

SELF-EFFICACY AND JOB-RELATED TASKS: SPECIAL EDUCATORS WHO TEACH
STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISORDER

by

Cheryl J. Andrews

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how special education teachers view their self-efficacy for teaching ED students and manage classroom tasks within the context of the self-contained setting. The theoretical frameworks that guided this study were Bandura's social cognitive theory and Rotter's locus of control theory as they related to self-efficacy and the management of tasks specific to teaching students with emotional disorder. The research questions that guided this study sought to describe how self-efficacy helped special educators manage ED students' individualized instructional programs (IEPs), cope with student behavior, and the management of para professional personnel. A review of the literature includes an examination of the constructivist epistemology, relevant literature on self-efficacy, and classroom challenges specific to special education teachers who teach ED students within self-contained settings. Data collection occurred through individual and focus group interviews, and participant blog entries. Significant statements were analyzed to uncover common themes that described the textural and structural descriptions that revealed the essence how self-efficacy assisted special educators who teach emotionally and behaviorally challenged students. Data were validated through triangulation methods that included member checks and writing rich, thick descriptions. The research presented the unique voices of special education teachers, their lived experiences as teachers, and served as validation of the challenges they experience.

Keywords: behavior improvement plan, emotional disorder, functional behavioral assessment, individualized education program, Individuals with Disabilities Act, No Child Left Behind, para professional, self-contained setting, self-efficacy.

Copyright Page

Dedication Page

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Krystal and Darrien. You both are the driving force and the motivating factors that inspired me to pursue a doctoral degree. It has been my life's goal to be a role model that makes you proud to call me your mother. It is my hope that each of you continues to strive for excellence in your studies, your daily tasks, and that you pursue your life's work with passion and purpose. It is my prayer that you will continue to seek God's guidance and His will for your lives. Krystal, from the time you were five-years-old going to your second day of kindergarten, I could see that you were not afraid to venture into the unknown. I have always admired you for your fearless pursuit of your dreams. You are my hero, and I am proud to be your mother. I love you! Keep grinding! Darrien, you were my 31st birthday gift. You have matured into a caring and compassionate young man who sees the world and the people in it with his heart. I love that about you and wish there were more people in the world like you. You have taken the road less traveled in pursuit of your education. Despite the hardships, struggles, and setbacks, I am proud that you will soon graduate and be able to say, "I did it my way". I am thankful that God choose me to be your mother. May God continue to bless and keep you both!

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List of Abbreviations

Behavior improvement plan (BIP)

Emotional disorder (ED)

Free Appropriate Education (FAFE)

Functional behavioral assessment (FBA)

General teaching efficacy (GTE)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Personal efficacy (PE)

Personal teaching efficacy (PTE)

Teaching efficacy (TE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter presents data that supports the need for this study, the problem the study addresses, and the purpose of the research. Research questions that guided the study, significance of the study for future research, and pertinent terms are also included. The chapter concludes with a discussion of my interest and situation in the study that provides the reader with an understanding of my connection to the research topic.

This transcendental phenomenological study examined the self-efficacy views of special educators who teach students identified as having an emotional disorder (ED). Students who have this disability exhibit aggressive, noncompliant, and antisocial behavior and that can impact the confidence or self-efficacy of educators (Allday et al., 2012). Special education students identified as ED experience challenges in school that include difficulty in learning, lack of healthy interpersonal relationships as well as decreased or unhappy mood or fears related to school (United States Department of Education, 2007). Self-efficacy is a construct that impacts teachers' confidence or belief in their ability to teach. Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs may impact student achievement as those with high self-efficacy beliefs tend to accept responsibility when students are not successful, use classroom management approaches and teaching practices that encourage and promote independence (Allinder, 1994), and keep students engaged in learning activities (Podell & Soodak, 1993). On the other hand, teachers who have low self-efficacy beliefs tend to give up when difficult situations arise and blame poor performance on students and external factors such as socioeconomic status and lack of parental support. Special education teachers who teach ED students are particularly vulnerable

for developing low self-efficacy beliefs. In addition to their instructional duties and paperwork duties, teachers of ED students have the added responsibility of helping students develop and use more acceptable behavioral and social skills (Oliver & Reschly, 2010).

Teaching ED students is marked by complex changing situations and requires the use of multiple skills (Jones, 2011). This means that special education teachers may possess high self-efficacy beliefs concerning their ability to teach a subject, but low self-efficacy for providing interventions that diminish ED students' anti-social behaviors. This view of a more situation specific measure of teacher self-efficacy beliefs is consistent with recommendations made by previous researchers (Bandura, 1997; Dellinger, Bobbett, Oliver, & Elle, 2008, Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Self-efficacy beliefs act as a motivating factor for teachers to continue when adverse situations arise. The development of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs is influenced by the context in which they occur. Bandura (1997) posited that self-efficacy beliefs are context specific and influenced by mastery, vicarious, emotional arousal, and verbal persuasion experiences. To explain the concept of self-efficacy, Chapter One provided a theoretical framework for understanding self-efficacy and presented literature about teacher self-efficacy beliefs and the impact on teacher attrition, student achievement, job satisfaction, and job commitment.

The theoretical basis of self-efficacy lies in social cognitive theory. Quantitative research conducted by Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) found the construct of teacher self-efficacy is one of the few teacher characteristics that consistently related to teaching and learning. Research has indicated that teachers who hold high self-efficacy beliefs are more positive regarding the potential of ED special needs students while low self-efficacy teachers tended to focus more on behavior as a predictor of failure (Mojavezi & Poodineh, 2012). Additionally, a

review of past research presented factors found to promote or impede the self-efficacy perceptions of special educators who teach ED students, their levels of job satisfaction, and their retention rates added to the review of the literature. An overabundance of quantitative data on teacher self-efficacy exists. Yet, very little qualitative data have been gathered on special education teacher self-efficacy beliefs and how this group of teachers experiences the phenomenon through their completion of tasks specific to teaching special needs students in the collaborative or self-contained setting. As stated, previous research recommended a shift from examining general teacher self-efficacy to a focus on more task specific situations. Thus, it is important to gather qualitative data to bring forth the lived experiences of special education teachers as they complete tasks specific to teaching ED students.

Special education teachers who teach ED students face numerous challenges that impact their ability to provide a classroom environment conducive to learning. Previous quantitative research has revealed self-efficacy beliefs as a consistent factor that impacts teachers' ability to provide quality learning experiences for all students. The level of a teacher's self-efficacy beliefs is a determining factor in whether the teacher will put more or less effort into trying to reach students who demonstrate behaviors that disrupt the learning environment. Focusing on self-efficacy beliefs in regard to task specific behaviors allows researchers to gather relevant data that reflects the multifaceted nature of teaching ED students in the self-contained setting and provide insight into how to best support teachers in developing higher self-efficacy beliefs.

Background

Special education teachers face a variety of self-efficacy perils as they endeavor to teach the neediest students. High caseloads, feelings of isolation, student behaviors, and a lack

of in-service experiences are factors that can cause special educators to experience high levels of burnout and attrition (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011). Self-contained teachers who teach ED students are particularly vulnerable to feeling isolated as they have few opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and may have little contact with other teachers throughout the school day due to the dynamics and demands of the self-contained setting. Cancio, Albrecht, and Holden (2014) cited opportunities to collaborate with general education colleagues as a factor associated with ED teachers' intent to remain in the profession.

Due to the specificity of their positions, special education teachers (specifically teachers of students with ED) may be left to function independently from other teachers in the building (Marvin, LaCost, Grady, & Mooney, 2003). Self-contained ED teachers, unlike their general education peers, teach multiple grade levels and have the responsibility of gathering student data to document the attainment of individualized educational program goals (IEP). In cases where an ED student has a behavior improvement plan (BIP) or a functional behavioral assessment (FBA), data must be gathered at specific time intervals. Daily schedules must accommodate students who receive part of their instruction in the general education setting. Students who demonstrate more severe behaviors often spend more than 50% of their time in the self-contained setting as these students are best served in a smaller more restrictive setting. This places more constraints on the time available to interact with colleagues or allow for a planning period. Although there may be a para professional educator assigned to work with the ED teacher, he or she must accompany students to the general education setting to provide academic or behavioral support. A para professional is an educator who provides instructional

services for children under the direct supervision of a teacher who is responsible for determining and providing educational services to students (NRCERS, 1989).

In the absence of the paraprofessional, the ED teacher is left alone to navigate the dynamics of teaching multiple grade levels, addressing behavior concerns, and managing the classroom environment. Successful management of the instructional environment becomes more difficult as the special education teacher's attention is dispersed which limits his or her ability to attend to the specific needs of individual students.

Historical Context

Perhaps the area that poses the greatest concern for the special education teacher is behavior management as ED students' behavior outbursts can be erratic and triggered by unknown factors. Typical behaviors associated with ED students include, poor work habits, use of aggressive language, and poor social interactions with adults and peers (Duchnowski & Kutash, 2011). Teachers of ED students may have trouble identifying with the behaviors of ED students because their cultural, social, and childhood experiences are often quite different from those of ED students (Solar, 2011). This mismatch in experiences can lead to discouragement and less job satisfaction. This factor places ED teachers at risk for experiencing job dissatisfaction, low self-efficacy, and attrition when they are not prepared to meet the demands of managing the para professional and managing the demands of challenging students (George & George 1995; Van Alstine, 2010).

Social Context

Retention of special educators is a national concern as special education teachers leave the profession at a faster rate than their general education counterparts. More than 13% of experienced special education teachers leave the field on an annual basis forcing school

districts to intensify their recruiting efforts and expand their hiring budgets (Viel-Ruma et al., 2010). Burkman (2012) found that special education teachers identified teaching emotionally behaviorally disabled students as a major challenge. Additionally, Mitchell and Arnold (2004) found that “among teachers of students who experience emotional or behavioral difficulties professional attrition has reached crisis proportions” (p. 215). Most of the current literature on self-efficacy has been acquired through quantitative methods and has focused on the factors that impact or predict self-efficacy as well as those factors that result in teachers leaving the profession. Data from these studies have been gathered through questionnaires developed by experts on teacher self-efficacy. These instruments are used to measure specific dimensions of teacher self-efficacy such as efficacy for instruction, discipline, and general teaching efficacy as well as predicting teachers’ intent to remain in the field of education (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Theoretical Context

Based on social cognitive theory, teacher self-efficacy may be conceptualized as individual teachers’ belief in their own ability to plan, organize, and carry out activities that are required to attain given goals (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Self-efficacy is an important construct in the field of education as it relates to a teacher’s belief in their power to teach all students despite behavior or perceived ability. It is the stimulus or the motivation that inspires them to continue even when setbacks or failures occur. Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Self-efficacy acts a motivating factor that drives teachers to set goals and approach difficult situations with a positive attitude. Additionally, research has indicated that teacher self-efficacy is a key factor in job satisfaction, teacher burnout, and teacher

retention (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Knowing how to facilitate self-efficacy building opportunities for special education teachers and improve job satisfaction as it relates to retention is of concern for school administrators.

Quantitative studies provide explanations of the degree to which certain factors impact self-efficacy. Previous studies using quantitative methods do not examine the lived experiences of special education teachers, fail to identify how self-efficacy beliefs impacts retention, and how these educators manage or complete tasks specific to their role as a special education teacher. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (1998; 2007) suggest that teacher efficacy qualitative studies are overwhelmingly neglected and are needed to shed light on the sources of self-efficacy building experiences. Additionally, Lee, Patterson, and Vega 2011 posited that “correlational studies and self-reports are limited and cited the need for other methodological sources of data such as semi-structured interviews and observations to provide qualitatively detailed research findings of the experiences and perceptions of teachers” (p. 72) as well as “rich, thick descriptions of the growth of teacher efficacy” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 30). All qualitative studies share several common bonds and allow the focus to be on the wholeness of participants’ experiences as an integrated and inseparable relationship of subject and object and parts of the whole (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, a study of this kind will provide future special education teachers, those who are in the student teaching phase as well as those who new to the profession with authentic insight and real-world connections between how their self-efficacy can foster greater success in educating ED students.

Situation to Self

I believe that individuals construct knowledge based upon their lived experiences. It is my belief is that teachers construct personal knowledge of their capability to teach from both successful and unsuccessful experiences as well as from methods and practices they may have used in the past. Constructivism maintains that individuals learn and construct knowledge based upon their experiences within their environment. “Constructivism is an epistemological view of knowledge acquisition emphasizing knowledge construction rather than knowledge transmission and the recording of information conveyed by others” (Applefield, Huber, & Mahnaz, 2001, p. 37). Mason (2006) further expands upon this notion: “Our ways of seeing, and of framing questions, are strongly influenced by the methods we have at our disposal, because of the way we see shapes what we can see, and what we think we can ask” (p. 13). Constructivists further believe, as Barrett and Long (2012) stated, that individuals are capable of acquiring new knowledge and making sense of it based on existing cognitive structures they have in place. Therefore, teachers base what they do daily in classrooms as they build upon their pedagogical knowledge acquired in their pre-service and in-service experiences.

Teachers’ personal epistemology development influences their choice of educational materials, teaching strategies, and whether they are receptive to education reform efforts and professional development (Bendixen & Feucht, 2010; Feucht, 2008; Patrick & Pintrich, 2001; Schraw & Olafson, 2002; Tsai, 2002). My goal, in conducting this transcendental phenomenological study, according to Creswell (2013), is to use participants’ views to understand how self-efficacy helps special education teachers’ in the context of completing tasks specific to teaching ED students.

The administrative experiences that I have had with ED teachers and their students over the last seven years inspired me to conduct this study. The teachers I have supervised were resilient and committed to the children they taught. Despite teaching students who were verbally, and in some cases, physically aggressive, the special education teachers handled tense and emotionally charged situations with professionalism and composure. They did not take the insults or profane name calling personal. Although students were held accountable and given consequences for their actions, after the penalty, students were given a fresh start. Despite the frequency of these situations, the teachers remained committed to building a sense of community within their classrooms and committed to teaching despite the usual and unexpected challenges associated with teaching ED students in a self-contained setting.

My experiences with ED special education teachers have taught me that they can be particularly vulnerable and that administrators may not identify their need for validation, support, or the intensity involved in working with students who have behavioral and emotional challenges. Interviewing individual ED special education teachers and gathering data through focus group interviews of ED teachers align with the epistemological assumption that knowledge is gained through the “subjective evidence” of participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 22). A study of this kind will broaden my knowledge of the role that self-efficacy plays in ED teachers’ job commitment, how they experience self-efficacy, and how they manage job specific tasks. The knowledge gained from this study will be used to improve my leadership practices and assist me in providing instructional leadership and insight that help to improve the self-efficacy of special education teachers who teach ED students. Additionally, my goals include helping special education teachers to acquire skills and knowledge that will enable

them to provide learning experiences that increase the academic achievement of ED students and improve student behavior and social outcomes.

Problem Statement

The problem of this study is special education teachers' self-efficacy for teaching ED students and how self-efficacy helps them navigate teaching tasks within the self-contained setting. Special education teacher retention is as national concern as this group leaves the profession at a faster rate as compared to their general education counterparts (Stempien & Loeb, 2002; Viel-Ruma et al., 2010). More than 13% of experienced special education teachers leave the field on an annual basis forcing school districts to intensify their recruiting efforts and expand their hiring budgets (Viel-Ruma et al., 2010). Extra paperwork, writing and implementing students' IEPs, and teaching multiple grade levels are job related factors that create additional stress for special educators (Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011).

Moreover, teaching ED students presents additional challenges as they have intensive social and emotional needs that are best met in a self-contained setting or more restrictive environment (Cancio, Albrecht, & Holden, 2014). Additionally, Burkman (2012) found that a high percentage of special educators named teaching students identified as having an emotional disability (ED) as a major challenge that decreased job satisfaction and caused them to "see themselves as ineffective and no longer doing a meaningful and important job" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010, p. 1060). ED teachers may have difficulty identifying with the behaviors of ED students because of their cultural, social, and childhood experiences (Solar, 2011). This exacerbates feelings of isolation and ineffectiveness. Feeling ineffective and experiencing a reduced sense of personal accomplishment can cause the teacher to experience negative, cynical attitudes, and feelings about colleagues and students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). The

problem of this transcendental phenomenological study is the lack of understanding of special education teachers' views of their self-efficacy for teaching ED students and how self-efficacy helps them navigate teaching ED students. Qualitative data regarding how self-efficacy helps special education teachers to manage tasks associated with teaching ED students in the self-contained setting and cope with students' disruptive behaviors may inspire other teachers to develop higher levels of self-efficacy, stronger commitments to the students they teach, and influence them to remain in the teaching profession.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how special education teachers view their self-efficacy for teaching ED students and how self-efficacy helps them navigate teaching tasks within the self-contained setting. This study attempted to address the gap in the literature by describing how special education teachers of ED students view their self-efficacy and how self-efficacy impacts the work they do within the context of teaching ED students in a self-contained setting. It was my intent to qualitatively describe participant's views of their self-efficacy and how self-efficacy helps special education teachers of ED students manage classroom tasks, handle students' disruptive behaviors, and achieve higher academic and behavior outcomes through thick rich descriptions of their feelings, thoughts, and actions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Heidegger, 1962, 1973, 1985, 2008; Husserl, 1973). Special education teachers' lived experiences will provide data that may be transferable and applicable to working with all students under the category of ED as well as students identified under other categories that include specific learning disability and other health impaired.

The theoretical frameworks that guided this study were social cognitive theory and locus of control theory. Social cognitive theory posits that individuals learn through interactions and by observing the behaviors of others. Rotter (1966) defined locus of control as a “predisposition in how an individual perceives reinforcements in the form of rewards, favorable outcomes, or goal accomplishments” (p. 1). An individual’s locus of control is directly related to their self-efficacy beliefs. Rotter (1966) posited that teachers’ perception of their power to control internal and external factors also influences their levels of self-efficacy.

Significance of the Study

Due to changes in special education teacher certification guidelines permitted by NCLB (2001), researchers have refocused their efforts to teacher development and retention (Sindelar, Brownell, Billingsley, 2010). There is a surplus of quantitative research studies that have found a positive correlation between teacher self-efficacy, job satisfaction (Wu & Short, 1996), teacher job commitment (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Podell & Soodak, 1993; Rosenholtz, Bassler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 1989; Viel-Ruma et al. 2010; Ware & Kitsantis, 2007), and improved teacher retention rates among general education teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). A qualitative research study that describes the self-efficacy views of special education teachers provides insight on how self-efficacy impacts their management of tasks specific to teaching ED students despite the challenges would serve several purposes. This study added to the body of knowledge on factors that foster greater self-efficacy in special education teachers. It is important to understand the interplay between an individual’s knowledge, skills, and beliefs of future performance because the beliefs people hold about their performance have more power than acquired learning (Pajares, 1996; Yost, 2006). Understanding that an individual’s beliefs

have a stronger impact on performance can be used to support them in developing future goals and providing targeted professional learning opportunities.

Bandura's construct of self-efficacy beliefs has been positively correlated with general aspects of both teacher and student success (Bandura, 1977, 1997). In addition, self-efficacy beliefs are tied to job satisfaction and retention. When considering this correlation in the context of achievement for special education students, it is desirable for school administrators to have knowledge of how ED special education teachers experience self-efficacy. This knowledge will assist administrators in developing practical staff development opportunities designed specifically for special education teachers that support them in becoming competent practitioners capable of meeting the academic needs of ED students. NCLB legislation as well as the IDEA has mandated that students with disabilities make adequately yearly progress (AYP). Thus, school administrators have a vested interest in understanding the instructional needs of ED special education teachers and how to provide them with teaching and learning opportunities that foster feelings of success to strengthen and enhance their self-efficacy beliefs and job satisfaction.

Results from a 2006 survey conducted by The American Psychological Association found that 60% of teachers cited a need for training related to decreasing and responding to disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, 2006). In addition, new teachers reported a desire to have more preservice training in the areas of classroom management and improving behavior outcomes for all students (Meister & Melnick, 2003). Feedback from special education teachers can also help pinpoint needed reforms and provide ideas to help improve the overall retention rates of special education teachers (Otto & Arnold, 2004). Lastly, according to Nance and Calbrese (2009), special

education teachers want their stories to be told; “they want to know their voices are being heard” (p. 435). Sharing experiences about the successes and frustrations associated with teaching special needs students would validate their lived experiences and set the groundwork for more inclusive school cultures that acknowledge and recognize the work that special education teachers do to educate ED students.

Research Questions

The research questions were framed to elicit responses that helped to develop a narrative that describes the essence of how ED special education teachers experience self-efficacy. Creswell (2013) wrote that a “phenomenological study should be guided by a “central phenomenon to be explored” (p. 136). Adhering to the tenets of phenomenological studies, the phenomenon being explored in this study is self-efficacy. ED special education teachers face job challenges and perform additional job-related duties that general education teachers do not experience. “They may be the only teacher in the building working with students with extreme behaviors and have no colleagues in the building who can identify with the challenges they face” (Cancio, Albrecht, Holden, 2014, p. 307). Special education teachers have legal requirements related to paperwork and compliance timelines that may be viewed as burdensome, and a lack of organizational support may increase feelings of dissatisfaction (Boe & Cook, 2006; Carlson, Chen, Schroll, & Klein, 2003; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Luekens, Lyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). The questions were framed to elicit descriptions of self-efficacy that will, according to Parse 2001, “guide me through the process of coming to know the phenomenon as it shows itself as described by the participants” (p. 79). It is intended for the participants to reflect upon their various experiences and give detailed descriptions of how self-efficacy helps them to cope and

manage in situations that can diminish their confidence in their ability to teach ED special education students.

Research Question 1

How do special education teachers view their self-efficacy for dealing with behavior issues when teaching ED students?

This question addresses educational research citing challenging behaviors as a risk factor for the development of low self-efficacy beliefs among special education teachers (George & George, 1995; Van Alstine, 2010). Special education teachers who teach ED students are at a greater risk for experiencing job dissatisfaction and low self-efficacy beliefs due to the demands of teaching challenging students and the management of specific tasks related to being a special education teacher within a self-contained setting.

Research Question 2

How do special education teachers view their self-efficacy for planning the work of the para-professional in the ED classroom?

Paraprofessionals are staff members who provide instructional support and/or other direct services for special education students under the direction of the special education teacher (NRECERS, 1989). It is important to understand how the dynamic of this supervisory relationship impacts special education teachers' self-efficacy.

Research Question 3

How do special education teachers view their self-efficacy for meeting IEP and eligibility paperwork compliance deadlines?

This research question addresses the legal requirements associated with federal and state compliance timelines associated with being a special education teacher. This additional

job-related duty has been cited as a risk factor for lowering self-efficacy and create additional stress for special educators (Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011; Keenan, & Lattanzi, 2004).

Research Question 4

How do special education teachers view their self-efficacy for helping ED students meet IEP goals?

Special education teachers who instruct ED students teach multiple grade levels and have the responsibility of gathering student achievement and behavior data to document the attainment of individualized educational program goals (IEP). ED student may exhibit poor work habits, use of aggressive language, and poor social interactions with adults and peers (Duchnowski & Kutash, 2011). These behaviors pose risk factors for increasing job dissatisfaction among special education students (George & George 1995; Van Alstine, 2010)

Research Question 5

How do special education teachers of ED students view their self-efficacy for helping ED students attain higher academic and behavior outcomes?

Teachers may lower expectations for some students and if they do not feel that they have the capacity to meet their needs (Cook, 2012). Due to the emotional and behavioral inconsistencies that ED students demonstrate, special education teachers may have high efficacy beliefs for instructional skills and strategies but possess low efficacy beliefs for managing student behavior. Low efficacy beliefs have been shown to negatively impact teachers' desire or motivation to work with ED students (Cook, 2002; Wagner et al., 2006).

Definitions

The following terms are pertinent to the study:

1. *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 increased to 100% by the 2013-14 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).
2. *Behavior intervention plan*- a concrete plan of action for or reducing the problem behaviors as dictated by the needs of the student who exhibits the behavior (Zirkel, 2011; Sugai et al., 2000; Turnbull, Wilcox, Stow, Raper, & Hedges, 2,000)
3. *Emotional disorder*- social, emotional, or behavioral functioning that severely limits a child's academic progress, social relationships with peers or teachers, or personal adjustment, that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or other health factors (Gage et al., 2010)
4. *Functional behavioral assessment*- a variety of assessment strategies (e.g., direct behavior observations and indirect assessments using interviews or behavior rating scales) that identify specific antecedent and consequent events that are directly related to problem behaviors (Zirkel, 2011; Sugai et al., 2000; Turnbull, Wilcox, Stow, Raper, & Hedges, 2,000)
5. *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).
6. *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 individuals 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).

7. *Paraprofessional*-staff members whose positions are either instructional in nature and/or who provide other direct services to children, or staff members who work under the direct supervision of teachers or other professional practitioners who are responsible for determining educational needs for individuals and groups of students, designing and implementing programs and services, and assessing student performance and progress (NRCERS, 1998).
8. *Self-efficacy*- beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997).
9. *Self-contained*- a small group setting of children with specific learning disabilities or special needs that cannot be met in the general education classroom (IDEA, 2004).

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of self-efficacy, self-efficacy risk factors, and its relationship to teacher retention. Data on special education teacher retention indicate that special education teachers leave the field at a rate higher than general education teachers (Burkman, 2012; Viel-Ruma et al., 2010). Special education teachers who teach ED students are at a greater risk for experiencing job dissatisfaction and low self-efficacy beliefs due to the demands of teaching challenging students and the management of specific tasks related to

being a special education teacher within a self-contained setting (George & George, 1995; Van Alstine, 2010). Teacher self-efficacy is a motivation factor that aids in job satisfaction, job commitment, and student achievement (Hastings & Brown, 2002). This construct is of concern to school administrators who have been tasked with ensuring that all students make suitable academic progress that meet federal and state guidelines. Additionally, federal NCLB and IDEA mandates work in concert and require that students with disabilities have the support of equitable accommodations that allow them to take part in in the general education curriculum assessments and must demonstrate adequate yearly progress as mandated by NCLB legislation. Special education teachers who teach ED students face specific job-related risk factors and student related concerns that general education teachers do not face. Feelings of isolation may produce emotions that can encompass stress, dissatisfaction with the work environment, and a lack of desire to continue in the teaching profession (Schlichte et al., 2005).

Quantitative research has indicated a strong correlation between job satisfaction, teacher efficacy, and job commitment (Wu & Short, 1996). A comparison of ED teacher attrition rates with other groups of special education teachers showed that ED teachers are more likely to experience diminished rates of job satisfaction and higher attrition rates (Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). Most of research data related to teacher self-efficacy has been gathered through survey instruments and questionnaires that are analyzed through quantitative methods. Although the data gathered through quantitative methods provides hypotheses, data sets, and explanations that can be of practical use, they fail to provide the essence of the human experience. Contrastively, qualitative examination of self-efficacy beliefs through multiple data sources enables me to present the unique perspectives and descriptions of the meanings that research participants bring to their lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The open-ended

nature of questioning associated with qualitative research enables the researcher to methodically examine and bring forth themes and the essence of the deeper meanings and hidden commonalities between participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how special education teachers view their self-efficacy for teaching ED students and how self-efficacy helps them navigate teaching tasks within the self-contained setting. This study presented the voices of ED special education teachers through their lived experiences with navigating instructional and procedural dynamics associated with teaching ED students within a self-contained setting. Individual and focus group interviews, and posts to a participant blog will provide data that will be used to write thick rich descriptions of their lived experiences.

This chapter will present the theoretical framework that underpins self-efficacy phenomena, self-efficacy development, and how self-efficacy experiences impact motivation and teacher practices. Additionally, previous research on teacher retention, federal mandates on teaching students with disabilities, and challenges specific to teaching ED students will be included in the review of the literature. A summary at the end of the chapter will synthesize past and current research that supports the context and the need for a study of this kind.

Theoretical Framework

This study, framed by Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory and Rotter's (1966) locus of control theory, provides an understanding of how an individual's perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs in their ability to influence outcomes impact self-efficacy beliefs. Collectively, these theories will bring focus to the study and assist in explaining the phenomenon self-efficacy and bring attention to the problems that special education teachers encounter when teaching students identified as having an emotional disability.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory posits that humans learn through interactions with and by observing the behavior of others present in an individual's environment (Bandura, 2001). Learning is a social phenomenon that supports the development of habits, beliefs, and behaviors (Schunk, 2012). The framework of social cognitive theory explains human behavior as a relationship between three corresponding interactions that include personal, behavioral, and social factors. Personal influences include thoughts, beliefs, skills, and affects. The way in which one perceives the outcomes of their actions provides feedback that changes their environments and their personal factors, which in turn informs and alters future behaviors (Bandura, 1997). In other words, cognitive processes or how individuals think about or perceives a situation enables them to predict possible outcomes and make attempts to take control over or act to achieve a desired result.

How one interprets outcomes is strong predictor of future actions to achieve desired results. Interpretation of outcomes of events affects how one views situations such as failures and successes. In the end, it is one's interpretation that determines what actions to take and how much effort to extend to bring about a desired outcome. When an individual is confident in their ability to produce desired outcomes, they act on the belief despite the challenges they may encounter (Bandura, 2001). Theorists have speculated that the beliefs an individual or teacher has about an ability or task will affect one's motivation and actions (Paneque & Barbetta, 2006; Scott, 2012). In other words, when individuals feel confident in their skill level or capability to complete a task, the more intrinsically motivated they are to make an attempt to complete the task.

As previously stated, an individual's perception impacts whether outcomes are viewed as failures or successes. Because judgments and actions are partly self-determined, people can effect change in themselves and their situations through motivation and their own efforts (Bandura, 1989). Human agency, a view of social cognitive theory, posits that individuals are free to make choices, take actions, and proactively engage in their own success and development (Schunk, 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2005). Human agency is a mechanism central to a person's belief in his or her capabilities or self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1989), individuals are motivated by a combination of self-governing and mechanical influences that serve as causation. In other words, these influences do not operate independently or in isolation. Thought patterns, motivation, personal and environmental factors collectively contribute to motivation, and as a result, influence individuals to take specific actions.

Efficacy judgments are also impacted by a selection process (Bandura, 1991). When individuals believe they possess the skills to control outcomes, they are motivated to take on situations they value, that promote competency, and satisfy personal interests. A reciprocal relationship exists between self-efficacy and the successful completion of specific tasks. As one's self efficacy increases and influences task performance, the successful effects of one's performance in turn build confidence (Sandholtz & Ringstaff, 2014). Bandura (1997) posited that for individuals to attain goals they need to influence and control their environment. According to the tenets of social cognitive theory, to achieve goals individuals attempt to self-regulate their actions and manage their behaviors purposefully (Bembenutty, 2007).

Locus of Control

Building on the principles of social learning theory, locus of control is a construct that views expectations or outcomes from either internal or external control of reinforcement

(Kormanik & Rocco, 2009). A tenet of social learning theory, locus of control is defined as a predisposition toward a belief in a perception of what causes an outcome (Rotter, 1966).

Individuals who view outcomes as the result of one's behavior operate from an internal locus of control. They believe in the power of their ability, skill level, and knowledge to influence outcomes. On the other hand, individuals who believe in external locus of control view outcomes as chance, fate, or as factors that are beyond their control. Reactions to situations are shaped by one's perceptions of the source and by the individual's perceptions of the ability to cope with the outcome (Kormanik & Rocco, 2009). In the end, it is how one perceives their success or failure is ultimately shaped by what they perceive as the cause of the outcome.

Interpretation of outcomes of events determines how an individual views failures and successes. In the end, it is the individual's interpretation that determines what actions to take and how much effort to extend to bring about a desired outcome. When an individual is confident in their ability to produce desired outcomes, they act on that belief despite the challenges they may encounter (Bandura, 2001). Individuals desire to exercise a certain level of control over situations when they believe the outcome is favorable and can link their actions to outcomes. Martinez (2003) identified internal locus of control as a significant factor that influences an individual's level of motivation for achieving learning outcomes.

Individuals who have internal locus of control have thoughts that are self-aiding and reflective. They view outcomes, whether positive or negative, as opportunities for growth. An individual's locus of control is directly related to their self-efficacy beliefs. Rotter (1966) posited that teachers' perception of their power to control internal and external factors also influences their levels of self-efficacy. In recent study of 240 graduate students that examined the mediating effects of locus of control on confidence, Au (2014) suggests that individuals

who possess internal locus of control were likely to view personal success to their own abilities and attribute failures to factors perceived outside of their control.

Additionally, adherents to the locus of control theory, Joo, Lim, and Kim (2013) found locus of control and self-efficacy as meaningful predictors of learner achievement. Within this construct, individuals are continually motivated and become more efficacious or confident when they succeed in reaching desired goals.

Individuals who have external locus of control believe that their efforts have no impact on outcomes. A study of 115 college students participating in an online English course indicated that students with higher level of internal locus of control performed better than those with a higher level of external locus of control (Chang & Ho, 2009). In this case, the individual holds self-hindering beliefs. This individual possesses a low sense of efficacy and lacks the motivation needed to try alternative actions that may lead to more positive outcomes. The cycle of success and failure has serious implications for special education teachers when considered through the lens of special needs students and their academic progress and behavioral outcomes as well as improving the self-efficacy levels of teachers. Special education students have special learning and behavioral needs that require that require specialized instruction to overcome their disability.

Cook (2012) stated “individuals are often confident and directive in attempting to control their environment, with a strong disposition of linking their actions and consequences” (p. 285). In other words, a teacher’s level of confidence will impact how little or how much effort is invested and will depend on whether they believe their actions will lead to a desired consequence. Thus, it is imperative for this group of educators to develop self-aiding thoughts,

so they can reflect on and modify instructional practices and techniques that assist special needs students in achieving greater success.

Related Literature

Teacher Quality

Teacher education programs have difficulty providing an ample supply of credentialed special education teachers. As previously mentioned, the need for special education teachers to fill vacant positions is greater than the number of qualified graduates. One of the prevailing issues with the special education teacher shortage is the number of candidates who meet the NCLB highly qualified mandate. According to NCLB guidelines a highly qualified teacher is one who has a bachelor's degree, holds a state teaching certificate or received a passing score on the state exam, and demonstrated knowledge of all academic subjects he or she will teach (Mongillo, 2011; NCLB, 2001). Although the federal government's definition of highly qualified is used to make hiring decisions when filling vacant special education teacher positions, there is limited research to demonstrate that these individuals meet the definition of quality special education teachers or possess expertise in their field. Another view special education teacher quality has been advanced to bring greater clarity to the definition of special highly qualified. Leko, Brownell, Sindelar and Murphy (2012), determined that since 2003 only nine studies have been conducted to articulate the attributes of individuals who possess expertise in special education. According to researchers, special education teacher quality is defined by (a) extended preparation in special education; (b) knowledge for teaching both elementary mathematics and reading; (c) ability to apply knowledge to practice; (d) explicit, interactive instruction to promote student achievement; (e) high levels of student engagement during instruction; (f) effective classroom management; (g) sense of responsibility for the

learning of students with disabilities; (h) ability to consider the individual learning and behavioral needs of students with disabilities during instruction; (i) a motivation to improve instruction; and (j) a sense of teaching efficacy (Leko, Brown, and Sindelar, 2012, p. 2). Although the list of characteristics can be applicable to all teachers, there is a gap in the research on special education teacher expertise.

The problem that exists with identifying who is an expert in special education is a discrepancy or a lack of clear understanding of what constitutes expertise in other professions and assumptions about how to develop expertise (Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Murphy, 2012). The lack of a clear definition of special education expertise is also evident in classroom management skills. Special education teachers who teach ED students are responsible for teaching ED students how to behave, cope, and manage their emotions. However, according to researchers, special education teachers of ED students may lack adequate pre-service experiences that helps them develop effective classroom management skills (Billingsley, Fal, & Williams, 2006; Katsiyannis, Zhang, & Conroy, 2003). Findings in a study conducted by Wagner et al., (2006) determined that “only about one fourth to one third of students with ED at any school level had teachers who reported receiving at least 8 hours of in-service training in issues related to work with students with disabilities” (p. 22).

Limited pre-service experiences can be problematic for both the special education teacher and ED students as researchers have raised questions regarding a connection between special education teachers’ lack of ability to control the classroom environment and an increase in negative behavior patterns among ED students. Osher, Bear, Sprague, and Doyle (2010) posited that when classroom contexts are chaotic and/or disruptive, there is an increased likelihood of teachers responding with punitive measures toward ED students that results in an

increase of their risk for emotional and behavioral adjustment problems. ED students are often educated in self-contained classrooms that have a low teacher to student ratio. The premise behind the self-contained setting is for special education students to receive instruction and behavior support in a setting with fewer students where more individualized attention can be devoted to their needs. Thus, adequate special education teacher preparation and strong classroom organization and behavior management skills are critical for students with ED who spend most of their time in the self-contained settings (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Oliver & Reschly, 2007).

A lack of adequate teacher preparation is only one of the issues that schools face as they seek to staff special education classrooms with highly qualified individuals who can manage the challenges associated with educating ED students. The shortage of special education teachers has resulted in special education classrooms being staffed with individuals who are in the certification process. Alternative certification programs can provide schools with individuals to fill special education positions. Researchers Katsiyannis, Zhang, and Conroy (2003), however, advise against using alternative certification as the primary means of filling special education positions as doing so could threaten comprehensive teacher education programs. In fact, a study of thirteen alternative certification programs found that individuals who obtained fast track credentials were not as prepared to meet the demands of the classroom as those special education teachers who completed traditional programs (Johnson & Birkeland, 2006). These accelerated programs raise the question of whether potential candidates have the right balance of pedagogical skills, content knowledge, and classroom management skills needed to successfully teach special education students. Nougaret, Scruggs, and Mastropieri (2004) found that novice special educators without preservice experiences were less effective

in the areas of planning and classroom practices than novice special educators who had the benefit of preservice training. Similar findings were reported when researchers compared the effectiveness of planning and classroom practices of special educators who completed traditional teacher preparation programs with those who completed alternative certification programs (Sindelar, Bishop, & Brownell, 2004). These studies support the need for traditional teacher training to provide a steady supply of highly qualified special education teachers. Teachers who lack the necessary skills to meet the specific behavioral and instructional needs of ED students ultimately impacts the quality of instruction as well as the achievement levels of these students (Cook, Landrum, Tankerley, & Kauffman, 2003; Wheby, Lane, & Falk, 2006).

Increased entry into teaching special education through alternative certification, permitted by NCLB (2001), has shifted the research focus from increasing the supply of special education teachers to developing teacher capacity and commitment (Sindelar, Brownell, Billingsley, 2010). Efforts to improve the professional practices of traditionally certified and alternatively certified teachers can improve retention rates and increase the professional practices of special education teachers. A substantial body of research revealed that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs were related to student achievement, motivation, as well as students' own sense of efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Studies of this kind can reveal effective methods for motivating ED students to put forth greater effort to attain academic achievement and to foster the development of coping skills that lessen the frequency of emotional or aggressive responses to situations.

Alternative certification routes have become a quicker and convenient means to acquire special education teacher credentials. Whether the pathways to credentialing are traditional or

alternative, teacher preparation programs must examine a variety of outcome variables associated with effective teacher performance (Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011). Bandura (1977, 1997), suggested the use of objective indicators on program effectiveness, practices, and policies and more subjective indicators such as teacher self-efficacy or perceptions of locus of control to determine teacher preparation and quality. Because a lack of self-efficacy can limit the potential of general education and special education teachers, schools must improve efforts to provide special education teachers with professional learning opportunities and in-service experiences that strengthen their self-efficacy, so they can improve the quality of instruction that special education students receive. Doing so is vital to lessen the achievement gap between special education students and their general education peers. Research has indicated that ED students often experience negative achievement, social, and behavioral outcomes that do not improve over time (Lane, Barton-Arwood, Nelson, & Wehby, 2008). These negative outcomes increase the likelihood that ED students will drop out of school at rates higher than those reported for general education students as well as students in other disability categories (Wagner & Cameto, 2004).

There is a lack of knowledge regarding whether the behavior problems of ED student are precipitated by academic deficiencies or whether academic deficiencies are at the root of their behavior challenges. “In fact, children with behavioral problems have been shown to receive fewer instructional opportunities” (Gunter, Denny, Jack, Shores, & Nelson, 1993, p. 188). Considering this research, it is important for special education teachers to receive training during the pre-service years that equips them with the classroom management skills and pedagogical knowledge needed to navigate the myriad challenges they will face in the self-

contained setting as well as provide instructional opportunities that improve the achievement outcomes for ED students.

Special Education Teachers

Special education teachers must be equipped with the instructional, organizational, and classroom management skills sets that empower them to plan, teach, and engage special needs students in learning that fosters measurable academic progress on state assessments as well goals stated on students' IEPs. Special education teacher retention is a national concern, as this group of educators, leave the profession at a faster rate than their general education counterparts. More than 13% of experienced special education teachers leave the field on an annual basis forcing school districts to intensify their recruiting efforts and expand their hiring budgets (Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette, & Benson, 2010). The Council for Exceptional children also found that 4 out of 10 special educators left the field permanently (Council for Exceptional Children, 2000). Factors shown to influence departure from the profession include low administrative support, burnout, excessive paperwork, and low levels of job satisfaction.

Special education teachers have additional legal responsibilities that can add to their stress levels and make their jobs less satisfying. Federal mandates for providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that is tailored to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities adds additional dilemmas that can lead to legal entanglements and create a sense of uncertainty for special educators (Nance & Calbrese, 2009). Further analysis of special education attrition data has revealed that teachers of students identified as ED, leave at a rate faster than their special education colleagues who teacher other subgroups of special needs students and report less job satisfaction (Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette, & Benson, 2010). A study of 191 special education teachers further substantiated previous research on the link

between stress, burnout and special education attrition. Adera and Bullock (2010) confirmed that job conditions and stress attributed to 70% of teachers' decision to leave their current positions. Additionally, Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997), through a comprehensive examination of studies conducted between 1969 to 1996, found that special education teachers who taught ED students experienced burnout at extremely high rates.

There is a variety of research that names specific factors that impact special education teacher turnover (Adera & Bullock 2010). Numerous studies have cited the need for further examination of specific factors that impact job dissatisfaction and lead to attrition among teachers who work with different disability groups (Billingsley and Cross 1992; Cross and Billingsley 1994; Brownell et al. 1995; Boe et al. 1996, 1997, 2008; Billingsley 2004b; Kaff 2004). Of concern is the rate at which teachers of ED students leave the profession. ED students present a unique set of instructional and behavioral challenges for special education teachers (Cancio, Albrecht, & Holden, 2014). Students who are identified as ED exhibit behavioral and emotional characteristics that impede their educational performance or an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual or other health reasons (Hallahan, Kauffman, Pullen, 2009; Miles & Singal, 2010). Research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (2012) revealed a high need for special education teachers as many states reported shortages in the availability of teachers to teach students with ED.

In addition to being responsible for drafting IEPs and helping students attain their IEP goals, ED teachers may have the responsibility to write functional behavioral assessments (FBA) and behavior improvement plans (BIP) for students who present with behaviors that appear to be related to environmental situations that cause extreme frustration. "Functional behavioral assessments (FBA) can be described as a variety of assessment strategies that

identify specific antecedent and consequent events that are directly related to repeated problem behaviors” (Horner, 1994). Assessments may include rating scales, interviews, and observations to determine what triggers cause students’ negative emotional or behavioral responses (Zirkel, 2011). Following the identification of possible antecedent behaviors, special education teachers are responsible for developing a (BIP). A BIP is a plan of action for reducing behaviors problem behaviors according to the needs of the students (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2000; Tumbull, Wilcox, Stow, Raper, & Hedges, 2000).

The addition of extra job duties often creates extra stress for special educators who teach ED students. These extra duties include large amounts of paperwork, coordination of services to effectively implement each student’s individual education plan (IEP), providing an education, and teaching students social skills to more appropriately interact with their non-disabled peers (Dodge, Keenan, & Lattanzi, 2004). Additionally, ED special education teachers must be prepared to adjust classroom routines as needed to address ED students’ behaviors. A review of the literature of special education teachers who teach ED students, illustrates that as students’ behavior challenges increase there is less time to focus on academics (Rousseau, 2011). The result of the day to day struggles to strike a balance between focusing on academics and reducing student behaviors can impact the teacher’s confidence, motivation, and decrease job satisfaction. This places teachers at risk for leaving the profession.

A topic potentially linked to the retention of special education teachers is self-efficacy beliefs, which has been positively correlated with teacher performance as well as student academic and social success (Bandura, 1997). Based on the tenets of self-efficacy, teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs should experience greater success in teaching students with ED. According to Allinder (1994), special education teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs have a positive

impact on instructional planning, organization of tasks, and improved student outcomes.

Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as well their beliefs about students with disabilities may affect the achievement of special education students as studies have shown that student performance is affected by teacher expectations (Kelhm, 2014). Therefore, it may be useful to identify other factors that increase special education teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and other factors that act in concert with their self-efficacy beliefs (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003).

Research indicates a need to help special education teachers develop the skills to support improved academic and behavioral outcomes for ED students (Boe, 2013). Compiling research-based knowledge of teachers who report high self-efficacy beliefs related to working with ED students, and information gathered through qualitative studies about these teachers may be utilized to assist other teachers in developing more effective practices that improve the achievement of students requiring specialized services (Jones, 2011). More useful and valid instruments used to examine teacher self-efficacy beliefs have evolved because of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Earlier struggles to develop instruments that would reliably measure teacher efficacy have produced an evolving field of research characterized by various definitions and numerous instruments (Jones, 2011). The measurement of teacher self-efficacy beliefs and other studies that revealed a relationship between teacher characteristics and self-efficacy beliefs have resulted in more reliable means to examine teacher self-efficacy (Jones, 2011).

Teacher Efficacy Instruments

Teacher self-efficacy is a concept that researchers have examined since the 1970's (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990). The concept gained the attention of educational researchers due to its possible influence on teachers' beliefs, practices, and student achievement. First examined by

the Rand Corporation as teacher efficacy, the efficacy construct has transformed into a multi-dimensional concept that has proven to have a powerful impact on teachers' motivation, instructional practices, and student achievement outcomes (Tschannen-Moran, Johnson, 2011). Numerous studies came about as a result early Rand studies and resulted in multiple theoretical foundations for examining the construct of self-efficacy. It is through these studies that valid self-efficacy instruments were developed.

The Rand studies, which were based on Rotter's (1954) locus of control theory, conceptualized teacher efficacy as a measure of teacher belief concerning ability to control learning (Jones, 2011). This study consisted of two questions that focused on a teacher's belief in his or her ability to control student outcomes based on environmental factors outside of school and factors based on a teacher's level of effort. The questions were:

When it comes right down to it, a teacher can't do much because most students' motivation and performance depends on his or her or environment and if I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.

(Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly & Sellman, 1977, pp. 159-160)

Researchers were critical of the Rand studies because they were too general in nature and did not focus on the daily tasks associated with teaching (Jones, 2011).

Over the years there has been mounting interest in teacher efficacy. Researchers have conducted numerous quantitative and qualitative studies to measure the construct. However, researchers struggled to reach to an agreement on how to define or how to effectively measure the concept of teacher self-efficacy (Jones, 2011). Early efforts to define the construct did not consider the unique and crucial role teachers' self-beliefs play in their ability to carry out the numerous tasks associated with teaching and learning contexts (Dellinger, Bobbett, Oliver, &

Ellett, 2008). As a result, researchers worked to refine the definition of teacher efficacy, advance teacher efficacy research, and develop valid instruments that measure the construct (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Using previous self-efficacy research from Bandura (1977), the theory of learned helplessness (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978), and their own qualitative research, (Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1983), attempted to create a conceptual framework for understanding teacher efficacy by separating teacher efficacy into teaching efficacy (TE), personal efficacy (PE), and personal teaching efficacy (PTE).

Teaching efficacy was related to teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and personal teaching efficacy was related to an individual teacher's beliefs about their effectiveness as a teacher (Ashton et al., 1983). Personal teaching efficacy was defined as a combination of personal efficacy and teaching efficacy (Ashton et al., 1983). They theorized that reciprocal relationships existed between teachers' sense of efficacy, students' behavior, and student achievement. They also postulated that contextual factors such as school conditions, staff relationships, and parent to teacher interactions also impacted teacher efficacy. "They conceptualized teacher efficacy as a constantly evolving situation-specific construct influenced daily by teachers' interactions with students, administrators, other teachers, and parents" (Jones, 2011, p. 14). The Rand studies, Ashton, et al., and Bandura's theory on efficacy development (1977) served as a catalyst for future research by Gibson and Dembo (1984) on teacher efficacy and instrument development.

Gibson and Dembo, using the previous findings of the Rand studies (Armor et al., 1976; Berman et al., 1977), Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977), and the work of Ashton et al.'s conceptual framework, developed a 30-item instrument to measure teacher efficacy. They surmised that a relationship between teacher efficacy and classroom behavior existed (Gibson

and Dembo, 1984) and should be addressed to reveal a possible link between teacher efficacy, teacher use of time on direct instruction, and student learning (Rosenshine, 1979). Participants completed the 30 item Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES), the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (BTES), Phase 2, 1973-76 (Ekstrom, 1975a), and consented to classroom observations. The findings of this study were used to further refine the definition of teacher efficacy and reveal the connection between efficacy levels and teacher persistence. The results from this study further supported a multidimensional concept of teacher efficacy that consisted of general teaching efficacy (GTE) and personal teaching efficacy (PTE). GTE was based on teachers' outcome expectations and PTE was based upon teachers' general opinions about teaching.

Findings also suggested that although high efficacy teachers spent more time in whole group instruction, they were more likely to persist in working with students to improve achievement outcomes, less flustered by off task behavior and interruptions during small group instruction, and more likely to successfully provide independent activities that kept students engaged and on task. Despite the findings of this study, Gibson and Dembo noted that future studies should examine elements of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as they relate to teacher efficacy in a variety of teaching contexts as well as examine the magnitude of teacher efficacy as it relates to the difficulty of specific tasks (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Their implications for future studies implied that teachers' efficacy levels can fluctuate within a variety of contexts and are influenced by both internal and external factors.

Evaluation of previous studies on teacher efficacy resulted in criticism of the questions purported to measure teacher efficacy. For example, Coladarci and Breton 1997 purported that GTE needed future clarification. Additionally, the GTE and PTE questions on the Gibson and Dembo instrument were reflective of idealistic beliefs in teacher's control of pupil behavior, a

fundamental attitude toward education (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990; Woolfolk, Hoy, & Rosoff, 1991), and analogous to the external and internal factor dependent locus of control construct (Guskey & Passaro, 1994). None of the researchers used Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as the theoretical framework to support their studies. Thus, early research on teacher efficacy lacked the fundamental elements needed to consider the reciprocal interactions between environmental factors, internal factors, and an individual's resulting behavior. The Gibson and Dembo instrument was not updated which lead researchers to assert that the questions were not reflective of the current job description of 21st century teachers (Dellinger et al., 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

A lack of consideration of these interactions and factors served as the motivation for researchers to develop instruments and that would validly assess teacher efficacy as well conduct research that would provide a definition of what teacher efficacy is and what it is not. Bandura (1977, 1993, 1997) conducted research that expanded the concept of self-efficacy and further specified how the construct teacher self-efficacy differs from teacher efficacy. According to Dellinger, et al., (2008), teacher efficacy beliefs focus on general views about affecting student performance or the outcome of successful teaching behaviors whereas teacher self-efficacy beliefs are specific and focus on teachers' confidence in their ability to successfully complete tasks related to their current teaching situation. Given that self-efficacy beliefs are believed to be task and situation specific, researchers advanced the notion that they function as learned beliefs acquired through active participation in activities that are contextually based (Bandura, 1997; Maddux, 1999). The contextual factors, school conditions, staff relationships, school organizational structure, and parent teacher relationships, are thought to be contributing factors to teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (Jones, 2011).

Using Bandura's definition, researchers sought to develop instruments that would provide valid results on teacher self-efficacy. Several instruments came about because of the inconsistencies associated with previous instruments used to measure teacher self-efficacy. The Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES) currently called the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES); (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) and the Teachers' Efficacy Beliefs System—Self Form (TEBS-Self) (Dellinger, et al. 2008) were developed to address validation concerns with previous instruments used to measure teacher efficacy. These instruments included elements that aligned with Bandura's (1977) definition of self-efficacy and have gone through validation studies and are both currently used to measure teacher self-efficacy. It should be noted that previous research used the terms teacher efficacy and teacher self-efficacy synonymously. However, because prior teacher efficacy studies failed to consider classroom and situation specific factors related to self-efficacy theory and a lack of conceptualization of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), researchers view findings from previous teacher efficacy studies as invalid (Brouwers & Tomic, 2003; Deemer & Minke, 1999; Dellinger, 2005, 2002, Denzine, Cooney, & McKenzie, 2005; Guskey & Passaro, 1994).

“The TEBS-Self was developed as one instrument in a system of measures to assess self-efficacy beliefs of teachers” (Dellinger, et al, 2008, p. 756). The TEBS-Self was designed to assess teachers' self-efficacy beliefs about tasks that are associated with correlates of effective teaching and learning, all within the context of their own classrooms (Dellinger et al., 2008). Dellinger (2002) wrote that the subscales are grounded in self-efficacy theory. Additionally, the subscales allow for examination of self-efficacy beliefs based on the context in which the behavior occurs (Dellinger, 2002). To provide empirical evidence that the TEBS-

Self produced valid and reliable data assessing teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, results from three separate studies involving 2373 K-6 elementary teachers from rural, urban, and suburban, underwent principal component analysis and reliability analysis (Cash, 2014).

Validity studies were conducted in three phases that examined the wording of items, correlation of items related to best practices in teaching, and an item rating review by experts in the field of education. Phase one of the validity and reliability studies involved examining the question stems. Statements on earlier versions of teacher efficacy instruments made use of question stems that used the words *I can*, or *I am able to*. With this in mind, the researcher chose to add a third stem stated in terms of participants' beliefs to align the instrument items with the tenets of self-efficacy theory. The results from 434 teacher participants indicated a weak correlation between the BELIEF item stem and traditional item stems and a stronger correlation between the two traditional item stems (Dellinger, et al., 2008). Given the weak correlation between the non-traditional and the traditional items and adhering to the suggestions of previous teacher efficacy studies, researchers modified the question stems on the instrument to reflect the tenets and language of self-efficacy theory.

Phase two examined items related to an observation framework called PACES (Davis, Pool, & Mits-Cash, 2000; Ellett, 1999; Ellett, Annunziata, & Schiavone, 2002) found to be associated with meaningful classroom practices as related to effective teaching and learning such as long-range planning, managing the learning environment, and professional responsibilities (Dellinger et al., 2008). The final phase involved the "rating of 51 initial items as to the importance of each task in assessing teachers' beliefs in their teaching abilities" (Dellinger, et al., 2008, p. 757). Completion of the final phase resulted in a 30 item self-assessment self-efficacy belief instrument scored using a four-point rating scale. "The four-

point rating scale consisted of the following: 1=very weak belief in my capabilities, 2 = moderate belief in my capabilities, 3 = strong belief in my capabilities, and 4 = very strong belief in my capabilities” (Dellinger et al., 2008, p. 757).

Use of the TEBS-Self in a longitudinal study of nurse educators also confirmed the questionnaire as a valid instrument to measure teacher self-efficacy beliefs. The self-efficacy beliefs of 70 nurse educators who took part in a two-year faculty development fellows program were examined. This study was conducted to determine whether participation in professional development impacted the self-efficacy beliefs of the participants. A control group, consisting of the same number of participants, did not participate in any professional development. Curriculum materials were designed to support the development of nurse educators’ leadership skills, instructional methods, and best practices in medical education. Participants received online training development, took part in peer observations, and participated in email discussion groups. The TESB-Self was found to have a reliability of 0.90 and was administered to participants using a non-randomized, quasi-experimental, pretest–mid test–posttest design (Singh et al., 2103).

The results of the study indicated that participation in the fellows program improved the self-efficacy beliefs of nurse educators and helped to sustain higher self-efficacy beliefs after a year (Singh et al., 2013). Data showed that fellows cohort participant’ scores on all subscales improved between the baseline, 6-months, and 12-months intervals. “The interaction of scores and fellowship in the “within subject contrasts” comparisons were significant implying that the participation in the program had a significant effect” (Singh et al., 2013, p. 631). In contrast, the self-efficacy beliefs of the control group remained stagnant. Although, this longitudinal study involved faculty members in the medical field, examination of self-efficacy

beliefs can be generalized as an important construct for all educators. According to Hoy and Woolfolk (1990); Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Nevgi, (2007) and Bümen, (2009), faculty development within higher education systems as well as professional development within schools improves the self-efficacy beliefs of teachers. Academic growth of educators and improved student outcomes in any system of education is dependent on the growth, expertise, and confidence of faculty members (Singh, de Grave, Ganjiwale, Burdick, van der Vleuten, 2013). Regardless of the field, teachers must believe they can produce the desired outcomes or they will have very little motivation or incentive to move forward when they encounter difficult situations (Caprara et al., 2003).

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy may be conceptualized as individual teachers' belief in their own ability to plan, organize, and carry out activities that are required to attain given goals (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Self-efficacy beliefs are part of a larger self-system that mediates human behavior (Bandura, 1997). The contexts in which the activities occur are either internal or external, self-referent in nature, and directed toward the successful completion of specific tasks (Bandura, 1977). Research has shown that self-efficacy beliefs predict outcomes, especially when efficacy beliefs are measured concerning the completion of specific tasks (Pajares, 1996). For this reason, special education teachers may hold higher self-efficacy beliefs for teaching special education students who are classified as learning disabled (LD) and low self-efficacy for teaching ED special education students. LD students typically do not present intense behavior concerns like ED students. Numerous studies have shown that teachers who are unusually effective in bringing about positive academic outcomes, such as high levels of academic achievement, are highly confident in their ability to teach all students

(Guskey, 1998). These data have important implications for student achievement, as special education students generally lag behind in achievement when compared to the achievement levels of their non-disabled peers (Feng & Sass, 2013).

A teachers' self-efficacy is a construct that influences how much effort a teacher will expend to ensure that students learn. The stronger a teacher's belief in their ability to positively impact student achievement, the more motivated they are to take additional steps to improve instructional delivery, use varied teaching strategies, and consistently modify practices based on students' needs. Teachers who possess low efficacy levels demonstrate less motivation and are less resilient in the face of obstacles. Self-efficacy beliefs are the origin of human motivation that causes individuals to take action and influences their emotional reactions or responses to stimuli (Bandura, 1989). Teachers' self-efficacy has been associated with teacher classroom behaviors, such as the efforts they invested in teaching, motivation, and the goals they set for themselves and their students (Leyser, Zeiger, & Romi, 2011). Hence, a teacher with low self-efficacy will likely get caught in a cycle of self-fulfilling outcomes of failure because they do not believe they have the skills and knowledge needed to bring about positive achievement outcomes for students. As a result, they lack the motivation to participate in activities that will improve their skill level and strengthen their knowledge base of teaching and learning.

Self-efficacy determines how much effort teachers are willing to put forth help struggling students (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Factors that impact teacher self-efficacy, job, satisfaction, and the attrition rates for ED special education teachers can impact student achievement. This implies that teachers who have low self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to view student achievement as out of their control and dependent on outside factors. A study

involving 610 teachers that explored their self-efficacy beliefs related to classroom management, perception of student misbehavior, and intent to leave the field suggested that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs for managing student behavior were related to how they perceived the misbehavior (Tsouloupas, Carson, Matthews, Grawitch, & Barber, 2010). Bandura (1997) held that teachers with low self-efficacy focus on their personal deficits as well as deficits within their students which significantly influence their classroom interactions and their level of investment with helping struggling students.

When obstacles are encountered in the classroom, the amount of time and effort invested is proportional to teachers' levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs serve as motivating factors that can be, as previously mentioned, self-aiding and support greater self-efficacy improving behaviors. By the same token, when an individual has low self-efficacy, their thought patterns about possible failures can be self-hindering and reduce the individual's level of self-efficacy. Teachers' self-efficacy was associated with their classroom behavior, such as the efforts they invested in teaching and their goals (Leyser, Zeiger, & Romi, 2011). Teacher behaviors such as modifying instructional practices, responding to student's misbehaviors, and response to poor outcomes are behaviors that are impacted by a teacher's level of self-efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) pointed out that, greater efficacy enabled teachers to be less critical of student errors and persevere with students who were having difficulties and was also associated with using more positive classroom management strategies. Teachers with a high sense of efficacy were more open to new ideas and more willing to experiment with new methods to meet the needs of their students (Leyser, Zeiger, & Romi, 2011).

The impact of a teacher's self-efficacy beliefs combined with a predisposition for internal locus of control and their positive impact on teachers' practices closely align with Rosenthal's (1997) affect-effort theory, also referred to as the Pygmalion effect, established a connection between teacher expectations of students and how they acted toward students. This theory suggests that if teacher changes his or her expectations of the academic performance of students, the teacher will act more favorably to the student and the effort level to teach the student will change as well (Klehm, 2014). When considering that teacher self-efficacy and locus of control are linked to student outcomes and affect-effort theory is linked to teacher expectation and effort, in theory when these constructs are at the right balance within the special education teacher, the achievement of their students will rise. Based upon the tenets of self-efficacy, teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs should be effective in working with ED students (Jones, 2011).

Teachers may lower expectations for some students and if they do not feel that they have the capacity to meet their needs, they may also feel that the "educational progress for their students with severe and obvious disabilities is beyond the scope of their responsibilities" (Cook, 2012, p. 211). Given the emotional and behavioral inconsistencies that ED students demonstrate, special education teachers may have high efficacy beliefs for instructional skills and strategies but possess low efficacy beliefs for managing student behavior. Low efficacy beliefs have been shown to negatively impact teachers' desire or motivation to work with ED students (Cook, 2002; Wagner et al., 2006). The relationship that ED students have with their special education teachers is a key factor that can decrease negative behaviors (Hughes, Cavell, & Wilson, 2001), improve academic outcomes (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008), and the development of trusting relationships that supports their successful integration into the

classroom and school environment (Jones, 2011). Bandura (1997) wrote that teachers' efficacy beliefs are neither consistent across the many kinds of tasks that special education teachers are required to perform nor are they consistent across different subject matter. For this reason, it is important that school administrators have knowledge of special education teachers' need for self-efficacy building experiences that increase their confidence and their capacity to successfully teach ED students.

Sources of Efficacy Expectations

An efficacy expectation is a belief in the ability to carry out specific actions to successfully complete a task (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Bandura (1986, 1997; Mongillo, 2011) posited that efficacy experiences are obtained through four sources; mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological arousal. Self-efficacy is only impacted when an individual cognitively processes the efficacy sources. However, the individual chooses and processes the information obtained from efficacy sources differently for specific types of information. Efficacy sources are generated through self-appraisals or self-judgments from previous successful or unsuccessful completion of tasks. Self-efficacy perceptions influence the kind of task completion scenarios individuals form in their minds. Bandura (1989) wrote people who hold high self-efficacy beliefs visualize successful outcomes and individuals who have low self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to visualize failure scenarios that become self-fulfilling. High efficacy beliefs foster and strengthen self-perceptions and enhance future performance of similar activities. "Perceived self-efficacy and cognitive simulation affect each other bidirectional" (Bandura, 1989, p.1176). A high sense of efficacy fosters positive thought patterns that act upon one's ability to plan efficacious courses of action that in turn strengthen an individual's self-perception of efficacy (Bandura & Adams,

1977; Kazdin, 1978). Simply stated, an individual's self-efficacy beliefs act in concert with thoughtful planning and purposeful actions.

Mastery experiences. Mastery experiences are those which an individual deems as successful or those that an individual deems as satisfactory. Central to the research on self-efficacy, the number of successes and failures that an individual experience has a strong impact on self-efficacy levels. According to Hoy and Spero (2005), "mastery experiences are the most powerful source of efficacy information; the perception that teaching has been successful raises efficacy expectations that teaching will be successful in the future" (p. 345). Mastery experiences can only occur through successfully teaching students or performing specific tasks. Confirmation is obtained through written form such as students' tests scores, verbal responses, or behaviors. Additionally, mastery experiences impact efficacy expectations as individuals believe that future attempts will also be successful. Teachers base their judgment of efficacy on how effectively and frequently they have achieved goals or mastered similar tasks in the past (Bembenutty, 2007).

Mastery experiences develop through either pleasurable or anxiety building teaching experiences. These experiences can build confidence or worsen feelings of incompetence (Sandholtz & Ringstaff, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). ED students demonstrate behaviors that are unpredictable. It is not uncommon for a special education teacher to become involved in a cycle of figuring out why behaviors occur and determining which interventions work best to decrease the likelihood of the behavior occurring in the future. Unsuccessful attempts can negatively impact mastery experiences and exacerbate feelings of incompetence. A task that can be stressful, especially for special education teachers who teach ED students, is developing FBAs and BIPs for students. This can be an anxiety building experience further

exacerbated by unsuccessful attempts to identify and implement interventions that diminish negative antecedent behaviors. Mastery self-efficacy building experiences provide the motivation needed to inspire special education teachers to continue despite failures. In the end, it is special education teachers' confidence in their ability to perform specific tasks to achieve desired outcomes that impacts their self-efficacy.

Vicarious experiences. Self-efficacy building experiences can be obtained by observing a respected colleague. Vicarious experiences are obtained through observing other teachers successfully complete tasks that are considered challenging. Teachers also obtain vicarious experiences by listening to colleagues' anecdotal stories or accounts of successful teaching experiences. Vicarious experiences serve as real world models that convey the message that teaching is a manageable experience (Szabo, Bailey, & Ward, 2005). Observing a colleague efficaciously teach a difficult skill or successfully use an innovative strategy that engages students is a way to intensify motivation and provide an incentive to attempt challenging teaching tasks (Grant, 2006).

Observing a colleague teach a skill fosters a feeling of "I can do this too". However, the model must be deemed credible. Observing a credible model successfully completing a task has a positive impact on the self-efficacy of the observer; however, observing a poor performance decreases the self-efficacy of the observer (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Interestingly, the more noticeable the differences between the model and the observer, such as race, experience level, and gender the less impact on the self-efficacy levels of the observer.

Verbal persuasion. Verbal persuasion pertains to verbal interactions that teachers receive about their performance and the prospects for success from important others in the teaching context, such as administrators, colleagues, parents, and members of the community

at large (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 945). This form of efficacy expectation is the most widely used and according to Bandura (1977), the weakest form of efficacy expectation because its source is not derived from a sense of personal accomplishment. For example, when an individual is not satisfied with their performance of a task, verbal persuasion holds little influence over their feelings. Although identified as the weakest form, when praise is consistently given from someone in a supervisory role, an expert, or a trustworthy individual, verbal persuasion, combined with other successful experiences, can serve as an immediate booster for self-efficacy levels.

Physiological states. Physiological states are factors associated with the fear of performing a particular task. These factors can arouse stressful feelings that can have a positive or negative impact on efficacy levels. “Strong emotional reactions provide cues about anticipated success or failure.” (Schunk, 2012, p. 108). These emotional reactions are related to an individual’s thoughts, fears, or a lack of confidence in their ability to complete a task. Situations such as this can lower self-efficacy beliefs. On the other hand, repeated successful experiences with completing a feared task, has the potential to strengthen an individual’s self-efficacy beliefs.

Development of Teacher Self-Efficacy

Examining special education teacher efficacy is of importance to teacher educators, administrators, and policy makers because research indicates that teacher who are confident in their ability to teach have a positive impact on student achievement and teacher retention (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Bandura explained that self-efficacy is developed through efficacy expectations and that the critical time for the development of self-efficacy is in the first years of teaching (Grant, 2006). This pivotal first year has a greater correlation to teacher retention

than academic performance or the quality of the teacher education program (Boreen, 2009). Most teachers, who leave the profession early on, do so because of perceptions of a lack of efficacy, job pressures, and a diminished sense of accomplishment and achievement (Vierstraete, 2005).

A study of novice teachers determined that efficacy rose during teacher preparation and student teaching but fell with actual experience as a teacher (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Special educators of ED students are vulnerable for efficacy reduction due to experiences with the day to day struggles of teaching students whose behaviors and emotional outburst cause disruptions. Students classified as ED typically experience difficulties in school that cannot be attributed solely to social maladjustment and are characterized by one or more of the following: difficulty in learning, lack of healthy interpersonal relationships, decreased or unhappy mood, physical problems, or fears related to school (United States Department of Education, 2007). Additionally, ED special education teacher reported that not having enough time to prepare for instruction and reduced instructional time due to behavioral disruptions as factors related to leaving the profession (George & George, 1995; Rousseau, 2011; Van Alstine, 2010). Efforts to imbue ED students with the motivation to acquire more appropriate and acceptable ways of responding to unfavorable or stressful situations are not immediately successful. Consistent unresponsiveness to behavior interventions frequently causes teachers to apply punitive consequences and reject students (Adkins, 2009). In the end, the special education teacher's efficacy level decreases as they become more skeptical of their own abilities.

Mentorship. The goal of any teacher mentoring program should be to develop effective teachers who learn best practices for instruction and classroom management and to improve

teacher retention of the best teachers (Glover & Mutchler, 2000). As previously mentioned, a 2005 study of novice teachers conducted by Hoy and Spero revealed that novice teacher efficacy levels decreased during the induction year. The factors that impacted a decrease in efficacy range from unrealistic expectations of teaching, high stress, student discipline, and feelings of isolation (Stanulis, Burrill, & Ames, 2007). Navigating the myriad of tasks such as writing IEPs, meeting deadlines, scheduling IEP meetings, and staying within compliance guidelines requires organizational skills and putting structures in place to systematically manage and balance instructional duties with administrative ones.

A seasoned special education mentor teacher leader can answer curriculum questions, help with scheduling, make introductions to other staff members, and help the novice teacher draft a professional growth plan for the year. This creates a supportive and collegial work environment that feels less isolated. Very often, teachers who do not receive adequate support in their first years leave schools and abandon teaching in favor of other professions (Kutsyuruba, 2012). The support of a seasoned mentor during the novice phase can provide, moral, emotional and professional support during this “make or break time (Kutsyuruba, 2012).

The purpose of mentorship efforts ranges from orientation and induction of new teachers to instructional improvement with the intent to change the culture of the school to a more collaborative learning environment (Podsen & Denmark, 2000). Quality mentorship programs provide teachers with supportive experiences that assist their professional growth, resilience, and teaching efficacy. Novice teachers will experience successes and failures during the initial years. Constructive feedback from a mentor can validate a successful attempt or serve as a guiding and supportive presence to help ease the feelings associated with unsuccessful teaching experiences or situations that did not go as planned.

Opportunity for ongoing contact between the mentor and the mentee is a primary feature of successful mentoring efforts. Meeting on a weekly basis with a mentor and creating an agenda to guide the conversation keeps the meeting on track and forces the mentee to reflect on the events that transpired since the previous meeting. According to Wynn, Carboni, and Patall (2007), beginning teachers need psychological and instructional support. Psychological support involves meeting the varying emotional needs of new teachers. Instructional support helps the new teacher learn things such as the local and state standards, basic lesson planning, and practices for managing student behavior.

Rowley (1999) identified six characteristics of a good mentor that include: a commitment to mentoring, accepting of a beginning teacher, skillful at providing instructional support, and effective in developing interpersonal relationships. Mentors must have the ability to collaborate with colleagues and articulate beliefs, practices, and goals in ways that are understandable to new teachers (Vierstraete, 2005). “Furthermore, teachers remain in the profession when they belong to professional learning communities that have at their heart high-quality interpersonal relationships founded on collegiality, trust, and respect” (Kutsyuruba, 2012, p. 248).

School leadership. According to Lucas (1999), if mentoring programs are to be successful in lowering teacher attrition rates, administrators must push mentorship programs beyond socialization by matching new teachers with competent mentors who can assist with the ongoing process of planning and teaching lessons, reflecting on the results, and then making informed changes. In addition, mentor teachers should also promote lifelong learning and be knowledgeable of curriculum standards, effective instructional strategies, and other current issues and trends in education (Vierstraete, 2005).

The principal has a critical role in the functioning of an effective teacher mentoring program (Kutsyuruba, 2012) and is responsible for the implementation of a structured and effective mentoring program. Selection of seasoned teachers to serve as mentors involves knowing who has the capacity, professionalism, and the teaching knowledge to guide and motivate a novice teacher. Wynn, Carboni, and Patall (2007) suggest that principal leadership is critical for the effective mentoring and retention of novice teachers because it promotes a culture of support and creates the opportunity for shared values and vision. Educational scholars and researchers suggest that professional development through focused support, including continued coaching and mentoring may be more helpful to novice teachers (Pianta 2006; Pianta et al. 2008).

School administrators must act with purpose and forethought when providing professional development opportunities designed to increase the teaching capacity of special education teachers. Authentic teacher development focuses on helping the teacher build “a personal understanding of pedagogy—the art and science of teaching and learning—that allows a teacher to continually refine and adjust his/her practice to consistently and effectively help students master content and skills” (Glover & Mutchler, 2000, p. 37). Principals must provide corrective and timely feedback after observations that highlight lesson strengths, weaknesses, and specific comments that stimulate reflection and promote the use of instructional best practices.

Professional development. The significant need to help special education teachers prepare for the academic and behavioral needs of students with ED is clear (Boe, 2013). Some of the existing research indicates that special education teachers who have supportive school environments and professional development are more successful (Van Alstine, 2010). ED

students have behavior and emotional challenges that can contribute to teacher stress, job satisfaction, and commitment to the profession (Evans & Tribble, 1986). In addition to the emotional challenges, and providing quality instruction, ED special education teachers have paperwork requirements and are responsible for helping students develop more appropriate social skills (Boe, 2013). The importance of recruiting appropriate candidates and preparing teachers with the skills necessary to cope with the unique demands of the job managing ED classrooms is critical to improving academic and social outcomes for ED students (Boe, 2013).

Teachers who lack sufficient preparation or opportunities for professional development are likely to leave the profession (Van Alstine, 2010). Although efforts are made to adequately provide pre-service experiences, ED teachers are often not prepared for the inevitable challenges associated with teaching students who demonstrate extreme behaviors. ED teachers who lack the skills sets needed to manage and control the learning environment can quickly lose confidence in their ability to be effective (Boe, 2013). Professional development at the school level in conjunction with mentoring programs can help build a solid foundation for a new special education teacher as well as support the development of stronger efficacy beliefs (Burkman, 2012). Bowman (1989) suggests that the most important service we can provide teachers is to engage them in discussions of our strategies for teaching, our purpose, and other strategies we could employ. Such discussions, according to Yuen (2012), help novice teachers create and articulate their philosophy and core beliefs about education. Engaging in conversations about teaching and learning can validate a teacher's perspective or clear up misconceptions about strategies or best practices.

Transforming what is learned from pre-service and professional development into classroom practices takes time, high self-efficacy, and reflection. If teachers are not prepared

for the demands of managing the students and the activities of paraprofessional in a classroom for students with ED, they can quickly experience dissatisfaction with the job (George & George, 1995; Van Alstine, 2010). Burkman (2012) found that a high percentage of novice special education teachers identified teaching emotionally disturbed students as a major challenge. Thus, the school administrator needs to be vigilant in assisting the special education teacher with implementation of the newly learned material. The dynamics of teaching ED students requires the special education teacher to have knowledge of effective behavior strategies and be especially skillful in using best practices that support academic and social achievement. Thus, the teacher may not be able fully identify or to prioritize their professional needs. The administrator must make diligent efforts to determine what their most pressing professional needs are as well as their professional interests.

Although a school administrator may develop a school-wide professional development plan, it is imperative that the individual needs of special education teachers be taken into consideration. Supervisors have a responsibility to be aware of staff needs and act purposefully to coordinate professional development (Cancio, Albrecht, & Holden Johns, 2014). Professional development geared toward improving professional practices must address the myriad of issues ED special education teachers will face in the classroom. Facilitating opportunities for special education teachers to receive training that will support their development into confident and competent teachers should be the primary goal of professional development.

Summary

An analysis of the current literature revealed that self-efficacy is a phenomenon that is experienced by all teachers. Research revealed that self-efficacy has been the focus of

numerous studies since the 1970s to develop instruments that measure the construct and produce valid results. Significant literature exists on sources of self-efficacy development as well as how self-efficacy beliefs impact teacher practices. Research on special education teachers reveal that nearly 9% of first year special education teachers leave the classroom after their first year of teaching due to factors such as student behaviors, lack of administrative support, and paperwork requirements associated with teaching ED students. Researchers agree that special education teachers who teach ED students are at a greater risk for leaving the profession and need self-efficacy building experiences. Additionally, Mitchell and Arnold (2004) found that “among teachers of students who experience emotional or behavioral difficulties professional attrition has reached crisis proportions” (p. 215).

In the area of self-efficacy development, research revealed that mentorship, administrative support, and professional development were all factors that could enhance self-efficacy beliefs. Understanding how to provide experiences that facilitate and sustain high self-efficacy beliefs in beginning and seasoned special education teachers is a key concept can that improve their decision-making capabilities and implementation of classroom practices that lead to higher student achievement, and a greater commitment to the teaching profession (Erdem & Demirel, 2007). Presently, there is a gap in the literature on the experiences of special education teachers of ED students. This study sought to address the gap in the research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how special education teachers view their self-efficacy for teaching ED students and how self-efficacy helps them navigate teaching tasks within the self-contained setting. This transcendental phenomenological study seeks to understand how special education teachers of ED students within ABC school view their self-efficacy and how self-efficacy helps them manage classroom tasks associated with teaching in a self-contained setting. A phenomenological research design that includes triangulation of data will be used to add credibility to the findings. Research questions were designed to engage special education teachers who teach ED students in reflective dialogue that presents how they view their self-efficacy and the essence of how self-efficacy helps them deal with tasks and challenges associated with teaching ED students within a self-contained setting.

This study followed the methods used for transcendental phenomenological studies. Phenomenological studies seek to answer a central question and sub-questions designed to gather data about a phenomenon that all research participants have experienced (Creswell, 2013). Further Moustakas (1994) stated that “the aim of phenomenological research is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13). Following the guidelines for qualitative research, the methods section will provide an explanation of the intended qualitative research plan design that includes sections that will explain the research questions, setting, participants, and the procedures for gaining institutional approval for the study. In addition to the aforementioned sections, the researcher’s role, data collection and data analysis procedures,

study trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations associated with conducting the study will be included.

Design

The qualitative phenomenological research design is appropriate when it is important to examine the common or shared experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 81).

According to van Manen (1990) and Moustakas (1994), the exploration of a phenomenon expressed as a single concept that is shared by a heterogeneous group of individuals is characteristic of transcendental phenomenological studies. This present qualitative phenomenological study will explore the concept of self-efficacy to describe the common views and experiences of special education teachers who instruct ED students.

The phenomenological approach was chosen because the study seeks to explore individual self- efficacy views and combine them to develop a description of the universal essence of self-efficacy (Creswell, 2007). Although there are numerous studies that have examined general education teachers' self-efficacy, a gap exists in the qualitative literature on the self-efficacy views of special education teachers of who instruct ED students. To address this gap, several forms of data will be collected during this transcendental phenomenological study that includes interviews, focus group interviews and participant blog responses. This present study seeks to add to the current literature by focusing specifically on the self-efficacy views of special education teachers who instruct ED students. Additionally, this study seeks to bring forth qualitative data that describes how self-efficacy helps special education teachers of ED students develop the skills sets to overcome the challenges they encounter with students' behavior, compliance guidelines, and working with a paraprofessional.

This study followed four distinct processes that are characteristic of transcendental phenomenological studies. Bracketing, the initial procedure, requires the researcher to rid him or herself of suppositions and view things in a different way or learn to see things as they are without interference of personal judgment (Moustakas, 1994). Edmund Husserl, German philosopher, developed the concept of *epoche* to explain the process of bracketing.

Development of the *epoche* requires the researcher to set aside personal experiences so that analysis of participants' responses is pure and not influenced by biases. The next essential process in transcendental phenomenological research is reduction. "Reduction calls for the researcher to reduce each experience to a singular incident in and for itself (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). During this stage of the research process, data from interviews and focus group interviews are reduced to significant statements. Individual statements that share similarities are joined together.

Combining significant statements assists in identifying central themes. Themes are further reduced and combined to reveal the context of what participants experienced and reduced further to identify descriptions of how the participants experienced the experience, under what conditions, situations, or in what context" (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Prior to the final step in a transcendental phenomenological study, the researcher writes about the role of the researcher that describes the researcher's experiences in terms of the context and situations that have influenced him or her (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Finally, the structural and textural descriptions are combined, and the researcher develops the essence or meaning that names the common experiences of all the participants (Creswell, 2013). This section is descriptive and should leave the reader with a vivid sense of what the participants experienced. Transcendental

phenomenological research is a procedurally intensive process that requires steadfastness and determination.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this transcendental phenomenological study:

RQ1: How do special education teachers view their self-efficacy for dealing with behavior issues when teaching ED students?

RQ2: How do special education teachers view their self-efficacy for planning the work of the para-professional in the ED classroom?

RQ3: How do special education teachers view their self-efficacy for meeting IEP and eligibility paperwork compliance deadlines?

RQ4: How do special education teachers view their self-efficacy for helping ED students meet IEP goals?

RQ5: How do special education teachers of ED students view their self-efficacy for helping ED students attain higher academic and behavior outcomes?

Setting

Elementary special education teachers from ABC School district who teach in self-contained ED classrooms were chosen for this study because the self-contained model is not used to serve ED students at the middle and high school levels. The study will utilize special education teachers who teach within ABC school district. This school district, located in southeastern Virginia, has approximately 30,000 students of which 12.1% have been identified as needing an individualized special education program to meet their academic and socio-emotional needs. Sixty-three percent of the student population is considered economically disadvantaged. Population wise, this city in southeastern Virginia has approximately 183,000

residents and consists of a mixture of suburban and urban areas. ABC school district is categorized as an urban school district due to the number of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. There are 24 elementary schools in the district, so it is assumed that there will be an adequate number of potential participants that meet the sampling criteria.

The special education supervisory staff for ABC school district is led by an executive director. In addition to providing leadership for the special education department, other academic related services that include gifted education and school counselors, also receive direct leadership from this individual. Special education supervisory staff coordinates placement of all special students and each is assigned to certain schools at the secondary, middle, and elementary school level.

The rationale for selecting this site was based on several factors. Having been employed for 26 years with the school district and serving as an assistant principal, I developed an interest in researching special education teachers who teach ED students. ABC school district assessment data indicates that ED students are at greater risk for out of school suspensions, poor course performance, and below benchmark performance on Virginia Standards of Learning assessments. With these factors in mind, the research site was chosen so that data can be used to design purposeful staff development opportunities that enhance special education teachers' self-efficacy for providing instruction that leads to higher academic, social, and behavioral outcomes for students who have an emotional disability.

Participants

This transcendental phenomenological study employed a purposive sampling method to secure special education teachers who teach ED students. Purposive sampling is best suited for phenomenological studies because the participants have common experiences of the phenomenon under examination (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, purposive or criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2001). Participants will be tenured special education teachers who have taught ED students for three or more years in ABC School District located in southeastern Virginia. As previously stated, more than 13% of experienced special education teachers leave the field on an annual basis forcing school districts to intensify their recruiting efforts and expand their hiring budgets (Viel-Ruma et al., 2010). An immense need exists for special education teachers to create high-quality educational opportunities and to level the playing field for students with disabilities (Nance & Calbrese, 2009).

When considering the sample size for phenomenological studies, Creswell (2013) cited instances where previous research studies have used between 1 and 325 participants. For the purposes of this study, the target number of participants was 15 special education teachers who met the sampling criteria. It was believed that a sample size of 15 participants would provide ample data to achieve the goal of data saturation. However, the final number of participants was 10 special education teachers. The chart below shows their demographic data.

Table 1

Participant Overview

Pseudonym	Gender	Years Teaching ED Students	Taught Other SPED Categories
Debra	Female	15	Yes
Martha	Female	9	Yes
Albert	Male	5	Yes
Susan	Female	27	Yes
Stephanie	Female	11	No
Karen	Female	12	Yes
Mandy	Female	18	Yes
Gail	Female	5	No
Anna	Female	10	Yes
Barbara	Female	4	Yes

Procedures

After successfully defending the research proposal and receiving IRB (Appendix A) approval, the proposal and a research application (Appendix B) were submitted to ABC school district. Following the approval to conduct research from ABC school district, a list of schools that housed ED self-contained classrooms was obtained from a special education supervisor. Two forms of communication, emails and phone calls, were used to contact building administrators. Phone calls were made to the building administrators to obtain permission to leave interest letters containing my contact information, participation criteria, the purpose of the study, and a request for study participation in each special education teacher's school mailboxes. Participants who responded within two weeks were contacted by phone. Once participants agreed to take part in the study, meeting locations and times were scheduled. Arrangements were made to finalize a date, time, and location for focus group

interviews to maximize time and create a sense of collegiality among the potential participants.

During the face-to-face visit, participants were informed of the purpose for the study, the methodology that will be used, and how the data will be used. A definition of self-efficacy as related to their positions as special education teachers was provided to support participants' understanding of the phenomenon being studied. During the meeting, participants were given a package that contained information about my personal and professional connections to the study and informed consent forms (Appendix C) to sign upon deciding to participate in the study. Stamped, self-addressed envelopes for participants who decided to participate were included in the package. At the second and third-week intervals, teachers who had not mailed back an informed consent form were contacted by phone to remind them of the significance of the study and to sign and send the informed consent back in the self-addressed stamped envelope. Upon receiving informed consent forms, each was labeled with a number and assigned a pseudo name used throughout the research process to preserve the anonymity of participants.

Data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and a participant blog. Individual interviews and focus group interviews were audio recorded and transcribed word for word. Interview questions (Appendix D) were reviewed by a colleague who had completed the dissertation process and had extensive experience with the qualitative method. An interview pilot was conducted with a small sample of special education teachers to ensure the clarity and wording of the interview questions. Responses from the participant blog were printed and sorted by date. All forms of data collected were kept in a locked file cabinet located in my home. When data collection ended, all data sources were

analyzed and organized by color. A concept map style graphic organizer depiction of the data was created as a visual image of significant statements that assisted with identifying themes.

The Researcher's Role

I entered into this research study with an understanding of my personal biases and how my experiences shaped my perspective of the topic. I have had a 26-year history of employment with the setting for this study. I had access to special education teachers that met the sampling criteria. The various positions I held during my employment include: classroom teacher, Title I Reading Specialist, 21st Century Community Learning Center Afterschool Coordinator, and Summer Program for Arts Recreation and Knowledge (SPARK) administrator. My various experiences enabled me to meet several of the study participants. However, none of the potential participants that I have supervised during the last five years were extended a study invitation. My experiences as an elementary school administrator helped to shape my view of special education teachers who teach ED students.

My 22nd year in education proved to be a challenge for me as I was transferred to a new building that had a first-year special education teacher in the ED classroom. I spent a great deal of time assisting her with navigating the myriad of tasks she was responsible for as well as familiarizing myself with her students and the paraprofessional assigned to work with her. It was a difficult year for her as she had very little support from other special education teachers in the building. She often spoke of how she felt she was left on her own to sink or swim. The students were often combative with one another and some were prone to having full blown emotional or violent meltdowns. It is my belief that ED teachers need ongoing long-term support that foster greater self-efficacy and commitment to teaching ED students. The impact of my experiences with ED students and special education teachers inspired me to

conduct this study using a qualitative research design so the lived experiences and the voices of special educators can be heard. I adhered to the steps of qualitative research beginning with the epoche where I bracketed my personal experiences, so I could view data with a “new or a fresh pair of eyes in a wide-open sense” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

Data Collection

The data collection methods for this study were chosen because they allowed me to have face-to-face interactions with participants and provided participants an opportunity to reflect on their career success and some of their failures. One of my goals through this study was to bring individuals together to freely exchange information in a nonthreatening environment that was supportive and free of judgment. Although the participants were my district colleagues, I had not worked directly with them in a supervisory capacity. Interviewing them individually and through focus group interviews allowed me to develop relationships with them that proved to be helpful to me in my role as a school administrator. Additionally, the participants gained professional knowledge from their peers, and widened their support base within the school district.

Individual Interviews

The primary data collection method in phenomenological research is through interviews. According to Creswell (2013), “multiple in-depth interviews are conducted with participants who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 81). This transcendental phenomenological study will gather data through individual semi-structured interviews with participants. According to Given (2008), semi-structured interviews are designed using an agenda with the researcher’s interests in mind that leaves room for participants’ spontaneous descriptions and narratives.

Interview questions were developed using the Teacher Efficacy Belief-Self (Dellinger et al., 2008) instrument as a guide. The TEBS-Self was developed to assess teachers' self-efficacy beliefs for performing specific tasks linked to effective teaching practices within the context of their own classrooms (Dellinger et. al, 2008).

Using the TSEB-Self supported the development of probing research questions designed to bring forth participants' views of their self-efficacy within the context of teaching ED students in a self-contained setting. Additionally, these questions enabled participants to self-reflect on a deeper level to relive and/or recall specific moments or situations. Participants provided various viewpoints and presented a wide array of perceptions. The data gathered from the interviews were used to write thick rich descriptions that bring to light the essence of self-efficacy as it was experienced by the participants.

The following questions were asked during the individual interviews.

Semi-Structured Individual Interview Questions

1. What is your name and how many years' experience do you have teaching ED students?
2. Have you taught other sub-groups of special education students? If so, which group?
3. What made you want to teach ED students?
4. ED students may exhibit extreme behaviors that are disruptive to the learning environment. What is your view of your self-efficacy for handling ED students' disruptive behaviors?
5. How do you respond to students who are disruptive? What steps do you take to calm students down?

6. How do you view your self-efficacy for completing paperwork tasks within compliance guidelines? Describe what you do to get paperwork tasks completed on time.
7. Describe how you determine which tasks to assign to the paraprofessional? What barriers do you encounter when deciding which tasks to assign to this individual?
8. Have experiences with administrators, specifically your building principal, or other colleagues shaped your self-efficacy? If so, how?
9. How does professional development help your self-efficacy? What areas of your job does professional development impact the most?
10. Did you have a mentor teacher during your career? If so, how did he or she shape your self-efficacy for teaching ED special education students?
11. Research shows that special education students lag behind general education students in achievement. How do you view your ability to help ED students achieve higher academic outcomes?
12. How do you view your self-efficacy for helping ED student attain IEP academic and behavior goals?
13. Has your view of your ability to influence positive academic and social outcomes for ED students changed during your classroom teaching experiences? If so, why have your views changed and how have they changed?

Questions 1 and 2 were designed to obtain personal background knowledge about the participants and their teaching experiences as special educators. Bandura (1997) posited that self-efficacy beliefs are context specific and influenced by mastery experiences. Given research indicating that special education teachers who instruct ED students are at risk for

developing low self-efficacy beliefs, job dissatisfaction, and feelings of ineffectiveness in their roles, Question 3 seeks to determine what factors impacted participants' desire to teach ED students.

Questions 4 and 5 were designed to elicit responses that describe participants' views of their self-efficacy for handling ED students' disruptive behaviors. Efforts to teach ED students more appropriate and acceptable ways of responding to unfavorable or stressful situations are not immediately successful. Consistent unresponsiveness to behavior interventions frequently causes teachers to apply punitive consequences and reject students (Adkins, 2009). In the end, the special education teacher's efficacy level decreases as they become more skeptical of their own abilities.

Questions 6 and 7 pertain to context specific tasks that special education teachers of ED students perform. Legal responsibilities associated with FAPE and instructing special education students can increase the stress level of special education teachers, create a sense of uncertainty, and make their jobs less satisfying (Nance & Calbrese, 2009). Managing tasks such as writing IEPs, meeting deadlines, scheduling IEP meetings, and staying within compliance guidelines requires organizational skills and putting structures in place to systematically manage and balance instructional duties with administrative ones.

A review of the literature on special education teachers indicates that mentoring, professional development, and administrative support can impact the self-efficacy levels of special education teachers. Verbal persuasion has been identified as the least effective means for building self-efficacy (Bandura 1977). However, when praise is consistently given from someone in a supervisory role, an expert, or a trustworthy individual and combined with other successful experiences, verbal persuasion can serve as an immediate booster for self-efficacy

levels. Therefore, Questions 8 through 10 were framed to assess how colleagues help shape participants' self-efficacy.

Data from previous studies illustrates that as behavior challenges rise in ED classrooms, the amount of classroom time devoted to instruction decreases (Rousseau, 2011). This imbalance can have a negative impact on special education teachers' self-efficacy. On the other hand, Allinder (1994) found that high levels of self-efficacy can have a positive impact on instructional planning, organization of tasks, and improve student outcomes. Understanding how to provide experiences that facilitate and sustain high self-efficacy beliefs in special education teachers can improve their decision-making capabilities and implementation of classroom practices that lead to higher student achievement (Erdem & Demirel, 2007). Hence, Questions 11 and 12 were designed to foster a discussion of how self-efficacy helps special education teachers cope with the imbalance between a focus on instruction and behavior to help ED students achieve their IEP goals.

Bandura (1997) identified verbal persuasion as the least effective means for building self-efficacy. However, when praise is consistently given from someone in a supervisory role, an expert, or a trustworthy individual and combined with other successful experiences, verbal persuasion can serve as an immediate booster for self-efficacy levels. Since self-efficacy can be obtained through verbal persuasion, Question 13 seeks to determine how colleagues impact the self-efficacy of special education teachers who instruct ED students.

Focus Group Interviews

Participant focus group interviews are used in qualitative research to bring forth depth and meaning of participants' common experiences. This data collection method enables both the researcher and the participant to pose stimulating questions that elicit participant responses

that are spontaneous and empowering experiences (Goss & Leinbach, 1996). According to Bosco and Herman, 2010, focus group interviews are “collaborative research performances” that reflect the socially constructed nature of knowledge in a group setting that promotes inquiry, questioning, and explanation of individual viewpoints through group conversations that present contrasting and complementary interpretations of the research topic (Goss & Leinbach, 1996; Kamberelis & Dimitraidis, 2013). Participants’ demographic data gathered from interest letters will be used to assign participants to one of two focus groups. Focus group interviews will be formed based on gender, longevity in the field, and school assignment. This grouping will ensure that participants have an opportunity to be more spontaneous and produce a more varied range of responses.

Grouping participants in this way will also help the more seasoned participants to reflect on past experiences with ED students and provide less experienced participants with a mentorship and a professional learning community atmosphere. It is hoped that grouping participants in this way will lead to a more meaningful exchange of experiences and richer dialogue. Additionally, greater diversity between group members increases the likelihood of obtaining data that can be generalized to all special educators who teach ED students. The following focus group interview questions (Appendix E) will be asked:

1. Please tell me your name, where you teach, and how many years you have been teaching.
2. What is most challenging about your job teaching ED students?
3. What role does self-efficacy play in your decision to continue teaching ED students?

4. Do you think your school based or district administrators help, or do they worsen your self-efficacy? How? What can administrators and district supervisors do to improve your self-efficacy in teaching?

Focus group interview Questions 1 and 2 were designed to create a sense of familiarity among participants. According to Burkman (2012), special education teachers identified teaching emotionally behaviorally disabled students as a major challenge. This research supports the use of Question 2 by encouraging participants to share their personal views on the most challenging aspect of teaching ED students.

Focus group interview Questions 3 and 4 speak to the research on special education teacher attrition and role that professional development and school administrative staff has on special education teacher self-efficacy. School administrators and special education supervisors must act purposefully to coordinate professional development geared toward improving professional practices (Cancio, Albrecht, & Holden Johns, 2014). Additionally, research indicates that special education teachers who have supportive school environments are more likely to develop stronger self-efficacy beliefs (Burkman, 2012).

Participants' Blog

A participants' blog (Appendix F) page will be created for participants to write responses to prompts and post comments about their day to day experiences. Prompts that foster self-reflection and stimulate participants to write descriptions of their experiences with teaching ED students, paper work deadlines, student behavior, discipline, and administrative support will be used. Participants will be asked to respond to the following prompts:

1. My decision to teach ED students was influenced by_____
2. Describe the perfect day, a bad day, and a typical day in an ED classroom.

3. Writing an IEP is like_____.
4. Managing ED students' behaviors is similar to_____.
5. How has your view of teaching ED students changed over time?

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this transcendental phenomenological study adhered to the steps of qualitative research analysis suggestions as stated in *Phenomenological Research Methods* (1994) written by noted qualitative researcher Moustakas. Following these methods ensured a rigorous and empirically sound process for analyzing qualitative data. Cycling through the data gathered from semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and a participants' blog using Moustakas's method uncovered related statements that were used to identify themes that described participant's experiences. Discussions of how data were analyzed are presented in discussions that follow.

The first step in analyzing data involved bracketing out my suppositions and biases to develop the phenomenological epoche. According to Moustakas (1994), the epoche enables the researcher to view things with a fresh start not hampered by voices of the past. My past experiences with special education teachers who teach ED students spans thirteen years. As a general education teacher for eighteen years, my experiences were more indirect as I observed teacher and student interactions from a distance. As an administrator, my perspectives and experiences have been much more direct and interactive. Therefore, my biases were revealed enabling me to analyze data with an open mind and a fresh perspective.

Participants were asked to read over data obtained from individual interviews and focus group interviews to check for accuracy in what they stated and transcription of their responses. The initial phase of data analysis involved reading and making notes on the

individual interviews transcripts, focus group interview transcripts, and the blog posts to identify codes or ideas that emerged. Data gathered from each individual interview, focus group interviews, and the blog post were examined and reduced to repetitive statements as well as statements that were similar in meaning. (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalization is an iterative process I used to complete an exhaustive and simultaneous examination of data to identify significant statements, words, or ideas that were common for all participants. From these significant statements, I developed clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013). Following, the previous step, Creswell (2013) suggests that “the significant statements and themes be used to write a textural description of what the participants experienced as well as a structural description of the context or setting.

During data analysis process, I created a concept map to form links between participants’ statements or repetitive phrases and to assist with eliminating statements that were irrelevant. A concept map, a visual of the data, helped facilitate the reduction of data into repetitive statements, words, and ideas. The concept map contained a concentric circle from which other circles radiated. Concepts that emerged from the repetitive statements, words, and ideas were grouped on the outside circles. The concept map evolved and underwent numerous transformations and enabled me to link the center circle with the outside circles and add others as connections were made between sets of statements, words, and ideas. The concept map assisted me in grouping repetitive statements, words, and ideas into themes.

Cycling through the data assisted me with identifying clusters of meaning that explained how participants experienced self-efficacy. I reexamined my data sources and the concept map to diminish the chances that my personal experiences and biases influenced my interpretation of the data. Emerging themes were analyzed from an overall focus revealed on

the concept map which was narrowed into specific and smaller units that represented the experiences of all participants. The process of refining and revisiting the data occurred until all themes were revealed. I achieved data saturation when themes reached a point of repetition.

The emergent themes were presented through participants' responses associated with specific research questions. Transcribed verbatim statements obtained from the participants during the individual interviews, focus group interviews, and the participant blog were used to write textural and structural descriptions of what participants experienced, where the experienced happened, and the context in which participants experienced self-efficacy.

The final step involved using the structural and textual descriptions to write a detailed account that presented the essence of the phenomenon called the essential or invariant structure. This descriptive passage focused on the common experiences of the participants; it is intended for the reader to gain a better sense of what it is like for someone to experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Trustworthiness

This study used several methods to ensure that the findings of the study were valid. Creswell (2012) suggests that qualitative researchers use multiple strategies to document specific steps taken during the research process that support the accuracy of their studies. I employed several methods to ensure that credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability were maintained throughout the study.

Credibility

Triangulation of data will be used to add credibility to the research findings. Using multiple methods of gathering qualitative data supports credibility or the internal validity of a study. Credibility was established by gathering data from multiple sources that

include individual interviews, focus group interviews, and participant blog responses. During the data analysis stage, identifying common codes or themes within different data sources, added credibility to this study (Creswell, 2013). Member checks will be conducted by the participants to ensure that interview responses are transcribed verbatim supported findings as credible.

Dependability and Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest using a peer reviewer as a “devil’s advocate” who asks questions about data collection methods and interpretation of the data from an objective perspective (p. 308). To address the dependability or reliability of my research findings, enlisted a colleague who has completed the doctoral process and had experience in conducting qualitative research. This individual assisted me in thinking reflexively about whose voice was being heard through the research to reduce subjectivity and personal biases may have emerged.

Peer reviews will be conducted to provide an outside examination of the data collection and data analysis processes. The peer reviewer acted as an opposing voice that created further opportunity for a more thorough examination of the data. External audits were performed to provide a more objective view of the product and the process (Creswell, 2013). Lastly, thick rich descriptions were written so that readers can make judgments about the transferability of the findings to other settings (Creswell, 2013, p. 252).

Methods were used to ensure that my personal opinions or experiences did not interfere with the interpretation of the results. In qualitative research, confirmability means that participant data is free of researcher bias (Shenton, 2004). The use of a various data collection methods ensured that data confirm one another (Gutcliffe & McKenna, 1999). Member

checks, interviews, and responses from blog posts were used to confirm data sources and ensured objectivity was maintained during the data analysis phase.

Transferability

The transferability or generalizability of qualitative results can be increased when the participants are closely linked to context being studied and have common characteristics (Given, 2008). Criterion sampling was used to establish requirements for participation in this study. All the participants had five or more years of experience teaching ED students in a self-contained setting. Based on the sampling procedures used to establish participation criteria and the implication of transferability, I believe the results were generalizable to other special education teachers outside of the context of my school district. Further, each participant were the only special education teacher within a self-contained ED classroom at each school site.

Ethical Considerations

This study presented personal reflections and the lived experiences of ED special education teachers who worked in buildings that are led by my educational colleagues. It was imperative for me to ensure that I adhered to the policies and procedures set forth in Liberty University's Dissertation Handbook and the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board Handbook so that no situations arose that lessened my credibility as a researcher or created a conflict of interest between the participants, their direct supervisors, and me. To that end, no research was conducted without prior approval from the Institutional Review Board and the approval of the school district's Research Authorization Committee. The privacy of the participants and maintaining strict guidelines for confidentiality were managed with the utmost care and consideration. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to conceal their identities. All files and data associated with this study were kept locked in a cabinet that only I

had access to. Participants were informed that participation was strictly voluntary, and they had the freedom to leave the study at any time should they choose.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe how special education teachers view their self-efficacy for teaching ED students and how self-efficacy helped them navigate teaching tasks within the self-contained setting. The data collection methods for this study followed the qualitative design. Data obtained through semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and a participant blog underwent rigorous analysis procedures to produce trustworthy results. Bracketing my experiences ensured the voices presented were representative of participants. It is hoped that the data revealed authentic thick rich descriptions of how self-efficacy helps special education teachers of students identified as having an emotional disorder completed tasks related to teaching in a self-contained setting. Limited qualitative research exists that describes special education teachers' self-efficacy experiences or research studies that presented their voices. Thus, I believe data obtained from this study added to the current qualitative research on this group of teachers and presented the essence of their lived experiences with teaching ED students.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of the of this transcendental phenomenological study described how special education teachers of ED students viewed their self-efficacy for handling ED students' disruptive behaviors and managing classroom tasks within the context of the self-contained setting. The goal was to document how self-efficacy impacted the work of special education teachers of ED students through their experiences. Individual interviews, focus group interviews, and participant's blog posts were employed as data collection methods. Ten special education teachers were used to explore how self-efficacy helped them manage classroom tasks within a self-contained setting.

Participants

Describing how special education teachers view their self-efficacy for completing specific teaching tasks documented the lived experiences of special education teachers. Through the responses from the personal interviews, focus group interviews, and the participants' blog, the experiences of participants and provided a means to present experiences. The intent was to interview 15 participants, however, only 10 returned consent forms indicating their willingness to participate. Cycling through the data of the 10 participants, getting participants to check for accuracy of their statements, and identifying repetitive statements, indicated that data saturation was achieved, and that no new data would be gained from the participants. According to Creswell 2013, data saturation is a necessary component that adds validity to qualitative research.

Debra

Debra (pseudonym) reported having 15 years of experience teaching ED students. She also revealed that she taught students under the category of specific learning disability. Debra admitted to feeling a strong connection with ED students. She explained that as a child she felt unwanted because she was sickly and small. She stated, "I felt like I was a little runt who no one wanted." Based on Debra's experiences, ED students have expressed feeling unwanted and that teachers are fearful of them. Debra believes that ED students have unlimited potential, are bright, determined, and resilient.

Martha

Martha (pseudonym) reported having nine years teaching students with an emotional disorder. She also reported having spent three years teaching students under the category of specific learning disability. Martha reported that her major in college was not in special education. She was encouraged by her academic advisor to earn a minor in special education, so she would have a better chance of getting a job upon graduating from school. Through internships with parks and recreation therapeutic programs, she was introduced to working with ED students. During her internships, she also worked with individuals who were special education teachers. They also sensed her potential and encouraged her to continue to work with students who have emotional challenges. Martha eventually realized that she liked working with ED students and found it easy to build a rapport with the students and their families. Martha stated, "It was inevitable that I would work with ED students."

Albert

Albert (pseudonym) has worked with ABC school district for 17 years in various positions that include a school-based substitute, a paraprofessional, and special education

teacher. He has worked with ED students for the past five years. Albert shared that he also worked with students served under the category of specific learning disability and has no preference for one group over the other. He reported being successful working with both groups of students. He shared that his inspiration to work with special education students stemmed from his experiences with an older brother who received special education services in the 1960s. He stated, "My brother was referred to as retarded and it bothered me." He shared that despite his brother's struggles in school, he graduated from high school, earned a college degree, and retired from the military. Due to his brother's experiences, Albert was inspired to work with students who have disabilities.

Susan

Susan (pseudonym) is a veteran special education teacher who has over 27 years working with special education students at middle and elementary schools. At the middle school level, she was the paraprofessional in seventh and eighth grade classrooms. She worked with students under the category of specific learning disability and in the ED classroom. Susan earned her teaching license after twenty-three years of working as a paraprofessional. Susan shared that she believes many students served in the ED self-contained setting often have an underlying learning disability that goes undiagnosed because the primary focus is on students' behavior. She stated, "Students who have emotional disorders are often viewed as bright, but I am seeing more and more students who need LD support just as much as they need support with their emotions." Susan shared that the last four years have been tough, and she is considering retirement at the end of the school year.

Stephanie

Stephanie (pseudonym) has 11 years' experience working with ED students. Prior to teaching, she worked with students who had behavior challenges in juvenile detention and juvenile probation. Stephanie stated, "ED students have behavior challenges that start out as minor issues, that left unchecked, become major issues. It is my goal to help them before they get into the justice system. Once they get into the system, it is like a revolving door."

Stephanie tries hard to help students develop coping skills, so they can be more successful academically. In her experience she stated, "ED students have the potential to reach grade level standards, but adults who work with them must change their way of thinking about ED students." It was obvious to that Stephanie firmly believes that ED students have the potential to be successful when provided with coping skills and strategies that help them gain more consistent control over their behavior.

Karen

Karen (pseudonym) began her career working with ED students in 2006 and had 12 years' experience working with special education students. She started at the middle school level. In addition to working with ED students, she also worked with students with learning disabilities, autism, and other health impairment or OHI. Karen shared that she did not seek out teaching ED students. It kind of landed in her lap. She was laid off from a retail management job and a family member suggested that she go into education as a backup. She worked as a substitute teacher and as a paraprofessional in the ED special education classroom. While working on her certification, a position in the ED classroom became available and she was hired as the ED teacher. Although Karen did not have a desire to work with ED students, she stated, "I just fit. It was one of those things that you unexpectedly fall into and it works out

in your favor.” It was apparent that Karen liked her job by the way she openly and honestly shared the details of how she became a special education teacher.

Mandy

Mandy (pseudonym) is special education teacher who has 18 years as a special education teacher. She has taught ED students in the self-contained setting for eight years. She also has experience teaching learning disabled students as well as students with autism and students who are identified as other health impaired. Mandy believes that ED students have changed over the years. She stated, “The ED students that I have taught over the last couple of years, have mental health issues and without their medication, it is impossible to manage their behavior.” She believes that parents need to be held accountable and need more education on how harmful it is to not give a child his or her prescribed medication.

Gail

Gail (pseudonym) reported having five years of experience teaching ED students in a self-contained setting. Gail reported that she is beginning to feel that ED students need mental health supports and that she is fighting a losing battle with some of her students. She feels that although this is her first teaching position, her experiences with ED students have made her a better teacher in terms of providing a structured classroom environment. She stated, “I took the job teaching ED students in hopes that starting out with a tough assignment would help me learn a lot and I would be a better teacher afterwards.” Despite rescheduling the interview with Gail twice, during the interview she was sincere and seemed eager to share her experiences.

Anna

Anna (pseudonym) was in her sixth-year teaching ED students in the self-contained setting. During her 10-year career as a special education teacher, Anna worked at an autism

center for students with severe autism and in the public-school setting as a teacher of intellectually disabled students. Anna shared with that when she worked at the autism center, students presented with behavior challenges like those demonstrated by ED students. She stated, “When I started my career in special education, I was skeptical on the idea that ED students have a disability. I secretly felt that they just needed some home training. That first year in the ED classroom was a real eye opener for me. I decided to get more professional development by attending school district sponsored Professional Learning Community meetings so that I could learn from my colleagues.”

Barbara

Barbara (pseudonym) has taught four years in the ED self-contained classroom setting. She has experienced working with students identified as learning disabled, students with autism, and severely handicapped children. She also worked as an applied behavior therapist. When asked what made her want to teach ED students, Barbara stated, “I knew that if I did this at the very beginning of my teaching career, it would make me the kind of teacher I want to be throughout my whole career.” Barbara felt she could apply what she had learned through her experiences as an applied behavior therapist to help her teach ED students how to manage their disruptive behaviors. She stated, “I know that ED students are struggling. I feel that they are probably not going to graduate from high school and there is a possibility that they will end up in jail and I want to help them.” Barbara noted that she had a tough school year and is contemplating not returning the next school year.

Results

Data were analyzed using the procedures outlined in the data analysis section of Chapter Three. Ten participants, special education teachers, who taught students with an

emotional disorder in ABC District (pseudonym) and had at least at least three years' teaching experience participated in this study. Participants signed a consent form and were assigned a pseudonym to keep their identities confidential. The racial and gender makeup of the participants included one Caucasian female, eight African-American females, and one African-American male. All the participants were asked to participate in a personal interview. However, one participant requested to have the interview questions emailed to her. She responded to the all the interview questions and submitted he responses to me by email. The remaining nine participants were interviewed face to face. There were two focus group interviews held. The first focus group interview consisted of three female participants. The second focus group interview included three females and one male. Five participants exchanged dialogue in the participants' blog. Data was transcribed from individual interview questions, focus group questions, and a participants' blog. Significant statements were grouped into codes. The codes were then organized into 8 themes that described how self-efficacy helped special education teachers complete specific classroom tasks within a self-contained setting.

Participant experiences were presented in relation to the research questions that guided this study. Emergent themes were synthesized from identified codes taken from significant statements. Table 2 lists the themes and codes that emerged through the analysis of participants' responses from semi-structured interview questions, focus group interviews, and the participants' blog prompts.

Table 2

Themes and Codes

Theme	Codes
Adaptable	Patience Create distractions Do not take behaviors personal Anticipate triggers Being prepared for the unknown Getting to know students Differentiation based on behavior needs Trial and error Using student data Needs of the individual Maximize gender-based relationships Flexibility Token systems based on positive behavior Immediate rewards
Inconsistent	Inability to calm students Feeling helpless Student's irrational behavior Over-reliance on technology to placate students Throwing of furniture Verbal and physical violence Lack of administrative support Isolation from support colleagues Unmedicated students

Theme	Codes
	Possible mental health conditions Feeling unappreciated Calling for help Feeling unsupported Lack of empathy from colleagues Expected to work miracles
Hesitant	Paraprofessional wanting to be in control Lack of trust in the paraprofessional Dislike of ED students Lack of initiative Low work ethic Wide variation in the daily needs of students Self-doubt Experience level Tension between adults
Like a Relay Team	Leveraging strengths Subject interests Group success Team player Well-oiled machine Passing off duties

Theme	Codes
Routine Driven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chunking tasks into smaller units Writing due dates on a calendar Data collection methods Completing paperwork in advance Communication with all parties Organization methods Setting attainable goals Sticking to routines Carving out time Prioritizing tasks Using electronic reminders
Trying to Reach the Finish Line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparing students for state standardized testing Keeping students informed of their progress Helping students reach IEP goals Helping students develop intrinsic motivation Helping students develop confidence in their abilities Build on students' strengths Maintain a focus on achievement Teaching replacement behaviors Close the achievement gap Getting behaviors under control to address academic deficits Helping students develop and use coping strategies

Theme	Codes
Uncertain	Self-doubt Impact of parent drug use during pregnancy Trying to prevent fights Instruction takes a back seat Fighting a losing battle
Group Effort	Supportive administrators Inclusive school culture Strong home/school relationships Need for additional staffing in the ED classroom Beginning with the end in mind Partnership mindset Central office support
Doubtful	Never-ending cycle of behavior interruptions At a loss Lack of socially acceptable behavior Inconsistent success with behavior interventions Feeling like a failure Lack of stable home environment Starting over at stage one each day Possible need for a more restrictive environment Student behavior influenced by parents

Nine themes were identified from analysis of the data. The themes identified were adaptable, inconsistent, hesitant, like a relay team, routine driven, trying to reach the finish line, uncertain, group effort, and doubtful. The lived experiences of special education teachers who taught ED students were examined through five research questions that guided this study. Significant statements, words similar in meaning, and repetitive ideas were used to generate a list of codes. From this list of codes, themes emerged that described how participants experienced self-efficacy while performing specific teaching tasks while teaching ED students within a self-contained setting.

Theme One: Adaptable

The theme adaptable sought to answer research question one that explored how special education teachers view their self-efficacy for managing ED students' challenging behaviors. Participants' viewed their self-efficacy as adaptable which supported them in adjusting their practices, routines, and techniques to meet the needs of ED students. Participants shared ways in which their self-efficacy views were strengthened when they addressed situations guided by mastery experiences, student data, and consistent responses to behaviors. Debra viewed student behavior challenges as an inevitable part of her job as a special education teacher. Having a plan in place when challenging behaviors occurred helped her adapt to situations and regain control of the classroom. Debra stated,

I know that students will act out at some point otherwise they wouldn't be labeled as ED, so I just try to keep things from happening. I remain calm so that when situations escalate, the other students are removed from the classroom and the angry student has an opportunity to calm down privately. Once the incident is over, we

talk about the incident and if there is a consequence, it is applied and we all move forward.

The nature of working with ED students requires special education teachers to anticipate situations that might trigger a negative behavior response. Adapting to situations and addressing them in a consistent and predictable manner enabled Karen to adapt to behavior challenges. She noted that effectively managing behavior involves being prepared to use specific techniques and a willingness to keep adjusting what you are doing when things don't work out as intended. She stated, "You've got to know how to approach situations with each student and what helps them to get their behavior under control." Albert noted that he tries to determine the root cause of student behavior. Albert stated,

Each student is different and has different triggers and needs, so the nature of the problem will be specific from student to student. The only way to figure out what to do in a crisis with students is to get to know the students and learn what makes them tick.

Martha noted special education teachers who teach ED students must be flexible in their approach when addressing students' behaviors because external factors outside of school may cause students to misbehave. Martha stated,

Things happen at home that trigger behaviors or the behaviors may be related to mental health diagnoses that are not addressed through medication management.

Situations can be unpredictable, so you must adapt to whatever happens. My classroom behavior management program must be specific and tailored to meet individual needs.

Teaching ED students is not a one size fits all scenario. Anna specified that behavior management plans for students in the ED self-contained setting requires specific interventions and supports for each student. She said, "Behavior management is different for each student

and must be used consistently.” Martha agreed and shared that she adapts and changes her behavior management practices based on students’ behavior triggers, a tangible reward system, and immediate positive feedback to extrinsically motivate students. Susan commented on her ability to self-reflect and adapt when she stated “I ask myself what’s the behavior and what’s the behavior management plan? That can change many times depending on whether the student is on target to meet his or her behavior goal.” Stephanie’s shared a similar experience during a focus group interview,

The more I've worked at it through trial and error and using different techniques, success with managing behavior just built upon itself. I do a lot of reflecting on what works, what's not working, and changing practices when necessary.

During a focus group interview Gail noted she gets to know each student and familiarizes herself with their behavior goals listed on BIPs as well as crisis plans to learn which calming techniques and strategies to use with each student. Gail stated, “Being flexible and adapting to changing classroom situations helps me to maintain my composure and keep things moving.” Karen reiterated the importance of getting to know each student individually when she said, “Every ED student has behavior deficits and each requires a unique approach. You can’t always deal with each of them the same way.” Participants held a positive view of their self-efficacy for managing student behavior when they consistently adapted to students’ needs using their knowledge of students’ individual needs.

Theme Two: Inconsistent

Theme two developed an understanding of participants' self-efficacy views when attempts to manage ED students' behavior are unsuccessful. Challenging behaviors has been cited as a risk factor for the development of low self-efficacy beliefs among special education teachers (George & George, 1995; Van Alstine, 2010). Susan noted that often, despite her best efforts to calm students, deter aggression or violent altercations, she sometimes fails. She believes this is most noticeable when students arrive at school agitated because of incidents that occurred at home or on the bus ride to school. She shared,

Students who have not had their meds (medication) have this look. I know immediately they are off because they come to the classroom hyped up. I can't rationalize with them or get them to a calm state. At that point, I accept that very little learning will take place that day.

Gail's day to day experiences with ED students, on occasion, were like Susan's. In her blog post Gail shared, "A bad day in the ED classroom is when nothing works to calm an angry or disruptive student. I feel helpless and overwhelmed." During a focus group interview the question "What is most challenging about your job teaching ED students?" was asked. Barbara shared a similar experience,

Controlling or managing multiple behaviors at the same time is always a challenge. It's like a domino effect. When you think you've tackled one student's misbehavior, another will act out and then another starts knocking things off the shelf or using bad language. Soon everyone in the class is out of control. This is a crisis point at that time, so I press the emergency button. That's a day when my assistant (paraprofessional) and I don't get a break.

Self-efficacy views are impacted by verbal persuasion when given by someone in a supervisory role and can result in a self-efficacy lowering experience. During a focus group interview when asked the question “Do you think your school based or district administrators strengthen or lower your self-efficacy”? Mandy reported feeling like a failure when things don’t go as planned. She shared that situations can spiral out of control quickly and her self-efficacy is impacted by how her building administrator responds when she calls the office for help. She reported feeling like a failure when her principal gives her a look that implies “Why can’t you control them?” Feeling unsupported was identified as one of the reasons participants viewed their self-efficacy as inconsistent. Gail felt administrators often do not have a real understanding of ED students or how to support special education teachers who teach ED students. She noted that professional development opportunities coordinated by central office are not always helpful or pertinent to the challenges special education teachers in ED self-contained classrooms face. She shared, “I just want to feel supported and appreciated for the work I do. I try new strategies, but when a student is off his meds, no matter what strategies I use, nothing works.” The ED self-contained classroom environment can go from calm to chaotic very quickly. Participants’ self-efficacy views of their ability for managing students’ behavior were dependent upon self-efficacy sources that empowered them to maintain a can-do attitude and adapt to students’ inconsistent behavior patterns. However, when efficacy sources failed to provide motivation or validate efforts, participants experienced diminished self-efficacy views.

Theme Three: Hesitant

The second research question was formed to gain insight of how participants viewed their self-efficacy for planning the work of the paraprofessional. The source of the special

education teachers' view of their self-efficacy was derived from an emotional state which manifests as a lack of trust in the ability of the individual completing the task. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the quality of the relationship between the special education teacher and the paraprofessional impacts the quality or the value of tasks assigned to the paraprofessional. Hesitant emerged as a theme when the relationship between the special education teacher and the paraprofessional was strained. Barbara noted having anxiety when deciding which tasks to assign to the paraprofessional because of her inner need to control everything and wanting to have things done a certain way. Academic knowledge of subject areas factored into her hesitancy when assigning tasks to her paraprofessional. She stated, "I want to do it all because I need it to be done my way. But I need to back off, so I ask what she wants, and I fill in when I want something done a specific way." Anna shared that she is not comfortable if the paraprofessional does not have strong subject knowledge. She stated,

I'll listen while she works with students. If I see that students are getting frustrated or if her frustration level is rising, I'll assign her something else to work on and I'll take over the task.

Paraprofessionals may have difficulty identifying or empathizing with the behavior deficits of ED students. A paraprofessional who has this view can have a direct impact on which tasks they are assigned. Debra reflected on her experiences during a focus group interview. She said,

One of my assistants was transferred into the ED setting. It was obvious through her demeanor and her tone that she was less than pleased to be in the ED classroom. So, I was very picky about what I assigned her to do.

Anna shared that the attitude or demeanor of the paraprofessional determines which tasks she assigns as the work ethic of the paraprofessional may not be the same as hers. She shared an experience with a paraprofessional that caused her to feel this way when she said,

Her level of commitment to the students was not the same as mine, so I did not trust her. I was hesitant to assign her tasks that required extra effort to help students since she acted cold toward students.

Karen relayed during a focus group interview that what she assigns to the paraprofessional changes based on the needs of the day or the moment. Karen said, "In the ED classroom, you have to maximize instructional time and stick to routines as incidents can happen at any moment that shift the focus to behavior." Barbara reflected on having a power struggle with a paraprofessional who was not only well like but was well-known and more experienced working with ED students. Barbara stated, "She would challenge me, or subtly refuse to complete tasks like I asked. She acted like she was in charge and it was a constant battle. I began to doubt myself" Gail shared an experience with a paraprofessional who did not take initiative. She stated, "I had to tell him this is not babysitting and to intervene immediately when students were fighting or if he observed behavior that could escalate into a violent situation." Albert noted that he assigns duties based on the paraprofessional's experience, ability and training but is hesitant to assign tasks that are not an area of strength. He stated, "If the paraprofessional has varied experiences with a particular subject, then I give them more responsibility both instructionally. My current assistant is not comfortable with science, so I handle all instruction related to science."

Theme Four: Like a relay team

An examination of participants' responses to research question two also revealed that special education teachers viewed their self-efficacy for planning the work of the paraprofessional like a relay team. When the special education teacher leveraged the skills of the paraprofessional, participants reported having a positive view of their self-efficacy. Stephanie noted that when her paraprofessional demonstrated a commitment to the success of ED students she felt comfortable assigning her meaningful tasks. Stephanie stated,

My paraprofessional had a degree in history. She willingly took the lead on finding resources. She did a good job because she put effort into completing tasks. We both felt that when the students were successful, we both succeeded.

Karen reflected on similar experiences with her paraprofessional. Karen said,

My assistant served in the military and loved discussing history, so I assigned him the task of teaching fourth grade history. He taught fourth grade history, while I taught the science for the fifth-grade students.

Working together like a relay team and passing off duties when classroom situations changed was reflected when Martha described her paraprofessional as her other eyes in the classroom. Martha stated, "My paraprofessional is a team player and adapts to change easily. She can take over if I need to go after a student who has eloped from the classroom or attend an IEP meeting. She is the second in command in the classroom." Likewise, Mandy shared a similar experience when she said, "It does not matter who starts the work as long as it gets finished. We are a team and take up each other's slack." Debra shared a similar experience with a former paraprofessional who was in school to become a teacher. Debra stated, "My paraprofessional asked for additional duties like planning lessons and working with small

groups. We were in sync.” Participants in this study revealed that the quality of their relationship with the paraprofessional impacted their self-efficacy views. Successful relationships fostered a more cohesive classroom environment where the special education teacher and the paraprofessional leveraged individual strengths and functioned as a team. However, when the relationship between the special education teacher and the paraprofessional was tenuous and unstable, special education teachers reported feeling ambivalent and anxious about which tasks to assign to this individual.

Theme Five: Routine Driven

Research question four was framed to examine how special education teachers who teach ED students view their self-efficacy for completing paperwork within timeframes established by federal and state mandates. Paperwork tasks and high caseloads have been cited as a factor that impacts special education teachers’ decisions to leave the field (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011). Participants’ responses were analyzed, and the theme routine driven emerged. Anna shared that having a system of recording due dates on a desk calendar helps her maintain a positive view of her self-efficacy for completing paperwork and has met parents in parking lots and made home visits to obtain parent signatures on paperwork. She stated,

I write due dates down and stick to getting things done. I try to stay a week ahead of paperwork. Chunking tasks day by day makes it easier to get things done. I give myself some wiggle room that allows for parents and administrators’ schedules.

Getting paperwork tasks completed within compliance guidelines requires strong organizational habits. Gail shared that she is confident in her ability to get paperwork completed on time. During her personal interview, she stated, “It’s just a matter of setting up a

timeline for myself and sticking to it and reminding myself to get the work done by the due date.” Establishing routines and having consistent methods to obtain current information from general education teachers as well as consulting with other district professionals is important for staying within compliance guidelines. Albert confirmed this statement when he stated,

Having a consistent routine and a consistent method for collecting information from other staff members and a routine for scheduling IEP meetings helps me to keep my stress level down. Keeping a calendar and being in communication with parents, general education teachers, and administrators plays a big role in my ability to stay organized to meet deadlines.

Mandy shared during a focus group interview that completing paperwork requires a systematic approach and timelines to stay on track. She stated,

Paperwork is a necessary part of the job and procrastination creates a stressful situation for me and everyone else. Whatever paperwork is due, an IEP or triennial component review, the paperwork must be done in advance.

Mandy also shared that she works very closely with the assistant principal to place meetings on the agenda at the beginning of the school year and complete paper work tasks as much as sixty days ahead of the due date. Organization, communicating with administrators about meeting dates, and having a central location to keep documents is what helps Susan complete paperwork tasks on time. Susan also shared that she uses binders to organize paperwork by student, schedules IEP meeting thirty days in advance, and schedules meetings by emails. She stated,” I meet with the assistant principal and other committee members at the beginning of the year to create a meeting calendar.” Stephanie reported that her method for getting

paperwork tasks completed on time involves using a desk calendar and completing tasks little by little. She shared,

I write down due dates for IEPs, triennials, and progress reports on an old-fashioned desk calendar. Each day after work, I stay late to work on one section of the paperwork. I set small attainable goals for myself. If I try to do too much at one time, I feel overwhelmed and nervous because there is always something else that needs to be done like lesson plans, checking papers, or documenting behaviors. I stick to my routine so that things get done and I am not stressing about being late.

Barbara shared during a focus group interview that completing paperwork is one of the biggest challenges she faces as a special education teacher. Barbara reflected,

I'm not good at paperwork sit-down type of work. I try to do a little bit at a time, but that does not seem to work for me. I do best if I sit down and spend a whole day getting it all done at one time.

Debra shared that paperwork tasks that drive her instruction are those that have the highest priority. She stated,

Paperwork tasks such as IEPs and lesson plans take priority over other paperwork tasks that I feel the district should take care of. IEPs and lesson plans drive my daily instruction and help me to make my classroom run smoothly and allow me to address student deficits. Those tasks drive my routines because they are the foundation of all the work I do with students.

Having a system in place that helps special education teachers complete the additional tasks helps to lessen the stress associated with meeting deadlines. Karen shared during a focus

group interview that she routinely uses multiple electronic methods to help her stay on track with paperwork. She stated,

I set up email reminders and use the district's student data management system to keep me on track. The system generates a calendar for me and sends me due date reminders. There have been times that I would have been late turning something in if the reminder had not popped up on my computer.

Martha noted that she uses routines to get paperwork tasks completed in a timely manner. She said,

I struggle with paperwork tasks to be honest. I have so many other things to do. So, I prioritize and pick the top three things to get done which are usually IEPs, triennials, and progress reports. I stick to a routine of what I must do now and what is due later.

Participants viewed their self-efficacy for completing paperwork as routine driven.

Although some participants, reported feeling less than positive about completing tasks, they prioritized tasks, set up reminders, and had specific procedures and protocols in place that enabled them to meet deadlines.

Theme Six: Trying to Reach the Finish Line

Theme six provided insight into how participants view their self-efficacy for helping ED students reach or attain IEP goals. Eight of the participants viewed their self-efficacy for helping students meet IEP goals like trying to reach the finish line. The IEP, whether behavior based or a combination of behavior and academics, is what drives instruction in the ED classroom. Karen noted that she keeps students abreast of their success throughout the school year. Karen stated,

I always remind my students they aren't doing meaningless work. I explain to them that I wasn't making stuff up to keep them occupied and that everything I was teaching, all the other students on their grade level were learning the same material. When students take the benchmark assessments they could see information we covered in class.

Karen also noted that students are motivated and put forth more effort to reach their IEP goals because she makes them aware of their progress toward reaching their IEP goals. Teaching ED students requires instructing students on their present level of functioning to help them achieve specific data points by the end of the school year. Albert stated, I work with students where they are to help them reach their IEP goals. Albert also pushes students to do more than the minimum. He said,

I don't limit my teaching and their academic learning to what is stated on the IEP. If I feel they are capable, I will put as much on a student's plate as he or she can stand or digest so to speak. Their confidence increases when they are successful.

Debra shared similar thoughts about using students' IEP goals as motivation. She stated, "I build on students' strengths and get them focused on achieving goals in small steps. Once they start experiencing success in an academic area, the negative behaviors may decrease." Albert shared that suspensions are nothing new to ED students. The key, Albert stated, is "making students aware of their behavior goals and the replacement behaviors they need to demonstrate." Feedback is also important for student motivation. Albert also believes students should be made aware of their behavior goals, so they learn to track their growth. Martha believes that in most cases, ED students' cognitive ability is average; they can do the work. So she is confident in her ability to help ED students attain their IEP goals and leverages the opportunity for ED students to receive a double dose of instruction. Martha said,

The general education teacher can focus on grade level standards so that my focus is on helping the students reach the IEP goals. The problem is the behavior piece that's preventing them from being successful in attaining grade level standards.

Special education teachers who teach ED students have the difficult task of addressing behaviors that may impact the academic success of their students. Susan shared,

I concentrate on the behaviors; it is frustrating because I don't get to teach the academics. It is my belief that more emphasis needs to be placed on the behavior first and then on the academics.

Karen shared that she feels very confident in her ability to help ED students reach IEP goals. Using a point system helps her have conversations with students about behavior expectations and rewards. She also informs students of their IEP goals and is open with them about their academic and behavior deficits. Karen said,

Students who ask, "Why am I in special education?" get an explanation they can understand. I tell them which skills they might struggle with, and how I will provide support to help them reach their goals. I am very open and honest with students, so they all know where they stand with the goals on their IEPs. I want them to know their deficits.

Anna's thoughts on behavior and its impact on academic achievement were like Karen's. Anna stated,

I don't believe that behavior has to impact academic achievement, if the behavior is managed correctly. Targeting the undesirable behavior on day one of school must happen. However, if I don't take time to manage the behavior on a consistent basis, the academic success will never come about.

Debra believes that her self-efficacy has remained high for helping students achieve IEP goals over the years. She recognizes helping students reach behavior goals can be inconsistent and based on day to day situations. She reflected on a student that showed growth in his ability to manage his emotions and advocate for himself. She shared,

One of my fifth-grade students had a job with the Morning Show Crew. He came back to class one day from a resource class one day upset because a girl was really bothering him. He was in tears. He said, "I can't say anything back to her, because I will lose my job. He said, "I wanted to hit her. "I know I'm not supposed to hit a girl, and I don't want to lose my job." I told him to come inside so he would not lose any points or get in any trouble. I asked him, "Did you tell the teacher you needed to cool off"? He said, "Yes". I praised him for not reacting. He kept saying, "I don't want to lose my job". He advocated for himself and recognized when he needed to leave a situation. This was a proud moment for me.

Mandy shared a similar experience with one of her students when she said,

I overheard one of my students repeating to himself something that was mentioned in a social story after he and a classmate had an incident on the bus. He kept repeating to himself "I don't have to say anything back to him. Just ignore him." Just to be sure that the situation did not escalate any further, I sent him out of the classroom to run an errand for me, to take his mind off the incident and focus on something else for moment. It is small victories like this that encourage me to remain in the classroom. His success made me feel more confident.

Having knowledge of students' academic needs and behavior patterns is necessary for helping students reach IEP and behavior goals. Barbara shared that she is more confident in her ability

to help students reach academic and behavior goals when she writes the goals on students' IEPs based on her knowledge of the student. Barbara shared,

When a goal is well written and stated in measurable objectives, especially when I've written the goal, I understand the data behind the goal because I've interacted with the student and had experiences with their triggers and their limits. I've read new students' IEP goals, both behavior and academic, and I question whether the previous special education teacher has met the student.

Professional development assists special education teachers with acquiring the skills sets needed to help ED students attain IEP goals. Gail shared that professional development specifically designed for teachers who teach ED students has improved her confidence. Gail stated,

The professional development offered by the district gave me sigh of relief because I felt so isolated. Talking to my colleagues helped get advice from someone who was having the same problems as me. I've used some of the content from the PD and some of my students are responding positively. I got ideas on reading interventions and how to teach social skills. Meeting with my peers every month has been helpful.

Realistic expectations about students, their present level of academic functioning, and their behavior deficits help Anna feel confident in her ability to help students attain IEP goals. Anna shared during a focus group interview that she writes IEP goals using common sense. Anna stated,

You can't address all their deficits in one year. So, the IEP goals should be achievable within the 180 days of school. I may be planting the seed this year. The next year, I may provide the water and the next year, the plant may grow.

It's all about knowing what a student can realistically achieve in one school year. Don't get me wrong, we should have high expectations of students, but IEP goals should be realistic. By the time a student is identified as ED, he or she has been behaving badly for many years. So, it is unrealistic to expect me to help a student get a behavior, that has been ongoing for years, under control in one year.

ED students need support that will aid them with attaining the behavior and academic goals on their IEPs. The path that leads to attaining goals, however, is not short and straight. It is more like a long-distance race which requires the special education teacher to have stamina, perseverance, and preparedness for the unknown.

Theme Seven: Uncertain

Teaching is an on the job training profession. This is particularly true for special education teachers who teach ED students from the context of managing student behavior. The day to day struggles to help students meet their behavior goals has an impact on how much attention gets focused on attaining academic goals. Susan believes the focus should begin with behavior and then transition to academics because she is not convinced the behaviors characteristic of ED students are always emotionally based. Susan stated,

I'm reading new information about students and the effects of drug addiction or the side effects of certain medications taken for attention deficit, mental health conditions, or autism. I question my ability to help a student reach IEP goals if she or he has mental health condition that is undiagnosed or not being treated.

Stephanie shared similar challenges and concerns with helping ED students attain IEP goals. Stephanie stated,

It is difficult to keep the focus on academics when my students are exchanging threats or insults. I continually remind the other students of what they have learned about controlling their behaviors and staying focused on their work, so they don't get drawn into behavior of the two new students.

Susan stated in her blog post, "Behavior problems always impact the instructional day. There are days when instruction takes a back seat and you focus on maintaining a peaceful classroom." Barbara shared similar thoughts in her blog post,

I used to believe that ED students needed the right teacher, structure, and extra time to meet IEP goals. But now, I'm at the point of believing that no amount of care, love, or structure is what most ED students need. They need mental health supports and so much more than I can provide. I think it is a losing battle.

Clearly, special education teachers who teach ED students are faced with numerous barriers, especially negative behaviors, that impact how they view their self-efficacy for helping students reach IEP goals. Special education teachers base their judgment of self-efficacy on how effectively and frequently they have achieved goals or mastered similar tasks in the past (Bembenutty, 2007).

Theme Eight: Group Effort

Research question five sought to document how special education teachers view their self-efficacy for helping ED students attain higher academic and behavior outcomes. A supportive school culture that embraces ED students, accepts them, and has a culture that places importance on building relationships with students and their families shaped the self-efficacy views of seven of the 10 participants. Debra reported a high level of confidence in her ability to help ED students attain higher academic and behavior outcomes because she gives

her best effort to help ED students achieve and in turn the students put forth effort. Debra stated,

I really believe that if I keep giving my best, the students will give me their best. After all this time, I still believe that. Having a good relationship with my students is also important. They have to trust that I am being real with them and that I care about them.

Albert also believes that building relationships with students and their families is a key factor that supports academic gains for ED students. He stated, "Experience has taught me the stronger the relationship I have with a student's family, the higher the outcomes for students." Karen's self-efficacy views are positively impacted for helping students attain higher academic and behavior outcomes because she involves other staff in keeping students aware of how they are performing. Karen feels it was necessary to help students take ownership of their learning and behavior as much as possible. She shared,

ED students have not had much success and often have a hard time seeing themselves as successful. Daily point sheets serve as a reminder of their daily behavior expectations and goals. The point sheet is tied to how they behave in all areas of the building and how they behave in the classroom. I involve administrators, general education teachers, and resource teachers in signing point sheets and giving feedback.

Martha shared that she begins with the end in mind for students and her main goal for ED students is fulltime participation in the general education setting with little to no support from the special education teacher. She said, "Helping students achieve involves collaborating and planning with the general education teacher so that students develop academic and social skills, that lead to better grades and improved behavior. Martha also stated, "I collaborate with general education teachers to learn how they teach the curriculum, so I can teach students using

the same or similar strategy.” Fostering a relationship with the general education, special education teacher, and the ED student leads to a more inclusive culture that conveys the message of collective responsibility for student success. Stephanie also relies on general education teachers to support improved achievement for ED students. Stephanie highlighted,

Whether an ED student spends most of his day with me or in the general education setting, I rely on general education teachers to complete my point sheets that reflect ED students’ behavior and participation in class. This year, I work with a general education teacher who is experienced success working with ED students. She supports my point sheet strategy that helps me to collect data to measure his IEP goals and I support her if he earns a reward as well as when he earns a consequence in her classroom.

Administrative support is a key factor that impacts the self-efficacy views of educators.

Barbara shared that her administrators are supportive and make her feel confident in thinking outside the box when looking for ways to help ED students. Barbara said,

Both principal and assistant principal support the ideas that I have for helping my students improve academically and behaviorally. When I go to them with what may seem like a crazy idea, they say, “Yeah sure go ahead. Whatever you think will work.” They allow me to have exercise equipment, punching bags, and other sensory items that you won’t find in general education classrooms for students who need movement breaks or ways to release energy or frustration.

Gail shared similar experience with special education central office staff. Gail stated,

A central office staff member observed my classroom early in the school year and were pleased with my routines. Their feedback and comments made me feel

confident. They also shared tips for transitioning that would help keep students on track. They also shared that my principal said positive things about my instructional skills.

Theme Nine: Doubtful

Three out of the ten participants expressed doubt about their ability to help ED students achieve improved academic and behavior outcomes. Their doubt stemmed from inconsistent behavior patterns that are characteristic of ED students. Anna shared that she has experienced behaviors this year that have impacted her self-efficacy. She replied,

I have a student who has crawls around the classroom on his hands and knees. I don't know what to do to help him. I ask myself, "What is this behavior about?" No matter what behavior technique I've used or incentives I have offered, he still does the same thing when he is upset. I'm at a loss. I can't address his academic deficits, when he is crawling on his hands and knees down the hallway.

When asked whether professional development has an impact on self-efficacy, participants shared that the content may help them with academics, but they seldom address what to do about behaviors. While Mandy agreed that professional development has supported her self-efficacy for helping ED students make academic gains, neither professional development nor her building principal have positively impacted her self-efficacy views for helping students reach higher behavior outcomes. Mandy asserted,

I feel like I have the academic part of teaching ED students under control for the most part. However, teaching them social skills like basic manners, consideration for others' feelings, or what to do when someone bumps you in

the hallway by mistake is a different story altogether. One of my students is so angry and defensive, his way of handling conflict is to hit first and ask questions later. Social stories to him are a joke. So, I don't expect his behavior to improve much this year. If I can't get him to change his behavior, then the academic piece won't happen either.

Susan shared that she has seen a change in the needs of ED students over the years and is not sure she can help them students attain better outcomes. She stated,

I sometimes question whether they are in the right setting. Family situations are sometimes unstable for ED students. Parents may not have reliable transportation or have leave time at work. Their work hours may conflict with coming to parent conferences or coming to pick their children up when severe behavior episode arises. If they don't go to work they lose pay or threatened with termination. Students feel the pressure of what's happening at home. When I call parents to inform them of behavior incidents, they will either go off on the student or say to me, "What do you want me to do? You're the teacher, figure it out." So, I only call when necessary. When parents act this way, it makes me nervous and I feel like a failure.

During a focus group interview, Gail shared,

So, you're trying to figure out, "Okay, so what can I do differently now and make it work?". Some days you see some growth and then something happens that causes a setback. Something inside of them is triggered, and it just goes back to stage one.

Situations like this make leave me feeling confused.

During a focus group interview, Debra shared that she is thinking about leaving the profession because she feels the pressure of preparing ED students to pass state tests. Debra stated,

I think the focus, because of special education students' test scores and the push for special education students to graduate with an advanced diploma, principals and supervisors are focusing more on pass rates rather than what each child needs. When students share the struggles they experience at home, I can't think about the SOLs. At that time, I am thinking about how I can meet the physical and the emotional needs of my students. That is the biggest challenge because I can't teach them when their emotional and physical needs are not met. This is what's going to make me leave the classroom.

Although Debra lacks confidence in her ability to help ED students attain higher behavior and academic outcomes, she desires to support the whole student as opposed to focusing on their academic and behavioral needs.

Research Question One

Research Question one examined how special education teachers view their self-efficacy for managing ED students' behaviors. Participants' responses were synthesized and the themes adaptable and inconsistent emerged. Participants shared having to be flexible, anticipate triggers, and use behavior management techniques to address ED students' negative behaviors. Participants who were realistic about the nature of working with students expressed optimism for managing student behavior because they used knowledge about students' and anticipated situations that were likely to trigger a negative response. Participants who expressed pessimism viewed their self-efficacy as inconsistent when addressing behavior. Special education teachers lacked optimism because, during crises situations, they were sometimes unable to calm students. In these crisis situations, violent behavior, verbal and physical, caused feelings of helplessness. During these times, participants felt more isolated

from their colleagues and unsupported by administrators. Another factor, students who were prescribed medication, but came to school unmedicated, also caused participants to view their self-efficacy as inconsistent. Susan described her experience with feeling helpless when she stated, “Students who have not had their meds (medication) may come to the classroom hyped or angry. When they are in this state I can’t rationalize with them or get them to a calm state.” Through these statements, participants described how they view their self-efficacy for managing behavior in the ED self-contained classroom setting.

Research Question Two

The second research question explored how special education teachers in the self-contained ED classroom view their self-efficacy for planning and monitoring the work a paraprofessional. Having this additional responsibility can add to the frustration of being a special education teacher especially when he or she is new to the self-contained setting. Examining participants’ responses revealed the themes hesitant and like a relay team. Participants who developed a trusting relationship with their paraprofessional and leveraged each other’s strengths and were able to work as a team. On the other hand, when the paraprofessional lacked a similar work ethic and a commitment to the success of ED students, the participants reported viewing their self-efficacy as hesitant. Anna reported having a paraprofessional who did not see the work in the way she did. Anna stated, “She did not have the same work ethic as me, so I kept her tasks to a bare minimum. I barely trusted leaving her alone in the classroom.” The experiences participants shared demonstrated they viewed their self-efficacy for planning the work of the paraprofessional as hesitant and like a relay team.

Research Question Three

Research question three sought to understand how special education teachers view their self-efficacy for meeting IEP and eligibility paperwork compliance guidelines. The legal requirements involved with federal and state mandates can be a factor that causes feelings of stress and anxiety when there are no established routines and procedures for meeting deadlines. Exploration of this question revealed the theme routine driven. Participants reported having personalized systems in place that helped them to obtain data from other parties, set up meeting dates, and adhere to exact routines. Participants had procedures for obtaining data from colleagues they needed to complete paperwork, methods for recording due dates, electronic reminders, and personalized ways to prioritize tasks. Stephanie's statement demonstrated how participants managed to complete tasks on time when she shared that she uses a personalized way to stay ahead of paperwork tasks. Stephanie stated, "I set goals for myself, use a desk calendar, and stay late to work on specific sections of paperwork. If I try to do too much at one time, I become overwhelmed and nervous. So, I stick to a routine."

Research Question Four

Research question four examined and explored participants' view of their self-efficacy for helping ED students meet IEP goals. Participants' responses revealed the themes trying to reach the finish line and uncertain. Participants' who were optimistic about the progress ED students keep the focus of their efforts on achievement, helping students develop coping strategies, and learn replacement behaviors. When students' behavior patterns improve, the special education teacher could place more consistent attention on academic achievement. Karen noted that students are motivated and put forth more effort to reach their IEP goals

because she makes them aware of their progress toward reaching their IEP goals. Similarly, Debra shared that builds on students' strengths and helps students set small incremental goals. The behavior goal for ED students is to develop and consistently demonstrate replacement behaviors. When this happens, special education teachers can focus on academic deficits. However, when special education teachers focused on outside factors, they were uncertain about of their ability to help students meet their IEP goals. Participants reported feelings of self-doubt because their primary focus was on behavior. Barbara expressed this best when she pointed out that he beliefs about ED students have changed. She stated, "I'm at the point of believing that nothing I do can improve the behavior of ED students because they need more than I can provide."

Research Question Five

Research question five examined special education teachers' views of their self-efficacy for helping ED students attain higher behavior and academic outcomes. Synthesis of participants' responses revealed the themes group effort and doubtful. Participants' experiences confirm that an inclusive school culture is one that views the success of ED students as a collective effort that includes administrators, colleagues, and student's families. The theme group effort was demonstrated most clearly by Martha who stated, "I collaborate with general education teachers to learn how they teach the curriculum, so I can teach students using the same or similar strategy." Albert stated, "Experience has taught me the stronger the relationship I have with a student's family, the higher the outcomes for students." Karen's self-efficacy views are positively impacted for helping students attain higher academic and behavior outcomes because she involves other staff in keeping students aware of how they are performing. Fostering a relationship between the general education, special education teacher,

and the ED student fosters a more inclusive culture that conveys the message of collective responsibility for student success. On the other hand, when participants held a negative view of their self-efficacy, the theme doubtful emerged. Mandy stated it best, “So, I don’t expect his behavior to improve much this year. If I can’t get him to change his behavior, then the academic piece won’t happen either.”

Summary

This chapter documented the lived experiences of elementary special education teachers who teach ED students in a self-contained setting. The findings of this research study document the self-efficacy views of special education teachers who teach ED students in a self-contained setting. The ten participants were introduced through descriptions that included teaching experience and whether they had experience teaching special education students served under other categories. Through participants’ responses, nine themes were revealed through the five research questions that guided this study. The research questions revealed high and low self-efficacy beliefs for completing tasks specific to teaching ED students in a self-contained classroom that include behavior management, planning, paperwork completion, meeting IEP goals, and helping ED students attain higher academic and behavior outcomes. Responses from interviews, focus group interviews and participants’ blog posts, revealed participants viewed their self-efficacy for managing student behavior as adaptable and inconsistent. Of concern was a lack of support from parents who don’t consistently provide students with their needed medication as well as administrators who do not have a full and complete understanding of ED students and their behavior needs. Hesitant and like a relay team emerged as themes when participants were questioned about planning the work of the paraprofessional. The quality and strength of the relationship between the participants and the

paraprofessional impacted how participants viewed their self-efficacy for planning the work of the individual. Questioning participants about paperwork tasks and meeting compliance guidelines, revealed the theme routine driven. Establishing timelines, writing reminders and organization assist participants in feeling confident about their skills in this area. Trying to reach the finish line emerged as the major theme for helping ED students meet IEP goals. Building and maintaining positive relationships with students and their families as well as writing attainable goals based on specific academic and social needs of the students impacted participants' self-efficacy views. Additionally, when ED students could spend more time in the general education setting, participant's self-efficacy views were strengthened.

Successful experiences and factors such as students' aggressive behaviors and a perceived lack of support revealed contrasts in how participants described their self-efficacy views for helping ED students attain higher academic and behavior goals. Not surprisingly, participants who felt supported viewed their self-efficacy as a group effort. Those who felt isolated and unsupported were doubtful of their ability to help ED students attain higher academic and social outcomes.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of the of this transcendental phenomenological was to describe how special education teachers of ED students viewed their self-efficacy for handling ED students' disruptive behaviors and managing classroom tasks within the context of the self-contained setting. The goal was to document the varied experiences of special education teachers and to bring attention to how their self-efficacy impacts the work they do within the context of teaching ED students in a self-contained setting. This chapter begins with a detailed description of the 10 participants. The research questions were explored through participants' experiences shared through individual interview questions, focus group interviews, and a participants' blog post. Data were analyzed according to the plan described in Chapter Three. Significant statements, taken from data sources, and identified themes were analyzed and presented in Chapter Four. This chapter overview is presented in sections in the following order: (a) a chapter overview, (b) summary of findings, (c) a discussion of the findings, (d) the implications through the context of the relevant literature and theory, (d) an implications section, (e) the study limitations and delimitations, (f) recommendations for future research, and (g) a concluding summary.

Summary of Findings

The participants in the study, special education teachers who teach ED students within a self-contained setting, shared how they view their self-efficacy for teaching ED students and how self-efficacy helped them navigate teaching tasks within the self-contained setting through personal interviews, focus group interviews, and a participant blog. Nine themes, adaptable, inconsistent, hesitant, like a relay team, routine driven, trying to reach the finish line, uncertain,

group effort, and doubtful emerged through examination of the data and present the shared experiences of participants. The data collection methods provided answers to the five research questions and inspired participants to share meaningful and poignant experiences that have impacted them on a personal and professional level.

Research question one guiding this study asked how special education teachers view their self-efficacy dealing with behavior issues when teaching ED students. The themes adaptable and inconsistent emerged. Managing student behavior is major concern for special education teachers who teach ED students within a self-contained setting. Participants viewed their self-efficacy as adaptable when they could address student behavior and maintain control of the classroom environment. On the other hand, participants viewed their self-efficacy as inconsistent when students' behaviors spiraled to a level where participants felt forced to seek administrative support or when students' behavior or ask for students to be removed from the classroom. Some participants reported that administrative reactions to ED students' behavior or requests for assistance negatively impacted their self-efficacy views for handling behavior issues causing feelings and perceptions of failure.

Research question two addressed how participants viewed their self-efficacy for planning the work of the paraprofessional. The paraprofessional has an important role in assisting the special education teacher in providing academic and behavior supports in the ED self-contained classroom. The duties participants assigned paraprofessionals ranged from completing clerical tasks to providing instructional and behavior support for ED students in both the self-contained classroom and general education classroom. The quality of the relationship between the paraprofessional and the special education teacher impacted the self-efficacy views of participants. Participants' self-efficacy views for planning the work of this

individual were hesitant when the special education teacher did not have a strong working relationship with the paraprofessional or if the paraprofessional was unable to make a social or an emotional connection with the ED students. When the relationship between the paraprofessional and the special education teacher was rooted in trust, a shared work ethic, and a mutual desire to help ED students succeed, participants viewed their self-efficacy like a leader of relay team. One participant described the paraprofessionals she worked with as “My eyes when I could not see.”

Research question three addressed how participants viewed their self-efficacy for meeting IEP and eligibility paperwork compliance guidelines. Analysis of the participants’ responses revealed the theme routine driven. According to participants, meeting compliance timelines required organization, setting goals, and setting up personal reminders on calendars or electronic devices. Some participants, however, experienced minor challenges with getting started and sticking to a set routine. Nine participants preferred to chunk tasks into small units and complete paperwork within a certain time frame. One participant preferred to set aside a specific day and complete paperwork tasks in one sitting. Having the flexibility to use personalized methods fostered high self-efficacy views within participants.

Research question four examined how participants viewed their self-efficacy for helping ED students meet IEP goals. Analysis of participants’ responses revealed the theme, trying to reach the finish line. Participants felt strongly that having personal knowledge of ED students’ strengths and weaknesses was necessary to write IEP goals that were measurable and attainable. Participants felt most efficacious helping students reach IEP goals when they used data gathered through their own personal observations, instructional deficits, and behavioral needs. One participant was adamant about knowing students’ academic strengths and

weaknesses before attempting to write an IEP. Additionally, the participant recounted a time she refused to write an IEP because she was not familiar with the student behaviorally or academically. Familiarity with ED students and writing goals based on a students' present level of functioning, academically and behaviorally, enabled participants to write IEP goals that were data driven, measurable, and attainable. On the other hand, participants who struggled with managing the classroom environment when students' behavior reached a crisis level reported feeling overwhelmed and unsure of how to regain control of the classroom. The theme uncertain described how participants viewed their self-efficacy when the special education teacher's focus shifted from achieving IEP goals to maintaining safety within the classroom. This was most evident, participants reported, when students were violent or when situations occurred outside of the school that caused students to experience heightened emotions which limited their ability to focus on school related tasks.

Research question five examined how participants viewed their self-efficacy for helping ED students attain higher academic and behavior outcomes. The first theme identified through this research question was group effort. Participants identified begin dependent on their colleagues and administrators to play a supporting role in helping ED students feel successful and included in the school environment. When the school culture was inclusive and concerted efforts were made to instruct ED students in the general education classroom and integrate them into schoolwide activities, participants noted that students responded positively. Also, when general education teachers monitored, reinforced behavior expectations, and participated in reward systems that celebrated the successes of ED students, special education teachers reported feeling included and supported which strengthened their self-efficacy. Special education teachers reported feeling isolated. Working in isolation and having the

responsibility of gathering data to demonstrate that ED students are responding to academic and behavior interventions negatively impacted self-efficacy lowering experience. However, when structures were in place that fostered collaboration with general education teachers enabled the special education teacher to gain knowledge of the curriculum as well as acquire knowledge of innovative instructional practices being used in the general education classroom. Knowing which strategies were used in the general education setting also allowed the special education teacher to reinforce skills using the same methods in the self-contained setting. This helped the ED teacher feel less isolated, allowed ED students to build relationships with other adults in the building, and allowed ED students to receive the same instruction as their non-disabled peers.

One the other hand, several participants viewed their self-efficacy as doubtful for helping ED students attain higher academic and behavior outcomes when students demonstrated little to no improvement in behavior. Participants felt reported little opportunity to focus on students' academic needs and deficits. Factors participants perceived as out of their control included a lack of parental support, misdiagnosed or undiagnosed mental health conditions, and a lack of consistent medication management. Participants reported that despite providing consistent behavior supports to address triggers and reward systems, behaviors would improve for a short time and then revert to negative patterns. The inconsistency in caused the participants to feel defeated and doubt their ability to help ED students.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how special education teachers of ED students view their self-efficacy for completing classroom task within a self-contained setting. Conducting this study, I found that participants' views of their self-efficacy were dependent on

how they interpreted outcomes, level of motivation, and whether they had a propensity for internal or external locus of control. These findings confirm Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory and Rotter's (1966) locus of control theory and may spur further examination of the self-efficacy views of special education teachers who teach ED students in a self-contained setting.

Empirical Literature

The qualitative research examining how special education teachers who teach ED students within a self-contained setting view their self-efficacy for completing specific teaching tasks was limited. Most of the previous studies utilized quantitative methods and focused on the correlation between ED students' behavior and special education teachers' self-efficacy. When examined using qualitative methods, participants can describe their thoughts, emotional responses, and how student behavior impacts their successful completion of tasks. When an individual is confident in their ability to produce desired outcomes, they act on the belief despite the challenges they may encounter (Bandura, 2001).

As one's self efficacy increases and influences task performance, the successful effects of one's performance in turn builds confidence (Sandholtz & Ringstaff, 2014). Some participants expressed feeling highly confident in their ability to manage behavior situations the ED self-contained classroom while others were not as self-assured for dealing with behavior concerns. Participants' previous successes in dealing with ED students' behavior strengthened their self-efficacy and enabled them to address behavior situations with a confident mindset. Albert stated, "Each student is different and has different triggers and needs, so the nature of the problem will be specific from student to student. I am not always successful, but I don't stop trying". Because judgments and actions are partly self-determined,

people can effect change in themselves and their situations through motivation and their own efforts (Bandura, 1989). Certain participants were motivated to adjust their practices and attribute student success to their efforts. On the other hand, other participants developed a defeatist mindset when they did not achieve the desired outcome. An individual's view of their self-efficacy can be task specific and teachers may lower expectations for some students and if they do not feel that they have the capacity to meet their needs (Cook, 2012). Barbara expressed, "I feel confident in helping students reach IEP goals but managing student behavior is most challenging for me". Mandy asserted, "I have the academic piece of under control for the most part, but teaching them basic manners, consideration for others' feeling, or not to respond violently is a different story altogether." Cook (2012) stated "individuals are often confident and directive in attempting to control their environment, with a strong disposition of linking their actions and consequences" (p. 285). Teachers who hold high self-efficacy beliefs are more positive regarding the future outcomes of ED students while low self-efficacy teachers tended to focus more on behavior as a predictor of failure (Mojavezi & Poodineh, 2012).

Teaching students with emotional disability can create a sense of uncertainty and make the job less satisfying (Nance & Calbrese, 2009). The sense of uncertainty places special education teachers who teach ED students at greater risk for developing uneven self-efficacy beliefs which means special education teachers may be confident in their ability to manage behavior while less confident with helping ED student attain academic goals. There is a large body of research that substantiates a link between teacher self-efficacy beliefs with student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Participants who were committed to working with ED students, those who understood and accepted the dynamics of teaching ED

students in a self-contained setting, were motivated and adapted to situations and maintained a focus on how to adjust their practices to achieve desired outcomes. When individuals are confident in their ability to produce desired outcomes, they act on the beliefs despite the challenges they may encounter (Bandura, 2001).

Paraprofessionals provide instructional support and/or other direct services for special education students under the direction of the special education teacher (NRECERS, 1989). How an individual cognitively processes or perceives situations enables them to predict possible outcomes and make attempts to take control over their actions to achieve a desired result. Several participants reported having high self-efficacy for planning the work of the paraprofessional. The participants who were confident with planning the work of the paraprofessional were able to leverage individual strengths and interests and derived a sense of personal accomplishment when the paraprofessional successfully completed assigned tasks. Participants' view of their self-efficacy was obtained vicariously or observing the paraprofessional complete a task successfully or to their liking. Martha expressed, "My paraprofessional is a team player. She is flexible and picks up where I left off. If I need go after a student who has left the classroom or attend an IEP meeting, she becomes me." Mandy also shared, "It does not matter who starts the work as long as it gets finished. We are a team and take up each other's slack." Researchers theorized that reciprocal relationships existed between teachers' sense of efficacy and staff relationships (Ashton et al., 1983). Participants responses revealed that a quality working relationship between the special education teacher and the paraprofessional impacted their self-efficacy views and enabled them to rely on the paraprofessional to support them in completing classroom tasks. Vicarious observation of a task can have a self-efficacy building experience especially when completed by someone

deemed credible. Participants who did not have a good working relationship with the paraprofessional expressed distrust and a reluctance to assign these individuals meaningful tasks. “Feeling ineffective and experiencing a reduced sense of personal accomplishment can cause teachers to experience negative, cynical attitudes, and feelings about colleagues. (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Barbara reported feeling anxious about assigning tasks to her paraprofessional because of her own control issues. She shared, “I want to do it all because I need it to be done my way.” Academic knowledge of subject areas factored into participants’ hesitancy when assigning tasks to the paraprofessional. Anna expressed that she is not comfortable if the paraprofessional does not have strong subject knowledge. She stated, “I’ll listen while she works with students. If students are not getting it or if she is not explaining the right way, I’ll assign her something else to work on and I’ll take over the task.” Efficacy judgements on whether an individual possess the skill to complete a task is linked to the degree of difference between individual completing the task and the individual observing. The perception that an individual cannot complete a task may be not, however, be based on actual competence (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Efficacy expectations are beliefs about the result of a given task (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Bandura & Locke, 2003). Teacher self-efficacy is a constantly evolving situation-specific construct influenced daily by teachers’ interactions with individuals in their environment (Jones, 2011, p. 14). Participants who were trusting of their assistants felt comfortable assigning tasks. Bandura (1997) wrote that teachers’ efficacy beliefs are neither consistent across the many kinds of tasks that special education teachers are required to perform.

Special education who teach ED students face specific job-related required paperwork tasks that may intensify emotional stress (Schlichte et al., 2005). There are legal requirements

related to paperwork and compliance timelines that may be viewed as burdensome, which may increase feelings of dissatisfaction (Boe & Cook, 2006; Carlson, Chen, Schroll, & Klein, 2003; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Luekens, Lyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). Mandy shared, “Paperwork is a necessary part of the job and procrastination creates a stressful situation for me and everyone else.” Stressful situations influenced some participants to view their self-efficacy from a deficit perspective. Self-efficacy beliefs can also serve as motivating factors that can be self-aiding or self-hindering.

Participants’ views of whether they possessed the skills needed to complete specific tasks impacted their self-efficacy views. Barbara stated, “Paperwork is a struggle for me and I have a feeling that it going to always be a struggle in my career. I’m not good at this sit-down type of work.” Participants also experienced feeling overwhelmed, intensified emotional stress, and anxiety, because of required paperwork tasks and meeting deadlines. Stephanie shared, “If I try to do too much paperwork at one time, I feel overwhelmed and nervous because there is always something else that needs to be done like lesson plans, checking papers, or documenting behaviors.” Job related factors, writing and implementing students’ IEPs, teaching multiple grade levels, and collecting data, create additional stress for special educators (Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011). This was evidenced when Martha shared, “I struggle with paperwork tasks to be honest. I have three grade levels to prepare for SOL tests, so I have a difficult time completing paperwork.”

According to Allinder (1994), special education teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs have a positive impact on instructional planning, organization of tasks, and improved student outcomes. Being organized and developing a system for getting paperwork tasks completed on time requires establishing and following routines as well as keeping everyone that has a role to

play informed. Prioritizing paperwork tasks by sticking to procedures such keeping a calendar and communicating with other staff members who are part of the IEP team enabled participants to complete paperwork tasks within specific timeframes. Anna shared, “I write due dates down and stick to getting things done. I stay a week ahead of paperwork. Chunking tasks day by day makes it easier to get things done and accommodate parents and administrators’ schedules.”

Debra prioritizes tasks according their importance to student achievement. Debra shared, “My priority is on the paperwork I need to teach my students on a daily basis.” Bandura (1989) wrote people who hold high self-efficacy beliefs visualize successful outcomes and individuals who have low self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to visualize failure scenarios that become self-fulfilling. In the end, participants who held high self-efficacy beliefs made paperwork tasks a priority. Hence, participants’ efficacy expectations were tied to the effort necessary to complete a task and the likelihood of a successful outcome linked to their actions. Participants believed in the power of their ability, skill level, and knowledge to influence outcomes. The combination of an expected outcome and a belief in their ability to control the outcome motivated participants. Teacher self-efficacy is a motivation factor that aids in job satisfaction, job commitment, and student achievement (Hastings & Brown, 2002). Participants who believed they possessed the skills to control outcomes, were motivated and committed to tasks they valued, that promoted competency, and satisfied personal interests. The more participants experienced mastery experiences, the efficacious they felt about completing specific classroom tasks.

There is a significant need for special education teachers to meet the academic and behavior needs of students with emotional and behavioral deficits (Boe, 2013). ED students often display behaviors that disrupt the learning environment causing special education

teachers to often shift the focus from instruction to behavior management. Students with behavioral problems have been shown to receive fewer instructional opportunities, and as a result, experience lower rates of academic achievement (Gunter, Denny, Jack, Shores, & Nelson, 1993). Participants viewed their self-efficacy for helping students meet IEP goals and attain higher behavior and academic outcomes in various ways. Participants who were confident in their ability were optimistic about helping students attain IEP goals and confident in their ability to help them achieve improved academic and social gains. Research has indicated that teachers who hold high self-efficacy beliefs are more positive regarding the potential of ED students while low self-efficacy teachers tended to focus more on behavior as a predictor of failure (Mojavezi & Poodineh, 2012). Albert reported having high expectations for students and providing instruction beyond what is necessary for students to attain IEP goals. He stated, “I work with students where they are. I don’t limit my teaching to what is stated on the IEP. If they are capable, I will put as much on a student’s plate as they can stand.” Leveraging opportunities to provide additional instruction confirmed the belief in the potential for ED students to achieve successful outcomes. Martha stated, “One advantage of small class sizes is being able to provide intensive instruction in the ED classroom helps students bridge achievement gaps.”

A firm belief in the potential of ED students and possessing a high level of confidence in their ability to help ED students attain successful outcomes motivated participants. Debra shared, “My self-efficacy has not changed. I really believe that if I keep giving my best, the students will give me their best. After all this time, I still believe.” Debra’s frequent success with helping ED students achieve higher outcomes influences her belief in the likelihood of being successful with students in the future. This confirms that teachers base their judgements

of efficacy on how effectively and frequently they have achieved goals or mastered similar tasks in the past (Bembenutty, 2007).

Participants who focused on the behavior ED students did not believe they possessed the skills to help ED students and that failure was imminent. Barbara stated, “I’m at the point of believing that no amount of care, love, or structure is what ED students need. They need mental health supports and more than I can provide. It is a losing battle.” When participants reached a point of giving up on students their lack of belief impacted their practices and the effort they put forth to assist students. Susan stated, “I question my ability to help a student reach IEP goals if she or he has mental health condition that is undiagnosed or not being treated.” Bandura (1989) wrote people who have low self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to visualize failure scenarios that become self-fulfilling. Repeated failures or unsuccessful attempts can negatively impact mastery experiences and exacerbate feelings of incompetence. Mastery experiences or successful attempts to achieve a desired outcome are powerful motivators that foster positive thought patterns and emotional responses. According to Hoy and Spero (2005), “mastery experiences are the most powerful source of efficacy information; the perception that teaching has been successful raises efficacy expectations that teaching will be successful in the future” (p. 345).

Theoretical Literature

One theoretical framework guiding this study was Bandura’s (1977) social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory explains the process of individuals learning through interactions within their environment. Through interactions with students, paraprofessionals, participants learned about the consequences of their attempts to complete specific teaching tasks (Schunk, 2012). The way in which participants perceived the outcomes of their actions provided

feedback that changed their environments and their personal factors, which in turn informed and altered future behaviors. Participants who perceived their actions as bringing about the desired outcomes were motivated to take risks, continued to persist despite setbacks, and experienced an efficacy building experience. Feedback was received when the desired outcome was obtained or when participants were motivated to persist despite a possible failure. Albert's response, "I am not always successful, but I don't stop trying to find out what works." demonstrated his perception of failure as motivation to persist and alter his actions to achieve a desired outcome. Debra identified her belief in setting small academic goals for students based on their strengths and leveraging that success, through positive reinforcement, to support a reduction in behavior outburst. In other words, the outcomes of Debra's thoughts, beliefs, and actions are reinforced when students experience success. As a result, her students' success with meeting goals was feedback that provided motivation for both her and her students. Debra's cognitive interactions between perception, action, and outcomes, supports Bandura (1997) which posits that how one perceives the results of their actions provides feedback, which in turn informs and alters future behaviors. How participants interpreted outcomes predicted their future actions to achieve desired results. Interpretation of outcomes of events also affected how participants viewed situations such as failures and successes. The beliefs an individual or teacher has about an ability or task will affect one's motivation and actions to persevere when faced with obstacles (Paneque & Barbetta, 2006; Scott, 2012). Ultimately, participants who experienced the most success were more motivated to persist even though failure was a possible outcome.

Locus of Control

Locus of control is a construct that provides an explanation of how individuals view outcomes. Locus of control is a predisposition toward a belief in a perception of what causes an outcome (Rotter 1966). Participants confirmed that having a predisposition toward both internal and external locus of control was situation specific. Individuals who believe outcomes are a result of one's behavior view outcomes based on internal locus of control and believe in their power, skill level, and knowledge to affect outcomes. On the other hand, individuals who believe in external locus of control perceive outcomes as fate, chance, and beyond their control. Reactions to situations are shaped by whether individuals view outcomes as internal or external (Kormanik & Rocco, 2009).

While some participants were confident in bringing about positive academic and social outcomes for students and held a propensity for internal locus of control, several participants believed too many factors were outside of their control and held a predisposition toward external locus of control. Susan, for example, questioned her ability to help ED students because of external factors that decreased the likelihood of her successfully managing behavior situations. Susan reported, "I will never be able to reach the student if there is a mental health issue that is not being addressed." Susan's interpretation of the outcomes, which are repeated failures with managing student behavior, impacted her actions, effort, and her belief in future successes for ED students. Her if then view, implied that she could help ED students if there was not a mental health diagnosis. Barbara also perceived external factors as restricting her ability to help ED students achieve any degree of success. She was initially hopeful and positive, but over the years her view of ED students has changed. At this point, she shared, "They need mental health supports, one on one assistants, and so much more than I or anyone

else can provide. I think it is a losing battle.” Participants who believed their efforts would not lead to desired outcomes eventually developed self-hindering thoughts and attributed their failures to factors outside of their control. Additionally, individuals projected that future failures were imminent. Through her statement, “I think it is a losing battle”, Barbara implied that no one else has the capability of helping ED students and that failure is the only possible outcome based on her experiences. Barbara’s belief supported Cook (2012) which states, “individuals are often confident and directive in attempting to control their environment, with a strong disposition of linking their actions and consequences” (p. 285).

Internal locus of control is a significant factor that influences an individual’s level of motivation for achieving outcomes (Martinez, 2003). Participants who viewed who view classroom tasks from internal locus of control were able to approach tasks from common sense approach and set goals for ED students that were within reach. Anna’s common-sense approach to setting IEP goals demonstrated thoughts that were self-aiding and reflective. Anna placed emphasis on managing student outcomes according to a timeline and focusing on goals on what she viewed as attainable and within her control. Internal locus of control enabled her to systematically address ED students’ needs. She described her process like planting a seed, providing all the elements needed for germination, and providing nurturance to support optimal and realistic growth outcomes. She stated, “It’s all about knowing what I can do and what a student can realistically achieve in one school year.” Mandy’s propensity for internal locus of control motivated her and heightened her self-efficacy. She stated, “It is small victories that encourage me to remain in the classroom. My student’s success makes me feel more confident.” Rotter (1966), defined locus of control as a predisposition for a thinking about

outcomes as controllable or uncontrollable. Participants who received favorable outcomes with tasks related to teaching ED students, were internally motivated and viewed outcomes as within their control. Stephanie explained her propensity for internal locus of control, “The more I’ve worked at it through trial and error and using different techniques, success with managing behavior just built upon itself. I do a lot of reflecting on what works, what’s not working, and changing practices when necessary.”

Implications

The results of my study, describing how special education teachers who teach ED students view their self-efficacy for completing classroom tasks, can provide building and central office administrators with ideas for designing professional learning opportunities to foster greater self-efficacy in special education teachers. Additionally, armed with an understanding of motivation and the relationship between knowledge, skills, and performance, administrators can make targeted efforts to increase teacher retention thereby improving academic and social outcomes for ED students. The findings of this study demonstrate need for special education teachers to have specific supports that help them navigate the myriad of tasks they perform and practical professional learning opportunities that help them meet the needs of ED students.

Theoretical Implications

Locus of control directs the actions of individuals based on their propensity for internal or external control of outcomes and whether they view outcomes as within their control. An individual’s locus of control is directly related to their self-efficacy beliefs. While participants viewed their self-efficacy in a variety of ways, those who held positive views of their ability to manage classroom tasks held predispositions for internal locus of control. Rotter (1966) posited

that teachers' perceptions of their power to control internal and external factors also influences their levels of self-efficacy. Participants held high self-efficacy beliefs and were confident in their ability and approached situations with a positive attitude. They were hopeful of achieving desired outcomes and connected outcomes to their actions and future outcomes to their reactions to unsuccessful attempts. Reactions to situations are shaped by one's perceptions of the source and by the individual's perceptions of the ability to cope with the outcome (Kormanik & Rocco, 2009). In the end, participants who were able to cope with unsuccessful attempts viewed them as learning opportunities.

Participants' perceptions of failure were shaped by their ability to adjust their actions or practices and rebound from unsuccessful attempts. In the case of participants who held low self-efficacy beliefs, their perception of ED students as unreachable, was shaped by their inability to cope with unsuccessful outcomes. Participants who viewed their self-efficacy from a deficit perspective also focused on students' deficits which ultimately impacted the level of effort they put into helping ED students (Bandura, 1997). In the end, their perception of their failed attempts kept them bound in a holding pattern of self-fulfilling prophecy. The Pygmalion effect suggests that when a teacher expects students to achieve negative outcomes, they behave in ways that are unfavorable toward students (Rosenthal, 1997). Participants' who held low expectations viewed their ability to help ED students as improbable. When considering the interconnectedness of self-efficacy, locus of control, outcome expectations, and effort theory, from a theoretical perspective, when these constructs are at the right balance, the achievement of ED students will rise, special education teacher retention rates will improve, and special education teachers will experience greater job satisfaction.

Empirical Implications

Teaching special education students having an emotional disability is a major challenge that causes special educators to “see themselves as ineffective and no longer doing a meaningful and important job” (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010, p. 1060). The findings of this study imply that special education teachers who teach ED students need a supportive school environment that leads to improved self-efficacy views. School-based and central office administrators must make professional development opportunities available that focus on instructional best practices, IEP development, and classroom management. Professional development at the school level in conjunction with mentoring initiatives can help build a more solid foundation for special education teachers as well as support the development of stronger efficacy beliefs (Burkman, 2012). Administrators have a responsibility to conduct a needs assessment and implement school improvement action steps that address the professional learning needs of all staff members. Administrators may not create opportunities in the master schedule for the special education teacher to attend common grade level planning sessions. Factors such as student behaviors, feelings of isolation, and a lack of in-service experiences and/or opportunities are factors that intensify feelings of burnout and decrease retention rates of special education teachers (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011). Understanding how to provide experiences that facilitate and sustain high self-efficacy beliefs in special education teachers is a key concept can that improve their decision-making capabilities and implementation of classroom practices that lead to higher student achievement, and a greater commitment to the teaching profession (Erdem & Demirel, 2007).

Practical Implications

The diverse experiences of participants provided evidence of the need for both special education central office and building based school administrators to focus on special education teacher self-efficacy development. Improved skill sets of educators and improved student outcomes is dependent on the growth, expertise, and confidence of the model (Singh, de Grave, Ganjiwale, Burdick, van der Vleuten, 2013). Participants in this study cited behavior as a significant barrier to higher academic and behavior outcomes for ED students. This supports research which concludes as students' behavior challenges increase less attention is focused on academics (Rousseau, 2011). Student behavior caused some participants to experience lower motivation, invest less effort into teaching, and predict that ED students would never experience success. Participants also shared that the day to day struggle to strike a balance between focusing on academics and reducing student behaviors impacted their confidence and motivation. Using this knowledge, administrators should respond by providing behavior based and instructional focused professional development opportunities. Understanding how to provide experiences that facilitate and sustain high self-efficacy beliefs, is a key concept that can improve special education teachers' implementation of instructional and behavior management practices that lead to higher student achievement (Erdem & Demirel, 2007). Providing professional development through focused support, including continued coaching and mentoring may be helpful to special education teachers (Pianta 2006; Pianta et al. 2008). Observing a seasoned mentor can create opportunities for efficacy building experiences through mastery, vicarious, verbal persuasion, or physiological states.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations of this study were designed purposely to gather data from participants who had shared experiences. Selecting to use a phenomenological approach was appropriate because the purpose of the study was to describe, through their shared experiences, how special education teachers viewed their self-efficacy for teaching ED students and managed teaching tasks within a self-contained setting. To add credibility to this study, individuals who were special education teachers who taught ED students in the self-contained setting were selected. The level of experience was purposeful as participants with three or more years' experience, has persevered in the profession. Limiting the setting of the study to ABC school district was purposeful as this district uses the self-contained model to instruct special education students served under the category of emotional disorder.

The limitations of this study should be discussed because they present the potential weaknesses of the study. The participants of this study taught in a self-contained setting. Other school districts may not use this instructional model to educate ED students. Therefore, study participants' experiences were limited to working with a paraprofessional and students in a self-contained classroom. Additionally, some interviews took place during the first marking period and participants may not have had ample time to fully establish routines and structures in the classroom and get to know students and their triggers. This fact may have impacted student behavior and teachers' experiences with students. All but one of the participants were female. Therefore, the data presented may have been impacted by the gender of the participants. Several participants reported having some previous experience working with students who presented with behavior challenges. With that in mind, it is possible that

participants' previous experiences working with behaviorally challenged students were more likely to engage freely and feel more comfortable sharing their experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future qualitative studies that examines how school administrators who have ED self-contained settings in their buildings view their self-efficacy is a recommendation. A study of this kind could be the impetus that drives changes in instructional leadership that improves academic and social outcomes for ED students. A study of this kind would provide data that could be used to design professional learning opportunities for new and seasoned school administrators to help them develop inclusive school cultures and support them with providing experiences that improve special education teacher self-efficacy.

Finally, a future study that examines the resiliency of special education teachers who persist in the ED self-contained setting would assist in identifying personal and professional characteristics that lead to longevity in the field. Data from a study of this kind would also assist special education central office administrators and building administrators with designing learning opportunities that foster competency and confidence and ultimately improve the retention of special education teachers regardless of the special education category they teach.

Summary

Chapter Five presented the findings from this research study and presented how special education teachers who teach ED students in a self-contained setting view their self-efficacy for teaching ED students and managing teaching tasks in the self-contained setting. It was important to acknowledge and understand that special education teachers have specific needs for ongoing professional development and support from both central office special education

administrators and building administrators that foster self-efficacy building experiences. The diverse experiences and self-efficacy views of participants are evidence of the need for both special education central office and building based school administrators to focus on special education teacher development that validates the work they do with ED students and affirm the obstacles they encounter as they endeavor to teach students who present with challenging behaviors. One participant reported feeling like a “failure” in helping her ED students to achieve positive academic and social outcomes while another reported feeling “confident and loving” toward teaching ED students. The wide variation in views can create an imbalance in the quality of instruction ED students receive as teacher efficacy levels can fluctuate within a variety of contexts and are influenced by both internal and external factors and impact persistence. School administrators have a professional responsibility to help special education teachers develop instructional competence to help ED students attain IEP goals and higher academic and social outcomes.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Letter of Approval**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 15, 2017

Cheryl Andrews

IRB Approval 2903.091517: Self-Efficacy and Job-Related Tasks: Special Educators Who Teach Students with Emotional Disorders

Dear Cheryl Andrews,

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

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

Sincerely,

APPENDIX B: School District Research Request Authorization

Research Authorization Request ABC School District

SUMMARY

ABC School District encourages the pursuit of research with potential benefits to the instructional program and the professional growth of division personnel by graduate students and other professionally and technically qualified individuals and research organizations.

The following factors are used in determining whether the school system can cooperate in a research proposal:

- The technical soundness of the research design;
- The appropriateness of the research in a public-school setting;
- The availability of research sites and subjects; and
- The need for the division to protect the personal and legal rights of students, parents, and staff.

The following categories of research will be accepted for screening and evaluation:

- Proposals for master's thesis and doctoral dissertations.

Applications for research projects to meet the requirements of undergraduate or graduate courses will be handled on a case by case basis in regard to the scope of the project and the factors defined above.

The Research Authorization Committee (RAC) is responsible for screening and evaluating all requests for studies to be conducted within ABC SCHOOL DISTRICT, and the signature of the RAC chairperson is required before a research study may proceed. Proposals involving sensitive issues or substantial commitment of ABC SCHOOL DISTRICT resources may be referred to the appropriate Executive Director

Applications to conduct research in ABC SCHOOL DISTRICT cannot be accepted from April 1st – June 16th. Research activities involving students may not be conducted from April 15th through September 30th, unless specifically requested and approved by the Assistant Superintendent of Academic Services.

The following table highlights the timetable for the RAC review process for all original proposal submissions. Subsequent proposal revisions, if necessary, will be handled upon receipt by the RAC chairperson. Researchers are encouraged to submit their research proposals well in advance of these deadlines.

Student and parent participation in a study is completely voluntary. Participation of school personnel also is voluntary unless specifically indicated by the Chief Academic Officer. Any instruments to be administered to research subjects must display a clarifying statement to this effect. Anonymity of any participant, school, or the division must be preserved.

4. If you answered "No" in Question 3, indicate whether you are proposing this study as:

An external research organization

A response to a request for proposals (RFP) or grant announcement.

An individual researcher. Briefly describe your area of research specialization and activity:

5.If your study involves human subjects (e.g. students, parents, and/or staff), you must have prior approval from your institution's human subjects review board. Have you received approval from your human subjects review board?

Yes

No

Not Applicable

B. MAJOR FEATURES OF PROPOSED STUDY

All applications must be accompanied by a full technical proposal, submitted as an attachment to this application.

NOTE:

See page 7 for format.

1. Title of research

2. Desired time schedule for carrying out the research:

From

/

to

/

Mo. Yr. Mo. Yr.

3. The research problems/questions and subproblems/subquestions to be studied:

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

4. Type of research site(s) required:

a) Check all that apply:

Elementary

Middle

High

Central or Field Office

b) Do you want to work with a specific school or schools?

Yes

No

If "Yes," specify

c) Are there other types of research sites required?

Yes

No

If "Yes," specify

3

C: REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDY

All applicants submitting proposals involving students or staff must also include a copy of their institution's human

NOTE:

subjects review board approval letter and a copy of the informed consent agreement detailing their subjects'

voluntary participation.

1. Will data be collected from/on students?

Yes (Answer parts a, b, and c of this question.)

No (Skip to Question 2.)

a) Total number of students needed for this study

b) Check and describe any specific criteria for selection of students to take part in the study.

Grade level

Ability/Achievement level

Racial/Ethnic background

Gender

Enrollment in special programs

Other (specify)

c) Are students' test results required?

Yes

No

If "Yes," specify tests and types of scores needed

2. Will data be collected from/on school staff, parents, or former students?

Yes (Answer parts a, b, c, and d of this question.)

No (Skip to Section D.)

a) Check all that are applicable; indicate number needed and briefly describe individuals' roles in study.

Individuals Needed

TotalNumber

Role of Individuals

Classroom teachers

School-based administrators

Central office Administrators

Parents

Former students or families

Support services staff

Other (specify)

b) Are data on staff required?

Yes

No

If "Yes," specify

c) Are data on parents required?

Yes

No

If "Yes," specify

d) Are data on former students required?

Yes

No

If "Yes," specify

APPENDIX C: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

SELF-EFFICACY AND JOB-RELATED TASKS: SPECIAL EDUCATORS WHO TEACH STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISORDER

Cheryl J. Andrews
Liberty University
School of Education

I am asking you to take part in this study because of your position as a special education teacher who teaches ED students. I ask that you read the form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate.

This study is being conducted by Cheryl J. Andrews, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University.

Background Information:

Data from this study will be used to write a narrative that describes your experiences as a special educator who teaches ED students. Specifically, I am interested how self-efficacy helps you complete tasks specific to teaching ED students in the self-contained setting. It is my goal to share your voices and the experiences you have had with teaching ED students in the self-contained setting.

Procedures:

Full participation will consist of a personal interview, a focus group interview, and posts to a special educators' blog.

- You will be asked to be to participate in an individual interview. The interviews should take approximately one and a half hours to complete. I will tape the interviews using an audio recording device so that I do not miss any of your responses.
- Focus group interview participation is similar to a group round table discussion. Focus groups will consist of two or more participants. Questions
- You are also being asked to submit entries to a participant blog. The purpose of the blog is to provide a method for participants to share experiences and to exchange dialogue with other with other ED teachers. A prompt will be provided so that all participants' entries pertain to the same topic.
- You will also be given an opportunity to review your responses to interview questions to ensure that I have transcribed them correctly. I ask you provide feedback on transcribed data within 10 days of receipt.

Confidentiality

- All responses and data from the interviews, blog, and observation will be kept confidential. All participants will be given a pseudonym to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity are maintained. This pseudonym will be used in the narrative and

reporting sections of the dissertation as well. Data gathered from this study will be kept in a locked cabinet that only I have had access to.

Compensation

You are under no obligation to participate in this study, and you will not receive any compensation for participation. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current job or position. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Risk and Benefits of being in this 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 presents the essence of how self-efficacy helps special education teachers of ED students with task completion.
2. It addresses a gap in the literature on how self-efficacy helps special education teachers of ED students with task completion.
3. It provides insight of how to improve the self-efficacy beliefs of special education teachers.
4. It presents the voices of special education teachers who teach ED students and provides validation of the work they do.

How to Withdraw from the Study

You may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the researcher at 757-344-8616 or by emailing the researcher at cjandrews@liberty.edu. All data collected will be promptly disposed of and any information within the dissertation deleted.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Cheryl J. Andrews. You may ask any questions that you have now. Should have questions during the course of this study, you may contact the researcher at cjandrews@liberty.edu or by calling 757-344-8614. You may also contact the student's dissertation chair at vevans@liberty.edu

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. My printed name and signature indicate my intention to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date

Your Name (printed)

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____ Date

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

Cheryl J. Andrews (principal investigator)

XXX-XXX-XXXX

cjandrews@liberty.edu

Dr. Verlyn Evans

XXX-XXX-XXXX

vevans@liberty.edu

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

APPENDIX D: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Individual Interview Questions

Self-efficacy and Job-Related Tasks: Special Educators Who Teach Students With Emotional Disorder

1. What is your name and how many years' experience do you have teaching ED students?
2. Have you taught other sub-groups of special education students? If so, which group?
3. What made you want to teach ED students?
4. ED students may exhibit extreme behaviors that are disruptive to the learning environment. What is your view of your self-efficacy for handling ED students' disruptive behaviors?
5. How do you respond to students who are disruptive? What steps do you take to calm students down?
6. How do you view your self-efficacy for completing paperwork tasks within compliance guidelines? Describe what you do to get paperwork tasks completed on time.
7. Describe how you determine which tasks to assign to the paraprofessional? What barriers do you encounter when deciding which tasks to assign to this individual?
8. Have experiences with administrators, specifically your building principal, or other colleagues shaped your self-efficacy? If so, how?
9. How does professional development help your self-efficacy? What areas of your job does professional development impact the most?
10. Did you have a mentor teacher during your career? If so, how did he or she shape your self-efficacy for teaching ED special education students?

11. Research shows that special education students lag behind general education students in achievement. How do you view your ability to help ED students achieve higher academic outcomes?
12. How do you view your self-efficacy for helping ED student attain IEP academic and behavior goals?
13. Has your view of your ability to influence positive academic and social outcomes for ED students changed during your classroom teaching experiences? If so, why have your views changed and how have they changed?

APPENDIX E: Focus Group Interview Questions

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Please tell me your name, where you teach, and how many years you have been teaching.
2. What is most challenging about your job teaching ED students?
3. What role does self-efficacy play in your decision to continue teaching ED students?
4. Do you think your school based or district administrators help, or do they worsen your self-efficacy? How? What can administrators and district supervisors do to improve your self-efficacy in teaching?

APPENDIX F: Participant Blog Prompts

Participant Blog Prompts

1. My decision to teach ED students was influenced by_____
2. Describe the perfect day, a bad day, and a typical day in an ED classroom.
3. Writing and IEP is like_____.
4. Managing ED students' behaviors is similar to_____.
5. How has your view of teaching ED students changed over time?

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