majority of their instruction in typical

classrooms from general education teachers supplemented by special education services (Florian, Young, & Rouse, 2010). This arrangement places students with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD) in the general education classroom (Runswick-Cole, 2011).

Over the past 30 years, great strides have been made in the improvement of educational opportunities for students with EBD (Vannest, Harrison, Temple-Harvey, Ramsey, & Parker, 2011). Lane, Gresham, and O'Shaughnessy (2002) highlighted advances in identification and assessment including effective and efficient diagnostic procedures and tools used in systematic screening for behavioral disorders. A number of evaluative instruments are available to assess literacy and social skills. These instruments provide accurate identification of students who are deficient and most likely at risk for academic failure. Academic risk is most prevalent when the discrepancy between current and desired levels of performance is extensive. Research suggests that both learning and emotional/behavioral problems are progressive in nature and interventions are most effective when the variance is narrow (Stoutjesdijk, Scholte, & Swaab, 2012).

To affect positive intervention for students with EBD, professionals must be provided with valid and accurate functional behavioral assessments and training in the implementation of more effective positive behavioral support (Anjali & Quist, 2012). The research of Beacham and Rouse (2012) found that knowledge and skills are crucial in developing teachers' beliefs and attitudes that lead to the success of inclusive education. Handwerk and Marshall (1998) reported the association between students diagnosed with learning disabilities as having significantly more behavioral problems than their non-diagnosed peers on all dimensions.

Allday et al. (2012) affirm that students identified with or at risk of EBD are increasingly being included in the general education classrooms with teachers who lack training or intervention skills needed to manage students with EBD. As such, teachers have reported that

issues associated with students who exhibit challenging behavior present the most stressful part of their responsibilities (Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell, & Wang, 2009).   The concept that work conditions influence personal well-being is prominent in the understanding of psychological and healthy work environments (Parker, Wall, & Cordrey, 2001).

 Hewitt (1999) suggests that if inclusion is to be successful, it must be considered a process and not an event. Special education students, particularly those diagnosed with EBD, have difficulty in general education classrooms where teachers are unprepared to handle their special needs (Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008). These students by diagnosis are confirmed to have behavioral challenges and are likely to impact the confidence of educators (Allday et al., 2012). The presence of students with behavioral challenges in general education classrooms may have implications to teachers' physical well-being, particularly stress (McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Troman, 2000). Daniels, Hartley, and Travers (2006) examined how an individual's beliefs about stressors assessed before stressors occur can alter affective reactions to those stressors. Their research is consistent with the theoretical framework of this study, particularly that experiences and the repercussions associated with choices can have profound implications on physical and mental health. The difficulties associated with instructing students diagnosed with EBD carry consequences that reach far beyond the classroom. Providing general education teachers who instruct in inclusive environments with a voice may ultimately improve teacher effectiveness and self-efficacy.

Situation to Self

As a special educator, I have experienced an unfavorable response from general education teachers towards the inclusion of students diagnosed with EBD. The resistance to including these students in the general education population is believed to be multi-faceted

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(Berry, 2010; Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). In order to understand the phenomenon of inclusion and EBD students encountered by general education teachers, I desired to give voice to the participants' lived experiences. Such research could foster impetus for future studies and provide practical suggestions for improving instructional strategies for students diagnosed with EBD.

The philosophical assumptions that led to my choice of this study were methodological in nature. This assumption allows me to use inductive logic and study the research topic within the context (Creswell, 2007). It provides for detailed descriptions relating to the content of the study and affords opportunities for revision while in the field. An interpretive paradigm shapes this study, which does not seek to verify truth or determine causal relationships; rather it looks for patterns to build explanations. Moreover, it tries to find understanding from the participant's perspective.

Problem Statement

Statistics reported that 81.6% of EBD students receive some of their instruction in the general education environments; more than half receive all or most of their instruction in inclusive environments (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2010). Students diagnosed with EBD present considerable challenges to the instructional environment. These students are more likely to be absent from school, accumulate lower grades, encounter higher levels of retention, and present the highest dropout rates (Vannest et al., 2011). Sutherland and Singh (2004) described students with EBD as the most difficult students to teach; they present considerable challenges to educators and school personnel. Billingsley, Fall, and Williams (2006) found that students with EBD are predominantly male, disproportionately African-American, and were identified with a disability later than other students with disabilities.

Current research indicates that general education teachers are becoming progressively disillusioned with inclusion environments that include students with EBD (Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008). Quantitative researchers have conducted studies on perceptions of general and special education teachers about inclusion (Beachham & Rouse, 2012; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Whitaker, 2011) and academic achievement (Berry, 2012; Burnett, 2010; Muscelli, 2011). Ernst and Rogers (2009) developed a questionnaire to investigate inclusive attitudes of high school teachers. However, there appear to be no qualitative studies that provide a voice for the lived experiences of rural general education middle school teachers in inclusive settings with students diagnosed with EBD.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of rural middle school general education teachers instructing students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive settings (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 2000; van Manen, 1990). More specifically, it sought to provide a rich and descriptive voice of general education teachers who share the phenomenon of instructing students diagnosed with EBD in inclusion classrooms by identifying their thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Heidegger, 1962, 1973, 1985, 2008: Husserl, 1973). By clarifying general education teacher perceptions of inclusion with students diagnosed with EBD, there exists the opportunity to advance both teacher and student quality of life.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to provide a voice of the experiences of teachers engaged in rural middle school inclusive instruction with students diagnosed with EBD (Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2012). Related research includes students with EBD and

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academic achievement (Burnett, 2010; Cooper, 2013). In addition, studies have investigated general and special education teacher attitudes towards inclusive education of students with EBD (Alhamad, 2006; Allison, 2012; Boe, 2013). These studies provide an important understanding of both teacher and student experiences in inclusive settings.

The rationale for the study originates in my desire to improve the overall experience of special education services for students diagnosed with EBD. Moreover, there exists an equal desire to improve the working experience of general education teachers and to stem the tide of attrition rates caused by job dissatisfaction, particularly at the local level (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010). The intent of this study was to present a synthesis of meanings and essence of the shared experiences of inclusion teachers (Moustakas, 1994). A paucity of information led me to focus on capturing the stories of the participants in their own words. As such, this phenomenological inquiry investigated general education teachers' experiences towards inclusion of students with EBD in a rural middle school setting (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1990). The study was significant because it explored the lived experiences of teachers in inclusive programs and the challenges presented by students diagnosed with EBD (Cannella-Malone, Tullis, & Kazee, 2011).

This study was significant in the following ways:

1. It addressed the essence of rural middle school general education teachers in inclusive environments with EBD students and captures their lived experience.

2. It studied existing gaps in the literature related to inclusion and the growing trend of placing students with EBD in general education classrooms.

3. It provided an additional resource for understanding teacher experiences with an emphasis of strengthening special education services for students with EBD.

4. It established a voice for rural middle school inclusive educators, which allows for changes in pedagogy and content in the future development of educational instruction.

5. It provided data sources or evidence needed to support future studies for identifying specific instructional interventions.

Research Questions

Foundational to the purpose of this phenomenological study was the investigation of experiences of rural general education teachers towards students diagnosed with EBD in their inclusive classrooms. This study took the supposition that behavior and practice originate from both the conscious and unconscious levels (Freud, 1935). As such, my prevalent desire was to reflect on the experience of including EBD students in general education classrooms and articulate what Heidegger (1985) calls "in-being" the everyday particulars of being involved with the things of the world (p.161). Five questions were developed from a review of the related literature that sought to establish an overall essence of teacher challenges and their lived experiences in inclusive settings (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). As the emphasis of the study was on general education teachers' experiences towards students diagnosed with EBD the general research questions focused on this relationship. The questions which were developed from the related literature and which framed the investigation were:

RQ1. How do rural middle school general education teachers describe their experiences with students diagnosed with EBD in an inclusion classroom?

RQ2. According to rural middle school general education teachers, how does the presence of students diagnosed with EBD influence their beliefs about inclusive education?

RQ3. How do rural general education teachers describe their attitudes toward teaching

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before instructing students with EBD in their classrooms?

RQ4. How do rural general education teachers describe their attitudes towards teaching after instructing students with EBD in their classrooms?

RQ5. How do rural general education teachers view their future in education based on their experience of teaching students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive settings?

Research Plan

Upon receiving appropriate permission and approval from all involved agencies (see Appendix A: Gate Keepers), this phenomenological study sought six to twelve participants, with secession upon thematic saturation. The basic goal of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon into a description of universal essence (Creswell, 2007). The premise of this study is found within the broad discipline of philosophy; that is, reality is a series of objects or events which can be perceived and understood in the human consciousness (Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 1913). The participants of this study instructed students in inclusive classrooms with assistance from special educators who are either embedded in the classroom or provide assistance and accommodations through the implementation of an IEP (Musti-Roa, Hawkins, & Tan, 2011). Through interviews, observations, field notes and documents, information was analyzed to assess "significant statements, meaning schemes, and descriptions" of the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p.89).

Limitations and Delimitations

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) described limitations as conditions that may weaken a study while delimitations clarify research boundaries. Delimitations are chosen aspects of the study related to time, location, and sample selection. The delimitations of this phenomenological study were related to the research design which focused on the shared lived experiences of rural

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middle school general education teachers. This study utilizes heterogeneous sampling, which

brings together people of similar backgrounds and experiences (Patton, 2002).

Limitations for this study arose from issues pertaining to gathering data, (interviews,

observations, field notes, and documents), and research bias (Biklen & Casella, 2007). This

study was limited to a single rural southeastern school district and focused only on middle school

experiences of general education teachers. The overwhelming population of these teachers

consists of Caucasian females. As such, a diverse sampling population in relationship to race

and gender would not be a representative population.

In phenomenological research there exists the potential limitation of research bias.

Epoche is a phase in which the researcher illuminates or clarifies preconception or bias (Hamill

& Sinclair, 2010). Katz (1987) suggests that researchers must be aware of viewpoints,

prejudices, or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Concerns for the

potential of bias related to the fact that I was the sole person responsible for data collection and

analysis. Moreover, this study was conducted in the school district in which I was employed. To

reduce bias, I utilized a number of strategies recommended by Sokolowski (2000), including

member checks, rich and thick descriptions, and peer review.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions have been provided to ensure understanding and uniformity

throughout this manuscript.

Access to the general education curriculum: Access to the general education curriculum

provides students with disabilities the opportunity to obtain the same academic content as their

peers within the same grade level. Access does not mean inclusive environments; rather, it

ensures exceptional students are provided access to the same content in a variety of settings

outside the general education classroom (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009).

Academic achievement: Academic achievement is a quantitative measurement of student academic performance. Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), student achievement is typically measured by state standardized assessments and the student's ability to meet the minimum requirements of grade level standards (Slavin, 2006).

Accommodations: Accommodations are the supporting structures that allow the person with a disability to participate in all aspects of their environment. Reasonable accommodations are necessary to measure academic achievement and functional performance on state and district-wide assessments (Gibb & Dyches, 2007).

Attitudes: According to Hockenbury and Hockenbury (2007) attitudes are a manner of acting, feeling, or thinking that shows one's disposition or opinion. They may be further defined as judgments connected with action, feeling, mood, or mental set.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): Adequate Yearly Progress is a measurement defined by the United States government that determines how every public school performs academically according to results on standardized tests. AYP establishes a timeline for meeting state academic assessments with gradual increments which increases to 100% by the 2013-14 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Behavioral management: Behavioral management is the practice of maintaining order or control of the specific setting; generally, this is the school classroom (Wong & Wong, 2009).

Beliefs: Myers (1999) describes beliefs as the psychological state in which an individual holds an assumption of truth; a particular tenant or body of tenets that an individual or group of individuals accepts as true.

Co-teaching: Co-teaching is a common method of inclusion where special education and

general education teachers share instructional responsibilities of all students in the classroom (Gatley & Gately, 2001).

Differentiated instruction: Differentiated instruction is the practice of modifying the instructional delivery through the use of multiple approaches based upon the individual needs of the student. Differentiated instruction takes into consideration modalities of learning and the extent of the disability. It adapts methods, materials, assessment, and the instructional content so that the student has the ability to achieve academic success (Wehman, 2006).

Disorder: A disorder is any physical or mental impairment that disrupts normal function (Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & McHatton, 2009).

Emotional behavioral disorders (EBD): These are impairments that interrupt the learning process which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or other health factors (Gage et al., 2010).

Exceptionality: This term refers to individuals who require special education and related services. Exceptionalities include but are not limited to: intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, autism, brain injuries, and hearing and visual impairments (Hallahan et al., 2009).

Free and appropriate public education (FAPE): Refers to the obligation of the states to provide personalized instruction and adequate support services so that each child benefits from their planned education (Drasgow, Yell, & Robinson, 2001).

General Education Curriculum: The general education curriculum is a term which describes the educational constructs where grade level standards are provided to a group of students with the expectation of achievement (Olivia, 2009).

Inclusion full and partial: Full inclusion (a) is defined as services in a general

education setting where the student receives instruction more than 80% of the time.

Partial inclusion (b) is defined as services in a general education setting where the student

receives their instruction less than 80% of time (Morrier, 2011).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): This federal legislation ensures the

specific rights of individuals with disabilities. IDEA oversees states' and public agencies'

implementation of interventions, special education services, and related services (IDEA, 2004).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): The Individualized Education Plan or IEP is a legal

document which guides the education of students with disabilities and states exactly what special

education services that individual with disabilities will receive. It describes the student's present

level of academic achievement and functional performance, measurable goals, and reports of

student progress. They include service needs to achieve annual goals, student placement, and

any accommodations necessary to measure academic achievement and functional performance

on state assessments (Gibb & Dyches, 2007; Slavin, 2006).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The LRE is the educational setting where students

with disabilities receive instruction. By law, school districts are required to provide educational

services that maximize a child's ability to receive educational benefits while minimizing the

extent of separation from the general population. The federal government considers that the

most appropriate environment is the general education classroom (U.S. Department of

Education, 2006).

Middle School: The middle school concept is fairly new and generally consists of grades

six, seven, and eight, and replaces the old configuration of junior high schools which usually

included seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. Middle school students are generally associated with

personal and emotional difficulties because of physical and hormonal changes that accompany

adolescence (Gutek, 1995).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Originally known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush, NCLB sought to focus attention on accountability, scientifically research-based instruction, and enhancement of teacher qualifications. It has been highly criticized for its unintended negative consequences to educational practices due to administrative emphasis on test outcomes (Deville & Chalhoub-Deville, 2011; Price, 2010; Runswick-Cole, 2011).

Perceptions: Perceptions can be interpreted as the state of being or the process of becoming aware of something through insight, intuition, and knowledge gained by the senses (Glazzard, 2011).

Resource: Turnkington and Anan (2007) denote resource as instruction for students who qualify for special education services and need remedial services in a small group or individualized setting away from their nondisabled peers for a portion of the day; this is commonly referred to as special education pullout.

Values: For this inquiry values will be defined as important and lasting controlling elements or ideals that serve as guiding principles of a person's behavior and attitudes (Knight, 2006; Smith & Mackie, 2007).

Summary

Federal mandates placed students diagnosed with EBD in the classroom of general education teachers. This arrangement places a greater responsibility on these educators and may have implications on their experiences. There is a preponderance of research related to student experiences, including achievement and social interaction, both in the United States and abroad (Bensen, Heagney, Hewitt, Crosling, & Devos, 2012; Cheney, 2012; Crichton & Templeton, 2013; Grimley, Green, Nilsen, & Thompson, 2012; Klomek, Sourander, & Gould, 2010;

Stoutjesdijk et al., 2012; Vannest et al., 2011). There exists an equally impressive number of studies related to teacher attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and inclusive practices (Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006; Dymond, Renzagila, & Slagor, 2011; Gokdere, 2012; Goodman, Hazelkorn, Bucholz, Duffy, & Kitta, 2011; Hsieh & Hsieh, 2012; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012; Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Janssen, 2012). In the area of general education teachers' experiences towards students diagnosed with EBD in their inclusive classrooms, there is limited research (Alhamad, 2006; Bell, 2012; Robbins-Etlen, 2007; Twine, 2008). To date, I have not found any qualitative dissertations on the perceptions of rural middle school general education teacher instructing students with EBD in inclusive settings. This study attempted to address that vacancy in the literature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two explores the theoretical framework and the existing literature concerning inclusion and students with EBD. Creswell (2007) described the need for a literature review as a source for providing direction for both the problem and position the researcher takes while developing the study. Consequently, the literature review interjects problems that lead the study in the direction of inquiry. As such, this study provided a summary and synopsis of the pertinent research surrounding inclusive practices and discusses issues related to instructing students with EBD (Fitzgerald, 2012; Ficker, 1999; Gutek, 1995; Hargrove, 2000; Hewitt, 1999; Jackson, 2008; Kauffman & Landrum, 2009; Levinson, 2011; Pellegrino, Singh, & Carmanico, 1999; Wrightslaw, 2012; Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998; Zirkle, 2005). Moreover, the literature presented an evaluation of the quality and findings of the research as it relates to students diagnosed with EBD and the challenges faced by middle school general education teachers (Achenbach, 1991; Coleman ,1995; Frank, 2011; Korkmaz, 2011; Lane, Carter, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006; Margaritoiu, 2010; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Ruijs, Van der Veen, & Peetsma, 2010; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Runswick-Cole, 2011; Salmivalli, 2010; Slavin, 2006; Wachter & Bouck, 2008; Wehman, 2006; Zhao & Bitchener, 2007; Zigmond, Kloo, & Volonino, 2009). Finally, the study sought to connect the existing literature to educational practices, particularly the experiences of general education teachers with students diagnosed with EBD (Albrecht, Johns, Mounsteven, & Olorunda, 2009; Anderson & Olsen, 2006; Brown, 2007; Cabello, 1999; Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Harper & de Jong, 2009; Hill, 2009; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Kose, 2009; Miller, 2010; Mintz , 2007; Moss & Brookhart, 2009; Moule, 2009; Nelson, Maculan, Roberts, & Ohlund, 2001; Reeves, 2002; Sabanci, 2011; Schuilwerve, 2011).

<center>**Theoretical Framework**</center>

The theoretical framework of this study includes two main theories prevalent throughout the research. The more influential of the two theoretical frameworks used in this manuscript are associated with Glasser's (1965, 1990, 1997) principals of reality therapy, choice theory, and quality world. Here they were utilized together as one theory. A second prominent theory is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. Both were important to this study because they provided an understanding of how beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions develop and transform experiences. The theoretical framework embodies the ontological and epistemological character of this study and anchored the methodological phase of its inquiry.

Glasser's Reality Therapy

Of all the problems facing education today, the most difficult to solve is human relationships (Bridges, 2008). Glasser (1965) published *Reality Therapy*, a book in which he suggested a need for a new approach to conventional psychiatry and the successful application of treatments for juvenile delinquents, disturbed children, and other psychiatric applications. Foundational to reality therapy is accepting responsibility for one's own actions and behaviors (Onedera & Greenwalt, 2007). Human psychological needs are basic survival, love and belonging, freedom, joy, and power (Cameron, 2009). To fulfill these psychological needs, people generally seek interconnectedness and relationships, and at times opposition. Glasser (1998) wrote that the widespread dependence on reactions, threats, and punishment have been unsuccessful in improving student behavior and academic achievement. He surmised that student transformation would be more successful if it was tied to fundamental biological needs, particularly the social need for belonging. Due to this strong need for belonging, Glasser theorized that antisocial behavior originates in an individual's inability to control his or her own

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choices (Walter, Lambie, & Ngazimbi, 2008). From Glasser's conception of reality therapy, he proposed that an individual tries to control his or her surroundings through his or her actions.

Choice Theory

Initially called *control theory*, Glasser's (1997) choice theory proposes that individuals can only control their own behavior. Glasser had originally been trained in the psychoanalytic approach, a grand theory that originated with Sigmund Freud (Berger, 2005). The psychoanalytic approach holds that human drives and motives, both rational and irrational, underlie all behavior. As a counselor, Glasser came to believe that insight was not enough to make the long-lasting changes the clients needed (Robey, Burdenski, Britzman, Crowell, & Cisse, 2011). Glasser began to believe that taking personal responsibility for one's behavior while avoiding putting blame on others leads to more effective lives. Understanding people as undetermined free creatures who choose their behavior is foundational to choice theory (Lojk & Lojk, 2012).

Glasser's choice theory affirms the concept that a person's happiness is not dependent on the behavior of others; rather, fulfillment is intrinsically motivated. Individuals receive information from those around them; from that information they make choices and respond. At its core, choice theory explains that people make their own choices including the misery they feel. Robey (2012) expressed Glasser's belief in relationships. Healthy relationships are an important element to life satisfaction and must be compatible with basic human needs (Lafond, 2012). Those basic needs are survival, love and belonging, freedom, power, and amusement. With varying intensity, these needs are common to all individuals (Henderson, Robey, Dunham, & Dermer, 2013).

Quality World

From Glasser's (1998) choice theory emerged the concept of quality world, which suggests that an individual has a vision of his or her ideal world. This world ideal is the "reason we perceive much of reality so differently from others" (p.44). Quality world allows people to create pictures or beliefs about whomever they want to be with, their desire to own and experience things, and their idea of beliefs and feelings that govern their behavior.

CHOICE THEORY – WHY AND HOW WE BEHAVE

Developed by J. Thomas Bellows, Ph.D. from "Chart Talk" by Dr. William Glasser, (2000) - 2003
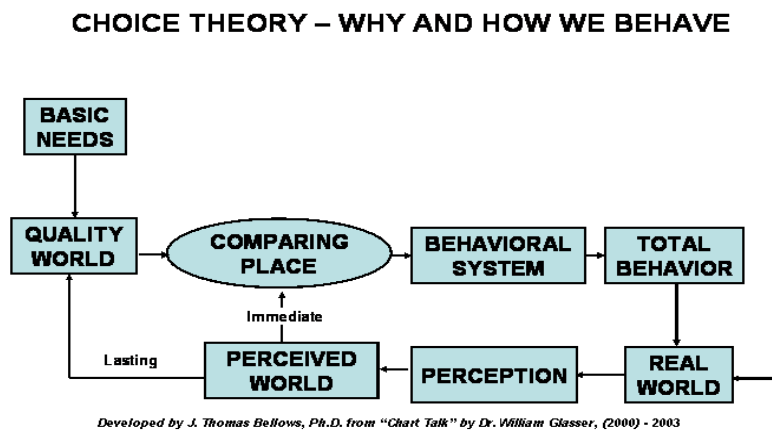
Figure 1. Glasser "theory choice" framework works is a cyclical flow chart from basic needs, behavior and perception, which form the quality world. Used with permission 2/16/2013 from J Thomas Bellows, talk chart. Retrieved from http://tombellows.com/_wsn/page2.html (see Appendix B)

When exploring the lived experiences of general education teachers in inclusive environments, the quality world of teacher and student merge, and both must share and compromise their ideal concept of quality world. Glasser suggests that both positive and negative experiences of relationships stimulate past feelings which effect current relationships (Fox & Delgado, 2008). An important concept to this research is Glasser's belief that individuals are more likely to adapt and accept changes to their environment if they believe that these changes will benefit their concept of quality world.

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Choice theory provides the foundation for another of Glasser's suppositions, "quality school." Quality school is an instructional model that focuses on teacher-student interaction and classroom enrichment (Logan & Plumlee, 2012). A critical component of quality schools is the premise that children learn best when conditions and positive relationships are present between students and teachers. Addressing students with EBD from a reality therapy/choice theory rationale requires the implementation of four psychological principles. First, human motivation is internal, and as people interact with the world around them, they develop specific wants and desires. This collective world is called quality world (Glasser, 1998). Glasser suggests that behavioral choices are the result of an individual's perception of the difference between what they want and what they have. The discrepancy between a want and the lack of fulfillment prompts a human being to generate choices to satisfy his or her needs. A third belief of Glasser's reality therapy/choice theory rationale proposes that actions, thoughts, feelings, and physiology compromise behavior (Wubbolding, 2007). For students with EBD, behavior is not aimless or arbitrary; rather, their behavior choices are purposeful manifestations to satisfy wants and needs (Glasser, 1998).

Finally, Glasser suggests that human beings see the world through a perceptual system (Onedera & Greenwalt, 2007). Incoming information is initially processed without judgment and the data is recognized solely as perception. A second process of judgment places value on incoming stimuli and organizes it in relationship to an individual's idea of quality world. This second process of judgment Glasser called high-level perception. From these high-level perceptions, teachers of students with EBD develop choices that have implications for supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, and trusting these students (Wubbolding, 2007).

Glasser's theories have immediate implications on students, their teachers, and classroom

environments (Olutayo, 2012). The purpose of schooling is to educate students and to produce

vibrant citizens (Glasser, 1990). Choice theory asserts the absolute need for positive home

relationships to fostering early childhood development. In addition, developing healthy

interpersonal relationships and autonomy in young adults requires that schools also meet these

same basic five needs (McClug & Hoglund, 2013). Establishing a school environment in which

all students can obtain a sense of belonging while maintaining the belief that they have some

control over their choices increases academic achievement, reduces disciplinary problems, and

increases student self-efficacy (CTRTC, C., & Hoglund, 2013; Glasser, 1990, 1993).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System

Interpersonal relationships, including microprocesses such as the parental child

relationship, do not exist in a social vacuum, but are embedded in a larger social structure of

society, community, culture, and economics. A person's development is the product of a

conglomeration of forces and not merely psychological ones (Ceci, 2006). Disturbances to any

of these forces may have widespread implications to child development and education.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory suggests that childhood development is

based on a continuum of interactions that form from their environment. These interactions have

significance in systems based upon different environments in which development occurs.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) hypothesized the development of children is enhanced through their

increased involvement in activities outside the home that bring them into contact with adults

other than their parents. It is therefore mutually accommodating and beneficial if students

engage in the social setting of schools (Lane et al., 2006). Moreover, widening the child's

experience from one setting to another tends to generate expectations and action patterns that are

in part radically transformative and compel the child to invite new activities, roles and patterns of

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interpersonal relationships. For students with EBD, the broadening of expectations and action

patterns has proven to be beneficial (Gage, Lewis, & Stichter, 2012). Ecological systems that

bring students diagnosed with EBD into contact with teachers who have clear behavioral

assessment goals increase the occurrence of positive alternative replacement behavior (May,

2009; Pierce, Reid, & Epstein, 2004).
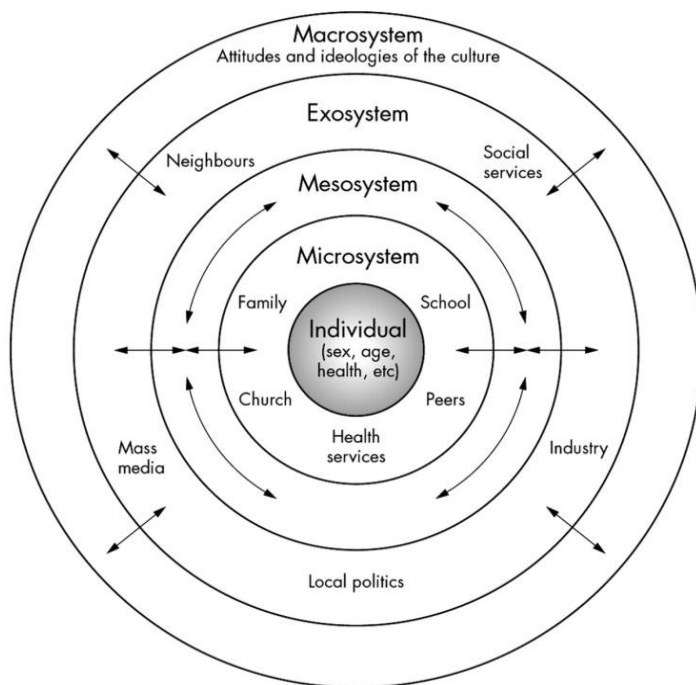
Figure 2. llustration of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework for Human Development
showing Bronfenbrenner differentiated ecological systems as concentric circles of influence.
Developed by Hchokr 11/20/2012, Rights Free. Retrieved from
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory subdivides a person's developmental

environments into different groups of influence. These various systems include microsystems,

mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. Bronfenbrenner differentiated ecological systems

as concentric circles of influence (Leonard, 2011). Microsystems are social influences

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represented by family, schools, and peers. Mesosystems are the relationships between different parts of the microsystems and how they work together for the good of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). A mesosystem might include the combined relationship of family and school. The positive involvement of a family member or caring teachers in the school environment can play a very positive role in the child's overall growth. Exosystems are external environments which indirectly influence development, (parental workplace); Macrosystems are the larger socio-cultural context (city, state, and country).

Problematic behavior was of particular concern to Bronfenbrenner (Brendtro, 2006). Believing that caring environments were key to prosocial behavior, he proposed a two-part solution which required the involvement of adults directly in the lives of children in an effort to build strong, mutual, and emotional attachments, as well as the active involvement of young people in finding solutions to problems. By involving youth in finding solutions to problems, young people develop a sense of belonging to a community rather than growing up disengaged from society (Leonard, 2011). Bronfenbrenner believed that actions of alienation and anti-social behavior were rooted in the breakdown of caring and loving relationships. Positive youth development requires the entire community sharing in the socialization of young people. The most powerful force in positive youth development is trusting bonds: "Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him or her" (Bronfenbrenner, 1991, p.2). A child's behavior reflects the cohesiveness of his or her circles of influence. Like Glasser (1990, 1993), Bronfenbrenner believed that trusting, supportive, and caring teachers can make a significant impact on the life of a young person (Brendtro, 2006). While Bronfenbrenner's theory was thought to focus solely on circumstances in the lives of students, most researchers now agree that the central aspect of his theory is about how personal characteristics, content, and society

influence proximal processes (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Simply stated, his theory helps to clarify how environments and the complex influences of culture affect an individual's perceptions and experiences, the impetus of phenomenology (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013).

Related Literature

Vygotsky

The concept that human development results from the dynamic relationship between an individual and the surrounding social and cultural forces began to develop (Berger, 2005). Vygotsky, a social psychologist who lived in the former Soviet Union prior to the advent of World War II, theorized that human development results from a unique interaction between an individual's social environment and cultural forces. For Vygotsky, students are capable of competent performance when they are properly assisted. According to Gindis (1999) special education was the main empirical domain which supported his theoretical conceptions. Vygotsky believed that the development of exceptional children is determined by the social significance of their impairment and a societal willingness to provide remediation (Smagorinsky, 2007). Vygotsky valued inclusion as a critical need for the overall improvement of children with disabilities.

Slavin

Slavin (2006) provides teachers with practical strategies to deal effectively with students with disabilities, which is a critical benefit for teachers who have students presenting challenging behaviors. Knowing how to transmit information and teach skills is as important as the knowledge of the information and skills themselves. Slavin suggests that teaching is not an innate gift; rather, it is developed over time through the application of specific behaviors and skills. Intentional actions based on proven methods, experiences, research, and the use of

appropriate materials are particularly needed by teachers who instruct students with EBD

(Maggin, Robertson, Oliver, Hollo, & Partin, 2010). Emery & Vandenberg (2010) proposed that

high teacher attrition rates are the results of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a

cause and the chronic emotional strain of dealing with other human beings. Slavin (2006) asserts

that part of the solution for teachers dealing with students with EBD is teacher efficacy; that is,

the belief that personal effort determines a student's outcome.

Defining Emotional or Behavioral Disabilities

EBD is one of the categories of disability included under the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Improvement Act, also known as IDEA, 2004. Kauffman and Landrum (2009) affirm

that defining EBD is fraught with difficulty; they note that the federal definition of this category

is considered by many professionals to be flawed. Forness and Knitzer (1992) highlighted

problems with the IDEA definition and proposed an alternative definition formulated by the

National Mental Health and Special Education Coalition (NMHSEC). That proposal defines

EBD as:

> A condition in which behavioral or emotional responses of an individual in school are so
>
> different from his/her generally accepted, age appropriate, ethnic or cultural norms that
>
> they adversely affect performance in such areas as self care, social relationships, personal
>
> adjustment, academic progress, classroom behavior, or work adjustment. (Forness &
>
> Knitzer, 1992, p. 13)

Kauffman and Landrum (2009) advanced the belief that it is impossible to distinguish emotional

disturbances from behavioral disorders. According to the American Psychiatric Association

(2013) guidelines for psychiatric evaluation, EBD is a condition that exhibits one or more

characteristics over a period of time that adversely affects a student's educational performances.

The APA would later include with this definition the inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual or health reasons as part of EBD diagnosis (Hallahan et al., 2009; Miles & Singal, 2010). The IDEA definition of emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (Code of Federal Regulation, Title 34, Section 300.7(c)(4)(ii).

Such disorders tend to be episodic, highly variable, and sometimes situation-specific, and may manifest themselves when demands are placed on the student to perform in the classroom. Understanding the episodic nature of EBD is critical (Kauffman & Landrum, 2009). Students with EBD might exhibit problems building or maintaining interpersonal relationships with other students or teachers (Slavin, 2006). They may also exhibit inappropriate behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances that present a general pervasive mood of unhappiness (Lane et al., 2006). Definitions of EBD would also include a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with persons or school problems or a diagnosis of schizophrenia (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Other difficulties associated with EBD are an inability of experts to reach a consensus for the definition, as well as methods to objectively assess students with EBD (Pellegrino, Singh, & Carmanico, 1999). Assessments for EBD include both self-reporting and behavioral ratings of the child by parents, teachers, and physicians. Glazebrook, Hollis, Heussler, Goodman and Coates (2003) determined that children attending general pediatric outpatient clinics are at increased risk of suffering from emotional/behavioral disturbances. This increased prevalence of EBD may be attributed to unmet needs of psychiatric services at pediatric clinics or the lack of routine pediatric assessments to aid appropriate referrals for children. It should be noted that a greater percentage of low-income families utilize clinics as a means of family health care.

The 4th edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-IV-TR) published by the American Psychiatric Association (2000) also describes disorders usually first diagnosed in children, but not all of these are considered disabilities by the federal government. These include tic disorders, mood disorders, and conduct disorders. Northey, Wells, Silverman, and Bailey (2003) concluded that while there are a number of DSM-IV descriptions, there remains significant variations between externalizing and internalizing disorders, and diagnoses continue to increase (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Externalizing disorders would include depression and anxiety disorders, and these generally do not pose significant challenges in the classroom (Simms, Prisciandaro, Krueger, & Goldberg, 2012). Other disorders pose significant behavioral problems and are manifested in conduct disorders like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD). A review in 2009 estimated that one-fourth of all young people experienced a mental disorder during the previous year (Merikangas, Nakamura, & Kessler, 2009). The fifth edition of the diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, DSM-5) has introduced new diagnoses found in school-aged children while lowering diagnostic thresholds of existing disorders (Batstra, Hadders-Algra, Van Tol, Pijl, & Frances, 2012; Paris, 2013; Reichenburg, 2013).

History of Special Education

The history of special education is rooted in the humanitarian efforts of individuals who sought the ethical treatment of the mentally ill or physically impaired (Hallahan et al., 2009). Historians trace the beginning of special education to the French physician John Mark Gaspard Itard (Lachapelle, 2007). In the early 1800's, Itard studied diseases of the ear and its implications to the education of deaf students. The discovery of a child who was roaming naked

and wild in the forests of France (referred as the "wild child" or "wild boy of Avyon") garnered the attention of Itard (McCance, 2008, p.69). Under intense criticism from opponents, Itard took custody of the child whom he called Victor, and sought interventions to eliminate Victor's disability (Shrofel, 1999). While not completely successful, Itard was able to dramatically improve Victor's inappropriate behaviors. Students of Itard disseminated his teaching methods throughout Europe and United States (Degeneffe & Terciano, 2011). Through the efforts of Itard, concepts of humane treatment emerged as well as the idea that children with profound disabilities can be taught (Johnson, 1999).

Unfortunately, the concept of humane treatment did not eradicate prejudice and inequality. Widespread prejudice was prevalent in all areas of American society, which gave rise to a policy of exploitation and separation (Soule & King, 2006). The plight of children diagnosed with disabilities was similar to that of individuals of color. Segregation policies not only excluded students of minorities but also extended to individuals deemed by society to be inferior (Ficker, 1999; Jackson, 2008). Consequently, exceptional children were either denied educational opportunities or were required to attend separate schools designated for students with disabilities. Such policies were considered acceptable by law if separate facilities provided equal services (Fitzgerald, 2012). The *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision legalized the "separate but equal" treatment of minorities and played a significant role in educational policy for over a century (McPherson, 2011).

The Supreme Court's landmark decision, *Brown v. Board of Education,* established the precedence for special education laws (Zirkle, 2005). The High Court held that government-sponsored racial segregation violated the 14th amendment's equal protection clause. Later, the court would clarify their decision and rule that the equal protection clause condemned

segregation policies as inherently unequal (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). The Brown decision was important, because the concept of equal opportunity was extended beyond minorities to individuals with disabilities.

The struggle for racial equality sparked the flames for entitlements of individuals with disabilities. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, discrimination on the grounds of race, color, or national origin was declared illegal by the federal government (Chay, 1998). This piece of legislation was called Title IV and it would become the origin of special education services in the United States (Gutek, 1995). Due to the rulings established in Title IV, there now persists the assertion that all children should be given equal or at least adequate resources to master a common set of knowledge and skills (Levinson, 2011).

IDEA

Concerns over racial inequality were the impetus of legislation which promulgated special education services in the United States (Skiba et al., 2008). Ten years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Congress would extend those same rights to individuals with disabilities. Initially known as P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act set the foundations for all subsequent laws pertaining to individuals with disabilities (Zigmond, Kloo, & Volonino, 2009). Further amendments and reauthorizations renamed this law as the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) (Slavin, 2006). In 2004, Congress provided the current amended form entitled IDEA, 2004 (Turnbull, 2005). This profusion of changes to special education legislation suggests the dynamic nature of special education enactments and the struggle required to implement those changes (Hallahan et al., 2009). The most controversial component of IDEA, 2004, is the placement of students in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Zigmond et al. (2009) suggest that the LRE integration within the general education

classroom must take place if exceptional students are to receive the best educational experience. However, LRE presents the greatest challenges and hardships to local educational jurisdictions when coupled with the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Liston, 2005).

No Child Left Behind

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law one of "the most far-reaching" of all federal education laws, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which is commonly referred as No Child Left Behind (Dee & Jacob, 2011, p. 91; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This presidential act dramatically expanded federal influence over the nation's more than 90,000 public schools (Dee & Jacob, 2011). The premise of NCLB was to support higher student academic achievement, develop robust public schools, and increase excellence in teaching. In reality, it has placed greater emphasis on standardized achievement test results and additional pressures on teachers (Karp, 2012). The effects of NCLB are mixed. Dee and Jacob (2011) found evidence of improvement in eighth grade math achievement, particularly with minorities and among low achieving groups. Still, the latest release of scores from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) provides little evidence of NCLB's lasting effectiveness (Ravitch, 2009). Even President Obama criticized elements of NCLB by suggesting that schools are teaching to the test, and in some cases lowering standards in order to avoid sanctions (Devarics, 2011). Houston (2007) indicates the failure of NCLB is especially keen for special education children and suggests that any accountability system must include a sense of authenticity. As a result of NCLB, both general and special educators are being pressured to narrow the achievement gap between the disadvantaged and other groups of students (Allison, 2012).

An important part of this legislation requires all school localities to show adequate yearly progress (AYP). AYP is the diagnostic indicator of how schools are performing academically, with greater accountability on students who historically have not performed well academically (NEA, 2012). A problem associated with NCLB is the penalty placed on teachers and staff when students fail to perform; most grievous of these problems is job termination or relocation (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In the existing literature, there is an absence of research relating to the implication of implementing NCLB and its impact on teachers who instruct EBD students (Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011). Such a deficiency must be addressed if the true ramifications of federal intervention are to be measured.

Inclusion

No single issue in special education is more controversial than the inclusive placement of students with disabilities in the general education instructional environments (Beacham & Rouse, 2012). Even the term "inclusion" is often confusing and is undefined by the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA). According to Twachtman-Cullen and Twachtman-Bassett (2011), IDEA addresses two fundamental requirements: the expectation that a child receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and a child's placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE). LRE is not simply a location; LRE also includes the instruction and social context of the student's placement. Inclusive education is based on the principle that schools provide education services for all students regardless of social, cultural, intellectual, or emotional differences or disabilities (Armstrong, Armstrong, A. C., & Spandagou, 2011; Florian et al., 2010). While there is a broad spectrum of research related to children in inclusive environments, the literature has failed to address the effects that such a policy has on teacher experiences and their concept of quality world.

Partial Inclusion

According to Wehman (2006), partial inclusion offers the student social integration in specific academic settings while allowing for special education services in pull-out resource classrooms. Partial inclusion provides students with disabilities selective participation in the general education environment. Physical education, art, and music are classes that have been typically reserved for student participation. Since the establishment of NCLB, core academic areas where the student can perform at grade level are now included (Hallahan et al., 2009). Resource room placement is an important component of partial inclusion. Partial inclusion provides students with disabilities a place in the general education environment for the majority of the school day while allowing pull-out resource instruction (Berger, 2005). Generally, resource programs focus on the core academic classes, such as mathematics and language arts, subjects that are the most problematic to a student's disability (Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004; Villanueva, Taylor, Therrien, & Hand, 2012). Resource rooms are considered beneficial because they involve smaller student numbers and are staffed by special education teachers working in close collaboration with the general education teacher (Miles & Singal, 2010).

Full Inclusion

Full inclusion places students with disabilities in the general education classroom full-time with the assistance of special education teachers who work cooperatively with general education teachers (Slavin, 2006). This arrangement places two educators in the classroom simultaneously and affords opportunities for special educators to provide accommodations and interventions when required (Zigmond et al., 2009). Such a co-teaching model increases the role and responsibilities of the general education teacher while providing a continuum of special

education services (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McMully, 2012; Wehman, 2006). This paper

uses the term inclusion to mean the integration of individuals with disabilities into the general

education classroom, which allows them access to rigorous and meaningful curriculum while

receiving collaborative support (Causton-Theoharis, 2009). While the research on inclusive

practices is exhaustive in consideration of students' interactions, there remains an overall silence

on the complex dynamics of inclusive teachers and students with EBD (Hanuscin et al., 2011).

Least Restrictive Environment

An important element of IDEA is providing special education services to students with

special needs in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The Least Restrictive Environment is

interpreted as providing access to the general education curriculum or providing educational

placement in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities. While LRE can be a

continuum of placement options, including more restrictive settings, most students with

disabilities are placed in the general education classrooms (Hargrove, 2000). The primary focus

must be on the needs of the individual child; the goal should be a continuum of services and not

a continuum of placement (Hewitt, 1999). For educators, the term "least restrictive

environment" refers to the reality that exceptional children must be educated in as typical an

environment as possible (Wrightslaw, 2012). The interpretation of LRE has restructured the

educational landscape for students with EBD and has moved educational instruction from the

auspices of special education to general education in inclusive settings.

Students with Emotional or Behavioral Disabilities in Inclusive Education

Before the implementation of inclusive classrooms, most students with disabilities

received their instruction in self-contained classrooms (Slavin, 2006). With the increased

demands for academic excellence placed upon schools by NCLB, localities see the benefit of

placing an additional educator in the classroom. Inclusive environments allow for the presence

of both general and special educator. The special educator in an inclusion classroom must be

highly qualified in order to teach any of the core subjects (National Education Association,

2012). However, placing two educators in the same instructional environment is not necessarily

a blueprint for academic success, particularly in cases where students present challenging

behaviors. Lane et al. (2006) found that middle school students with EBD are more likely to

experience academic failure even in inclusive settings. Socially, these students exhibit higher

levels of behavioral problems that detract from the learning environment. Studies show that

school teachers in middle and high school settings are more likely to have negative attitudes

toward inclusion than elementary school teachers (Ernst & Rogers, 2009; Korkmaz, 2011).

While multiple investigations have shown positive influences for students in inclusive

classrooms, teachers generally view inclusion cautiously (Margaritoiu, 2010; Ruijs et al, 2010;

Runswick-Cole, 2011). Equally troubling is the magnitude of current research which argues for

or against inclusive education primarily from the student's perspective. If inclusive education is

to be fairly evaluated, then the teacher phenomena must be investigated (Odom et al., 2011; Zhao

& Bitchener, 2007; Zigmond et al., 2009).

Characteristic Behavior of Emotional or Behavioral Disabilities

There are a number of characteristics associated with students diagnosed with EBD.

Moreover, the disorder presents a number of instructional and behavioral management

challenges. Lane et al. (2006) documented significant deficiencies in core academic subjects

including reading, geography, science, mathematics, and written language. While academics

present challenges to students diagnosed with EBD, the greatest issue facing these students is

their ability to control their own behavior. Specifically, these behaviors include impulsivity,

anxiety, and distractibility (Wehman, 2006). To qualify for special education services with a

diagnosis of EBD, students must present both social and academic problems (Frank, 2011).

Some research suggests that the diagnosis for EBD is distributed disproportionately (Billingsley

et al., 2006). Reedy, De Thomas, Newman, and Chun (2009) reported that 71% of students

diagnosed with EBD were male and 50% of those were African-American.

Coleman (1995) theorized that there are two models of deviant behavior: biophysical and

psychodynamic. Both regard the individual as the primary source of the problematic behavior

and hold that treatment can be either physical or psychological. Understanding these theoretical

models is important in dealing with children diagnosed with EBD because attitudes, reactions,

and interventions are based upon assumptions drawn from these models. A biophysical model

assumes organic causes of EBD, which can be treated physically or medically. The

psychodynamic model for EBD encompasses psychoanalytic and humanistic interventions based

on human behavior. However, teachers of EBD students report insufficient professional

development pertaining to behavioral knowledge and their integration into the general education

curriculum (Beattie, Anderson, & Antonak, 1997; Blake & Monahan, 2007; Hastings & Brown,

2002). Manning, Bullock, and Gable (2009) found a general lack of cohesive information

available to guide teachers and classroom practitioners in dealing with students with deviant

behavior.

Behavioral Issues in the Instructional Environment

One of the greatest challenges in the instructional environment is teaching students with

EBD (Billingsley et al., 2006; Shapiro, Miller, Sawka, Gardill, & Handler, 1999). Students with

EBD present educators with a variety of academic and behavioral challenges although they

represent the fewest number of students with special needs (Niesyn, 2009). Students may be

aggressive or withdraw and may present both of these behaviors at different times (Nickerson &

Brosof, 2003). Mihalas et al. (2009) found that EBD students display a wide variety of

externalizing and internalizing behaviors that can seriously interfere with their ability to be

successful in the classroom. It is common for students with EBD to exhibit poor work habits and

social skills, which adults interpret as disrespect or rudeness (Duchnowski & Kutash, 2011).

Many teachers find it difficult to understand what a student with EBD is experiencing, because

their own childhood backgrounds were so dramatically different from that of the student (Solar,

2011). Niesyn (2009) suggests that unlike special education teachers whose preparation includes

working with students with behavioral differences, general education teachers' preparation

concentrates on working with groups of students across content domains. As these students can

present bizarre and disruptive behavior in the classroom, they are more likely to receive

disciplinary measures that include exclusion (Wehman, 2006). Exclusion involves the increasing

placement of students in alternative schools. Many communities utilize these facilities as places

to educate students with behavioral disorders (Lane et al., 2006). With the ever-expanding

responsibilities of teachers, it is reasonable to expect a mix of positive, negative, and neutral

attitudes towards children with disabilities (Levins, Bornholt, & Lennon, 2005).

Aggression and Violent Behavior

The most common behavioral problem within schools is the intentional harm of other

students (Frank, 2011). Students diagnosed with EBD may manifest aggression, disruptive

behavior, stereotypical behavior, and self-injury. Gumpel and Sutherland (2010) suggest that

while the characteristics of students with EBD would appear to predispose them to experiences

of aggression or victimization at higher rates than those of their peers, extensive research on this

topic is sparse. Externalizing behaviors such as aggression and delinquency are typical of many

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students identified with EBD (Achenbach, 1991). Aggression and violent behavior must be viewed in light of student placement. In a recent investigation of student aggression, students with disabilities were victimized more than their general education peers (Strelitz, Rees, Thompson, & Walker, 2011). Additionally, more restrictive educational placement served as a predictor for violent behavior (Rose, Espelage, Aragon, & Elliott, 2011).

A study by Pellegrini and Bartini (2001) defines school violence as behavior that has been primarily associated with direct physical aggression, which is a form of proactive aggression, and is intended to achieve, demonstrate, or maintain social dominance. Commonly referred to as bullying, this type of behavior is characterized by an imbalance of physical or psychological power generally repeated over time (Wehman, 2006). Bullying affects not only the victims and bullies but it especially "harms those students who are the bully/victims" (Pugh & Chitiyo, 2012, p. 47). Moreover, bullying has social implications that have adverse effects on the total student body. Salmivalli (2010) confirmed that the typical occurrence of victimization is not in isolation, but within larger social contexts which implicates others in bullying behavior. Konishi, Hymel, Zumbo, and Li (2010) found that students who frequently experience physical, verbal, or psychological abuse by their peers are at greater risk for various forms of psychological distress, including depression and suicide. As physical forms of bullying increase in elementary school and reach their peak in middle school, teachers must be ever vigilant and schools must be proactive in their efforts to curtail this problem.

Student Mobility and Dropout

According to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), students with emotional disabilities currently comprise 7.4% of the total school population of students with

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disabilities (Office of Special Education, 2007). The number of students, ages 2- 21, who are diagnosed with serious emotional disabilities has increased 10.3% during the most recent reporting comparison period. These statistics point to a growing problem in American education. Students with EBD are more likely be absent from school, fail courses, be retained, and have higher dropout rates than those identified with other disabilities (Billingsley et al., 2006; Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004). Grade retention, or being "held back," has also been linked to students dropping out of school. The deleterious effect of retention in elementary school or the combined effects of retention in elementary and middle school have also been reported. Analyses have found that retention in elementary and/or middle school increased the odds of dropping out of high school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Dropping out of school is especially damaging to students diagnosed with EBD (Osher, Morrison, & Bailey, 2003). Dropouts typically earn less than their peers with more education, and they are more likely than high school graduates to end up in prison (Lofstrom & Tyler, 2009; Osher, Morrison, & Bailey, 2003). According to the U.S. Department of Education, 73% of all students with EBD who drop out of high school are incarcerated within the first five years of leaving high school (US Department of Education, 2010).

Suicide

Suicide is the third leading cause of death in individuals ages 10 to 24 (National Institute of Mental Health, 2007). Brener, Krug, and Simon (2000) estimate that 17 to 29 percent of all secondary school students seriously contemplate suicide and almost eight percent have made an attempt. Students diagnosed with disabilities have shown a greater risk of suicide than their general education peers (Wachter & Bouck, 2008). Of particular concern are students who show at-risk behavior, a common symptom of students diagnosed with EBD. Fleischmann, Bertolote,

Belfer, and Beautrais (2005) suggest that adolescent females with high incident disabilities, particularly, EBD, consider and attempt suicide more often than their peers without disabilities. A growing concern of educators with students diagnosed with EBD is the lack of identification and intervention skills training which are effective in suicide prevention. Working to improve programs that provide students with disabilities exposure to multiple domains of protective interventions can reduce the risk of teen suicide (Strelitz et al., 2011). Studies indicate that preventive activities, early identification, and efficient use of school crisis team resources are successful restraints to teen suicide (Wachter & Bouck, 2008). Cross (2012) affirms the need to ensure a "collective awareness" that everyone has an important role and responsibility for the well-being of others (p.1).

Teacher Perceptions toward Students with Special Needs

A number of studies have been conducted on the perceptions of general education teachers towards students with special needs. Most noteworthy is research related to bilingual and ESL (English as a Second Language) learners (Cabello, 1999; Reeves, 2002; Schuilwerve, 2011). They found that general education teachers who instruct students with limited English proficiency face similar challenges as those who teach students diagnosed with EBD. According to Semmel, Abernathy, Butera, and Lesar (1991), the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classroom requires a rudimentary restructuring of the teacher's role. This restructuring can have profound implications on teacher attitudes, beliefs, and quality of life. Research suggests that teacher attitudes may be the single most important determinant of student success or failure (Anderson & Olsen, 2006; Brown, 2007; Moss & Brookhart, 2009). Walker-Dalhouse, Sanders, and Dalhouse (2009) argued that teacher attitudes can boost student achievement, particularly for students who find themselves alienated from the learning

community by race, culture, or disability. A study of academic achievement by Good, Grumley, and Roy (2003) indicated that the quality of interaction between teachers and students was a significant indicator of student success. Studies indicate that partnerships between student and teacher can be profoundly influenced by teachers' perceptions (Harper & de Jong, 2009; Miller, 2010; Moule, 2009).

Glasser (1997) theorized that an individual's perception of reality frames their concept of quality world. These perceptions manifest themselves in one's actions, feelings, or mental set (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2007). Hughes and Kwok (2007) affirmed that a teacher's understanding of attitudes is an important factor in building a complex sense of community within schools. For ESL and EBD students, strengthening a deep sense of community within schools requires an exploration of teacher attitudes and a concerted effort by administrators to improve professional development (Cummins, 1997; Garcia, Arias, Murri, & Serna, 2010; Hill, 2009; Kose, 2009).

Teacher Perceptions toward Students Diagnosed with EBD

Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theorizes that social interaction is the framework for meaningful learning. As for ESL students, social interaction and cultural factors such as school and community influence EBD student outcomes (Collier, 1995). These microsystems directly influence one's beliefs and attitudes, which ultimately affect one's experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cummins, 2001). Orr (2009) suggests that rural general education teachers' experiences can be categorized into three general areas of concern:

- Laws and litigation related to students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and teachers' inabilities to meet established requirements found in these legal documents (Florian et al., 2010).

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- Concerns related to evaluation and performance, classroom management, and implementation of curriculum.

- Issues related to personal health and safety (Korkmaz, 2011).

Teachers' perceptions are influenced by a variety of factors. Of the three areas of concerns listed, none is more frightening than the issue of litigation (Caskie, Holben, & Zirkel, 2009; Zirkel, 2006). Since the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, the Supreme Court has heard seven cases related to special education. Within that same time period, over 120 court decisions have been rendered with direct implications to discipline procedures due to violations of schools' prescribed codes of conduct (Wagner & Katsiyannis, 2010). Students who present inappropriate behavior are more likely to receive out of school suspensions which may be in direct violation of their due process rights. In the Scranton, Pennsylvania school district, eighty special education cases have been settled since 2008, totaling $2.5 million dollars (Sarah, 2012).

Laws and Litigation Concerns

IDEA, 2004, requires that all students who receive special education services must have in place a working IEP. Gibb and Dyches (2007) state that the IEP must include a variety of elements: a statement of performance, measurable goals, a description of the student's progress, appropriate accommodations, and the duration of the services. As the IEP is the legal basis for the student's instruction, failure to meet the requirements of the IEP can lead to legal action. Generally, the IEP team includes the general education teacher, and therefore the teacher should be informed about the accommodations listed within the IEP. Other legal considerations of concern to teachers include litigation as a result of injury caused by the explosive behavior of students with EBD. In developing an inclusive attitude scale for high school teachers, Ernst and Rogers (2009) found that teachers were concerned about the ability to ensure the safety of all

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students in classrooms including those students diagnosed with EBD.

Evaluation & Performance

Special education services in the United States have been profoundly influenced by two pieces of legislation: IDEA, 2004 and NCLB. The debate over the effectiveness of NCLB has recently come to the forefront with President Barack Obama's new legislation, HR 3989, the Student Success Act (National Education Association, 2012). Possibly the most contentious part of NCLB relates to accountability requirements associated with AYP (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Lewis, 2006; Popham, 2009; Wei, 2012). On February 9, 2012, the US Department of Education (2012) and the current administration announced approval of a 10 state plan to make substantial reforms to measures associated with NCLB and AYP. Lane, Wehby, Little, and Cooley (2005) found teachers are also concerned about low academic performance associated with students diagnosed with EBD. These students tend to lower states' standardized achievement test scores and consequently lower teacher evaluations (Mason, Kubina, Valasa, & Cramer, 2010). In many states, incentive pay is based upon student performance, and teachers may be reluctant to teach inclusive classes and cite financial hardships (Eberts, Hollenbeck, & Stone, 2002).

Health and Safety Issues.

Mintz (2007) affirms some risk associated with teaching students with EBD. Empirical studies suggest that health and safety issues affect both teachers and students. Yang Ge, Hu, Chi, and Wang (2009) affirmed that job strain, a form of chronic stress, increases the risk of both somatic and mental syndromes such as exhaustion, psychological distress, and burnout. Richards (2012), utilizing a survey adapted from the *Teacher Stress Inventory and Coping Skills for Adults,* found that teachers nationwide are highly stressed and that school administrations are doing little to adequately prepare teachers and prevent classroom stress. A number of bio-

psychological stressors are associated with teacher stress and anxiety. Siegrist and Rodel (2006) link a compromised ability of adapting brain activation among those suffering from chronic social reward frustration, with particular concern for teachers who instruct inclusive classrooms with students diagnosed with EBD (Albrecht et al., 2009; Nelson et al., 2001). Carlyle and Woods (2004) expressed concerns that negative emotional climates are typical of new education administrations that are driven by the values of the market, heavy-handed accountability, competition, and managerialism. The psychological consequences of stress can interfere with an individual's mental health and well-being and is typically manifested in poor job performance, lowered self-esteem, and inability to concentrate and make effective decisions (Sabanci, 2011). A number of studies concur that teachers of students diagnosed with EBD report higher levels of stress than any other type of educator (Albrecht et al., 2009; Center & Steventon, 2001; Nelson et al., 2001).

While some of these risks can be physical in nature, others are related to long-term health issues associated with increased levels of anxiety. Emery and Vandenberg (2010) suggest that there are a number of factors linked to high attrition rates of teachers who work with high-risk children. Manifestations associated with health risks and students diagnosed with EBD have been well documented (Wehman, 2006). Symptoms include chronic fatigue, reoccurring infections, colds, and headaches. Common occurrences are experiences of emotional exhaustion and a lack of energy (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010). While many school localities have implemented stress management resources, many of these symptoms can be alleviated through mentoring, mediation, and stress management. Consequently, many school districts have failed to adequately address issues related to occupational stress, particularly as it relates to instructing students with EBD.

Summary

An analysis of the current literature indicates a proliferation of research on inclusion and its implications to students (e.g., Anderson & Hendrickson, 2007; Cook & Cameron, 2010; Hawkins & Heflin, 2011; Jones, 2005; Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005; Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008). In the area of EBD students in inclusive environments, the majority of research has been directed towards classroom management and curriculum (e.g., Allday et al., 2012; Anderson & Sadler, 2009; Billingsley et al., 2006; Christ, Silberglitt, Yeo, & Cormier, 2010; Lane et al., 2006; Lieberman & Walker, 2007; McCray & McHatton, 2011; Sutherland et al., 2008. There exists significant literature documenting the difficulties associated with instructing students with EBD in an attempt to reduce teacher attrition rates (e.g., Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Poulou & Norwich, 2000; Prather-Jones, 2011). Researchers concur that the phenomenon of teacher stress is of particular concern in inclusive environments with students who present challenging behaviors (e.g., Botwinik, 2007; Carlyle & Woods, 2004; Daniels et al., 2006; Forlin, 2001; Lane et al., 2006; McCormick & Ayres, 2009; Mintz, 2007; Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Algozzine, 2012; Sass, Seal, & Martin, 2011). However, a review of current literature reveals an absence of information related to middle school general education teacher lived experiences when instructing students with EBD in rural inclusive environments. This study sought to fill the existing gap within the body of research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The intent of this study was to explore the shared experience of rural middle school general education teachers of students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive classrooms. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, the research investigated general education teachers' experiences with an emphasis of giving a voice to the participants (Creswell, 2007). The inquiry was important because students with EBD present unique challenges to the instructional environment (Cannella-Malone et al., 2011). Additionally, students with EBD have significant implications on society with dropout rates that are the highest of any disability category (Mayer, Lochman, & Richard, 2005; Reschly & Christenson, 2006). Students who drop out of high school have limited access to support and other educational services where they can access vocational training that will provide successful inclusion into society (Frank, 2011). Moreover, there is a social aspect of students diagnosed with EBD. Students diagnosed with EBD generally fall into psychiatric categories of anxiety, bipolar disorders, oppositional defiance disorders, depression, and forms of psychosis (Hallahan et al., 2009). Such disorders tend to isolate students from both peers and teachers and add to the general difficulty of instructing these students.

This chapter includes a description of the research design and explains why it was chosen. It provides a description of the participants and the sampling techniques used to select them for the study. Additionally, it explains my role in the study, the data collection process, and instruments used (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). It cites strategies used in supporting the value and integrity of the research while upholding the artistry consistent with phenomenological research. Finally, it addresses issues of data analysis, discusses trustworthiness, and establishes the protection and ethical treatment of its participants.

Research Design

Qualitative research is best suited for research problems that are not yet determined and require further exploration (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (2009) noted that qualitative research focuses on meaning and understanding, uses a holistic inductive process, utilizes data collection and analysis processes that are significantly affected by the researcher's own paradigm, and provides final reporting that is richly descriptive from the participant's perspective. At its core, qualitative research seeks to develop knowledge that advances education by answering questions related to the experience and why or how the experience is happening.

Phenomenology

Phenomenological research is rooted in the foundations of sociology (Creswell, 2007). The term *phenomenology* was first used by Sonnemann (1954) to express the descriptive recording of an individual's subjective experience. As a derivative of the Greek word *phainomenon,* meaning appearance, phenomenology seeks to identify reality as perceived by an individual (Heidegger, 2008; Parson, 2010). Patton (2002) described that a phenomenological approach should explore how people make sense of experiences and transform their experiences into consciousness. Phenomenology aims at finding a deeper understanding of the nature of common experiences.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Husserl (1913) wrote of logical investigation from a mathematical viewpoint. His basic premise was that an individual can only understand experience through sensory perceptions which bring to life conscious awareness. As such, phenomenology focuses on an experienced phenomenon and how understanding that phenomenon provides meaning and interpretation (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, Fischer, & von Eckartsberg, 1971; Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Sartre, (1958). As stated earlier,

phenomenology is at its essence a philosophy (Cerbore, 2010; Lewis & Staehler, 2010; Heidegger, 1962; Sokolowski, 2000; van Manen, 1990, 1997, 2007). From an understanding of the philosophical origins of phenomenology, the researcher is better equipped to find incentive for quality methodology and ultimately an appreciation (Biklen & Casella, 2007).

Phenomenology finds its origin and vision in the works of Edmund Husserl, particularly in his *Logical Investigations* (1901). Husserl developed his concept of phenomenology as a kind of descriptive psychology and expanded this approach to include a transcendental science of consciousness (Giorgi, 1985; van Manen, 1990). Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, expanded Husserl's concept of phenomenological inquiry. Heidegger's (1962, 2008) *Being and Time* theorized that human beings engage and know their world through a variety of ways. Heidegger differed from Husserl in his existential belief that affirmed phenomenology as a metaphysical approach rather than a descriptive science (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009; McGuirk, 2010).

For this study, I chose a phenomenological design in order to better understand the daily lived experiences of general education teachers in the phenomenon of inclusion with students with EBD. Husserl (1970) suggests that phenomenology allows "the researcher to develop an unprejudiced view of the world and explore their rational interconnections" (p.43). Phenomenology explores common themes emerging from the lived experiences and observations of the participants and the perceptions of the phenomenon which becomes the primary source of knowledge (Creswell, 2007). This phenomenological-epistemological bifurcation is most prevalent in the methodology employed by the two schools of thought.

Followers of Husserl assert that every individual brings to an experience preconceived ideas and suppositions (Moustakas, 1994; Patton 1990). These biases must be exposed so that

the researcher can find a clear and "unadulterated consciousness" (Husserl 1913, p.178). Husserl called this process "bracketing" or *epoche* from the Greek word *epechein* meaning to suspend or refrain. In phenomenology, epoche and a similar concept utilized by Husserl termed reduction, are used interchangeably to refer to suspension or redirection of one's attention towards the phenomenon (Cerbone, 2010; Lewis & Staehler, 2010; Moustakas, 1994. Heidegger approached the concept of bracketing quite differently. It is the researcher's judgments and understanding that enhances disclosure of the essence or meaning (Moran, 2000). Heidegger's approach to phenomenology is entitled hermeneutical, which refers to the process of exposing the very essence of meaning. In this study, it was my desire to do just that; through the use of systematic processes and data collection methods, I extracted the essence of inclusive teachers who instruct students with EBD.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of rural middle school general education teachers who instruct students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive settings (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 2000; van Manen, 1990). Moreover, it sought to provide a descriptive voice of general education teachers who share the phenomenon of instructing students diagnosed with EBD in inclusion classrooms and identifies their thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Heidegger, 1962, 1985, 2008: Husserl, 1973). According to Nelson et al. (2004), students with EBD display substantial academic deficiencies in the core subjects of reading, math, and written language. In addition, teachers are finding themselves held more accountable for student performances on state standardized achievement tests (Lane et al., 2006). While a number of studies investigate inclusion from the students' perspectives, this study sought the experiences of general education teachers. The

study incorporated interviews, observations, field notes, and documents to assess "significant statements, meaning, schemes, and descriptions" of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p.89). It employed a systematic data analysis procedure and established guidelines for assembling the textual and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2007).

Research Questions

Foundational to the purpose of this study was the investigation of the experiences of general education teachers towards students diagnosed with EBD in their inclusive classrooms. Five questions were developed by reviewing the related literature (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). These questions sought to establish an overall essence of teachers' challenges and lived experiences in inclusive settings. As the emphasis of the study was on general education teacher values, beliefs, and lived experiences towards students diagnosed with EBD, the general research questions focused on these relationships. The questions developed from the related literature were as follows:

RQ1. How do rural middle school general education teachers describe their experiences with students diagnosed with EBD in an inclusion classroom?

RQ2. According to rural middle school general education teachers, how does the presence of students diagnosed with EBD influence their beliefs about inclusive education?

RQ3. How do rural general education teachers describe their attitudes toward teaching before instructing students with EBD in their classrooms?

RQ4. How do rural general education teachers describe their attitudes toward teaching after instructing students with EBD in their classrooms?

RQ5. How do rural general education teachers view their future in education based on the experience of teaching students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive settings?

Participants

The purpose of phenomenological research is the discovery of the human experience by describing the voice of its participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007). Participants of this query were chosen based upon their involvement in inclusive environments with students diagnosed with EBD. A list of possible participants was selected from the special education director's database files and document sources: individualized education plan (IEP), manifestation determination records (MDR), and behavioral records. From that list, ten possible candidates were selected to participate in the study. The principals of the four middle schools in the district were contacted and provided with a description of the research design. I obtained permission from the superintendent of schools to conduct the study. Prior approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensured that the risk to subjects was minimal and in compliance with all ethical principles (#1698.102113, see Appendix C).

In an effort to ensure confidentiality, all participants were given pseudonyms with no surnames (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990). Participants numbered ten general education middle school teachers from a southeastern public school district whose classes contain at least one student diagnosed with EBD. The determination of eligibility for this study required all participants to have five or more years of instructional experience in the field of education. A digital mailing was sent to all eligible participants and used as an invitation to participate. The mailing also provided the details of the study stipulated by the IRB (Biklen & Casella, 2007; Piantanida & Garman, 2009; Yin, 2011). Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and subjects had the right to remove themselves from the research at any time. Participants were selected through a non-probability sampling design of purposeful sampling (Brown, 2007; Lynch, 2008).

DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) has identified 10 major groups of disorders that may be present in students diagnosed with EBD. The study was particularly concerned with students who manifest conduct disorders and oppositional defiance disorders. Conduct disorders are represented by persistent patterns of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated. Oppositional defiance disorders are a pattern of negative, hostile, and defiant behavior that persists for the duration of at least six months. Participants in the study were approached and asked to participate if they met inclusive criteria (Creswell, 2007). The qualifying criteria for this study were:

1. General education teachers with five or more years of experience instructing sixth-through eighth-grade students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive classrooms.

2. Participants must have at least one student receiving special education services with a current IEP that designates a primary or secondary diagnosis of emotional disabilities (ED) or emotional disabilities/behavior diagnosis (EBD).

3. The student must exhibit conduct or oppositional defiance disorders as established by DSM-IV-TR (2000) criteria.

4. The student's behavior must have manifested itself during the current or prior school year. The student must have incurred conduct referrals or disciplinary actions, or have exhibited behaviors which lead to an out of school suspension or a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR).

Site

Southeastern School District (pseudonym) was located approximately 100 miles between two large metropolitan areas and was situated in a predominantly rural county. The school district contains a large percentage of low-income families and blue-collar workers who have been severely impacted by high levels of unemployment. Textile mills were the predominant employer in this area, but these mills have systematically outsourced production to cheaper overseas markets. Although the average state high school dropout rate is 7.2%, Southeastern School District has a current dropout rate of 9.3% (Council on Virginia's Future, 2011). The total school enrollment for the 2012-2013 school year was approximately 9,311 students with approximately 2,116 middle school students. In 2010, Southeastern School District adopted full or partial inclusion for all its special education students with the majority of its exceptional students receiving instruction within the general education population.

Procedures

This study incorporated semi-structured open-ended interviews, observations, field notes, and documents as a form of data collection (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006). It employed a systematic data analysis procedure that establishes guidelines for assembling the textual and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2007). Finlay (2009) postulated that qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that the role of the researcher is to be acknowledged, and inherently becomes part of the study. In phenomenology, the primary instrument of data collection and data analysis is the researcher, so the potential for research bias exists. The researcher needs to be forthright in describing his or her own experiences, beliefs, and relationship to the shared phenomenon. Consequently, I believed that providing a personal biography was important to the integrity of the study, establishing dependability and

confirmability of the research data (Hammersley, 1992).

Researcher's Role (Personal Biography)

I am currently employed as a full-time special educator in the Southeastern School District. My duties include instructing students diagnosed with EBD. As a special education inclusion teacher, my role and responsibilities have changed dramatically since the implementation of full inclusion. Before inclusion, I taught students with EDB in my own self-contained classroom; after full inclusion was implemented, I shared teaching obligations in various general education classrooms. I personally have misgivings towards the implementation of inclusion as established by the guidelines of NCLB. Prior to inclusion, a large percentage of students with EBD were self-contained in classes that had small student-teacher ratios. In the school district, students with EBD may be placed in inclusion classes which exceed 20 students. Some classes contain a 25% population of students with exceptional needs. I also recognized the daunting task of general educators who teach an ever-growing population of students with disabilities while they work to meet the increased demands for academic excellence. As a researcher working in the school district that I teach, I was aware of the possibility that participants may not be transparent with their statements. To facilitate honest dialogue, I emphasized confidentiality and adherence to IRB requirements.

Hatch (2002) suggests that the researcher put the words and experiences of the study into print without being judgmental. Lewis and Staehler (2010) described Husserl's concept of *epoche* as the suspension of judgment. Personally, I had misgivings about the ability to bracket one's experiences and remove them from the process of analysis. Siding with Heidegger, I believed that experiences, worldviews, and biases become part of the researcher's unique interpretation. Consequently, I held an eclectic view of research methodologies.

Notwithstanding, my "lean" was more prevalent towards the hermeneutical camp as I found greater comfort in the approach taken by van Manen (1990, 1997) and interpretivist's philosophy (Creswell, 2007). As a special educator, I found myself in the unique position as an individual who knew the reality of teaching students diagnosed with EBD and being in contact with general educators who work in the studied phenomenon. In an attempt to enhance credibility and suspend personal judgments, I utilized a reflective journal which chronicled my own experiences prior to and during analysis. Journaling brought into focus potential researcher bias and assumptions (Ortlipp , 2008). Additionally, journaling identified personal beliefs, background, and cultural suppositions that could limit my ability to discover the shared essence (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). I believed that by systematically examining my own journal and the emerging themes from participants' narratives, a purposeful epoche lead to a successful voice of the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Confidentiality

One of the responsibilities of the researcher is to provide for the confidentiality of his or her participants (Neuman, 2006). As such, issues of confidentiality were addressed at the time of data collection and utilized throughout the study. The discussion of confidentiality at the outset was necessary for acquiring informed consent and building trust with respondents (Crow, Wiles, Heath, & Charles, 2006). All the procedures for the securing and storing of data in the study were done in a manner that protected the confidentiality of the participants (Seidman, 2006). Codes on all data and pseudonyms for all written descriptions of participants were employed. Locations of interviews and places of employment were coded and used throughout the study so participants could not be linked to specific data responses (Creswell, 2007). Each participant provided consent prior to conducting interviews (See Appendix D). To ensure confidentiality,

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each participant was randomly assigned a coded number and pseudonym name. Interview locations were coded using the last two digits of the zip code followed by the participant's numbers. All forms of data collected during the study will be stored in a safety deposit box for three years after completion of the study; after three years all documents will be shredded and destroyed.

Data Collection

Creswell (2007) suggests that data collection is the process of interconnected activities which provides quality information to answer emerging research queries. Consistent with this purpose, I sought to capture the collective voice of participants through documents, observations, and standard open-ended interviews (Seidman, 2006; Yin, 2011). The data collection method used purposeful sampling to select the sampling population (Finlay, 2009). This qualitative study emphasized subjectivity and discovery as part of the data collection process; as such, I provided personal narratives based upon the participant experiences (Campbell, 2012). As part of the collection process, the initial data entailed naïve descriptions through the use of open-ended questions and dialogue. Naïve description is defined as the researcher's acceptance of the participants' description as truthful in order to avoid forcing his or her cultural categories onto the observed (Anguera-Argilaga, 1979). The goal was to determine the shared universal essence of general education teachers who instructed students with EBD in inclusive environments. Data collection began immediately after approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, consent from my chair, committee, and research consultant. I submitted an expedited review application on the grounds that the research includes only adult participants and was not harmful (Biklen & Casella, 2007; Piantanida & Garman, 2009).

Interviews

  In phenomenological qualitative research, interviews are the principal means of data collection (Creswell, 2007; Englander, 2012; Hatch, 2002; Seidman, 2006). The purpose of the interview is to discover the personal perspective of participants with the assumption that this perspective is meaningful and able to be made known (Patton, 2002). Moustakas (1994) affirms that phenomenological interviews involve an informal process of interactions which are formulated around open-ended comments and questions. Qualitative phenomenology seeks to "explore experiences and uncover meaningful structures" which can be obtained from participants by designing interview questions that are open-ended (Hatch, 2002, p.86). While the nature of interviewing is informal, Englander (2012) expresses concern that phenomenological research must employ the same rigors as natural scientific research.

  In an attempt to uphold the integrity of this study, I followed established guidelines of data collection using the unifying process of underlying rigors associated with scientific research. As such, I remained in charge of the questions and established a 60 to 90 minute time frame to complete the interviews. I was the sole person responsible for data collection and for the design of the instrument that was used to collect that data. It should be noted that the gatekeeper requested a copy of the interview questions before permitting access to the site. This study utilized an interview form as a conventional guideline to keep the interview focused and on track (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interview form allows the researcher to conduct interviews in such a way that each participant was asked the same set of questions in the same prescribed sequence (Patton, 1990). The use of a research question/interview matrix in conjunction with a piloted interview ensured that the interview questions achieve the necessary coverage of the research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

This study utilized a modified interview series model based on Locke, Silverman, and Spirduso (2004). The interview established the context of the participants' lived experiences, provides participants opportunities to reconstruct the specific details of their experiences, and finally, encouraged participants to reflect on the essence of their experiences. Member checks were conducted as a means of providing accuracy for each participant. In addition, participants were asked to complete a member check survey in an attempt to gauge the accuracy of the interview transcription and its interpretation (see Appendix E).

Interviews were recorded using multiple audio digital voice recording devices. All participants' voice recordings were coded and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality (see Appendix F). The initial sampling of participants numbered six to twelve (or until data saturation was reached) general education middle school teachers whose classes contain at least one student diagnosed with EBD. Ten teachers agreed to participate and completed the study. The process was audio taped so that I could review the audio recordings multiple times. The nature of qualitative studies places the researcher close to the participants in the interview process; therefore, it was imperative that trusting relationships were developed between me and the participant (Pringle, Hendry, & McLafferty, 2011). According to Irving (2006) qualitative interviewing is the most important means of data collection, because interviewing provides opportunities for the researcher to discover prior information. Such information afforded a deeper understanding of the group phenomenon and provided me with insight into the lived experiences of the participants. To establish these relationships, I began the interview sessions with a more formal tone. Following established interview etiquette, introductions were in order, followed by an explanation of the selection of their pseudonym and why they were utilized (Campbell, 2012; Seidman, 2006).

Table 1. *Individual Interview, General Education Inclusion Teachers*

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Interview Questions

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1. Do you have a hobby or favorite sports team? (ice breaker question)

2. What is your current job? (Please do not state your job location)

3. How many years have you been teaching?

4. What is your experience with inclusive classrooms? (subjects taught, years)

5. In those inclusive environments, do you teach students diagnosed with EBD?

6. How did you become interested in teaching?

7. Tell about your past life up until becoming a teacher. Please share any specific school experiences related to students with disabilities. When was your first awareness of students with disabilities? Do you recall how they were treated? Where were their classrooms located? How often did you encounter students with disabilities? Do you remember encountering students with EBD?

8. When you first became a teacher, how would you have described your thoughts, feelings, and experiences about teaching when you first became a teacher?

9. What are your responsibilities as a teacher now? Are your responsibilities consistent with what you expected the responsibilities of a teacher to be when you first became a teacher?

10. Reconstruct a typical day of teaching.

11. Describe your relationships with your students.

12. Describe your relationships with your student with EBD.

13. Describe the relationship between the EBD students and other students in your classroom? Does that relationship add or detract from your classroom in attention, student performance, or discipline?

14. Is there a special educator working with you in your inclusion classrooms? If so, what is the relationship between the EBD student or students and the special educator in your classroom? What is the relationship between you and special educator in your classroom?

15. Does the EBD student in your classroom have a behavioral aide? If so, how would you describe that relationship? If not, do you think a behavioral aide would be beneficial?

16. How many times would you say that the EBD student presented problematic behavior in your classroom per week?

17. Give examples of classroom disruptions experienced by EBD students.

18. What kind of support do you receive from the caregiver/parent of your student with EBD? Would you desire more parental support?

19. How would you describe your attitudes towards teaching before instructing students with EBD in your classroom?

20. How would you describe your attitudes towards teaching after instructing students with EBD in your classroom?

21. Given what you have said about your life before you became a teacher and what you have said about your current teaching experience with EBD students, has there been a change in your thoughts, feelings, and experiences?

22. Has the presence of students with EBD in your classroom changed those feelings? If so,

how? Do you feel that EBD students make your job more difficult?

23. Have you ever felt threatened by the presence of EBD students?

24. Do you think you would benefit from additional training in addressing students with EBD?

25. What would you do differently if you had the ability to make changes in your inclusion program?

26. Explain your convictions about your future in education. Has the presence of EBD students changed those convictions?

27. Is there any else you would like to add?

_____

All the interviews began with an ice breaker question about hobbies and sports. After formalities and the initial ice breaker question I began a series of 26 questions chosen to extract the participant's beliefs, attitudes, and feelings related to the phenomenon of inclusive education with students diagnosed with EBD. The purpose of interview questions two through five were to establish parameters for the qualification of the study. Participants had to be general education teachers with five or more years of experience who instruct sixth, seventh, or eighth-grade students in inclusive classrooms with students diagnosed with EBD. The student had to exhibit conduct or oppositional defiance disorders as established by DSM-IV-TR criteria with the student's behavior manifesting itself during the current or prior school year (Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006; American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Prather-Jones, 2011; Stoutjesdijk et al., 2012). Question six asks the participant to explain why he or she became interested in education. This question provided additional background knowledge relating to what Sass, Seal, and Martin (2011) referred to as significant influences that lead to the attrition of teachers. By

understanding the relationship between the many variables that affect these teachers, I was better able to understand how to purposefully analyze the data (Creswell, 2007 Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Questions seven, eight, and nine were included as a means to explore the cultural background and socially significant roles in the participants' social, emotional, and educational development. Hastings and Brown (2002) revealed that behavioral and causal beliefs are positive predictors of self-efficacy and emotional reactions. Emery and Vandenberg (2010) concluded that personal values may mitigate the relationship between the emotional exhaustion component of burnout and job satisfaction and may impact job retention rates. Clearly, there exists a relationship between social supports, past experiences, and the complex influences of culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005).

Question 10 asked participants to re-create a typical school day. The purpose of the question related to studies associated with teacher workloads, stress, and preparedness (de Jager, 2013; Forlin, 2001; Prather-Jones, 2011). Day (2012) expresses concern that teachers face an ever increasing struggle with the crisis of professional identity associated with the perceived loss of public confidence in education and a highly global competitive world.

Questions 11, 12, and 13 provided me with specific information about teacher/student relationships. Mihalas et al. (2009) asserts that students diagnosed with EBD need strong and caring relationships with teachers. Unfortunately, EBD students can exhibit a variety of antisocial behaviors that hinder the development of strong teacher/student bonds (Solar, 2011; Steenbeek, Jansen, & van Geert, 2012).

Questions 14 and 15 were developed to gauge participants' feelings about professional relationships. There is research evidence that suggests teacher relationships can be best

described as conflicted (Levins, Bornholt, & Lennon, 2005). Important to this study was the relationship between general education teachers and special educators. Question 15 specifically targeted the relationship between general education teachers and behavioral aids.

Giorgi (1985) strongly asserted that any research method must rise out of trying to respond to the phenomenon. Questions 16, 17, and 18 sought to capture the subjective experience of the participants. Robinson (1998) used the term "lifeworld" to describe an individual's lived situation, the world in which he or she does things and relates to other people (p.218). Question 18 further expands this idea of lifeworld to include caregivers/parents.

Research suggests that teacher perceptions are activated, challenged, and modified as they interact with their world (Leland, 2012). Bronfenbrenner (1979) asserted that the developmental potential of the setting is a function of the extent to which roles and relations occur within that setting over time. Questions 19-22 asked the participant to reflect upon the phenomenon of inclusive environments with students of EBD and to ponder the significance of instructing them.

According to Frank (2011) the most common behavioral problem within schools is the intentional harm of others. Students diagnosed with EBD may manifest aggression, disruptive behavior, stereotypical behavior, and self-injury. Externalizing behaviors such as aggression and delinquency are typical of many students identified with EBD (Achenbach, 1991). Question 23 addresses issues of aggression and violent behavior through the eyes of the participant.

Question 24 is tied to the literature of Beattie, Anderson, and Antonak (1997); Blake and Monahan (2007); and Hastings and Brown (2002) that suggests teachers of students with EBD report insufficient professional development pertaining to behavioral knowledge and their integration into the general education curriculum. In addition, the work of Manning, Bullock,

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and Gable (2009) found a general lack of cohesive information available to guide teachers and classroom practitioners in dealing with students with deviant behavior.

Question 26 is tied to the literature review and the works of Carlyle and Woods (2004); Daniels et al. (2006); Forlin (2001); Lane et al. (2006); McCormick and Ayres (2009); Mintz (2007); and Obiakor et al. (2012). Inclusion is built on the principle that all students should be valued as individuals regardless of their disabilities. A preponderance of research contends that inclusive education is tied to social justice and requires teachers and professionals to engage in continual reflection on expectations, achievement, and emotional success for all students in their classrooms (Miles & Singal, 2010; Newman, 2012; Odom et al., 2011; Turnbull, 2005; Visser & Stokes, 2003; Zigmond et al., 2009). How teachers view their futures in education provides insight in identifying key facets of the lived experience.

Finally, question 27 provided an opportunity for the participant to provide any additional information that they felt was necessary to clarify their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions related to inclusion and students with EBD.

Observations

Rubin and Rubin (2005) expressed that qualitative research is more than learning about a specific topic; it is discovering what is important to the participants of the study. I utilized classroom observations to uncover the significance of the phenomenon to the participants in their natural setting. Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) suggests that observations help to "demystify what is actually going on as opposed to what one might hope or assume is happening" (p.129). Observations were significant to this study in two ways: first they served as verification that the participants were engaged in inclusive practices. In addition, observations offered divergent data assisting triangulation which contributed to the researcher's "knowledge of the content or to

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provide specific incidents and behaviors" to be used as reference points for the subsequent

interviews (Merriam, 2009, p.96). Van Manen (1990) espoused the belief that the researcher is

simultaneously participant and observer, maintaining a level of orientation of reflectivity by

guarding "Against a more manipulative and artificial attitude that a reflective attitude tends to

insert into a social situation" (p.69). In using close observations, I was continually alert against

this "manipulative and artificial attitude" when handling the interpretation of the situation.

Observations were done one time in the participant's inclusion classroom for the duration of 60

minutes before the interview process.

Field Notes

This study utilized field notes as a form of data. Sagor (2000) defined field notes as a

"Retrospective understanding of why things transpired in a particular fashion" (p. 80). Gall,

Gall, and Borg (2007) concur by suggesting that field notes capture the participant's emotion,

behavior, setting, and mood. Equally important, field notes should include personal reflections

of the researcher. Such reflections should include the researcher's frame of mind,

interpretations, thoughts, and perceptions. Field notes should provide an account of the

experiences and observations of the researcher while participating in intense or involved data

collection (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Laverty (2003) suggests that field notes should

extend to the preparatory phase of research to help in the reduction process. Properly utilized

field notes facilitate the bracketing process by suspending or redirecting one's attentions towards

the phenomenon throughout the study (Cerbone, 2010; Husserl, 1913; Lewis & Staehler, 2010).

The field notes provided retrospective understanding to the principal data collection instrument,

which were the interviews. Field notes guided the questions and helped construct and modify

them for the interview process (Mills, 2003). Caelli (2001) affirms that taking field notes during

the investigation process forces the researcher to clarify each interview. During this study, field notes were completed within 24 hours of each interview to provide better accuracy of the events that transpired.

Documents

According to Miller and Dingwall (1997) documents are "socially constructed realities that are important in their own right" (p.77). The sheer volume of documents available to me makes them uniquely positioned for analysis, particularly in the social content of the lived experience. Patton (2002) suggests that there are special challenges in collecting data from documents, including access, understanding, accuracy, and research linkage. Even with these challenges, documents were beneficial to the study in two specific ways. First, they were used as a means of identifying possible participants for the study. Participants must have had at least one student receiving special education services with a current IEP that designates a primary or secondary diagnosis of emotional disabilities (ED) or emotional disabilities/behavior diagnosis (EBD). In this aspect, documents were used as a means of purposeful sampling to select the sampling population (Finlay, 2009).

In addition, documents were utilized to confirm that the participant's students exhibited a specific type of behavior: conduct or oppositional defiance disorders as established by DSM-IV-TR (2000) criteria. Through the review of relevant documents, the focus of the study was narrowed to students whose behavior manifested itself during the current (2013-14) or prior (2012-13) school year, incurring conduct referrals or disciplinary actions or behavior leading to out of school suspension or prompting a Manifestation Determination Review (MDR).

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

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Most approaches for organizing and analyzing data in phenomenological qualitative

studies are grounded in German philosophy and seek to understand the lifeworld or human lived experience (Laverty, 2003). Two major approaches are most predominant and have similar and complementary goals, which seek to provide a thick and rich descriptive text. Transcendental phenomenology identified by Husserl (1913) and formulated by Moustakas (1994) provides a very regimented, logical, and systematic design. The empirical approach associated with Moustakas (1994) recommends an analysis of reduction; bracketing, horizontalization, invariant qualities and themes with the final composite of "textual and structural descriptions" (p.180). The second approach is less structured and requires reflective interpretation of the data to achieve meaningful understanding. Yin (2011) emphasizes hermeneutical phenomenology as "strongly devoted to capturing the uniqueness of the event" (p. 14). Hermeneutics comes from the Greek word *Hermeneuein,* meaning interpretation; its origin is from the god, Hermes, the messenger.

Dutch Influence

Critical to this type of phenomenology is the belief that the researcher is both participant as well as observer and he or she is open or responsible for meaningfulness that already exists (Lewis & Staehler, 2010). Van Manen (1990) warned against the use of predetermined research methods whose fixed procedures might produce a "rule-governing" research project (p. 29). This Dutch approach strives to faithfully represent the lived phenomenon of the participants in their own voice. As a special educator immersed in the topic, I felt this interpretive analysis approach was best suited for this study (Hein & Austin, 2001). Consistent with Dutch phenomenology, I used the emerging themes for providing the textual description (van Manen, 1990). A synthesis of these themes was developed into the participants' own words (Creswell, 2007).

Accordingly, this study was based on the actual language of the participants and was categorized by themes, sub-themes, and structures of meaning or meaning units. To accomplish this, I began by printing out and posting the purpose statement of the study and the five questions that frame the investigation developed from the related literature. In doing so, I was able to effectively "maintain a strong and oriented relationship to the study" (van Manen, 1990, p.33). Guided by the purpose statement to provide a rich and descriptive voice and to identify the participant's thoughts, feelings, and experiences, I isolated which interview questions were likely to produce emotional, cognitive, or reflective responses. Four color codes were developed: green related to the participant's experience or reflections, yellow identified the participant's feelings or emotions, blue highlighted the cognitive process related to inclusion, and red noted the participant's views of his or her future.

According to Creswell (2007), interviews play the central role of data collection. Theme analysis began immediately after receiving the transcriptions. The transcriptions were done by a hired professional transcriptionist. As the sole researcher, I listened to the recorded interviews while following the transcription data to verify the quality of the transcriptions. All transcriptions were verbatim. Through this process of listening and re-listening to the interview recording, reading and re-reading the transcribed data, documents, observation notes and key words, phrases and statements began to emerge.

Coding Data

Seidman (2006) identified the need for coding data as a means of maintaining credibility. Coding is a process of noting what is interesting and requires labeling significant words and filing data appropriately (Creswell, 2007). Utilizing a yellow highlighter, I began to mark any words, phrases, or statements that addressed the participant's description of feelings related to

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inclusive environments with students of EBD. I further coded these descriptions as EMO (emotions) and assigned a numeric code for different types of emotions. For example, frustration was coded EMO1. Later, identified statements of significance were grouped into meaningful units. The same process was followed in green for "participant's experiences" and coded EXP; blue for "participant's thoughts about inclusion" coded "TOI", and finally the color red highlighted "participant's thoughts about the future" which was coded TOF (See an example of raw data analysis, Appendix G).

Van Manen (1990) refers to this further division of sub themes as a method to "articulate" the main theme (p. 168). Sub-themes were coded with an S after the main codes. Thoughts of inclusion sub-code TOIS-CE refers to the sub-code educational training or CE for continuing education. From the main theme Experiences with Students of EBD four sub-themes emerged:

- Issues of classroom management.

- The process of transitioning students with EBD into the general curriculum needs reevaluating.

- The use of non-trained personnel for students with EBD is ineffective.

- Instructional time and academic performance are cohorts to learning.

A total of five sub-themes arose for the main theme Thoughts of Inclusion with Students of EBD:

- Professional development and continuing education are essential.

- Collaboration between special and general educators requires strengthening.

- Effective inclusion of students with EBD requires the presence of trained special educators.

- There remains a need for better parent/caregiver and teacher support.

- Greater emphasis is required on placement decisions for students with EBD.

Additionally, four sub-themes surfaced for the main theme Emotional Experiences of Inclusion with Students with EBD:

- High-stakes testing places considerable pressures on teachers.

- There is an intrinsic value in teaching students with EBD.

- Students with EBD are unique and should be annually evaluated for changing needs and accommodations.

- Educating students with EBD can be challenging, demanding teachers' knowledge of their students.

Again, four sub-themes were developed from the main theme Considerations to the Future in Light of Teaching Students with EBD:

- Teachers enjoy teaching.

- Teachers are committed to the ideas of inclusion.

- Inclusion of students with EBD reinforces social benevolence in other students.

- The inclusion of students with EBD requires teachers to reevaluate their concept of quality school.

Finally, I endeavored to capture the shared perceptions of the participants by rendering sub-themes into units of meaning. Here I relied on Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam (1959, 1966) method of phenomenological analysis. These units of meaning needed to be the general consensus of the group. To do so I clustered the invariant constitutes of the experience into core themes to produce a textual description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Seven core textual descriptions emerged:

1. Classroom management (time, academics, and behavior)

2. Educational policies (legislation versus student need)

3. Professional development and continuing education

4. The role of special educators in inclusive settings

5. Teachers perceptions: students & parents

6. The intrinsic value in teaching students with EBD (how teachers experience joy and commitment to teaching)

7. Inclusion of students with EBD (teachers' concept of "Quality School")

The Phenomenological Text

The goal of qualitative research and ultimately the standard for a well-written phenomenological study is communicating the story of its participants (Biklen & Casella, 2007; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Piantanida & Garman, 2009; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; van Manen, 1990). Yin (2011) suggests that "Telling the research story is the crux of the declarative self's challenge" (p. 265). For van Manen (1990) "The phenomenological text succeeds when it lets us see that which shines through and that which tends to hide itself" (p.130). Patton (2002) affirmed that the final step in any qualitative research project is a narrative on how one learned what one learned. This requires "finding and writing your own story" (p.502). Phenomenological research is different from any other type of research in that the bond between the link and the results cannot be broken. That is why the role of the researcher is as critical to the story as the participants themselves. Van Manen (1990) articulates it best when he states that "Phenomenological description is always one interpretation and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary or even

potentially rich or deeper description" (p.31). Because each inquiry is unique, this rarity should fill the reader with a sense of wonder; wonder in terms of awe or perplexity, as when something ordinary becomes something exceptional. Van Manen (2002) suggests that "Wonder is the central methodological feature of phenomenological research" (p. 5). For the phenomenological texts to lead the way to human understanding it must also lead the reader to wonder. This was the ultimate goal of the written text.

In writing the phenomenological text, one must engage in the "endless" process of writing and rewriting in an attempt to capture the essence of the study. The great challenge in producing a hermeneutical phenomenological text is that there is no prescribed systematic methodology (Ricoeur & Thompson, 1981). As such, I reverted back to following the more empirical design of Moustakas (1994); in particular, I looked at individual textural descriptions and eventually integrated all the individual textural descriptions into universal textural descriptions. Of the seventeen sub-themes that emerged, I further reduced them to produce seven textural themes. Understanding that it is the participant's voice that gives phenomenology its thick, rich, and descriptive quality, I determined to represent the story of the participants by placing emphasis on their own words.

Trustworthiness

In an attempt to uphold the external validity of the study, member checks or informant feedback were utilized. In the process of member checking, each of the research participants reviewed the transcriptions and the summary of the final results of the inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the quality of the transcription and its interpretation, the participants were asked to rate the findings of the data analysis and the credible interpretation of the reality they experienced in the study. Documentation used in the member checking process will be stored

and available upon request. Churchill (2000) postulated that attention to trustworthiness affirms that the integrity of qualitative research will be an important consideration in a study. The goal of trustworthiness is to support the argument that the research findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.290). Trustworthiness is more than maintaining validity and credibility through a series of strategies. It is the pervasive attitude of the researcher to honestly represent the reality of the situation and persons studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Strategies for trustworthiness utilized in this study included triangulation, rich and thick description, reflexivity, and peer review. Triangulation is the cross-checking of information and conclusions through the use of multiple procedures of sources (Sokolowski, 2000). I used multiple research methods of reflective journaling, interviews, and documents to study the phenomenon. Rich, thick descriptions provided opportunities for the reader to make decisions regarding transferability. Creswell (2007) suggests building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words reporting detailed views of the informants' understanding of the phenomenon is the best way to provide transferability. Utilizing rich, thick descriptions and analysis, I provided operational details of the data gathering process and addressed the minutiae of what was done in the field. Verbatim transcriptions were employed, providing direct quotations and descriptive phrases to capture the essences of the participants (Seidman, 2006).

Confirmability ensures that the study's findings are the result of experiences and ideas of the participants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). This study used both confirmability audits and reflectivity. Patton (1990) recognized the difficulty of ensuring real objectivity when intrusion of the researcher's bias is inevitable. Reflexivity involves self-awareness and critical self-reflection by the researcher of potential biases and predispositions, as these may affect the research process and conclusions. To ensure

reflectivity, I recorded the narratives of the participants in an attempt to connect their voice and story.

Peer review or debriefing allowed for external checks of the research process (Creswell, 2007). I encouraged discussion of the study's interpretations and conclusions with other people. Such discussions included a disinterested peer not directly involved in the research. A reviewing peer should be skeptical and challenge the researcher to provide solid evidence for any interpretations or conclusions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined the role of peer reviewer as a "devil's advocate" who seeks to keep the researcher honest by asking hard questions about methods, means, and interpretation (p. 308). As part of the accountability process, I asked the reviewing peer to keep written accounts of the sessions.

Ethical Considerations

The protection of human subjects or participants in any research is imperative (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). Ethical considerations must be used to guide the research in addressing the initial and ongoing issues that arise from qualitative research. The integrity of this study was upheld by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. While the IRB oversees the ethical treatment of human subjects in research, it is ultimately the responsibility of the researcher to protect the study's participants (Shenton, 2004). In order to protect the employment location of the participants, I only use the geographic designation of Southeastern School District. As previously stated, all participants were given pseudonyms, and numerical coding was extended to both the school and place of interviews. All data will be stored and protected on flash drives, as well as stored on compact disc. The stored data will be protected for the duration of three years and I will have sole access to this data. Prior to conducting any research with participants, informed consent forms were provided and signed.

Consent forms included a brief description of the study's procedures, risk, and benefits. Confidentiality issues and my contact information were also provided. The voluntary nature of the study allowed participants to discontinue at any time during the study if they chose to do so. A timeline is provided in the appendix (see Appendix H) of this manuscript.

Summary

This study sought to understand the shared experience of rural middle school general education teachers of students with EBD in inclusive classrooms. A phenomenological study was employed to investigate rural middle school general education teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms of students with EBD. The research was significant, because students with EBD present challenges to the instructional environment and can affect teacher quality of life (Cannella-Malone et al., 2011). Moreover, a review of current literature reveals an absence of information related to rural inclusive environments and students with EBD. The study was limited to a rural southeastern public school district and is not intended to be generalized to greater populations.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of rural middle school general education teachers instructing students in inclusive settings diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 2000; van Manen, 1990). This study sought to provide a rich and descriptive voice of general education teachers who shared the phenomenon of instructing students diagnosed with EBD in inclusion classrooms, and identified their thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Heidegger, 1962, 1973, 1985, 2008; Husserl, 1973). Van Manen, (1990) asserts that the ultimate goal of qualitative research is to create a phenomenological text. Patton (2002) further argues that phenomenology seeks to capture how an individual experiences a phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) proposes that "Phenomenology seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at the essence to intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience leading to ideas, concepts, judgments, and understandings" (p.58).

Chapter 3 provided the methodology utilized to conduct this phenomenological study. This chapter presents the findings involved in analyzing the data from interviews, observations, and documents of ten participants who teach in inclusion classrooms with students diagnosed with EBD. While this study followed clear and regimented research and data collection processes, the goal of creating a phenomenological text was much more flexible. For van Manen (1990), hermeneutical phenomenology does not approach the interpretation of the text from a set of rules and methods; rather, it requires a dynamic interplay between the researcher and participants. The fluidity of phenomenological research requires that the researcher "meditates between different meanings of the lived experience" (van Manen, 1990, p.26). As such, I

followed the ideals of hermeneutical phenomenology and constructed the phenomenological text solely on the "nature of the phenomenon being addressed and the investigative methods that appear to be appropriate to it" (van Manen, 1990, p.173).

Research Questions

In exploring the lived experience of rural middle school general education teachers instructing students diagnosed with EBD, five research questions were proposed:

RQ1. How do rural middle school general education teachers describe their experiences with students diagnosed with EBD in an inclusion classroom?

RQ2. According to rural middle school general education teachers, how does the presence of students diagnosed with EBD influence their beliefs about inclusive education?

RQ3. How do rural general education teachers describe their attitudes toward teaching before instructing students with EBD in their classrooms?

RQ4. How do rural general education teachers describe their attitudes towards teaching after instructing students with EBD in their classrooms?

RQ5. How do rural general education teachers view their future in education based on their experience of teaching students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive settings?

Documents

After receiving permission from the Superintendent of Schools, I was given access and assistance by the supervisor of special education to school personnel and documents. Further assistance was given by district middle school psychologists, who provided a list of possible students meeting the criteria of the study. The list contained students who manifested conduct disorders or oppositional defiance disorders, represented by persistent patterns of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules were violated.

Oppositional defiance disorders are a pattern of negative, hostile, and defiant behavior that persists for the duration of at least six months (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). With the help of special educators from the research site, a list of students whose primary diagnosis on their Individualized Education Program (IEP) was Emotional Disorders (ED) or EBD was attained. These students had discipline records which indicated out-of-school suspensions which warranted a Manifestation Determination Report (MDR) of 10 or more days. Teachers instructing these students were identified and a list of 25 possible candidates was developed. Of these 25 candidates, 12 teachers met all participant parameters and 10 agreed to participate.

Participants Summary

The participants for this study were chosen from a rural public middle school (grades 6-8) according to time of service and experience within the phenomenon. After permission to conduct the study was granted by Liberty University's Institutional Review Board on October 21, 2013, and the proposed research site was approved (Appendix F), a letter of invitation was e-mailed to possible participants. Ten total participants volunteered and completed the study. The participants' teaching experiences ranged from five to 41 years. Their experience in inclusive settings was from three to 14 years. All four core subject courses were represented, and all participants were Caucasian; two were male and eight were female. All participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Table 2

Participant Overview

Participant	Age	Race/Gender	Grade	Experience	Inclusion	Subject
Victoria	30s	White female	6	8	3	English
Mary	50s	White female	6	41	4	Science

Helena	40s	White female	8	14	14	Science
Edward	30s	White male	7	5	5	History
Anne	20s	White female	6	5	4	Math
Katherine	30s	White female	6	16	11	Science
Beatrice	40s	White female	7	23	10	Math
Isabella	30s	White female	8	14	14	English
Sophia	50s	White female	8	36	10	Science
Philip	50s	White male	8	7	4	History

Description of Participants

The following is an individual descriptive synopsis of the participants for this study. It entails the content areas of experience, the reasons each became educators, and their exposure to students with special needs.

Victoria

Victoria, an eight-year middle school teacher, has exclusively taught language arts. Her experience with inclusive classrooms began three years ago when her school eliminated self-contained classrooms. She became interested in teaching at an early age when she was motivated by a teacher who made a difference in her life. Here is her description becoming interested in teaching:

Victoria:

I wasn't a big fan of math. I never could get it. And multiplication tables came up and she created this game with race cars and whoever finished the race-every time you got to a new number, your race car moved. And I went from hating it, couldn't get it, and I won

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the race. And she made this huge deal about it and then just throughout the year, she just

made me feel so comfortable and she taught me things that I couldn't get. And she – just

her personality and how she changed me as a student and so many other students. I

wanted to be a teacher from third grade on, that's what I wanted to do. It was because of

her.

She further describes her experience with exceptional learners:

Victoria:

I have never had contact with them, and they were just their own little group and they

were together all day and (long pause) they had their teacher, and, they had the same

teacher all because there was no inclusion then. It was just their special ed teacher. They

had the same teacher every year. And um, (pause) that was the only contact I had with

special needs children up until teaching.

Mary

Mary is a middle school teacher, with 41 years of experience teaching language arts,

history, and science. She has a Master's degree in language arts. Her experience with inclusion

started four years ago. All of those four years included students with EBD. She also became

interested in teaching at an early age:

Mary:

I think I've always wanted to be a teacher. I got very interested in school, when my older

brothers and cousins began to go to school. I couldn't wait to go myself, and I think from

the very first day of school I was enamored with teachers, and I just wanted to be a

teacher.

In looking back at her contact with children with disabilities she states:

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I don't ever either remember seeing students with disabilities or with any kind of um,

special education designation in classes. I do remember early on in elementary school,

we would see students every once in a while who had -- who were considered. We knew

they were mentally retarded. It was the term that was used. You never -- We never saw

those children in the cafeteria. We never saw them on the play grounds when we were

there. If there were special programs where we had to go to the auditorium, those

children were never invited. I do know that they had a classroom in the basement away

from everybody else but pretty close to my homeroom and they were never,(pause) they

were never allowed to mix or mingle with us.

Helena

Helena is a 14 year veteran middle school science teacher who began her career teaching

sixth-grade computer science. She is teaching in her second career having served 20 years in the

armed services. She believes that she has always had students with disabilities in her classroom

and currently instructs students with EBD. Here is how she describes becoming interested in

education:

Helena:

I was teaching in the military and my instructor there, my evaluator, asked me why I

wasn't teaching in regular life because I was reservist. And I, I said, "I never thought

about it" and he said, "Well you should, because I think that would suit you. You'd be

good at it." So I took this, like test, and it also said teaching would be a good field for

me, so I switched my major from computers to teaching.

Her experience with students with special needs is much more personal:

Helena:

My daughter has autographic motor dysfunction, and she -- from the time she was in, I think it was first grade, they said she wasn't able to connect sounds and letters so she couldn't read at all. Um, so she went into the, the program and she was in it all the way till seventh grade. And at the beginning of seventh grade, Miss ------ ----- who happened to be her teacher said she felt that she should be mainstreamed in all classes. That she didn't need her any more, that she had gotten her as far as she could get her. And, um, and then so she was put in regular classes, and she excelled in high school.

Edward

Edward is a fifth year middle school teacher who has taught math, history, and civics. He has taught students with disabilities throughout his teaching career and currently has a student diagnosed as EBD. Like Helena, Edward is also teaching in his second career. Edward describes his move from business to education in this fashion:

Edward:

Well, I used to be in the business world. I was in mortgages for 15 years. The big subprime scare hit. My company shut down. I was living in ------ ------- and decided to get a new career. With my savings, went back to college, --- through the career switcher program and then after that started teaching.

He described that his contact with exceptional learners started in high school:

Edward:

In high school, I was – I guess a member of the Key Club, actually the president in my senior year and one of the projects we did or helping the community we did was we volunteered uh m, during our study hall, at that time it was not included – inclusion, but we went to their classroom and helped the teacher out with lessons or help you know took

the kids out for a walk or play basketball with them or help them with lessons or the coloring sheet or the homework they might have. We did that for a semester in my senior year in high school. In college, Uh-m a big part of it was the young lady I was dating had a younger brother who would fit that category and I spent a lot of time with him in their home and just basic activities and dated like what you know - I guess not necessarily a direct classroom activity, but just, you know, teaching him things here and there about life.

Anne

Anne has 41years of experience teaching middle school in language arts, history, and science. Her experience with inclusion started four years ago; all of those four years included students with EBD. She also became interested in teaching at an early age and described it in this fashion:

Anne:

There's a story when I was younger. I used to like to play school and so I always wanted to be a teacher, and then uh-hmm I just thought that I knew I always wanted to be a teacher. Before I became a teacher when I graduated from college I – when I graduated from college, I went to work for a bank for about a year and then I decided that that was not what I wanted to be doing. I knew I wanted to be a teacher, but I knew I had to go back to school to be a teacher, because I didn't have a teaching degree. So then I went back to school and proceeded to get the qualifications and –.

Her awareness of students with special needs began with her brother, but beyond that she had no previous contact with children diagnosed with special needs:

Anne:

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Uh-huh, one of my brothers had a speech disability but he was – worked with speech

therapist and got that cleared up. They were in a self-contained classroom because I never

had a special teacher in my classroom when I went to school.

Katherine

Katherine is an eighth-grade physical science teacher with 16 years of experience; eleven

of those years were in a middle school setting. She believes that she has always taught students

with disabilities. However, in the last two years she has had students diagnosed with EBD in her

classroom. She points to the influence of a caring teacher in her life for making her career

choice. Here is how she describes the event:

Katherine:

I had an amazing first grade teacher (pause) who not only made learning fun, but taught

me a lot about compassion (pause) and then the same thing reoccurred with my 12th grade

government teacher, and (pause) I just love children (long pause.)

Like many of the other participants in this study, Katherine had little contact with students with

disabilities:

Katherine:

Growing up not as much, um, you know, we knew the classrooms for which children

who've had severe disabilities. We always knew, you know, where those children were,

um, but I do not recall having classes, um, with each student, with learning disabilities or

any disabilities at all. Um, college (pause) um, I don't recall any (long pause) I don't

even think in my graduate work that I have – really had classes with them.

Beatrice

Beatrice is a 23 year veteran teacher who has taught a variety of subjects including math,

history, and civics. Compared with the other participants, she had the most experience teaching

students with disabilities. Prior to becoming certified in teaching, she worked with learners with

intellectual and developmental disabilities in a residential school setting. For two concurrent

years, she has had students diagnosed with EBD in her classroom. This is how she described her

path to becoming a teacher:

Beatrice:

> I was working in a special education school as a teacher aid, and needed to do something
>
> else with my life and decided I wanted to teach. When I first started working I was
>
> working at, (pause) I don't know if they call it the ARC here, uh-m, as workshop
>
> manager in charge of production where students – where clients did piecework and I was
>
> supervisor there. Then I worked at (pause) a special Ed school (pause) that was all
>
> handicapped children, physically, mentally, emotionally handicapped children, (pause)
>
> worked there as a teacher aid in several different positions. I worked at a day care
>
> (pause) as a summer counselor (pause). So I have been (pause) and they were always
>
> treated, I mean I love my clients love the kids, they were always treated with respect….

Isabella

Isabella is an experienced 14 year language arts teacher, who has predominately taught

eighth-grade students and is currently teaching seventh-grade students in inclusive classrooms.

For two consecutive years she has had students diagnosed with EBD in her classroom. She

attributed her interest in education to her mother, who was also an educator. She articulates her

choice of teaching in this manner:

Isabella:

> Um, I actually started out as an environmental science major and then I worked in a

summer camp program and I really love working with kids. So you know from there, I

started working on my teaching license. Well, my mother is a teacher so that probably

also influenced my interest in teaching going back to number six, but I graduated from

high school um, went on to college. I was very interested in environmental science, I

guess I had to start out with, but, um, really enjoyed some experiences I had with kids,

and so that's when I decided to switch over.

She states that her parents also influenced her contact with individuals with disabilities:

Isabella:

Um, I also grew up with parents who were very involved with individuals with physical

disabilities. Um, so I remember for a very – at a young age going to visit – okay you'll

make it right okay (went and shut the door). Going to visit, um, a man who had cerebral

palsy and, um, was unable to – he had no mobility, so my parents took him to church.

Um, and so our family had a relationship with him, uh, that um I worked with kids there

who had disabilities. I remember my first student with Asperger Syndrome was an eye

opener, and I had no background whatsoever in college with kids with disabilities, but

you just – I just kind of figured it out what to do.

Sophia

Sophia is another veteran teacher with 36 years of experience. She believes she has

taught students with disabilities throughout her career. She also has taught students with EBD

during the current year and the previous school year. Like Isabella, she graduated from college

in a field outside of education. Here is how she describes that transition:

Sophia:

Just sort of found me. I said that when I graduated from college, I graduated with a

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degree in biology, and I wanted to do research but the job market was not there and I got

called while I was on my honeymoon, they needed a teacher at a private school in town

and so they called the city, to see if they had anybody with a science degree. And then

they called me and I interviewed and, and then I don't know, I just loved it.

She describes her contact with students with special needs in this way:

Sophia:

Oh well, when I was – of course in school. When I was in school, they were just labeled

Special Ed. I had this friend who was, she was a Special Ed student but we were always

close and then my husband and my youngest child both are ADHD. That's it –.

Philip

Philip is also another participant teaching in his second career with seven years of

experience. He did have prior experience teaching as an adjunct professor at a local community

college. During his seven years as a middle school teacher, he taught students with IEP's. Four

of those years involved students with EBD. Prior to teaching, he worked in local government

and has a master's degree in public administration. He explained the move from local

government to education in this manner:

Philip:

Um, I worked in local government, um, that was like, like my Master's Degree was in

public administration, local government administration, um I was, uh, um, assistant town

manager for a small municipality. We worked together for about five years, but then

ultimately he's the town manager, I was the assistant, and he decided he wanted someone

else, um. Um, and because of my community involvements, several people in the

community said, you know, you really need to go into teaching.   You have the

personality.   You have the, I guess, that professorial quality and theatrical event

background. I'd listen to those wise voices, I think they're wise, um, and uh, and I started

dabbling with it, starting off with just substituting in the local school, and then um

enjoying it, taking the classes, because even though I had a Master's Degree. But that's

how I got into education.

Philip relates his first encounters with individuals with disabilities in this way:

Philip:

There's one kid that I remember standing out, and I'm a tender-hearted individual.   I

mean, I'm sensitive and caring, um, uh Christian up-bringing and there is one fellow

when I was in elementary school that the kids used to tease, and he was at that time

mainstreamed with us, um, but he was different. I mean he is – I, I want to say it was

Down's syndrome or, but he had, he had an appearance that looked like something was

different, but he was teased mercilessly. And I kind of – he and I befriended each other,

and I made sure I tried to include him, um, and uh, and so that was one of those things

that, you know – so I was not one of those that was embarrassed, um, to go over to his

place, and hang out or, um, and uh, I don't know. I just, I was empathetic um, um,

because maybe I wasn't always being picked first for the baseball team or whatever, and

he certainly wasn't, so we made a bond, and we kind of kept that going until I moved

away, um.

Observations

Direct classroom observations of the participants in their inclusion classrooms were used

during the data collection phase of the study. All participants were made aware of the need for

observations as part of the study and were given a sign-up sheet for the observations which

indicated a specific day and time for the observation. Prior knowledge of the observation allowed teachers to select their inclusion classes that contained students with EBD, or for those teachers who taught EBD students the prior year, prior knowledge of observation times allowed them to select the inclusion classes that posed their most significant challenges. During the study, I assumed the role of a complete observer, taking the position of sitting quietly in the far back of the classroom and, after a period of observation, slowly withdrawing from the site (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Both descriptive and reflective notes were taken during the observation and were transferred to an observation journal that recorded aspects of the physical setting, particular events, activities, and reactions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The observations were limited to one observation and ranged from 45 to 60 minutes in duration. Observations took place in the participants' classrooms and were completed over a three-week period. Field notes were taken during the observation and were transcribed into an observation journal within 24 hours of the occurrence.

The focus of the classroom observations was twofold: 1) they served as verification that the participants were engaged in inclusive practices, and equally important, 2) observations provided retrospective understanding to the interviews, which were the principal data collection instrument. Through the use of field notes from the observations, the interview process became more meaningful and individualized for the participant. It also helped me construct and modify the interview process (Mills, 2003). Caelli (2001) affirms that the use of this process during the investigation phase forces the researcher to clarify each interview. In addition, classroom observations help the researcher identify if the participants' voiced perceptions were actually occurring in the classroom. Any inconsistencies were noted in my reflective journal. Robbins-Etlen (2007) suggests that observations can provide understanding to a teacher's willingness to

adjust the environment, modify and accommodate, provide learning opportunities, and provide needed behavioral supports for the students with EBD.

Interviews

Interviews were utilized as the principal means of data collection following an interview form as a guide to keep the meeting focused and on track (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviews were conducted in the location of the participant's choice with all the participants choosing to be interviewed in their classrooms after the completion of the school day. All participants were asked a set of twenty-seven questions which were rooted in the literature review. In an attempt to simplify data analysis, all participants were asked the same questions in the same order. The initial questions were foundational to the study for establishing rapport with the participants and to facilitate open dialogue (Powney & Watts, 1987). The last question of the interview encouraged participants to share anything that may not have been asked during the interview process.

Before the initial interviews began, I piloted the proposed questions with a teacher who did not meet the parameters of the study. Piloting the interview questions ensured that the interview would ensue with clarity and preciseness; in addition, it ensured that I was confident and comfortable with the audio recording equipment (Creswell, 2007). Yin (2011) suggested that a pilot test be used to refine data collection and develop or revise questions. Through the piloting processes, I was able to check for inappropriate wording of questions and clarify ambiguity (Powney & Watts, 1987). I utilized a transcription service with transcriptions being completed 24 hours after the initial interview. On receipt of the transcriptions, I checked the quality of transcriptions to the actual audio recordings, and made any corrections that were not precisely verbatim; this process ensured the quality of the transcriptions. In addition, a copy of

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the transcription was given to the participants as a member check, with all verifying the accuracy of the interviews.

One-Voice Themes

Several themes emerged throughout the research and interview process. These textual themes provide the shared essence of the participants and were cited by the majority of participants in this study. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of rural middle school general education teachers who instruct students in inclusive settings diagnosed with EBD (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 2000; van Manen, 1990). The descriptive themes from this study were:

1. Classroom management (time, academics, and behavior)

2. Educational policies (legislation versus student need)

3. Professional development and continuing education

4. The role of special educators in inclusive settings

5. Teachers perceptions: students & parents

6. The intrinsic value in teaching students with EBD (how teachers experience joy and commitment to teaching)

7. Inclusion of students with EBD (teachers' concept of "Quality School")

Classroom Management: Time, Academics, and Behavior

This theme continued to surface throughout the interviewing process. Instructing students with EBD requires an effective and consistently implemented classroom management policy. Research has shown that general education teachers lack training or exposure to characteristics of and interventions for students with EBD (Allday et al., 2012; Jeffrey,

McCurdy, Ewing, & Polis, 2009).

Isabella:

Um, it was very challenging; probably my biggest challenge was behavioral issues and

classroom management… So I worry that I'm spending an enormous amount of time

trying to make sure this child is comfortable and okay and functioning. Whereas a child

who is quiet and just sitting there and doing their work and you know, there are times

where I feel like they're losing out on some of that one on one instruction because I'm

giving more time or more attention too.

Anne:

Um-m while we were having classroom instruction, they're getting out of their seat,

throwing things um-m actually we're kind of wrestling back and forth with their hands or

um-m with the behavior aide um-m talking to other students, movement, constant

movement in the seat. Um-m this year, it's been a little bit different. This year it's been

more shutting down, lean head down, not willing to do anything, or kind of crawl under

the desk not want to come out or get up and walking out of the classroom.

Helena:

Yeah, it's, it's a lot tougher because you have to be careful what you say because you

could set them off.   It's too easy to irritate them and to make, make them mad to what

they do something that get themselves in trouble. So you have to – and sometimes you

have to be more stern, because otherwise they'll take control and if they take control,

then the whole class is out of control.

Mary:

It did seem that most of my attention was focused on controlling the EBD student. And

when of course all my attention was being spent on him, then the other students would

find other things to do. Because it was an inclusion group and even though they weren't

all EBD students, then their attention would be drawn away from the task at hand and

with very short attention spans lot of times the lesson was lost.

Victoria:

Because there are many days when I would walk out of that classroom and it wasn't just

him, but in that setting, with tears flowing down my face because I just couldn't take it

anymore. And I tried and I'm such a headstrong person myself, I was just determined not

to let him ruin another day. But he did and he ruined many days and he was in and out of

suspension quite a bit.

According to Niesyn (2009) general education teachers need support in developing

proactive classroom management practices based on antecedent interventions to reduce

inappropriate behavior of students with EBD. Rogers (2005) suggests that teachers need explicit

and practical ways in which to manage behavior so as to minimize inappropriate behavior. In

addition, the research literature consistently supports the relationship between learning and

behavioral problems (Sutherlin et al., 2008). Typically, behavior is managed as a separate issue

apart from academics, with teachers likely to remove students from the academic setting when

inappropriate behavior is displayed (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008). According to

Vannest et al. (2011), academic intervention for students with EBD is a critical area of practice.

The greater emphasis should be placed on the idea that behavior and academics are cohorts to

learning. When students are engaged in ability based learning taught by teachers who are well

trained and empathetic, effective classroom management is a probable outcome (Alderman &

Green, 2011).

Educational Policy: Law versus Student Needs

Currently, classroom instruction is driven by the federal and state policy framed around two pieces of legislation. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has literally transformed the roles and responsibilities of teachers (Dee & Jacob, 2011; Deville, 2011; Fletcher et al., 2006; Price, 2010; Ravitch, 2009; Smyth, 2008; Stover, 2007). The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) directs education for students with disabilities (McLeskey et al., 2012; Miles & Singal, 2010; Turnbull, 2005). Mandated by law, all students who qualify for special education services must receive their instruction in the least restrictive environment (LRE). These laws are deleterious to teachers in that legislators never sought teacher buy-in before implementation. Schools that fail to meet established requirements are likely to incur judicial action containing severe punitive threats (Desimone, 2013). Moreover, the participants believe that the two laws conflict in that educational policy overrides student needs. This is particularly true with the emphasis on high-stakes testing as the benchmark to evaluate student academic growth.

Victoria:

They want them in the Gen Ed classroom so they can take that SOL and be just like the other Gen Ed students. I think they are treated as one big type, no one pays attention to why they have an IEP or what their needs are. I just think it's all based on can they pass an SOL well or standardized test.

Helena:

I don't understand why a special needs student has to take the same test that a normal student has to take, when they -- you modify all their work, if you are going to modify

their work, the tests should be modified as well. I don't think it's fair to them to say,

okay, here you only have to do only this many questions on this but, here you've got to

take the SOL test and you have to pass it.

Edward:

It would be a better opportunity to at the very least teach them life lessons, teach them the

basics, so when they get out of school, they know how to survive the real world – uh-m -

you know, I think that's more important than making sure they get a 400 on a Civics

SOL.

Anne:

You obviously you want learning to take place, you want growth to take place, but for

some people it should be measured different, especially EBD students. If – if they are

having a hard time just surviving in your period, um-m, then it's hard for me to believe

that they should be expected to take an SOL, and then it's going   to go under your

name…And I just – I feel like with the pressure they're putting on and, um-m, want it to

be 100% pass rate for SOLs, I just feel like it's too much pressure.

The common thread was not that teachers had rejected inclusion and felt that all students

with EBD should receive their instruction in a self-contained classrooms; rather, that the

effective inclusion of students with EBD into the general education setting requires a specific set

of knowledge and skills (Shapiro et al., 1999).

Isabella:

I think they are better served in the general ed…. I mean she's very strong and the other

kids learned to be accepting of a very different type of behavior. So I thought that her

presence was actually good for them as much as it was for her. I would love to see us get

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more funding for people. Not for stuff, not for technology, not for books not for… Uh I,
think we need more trained adults in the classrooms with the kids. I think that they
flourish when they have more people that care about them; especially adults that care
about them, around them, help them. And that would be my conviction, like get us more
money for people, not stuff.

Professional Development and Continuing Education

More than 20 years ago Congress authorized Part C of IDEA. This mandate specifically
targeted youth identified with EBD (Carran, Kerins, & Murry, 2005). The most challenging
components of the law authorized the creation of comprehensive and collaborative programs
geared towards the needs of students with EBD. More than two decades ago, the Peacock Hill
Working Group (1991) recognized the importance of professional development programs for
teachers instructing students with EBD. Male (2011) found that teachers desire professional
development programs and that such programs are likely to produce positive teacher attitudes
towards inclusion. Batsiou, Bebetsos, Panteli, and Antoniou (2008) reported that experience and
training were strong factors in the success of students with special needs. Each of the
participants in this study voice to a lack of professional development and the frustration
associated with that.

Mary:

…they do have special needs and it's very frustrating to try to figure out when you've
had no training or you feel like you have no skills. How do you, how do you get to the
point to figure out what you need to do so that you are actually helping these students,
because they need their education too.

Edward:

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I think my career would be helped if there is training involved - and/or it would be helped

if the system changed. One of the two would probably make the career a more

pleasurable experience from time to time. Yes!

Katherine:

I don't see how that could ever not be helpful because every time you have some training

something could be said, you may have -- you may be told 45 things that you're already

doing but there could be five that, oh, let's implement that, let's try that. So I don't know

how it could not be helpful.

Isabella:

Yes, especially students with, um, defiance issues; I know you know I've had a couple

times when I've triggered a reaction that I was not intending to trigger and just kind of

like, you know, I would like training on if you back a kid into a corner by accident,

because I don't think any teacher really intends on doing that. But if you back a kid into

this protective corner, what can you do to get him out or her out of that corner? That

would be my biggest desire.

Special Educators: Roles, Inclusion, & EBD

Research suggests that teachers of students with EBD incur higher rates of attrition due to

stress and job dissatisfaction (Abelson, 1986; Akin, 1988; Banks & Necco, 1990; Center &

Steventon, 2001; Forlin, 2001; Lawrenson & McKinnon, 1982; Nelson et al., 2001). The

pressure of teaching is exacerbated by student performance expectations and concerns of

litigation (Wagner & Katsiyannis, 2010). Of equal concern are high rates of student dropout and

quality of life issues associated with a diagnosis of EBD (Osher et al., 2003). Yet, general

education teachers of students with EBD view special educators as a valued resource; they are

individuals who stand in the gap between the complexity of their job and individual student success. Many of the participants in this study utilize special educators like a pop-off valve; a safety mechanism on high-pressure cylinders. When things began to deteriorate in their classroom, special educators either remove the student, or the student was sent to the special educator.

Anne:

> …if he or she needs to be removed from the classroom or go out for a cool down, the special educator will go out in the hallway and talk – and she talks about things that may be or not just about that incident. What could be bothering him, other than that anything that could help us to get out for the particular mood or outburst or something that's going on in the classroom at that time.

Sophia:

> Um, whenever there's a problem he will – he uh, it's good. He, he takes care of most of the problems she has. He will take her out of the class.

Philip:

> I myself might have to decompress and I would go to the special ed. person and say, "Look, uh, my blood pressure is going up" uh, and he'd let him go. And so, um – and that's another role that I think sometimes I can say, "Hey, man, I need to take five." Um.

Anne:

> Uh, I think that they would be better in a more nurturing classroom that could focus more on their needs – uh-m – but still educational if the disruptions are   that bad. It depends on how – what the level is, if there are daily or multiple times during the day, then I think that it would be better suited if they were in different classroom.

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Helena:

Well, I used to think that, the, the -- them being separate in their own classes, um was more in my own case and my daughter, that putting them somewhere else in the building was, was -- made them feel like they didn't, you know, they weren't as good as the other kids, I guess you could say. And, um, but after having to teach them I think that, there -- they do better in self-contained and in a smaller environment than, they do in the classroom with all the students. So, I mean, my attitude changed from that. If you have a disability, any kind of disability, you know, you have to be allowed to, to use what you have. And if it's not working in the classroom, then you, you know, if a small group is better, then that's where you should be.

Edward:

Oh! There's no question that a group of them would be better in self-contained and uh-m there's no question about that, because in the self-contained, it would be a better opportunity to at the very least teach them life lessons, teach them the basics, so when they get out of school, they know how to survive the real world.

Beatrice:

I would have smaller classrooms where I could provide more individual attention to everybody.

Sophia:

I think the fact that they're throwing all these children into a regular classroom and it's just overwhelming for them, just in preparation because they don't have it. They don't have special classes for them in high school, they're just throwing them, basically throwing them to the wolves, and it's overwhelming for them.

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Financially strapped school districts have watched dwindling federal funding for special education services. In the case of NCLB, the full funding which was initially authorized never materialized (Houston, 2007; Stover, 2007). As such, rural school districts have sought creative ways to provide services in inclusive environments. Math and language arts classes are more likely to be staffed with special educators; whereas, subjects that are not part of high-stakes testing do not. The majority of the teachers in this study commented on such practices.

Philip:

> … I kind of wish that, uh, the special ed. person was extended to my class and to the science class. Um, again if money wasn't an option, or if they had even a ---- ---- type aide as well. Um, I wish that maybe we could have some –

Helena:

> I think I would -- if I'm, if we're going to stick with inclusion I would make it an inclusion teacher in every class. I don't think that science should be separated; I don't think social studies should be separated. I think that if you have a student, that has special needs, you need a special needs teacher in every class. So if you're going to do that, then you need to get more specialized teachers, so that they can be in each class.

Sophia:

> Well, I think we need to, uh, find some funds for behavioral specialists with these kids. I've seen what it does for them, and I've seen what it does without them. I disagree with that.

Katherine:

> Uh, being -- again being a science teacher you don't get a lot of the attention of you have to seek that -- had to seek that person out (pause) sometimes, uh, for a couple of days.

Mary:

No, I do not have a special educator, no, I have access to uh -- if I need to talk to her about a student or ask her to intervene in something that she is not able to because of the way I schedule is, she has to be shared with two teams. And our focus is on, uh, reading, or language arts and Math; therefore she has to spend two of her class periods a day with my teams' language arts and math teachers and two of her classes a day with the other team, sixth grade teams math and language art teachers.…provide, uh, more special ed teachers to help us get where we need to be…

Isabella:

I'm not kidding. I would prefer to have more teachers in the classroom; I think that the more adults caring about these kids we have with them, the better they are going to be. Uh, and our kids, not just EBD kids, not just bad kids in general and not just Gen Ed. kids; all of our kids crave small groups. They love small group, and they love one-on-one with an adult.

Edward:

No, I do not have the special ed. teacher, not in my classroom. It would help with the times when there is a behavior issue, yes!

In her frustration Victoria expressed:

…I just… that's what I wish, I wish that they could go into a special ed classroom and taught on their level, where they could really shine and feel good about themselves and show their ability in their own way, not what a test says they should have.

Teachers Perceptions: Students and Parents/Caregivers

In this section, I have chosen to address two questions developed from the related

literature: Initially, I asked teachers to describe their attitudes towards teaching students with EBD. In addition, I had the desire to understand their feelings towards parental involvement. Students diagnosed with EBD often have significant mental health needs which are co-mingled with another difficulty such as learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Mihalas et al., 2009; Pierce et al., 2004). When asked to reflect on how teaching students with EBD has changed her feelings towards instruction, Victoria expressed:

Victoria:

> So I loved teaching. I loved coming to school every day. I couldn't wait to see what they were going to do. I really did love it. And last year, I hate to say it, but I dreaded every single day because of my inclusion class.

Anne had similar feelings, and she described them in this manner:

Anne:

> I guess there has been a change in my thoughts some, and it honestly changes. Some days, like I said, are really good days, and then the bad days it makes me think, it's not fair, uh-m, that the rest of students are being held back, because I am dealing with such an episode in the classroom.

There was an overriding majority of participants who believed that stronger cooperation with parent/caregivers would enhance student outcomes. Simpson et al. (2011) expressed this is a critical component for students with EBD. Chen and Weikart (2008) reported that significant mental health problems trouble families of students with EBD post-school and throughout life. Teachers believe that parents should be more involved; yet teachers seem at a loss, both in time and resources to facilitate their involvement and make that happen. The participants in this study showed mixed views on parental support and believed that most parents/caregivers were equally

underequipped to handle students with EBD.

Isabella:

> I haven't received a lot of support, um, because I think there're several factors that play into those homes, um, but I know that the parents have tried really hard to do the best that they can, but the parents that I'm thinking about in particular did not know what to do. So they were sort of coming to us for – I mean, they were supportive in that, if we ask them to try something they would try it, um, and you know once again it really depends on the relationship that you've established. Um yes, I mean I think I would desire more parent support with all my kids so (laughs) yes.

Katherine:

> Very supportive any time uh, (pause) we needed her to come to the school she came (pause) she offered some background. Uh, toward the beginning of the year that was uh, (pause) very helpful in understanding where this child had been, what this child came from and how this child was (pause) outside of school. Uh, (pause) and (pause) any time that something did come up that maybe he had to be out of school for discipline reasons. She was always up here trying to figure out what she could do to help him, collecting his work and you know I heard her talking to him (pause), uh, about what you know this is what you're got to change, you have to remember this. This is what you got to do (pause) and not in a very (pause) uh, you know rough you're -- you know you (pause) just got to do this kind. She was trying to work him through it. So it was a good relationship

Anne:

> In my case, we've had very good support. The parents have been up to the school, we've met with them several times on some occasions – uh-m – phone contact and they've

been very interested in, what's the best you know, where to help, is the behavioral aide

working – uh-m – so, it's been very good.

Mary spoke of the parental frustration associated with a diagnosis of EBD.

…last year's students, uh, the father was extremely supportive, if we ask for conference

he was here, he was on time, he was 100% behind us. I think he was confused and

frustrated, because he couldn't get the kind of help that he wanted to get either. Um, he

would take the child in for diagnostic testing, he would take the child in to his

pediatrician's to make sure that if he was being medicated, he was being medicated

appropriately and for something that would fit with his situation. So he was very, very

supported but we saw very, very little change in that child at all. If anything he got

worse.

Beatrice answered:

I believe the parents are very supportive but are somewhat at a loss because they don't

know what to do. I don't know if more parental support is what would fix the problem.

The Intrinsic Value of Teaching Students with EBD: Joy and Commitment

Most of the participants in this study admitted that having students with EBD made their

job more difficult. They attributed that to a combination of factors, not solely to the presence of

students with EBD. Most felt that instructing students with EBD has not changed their overall

attitudes toward education. With one voice the participants in this study spoke of the intrinsic

value of teaching as a motivating force. After 41 years, Sophia emphatically voiced her feelings

towards teaching:

Sophia:

I love what I do!

Victoria:

> Uh, well, my attitude towards teaching hasn't changed, but (pause) I still love it. I still love it when they get that – I can see that light bulb moment go off in their head. I'm going to still teach so of course and um, I think with working with the student last year (pause) as hard as it was… And I think he taught me to really sit back (pause) and just take them for who they are.

When asked if teaching students with EBD has changed his career plans, Edward answered in a more practical manner:

Edward;

> I guess you can say- the answer to that question depends upon which day you ask me that question (laughs). I mean, probably you know, the week I just had - no - I mean right now the plan is still, you know, hanging in there for thirty years.

Katherine:

> I am not just saying this, but I truly love my students. I see my students as an extension of (pause) my family. I try every year to look at every child regardless of what they are doing as (pause) how can I make that child's life better. Not just teaching them science, but to let them know that somebody cares about them (long pause). Well, you know, I just, I know what (pause) I have to do, I know what I need to do, and it's not just to collect the paycheck. I feel like this is where I'm supposed to be, and I guess they've probably enhanced that (pause) conviction that I have to serve these kids. This is my clientele, and yes test scores are important (pause) but it's not just important for me. It's important for them and helping them to be successful probably has given me a stronger drive (pause), to reach everybody or try. No, (pause) there are times when I get frustrated

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because I don't feel like that there's enough resources for them. (Pause) And that

becomes very frustrating, and that is not the fault of the people who are the special

educators. It's because we are stretched. Everybody is stretched so thin and expected to

do so much, and so it is frustrating (pause) in that aspect. But I've never thought, ah, I'm

not coming back here in tomorrow because they are in my classroom.

Beatrice:

I love what I do. I'm meant to do it! Uh, again, I don't see disabilities. I don't see the

issues. I see the child. (pause) Because I am an educator, I'm here to teach the children,

and all of us have different issues and problems (pause), so if they have an emotional or

behavioral problem, then (pause) they're still my kids. I still love them and teach them

the best I can.

Isabella:

Uh, probably working with EBD students has made me feel that this is where – and

SPED students in general and students from poverty and any other students that I've

encountered that has been – who has changed my perspective about anything, has made

me more certain that this is the job for me; that this is where I want to be. Um, as much

as some challenges are frustrating, I enjoy going home at night and thinking how are we

going to fix this or how are we gonna – how are we gonna work and make this work. Uh,

I enjoy the challenge that the students that I teach provide for me, and I wouldn't want to

do anything else you know. And I think it's just kind of driven home the fact that this is

where I want to be and this is the group of kids I want to be with.

Philip:

Um I, I still think that I'm a good teacher. I, uh, think that I've got a lot to offer young

people. Um, the presence of EBD students has made it more challenging, um, but the one

from last year made it rewarding at the same time.

Mary:

I still wouldn't do anything else but teach, and I feel like, you know, sometimes we have

a calling to do a specific thing with our lives, and I truly believe that this was what I was

meant to do. This is what I was born to do, and I hope that in some way, somehow, I've

touched somebody's life, and I've made a difference. And I hope I have even with my

EBD students and inclusion students. Even though I'm not trained to deal with them, I

hope they still know they matter and that I love them dearly.

Every participant in this study saw a double standard within the system, a system that

holds them academically responsible for student outcomes while failing to provide them with

appropriate effective strategies, materials, and methods to handle students with EBD (Albrecht et

al., 2009; Obiakor et al., 2012; Runswick-Cole, 2011). Their frustration was directed at the

believed hypocrisy within the system. Nevertheless, they loved teaching; serving students

diagnosed with EBD has not changed that.

EBD & Quality School

The framework for this study was centered on Glasser's (1965, 1997, 1998) principals of

reality therapy, choice theory, and quality world. Choice theory provides the foundational

principle for Glasser's concept of quality school (Wubbolding, 2007). Choice theory is built

around the premise of internal control, a skill that most students with EBD lack. Glasser's

principles of choice theory state that people are agents of human behavior and are not the victims

of the external world (Glasser, 1997). Moreover, their behavior originates from inside and is not

predicated on society, culture, personal history, or other external events (Cameron, 2009).

Consequently, as people interact with the world around them, they develop specific wants or desires collectively called quality world (Onedera & Greenwalt, 2007). An individual's concept of quality world is dynamic, which requires the assimilation or accommodation of new beliefs and attitudes. This concept is similar to Piaget's theory of cognitive equilibrium, which is the state of mental balance in which an individual is able to reconcile new experiences with old ideas (Berger, 2005).

The participants were not specifically asked any questions pertaining to quality school; however, a common thread throughout their response was the premise that children learn best when conditions for positive relationships are present between student and teacher. Bronfenbrenner (1979) expressed the belief that interpersonal processes in school are not detached from the larger social content. The principles of Choice Theory, focuses specifically on the issues of helping students to develop personal responsibility. Walter et al. (2008) suggests that middle school students desperately need a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Mary:

> If I have a message, it is you've got to care. You've got to love them. It doesn't make any difference whether they are EBD or LD or whatever the terms are. You know the terms change with every generation. They are all children and they all deserve our love and our care and the best that we can give them. And I think that's where we all need to be headed.

Anne talked about how the presence of students with EBD expands other students' understanding of compassion.

> I think it's (pause) hard for the other students to sometimes have to deal with it, but I also think that it helps them to show compassion, because that's the way life is, and it lets

them show their caring sides.

Katherine:

But this having EBD students, makes you have the (long pause) the thoughts of how can I be the best for them, because some things in their life have not worked in their favor. So it takes to another level. Look, I'm not just here to put piece of paper in front of them. Uh, you know, their personal life is as important if they are going to be successful.

Isabella was able to best articulate the principles of quality school and the willingness of teachers to expand their quality world to meet the needs and challenges of teaching students with EBD.

Isabella:

They have, I guess, their protective mechanisms that are not accepted by society, and so I think that for them we need to somehow say and train them how to have different mechanisms. And, you know, I want them to be able to go into college. I want them to go and get a job, and I want them to learn how to control some behaviors and reactions, so– and I want them not to-to own it. You know, and I want them to accept that for themselves and I've seen some of them do fantastic with that, you know that buy-in is so important to their own future and that really helped them. Uh, so I would like to see more training the child. We don't train the child and not the class you know, when there are not enough pro-social behaviors, they are specifically taught in class, and I think that we need to do that. I mean, I think we just need to accept, but you know, accept that we've got to teach children what are acceptable behaviors in society and get them to own those behaviors.

Summary

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The purpose of this chapter was to describe the lived experience of ten rural middle school general education teachers who instruct students with EBD in inclusive settings. Data gathered through documents, observations, and interviews revealed the participant's perspective and placed significance on the participant's own voice. Using the Dutch approach to data analysis, seven textual themes emerged. The themes addressed the questions which were developed from the related literature and which framed the investigation. These themes sought to clarify general education teachers' perceptions of the phenomenon of instructing students with EBD in inclusive environments, while advancing both teacher and student quality of life.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize, analyze, and interpret the study's findings based upon the guiding research questions. A brief overview will outline the course of study including a discussion of the findings, limitations, and methodology with recommendations for future research.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of rural middle school general education teachers who instruct students in inclusive settings diagnosed with EBD. More specifically, it sought to provide a rich and descriptive voice of general education teachers who share the phenomenon of instructing students diagnosed with EBD in inclusion classrooms, and identifying their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The research questions focused on the relationship of general education teachers and their experiences towards students diagnosed with EBD. Five questions were developed from the related literature and frame the investigation:

RQ1. How do rural middle school general education teachers describe their experiences with students diagnosed with EBD in an inclusion classroom?

RQ2. According to rural middle school general education teachers, how does the presence of students diagnosed with EBD influence their beliefs about inclusive education?

RQ3. How do rural general education teachers describe their attitudes toward teaching before instructing students with EBD in their classrooms?

RQ4. How do rural general education teachers describe their attitudes towards teaching after instructing students with EBD in their classrooms?

RQ5. How do rural general education teachers view their future in education based on their experience of teaching students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive settings? A phenomenological design was chosen to interpret the daily lived experiences of general education teachers in the phenomenon of inclusion with students with EBD. Consistent with a phenomenological design, I sought to capture the collective voice of the participants through reflective documents, observations, and standard open-ended interviews. The interview was the principal means of data collection that contained 27 questions which identified thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to the phenomenon of instructing students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive environments.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical foundations for this study relied on the works of Glasser's (1965, 1997, 1998) constructs of reality therapy, choice theory, and quality world. Reality therapy requires an individual to take responsibility for his or her own actions and behaviors (Onedera & Greenwalt, 2007). Choice theory proposes that the only control an individual possesses is the control of his or her own behavior. Choice theory affirms that people make their own choices and are the agent of behavior; as such, they are not the victims of the external world but their own design (Glasser, 1997).

Equally important to this study is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which places significance on an individual's developmental environments. This sub-division of influence has implications to personal and social growth and development. Bronfenbrenner (2007) believed that the positive involvement of caring teachers in the school environment can play a very positive role in the child's overall growth. Ecological systems theory emphasizes how circumstances in the lives of students influenced by environments and culture affect

perceptions and experiences. These theories correlate to the perceptions of rural middle school general education teachers who instruct students in inclusive environments diagnosed with EBD in several ways:

1. The phenomenon of inclusive environments of students with EBD has mixed effects on rural middle school teachers. These effects impact the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of teachers. Based on the findings, as teachers engage in the phenomenon of inclusive environments, their perceptions and feelings appear to affect student outcomes.

2. The presence of students diagnosed with EBD influence either directly or indirectly the perceptions of inclusion teachers and challenges their concept of quality world, which requires assimilation or accommodation of new beliefs and attitudes.

3. The findings may indicate that a greater understanding of ecological systems and positive student-teacher relationships can positively transform a child's life perspective.

Effective inclusion of students with EBD requires teachers to understand the complex social dynamics of classrooms (Smagorinsky, 2007). This complex social experience has implications for all the participants, especially the student. The quality of school life is most affected by student-teacher relationships. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2011) assert that student teachability and behavior are greatly influenced by the teachers' perceptions of their students. Identifying and understanding how teachers develop thoughts, feelings, and experiences is critical to improving teacher and student quality of life.

Discussion of Findings

For years the debate to include students with disabilities in the general education

classroom setting has continued (Aikman, 2012 Hurley & Horn, 2010; Martin & Speer, 2011; Miles & Sigal, 2010; Obiakor et al., 2012; Ross-Hill, 2009). Most researchers believe that in order to increase normality in the lives of students with disabilities they must be educated with their peers in the general education environment (Cumming, 2012; Miles & Singal, 2010; Obiakor et al., 2012; Odom et al., 2011; Runswick-Cole, 2011). The majority of research suggests that students with disabilities perform socially and academically better when included in the general education curriculum (Goodman et al., 2011; Maggin et al., 2011; McLeskey et al., 2012; Ruijs et al., 2010). Currently, few studies exist on best placement practices for students with EBD (Cheney, 2012; Florian et al., 2010; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013).

General education teachers' attitudes may be a contributing factor to successful inclusion practices for students with EBD. Numerous studies suggest that experience and training have an influence on teachers' beliefs and their intentions related to teaching students with special needs (Batsiou, Bebetsos, Panteli, & Antoniou, 2008; Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Elik, Weiner, & Corkum, 2010; Florian et al., 2010; Hewitt, 1999; Male, 2011; Oh et al., 2010; Palou & Norwich, 2002). For a positive inclusion experience for students with EBD, teachers need specific information, such as a summary of the students' needs in order to develop appropriate instruction. There are a number of effective interventions available to teachers. Unfortunately, these strategies have not been implemented, nor are they universally taught to teachers (Albrecht et al., 2009; Nikerson & Brosof, 2003). MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) maintain that teachers' beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and experiences will predict behavioral intervention and outcomes. It is therefore imperative that general education teachers have the specific skills which are backed by systematically reliable procedures in order to educate children with EBD. Seven core textual themes emerged from this study:

1. Classroom management (time, academics, and behavior)

2. Educational policies (legislation versus student need)

3. Professional development and continuing education

4. The role of special educators in inclusive settings

5. Teachers perceptions: students & parents

6. The intrinsic value in teaching students with EBD (how teachers experience joy and commitment to teaching)

7. Inclusion of students with EBD (teachers' concept of "Quality School")

Classroom Management: Time, Academics, and Behavior

Classroom management was a major concern for all teachers. They viewed classroom management in terms of time, academics, and behavior. Having students with EBD in the classroom makes teachers' jobs more challenging. Dealing with behavioral issues in the classroom, regardless of who is involved, requires the secession of instruction. Teachers understand that time is vital; any disruption in the classroom learning environment takes away from student engagement. Moreover, student engagement is a consistent predictor of academic performance.

Santoli, Sachs, Romey, and McClurg (2008) suggest that time is one of the most significant areas of concern for educators. Their research indicated that teachers have inadequate "time to consult with other teachers and specialists, to attend meetings pertaining to their students, and they lack time to undertake responsibilities to educate students with disabilities" in inclusive settings (p. 1). All of the teachers in this study expressed a lack of time to adequately prepare for and fulfill the responsibilities that are required of school policy administrators. Although all teachers had a scheduled daily planning period, that time was consumed by

administrative meetings, parent teacher conferences, or data collection. What teachers desired

most was an allotment of time for planning, sharing of ideas and concepts, and collaboration

with special educators.

The participants of this study want their students to succeed academically; the question of

what constitutes academic success was challenged. Most felt that students who were

significantly below the academic level of their peers receive no benefit from inclusive

environments which are taught at grade level. They agreed with the research that suggests that

the purpose of restrictive placement for students is to provide intense academic and social

supports that are not possible to provide in general education classrooms (Maggin et al., 2011).

As a whole, the participants of this study believe that inappropriate student behavior

detracts from the classroom environment. Moreover, dealing with specific behavioral problems

in the classroom usually results in the secession of instruction. Students with EBD present

educators with a variety of academic and behavioral challenges (Sutherland et al., 2008).

Among these challenges are poor organization and work habits, lower academic achievement

scores, underdeveloped social skills, and extreme behavior.

Most teachers want successful classrooms that include all students (Acedo, 2013; Hewitt,

1999). However, teachers believe that they lack the tools necessary to achieve that success

(Nickerson & Brosof, 2003). Hastings and Brown (2002) found that the emotional response of

teachers to challenging behavior also affects their responses to challenging behavior. A number

of successful interventions exist in dealing with students with EBD (Blake & Monahan, 2007;

Hawkins & Heflin, 2011; Jeffrey et al., 2009 Lane et al., 2002; Mihalas et al., 2009; Niesyn,

2009; Pierce, et al., 2008; Rogers, 2005; Simpson et al., 2011). However, it is disconcerting that

these interventions are not readily available to teachers. To get these tools into the hands of

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general educators requires a concerted effort at the federal, state, and local levels.

Educational Policies: Legislation versus Student Need

The participants of this study believe that educational policy is at odds with individual student needs. They believed this to be particularly true for students diagnosed with EBD. High-stakes testing has changed the focus of education. To obtain successful pass rates and to stay out of restructuring requires them to teach to the test, a repugnant practice for most teachers. Most felt that placement decisions were based on test outcomes and not needs assessment. All agreed with the research that inclusive practices have changed little. Consequently, if change is to occur, teacher education programs must be directed specifically towards educating students with EBD in the general curriculum (Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Florian et al., 2010; Forlin, 2004).

The participants of this study believe that the issue is balancing the extent to which students receive their instruction in general education classrooms with an emphasis on student outcomes and program effectiveness (McLeskey, 2012). Houston (2007) expresses the problem of educational policy: "You can't get something designed for one purpose to be effective at fulfilling a very different purpose, no matter how many resources you apply to it" (p. 744). A majority of the participants of this study cited problems associated with NCLB. Among them is the belief that the publication of detailed information on a school's specific performance, the linkage of high-stakes tests to student instruction with punitive sanctions, will not lead to positive buy-in and implementation (Dee & Jacob, 2011).

Students diagnosed with EBD are different from other students who walk into teachers' classrooms (Solar, 2011). Although the participants of this study were concerned about improving the achievement of their student population, they were more concerned about improving the social and emotional needs of students with EBD. If this is to happen, then school

reform activities must emphasize school-based mental health services for students with EBD (Duchnowski & Kutash, 2011). Lee, Wehmeyer, Soukup, and Palmer (2010) found significant correlations between curriculum modification and positive student academic engagement and behavior. Consequently, current research supports a reevaluation of current educational policy, particularly the need to focus efforts on the provision of funding for evidence-based intervention practices (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Stoutjesdijk et al., 2012; Watson, 2013).

In addition, interventions must include a holistic approach with the inclusion of families, schools, and mental health providers (Northey et al., 2003). What is most interesting about placement choices for students with EBD is that these students rated self-contained school classrooms significantly higher than their peers with EBD who were educated in the general education environment (Sacks & Kern, 2008).

Professional Development and Continuing Education

An individual's beliefs and attitudes can be influenced by his or her successes or failures (Romney, Smith, Freeman, Kagan, & Kline, 1997). A continued defeat will eventually lead to a defeated, negative attitude and unwillingness to try again. Dweck and Repucci (1973) called this phenomenon Learned Helplessness. Learned Helplessness can affect both adults and children, but is most damaging for students learning new skills and concepts (Dweck, 1973; Miller & Seligman, 1976). When teachers are not given successful tools that bring about positive results, it is unlikely that beliefs and attitudes towards inclusive education and practices will change (Beacham & Rouse, 2012). If the LRE is likely to be interpreted as the general education classroom, then preparing teachers for inclusion of students diagnosed with EBD is of utmost importance. This requires a greater emphasis on professional development and continuing education (Male, 2011; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). All the participants in this study felt

that teacher education is a vital component to successful inclusion. Manning, Bullock, and

Gable (2009) concur, and state that it seems reasonable that preservice preparation, teacher

accountability and training, and administrative evaluation methods will ensure that teachers are

highly qualified to teach students with EBD.

The participants also felt that a higher education curriculum must place a greater

emphasis on methods of instructing students with special needs. Most participants stated that

they received little or no training in inclusive environments with students with EBD. Higher

education and teacher training have been lacking in the preparation of general education teachers

for students with severe disabilities (Whetstone, Abell, Collins, & Kleinert, 2012). To facilitate

the development of better prepared teachers, universities and state departments of education

should work closely with local school districts to prepare and evaluate educational programs.

None of the teachers in this study received any training at the university level on methods of

instructing students with EBD. Day (2012) suggests that teacher education is both an intellectual

and emotional endeavor, where "students spend most of their time in schools learning the craft of

teaching but not developing their thinking capacity for reflection and emotional understanding"

(p.8).

The Role of Special Educators in Inclusive Settings

Consistent with the research done by MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013), the participants

in this study were generally positive about the principles of inclusion while at the same time

seeing its practical implementation as problematic. Current literature suggests that student

placement must be based on knowledge about the special educational needs of children with

EBD (Bakken, Obiakor, & Rotatori, 2012; Stoutjesdijk et al., 2012). Teachers want greater

opportunities for academic and social development as well as evidence-based instruction to

improve the school-based outcomes for students with EBD (McLeskey et al., 2012; Maggin et al., 2011).

There is a need to place special educators in all inclusion classrooms of students with EBD. The participants consistently praise the work of special educators and felt that inclusive practices are likely to fail without their presence. A large majority believed that placing behavioral aids into inclusive classrooms of students with EBD without specific training only adds acerbity to an already problematic environment. In addition, they consistently spoke of the need for collaborative and intensive consultation with special educators and lamented the lack of time constraints to do so. Visser and Stokes (2003) affirm that students who display behavior that jeopardizes a school performance or are a potential danger to the education of other students are not universally welcome in a general education setting. It was the overall perception by the participants that special educators are better trained and equipped to facilitate the unpredictable behavior of students with EBD. Given the severe shortage of fully certified special education teachers, it is likely the general education teachers will find students with EBD in the classroom. Sutherland, Denny, and Gunter (2005) reported that licensed teachers expressed greater feelings of competence than did non-licensed teachers in dealing with issues concerning students with EBD. The Council for Exceptional Children (2000) reported that the U.S. Department of Labor estimated that the need for special educators will nearly double in the next five years. The attrition rate of special education teachers is extremely high; two thirds of all teachers plan to quit teaching at the end of their first year (Anderson & Hendrickson, 2007). Teacher shortages are creating working environments that have a direct effect on the quality of education for students, particularly those students diagnosed with EBD (Blake & Monahan, 2007; Billingsley et al., 2006).

Ideally, inclusion placement and special educator roles should be an IEP team decision based upon student diagnosis and need. Yet research suggests otherwise. Cook, Landrum, Tankersly, and Kauffman (2003) reported incongruence between instructional practices used with students of EBD and their needs. Just as disconcerting is the belief that effective academic interventions for students with EBD have been hindered by methodological issues (Lane et al., 2002; Pierce et al., 2004).

Teachers Perceptions: Students & Parents

This study could have solely investigated these two issues. Volumes have been written and the research is substantial (Florian et al., 2010; Hastings & Brown, 2002; Hawkins & Heflin, 2011; Hewitt, 1999; Janney & Schoenfeld, 2008; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Male, 2011; Manning et al., 2009; McCray & McHatton, 2011; Mihalas et al., 2009; Niesyn, 2009; Nikerson & Brosof, 2003; Poulou & Norwich, 2000; Prather-Jones, 2011; Rose-Hill, 2009; Sacks & Kern, 2008; Stoutjesdijk et al., 2012; Sutherland et al., 2008). Academic progress for students with EBD is considerably less than their nondisabled peers (Anderson, Kutash, & Duchnowski, 2001; Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004). Costello, Egger, and Angold (2005) found that youths identified with EBD are five times as likely to have further intensified problems. With more and more frequency, general education teachers are finding significantly below grade level students with very specialized needs in their classrooms. Their disability surpasses their repertoire of effective knowledge and strategies (Niesyn, 2009; Simpson et al., 2011; Sutherland et al., 2008).

Teachers expressed the need for better partnerships with parents/caregivers. Support from parents/caregivers varied significantly as did the home life of students with EBD. A general consensus of participants felt that parents/caregivers were equally in need of intervention

training and look to the teachers as a source of behavioral intervention knowledge. Teacher perceptions were positive in light of the stressors associated with teaching students with EBD in a general education setting. All believed that EBD has a diagnosis which should be viewed on a spectrum much like autism. They espoused the need for ongoing and consistent evaluation for making intervention and placement decisions.

The Intrinsic Value: Joy and Commitment to Teaching

Studies link teacher commitment to intrinsic satisfaction (Bogler & Nir, 2012; Timms & Brough, 2013). All the participants talked about their love for teaching and their belief that teaching is their life mission. A great many of the teachers in this study could articulate the intrinsic value of teaching. Excessive workloads, increased stress, an overabundance of paperwork and data collection are likely causes of teacher attrition. Yet, teachers who believe they can influence and change the life of a student are likely to stay and overcome classroom challenges. Slavin (2006) suggests that resiliency in teachers is tied to the characteristic of intentionality; the continual practice of evaluating positive student outcomes and how their decisions move their students towards those outcomes.

Inclusion and the Concept of Quality School

Finally, the inclusion of students with EBD in the general education classroom requires teachers to reevaluate their concept of quality school. Glasser (1990, 1993) stated that the fundamental element for successful school is healthy human relationships. He surmised that the basis of school improvement is the effective satisfaction of the human need for belonging. Students learn that self-esteem and happiness is predicated on healthy interpersonal relationships, particularly the relationship between teacher and student. While none of the participants specifically talked about Glasser's theories, they all embraced the need for healthy human

relationships. The healthy inclusion of students with EBD rests in the quintessential belief that satisfying relationships within a school ultimately results in joy, pride, competence, and excitement about the educational process (Wubbolding, 2007).

Limitations

The focus of this phenomenology study was the exploration of how human beings find meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of rural middle school general education teachers who instruct students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive settings (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1999, 2002; van Manen, 1990). The study sought to provide a rich and descriptive voice of general education teachers who share the phenomenon; it identified their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The study has limitations in scope, as it involves only rural middle school teachers with five or more years of experience. As a result, the narrow confines of the study only allowed settings of a very limited sample. Moreover, the teachers and their perceptions (thoughts, feelings, and experiences) represent a population from Title I schools, and those perceptions may be unique when compared to teachers from a more affluent setting. Also, the participants of this study do not represent the heterogeneous makeup of the typical public school. All the participants were Caucasian and eight of ten were female.

An additional factor exists. I was also a special educator working at one of the data collection sites. Every effort was made to delineate that relationship, and it is my belief that the relationship did not interfere with data retrieval or its interpretation. Moreover, a greater emphasis was made to interpret the study as a researcher rather than a special educator. Specifically, all measures such as reflective journals, member checks, and peer review were utilized in an effort to limit research bias. As students with EBD are at the greatest risk of tragic social and economic outcomes (such as higher rates of unemployment, incarceration, and

substance and sexual abuse), I feel very passionate about the research topic and believe that it is very difficult to bracket one's personal beliefs while providing an interpretation of other's beliefs (Cautilli, Hesky, & Thoder, 2010).

Day (2012) wrote that "depending on our own ontological and epistemological position we may believe that it is the grand stories" which determine changes in life (p.7). Rather, it is the accumulation of small stories and what we do with the knowledge that we glean from them. Researchers tend to write about students with EBD as victims. In reality, there is a link between good teachers, good practices, and quality of life. I embrace the ideal of activist professional (Sachs, 2003). As an activist professional, I hold tenaciously to the belief that I and other "intentional" teachers make a difference in the lives of our students (Slavin, 2006, p.5).

Implications

The significance of this study was to provide a voice of the experiences of teachers engaged in rural middle school inclusive instruction with students diagnosed with EBD (Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2012). The intent of the researcher was to present a synthesis of meanings and essence of the shared experience of inclusion teachers (Moustakas, 1994). The study was significant because it explored the lived experiences of rural general education public school teachers instructing in inclusive programs with the challenges presented by students diagnosed with EBD (Cannella-Malone, Tullis, & Kazee, 2011).

The implications of the study were significant in the following ways:

1. It addressed the essence of rural middle school general education teachers in inclusive environments of students with EBD and captured their lived experiences.

2. It studied existing gaps in the literature related to inclusion and the growing trend

of placing students with EBD in general education classrooms.

3. It provided an additional resource for understanding teacher experiences with an emphasis on strengthening special education services for students with EBD.

4. It established a voice for rural middle school inclusive educators, which allows for changes in pedagogy and content in the future development of educational instruction.

5. It provided data sources or evidence needed to support future studies for identifying specific instructional interventions.

Recommendations

The problems associated with behavior disorders in the classroom are ever increasing (Mackenzie, 2012; McCray & McHatton, 2011; McLeskey et al., 2012). These students present some of the most difficult and challenging behaviors that teachers have experienced. The label itself conjures up fear from teachers who have previously taught these students. Of equal concern is the increasing prevalence of EBD diagnoses in children (Albrecht et al., 2009; Cumming, 2012). If the challenging behavior of these students is not addressed properly, their future likelihood of quality of life is diminished (Gumpel & Sutherland, 2010; Osher et al., 2003; Stoutjesdijk et al., 2012; Vannest et al., 2011). In addition, the difficulty of educating these students is a likely indicator of teacher attrition. Notwithstanding, there are critical shortages in the area of special education teachers of students with EBD. Equally troubling are federal and state educational policies that encourage student placement based on academic scores and limited interpretation of special education laws. In this section of the study, I endeavor to provide recommendations to change the educational practices which could provide positive outcomes for both educators and students with EBD.

Teacher Support

Albrecht et al., (2009) expressed the need for more special education teachers, especially those certified in emotional behavioral disorders. There needs to be a greater emphasis on providing special education teachers with skills that have been known to produce positive outcomes for students with EBD. Excessive work problems are reported to increase stress, lower job satisfaction, and reduce professional commitment (Cook & Cameron, 2010). Teachers who are committed to stay in the field of special education enjoy working with students and cite positive school climate as indicators of longevity. Reducing teacher workloads, including administrative paperwork and providing teachers with opportunities to talk to counselors about related job stress, will increase teacher satisfaction (Billingsley, 2004). Rather than placing behavioral aids in the classroom with little or no job experience, behavioral aids could be used to support special educators' paperwork, which would allow opportunities for trained special educators to be in the classroom (Albrecht et al., 2009). Cautilli et al. (2010) recommend the use of Behavioral Analysis and Therapy Partners (BATP) to support teachers instructing students with EBD. These for-profit behavioral health specialists can provide services such as diagnosis and intervention which are based on applied behavioral analysis principles and are specifically targeted toward specific student behavior. An important aspect of BATP is a family-focused approach that involves both the families of the children as well as the children in regards to developing and evaluating services.

Research by MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) examined teacher beliefs and behaviors with respect to students with EBD. Their study suggests that general education teachers who instruct students with EBD are less favorable about their students' academic potential than

special educators. In addition, their research found that more experienced teachers were less willing to work with students diagnosed with EBD. They also reported that teachers who attend more in-service training held more positive attitudes. Male (2011) presents similar findings and asserts that professional development in the area of special education for inclusive educators is effective in achieving attitudinal shifts for teachers. These findings seem to imply that new teachers just entering the profession need better training in dealing with students with challenging behavior at the university level (Whetstone et al., 2012). Cook et al. (2003) found that both general and special education teachers lack necessary preparation skills to meet the needs of students with EBD. Moreover, they saw an overall lack of emphasis on the evaluation and effectiveness of academic interventions for the students.

Teachers must have ongoing and adequate training. The mandates in NCLB require teachers to be highly qualified in content knowledge rather than pedagogical knowledge and skills, which reduces the likelihood of successful intervention (Mihalas et al., 2009). When teachers lack pedagogical knowledge and skills, the atmosphere in inclusive classrooms of students of EBD generally leads to more restrictive placement. Notwithstanding, the current trend towards high-stakes testing creates an atmosphere of zero tolerance. Students with EBD require classrooms that meet their physical and emotional needs. The current climate tries to fit students into a one-size-fits-all mold, and does not adequately address differentiation and the individual needs of students with EBD (Rosenberg, Wilson, Maheady, & Sindelar, 2004).

Student Need

Currently, students with EBD comprise only 8% of all students with special needs (Cautilli et al., 2010). This unique population presents the greatest challenges to the education system. Students with EBD have characteristics that adversely affect educational performance.

Most present difficulties in building and maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers (Janney & Schoenfeld, 2008). Students with EBD exhibit inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances (Bakken et al., 2012; Coleman, 1995; Janney & Schoenfeld, 2008; Simpson et al., 2011). They are predominantly male and disproportionately African-American (Billingsley et al., 2006). Many of these students are predisposed to experiences of aggressive and violent behavior (Gumpel & Sutherland, 2010). As a result, students labeled as having EBD make much less academic progress than their nondisabled peers (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton, 2009; Sutherland et al., 2008).

These statistics provided an ominous picture for general education teachers in inclusive settings of students with EBD. The research suggests that successful intervention for students diagnosed with EBD is achievable (Vannest et al., 2011). Success depends upon collaboration between families, physicians, educators and legislators. Effective intervention requires a holistic approach, including risk evaluation, early identification, and monitored interventions. As students with EBD are generally diagnosed much later than other students with disabilities, practitioners need better evaluation techniques which will identify students with EBD promptly. Lane et al. (2002) recommends that school districts focus on the implementation of cost-effective screening procedures. A number of instruments have been developed which are available for use by practitioners. The student rescreening scale (Drummond, 1993) has been used effectively to detect students at risk for emotional behavioral disorders. In the area of social skills, there are a wide range of sound instruments available to practitioners in school psychology: The Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliot, 1990), the Walker-McConnell Scale of Social Competence and School Adjustment (Walker & McConnell, 1995) and the Behavioral Assessment System for Children (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992). Gilliam and McConnell (1997)

developed an effective tool to identify whether students have skills and behaviors that lead to successful integration into inclusive environments. Nickerson and Brosof (2003) utilized this tool to successfully distinguish between students with severe emotional behavioral problems and those who have less severe problems. As such, its use for determining placement and programming for inclusion of students with EBD is highly probable.

Consistent with Glasser's concept of choice theory, a number of evidence-based, self-directed intervention practices are available for students with EBD. Evidence-based interventions (EBI) have achieved success with general education curriculum inclusion settings. Research indicates that students with EBD who have been taught self-management interventions have successfully generalized their behavior to other situations and settings (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton, 2009). Students who are able to successfully utilize EBI practices show marked improvement in the acquisition and maintenance of social and behavioral skills.

In addition to self-managed interventions, there exists effective teacher mediated interventions for students with EBD (Pierce et al., 2004). A teacher-mediated intervention is an intervention in which the teacher administers the intervention and takes responsibility for the treatment, manipulating the antecedent in order to improve student performance. There are a number of examples of teacher mediated interventions: story mapping (Babyak, Koorland, & Mathes, 2000), adjusting task difficulty (Center, Deitz, & Kaufman, 1982), contingency contracting (Murphy, 1988), and token economies (Musser, Bray, & Kehle, 2001). Currently, a consensus of researchers suggests a compendium of research based practices useful in instructing students with EBD. Those practices include: teacher praise and reinforcement, antecedent exercise, cultivating caring relationships, positive behavior support, trust relationships, and opportunities to respond during instruction (Allday et al., 2012; Cannella-Malone et al., 2011;

Donlevy, 2001; Gage et al., 2012; Hawkins & Heflin, 2011; Jeffrey et al., 2009; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011).

Future Research

The goal of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of rural middle school general education teachers who instruct students in inclusive settings diagnosed with EBD. It sought to render a rich and descriptive voice for them by describing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in relationship to the phenomenon of inclusion with students of EBD. The preponderance of research suggests an optimistic future for students with EBD if administrators and educators reverse the current course of action typically taken for these students (Bedford & Casbergue, 2010; Dee & Jacob, 2011; Miles & Singal, 2010; Newman, 2012; Ruijs et al., 2010; Santoli et al., 2008). To facilitate positive outcomes of students with EBD, it is necessary for researchers to continue to examine educational trends. It is the recommendation of this study that future research be piloted in some very specific directions.

Qualitative studies identify teacher perceptions of inclusive environments with students diagnosed with EBD after the implementation of teacher specific interventions (Mihalas et al., 2009; Obiakor et al., 2012; Pierce et al., 2004). Equally important is the need for quantitative research to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher mediated interventions and their effects on behavioral and academic outcomes of students with EBD. Such studies are important because they would provide empirical evidence for the proper placement of students diagnosed with EBD. Currently, the lack of programmatic research on teacher mediated interventions has made it nearly impossible to generalize interventions for broader populations of individuals suffering from EBD (Handwerk & Marshall, 1998; Nickerson & Brosof, 2003).

Further research concerning professional development and continuing education should

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be investigated. A strong body of research affirms the need of teachers to develop skills related to classroom management, particularly when those environments include students with EBD (Allday et al., 2012; Cannella-Malone et al., 2011; Gage et al., 2012; Hawkins & Heflin, 2011; Jeffrey et al., 2009; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). Furthermore, research suggests that teachers just coming into the profession are more likely to view the inclusion of students with EBD more favorably (Berry, 2008). In addition, there is a need for research directed at providing fledgling teachers curriculum weighted in management skills which address the classroom and behavioral problems of children, including students with EBD.

This study found that general education teachers respect and revere their relationship with special educators. Unfortunately, there appears to be a shortage of qualified special educators when more students are being identified with special needs. Studies have viewed this phenomenon and made recommendations for its alleviation, but still the problem persists (Billingsley et al., 2006; Blake & Monahan, 2007; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Niesyn, 2009; Simpson et al., 2011; Whetstone et al., 2012). Future studies that provide insight into the reasons administrators fail to initiate corrective action would be of value. Extending research involving why special educators view the inclusion of students with EBD more positively than their colleagues might prove advantageous in cultivating stronger caring relationships between teachers and students with EBD (Ernst & Rogers, 2009; Sacks & Kern, 2008; Santoli et al., 2008).

Finally, the question arises as to why some teachers possess a strong intrinsic value for teaching when others do not. Because these internal values shape our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions and transform despair to resolve, it is of the utmost importance to understand it (Beattie et al., 1997). Greater research is needed in identifying the formation of characteristics

and behaviors associated with self-efficacy. What drives some teachers to embrace the ideal of

activist professionals; the tenacious beliefs that they are making a difference in the lives of their

students? That is a study worthy of attention.

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Appendix A: Gate Keeper Permission

SCHEMES ▬▬▬ **Division Superintendent**

September 26, 2013

Mr. James R. Barr
▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬
▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬
▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

Dear Mr. Barr:

    I, ▬▬▬▬▬, Division Superintendent ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ Schools, grant permission to allow you to conduct a study of inclusive environments from the perspective of rural middle school general education teachers of students with emotional behavioral disorders. You will be allowed access to teachers, IEPs and discipline referrals for the school years 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 school years for students with EBD attending middle schools in ▬▬▬▬▬ Schools. I understand that the information gathered would be for research purposes only and that the identity of the students, teachers, schools and the system will not be revealed.

    You have my support to examine the data needed in your research study. I understand that the use of this information will be conducted in a professional and confidential manner. Should additional information be required, please contact my office.

                    Respectfully,

                    Division Superintendent

C: ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ Middle/Secondary Education
   Middle School Principals

October 14, 2013

James R. Barr

Dear Mr. Barr:

You have my permission to proceed with your study involving ████████ Schools under the conditions you have stated in your letter of request. While conducting your study, you will have access to teachers and for years 2011 to the present: student IEPs and discipline records. It is my understanding that this access will only be used for research purposes and the identity of students, teachers, schools, and the school system will be kept confidential.

Mr. Barr, I fully support your research efforts. Should you need additional information please contact my office.

Respectfully,

Supervisor of Special Education

C:

Appendix B: Use Consent

February 16, 2013

<div align="center">Feb 16</div>

James Barr <jbarr.liberty@gmail.com>
to drtom

Dr. Bellows,

Is it possible to use your flow chart in my dissertation? I am using Glasser's "choice theory as part of my theoretical framework. Of course I would acknowledge your work.

James R. Barr

<div align="center">Response</div>

Tom Bellows <drtom@tombellows.com> Feb 16

to me

Of course, all I ask is that you credit it properly. I hope it suites your needs well.

Appendix C: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 21, 2013

James Barr
IRB Approval 1698.102113: A Phenomenological Study of Inclusive Environments from the Perspective of Rural Middle School General Education Teachers of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

Dear James,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. 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.

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

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

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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CONSENT FORM
A Phenomenological Study of Inclusive Environments from the Perspective of Rural Middle School General Education Teachers of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders
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School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of A Phenomenological Study of Inclusive Environments from the Perspective of Rural Middle School General Education Teachers of Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a general education teachers with five or more years of experience instructing six through eighth-grade students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive classrooms.

I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. This study is being conducted by James Barr a student at Liberty University enrolled in the doctoral program in the School of Education.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to answer the following questions which were developed from the related literature and which frame the investigation.

1. How do rural middle school general education teachers describe their experiences with students diagnosed with EBD in an inclusion classroom?
2. According to rural middle school general education teachers, how does the presence of students diagnosed with EBD influence their beliefs about inclusive education?
3. How do rural general education teachers' describe their attitudes toward teaching before instructing students with EBD in their classrooms?
4. How do rural general education teachers' describe their attitudes towards teaching after instructing students with EBD in their classrooms?
5. How do rural general education teachers view their future in education based on their experience of teaching students diagnosed with EBD in inclusive settings?

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things As a volunteer, you would be audio recorded during one, sixty to ninety minute interview and be observed during one of you inclusion classes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study presents minimal risks to participants, no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

This study is beneficial in the following ways:

1. It addresses the essence of rural middle school general education teachers in inclusive environments with EBD students and captures their lived experience.
2. It studies existing gaps in the literature related to inclusion and the growing trend of placing students with EBD in general education classrooms.
3. It provides data sources or evidence needed to support future studies for identifying specific instructional interventions.

The benefits to participation are:

1. It provides an additional resource for understanding teacher experiences with an emphasis of strengthening special education services for students with EBD.
2. It establishes a voice for rural middle school inclusive educators, which allows for changes in pedagogy and content in the future development of educational instruction.

Compensation: Participant will not be compensated 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.

To protect the employment location of the participants the researcher will use only the

geographic designation Southeastern School District. As previously stated, all participants will be given a four digit coded number; this coding will extend to both the school and place of interviews. All data will be stored and protected on flash drives, as well as stored on compact disc. The stored data will be protected for the duration of three years and the researcher will have sole access to this data. Data will be collected via interviews and observations. All documents and research data will be kept in a locked storage drawer and on the principal investigator's computer with a secure password. The only persons who will have access to the raw data are the principal Investigator and the committee. All forms of data collected during the study will be stored in a safety deposit box for three years after completion of the study; after three years all documents will be shredded and destroyed

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. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is James R. Barr. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at (omitted).

Additional contacts and questions can be addressed to committee members supervising this study.

Dr. Gina Grogan, Assistant Professor, Liberty University-Committee Chair

Dr. Kimberly Lester, Assistant Professor, Liberty University-Committee Member

Dr. Susan Robinson, Liberty University-Committee Member

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.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: Date:

The participant/person giving consent agrees to said documentation. Please check_____

IRB Code Numbers: 1689

IRB Expiration Date:

Please keep a copy of this information for your records.

Appendix E: Member Check Survey

Likert Scale Questionnaire

Member Check

Please check one box per question

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The transcription of my interview was accurate?					
The researcher provided a credible interpretation of my experiences?					

Appendix F: Pseudonyms & Codes

CODES: -MS-531 --MS-586

1. Victoria (1610531802_000210-29)

2. Mary (2606531802_000610-30)

3. Helena (3806531802_001511-1)

4. Edward (4612531802_001711-01)

5. Anne (5615531802_001811-04)

6. Catherine (6609531802_001911-05)

7. Beatrice (7709531802_002011-13)

8. Isabella (8709586802_002111-26)

9. Sofia (9806586802_002211-26)

10. Phillip (10812586802_002311-26)

Appendix G: Raw Data Analysis (Sample)

Isabella: Um I would have more like more aides or more – and like I was talking about this morning, I'm not kidding. I would prefer to have more teachers in the classroom; I think that the more adults caring about these kids we have with them the better they are going to be. Uh and our kids, not just EBD kids, not just bad kids in general and not just Gen Ed. kids; all of our kids crave small groups. They love small group and they love one-on-one with an adult.

Interviewer: Um I know that students with disabilities, in particular EBD, students aren't going to make you change your plans.

Isabella: Mh hm.

Interviewer: Um but the question – I have a question that says; explain your conviction about your future in education and has the presence of EBD students changed those convictions in any way?

Isabella: Uh probably working with EBD students has made me feel that this is where – and SPED students in general and students from poverty and any other students that I've encountered that has been – who has changed my perspective about anything, has made me more certain that this is the job for me, that this is where I want to be. Um as much as some challenges are frustrating, I enjoy going home at night and thinking how are we going to fix this or how are we gonna – how are we gonna work and make this work. Uh I enjoy the challenge that the students that I teach provide for me and I wouldn't want to do anything else you know and I think it's just kind of driven home the fact that this is where I want to be and this is the group of kids I want to be with. Um I kind of lost my train of thought, what were we – what was the question?

Interviewer: Um and you pretty much covered it; explain your convictions about the future of education –

Isabella: Okay yeah. Um and I – but the future of education in general, I would love to see us get more funding for people. Not for stuff, not for technology, not for books not for uh I think we need more trained adults in the classrooms with the kids. I think that they flourish when they have more people that care about them; especially adults that care about them around them help them. And that would me conviction, like get us more money for people, not stuff.

Interviewer: Um my final question is, is there anything else that you would like to add to what we've been discussing, in particular about EBD students?

Isabella: I had a thought a second ago like I wanted to tell you then I lost the train of thought. So, yes there is something that I might have to write it an email and send it to you. Um just that I've really haven't seen that my EBD kids are they're not problems in the classroom, they are not. I mean like I said, I have had so many students that want to talk out or want to be disrespectful and you know what I mean, other issues that my EBD students do not have. That you know, the young man that were talking about in particular, extremely respectful of me and really hard worker, didn't really even engage with his classmates and when he had that reputation, he didn't do it and I had him sixth period, last class of the day. All of the EBD students that I have account of really have turned out, you know they may have been like little

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Appendix H: Dissertation Timeline

Fall Semester 2012

December 2012-Complete EDUC 980: Dissertation Prospectus

 December 2012-Secure a Dissertation Chair and Committee Members

December 2012 – Formalize Dissertation Committee and Receive Approval.

Summer/Fall Semester 2013

January 2013 – Register for Dissertation and Research Course #1 (EDUC 989)

       Under Chair's Section

January 2013–Develop Proposal

January-April 2013 Education 917 (Qualitative Research)

June 2013- Finish Proposal (Committee Approval)

July 2013– Submit Proposal for Research Consultant Review

July 2013– Schedule and prepare for Proposal Defense

October 2013– Submit application and seek preliminary review from Institutional

Review board (IRB)

 October 2013–Provide IRB Revisions and Resubmission

October 21, 2013– Obtain Study Approval from IRB

December 2013 – Begin Research Preparation

December 2013 –Research and Collect data

December 2013 – Data Analysis

March 2014 – Submit the Manuscript to Research Consultant Review

March 2014 – Have Manuscript Professional Edited

Spring Semester 2014

September 2013 –Dissertation and Research Course #3 (EDUC 989)

January 2014 –Dissertation (first draft)

February 2014 – Dissertation (final draft)

February 2014 – Schedule and Complete Oral Pre-Defense

February 2014 – Register for Dissertation Defense (EDUC 990)

March 2014 - Dissertation Defense at Liberty University

April 2014 - Complete Final Edits of Dissertation

April 2014 - Obtain Final Approval

April 2014 - Publish Dissertation via the Liberty University library

March 2014 - Complete Graduation Paperwork

May 2014 - Degree Confirmation & Ceremony