

THE EXPERIENCE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION GRADUATES WHO RECEIVED PULL-
OUT SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Sharon Diane Flückler

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2021

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of high school graduates who received special education services, in part, through a pull-out program that focused on the development of social skills in the northeast region of the state of South Carolina. The theory guiding this study was Bandura's social cognitive theory as it addressed the role of the environment, modeling, goal setting, evaluation, and sense of efficacy in human development and learning. The central research question and three sub-questions were based on the triadic reciprocity causation in Bandura's theory. The sample size was 12. Purposeful and snowball sampling were utilized. The data collection methods consisted of interviews with the graduates, a drawing to show their feelings regarding the pull-out program, and writing/dictating a letter to a current student in the pull-out program. By utilizing three different data sources, triangulation was achieved. The interview questions were centered on the participants' perceptions and experiences with the pull-out program, and if they believe the experience helped them in their life after graduation. The participants' responses were transcribed, organized, and coded. The memos, journals, and artifacts were logged. The data was analyzed to identify the invariant qualities and themes that emerged, which were feelings, social (skills), learned, self-efficacy, and level of life satisfaction. Overall, the graduates had a positive experience with the pull-out program and they learned valuable lessons. The graduates had a high level of life satisfaction, had jobs, went to college, volunteered, and/or had realistic goals to achieve these.

Keywords: graduate, job readiness skills, pull-out program, social skills, special education, special needs

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents who always told me I could achieve anything I put my mind to. I promised my dad in his final days that I would never give up on my dream of obtaining a doctorate degree. Marriage and children had me put my dream aside for several years, but here I am keeping my promise! I would also like to dedicate this work to my husband and children for their unwavering support and encouragement through the long ride of completing this degree. They have always forgiven my time spent on classes without a single complaint and gave me the strength to continue this journey. Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to God, who got me through many trials and tribulations while working on this degree.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thank my chair, Dr. Tracey Pritchard who gave me unconditional support. I was ready to give up several times and she encouraged me through to completion. I would also like to thank and acknowledge my committee member, Dr. Meredith Park for being a supportive member of my team and encouraging me to take my work to the next level. Finally, I would like to thank and acknowledge SOS Care for allowing me the opportunity to complete my interviews.

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List of Abbreviations

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Emotional and Behavioral Disability (EBD)

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

Occupational Course of Study (OCS)

Structured Behavior Support (SBS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Special education teachers must be willing to “hear” what students experience in a social skills pull-out program in order to improve programming that will impact student achievement and prepare students for life after high school. The student experience is critical to understanding how to better assist students in basic life skills that better prepare them for success. The purpose of this study was to explore students’ lived experiences in a pull-out program. The results of this study may cause change to be made based on the lived experiences of graduated students who participated in a social skills pull-out program. This study may provide beneficial information for the improvement of social-skills programming that could be utilized by special education teachers. This chapter presents background information, the situation to the researcher, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the significance of the study, the guiding research questions, and the definitions of terms that were pertinent to the study.

Background

Positive relationships with peers, teachers, and other staff members is very important for children. Relationships have an impact on the student’s success (Carter et al., 2014; Haydon et al., 2017; Hutchins et al., 2017). Special education students often struggle both socially and academically (Carter et al., 2014; Espelage et al., 2016; Halle et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2017; Syrjamaki et al., 2016). Carter et al. (2014) reported that relationships “offer a primary avenue through which students learn the array of academic, social, vocational, self-determination, and other functional skills that can contribute to their short and long-term success” (p. 91). Social competence has a major effect on the students’ success in school and beyond (Carter et al., 2014; Halle et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2017). Positive social skills enhance

the student's quality of life, so teaching children social skills is imperative. Social skills training is used to prevent many negative scenarios, such as social anxiety, isolation, and drug related problems (Kilic & Aytar, 2017).

Historical Context

For at least the last 30 years, students with disabilities have been behind their non-disabled peers in obtaining a career, attending college, and having meaningful social relationships after high school graduation (Miller-Warren, 2015; Schifter, 2016; Wagner et al., 2015). Also, "for the past 30 years, the dropout rate for students with emotional disturbance has hovered around 50%, a rate substantially higher than the dropout rate for students with other disabilities and the general population" (Sullivan & Sadeh, 2016, p. 251). It has been known for a long time that children with Autism have issues with social skills (Goldstein et al., 2014). Hutchins et al. (2017) reported that according to their literature review that stemmed from 1998-2014, the most frequent behaviors from all of the studies were failure to comply, inappropriate communication with others, and disrupting class. Students with disabilities have issues with communication, social skills, and especially developing social relationships (Alzyoudi et al., 2014; Vlachou et al., 2016; Yeo & Teng, 2015). Gul (2016) reported that the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disability explains that an intellectual disability is an impairment identified by serious impediments in cognitive abilities, conceptual, social and pragmatic skills, and adaptive practices which began prior to the child turning 18 years of age. Students who attended special education services in high school were less likely to have positive interactions with other students and this deficit continues after the completion of high school (Lyons et al., 2016; Miller-Warren, 2015; Smith & Matson, 2010). Over the course of the last 10 years, a large amount of attention has been placed on children's social-emotional capability,

including assessing and teaching social skills (Gresham, 2015). Special education students who act out might be labeled with an emotional and/or behavioral disability (EBD). These students have trouble forming relationships with important people in their lives (Haydon et al., 2017; Hutchins et al., 2017) and have poor engagement in the classroom (Nussli & Oh, 2016). During the course of the last three decades, clinicians and researchers have given a substantial amount of attention to social skills deficits in children (Matson & Wilkins, 2009).

Social Context

Poor social skills are common amongst the special education population (Laugeson et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2013). Humans have an innate psychological and biological need to be a part of a group (Syrjamaki et al., 2016). When children have a deficit in social skills, it impedes their ability to have meaningful relationships, which could lead to withdrawing from peers and isolating themselves (Bellini et al., 2007). Special education students struggle with understanding people's nonverbal cues, keeping eye contact, and other appropriate social communication skills and these deficits impede quality relationships (Cappadocia & Weiss, 2010; Doody, 2015; Halle et al., 2016). Parents and teachers report that their students with disabilities have poor social skills and poor behaviors (Lyons et al., 2016). High school graduation is important for meeting many adult milestones such as social relationships, health, career, and pay rate (Elbaum et al., 2014).

Mazzotti et al. (2015) reported in a quantitative study that social skills instruction shows some evidence in predicting career outcomes. Special education students are just not prepared for the workplace, due to not learning a positive work ethic, having social relationship issues, and poor communication skills (Chu & Zhang, 2014). People with disabilities do not typically lose their jobs due to not being capable of performing their job duties. More often, they lose their jobs

because they struggle to fit in socially with their co-workers and in performing the social duties of their job. For example, they may disrupt a meeting by walking in uninvited or they may not properly greet a customer (Agran et al., 2016). When special education students head into the work environment, they typically do not have the social skills needed to be successful in the workplace (Henson, 2014).

Theoretical Context

Bandura's social cognitive theory applies to a virtually unheard population, as it addresses the role of group, motivation, retention of information, and reproduction of skills. Social cognitive theory also shows that it is better to be proactive instead of reactive (Bandura, 2002). Bandura's (2002) Social Cognitive Theory examines environmental factors such as social modeling, evaluating, and giving feedback; behaviors such as motivation and goal setting/progress; and personal factors such as self-efficacy and self-regulation. Bandura (2002) said that most meaningful learning takes place through vicarious learning, which is learning through observation or modeling.

Currently, studies are all but nonexistent regarding students who have graduated from high school who were a part of a social skills pull-out program. There is an abundance of research regarding special education students and social skills instruction (Alzyoudi et al., 2015; Bellini et al., 2007; Cappadocia & Weiss, 2010; Doody, 2015; Goldstein et al., 2014; Gresham, 2015; Gul, 2016; Halle et al., 2016; Haydon et al., 2017; Hutchins et al., 2017; Laugeson et al., 2014; Lyons et al., 2016; Matson & Wilkins, 2009; Nussli & Oh, 2016; Puckett et al., 2017; Vlachou et al., 2016). However, there is very limited research with respect to students and their experiences with social skills instruction. There have not been very many studies that have examined whether or not children learning social skills in school has been effective (Laugeson et

al., 2014). The problem this study addressed was the dearth in qualitative research studies describing the experience of special education high school graduates who were pull-out students in a social skills group as part of their special education services. Current special education students who participate in the pull-out program could be affected by this problem and may benefit from the proposed research because there might be better ways of running the program and there is possibly a need for it to be expanded to include more special education students than who currently participate.

Situation to Self

There are a few personal reasons that I wanted to look at this problem. First and foremost, my youngest son is a special education student, as he has autism. Children with autism tend to have poor social skills (Bellini et al., 2007; Cappadocia & Weiss, 2010; Carter et al., 2014). Although my son does not participate in a pull-out social skills program like the ones that were studied, he does participate in social skills training in his class during the school day. Even though my son's functioning level is lower than the students who were interviewed in this study, special education is a subject very close to my heart. I have been a counselor in group homes and psychiatric residential treatment facilities for over 20 years and most of the children who I served were special education students who either had major mental health issues or major behavioral issues. I always worried about what we were doing to really help these children become productive members of society. I often refer to these children as the "throw away" children because many times, teachers just want them out of their class by any means possible because they are too hard to handle. No one really took the time to work with them, focusing on the development of positive relationships. They would come into a residential facility to get medication and therapy, but no real social skills training. Then they would get released and have

to go to the alternative school setting where many would lose any skills they gained. They were not given the chance to prove themselves in a regular and positive school setting. Finally, I am currently a behavior intervention specialist in my school district, and I am one of the people who teach the social skills to children in the pull-out program, so this research could directly serve me in my career. It could potentially help improve my instruction of social skills. I received some valuable feedback from the participants to help me help my current and future students. I was ready to accept any negative feedback that the participants provided as that feedback was proven to be valuable to me and my colleagues who are teachers in the social skills pull-out classes.

I did not have any prior relationship with the participants, and I was certain not to include any of my own previous students in my research study. The study is also not limited to students who graduated in my district. These students mostly came from the northeast region of the state of South Carolina, which is right next door to my home state.

My biases were handled with bracketing by utilizing journaling (Moustakas, 1994). The axiological belief is that my biases must be controlled and not enter into the study (Philosophical Assumptions and Interpretive Frameworks, 2018). I bracketed my own views to take a fresh perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A paradigm, or interpretive framework, is “a basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 18). One’s worldview is developed through the paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The lens in which the study was viewed was an ontological one. Ontology is the study of being or “the researcher’s view of reality” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 18). I attempted to report the participants’ perspectives and experiences in themes. The axiological assumption shows that the researcher has a bias and that it must be controlled. The epistemological assumption allows for the researcher to spend time with the participants and utilizes direct quotes (Philosophical Assumptions and Interpretive Frameworks, 2018).

Constructivism was the guiding paradigm as I attempted to describe the participants' perceptions. Constructivism "focuses exclusively on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind...and points out the unique experience of each of us" (Patton, 2015, p. 122). Each person's perspective is valid and worthy (Patton, 2015). Constructivism goes right along with Bandura (2002) who states that people make sense of their world through social perspectives and meaning is derived due to social situations.

Problem Statement

The problem is special education students are not given a voice as to their experiences in social skills pull-out programming and its impact on the successful implementation of social skills after graduation. Students in special education classes have many social skills deficits (Barisnikov & Straccia, 2019; Leaf et al., 2016; Reisinger & Roberts, 2017) and have more trouble obtaining and maintaining careers and social relationships after graduation (Miller-Warren, 2015; Schifter, 2016; Wagner et al., 2015). Much research has been conducted on the need for teaching social skills to special education students (Garrels, 2019; Guivarch et al., 2017; Hart & Banda, 2018; Leaf et al., 2016); however, there is a gap in qualitative research studies describing the lived experiences of special education high school graduates who were pull-out students in a social skills focused group setting. By examining the lived experiences of special education students, educational specialists will be informed in how to better structure a social skills pull-out program, thus meeting the needs of current and future students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of high school graduates who received special education services, in part, through a pull-out program that focused on the development of social skills in northeast South Carolina. The lived

experiences of special education students will be generally defined as the experiences described by the special education graduates who participated in the social skills pull-out program for at least 30 minutes per week to target their social skills deficiencies as part of their special education services while they were in school (Rose et al., 2016). Social skills are learned behaviors that can be observed in students after the skills are taught in a systematic manner (Alzyoudi et al., 2015; Gul, 2016). The theory guiding this study is Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory as it addresses how learning occurs and the importance of modeling to obtain proficiency. Modeling is a major part of any social skills instruction or curriculum. Modeling by peers and adults, as well as video modeling can be utilized to teach social skills (Gul, 2016; Puckett et al., 2017; Shepherd et al., 2014). Special education students who participated with non-disabled peers who were modeling appropriate social skills were more likely to have a job after graduation from high school (Mazzotti et al., 2015). This study explored the thoughts and feelings of graduated special education students regarding their lived experiences in a social skills pull-out program giving them a voice to describe their experiences, both positive and negative, which may have an impact on future students. It was also seeking to discover if these graduates are productive members of society, thus examining their lived experiences after graduation.

Significance of the Study

Empirically, this study has added to the predominantly quantitative literature showing if the social skills programs are working or not (Bellini et al., 2007; Cappadocia & Weiss, 2010; Goldstein et al., 2014; Gresham, 2015; Halle et al., 2016; Hutchins et al., 2017; Laugeson et al., 2014; Matson & Wilkins, 2009; Smith & Matson, 2010; Vlachou et al., 2016; Yeo & Teng, 2015). This study provided a voice to the high school graduates who received special education

services in the form of a pull-out social skills group. These participants had the opportunity to give their perspectives on the pull-out program. They talked about their experiences, good and bad, while they were still in school and they were able to tell if the experience of the pull-out program has helped them in their current life after graduation. Parents and teachers report that their students with disabilities have poor social skills and poor behaviors (Lyons et al., 2016). Agran et al. (2014) found that people with disabilities are struggling in the job force due to not having proper social skills. This is something that the pull-out program could help with. It shows that possibly more students need to participate in it. The stakeholders in this study were the school districts, especially the special education department, the parents of the special education students, and the future employers of the special education students. The people who may benefit from this study are the current and future special education students because this study showed the positives and negative aspects of the pull-out program, along with some new ideas to try.

Theoretically, the research showed that Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory applies to a virtually unheard population as it addresses the role of group, modeling, motivation, goals, sense of efficacy, feedback, retention of information, and reproduction of skills. Since the pull-out program utilizes groups, role modeling, motivation, goal setting, sense of efficacy, positive feedback, and retention and reproduction of information, it was able to add to social cognitive theory and validate its findings. People learn more through vicarious learning (through observation) than enactive learning (reinforced with consequences) (Bandura, 2002). The program counts on role modeling as a major teaching instrument. This study added to Bandura's theory due to the modeling aspect in the pull-out program.

Practically, this information may help school districts, especially the special education department and more specifically the behavior specialists who run the pull-out classes and

understand the experiences of the special needs students who are attending the pull-out social skills group. If the graduates think it was a positive experience, other schools may want to have it at their school and it might expand to help even more children. If the students did not find the pull-out program helpful, the research may show what might have made it a better experience. The participants were asked to give feedback as to the strengths and weaknesses of the program. This information could be very useful to the staff who are facilitating the groups.

Research Questions

There are four primary research questions that guided this study. The research questions are substantiated through the theoretical framework of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. The first question sought to describe the participant's experiences in the pull-out program. The question reaped some rich and descriptive explanations (Patton, 2015). The other three questions asked for more specific details of the participants' experiences and followed along with Bandura's (2002) environmental factors, personal factors, and behaviors.

Central Research Question

How do special education students who graduated from high school in northeastern South Carolina describe their lived experiences of being a pull-out student?

This question framed the study by allowing the participants to fully describe their experiences in the pull-out program. This question provided rich descriptions of the participants' lived experiences (Patton, 2015). It is purposely open ended to encourage the participants to share their experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

Sub-Questions

1. How do participants describe their sense of efficacy with the pull-out program while in high school?

This question builds on the central question by describing the aspect of the student's self-efficacy during and after the social skills pull-out program. The sense of self-efficacy falls under the personal factors of Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory.

2. How do the participants describe the social skills group and the curriculum used?

Sub-question two encouraged the participants to provide details on the feedback that they have regarding the social skills pull-out program. This question followed along with Bandura's (2002) environmental factors. Some aspects of the environmental factors are social modeling, instruction, and feedback (Bandura, 2002).

3. How do the participants describe their current life and goals after participating in the pull-out program?

The third sub-question encouraged participants to share details of how the program has affected their goals. It will also investigate what motivates them to do well. Bandura's (2002) behaviors section includes goals, motivation, and learning.

Definitions

1. *Bracketing* – setting aside our biases and judgments (Moustakas, 1994).
2. *Curriculum* – refers to the social skills program that is being taught (Cappadocia et al., 2010).
3. *Inclusion* – Children with disabilities and children without disabilities learning together in the same classroom (Puckett et al., 2017).
4. *Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD)* - is characterized by being unable to form relationships and having disruptive and inappropriate behaviors (Haydon et al., 2017).

5. *General Education or Regular Education* – refers to most of the classrooms in a school where students who do not have a disability are educated and where special education students receive their inclusion services (Halle et al., 2016).
6. *Pull-Out Program* – (also referred to as “group”) refers to students being removed from their typical classroom, in groups of at least three students, for 30 minutes or more, at least once a week for specific or additional instruction in the area of identified social skills weaknesses (Rose et al., 2016).
7. *Social Skills* – “observable, definable, and learnt behaviors that help an individual to achieve positive results in social situations” (Alzyoudi et al., 2014, p. 54).
8. *Special Education Student or Special Needs Student* – is a student who receives specialized services or interventions for many reasons, including counseling services and specialized instruction services by a special education teacher (Rose et al., 2016).
9. *Students with Disabilities* – report that they have issues with communication and social skills, especially developing social relationships (Alzyoudi et al., 2014).
10. *Typically Developing Students/Peers* – students who are not special education students (Halle et al., 2016).

Summary

The problem this study addressed is giving the special education graduate a voice regarding his/her social skills instruction. There is a gap in qualitative research studies describing the experience of special education high school graduates who were pull-out students for a social skills group as part of their special education services. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experience of high school graduates who received

special education services, in part, through a pull-out program that focused on the development of social skills in the northeastern region of the state of South Carolina.

Students in special education classes tend to lack in social skills (Carter et al., 2014; Espelage et al., 2016; Halle et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2017; Syrjamaki et al., 2016). Due to not having proper social skills, many special education students struggle after graduation (Carter et al., 2014; Halle et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2017). They are less likely to have a good job with good pay and a stable social life (Agran et al., 2016; Lyons et al., 2016; Miller-Warren, 2015; Smith & Matson, 2010). A correlation has been shown between a special education student being taught proper social skills and obtaining and retaining a job (Chu & Zhang, 2015). Children learn best by modeling (Bandura, 2002) and social skills training is primarily done through modeling. Students should have a voice regarding their perception of social skills training when they were in high school.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

There have been many studies conducted concerning special education students and social skills instruction. The studies have focused on graduation, transitioning from high school to adulthood, social skills in the workplace, modeling social skills, and general social skills instruction. There was even one study that looked at peers' perceptions of students in the pull-out program (Rose et al. 2017). This chapter focuses on the theory used in this study. This chapter also shows a review of current literature published on multiple topics regarding social skills and special education students. This review shows evidence of the gap in the literature that gives the students themselves a voice regarding the pull-out program.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory reports that learning happens through modeling, efficacy, reinforcement, and self-regulation. The three categories are environmental factors, personal factors, and behaviors. Social models and feedback fall under the environmental factors. Self-efficacy, and self-regulation fall under the personal factors. Goals and motivation fall under behaviors (Bandura, 2002). Learning happens due to observation and modeling. Behaviors are goal directed and eventually will be self-regulated (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory revolves around the idea that people learn via observation, modeling, and motivation. Social stories, video modeling, and peer mentoring are a few ways for students to learn social skills through modeling, observation, and motivation (Puckett et al., 2017; Shepherd et al., 2014). There are four components when learning by observation. The first one is attention, which is what people pay attention to when they are

observing them. The second component is what people retain after observing someone or something. The third component is behavioral, which means what action do the people show after the observation. The fourth, and final, component is motivation, which is what are they motivated to do (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

In social cognitive theory, there is a distinction between performance and acquisition because the children do not do every single thing that they learn. The children are likely to copy the behaviors that generate some type of reward. Modeling should not just cause a child to copy the modeled behavior. Children should establish functional behaviors through the use of modeling. When modeling begins, the first goal is for the child to learn basic rules and strategies. Next, the child should be given scenarios in which to practice his or her new skills through role playing. Finally, the child needs to be given a chance to practice the skills in a real-life environment such as the classroom. The child should be set up to succeed on the first few trials so confidence can be built (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Social skills can be taught to special education students through observation and modeling. The students may be motivated to learn the skills so that they can begin to have meaningful relationships with their peers in the classrooms (Laugeson et al., 2014).

People should be able to learn different ways to deal with any type of situation that is presented to them. Self-confidence can be built by modeling different responses to several situations (Bandura, 2002). In order to master the skills that a person has learned, the person will need many opportunities to practice them. This can be done while role playing scenarios or some other way to practice the skills (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Generalization can occur more easily when a special education student is given opportunities to practice with peers who are similar in age and skills (Laugeson et al., 2014). Receiving feedback on their performance is important at

this stage. Children can gain confidence by utilizing their new skills in real life situations (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

A person's perception of his or her own self-efficacy is important because beliefs can help to garner the motivation needed to take action and exercise control over one's own life. People's thoughts regarding their capabilities can increase or decrease their desire to try new skills (Wood & Bandura, 1989). They need to be taught to be resilient because it is impossible to always be successful. They must learn how to overcome failures and still be motivated to keep trying (Bandura, 2002). Peer mentoring is a great way for special education students to learn and practice newly acquired social skills (Puckett et al., 2017). Another way to improve a person's confidence and belief in themselves is by modeling (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Video modeling allows special education students to observe a skill over and over to really learn the behavior (Haydon et al., 2017; Murry, 2018; Shepherd et al., 2014). Successful social situations will help a person's self-confidence (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Goals can help a person accomplish many things because they help with motivation (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Goals can be accomplished when one is self-regulated (Bandura, 2002). When a person has goals, he or she has expectations and those expectations will motivate the person to follow through and complete the goals (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Gresham (2015) said that goal setting is an important social skill for special education students to learn. Technology can be used with special education students to help with their goals. For example, a student could be filmed in the classroom. Then he or she could watch and analyze the film later during social skills group (Puckett et al., 2017).

Related Literature

An abundance of literature can be found regarding social skills and social skills instruction. This section will separate the literature into several different categories. The related literature contains social skills, modeling, technology, relationships, graduation, transitioning to adulthood, and work social skills.

Social Skills

Social skills can be defined as learned, observable, and describable behaviors that aid a person to attain positive outcomes in sociable situations, along with being welcomed by society (Alzyoudi et al., 2015; Brooks et al., 2014; Bundock & Hewitt, 2017; Cheung et al., 2017; Guivarch et al., 2017). In the opinion of Smogorzewska & Szumski (2018), social skills contain the ability of being flexible and using emotional, cognitive, and behavioral assets in order to obtain one's own social goals without knowing his or her peers' goals. Social skills also show a child demonstrating proper behavior in a specific situation or during a certain interaction that shows a willingness and an understanding of how the child's peer may be feeling at that particular moment in time (Bundock & Hewitt, 2017; Cheung et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2016; Lopata et al., 2019; McDonald et al., 2019; Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018).

People with special needs or in a special education program often have a social skills deficiency (Ashman et al., 2017; Barisnikov & Straccia, 2019; Cheng et al., 2015; Cheung et al., 2017; Dekker et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2016; Kaboski et al., 2015; Leaf et al., 2016; Lopata et al., 2019; Reisinger & Roberts, 2017; Szumski et al., 2016). One definition of having a social skills deficiency is when a person is unable to learn different social skills or is unable to utilize the skills in the correct manner or correctly for the situation (Barisnikov & Straccia, 2019; Fisher et al., 2016; Gul, 2016; Kaboski et al., 2015; Reisinger & Roberts, 2017; Schmidt et al., 2014).

Social skills deficits may show up as an external behavior or an internal behavior; some students will have both internal and external behaviors, while others will exhibit one or the other. Some examples of external behaviors could possibly be aggression (verbal or physical), disrupting class, or refusing to listen or follow directions; some examples of internal behaviors could possibly be having anxiety issues, depression, or having self-injurious behaviors (Fisher et al., 2016; Jonsson et al., 2019; McDaniel et al., 2017; Reisinger & Roberts, 2017). Children with social skills deficits are vulnerable due to loneliness and not having a clear understanding of others' social behaviors (Bundock & Hewitt, 2017; Fisher et al., 2016; McDonald et al., 2019; Syriopoulou-Delli et al., 2018; Zach et al., 2016). Social skills deficits also contribute to poor academic performance (Albrecht et al., 2015; Davies et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Hart & Banda, 2018; Kaboski et al., 2015; McDonald et al., 2019; Syriopoulou-Delli et al., 2018).

Special education students tend to have less motivation to do well, are more easily distracted, are more withdrawn, and have a lower frustration level than typically developing children (Cheung et al., 2017; Rhoad-Drogalis et al., 2018). It is not entirely clear whether the social skills deficits are due to the child having a disorder/special education issues or if they are from the special education child being different from his or her peers resulting in being isolated from the group (Brooks et al., 2014; Fisher et al., 2016; Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018; Szumski et al., 2016).

Social skills deficits can also show up as having issues with proper communication, problem solving, following rules, lack of looking someone in the eye when they speak to them, having very repetitious behaviors, having very restrictive type behaviors, being unable to regulate one's emotions, indifference to peers, and lacking reciprocated behaviors (Cheng et al., 2015; Dekker et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2016; Guivarch et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2014; Radley et al., 2017a; Radley et al., 2017b; Roberts et al., 2015; Selimović et al., 2018; Shepherd et al., 2014; Shyuan

Ng et al., 2016; Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018; Syriopoulou-Delli et al., 2018; Withey, 2017). Social skills deficits could also be due to not understanding other people's feelings, wants, purpose, and behaviors (Dekker et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2016; Garrels, 2019; Hill et al., 2014; Jonsson et al., 2019; Leaf et al., 2016; McDonald et al., 2019; Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018; Withey, 2017; Zach et al., 2016). Typically developing children will usually learn social skills just by interacting with their families and their environment. These social interactions and the learning of social skills builds a child's foundation for all learning. Social skills are very closely related to communication skills, which are needed for school and throughout life (Ashman et al., 2017; Brooks et al., 2014; Garrels, 2019; Radley et al., 2017b; Roberts et al., 2015; Selimović et al., 2018; Withey, 2017; Zach et al., 2016). Social limitations could begin as early as birth and may even affect interactions with the child's guardians. The social delays typically continue to get worse over time and hinder social engagement. This leaves these special needs children without the proper skills to become involved with their peers; which continues to limit their learning of appropriate social skills and could lead to isolation (Albrecht et al., 2015; Barisnikov & Straccia, 2019; Jamison et al., 2012; Kaboski et al., 2015; Radley et al., 2017b; Rhoad-Drogalis et al., 2018; Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018; Withey, 2017). These deficits will also affect their academic progress (Albrecht et al., 2015; Davies et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Hart & Banda, 2018; McDaniel et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017a; Rhoad-Drogalis et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2015; Withey, 2017; Zach et al., 2016).

“Academic enablers” is a phrase used to characterize the behaviors that help a student do well in school (Caldarella et al., 2017, p. 78). The academic enablers consist of certain skills such as relationship building, “study skills, motivation, and engagement” (Caldarella et al., 2017, p. 78). It is believed that the enablers increase academic ability in special education students. For

example, when special education children are accepted by their peers and feel like they are a part of a social group, they are more motivated to achieve the classroom norms and perform well on their academic tasks so that they do not stand out in a negative way to their peers (Brooks et al., 2014; Caldarella et al., 2017; Denault & Déry, 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; McDonald et al., 2019).

People are looked at as being very social by nature. Just like any other behavior that children learn, they need to learn social behaviors (Denault & Déry, 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Oh-Young & Filler, 2015; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). Early intervention regarding social skills has the best chance for the child to make academic gains (Albrecht et al., 2015; Brooks et al., 2014; Cheng et al., 2015; Jamison et al., 2012; Radley et al., 2017b; Rhoad-Drogalis et al., 2018; Shepherd et al., 2014; Withey, 2017). Children with developmental delays require social skills to be taught to them in a systematic way so that they can obtain the social skills that are necessary to function in their daily lives (Cheng et al., 2015; Davenport et al., 2018; Radley et al., 2017a; Szumski et al., 2016; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010).

Parents and teachers showing their support to the child can also be very important in developing positive social skills (Fisher et al., 2016; Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). Children between the ages of zero to three learn from their environment and relationships (Brooks et al., 2014; Kilic & Aytar, 2017). When parents, teachers, or caregivers have positive thinking regarding the children's competence to learn and use proper social skills, the special needs children will likely have a more positive outcome after social skills training. However, if the parents, teachers, or caregivers have a negative perspective, the outcome is likely to not be as positive (Fisher et al., 2016; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). The negative outcome would be due to the child not having a strong relationship with their loved one and he/she may feel the negativity from the loved one. It will be imperative for those children with caregivers who have

negative thoughts or poor relationships to be formally taught social skills in the school setting (Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010).

Students in the special education department have many social skills deficits. Some of their social skills deficits include: poor communication skills, forming and maintaining social relationships, poor quality of social interactions, difficulty processing information quickly, seeing things from another person's perspective, lack of true friendships, and initiating social interactions (Bellini et al., 2007; Cappadocia & Weiss, 2010; Doody, 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Garrels, 2019; Goldstein et al., 2014; Halle et al., 2016; Hart & Banda, 2018; Haydon et al., 2017; Hutchins et al., 2017; Jamison et al., 2012; Ledford et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2016; Radley et al., 2017a; Vlachou et al., 2016; Yeo & Teng, 2015). Special education students have more trouble learning and utilizing appropriate social skills. This could be partly due to communication and physical limitations (Cheng et al., 2015; Cheung et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2016; Garrels, 2019; Jamison et al., 2012; Kaboski et al., 2015; Radley et al., 2017a; Roberts et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2014). Many times, special education students will have social skills as a target behavior on their individual education plan (IEP) (Cheng et al., 2015; Denault & Déry, 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Oh-Young & Filler, 2015; Radley et al., 2017a; Roberts et al., 2015). This occurs about 80% of the time (Radley et al., 2017a). Students with poor social skills also have some inappropriate behaviors such as disrupting their classes, not staying on task, and are easily distracted (Cheng et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Haydon et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017a; Rhoad-Drogalis et al., 2018; Szumski et al., 2016). There are many challenges for students who are lacking appropriate social skills. Poor social skills will likely affect relationships with parents, peers, and teachers (Cheung et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2016; Garrels, 2019; Gresham, 2015; Kaboski et al., 2015; Rhoad-Drogalis et al., 2018). Often, the students will

cause chaos at school and at home (Garrels, 2019; Gresham, 2015; Radley et al., 2017a; Szumski et al., 2016). These students with poor social skills often end up not participating in the general education setting because they are so disruptive and/or inappropriate when they are in the general education classes (Cheng et al., 2015; Denault & Déry, 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Hutchins et al., 2017; Szumski et al., 2016). Special education students typically will have a long discipline history (Hutchins et al., 2017; McDaniel et al., 2017; Szumski et al., 2016).

One of the best ways to combat all of the social skills deficits is by teaching appropriate social skills to the special education children, even those children with emotional and behavioral disorders (Bellini et al., 2007; Bundock & Hewitt, 2017; Doody, 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Gresham, 2015; Haydon et al., 2017; Hutchins et al., 2017; Laugeson et al., 2014; Ledford et al., 2018; Matson & Wilkins, 2009; McDaniel et al., 2017; Nussli & Oh, 2016; Puckett et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017a; Roberts et al., 2015; Shepherd et al., 2014; Vlachou et al., 2016; Yeo & Teng, 2015). The goal of social skills training is twofold: decreasing the student's negative behaviors, while increasing the student's positive social and behavioral skills (Bundock & Hewitt, 2017; Cheng et al., 2015; Denault & Déry, 2015; McDaniel et al., 2017; Stichter et al., 2019; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016; Szumski et al., 2016). Federal guidelines emphasize the importance of using evidence-based curriculums (Combes et al., 2016; Fisher et al., 2016). Using an evidence-based social skills curriculum will allow for a better chance at positive results (Combes et al., 2016; Davenport et al., 2018; Ledford et al., 2018, Locke et al., 2019; McDaniel et al., 2018; Murphy et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017b; Stichter et al., 2019). However, evidence-based curriculums are not utilized very often; instead social skills interventions that have not been researched tend to be used (Murphy et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017b; Stichter et al., 2019). When evidence-based curriculums are used, there are increases in positive social skills (Combes

et al., 2016; Davenport et al., 2018; Locke et al., 2019; Murphy et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017b; Stichter et al., 2019). Evidence-based curriculums allow educators productive, compelling, valuable, and powerful teaching methods utilizing only a fraction of their educational day (Combes et al., 2016; Davenport et al., 2018; Locke et al., 2019; Radley et al., 2017b; Stichter et al., 2019; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). A social skills curriculum should include teaching, modeling, role playing, and providing feedback to the student regarding their actions (Cheng et al., 2015; Combes et al., 2016; McDaniel et al., 2018; Radley et al., 2017a; Radley, et al., 2018; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). When facilitating social skills instruction, one needs to be certain that the instruction is culturally responsive so that all students in the group feel included (Davenport et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2015; Stichter et al., 2019).

Social skills can also be taught by collaborative teaching, using written or non-verbal prompts, social stories, group discussions, and video stories or video recordings of the children in the group so they can watch themselves and critique themselves (Shyuan Ng et al., 2016; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). It would be wise to include play in the social skills group as it has many benefits, including, but not limited to, increasing spontaneous actions while limiting apathy, it helps children learn coping skills to deal with their emotions, and allows for the very important pretend play (Denault & Déry, 2015; Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018). A group goal should be developed to help the facilitator maintain focus for the content of the group (Goforth et al., 2016). Very specific social skills, such as making positive decisions, can be taught in the social skills session (McDaniel et al., 2018; Olcay-Gul & Tekin-Iftar, 2016; Radley et al., 2017a). The social skills training should also incorporate regular education children because it allows the special education children to practice the social skills they are learning in a real-world environment (Brooks et al., 2014; Denault & Déry, 2015; Murphy et al., 2017; Radley et al.,

2017b; Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). Federal guidelines state that special education students should be educated with regular education students as much as is appropriate for each special education student (Fisher et al., 2016; Oh-Young & Filler, 2015). When choosing the group of children to put together in a social skills group, careful consideration should be made to match them up with students of a similar developmental level. In other words, they should not necessarily be grouped only according to their ages (Murphy et al., 2017; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010).

When the educators are selecting a social skills program to use in their school pull-out program, there are three concerns that should be considered. The first concern is making sure there is a component of a normal environment that a child might encounter on a daily basis. The second concern to address is having a character that children will love and connect with. The character should appeal to both special education students and regular education students. The third concern is to make very sure that the program would be suitable to both regular education students and special education students (Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018). Educators must be competent in teaching a social skills curriculum. The teachers should be given some training on whatever curriculum will be utilized in the social skills groups that they will be facilitating. It is very important for the teacher to feel comfortable and competent in the teaching of social skills (Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010).

When students have positive social skills, they are more likely to be accepted in a peer group, they will get along better with their teachers, and have success in the academic arena (Brooks et al., 2014; Caldarella et al., 2017; Cheng et al., 2015; Denault & Déry, 2015; Guivarch et al., 2017; McDaniel et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017a; Roberts et al., 2015). Being competent in social skills during the years of three to eight includes three behaviors: the capability to show

feelings and enthusiasm with others, the capability of playing with others, and the capability to join in an activity with a purpose or objective (Brooks et al., 2014; Guivarch et al., 2017; Jamison et al., 2012). If a student reaches social competence, he/she will likely have positive outcomes when he/she becomes an adult (Denault & Déry, 2015; Stichter et al., 2019). Social skills can be taught in small groups, in individual one-to-one sessions, or in large groups such as a classroom (Bellini et al., 2007; Cappadocia & Weiss, 2010; Radley et al., 2017a). Ideally, a social skills group will include both special education students and regular education students, as this will allow the special education student to not only learn the skills but have a model to learn from and practice with, right in the group. Due to the natural consequences of using social skills, skill generalization is more likely if regular education students are included in the social skills groups (Brooks et al., 2014; Denault & Déry, 2015; Radley et al., 2017b). If systematic interventions are used, special needs children can be taught social skills. Early intervention with specific attention focused on playing with peers will have the best results for lasting improvements in the child's social skills (Jamison et al., 2012). One could also change and modify the child's surroundings to help promote positive social skills (Bellini et al., 2007; Brooks et al., 2014). The social skills groups can include a facilitator led group, a group using cognitive behavioral techniques, such as rewards and consequences, or a group with the parents involved (Cappadocia & Weiss, 2010; Radley et al., 2017b; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). The social skills teaching should ideally involve some adult and child interactions along with child to child interactions (Bellini et al., 2007; Fisher et al., 2016; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). Social skills pull-out sessions should always include strategies that target a specific social skill or skills and allow the students time to practice the skill(s) are likely to have good results for the students (Guivarch et al., 2017; Shepherd et al., 2014). Much of the responsibility for teaching

appropriate social skills seems to have fallen straight into the lap of the school system. School systems are responsible for teaching the special education students the appropriate social skills (Denault & Déry, 2015; Gresham, 2015; Locke et al., 2019; McDaniel et al., 2016). When the school teaches the parents to utilize the same evidence-based social skills curriculum at home, the chances of success expand exponentially (Radley et al., 2017a). Although social skills training is on many special education students' IEP, teachers have not been properly trained how to utilize research-based curriculums to make the biggest impact for these students. The lack of teacher training, combined with the lack of resources, leaves the teacher with a well-intentioned, but half-hearted attempt at teaching proper social skills. The children could suffer from this environment that is not an optimal setting for social skills training (Radley et al., 2017a; Stichter et al., 2019; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). There is, however, a considerable amount that teachers can do to help their students with their social skills training. Teachers can increase their students' social skills by impacting how complex their play becomes, especially when this begins in early childhood (Brooks et al., 2014; Guivarch et al., 2017; Jamison et al., 2012). There are many ways for social skills to be taught. Some of these ways of teaching might include teacher instruction, such as one would observe in a traditional classroom setting with the teacher in the front of the room teaching, "modeling, role-playing, shaping, feedback, reinforcement of positive interactions" (Cappadocia & Weiss, 2010, p. 71). Showing videos of social stories or reading children social stories may also be used (Doody, 2015; Haydon et al., 2017; Olcay-Gul & Tekin-Iftar, 2016; Radley et al., 2017b; Shepherd et al., 2014; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). A social story is a video or written very short story of a person acting socially appropriate in a certain social situation while using an appropriate targeted social skill. There are several different stories to meet several different situations. A social story can even be made personal, even using the

child's name, and for a very specific behavior that a child or group of children are showing (Halle et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2017; Olcay-Gul & Tekin-Iftar, 2016; Shepherd et al., 2014; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). Unfortunately, utilizing social stories is not an evidence-based social skills strategy when using it with students who do not have autism, but it has been deemed as advantageous and helpful to those special education students with autism (Shepard et al., 2014). However, video modeling, which is similar to social stories, is considered an evidence-based strategy to teach social skills to all special education students (Murphy et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017b; Shepherd et al., 2014; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). Teachers can introduce a "buddy system" that includes a regular education student being a buddy with a special needs student. The students will have a time limit that they must play together, during that time, they must stay with their buddy, have conversation with their buddy, and play with their buddy. The teacher can dictate what the play will be, or they can allow free play. Teachers could also have more than two buddies in a group and they can institute the buddy system at other times of the day, such as mealtimes, arrival time, or recess time. This will increase social interactions for the special needs children, which will likely increase their social competence (Jamison et al., 2012; Matthews et al., 2018).

The social skills that are taught to each student should be based on their own individual needs and where their deficits lie. Then other children with the same or similar needs should be grouped together to form a social skills group where they are all taught the same specific social skill (Bellini et al., 2007; Kilic & Aytar, 2017; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). Students who tend to be more extroverted will learn appropriate social skills easier than introverted students. This is likely due to the fact that extroverted students will be seeking interactions with their peers and introverted students will likely be avoiding interactions with their peers (Kilic & Aytar, 2017).

The student should be taught the skill and then be given many opportunities to practice whatever skill has been taught. Role playing is a terrific way to practice the social skills as they learn them. The practicing of the skill will help cement it into the child's repertoire (Cappadocia & Weiss, 2010; Cheng et al., 2015; Laugeson et al., 2014; Radley et al., 2018). Children can be taught self-monitoring procedures to further their social skills training (Murphy et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017a). When the social skills lessons are engaging and hands-on, the students are more likely to use them outside of the small group social skills session (Laugeson et al., 2014). The students need to learn appropriate social skills in order to be successful in all aspects of their lives. Appropriate social skills will help the children learn how to function at school, at their house, and in different places within the community (Brooks et al., 2014; Denault & Déry, 2015; Doody, 2015; McDaniel et al., 2017). These social skills must be taught to students as they enter high school, as this is a prime time that social skills are needed. Being successful in high school requires one to be able to navigate the social world in an appropriate manner. Appropriate social skills may also be a predictor of the success a student experiences after he or she has completed high school (Denault & Déry, 2015; Lyons et al., 2016). Learning appropriate social skills will help children participate in their classes by joining in the academic discussions and being able to collaborate with their peers (McDaniel et al., 2017; Puckett et al., 2017; Vlachou et al., 2016). The better that the special education students do with their social skills, the more time they are able to remain in an inclusion setting (Denault & Déry, 2015; Vlachou et al., 2016; Yeo & Teng, 2015), which allows them more time to practice their social skills with their typically developing peers. Spending time with typically developing peers is critical when attempting to teach special education students positive social skills and it helps the special education students learn to generalize the new behavior that they learned (Brooks et al., 2014; Denault & Déry, 2015;

Radley et al., 2017b). Both special education and regular education teachers need to know how to help their special education students with their social skills. They may not be the teacher teaching the social skills but must help the students implement their newly formed skills (Yeo & Teng, 2015). Any particular social skills that are taught in a small or large group setting should be able to be generalized into the children's regular daily life. Generalization into the children's daily lives is very important and is the ultimate goal of teaching social skills to children in the special education department (Einfeld et al., 2018; Denault & Déry, 2015; Uysal & Ergenkon, 2010). One study showed that the positive results of a social skills group were still holding after 12 months (Einfeld et al., 2018).

Modeling

“Modeling is the demonstration of a desired behavior to an observer who may reproduce the behavior in imitation” (Alzyoudi et al., 2015, p. 55). Social skills programs that prove to be the most useful for special education children are ones that include modeling as one of the frameworks in which the social skills are taught (Shepard et al., 2014; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). Typically developing children are perfect to model appropriate social skills to special education students (Hart & Banda, 2018; Matthews et al., 2018; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016; Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018). Peer modeling has been well researched and features typically developing children trained as models of appropriate behaviors for special education children and can be utilized in large or small groups (Hart & Banda, 2018; Matthews et al., 2018; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). A few other important factors to include are fixing the environment in which the modeling and social skills training takes place to be appropriate for learning the social skills being taught or modeled that day (Matthews et al., 2018; Smogorzewska & Szumski, 2018), coaching both the regular education students and the special education students, and some type

of reinforcement for the special education students and the regular education students when teaching social skills to special education students (Matthews et al., 2018; Shepherd et al., 2014). Special education children, especially ones with emotional disabilities, must have consistent support and education regarding their social skills (Haydon et al., 2017). Bandura's social learning theory discusses learning through observation. One can change their thinking and behavior by watching others. This would be considered modeling (Acar et al., 2017; Halle et al., 2016; Matthews et al., 2018; Shepherd et al., 2014; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). The background of video modeling is in Bandura's social learning theory (Acar et al., 2017; Murry, 2018; Shepherd et al., 2014). One way of modeling is through a social story, which is a story that describes a certain social skill with words and pictures, or it can even be a video (Acar et al., 2017; Halle et al., 2016; Radley et al., 2017a; Shepherd et al., 2014; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). Modeling is when one shows another person an example or a presentation of a chosen behavior or action and then the observer (special education student) duplicates that behavior by copying it. The student would be given many opportunities to practice this new behavior also (Acar et al., 2017; Alzyoudi et al., 2015; Radley et al., 2017b; Shepherd et al., 2014; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). A target behavior can be chosen and then a social story and video could be made to target that specific behavior (Acar et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017a). A special education student is very likely to imitate a positive social skill when it is modeled by a peer or an adult and it is modeled via video modeling. Something about the combination of these two types of modeling makes the special education student much more likely to imitate the social skill than when just one type of modeling or the other is utilized. Utilizing both of these types of modeling has shown to also increase the special education student's ability to begin to understand other people's emotions (Shepherd et al., 2014; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). The modeling of a desired behavior can be done

in person by the social skills instructor, parent/guardian, or peer; or by watching videos of the desired behavior (Acar et al., 2017; Alzyoudi et al., 2015; Gul, 2016; Halle et al., 2016; Haydon et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017b; Shepherd et al., 2014; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). Teaching social skills in a small group setting is much more effective than teaching it in a one-to-one setting because the small group setting allows all of the students to observe each other modeling different social skills. Then there will be an opportunity to give each other feedback on the social skills that they observe the others portraying and it also allows for each student to learn some self-management skills (Radley et al., 2017b). There are four types of video modeling:

- “Modeling with video” (Alzyoudi et al., 2015, p. 55) – This is where the special education student watches a video that shows a person (similar or adult) performing a certain skill. It will show all of the steps needed and then the special education student will perform these steps (Alzyoudi et al., 2015).
- “Feedback with video” (Alzyoudi et al., 2015, p. 55) – This is where the special education student watches a video of himself or herself performing the behavior. The video will not be edited and will allow the special education student to observe both the appropriate and the inappropriate that he or she performs. Then the special education student and the facilitator will talk about the performance and decide what needs some work or needs to be changed completely (Alzyoudi et al., 2015).
- “Cue with video” (Alzyoudi et al., 2015, p. 55) – This provides the special education student the chance to show their new skill directly after the cue is given. The special education student must be very active in this type of video modeling (Alzyoudi et al., 2015).

- “Computer-aided video teaching” (Alzyoudi et al., 2015, p. 55) – This shows the special education student “texts, graphics, animations, sound, music, slides, films, and movie recordings” (Alzyoudi et al., 2015, p. 55) of different social skills in one session so that the special education student can see multiple ways of performing this same or similar behavior (Alzyoudi et al., 2015).

The previous four types of video modeling are usually used to show fairly easy behaviors for the special education students to replicate in a real environment outside of the social skills program (Alzyoudi et al., 2015; Murry, 2018; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). Video modeling not only shows the special education students a specific social skill which moves those students closer to becoming competent in that skill, it also helps the students with generalization of that specific skill across different settings (Radley et al., 2017b; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). Video modeling is often used instead of live modeling when the facilitator is teaching a brand-new social skill or behavior or trying to change a negative behavior the special education student is displaying. Video modeling allows the special education student to observe all of the steps for the desired behavior on the video prior to being taught the proper steps in person (Acar et al., 2017; Gul, 2016; Radley et al., 2017b; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). Another way of using modeling through a video is to write a social story that pertains to a specific negative behavior that a special education student has been observed doing (Acar et al., 2017; Halle et al., 2016). Read the social story to the special education student or group of special education students. The story will include the desired replacement behavior. Next, show the student or students a video that models the desired behavior. Then one could have the student(s) perform a role modeling skit utilizing the same replacement behaviors (Halle et al., 2016; Murry, 2018; Radley et al., 2017b). This will help cement the new behaviors for the children and it also goes right along with Bandura’s social

learning theory (Acar et al., 2017; Halle et al., 2016). Video modeling allows the special education students to repeatedly watch the same skill or behavior over and over to help perfect it. The special education student could watch the individual steps of each new skill broken down instead of watching the whole sequence together so that the child can really learn each step before putting them all together in a sequence (Haydon et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017b; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). Then preferably, the special education student will be filmed and can watch their own video and serve as their own model performing the newly acquired social skill (Haydon et al., 2017; Murry, 2018).

Special education students could be filmed in their natural settings in the classroom or on the playground. The social skills instructor could break these filmed times down into small sections of video for the children to observe themselves performing a newly acquired skill appropriately or at least nearly appropriately. Then the facilitator could give the children feedback on their use of the social skills while the children are watching themselves on the video. The children could even give feedback to each other on the positive aspects of using the skill and some feedback on what one might try the next time they are in a similar situation (Alzyoudi et al., 2015). Using social stories and video modeling together could work very well, especially when one is attempting to teach a very specific skill, such as introducing oneself to a new person (Acar et al., 2017; Gul, 2016; Radley et al., 2017b). Video modeling can be done in small increments that do not take a lot of time once the initial skill has been established (Halle et al., 2016). A teacher could show brief example reminder videos to children relatively quickly throughout their week until the skill is used consistently across settings. These short reminder videos can be shown right in the special education classroom as opposed to only being used by the social skills instructor to really allow for saturation of the skill to occur. The videos can also

be watched with very little teacher assistance once the special education student is taught how to access them. Being able to access and watch the videos without much help from the teacher also promotes independence for the special education student. These videos could be uploaded to a mobile device so that peers will not even realize that the special education students are doing anything differently than their general education peers as many of them are also carrying around a mobile device. The same videos can be uploaded to many different students' devices or different ones can be uploaded to individualize each special education student's needs. The student could independently watch these short videos whenever they feel the need or whenever the teacher directs them to do so (Haydon et al., 2017).

Video modeling has been deemed to be fairly effective, especially when targeting one specific behavior or skill (Acar et al., 2017; Alzyoudi et al., 2015; Gul, 2016; Halle et al., 2016; Haydon et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017b; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). Special education students showed 80% mastery on the following skills after utilizing video modeling as the social skills intervention: (a) beginning a social interaction, such as asking a peer if he or she could hand them something; (b) using communication skills, such as joking with peers or reciprocal conversation with peers; (c) utilizing appropriate body language, such as looking at the person speaking to them or nodding their head in acknowledgement; (d) responding to or asking questions, such as what is your favorite color? My name is 'John' what is your name? What is your favorite television show? (Alzyoudi et al., 2015). Reciprocal skills, such as maintaining eye contact, making appropriate facial expressions for the situation, and answering questions appropriately were some of the social skills that were found to be appropriately utilized after video modeling was used as a social skills intervention tool for special education students (Gul, 2016). When the video modeling was done for several days in a row, there was a decrease in the

undesirable behaviors and an increase in the desirable behaviors (Halle et al., 2016). Video modeling helped with peer relationships and conversations, staying focused with what the class was focusing on, and lessening the negative behaviors (Haydon et al., 2017). Including a couple of typically developing students in the social skills groups could be very helpful to the special education students who are learning positive social skills. These typically developing students can serve as a peer model for the special education students in the group to follow and copy (Jamison et al., 2012; Radley et al., 2017b; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). Utilizing peer models and video modeling have been validated in their ability to work when teaching special education students' positive social skills. Peer models and video modeling also help with the ability to generalize the new skills across settings (Radley et al., 2017b; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). However, modeling and video modeling are not very often used in a school-based social skills program. This lack of use seems to be due to the teachers not being comfortable or taught how to utilize modeling and video modeling. It could also be due to time constraints, lack of a curriculum, or not receiving support from the administration at the school (Radley et al., 2017b).

Technology

There are many ways to include technology when implementing a social skills education program for special education students (Alzyoudi et al., 2015; Doody, 2015; Halle et al., 2016; Haydon et al., 2017; Nussli & Oh, 2016; Puckett et al., 2017; Shepherd et al., 2014; Withey, 2017). One way to utilize technology for social skills instruction is for the social skills instructor to use some form of technology to research a social skills intervention or to create a social skills intervention. When only the social skills instructor utilizes the technology, it does not make it more interesting or engaging for the special education student. However, it is still very useful for the social skills instructor to utilize technology in their planning of their social skills lessons. One

example of the social skills instructor utilizing the technology would be for the instructor to create a social story for the special education students and print it out to read it to them (Withey, 2017).

Social skills apps and software are constantly changing and updating. There are always new and/or better apps, software, and hardware becoming available. Prices are also continuously dropping because of the new and updated apps, software, and hardware that are always coming out. The lower prices make the older, but not outdated apps, software, and hardware more readily available to school districts and their small budgets. Using the technology is also cost effective when considering the time it will take a teacher to teach the students to utilize it (Doody, 2015). Special education students can very quickly learn to access the social skills programs on their own, thus saving the teacher time and promoting independence amongst the special education students (Chen et al., 2015; Cheng et al., 2015; Doody, 2015; Haydon et al., 2017; Lorenzo et al., 2016; Withey, 2017). Utilizing technology for social skills instruction also saves money by not needing a lot of paper, laminating, and other supplies. It can also be used by more than one child (Chen et al., 2015; Cheng et al., 2015; Doody, 2015; Withey, 2017). The cost savings that are produced by utilizing technology are extremely important, as it costs several thousand dollars more to educate special education students than regular education students (Halle et al., 2016). Utilizing social skills applications on a tablet or cell phone will allow special education students to learn appropriate social skills for many different scenarios (Withey, 2017).

One example of technology that can be utilized to teach special education students how to use proper social skills is through “slowmation” software (Shepherd et al., 2014, p. 152), which means “slow animation” (Shepherd et al., 2014, p. 152). Slowmation allows special education students to come up with their own animations by using “storyboarding, character manipulation,

photography, and narration in creating their own animation” (Shepherd et al., 2014, p. 152).

Slowmation is fairly inexpensive, as the movie making software is free. It also does not require the special education students to have super computer skills. Slowmation uses regular items such as clay, paper, and a camera. It plays the pictures at a very slow speed so that the social skills are seen at this very low level of speed with each concept really broken down into minute parts so that the social skill being taught can really be looked at and each concept can be gone over in great detail. By utilizing Slowmation, special education students can learn the proper steps for each social skill concept that they are taught and will likely be motivated to think uniquely about each social skill concept. In order for social skills instruction to be effective for special education students, the social skills concepts must be broken down into much smaller parts. Students must not be low functioning special education students for Slowmation to work, as it requires drawing, writing, and taking many pictures of items with only one centimeter of movement. Some special education students will not have a high enough functioning level to properly utilize this social skills training, as they are required to be able to read and write at an adequate level. Most special education students will require adult assistance to utilize this program (Shepherd et al., 2014).

Utilizing technology for social skills instruction helps to promote positive behaviors. The special education student can watch themselves, adults, or peers displaying appropriate social skills (Cheng et al., 2015; Lorenzo et al., 2016; Puckett et al., 2017; Withey, 2017). A behavior that the teacher wants to improve or eliminate must be decided upon prior to beginning the technological social skills instruction so that behavior can be targeted through the technology (Cheng et al., 2015; Haydon et al., 2017; Withey, 2017). Most special education students today are able to pay attention to technological devices for at least a short time. Thus, they are more likely to learn the skills quickly. It will also teach the students to utilize the skills in different

settings (Alzyoudi et al., 2015; Cheng et al., 2015; Lorenzo et al., 2016; Withey, 2017). One of the technology evidence-based social skills programs would be video modeling. This is where a special education student watches a video of a person modeling the social skill that the social skills instructor is wanting the special education student to learn (Leaf et al., 2016; Radley et al., 2017b; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). The use of technology in social skills instruction will raise the special education student's engagement in the curriculum and will also raise their autonomy. Special education students are motivated to use technology and it may increase the special education students to become more interested in social interactions. There has been a concern that utilizing technology would isolate the special education students more, but in all actuality, special education students are more likely to talk to peers when they are using the computer or tablet. So, technology may actually help improve social and communication skills for special education students (Withey, 2017). Technology is a great addition to a parent social skills acquisition repertoire too; especially when the child does not have many opportunities for socialization with same age peers at home (Cheng et al., 2015; Doody, 2015; Withey, 2017).

Special education students can be taught self-monitoring skills through the use of technology (Halle et al., 2016). The students also can save their self-esteem by not looking out of place carrying a big bulky binder or point sheet. The special education students will be carrying around some of the same technology that their regular education peers are carrying around. For example, the technology might include iPhones, iPads, or iPods (Haydon et al., 2017). Students can be taught to read facial expressions and emotions by utilizing augmented reality technology, which is a three-dimensional animation of facial expressions overlaid on the student's face (Chen et al., 2015).

A very exciting form of technology that might be used to teach social skills are virtual worlds (Cheng et al., 2015; Lorenzo et al., 2016; Nussli & Oh, 2016). These virtual worlds would be set up similar to a game. It would give the special education students different social scenarios so the children could practice their responses in a very safe environment. There would be no one judging the student if they made a poor choice in the virtual world (Cheng et al., 2015; Nussli & Oh, 2016). The special education students would receive immediate feedback regarding their actions. These virtual worlds can also be set up to have virtual peer interactions with real students. Special education students would likely be very engaged in these lessons, as they are set up like a video game (Cheng et al., 2015; Lorenzo et al., 2016; Nussli & Oh, 2016). Technology in general is likely to be engaging to special education students today because most children today like utilizing technology (Alzyoudi et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015; Cheng et al., 2015; Doody, 2015; Halle et al., 2016; Haydon et al., 2017; Nussli & Oh, 2016; Puckett et al., 2017; Withey, 2017).

Most children, including special education students have experience with some type of mobile device, such as a cell phone or tablet, because most of the students already have them in their homes and have likely been using them since they were very young (Doody, 2015; Radley et al., 2017b; Withey, 2017). Students typically have these mobile devices regardless of the family's socioeconomic status. A tablet or cell phone would make a very good choice as a first tool to use when adding technology into a social skills curriculum because most students will have some familiarity with them. Using an app on the tablet or cell phone would require the teacher to do less talking to the special education student. The app will be highly structured, and the special education student will have to follow along or the student will not be able to properly play the social skills game (Withey, 2017).

The social skills instructor will first need to come up with rules and expectations for the use of the technology. The instructor will need to go over these rules and expectations with the special education students. Ideally, the special education students will be able to access their social skills programs throughout the day to reinforce the social skills that they are learning on the app. The instructor must also establish how many students will be using one mobile device at a time. Many social skills apps call for two or more users, which will increase interactions with peers (Withey, 2017).

The social skills instructor must make sure to pick the most appropriate software. Using an app that is more open-ended is better because it allows for free exploration and creativity, which helps special education students to communicate more with their peers who are using the app with them. The instructor also needs to properly arrange the classroom so that special education students who are sharing a device are able to sit close together to get the most out of the app. There should be non-technology activities included in the social skills lesson plan that complement the learning that the special education students received on the app (Withey, 2017). These other activities will help the special education students with generalizing the newly learned social skill (Radley et al., 2017b; Withey, 2017).

Relationships

Human beings are social beings. Having social relationships and feeling as though one belongs to a group is important in a person's life. Special education students are no different; they crave the acceptance of their social world, too. However, forming and maintaining social relationships is a struggle for most special education students (Albrecht et al., 2015; Carter et al., 2014; Cawthon et al., 2018; Espelage et al., 2016; Fisher et al., 2016; Floress et al., 2017; Halle et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2016; Kaboski et al., 2015; Kilic & Aytar, 2017; Ledford et al., 2018;

Lopata et al., 2019; Rose et al., 2017; Syrjamaki et al., 2016). Special education students may have problems with their interactions with their guardians due to the many social deficits that they have. These issues may affect the attachment a guardian usually has with their child and also may have a negative effect on their future social interactions (Jamison et al., 2012; Kilic & Aytar, 2017; Ledford et al., 2018). Children in the special education arena tend to have issues developing a relationship with their peers. These students struggle to communicate with their peers. They also struggle to develop and maintain rapport with other people. Social activities, including school, tend to be very uncomfortable to them because they really do not know how to make or keep a friend (Cawthon et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2016; Floress et al., 2017; Kaboski et al., 2015; Ledford et al., 2018; Lopata et al., 2019). Teacher-student relationships can also be affected in a negative manner when students have poor social skills (Fisher et al., 2016). Special education students learn more than academics in the general education classroom. They will develop their sense of belonging, self-esteem, and overall sense of well-being. Whether or not students are able to form relationships and be a part of a group has a major impact on their lives (Carter et al., 2014; Fisher et al., 2016; Floress et al., 2017; Jamison et al., 2012; Kilic & Aytar, 2017; Lopata et al., 2019; Rose et al., 2017; Syrjamaki et al., 2016). When special education students and regular education students interact, they create social connections that frame the foundation of their social universe for the rest of their lives. Special education students require social skills training and time just for playing with peers when they are young to help them develop relationships with their peers. When these interventions and play times happen for young special education students, it can have positive effects that last a lifetime (Floress et al., 2017; Jamison et al., 2012; Kilic & Aytar, 2017; Lopata et al., 2019; Sigstad, 2018).

Special education students are often the victim of bullying due to poor relationship skills (Espelage et al., 2016; Floress et al., 2017; Lopata et al., 2019; Sigstad, 2018; Syrjamaki et al., 2016). Special education students will likely not be very popular in their peer circle, will not have as many friends as their peers, and will not participate in groups as much as their peers. Special education students who show negative or inappropriate behaviors in the classroom are even less likely to have friends (Floress et al., 2017; Lopata et al., 2019; Rose et al., 2017). The special education students may feel rejected by their peer group (Floress et al., 2017; Lopata et al., 2019; Rose et al., 2017; Syrjamaki et al., 2016). Feelings of rejection can cause physical ailments (Lopata et al., 2019; Rose et al., 2017) and possibly cause mental health issues such as depression (Albrecht et al., 2015; Halle et al., 2016). Special education students who are rejected by their peers, bullied, or not included in groups with their peers may have other serious issues when they are adults (Lopata et al., 2019; Syrjamaki et al., 2016).

There are five intervention types that can be very useful in building social relationships for special education students. The five intervention types are: (a) teaching the special education student social skills regarding relationships; (b) teaching the general education students about students with disabilities and acceptance of differences; (c) showing the teachers and school staff how to support the special education students with relationship building techniques; (d) working with the whole school to be supportive of the special education students; (e) working closely with the special education students' families and teaching them techniques to support the students at home (Carter et al., 2014). "It is imperative that prevention programs begin to address victimization and promote prosocial attitudes and behaviors including caring, empathy, and willingness to intervene in bullying situations to reduce the number of students, including students with disabilities, who experience victimization" (Espelage et al., 2016, p. 323). There

has been a reduction in bullying in the last 10 years when all children are taught these behaviors (Espelage et al., 2016).

There has been an increase in positive peer relationships and academic test scores for special education students when they are included in learning positive and appropriate social skills (Albrecht et al., 2015; Carter et al., 2014; Espelage et al., 2016; Lopata et al., 2019). A teacher can observe and document interactions that special education children have and how they interact with their environment. Then social skill activities can be made specifically for that child to learn and grow (Hong et al., 2016; Kilic & Aytar, 2017; Lopata et al., 2019). When children are very young, there are three aspects of behavior that they need to have in order to have positive relationships. These three aspects of behavior include being able to show an interest and understanding with others, being able to join in with others who are playing, and being able to take part in goal-oriented events (Jamison et al., 2012; Lopata et al., 2019). Children rate other children higher as someone they want to be friends with when the children show positive behaviors in the classroom. They tend to reject the children who are exhibiting negative behaviors (Rose et al., 2017; Syrjamaki et al., 2016). Special education students can be affected positively when they are made to participate in an activity that requires joint attention and being physically close to their peers and it can have a lasting positive effect (Jamison et al., 2012; Kilic & Aytar, 2017). Self-regulation must be a social skill that is taught to special education children so that they can regulate their emotions and will be more likely to engage in positive behaviors (Espelage et al., 2016; Syrjamaki et al., 2016). Special education teachers can set up their classrooms to encourage students to interact. The teachers can also have rules in their classrooms that will encourage students to interact. This could involve assigning each student a friend for the day. These friends would stay together, play together, and talk to each other for that day

(Jamison et al., 2012). The results of promoting appropriate social skills and positive peer relationships will have better results if it is started when the children are young and when specific skills such as taking turns, looking at the person speaking, or answering questions (Carter et al., 2014; Jamison et al., 2012; Kilic & Aytar, 2017; Lopata et al., 2019; Syrjamaki et al., 2016). On the other hand, if these things are not encouraged when special education children are young, it can have a lasting negative effect on the special education student's ability to form positive relationships as they get older (Albrecht et al., 2015; Jamison et al., 2012; Lopata et al., 2019; Sigstad, 2018). Each student's temperament has an effect on how they are accepted socially. Students who are more loud or angry will have a more difficult time in the social arena (Kilic & Aytar, 2017).

Graduation

In the 2016-2017 school year, 84.6% of students in America graduated from high school with a high school diploma (Gewertz, 2019). Approximately 15% to 20% of high school students did not graduate with a high school diploma (Hemelt et al., 2018). During the year of 2012 there were 6.4 million special education students in the United States (Chesmore et al, 2016; Schifter, 2015). In the 2010-2011 academic school year, only about 40% of the special education students who were seniors in the United States graduated with a high school diploma (Elbaum et al., 2014), while about 79% of regular education students graduated from high school (Chesmore et al., 2016). In 2013, about 20% less special education students graduated with a regular high school diploma than regular education students (Schifter, 2015). There is a variation in different areas in the United States. For example, Minnesota has a high average of special education students who graduate with a high school diploma (Elbaum et al., 2014). So high that it almost

matches the national average for regular education students. Utah, on the other hand, has an extremely low rate of graduating special education students (Elbaum et al., 2014).

In general, about half of the special education students in America drop out of high school. This is a much higher rate than regular education students (Chesmore et al., 2016; Schifter, 2015; Sullivan & Sadeh, 2016; Wilkins et al., 2014). Students who were in a special education program in high school also had less years of college work, had a higher rate of unemployment, and earned less money at their jobs than their regular education peers (Chesmore et al., 2016). Special education students who have a supportive and knowledgeable family are likely to graduate. As are students who are offered career minded classes, make-up work, tutoring, and credit recovery. Special education students who receive social skills training are more likely to have a connection to some of their peers and this helps the special education student stay in school until he/she graduates (Wilkins et al., 2014).

Special education students can stay in high school longer than four years to graduate. However, the incidence of graduation declines with each year past the four-year mark (Schifter, 2015). Many special education students score below the low-average students in math and reading. During the 2013 school year, 60%-65% of special education students did not even score at the basic level for math and reading (Chesmore et al., 2016). Special education students who are a part of regular education classes and any extracurricular activities are more likely to graduate high school (Schifter, 2015). Special education students who have an adult mentor while in high school have a much higher rate of graduation than special education students without a mentor. This higher rate of graduation is due to the mentor giving the student support in academics and social skills, but also because the mentor makes sure the student is coming to school regularly (Wilkins et al., 2014). If a student is a special education student and a low-

income student, their chances of making it to graduation are lower than if they were not low-income students (Schifter, 2015). There is a connection between having poor achievement academically while in school and having poor outcomes as an adult in society (Chesmore et al., 2016). Students dropping out of high school are much more likely to show criminal behaviors, live in poverty, and have a lower life expectancy (Sullivan & Sadeh, 2016).

Many schools have developed zero tolerance policies as far as discipline is concerned. The zero tolerance policies were designed to increase safety in the schools, but the students who are getting the most severe discipline, such as expulsion, are more likely fail at least one class and drop out of school before they can graduate (Duran et al., 2011). Students in the special education department have more dangerous behaviors that may lead them into being involved with a probation officer. Having a probation officer as a youth puts them more at risk for committing crimes as an adult. Special education students also have more struggles with mental health issues and substance abuse issues. They tend to not be very happy with their lives in general (Chesmore et al., 2016).

Transitioning to Adulthood

Special education students who have graduated with a high school diploma are less likely than regular education students to go on to college or trade school (Schifter, 2015). If a special education student is able to hold a job while in high school, that same student is more likely to hold a job after graduation (Mazzotti et al., 2016). Social skills instruction will help the special education students have positive relationships after graduation, which will help those students live a happier life than they would without having friends (Fisher & Morin, 2017; Smith & Matson, 2010; Zach et al., 2016). It is important for these students to know how to resolve a conflict and cope with bad things happening to them as they become adults and do not have as

many supports in place as they did when they were children in school (Denault & Déry, 2015; Fisher & Morin, 2017; Schmidt et al., 2014; Smith & Matson, 2010). One study reported that beginning social skills instruction during adulthood did not show any benefits in improving social skills (Ashman et al., 2017).

Special education students are required by law to have a transition plan with their IEP once they hit age 16, and some may have a transition plan as early as age 14. Many special education students have plans that are not very good and do not show that any evidence-based interventions were utilized during that student's high school career (Miller-Warren, 2015; Stichter et al., 2019). Attending social skills groups would be one of the evidence-based interventions that may have been used. The special education student should be involved in creating the transition plan, so they can work on their own transition goals while completing their last couple years of high school (Miller-Warren, 2015). Miller-Warren (2015) said these goals should be meaningful in helping the special education student become a productive member of society after graduation (Denault & Déry, 2015; Stichter et al., 2019). The goals should include very specific things that the student will accomplish each year while still in high school, such as applying for a job, role-playing a job interview, and visiting a college or trade school (Miller-Warren, 2015).

There are many transitions during the ages of 18 years old to 25 years old. These are the years when a student will graduate high school, attend college or trade school, obtain employment, move into their own house or apartment away from their parents for the first time, have an intimate relationship, and possibly even become a parent themselves (Wagner et al., 2016). Students who were special education students while in high school tend to struggle with many of these life transitions (Kaboski et al., 2015; Mazzotti et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2014;

Stichter et al., 2019). Developing positive social skills as an adult is difficult for special education students who were lonely and rejected as young children (Zach et al., 2016). The special education student's success may be determined by their positive or negative social skills and what their discipline was like while still in high school (Kaboski et al., 2015; Schmidt et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2016).

Work Social Skills

There is a low employment rate for people with disabilities. The rate at which a person with disabilities is either not employed or only holds a part-time position as an adult is about 80% (Agran et al., 2016). There could be many reasons for this high rate. Some examples of why this rate is high are “prejudice, discrimination, limited disability awareness, and fear” (Agran et al., 2016, p. 111). Special education students usually have fewer skills heading into college or the workforce than the students who are typically developing (Henson, 2014). Problems with appropriate social skills, communication skills, and having trouble adjusting to life as an adult are problems that these former special education students struggle with while on the job (Agran et al., 2016; Chu & Zhang, 2015; Fisher & Morin, 2017; Henson, 2014). These students also have less confidence than regular education students (Henson, 2014; Schmidt et al., 2014). People who were in the special education program in high school that do find employment after they graduate usually will work in an entry-level position with very limited chances of receiving a promotion (Chesmore et al., 2016). Former special education students are typically not losing their jobs due to being unable to perform the duties of the job but remaining unable to fit into the social realm and norms of the place of employment is what is causing them to lose their job (Agran et al., 2016). People with disabilities that have reported positive experiences at work and staying at a job longer when they have positive social skills (Chu & Zhang, 2015). There are

some employment social skills that are required for a positive experience (Chu & Zhang, 2015). These employment social skills “include proper hygiene, adaptive behavior, punctuality, and verbal social skills (Chu & Zhang, 2015, p. 630). These skills should be able to be taught during the social skills pull out program while the student is still in high school.

Summary

The current research showed that there have not been any studies conducted regarding special education students who have graduated and were in a pull-out program in high school. There is, however, much research regarding social skills and special education as far as the need for social skills, both during and after high school. The categories that emerged in the literature review were graduation, modeling, social skills instruction, relationships, technology usage for social skills, transitioning out of high school into adulthood, and work social skills. There was one study that looked at one very specific social skills curriculum and its effectiveness. That study showed that all of the participants in the study showed at least some improvements (Radley et al., 2017b). Prior to this research, the students in this study were not given a voice. There were some studies that discussed the parents’ and teachers’ perspectives. There was even one study regarding the other students’ perceptions, but none asking the students that were part of the pull-out program. This study seeks to fill that major gap in the literature.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological transcendental study is to describe the experience of high school graduates who received special education services, in part, through a pull-out program that focused on the development of social skills in the northeast region of South Carolina. The purpose of this chapter is to present how the research was conducted. Included in this section is the design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, researcher's role, data collection methods, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Design

A qualitative research study utilizing a transcendental phenomenological design was used so that it can fully describe the thick, rich details that the participants provide regarding their experiences in the pull-out program (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological approach allowed the participants to describe how they experienced and felt about a particular event (Patton, 2015). I needed to step out of the equation by bracketing or putting personal experiences aside, so a transcendental phenomenological approach was the best choice (Moustakas, 1994). Rich, thick descriptions of the graduates' lived experiences were explored by utilizing this research method and design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Allowing for the exploration that was needed to understand the perspective of special education students who have graduated and what impacted their views was accomplished by using this design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Phenomenology is an area of research that examines the experience of individuals surrounding a common experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Central to this approach is that the members of the group share the lived experiences of a particular phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The phenomenon was described exactly as it was perceived (Moustakas, 1994). The name transcendental is due to

its ability to move past the day in day out and go to the pure ego in which the perception is fresh, as though it was the first time and it is named phenomenological due to its ability to transform the environment into mere phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The central research question was, “How do special education students who graduated from high school in northeast South Carolina describe their lived experiences of being a pull-out student?” To better understand how special education students described their lived experiences of being a pull-out student, four sub-questions were explored.

CRQ: How do special education students who graduated from high school in northeast South Carolina describe their lived experiences of being a pull-out student?

SQ1: How do participants describe their sense of efficacy with the pull-out program while in high school (Bandura, 2002)?

SQ2: How do the participants describe the social skills group and the curriculum used (Bandura, 2002)?

SQ3: How do the participants describe their current life and goals after participating in the pull-out program (Bandura, 2002)?

Setting

The setting for this study was in the northeast region of South Carolina. The racial makeup of the county that the study was conducted in consists of 79.9% white, 13.4% black or African American, 1.0% Asian, 0.5% American Indian, 0.1% Pacific islander, 3.1% from other races, and 2.0% from two or more races. The majority of the population have graduated from high school (89.6%), but only 23.6% have a bachelor’s degree or higher. There is 12.7% of the population that live in poverty. South Carolina is a south-eastern state that contains rural and

urban areas, along with a large coastal region. The northeast region of South Carolina has many beach towns. The actual site of the interviews was in May County (pseudonym) South Carolina at the SOS Healthcare facility. I traveled to my participants and met with them in a place that was private, convenient, and comfortable for them.

School districts across South Carolina use the pull-out program from kindergarten through the twelfth grade. It is used to teach social skills to children who struggle with having appropriate social skills. Some examples of the social skills that are taught during the pull-out program are anger management, decision making skills, communication skills, and problem-solving skills. The graduates were from one of the three coastal counties in northeast South Carolina.

Participants

The participants, who are special education graduates, were chosen through purposeful sampling because it provided information rich cases that were related to the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling is deliberately choosing one's sample based on the reason for the study. I chose the sample based on the phenomenon that is being studied so that the sample will have experienced the particular phenomenon that the research covers (Patton, 2015). Maximum variation/heterogeneity was the goal for the sample in order to have diversity (Patton, 2015). Maximum variation/heterogeneity is a type of purposeful sampling that is used to get a wide range of perspectives in regard to the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015). A researcher is interested in diversity so that many different perspectives can be described (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Snowballing was also utilized to gather more participants. Two original participants referred another participant each who had experienced the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Snowballing is important because it allowed for more participants that had experienced

the phenomenon to be interviewed and more rich descriptions emerged (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants graduated no more than three years prior to the interview so they were able to remember their experience in the pull-out program. The study participants had to be in the pull-out program for at least one year of their high school career. The special education graduates had an I.Q. of at least 70 and graduated with a regular high school diploma, not a certificate of completion. Students with I.Q.s lower than 70 will have graduated with the certificate, not the diploma. The adult specialist program manager who referred the graduates to me had access to their records which included the I.Q. test results and/or their type of graduation diploma so she could make a proper referral. I did not need to see the results of the I.Q. tests because the only reason that was important was to make sure the graduate had the cognitive ability to answer my interview questions. The adult specialist program manager was told my needs as far as the I.Q. goes so they were able to refer appropriate participants. The I.Q. of 70 was chosen because most students with this I.Q. will graduate with a regular high school diploma. The special education graduates that were interviewed were likely placed in the special education department due to their behaviors, which would be classified as ED (emotional disability), AU (autism), or with a specific learning disability, but they would have been on the standard course of study and will have graduated with a regular high school diploma, not a certificate of completion that many special education students receive. Some of the students participated in the occupational course of study (OCS), which also requires students to have a minimum of a 70 I.Q. and they also received a regular high school diploma. Due to the nature of qualitative research, pseudonyms were used to protect participants confidentiality. There were 12 participants in the study. The adult specialist program manager from SOS Healthcare provided me with information for 10 special education graduates to voluntarily participate in the study. Two other participants were

obtained through snowballing. See Appendix B for the script that the program manager used.

Procedures

After gaining permission from SOS Healthcare to perform the study with special education graduates, I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research. See Appendix D for IRB approval letter. A pilot study was also conducted with some high school special education students in my district who are part of the pull-out program. I used them to test my interview questions. The students had no problem understanding the questions. I obtained my list of potential participants from SOS Healthcare in the northeast region of South Carolina. SOS Healthcare gave my contact information to their graduates after I obtained IRB approval to contact me to set up the interviews. I wrote a letter to Dana Smith at SOS Healthcare to gain permission to have them contact their previous special education students (graduates) who were recommended for me to interview. I did not need site permission as I met the participants at community places of their choosing. If they were interested in participating, they contacted me by telephone. I explained who I was, my purpose for SOS Healthcare in contacting them, and the procedures that would likely follow. I made certain that the participants understood that their information would be protected by keeping everything locked in a filing cabinet, on a password protected computer, and by using pseudonyms. Once I had an affirmative, I sent the consent form to the participant to sign, set up the meeting, and conducted the interview once the consent form had been signed. See Appendix A for participant consent form. The art supplies and writing supplies were brought with me, so the participant could complete the artwork and write a short letter to a current student during that visit. See Appendix F for the letter prompt and Appendix G for the artwork instructions. The graduates preferred that I do the actual writing and they just dictated the letter. My goal was to do

everything at one meeting, as they were not likely to want to meet twice.

The Researcher's Role

In a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study, the instrument used for data collection is the human instrument, which is a very unique role in scientific inquiry, as only a human can bring meaning to the study through personal qualities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The human is an appropriate instrument to discover understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data was gathered through me as the human instrument as opposed to inventories or questionnaires (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013). Meaning was brought to the study by separating the data into meaningful themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I did, however, bring my own set of biases due to being a parent of a special education student. I also have worked with special education students who were removed from the school setting for many years. These are the students that I call the “throw away” kids that no teacher wants in their class due to their behaviors. I am currently a behavior intervention specialist who teaches the social skills pull-out classes, so this research could have a direct impact on me and how I do that part of my job. I learned from the participants. Memos and journaling were utilized in order to bracket my own biases (Moustakas, 1994). I did not know or have any previous relationship with any of the participants. They were not my former students. The participants were chosen by a referral from SOS Healthcare or from snowballing. I did not have any relationship to the site as this was the participant’s choice.

Data Collection

I gathered data in several ways. I conducted interviews, had the participants make a drawing, and had the participants dictate a letter to a current pull-out student. Triangulation was achieved by using these three forms of data. Triangulation shows the dependability of the data

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to analyze the data, the interviews were first transcribed, then organized and coded. Themes emerged once the data was coded and organized (Schwandt, 2015). The artifacts were documented, coded, and organized, as was the journal and memo from the bracketing (Moustakas, 1994).

Interviews

Open-ended questions were asked to gather data. The interviews were recorded by two devices in case one was to fail. The participants were also asked to do some form of artwork to describe their feelings about the pull-out program and were also asked to dictate a short letter to a current student in the pull-out program. First, I attempted to develop rapport with the participant. Rapport, respect, and relationships are very important to achieve with this population. They must feel comfortable with me and must not feel judged (Carter et al., 2015). A few ice breaker questions were asked first. The interview questions (see Appendix E) that were asked were as follows:

1. How is your day going?
2. What is your favorite movie or television show?
3. Please tell me three words to describe yourself.
4. What was your favorite class in school?
5. Tell me about your experience in the pull-out program.
6. How did participating in the pull-out program effect your life during school?
7. What did you like about the pull-out program?
8. How has being involved in the pull-out program impacted your current life?
9. What did you work on in the pull-out program that may have influenced your life now?

10. What did you find most helpful about the pull-out program?
11. What did you not like about the pull-out program?
12. What would have made the program more helpful?
13. What advice do you have to improve the pull-out program?
14. If you currently attend school/college, what are you studying and how are your grades/GPA?
15. If you currently have a job or do any volunteer work, what type of work is it?
16. What is your feeling regarding your school/college, job, or volunteer work?

The first four questions were designed to break the ice and begin to develop rapport (Patton, 2015). Question five allowed the graduate to freely speak of his/her lived experience regarding the pull-out program (Patton, 2015). Question six allowed the graduates to examine and explain his/her sense of self-efficacy while still in school (Bandura, 2002). Question seven allowed the graduate to talk about the pros of the program. Question eight explored whether or not the graduate believed the pull-out program impacted his/her current life situation, which is important knowledge for behavior specialists to have because the goal of the program is to help the graduates lead a productive and meaningful life. Question nine expanded on question eight with some more information regarding lasting influences of the program. The question was open ended to allow the participant to explain his/her experiences with rich, thick detail (Patton, 2015). Question ten encouraged the participant to share the most helpful parts of the pull-out program. Question eleven allowed the graduate to give great detail in telling what he/she did not like about the program. Behavior specialists running the pull-out programs could use the dislikes to improve the program for future students. Question twelve allowed the graduate to expand on the previous two questions by telling what he/she believed would make the program more

beneficial to future students. Question thirteen asked for even more detail in what the graduate believed would make the program more effective by asking the graduate for his/her advice to make the program better. Question fourteen and fifteen gathered details on the graduates' current lives and their contribution to society. Question sixteen expanded on the previous two questions to discover the graduate's level of life satisfaction. All of these questions brought about the rich, thick data that a qualitative study is known for (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview questions were tested during a pilot study with some of my current pull-out program students. The students were able to understand and answer the questions.

Art/Drawing/Collage

I had art supplies available to complete an art project and asked the participants to do some form of artwork to describe their thoughts and feelings regarding participating in the pull-out program. Participants were given a choice of what type of artwork to complete so that they were more likely to cooperate with doing the artwork. The artwork served as a springboard for more conversation about the pull-out program. Artwork as creative data helped the participants to open up and share their experiences (Halcomb, 2016). All 12 participants decided to draw a picture as their artwork.

Letter to a Current Student

The participants were asked to write or dictate a letter to a current pull-out program student. This letter could have included details such as what advice they have to share with the current students in this program? What was their favorite part of the program? How did they overcome their least favorite part of the program? What have they learned in the program that was helping them since they graduated? The participants were encouraged to give advice and tell about their own experience in the program to the current pull-out program students. Document

analysis allowed for triangulation to be achieved due to having three data sources instead of just one (Patton, 2015). More conversation about the pull-out program came from what the participants wrote in their letter.

Data Analysis

While completing data analysis, the data was assembled into codes and themes in hopes of finding logic. Moustakas' (1994) recommendations for data analysis with a transcendental phenomenological study was followed. Edmund Husserl, as presented by Moustakas (1994), said that transcendental phenomenology is looking at something as it is and developing an understanding through self-reflection. The phenomenon was looked at from a new viewpoint, while leaving bias, personal experience, or judgement behind, which is called the epoche (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) reports that the epoche is a mandatory beginning step in the data analysis procedure. In this first step, I had to put my own experiences aside so that I could experience the phenomenon as if it were the first time (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) recommends the next step of analysis to be the process of transcendental phenomenological reduction. Moustakas' (1994) process for phenomenological reduction will be used. This process includes "bracketing, horizontalizing, clustering the horizons into themes, and organizing the horizons and themes into a coherent textural description of the phenomenon" (p. 97). Bracketing is where one puts the research in brackets, so the researcher's biases stay out of the research and horizontalizing is when the researcher looks at all statements as equal and clusters the statements into themes (Moustakas, 1994). I bracketed out any of my own experiences as a behavior specialist. Putting my experiences and judgements aside is a step in the epoche procedure. The next step is horizontalization, which indicates that every statement will be appointed equal value which serves as a part of the meaning (Moustakas, 1994).

Perceptions emerged and are called horizons. All of the perceptions count because each one contributes something of importance to each experience (Moustakas, 1994). Words or statements that are related to my experience as a behavior specialist will be highlighted. Then clusters of meaning were developed. Memos and journals were kept during the whole research process and included my notes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My thoughts that occur during the interview process were journaled so that I could remember and reflect upon those thoughts as I was looking at all of the data after the fact. See Appendix I for an example of the memos.

The interviews were recorded using two recording devices. The reason for using two devices is to have a back-up if one fails. Google Docs electronic transcriber was used to transcribe the interviews. Then I listened to the recordings and made sure that every single word was transcribed. ATLAS.ti is software that many researchers use to code their data. The interviews were then added into the coding software. The data was coded and put into categories to organize, compare and contrast (Schwandt, 2015). Creswell and Poth (2018) defined themes as “broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 328). I used ATLAS.ti software to help organize my data files into meaningful themes. Coding is like mapping data. For example, a code was used to show every time a graduate said something relevant to the first question. Codes were used instead of just reading the answers to each question. A theme or pattern emerged that is important in the phenomenon description (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness

It is important that the study show that it is trustworthy. The study must show that it is credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable. Those are the four ways to show trustworthiness. The study also must show that it is done in an ethical manner. The researcher

should be very transparent in all aspects of the study. The participants will remain protected by using a locked filing cabinet, password protected computer, and using pseudonyms. Member-checking strategies were utilized so the participants can see the study results (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) said a researcher must have credibility, transferability, and dependability to have a trustworthy study. This study has credibility, transferability, and dependability. Patton (2015) refers to credibility as internal validity. Triangulation from three data sources was utilized by having three sources of data from each participant to add to the credibility of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The three data points include interviews, artwork to describe the participant's experience/feelings, and a letter to a current pull-out program student. ATLAS.ti software was used to code the data, which was then organized into themes (Schwandt, 2015). Credibility was also achieved by sending the first draft of the transcripts to each participant to ensure that they agree with what is written. Member-checking provided even more accuracy to the data (Patton, 2015).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is parallel to reliability and confirmability is parallel to objectivity (Patton, 2015). Dependability ensures that a proper process is followed, and confirmability makes sure the findings of a study are not just the researcher's perceptions (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) said that auditing is an effective way to establish dependability and confirmability. There was rich, thick descriptions of the participants' experiences and feelings (Moustakas, 1994). The rich, thick descriptions included, but were not limited to the participants themselves, the setting, body language, and rate, tone, and volume of speech. These descriptions were written in the journal.

Themes emerged that were described in great detail (Schwandt, 2015). Journaling and memo keeping were utilized to bracket the real research and leave out any biases (Moustakas, 1994). By building rapport and spending time with the participants, I was able to get a better understanding of their thoughts and feelings regarding the pull-out program and what they believe could make the program better.

Transferability

Patton (2015) calls to transferability parallel to external validity. Transferability refers to the ability to generalize the research and provides enough information for similarities between this study and another study that the findings might be transferred (Patton, 2015). The information in this study is able to be transferred into other studies considering special education social skills programs. This study allowed students who have recently graduated to have a voice on the subject of teaching social skills in a pull-out program and it can add to the other studies that gained teacher and parent perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

This study will be used to improve the social skills pull-out program. IRB approval was obtained prior to any research beginning. All permissions were also obtained before the beginning of the research. See Appendix C for the permission letter. Participants were informed of the reason for the study and asked to sign a consent form explaining how their information will be used and how their personal information will be protected. Trust was built between the researcher and the participants by building rapport and relationships. I did not share my personal opinions. The participants were reminded that their participation is voluntary. Any cultural, religious, or any other differences that need to be respected were asked about, but there were none (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I was very transparent with the participants and they were given

informed consent. I reported all information honestly. Bracketing, by use of memos and journaling was utilized (Moustakas, 1994). Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants and I did not know the participants prior to the interviews. The data is kept in locked filing cabinets and the computers are password protected. This keeps all of the data and participant's identity protected and confidential.

Summary

IRB approval was absolutely necessary to have prior to collecting any data. In this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study, the participants were special education students who graduated high school and were chosen by purposeful sampling. I did not have any prior knowledge of the participants and used journaling to handle my biases as it is very important for my biases to be put aside in order to take a fresh perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I was sure to maintain confidentiality during and after the study. It is important for all research studies to have credibility, dependability, and confirmability, and it must be an ethical study. This study may prove to be important in the ongoing teaching of social skills in public education because it followed all of the standards of an ethical study and it gave voice to the students themselves, which has been neglected in the past.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experience of recently graduated special education students who were part of a pull-out social skills program when they were in high school. The phenomenon under investigation was the recent graduates' perception of the pull-out program, their sense of self-efficacy while in high school, and their current life and goals. This chapter contains a summary of the participants. Theme development and responses to research questions are presented in the results section. Data collected from interviews, letters to current students in the pull-out program, and pictures drawn of their feelings towards their groups were analyzed to develop codes and themes. The themes developed from the data are presented in the form of a narrative. Responses from participants are also presented in a narrative form to support the themes that were discovered. In addition, direct quotes from participants' interviews and letters are included to provide greater insight into their lived experiences concerning their perceptions of their time in the pull-out program. See Appendix H for sample parts of the interview transcripts. Finally, to conclude the chapter, a summary is provided.

Participants

After obtaining IRB approval, participants were chosen via purposeful sampling. Ten recently graduated special education students who participated in a pull-out program while they were in high school volunteered to be participants in the study after being referred by Dana Smith (pseudonym to maintain confidentiality), the adult specialist program manager at SOS Healthcare. Dana Smith gave the recent graduates my contact information so they could get in touch with me if they were interested in participating in the study. Snowball sampling was also

utilized to gain two more participants. Two of the original participants each referred a participant that they knew had experienced the phenomenon. The requirements of the research study were met, as all of the participants had graduated high school with a regular diploma, not a certificate of completion, within the last three years and had a minimum I.Q. of 70. Dana Smith had access to their high school diploma status and their I.Q. information, so she only referred participants that would qualify. Dana also had the information for the two participants who were obtained through snowball sampling, as they used to be members at SOS Healthcare. The participants called me and we set up the meeting. The consent forms were signed prior to the interview. I explained how I would maintain their confidentiality by using pseudonyms and keeping everything locked up and/or password protected. I also let them know they can choose not to participate at any time just by letting me know. There were seven female and five male participants. All twelve of them chose to participate in the three aspects of the study. They all answered all of the interview questions, drew a picture, and dictated a letter to a current pull-out program student. When the participants were still students in high school, they were excused from a mainstream class to attend “group,” which is the pull-out social skills program.

Tara

Tara is a 20-year-old, Caucasian female who described herself as kind, faithful, and happy. She reported that she was having a good day on the day of the interview. She said she enjoys watching *The Golden Girls* on television and her favorite class when she was in high school was reading. Tara said she had As and Bs in high school. She enjoyed going to group because it helped her learn and she was able to help out at home more. She found it very helpful to learn how to be nice to other people and to not be so bossy. Tara works at a restaurant and likes it.

Cade

Cade is a 21-year-old, Caucasian male who described himself as good, nice, and happy. His day was going “good” and he does not have a favorite television show or movie. His favorite class when he was in high school was math. Cade reported that he made mostly Cs in high school. He had a good feeling about going to the pull-out program because he liked talking to people. He said he liked learning to cook, but the thing he liked the most about group was meeting new people. He does not currently have a job or volunteer, but he has a goal of working at the Disney Store. The one thing that he did not like about the pull-out program was when his peers interrupted him.

Jacob

Jacob is a 19-year-old Caucasian male who described himself as happy, helpful, and hopeful. He was having a “great” day and reported enjoying to watch NCIS and Law and Order. His favorite class was math and he said he earned As and a couple Bs when he was in high school. He learned about daily living skills in the pull-out program. The program helped him to focus in class and to be more helpful at home. He also learned how to get along with people. He thinks the program would have been more helpful if the leader taught more about being nice to others and not interrupting. He volunteers at an assisted living facility, which he likes.

Colleen

Colleen is a 19-year-old Caucasian female who described herself as creative, funny, and sassy. Her day was going “good” and she likes the movie Frozen II. She reported that she received Bs and Cs in high school and her favorite class was English. She reported that the people in her program were nice and she liked it. She said she was bullied as a child and it helped her to talk about it in the pull-out program. She learned daily living skills that will help

her live on her own someday. She said she learned skills that she never thought she could do on her own. She did not have any recommendation on things to make the group better. She volunteers at SOS Healthcare and said it was going well and that everyone is nice.

Grant

Grant is a 20-year-old Caucasian male who described himself as methodical, creative, and meticulous. When asked how his day was going, he said, “so far, so good.” He enjoys watching the Power Rangers and Myth Busters. His favorite classes in high school were math or literature. Grant reported earning mostly As in high school. He reported that the pull-out program, “helped me get my act together.” He felt out of place because he is “high-functioning.” He liked learning things that did not require any homework to be done. He said group probably affected his current life, but he is not sure how. He enjoyed learning daily living skills and that is what he thought was the most helpful. The things he did not like about the program were his “absent minded” peers and he thought it would be better if students with the same functioning level were placed together. He is currently working on an Associate’s Degree in digital arts and has a summer job as an usher at a movie theater. He has held the job for several years. He said school is “not bad” and the job “had no major problems.”

Aaden

Aaden is a 19-year-old Caucasian male who described himself as caring, honest, and funny. His was doing “good” and he likes to watch the comedy, Camas. Aaden said he earned Bs in high school and his favorite class was math. He liked the pull-out program because he learned new things and enjoyed hanging out with friends. His favorite part that had an impact on his life was learning about money. He is currently going to college and gets good grades and he works at a grocery store. He said school is “good” and he likes his job.

Andrea

Andrea is a 21-year-old Caucasian female who described herself as happy, creative, and silly. She said the day was going “very good” and she enjoys watching Pokémon. Andrea reported earning As and Bs in high school and her favorite class was science or chemistry. She liked the group activities and learning daily living skills. It helped her “take care of stuff” when she was in school and she liked the friendly people to talk to. She reported that she used to have trouble working with others and the program helped with that. That is how it impacted her current life. Learning life skills also has a current impact on her. She had no complaints regarding the program and no advice to make it better. She went to culinary school and has a goal to get a job. She knows that she needs a job where she can move around because she struggles to stay seated.

Emilia

Emilia is a 20-year-old Caucasian female who described herself as fun, outgoing, and a hard worker. She said her day was going “good,” but she was a little tired because she went to the gym that morning. She enjoys watching Power Rangers and her favorite class in high school was lunch and then English. Emilia said she earned mostly Cs in high school. She reported that she was bullied when she was in school. Her favorite part of the pull-out program was talking to her friends. She said communicating with others helped her to not feel alone. She said it impacted her current life because she used to stutter when she was nervous, but from practicing with people she was comfortable with, she does not stutter as much as she used to. She learned to make eye contact and how to be a friend. She said her group was like a family. They were there for each other and even had parties together. She did not like it when mean kids were in the group. The group having a better understanding of her disability would have made it better for

her. She volunteers at SOS Healthcare and in the church children's program. She said it is very fun volunteering at SOS because the people are all so different and she really likes volunteering with the kids at church.

Amara

Amara is a 20-year-old Caucasian female who described herself as fun, loving, and caring. She said her day was going "good." She enjoys watching fantasy shows and her favorite classes in high school were theater and science. Amara said she earned Bs in high school. She reported that group was fun and she made a lot of friends. She likes learning life skills and really likes making her friends laugh. Making friends was the most helpful part of the program for Amara. She had no complaints and no advice to change it or make it better. She has a goal of volunteering somewhere with animals such as the animal shelter or volunteering with children.

Kirsten

Kirsten is an 18-year-old Caucasian female who described herself as smart, an animal lover, and honest. She said her day was "fine" and her favorite class when she was in high school was digital arts. The pull-out program took some time away from her school work, but it was okay. She enjoyed learning to garden in her group. The impact that it had on her current life is that she is talking more and communication is what she found to be the most helpful. She could not think of anything that would make it better. Kirsten said her grades in high school were mostly Ds or Fs until she switched to online high school. She liked online high school because she could not see anyone looking at her.

Tiana

Tiana is a 20-year-old African American female who described herself as good at sports, smart, and pretty. She said her day was "going really well." She enjoys watching Home Alone

movies and Full House on television. Tiana was in the OCS (Occupational Course of Study) in high school and said her favorite classes were the job skills classes. Tiana reported having As and Bs in high school. She said the pull-out program was fun and she got to know people. She said it helped her in school because she learned to socialize more and the impact on her current life is that she is more independent. She learned how to introduce herself and uses that skill in the store that she works at. Learning to socialize was the most helpful part of the program. She had no complaints regarding the program. Tiana is currently in college and gets good grades. She also works for a small boutique shop. She feels “really great” about her job and school.

Lincoln

Lincoln is a 19-year-old Caucasian male who described himself as being well groomed (“fresh”), likes music, likes discovering new things, and having difficulty with money. He said his day was “going okay,” but he misses his friends (due to COVID). He enjoys watching Toy Story movies, CARS movies, and Remember the Titans movie. His favorite class in high school was math. Lincoln reported earning As and Bs in high school. Learning life skills was very helpful to him. He liked forming relationships with the facilitators of the social skills groups. He reported that he was struggling a bit and needs to work on personal boundaries. He said he will “persevere” though. He would have liked to learn to be more independent and to pay attention better. His advice to make the program better is for the leaders to give better and more frequent prompts and reminders. He used to work for SOS as a landscaper, but he did not really like it because he was always sweaty. He has a goal to take some adult education classes and to get a “more professional” job and “wear a uniform.” He knows that he will need extra bathroom breaks when he gets a job because he has a kidney disease. He would like to have a job coach to help him.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Name	Age	Gender	Race	Grades in High School	Job	Volunteer	College	Goal to obtain job/volunteer and/or attend college
Tara	20	Female	Caucasian	As & Bs	X			
Cade	21	Male	Caucasian	Cs				X
Jacob	19	Male	Caucasian	As & Bs		X		
Colleen	19	Female	Caucasian	Bs & Cs		X		
Grant	20	Male	Caucasian	As	X		X	
Aaden	19	Male	Caucasian	Bs	X		X	
Andrea	21	Female	Caucasian	As & Bs			X	X
Emilia	20	Female	Caucasian	Cs		X		
Amara	20	Female	Caucasian	Bs				X
Kirsten	18	Female	Caucasian	Ds & Fs				
Tiana	20	Female	African American	As & Bs	X		X	
Lincoln	19	Male	Caucasian	As & Bs	X			X

Results

I collected data from one-to-one interviews, drawings of the participants' feelings regarding their pull-out program, and the participants dictating a letter to a current student participating in the pull-out program. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. All three data points were done during the initial meeting so that participants did not have to return for follow-up meetings. The interviews were done first, then the drawings and the letters. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The participants were sent a copy of their interview transcription to look over. None of the participants disagreed with the transcription of their interview. I initially utilized ATLAS.ti qualitative software to aid me in the organization of my data in order to code the data. Then, I used an Excel document to keep everything organized on one readable sheet and completed the coding by hand.

It was very important to analyze all of the collected data to determine the emerging themes. Codes were identified and themes emerged to become the narrative of the participants' lived experiences of participating in a social skills pull-out program while in high school. The data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) method for transcendental phenomenology. I bracketed my personal experiences and put them aside to look at the phenomenon from a new viewpoint. Reduction was used and horizontalizing and clustering was utilized until saturation occurred. I also kept memos (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Theme Development

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of high school graduates who received special education services, in part, through a pull-out program in northeast South Carolina that focused on the development of social skills. Three data collection methods were utilized in this study. The data collection methods used were an interview, a drawing of the graduates' feelings toward the group, and a letter written to a current student of the program. All three pieces of the data were obtained in one meeting. There were 12 graduates interviewed. Having the data points allowed triangulation to be achieved (Patton, 2015).

As stated in Chapter Three, the data was assembled into codes and themes by using the process of transcendental phenomenological reduction. That process includes epoche, bracketing, horizontalizing, clustering, coding, and developing themes (Moustakas, 1994). Two recording devices were used, and I transcribed the content using Google docs. I then ran the data through the ATLAS.ti qualitative software in order to organize it, along with coding by hand to see the themes emerge. Table 1 shows the themes that emerged from the codes in phenomenological reduction.

Table 2*Themes that Emerged from the Codes in Phenomenological Reduction*

<i>Codes</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Liked group Positive Feelings It helped Fun Did not like Felt Alone/Different Bullied	Feelings (positive and negative)
Socializing Sharing Friends Communication Talk About Issues Social Skills Independent Living Skills ADLs (Activities of Daily Living) Job Skills	Social (social skills)
Understanding One's Disability Advocating for Self Self-Esteem Self-Efficacy Motivation Encouragement	Self-Efficacy (self-esteem and motivation)
Learned Listen School Teaching	Learned
Work Graduated Good Grades Volunteer Likes it College Job School Goal Want	Life Satisfaction

Theme 1: Feelings (positive and negative)

“I liked it” or some variation of that was what the overwhelming majority of what participants had to say regarding their experience in the pull-out program. Many of them also said that “group was fun” or “group made me happy.” Grant mentioned that group, “helped me get my act together” and he liked that. Colleen said that talking about her feelings helped her. Emelia did not like being in group with mean kids. Grant reported that sometimes “I didn’t feel like I was part of the group” and he did not like others looking at him or making him a part of a conversation without asking him first. Caleb reported having “good feelings” regarding the pull-out program. Jason said that he “liked group therapy” when asked how he felt about the pull-out program. Aaron and Amanda said that the pull-out program was fun. Angela stated that she thinks the group was “very good.”

Nine out of the twelve participants drew a “happy” picture. Jacob drew a sad picture, but said he drew that because he misses his nana who recently died. I believe that he misunderstood the directions for the drawing. Grant drew a group of animals with one animal slightly different than the others. He said that he drew that because he felt like he was a little different than the others in the group and sometimes did not feel like he was a part of the group. Cade and Jacob did not like when someone interrupted them.

All of the graduates reported having a positive experience in the pull-out program. They pointed out specific parts of the pull-out program that they liked or they just spoke of liking the program overall. A few of the graduates had some specific parts of the program that they did not like, however, these were minimal.

Theme 2: Social (skills)

The social and learned themes overlap a little, but had enough differences to warrant two separate themes. Many of the graduates mentioned enjoying hanging out with their friends,

making friends, talking to their friends, having fun with their friends, socializing, friendly people, and having someone to talk to as positive aspects of the pull-out program. Tara was glad she learned to be nice to others and not be so bossy with her friends. Grant mentioned having a calm demeanor was helpful in a group. Andrea liked talking with others about their future goals so she could get some new ideas. Emilia said that she used to stutter a lot because she was nervous talking to others and being in the pull-out program and practicing helped her to cut down on the stuttering. She also said that the group members were “like family” that looked out for each other and did things together. Amara liked making her “friends laugh.” Tiana said group helped her be able to socialize more and know “how to introduce myself,” which helps in her job at a boutique. Lincoln enjoyed forming relationships with the group facilitators and said that he would like to join an adult program to learn how to have a romantic relationship with a female and be appropriate.

Tara wrote, “be nice to kids” in her letter to a current student in the program. Grant suggested that the current student try to “hang around other high-functioning students” in his letter. “Help your peers and listen to your teachers” is what Aaden wrote to the current student in the program. Andrea suggested that the current student “interact with people, you’ll never know who might become your best friend.” “You need friends to survive” is what Amara had to say in her letter. Kirsten suggested, “you should communicate with others” in her letter. Tiana told the current student in her letter that “you can learn to talk to others and introduce yourself to people.” Lincoln spoke of making friends in his letter.

Overall, the graduates enjoyed their social time with their friends in the pull-out program. They liked having the opportunity of having time to “hang out” and socialize with their peers. They also enjoyed learning the social skills that help them become friends with others or enhance

their friendships. Some of the graduates spoke of learning the social skills that help them in their current jobs or volunteer ventures.

Theme 3: Learned

Many of the graduates talked about learning social skills (the overlap of the two themes) such as, looking people in the eye or face when talking to them, learning to make friends, to talk to people, how to be nice to people, to not interrupt when others are talking, to socialize and not be shy, and how to get along with others. They also spoke a lot about learning independent living skills (the reason learned received its own theme) such as, learning to garden, to cook, to do laundry, to clean, to do chores, to help out at home, to take out the garbage, to take care of their stuff, to stay organized, to make their bed, proper hygiene, money management, and how to be independent.

In the letters, they wrote that “you need to learn,” “try to learn new things,” and “try everything, you don’t know if you’ll like if you don’t try.” Colleen said she “learned new skills that she didn’t know she could do by herself” and what she needed to do to be able to live on her own. Grant said he “likes to learn things without having to do homework.” Andrea liked learning how to get a job. Emilia played sports in high school and said the program taught her to be a better teammate. Tiana learned skills that help her in job at the boutique. Lincoln would like to join an adult group because he said he needs to learn how to keep his belongings organized.

The graduates had much to say regarding learning. They were excited about what they learned. They wrote in their letters to current students about the importance learning. They were able to articulate the specific skills that they learned in the pull-out program and most of them are using those skills in their current lives. Learning was an important concept for all of the graduates.

Theme 4: Self-Efficacy (self-esteem and motivation)

There were many mentions of encouragement, especially in the letters. “Be yourself” or some version of that was said often. Cade wrote, “Do your schoolwork because it will help you feel good about yourself.” Colleen wrote, “Keep pushing through and you will get to wherever you need to go in your future.” Grant wrote, “If they are teaching something you already know, still listen because you might learn some new details.” Emilia wrote, “no matter what your disability is, just power through your classes. You have to believe in yourself because if you believe in yourself, you can get the job done.” Lincoln said, “it helped me a little bit, I hope it helps you too.”

Four of the graduates have a goal to get a job, volunteer, or go to school. Four of them have jobs. Three of them volunteer. Five of the graduates go to college or trade school. The graduates knew that feeling good about yourself is important and it showed in what they had to say to the current students in their letters.

Theme 5: Level of Life Satisfaction

Cade has a goal to get a job at the Disney store. Tara likes her restaurant job. Jacob volunteers at an assisted living facility and likes it. Colleen volunteers at SOS Healthcare and said it was going well and the people are nice. Grant goes to college and has a summer job as an usher at a movie theater. He has worked at the theater for several summers. He likes both of them. Aaden goes to college and gets good grades. He also works at Publix and likes both of them. Andrea enjoyed culinary school and has a goal to get a job where she can move around because she does not like to sit. Emilia volunteers at SOS Healthcare and at her church children’s program. She enjoys both of these. Amara has a goal to volunteer with animals or children. Kirsten gets good grades in school. She likes the online school she goes to. Tiana goes to school

and gets good grades. She also works at a boutique in her town. She said she really loves both. Lincoln used to work as a landscaper, but he did not like being messy. He has a goal to get a job that is more professional where he would wear a uniform.

Every graduate expressed satisfaction with their current life. They spoke of being happy in their jobs, volunteer ventures, and college experiences. The graduates feel more useful at home since they have a better handle on independent living skills. Many of them are looking forward to living on their own away from their parents.

Research Question Responses

The central research question that guided this study was: How do special education students who graduated from high school in northeast South Carolina describe their lived experience of being a pull-out student?

This research question aimed to narrow a gap in the current literature regarding teaching social skills to special education students. There are research studies available that arrange for parent or teacher opinions or are quantitative in nature, but there are very few studies examining the students' lived experience. The graduates' lived experience data was gathered through interviews, drawings of their feelings toward group, and letters written to current students in the pull-out program. Five themes emerged from the original codes. Two of the themes overlap, but it was important to separate these into two different themes. The two themes that overlapped are: social (skills) and learned. The reason the two themes overlap is due to the graduates discussing that they learned social skills and the reason to keep them separate is that the graduates also spoke of learning many other independent living skills besides social skills.

Some of the graduate's gave very descriptive answers (Patton, 2015), while others gave answers that were less wordy, but definitely still told the story of their lived experiences. Many

of the graduates used phrases such as, “I liked it,” “it was fun,” “I liked hanging out with friends,” “I learned how to be a friend,” “I learned to make friends,” along with, “I learned to cook, clean, garden, make beds, help out at home,” etc. Andrea described her drawing by saying, “being in group is like having fun in the sun. It’s a warm and fuzzy feeling.” Emilia described group by saying, “it helped to communicate so I wasn’t by myself” and “in group we talk it out.” Kirsten said she hardly ever talked to anyone before she started in the pull-out program because she was so afraid to talk, but being in the group helped her to overcome it a little and she talks more now than she used to. Tianna spoke of how shy she was before she started in the pull-out program, but she learned to make friends and socialize in group. Grant did not always have a positive experience. He described himself as different than the others and said he did not always feel like he fit in. Even his drawing was a group of animals and he was a little different than the others. He said, “I particularly get along with those who are also high functioning.” Nine of the graduates drew something happy to depict their feelings about the pull-out program (Figure 1.1). The graduates were very encouraging to the current students in their letters to them (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.1

The 12 pictures that the graduates drew regarding their feelings about the pull-out program. Some have descriptive notes.

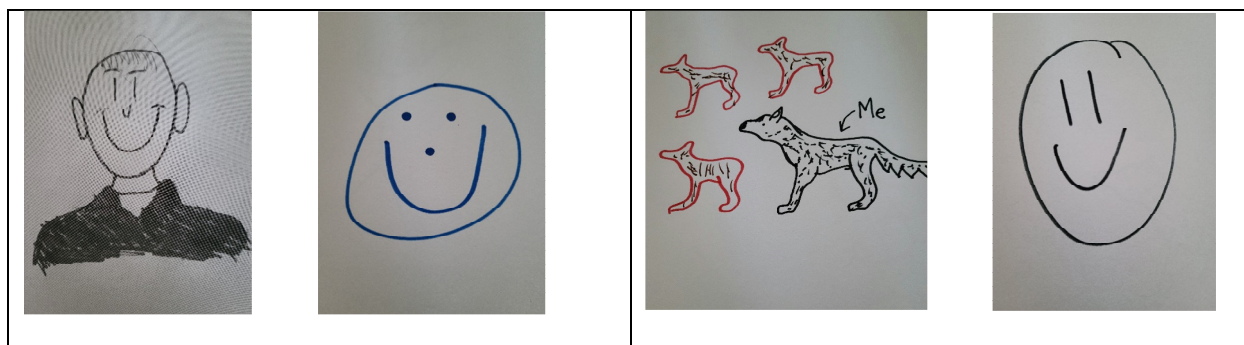




Figure 1.2

The 12 letters (using pseudonyms) that the graduates dictated for students currently in the pull-out program.

<p>“Dear Student, Be nice to the kids. From Tara”</p>	<p>“Dear Student, Do your school work because it would help you feel good about yourself. From Cade”</p>	<p>“Dear Student, Stay in school. Do not cut school because it is bad. You need to learn. From Jacob”</p>
<p>“Dear Student, Keep pushing through and you will get to wherever you need to go in your future. From Colleen”</p>	<p>“Dear Student, If students are around you that you don’t feel good around, try to keep your cool. Try to hang around other high-functioning students. If they are teaching something that you</p>	<p>“Dear Student, Help your peers. Listen to your teachers and try to learn new things. From Aaden”</p>

	<p>already know, still listen because you might learn some new details.</p> <p>From Grant”</p>	
<p>“Dear Student,</p> <p>Interact with people. You’ll never know who might become your best friend. Have fun. Make sure you try everything because if you don’t try it, you’ll never know how it’s going to be.</p> <p>From Andrea”</p>	<p>“Dear Student,</p> <p>No matter what your disability is, just power through your classes.</p> <p>You have to believe in yourself because if you believe in yourself, you can get the job done.</p> <p>From Emilia”</p>	<p>“Dear Student,</p> <p>You should learn how to make friends because it will help with social skills and passing time. You need friends to survive></p> <p>From Amara”</p>
<p>“Dear Student,</p> <p>You should communicate with others.</p> <p>From Kirsten”</p>	<p>“Dear student,</p> <p>If you’re going to be in a program like Ms. Martin’s, you can look back in the story and highlight main ideas. You can learn how to talk to people and introduce yourself to people.</p> <p>From Tiana”</p>	<p>“Dear Student,</p> <p>We made friends and got to hang out and learned a lot of new stuff.</p> <p>We did projects together. It helped me a little bit. I hope it helps you too.</p> <p>From Lincoln”</p>

Sub-Question #1

The first sub question established to support the central questions was, “How do participants describe their sense of efficacy with the pull-out program while in high school?” This question builds on the central research question by discussing the graduates’ sense of self-efficacy during and after the pull-out program. Tara talked about the group helping her learn. Caleb reported that it helped him talk to people outside of the group too. Jacob felt that it helped him to focus in class more. Colleen reported that she was bullied a lot and talking about it in

group helped her. Grant said it helped him by “blatantly reminding me what I already know and adding some stuff that I didn’t know.” Aaden said it helped him learn. Andrea said, “I usually have trouble working with others, even when I was younger, so it’s helping me work with others a bit more.” Emilia said it helped her stuttering a little. Tiana felt like it helped her learn to socialize and to introduce herself. Tiana uses these skills while working at the boutique waiting on customers. She did not think she would be successful in her job if she had not learned to socialize with strangers and introduce herself to them. Lincoln reported that group “helped a little bit.”

All of the graduates had positive things to say about the pull-out program that they went to. The graduates were very encouraging to others in their letters and most of them drew something happy to depict their feelings regarding the pull-out program. Cade explained in his letter, “do your schoolwork because it would help you feel good about yourself.” Colleen wrote, “keep pushing through and you will get to wherever you need to go in your future.” Emilia wrote to “believe in yourself.”

Eight out of the twelve graduates volunteer, go to college, and/or have a job. The other four have goals they want to achieve. All of the graduates reported liking their current jobs, volunteer ventures, and college. Lincoln was somewhat disappointed in himself for getting kicked out of the Project Search program but spoke of persevering and he has a goal/plan to obtain a new job. The graduates reported being happy with their current lives.

Sub-Question #2

The second sub-research question was, “How do the participants describe the social skills group and the curriculum used?” This question is to encourage the participants to go into detail on the feedback that they have regarding the social skills pull-out program. All of the participants

talked about the group teaching them independent living skills such as, cooking, cleaning, making beds, good hygiene practices, taking out the garbage, helping out at home, doing windows, and gardening. Kirsten mentioned liking a field trip to help out the community by having a beach clean-up. Many of the graduates also spoke of learning social skills such as making friends, looking people in the eye when talking to them, learning to introduce yourself, not bossing your friends around, and how to make friends. Tara learned to be nice to others. Cade does not like it when someone interrupts him. Jacob learned to not interrupt others when they are speaking. Grant said, "I get to learn something new without doing homework." Andrea liked learning independent living skills. Emilia and Kirsten reported that it helped with their communication skills. Tiana was happy that she learned to introduce herself because she uses that skill at her job in a boutique. The pull-out program helped Grant "get his act together." Lincoln learned to advocate for himself.

All of the graduates encouraged the current students to do well in their letters. Lincoln said, "it helped me, I hope it helps you too." Jacob reminded them that, "you need to learn." Aaden said to try to learn new things. Andrea encouraged the current students to "try everything." Tara reminded them to "be nice to the kids." Amara said that "you need friends to survive." Colleen told them they can "get to wherever they need to go in their future." Grant encouraged them to listen. Andrea suggested that they "try everything." Kirsten reminded them to "communicate with others."

The graduates reported liking the pull-out program. They spoke very positively about it and were glad that they participated in the program. They did not speak of the particular curriculum used, but spoke of everything that they learned while in the pull-out program and how they are still using what they learned in their current lives.

Sub-Questions #3

The final sub-research question was, “How do the participants describe their current life and goals after participating in the pull-out program?” This question encourages participants to share details of how the program has affected their goals and motivation.

Grant, Aaden, Andrea, Kirsten, and Tiana have had at least some college classes. Jacob, Colleen, and Emilia volunteer at least at one place. Tara, Grant, Aaden, and Tiana have jobs. Lincoln had a job, but did not like it. He learned what he does not like in a job and has a goal for a new job. Those who do not go to college, work, or volunteer, have goals to get a job or volunteer. The four who have goals to volunteer or work are Cade, Andrea, Amara, and Lincoln.

It appears as though all of the graduates interviewed are pleased with their current lives. They may not have started a job, college, or volunteer work yet, but they have goals to do so very soon. The graduates are motivated and were attempting to motivate and encourage the current students in their letters. The participants spoke of how they currently use the skills they learned in the pull-out program to improve their lives. Some of them reported that they would not be able to do their current jobs or volunteer ventures without the skills they learned in the pull-out program.

Summary

The lived experiences of special education graduates who participated in a social skills pull-out program while in high school were presented in interviews, drawings of their feelings regarding the pull-out program, and written letters to current students who participate in a pull-out social skills program. The data collected were organized and analyzed through ATLAS.ti and hand coded. Codes were developed, and five themes emerged utilizing phenomenological reduction. Two of themes, social (skills) and learned, overlap each other a bit regarding learning

social skills, but there were many other items the graduates learned that did not fit under the social theme. The five themes that emerged were: feelings, social (skills), learned, self-efficacy, and level of life satisfaction. The research questions highlighted the graduates' thoughts and feelings regarding the social skills pull-out program that they participated in.

The graduates' data revealed that overall, they liked the groups and learned a lot while in them. The groups seem to have had a positive effect on the graduates' current lives and level of life satisfaction as all but four of them attend college, have a job, and/or volunteer and enjoy these activities. The four that do not currently have a job, volunteer, or attend college have very realistic goals of getting a job, going to college, and/or volunteering. They know what they want and how to achieve those goals.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of high school graduates who received special education services, in part, through a pull-out program that focused on the development of social skills in northeast South Carolina. The phenomenon under investigation was the recent graduate special education students' perception of the social skills pull-out program. This researcher sought to learn what the graduates liked and disliked regarding the program, what advice they had to make the program better, was their self-efficacy effected by the group, and is the pull-out program effecting their current lives? Chapter five includes a summary of the study's findings, a discussion of the findings, and the implications in light of the relevant literature and theory, an implications section, a description of the study delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The central research question that guided this study asked, "How do special education students who graduated from high school in northeast South Carolina describe their lived experiences of being a pull-out student?" The open-ended questions allowed the graduates to provide rich detail and share their experiences regarding the pull-out program (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). All five themes that emerged were addressed in this question. When the graduates described their lived experiences in the social skills pull-out program, they discussed their feelings, social skills, self-esteem/motivation, what they learned, and their level of life satisfaction. Overall, all of the graduates reported having positive experiences in their programs. They spoke of liking group, loving group, group was fun, liked socializing, like learning how to

be a friend, liked learning social skills, and liked learning independent living skills. The graduates wrote encouraging letters to the current students and nine out of twelve drew happy feelings regarding the group. The positive statements far outweighed the negative.

There were a few specific circumstances that were mentioned that they did not like, such as feeling different or alone at times, people looking at them, someone interrupting, people copying them, people being mean, and including them in a conversation without asking first. The advice given to make the program better was to allow more free time for socializing and the facilitator should give better prompts and more reminders.

Sub-Question #1

How do participants describe their sense of efficacy with the pull-out program while in high school? The themes that addressed this sub-question are: feelings, social (skills), self-efficacy, learned, and level of life satisfaction. Nine of the participants drew happy feelings when asked to draw their feeling about their pull-out program. The participants wrote encouraging letters to the current students regarding the program. The happy feelings and encouraging words say that they are feeling pretty good about themselves and the group. The students spoke a lot about learning when asked about their time in the program. They reported learning many independent living skills and social skills. The participants reported that the pull-out program helped with learning, helped with talking to others (inside and outside of the group). Talking about the bullying was helpful. They learned to work with others, and became a better friend. They told the current students in their letters to “be yourself” and “believe in yourself.” All of these statements, along with the graduates having jobs, volunteering, going to college, or/and having goals, shows that the participants have a positive sense of self-efficacy.

Sub-Question #2

How do the participants describe the social skills group and the curriculum used? The themes that addressed this question are: feelings, social (skills), and learned. The majority of graduates drew happy feelings in regard to the program and wrote encouraging, positive letters to the current students in the program. They all named at least one independent living skill that they learned while in group and the majority of them spoke of learning and using social skills. Just learning in general while in the pull-out program was an overarching part of their description of the group. Helping out at home was another major factor for the graduates in this sub-question.

Sub-Question #3

How do the participants describe their current life and goals after participating in the pull-out program? The themes that were addressed in this question are: self-efficacy and level of life satisfaction. The letters encouraging the current students to be themselves, do well, try hard, do not give up, and keep pushing show that the graduates have positive thoughts about their lives. When a person is a contributing member of society, they tend to have a certain level of satisfaction in their lives. Attending college, having a job, and volunteering would contribute to society. Having realistic goals of contributing to society is a step before achieving those goals. Five of the graduates were attending college. Three of the graduates were volunteering. Four of the graduates have jobs and four of them have goals for getting a job or going to college. Tiara, Aaden, and Grant attend college and have a job. Andrea attends college and has a goal for getting a job. Lincoln had a previous job, but did not like it, so he has a goal to get a job and attend college. Overall, it appears as though all of the graduates have a level of positive life satisfaction.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of high school graduates who received special education services, in part, through a pull-out program that focused on the development of social skills in northeast South Carolina. This study focused solely on the experiences of students who were in a social skills pull-out program and aimed to give them a voice regarding the social skills pull-out program. The findings revealed that overall the graduates had a positive experience in the social skills pull-out program and the program had a positive effect on their lives while they were still in high school, along with their current lives. The findings also relate to the theoretical and empirical literature discussed in chapter two. Empirical research was presented in the chapter two literature review regarding the need for social skills to be taught explicitly to special education children for them to be successful later in their lives. The theoretical literature was grounded in Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory as it focused the role of group, modeling, motivation, goals, sense of efficacy, feedback, retention of information, and reproduction of skills.

Empirical Discussion

The voices of special education graduates who participated in the social skills pull-out program are missing from the research. Listening to the accounts of the special education graduates' lived experiences gathered in this study is one way to address this issue. Empirically, this study added to the predominately quantitative literature showing that social skills programs work (Bellini et al., 2007; Cappadocia, & Weiss, 2010; Goldstein et al., 2014; Gresham, 2015; Halle et al., 2016; Hutchins et al., 2017; Laugeson et al., 2014; Matson, & Wilkins, 2009; Smith & Matson, 2010; Vlachou et al., 2016; Yeo & Teng, 2015). The participants were given the opportunity to share their perspectives on the pull-out program. They discussed the positives and

the negatives of the program and whether or not the program helped them when they were in high school, as well as their current life.

Parents and teachers have reported that their special education students tend to have poor social skills (Lyons et al., 2016). Children and adults with special needs often have a social skills deficiency (Ashman et al., 2017; Barisnikov & Straccia, 2019; Cheng et al., 2015; Cheung et al., 2017; Dekker et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2016; Kaboski et al., 2015; Leaf et al., 2016; Lopata et al., 2019; Reisinger & Roberts, 2017; Szumski et al., 2016). People with disabilities struggle in the work force due to having poor social skills (Agran et al., 2014). Judging by the fact that most of the graduates in this study have a job, volunteer, or go to college, a social skills pull-out program could be helpful for students with disabilities to participate in to combat them struggling in the work force because of their lack of social skills.

Deficits in social skills also contribute to poor academic performance (Albrecht et al., 2015; Davies et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Hart & Banda, 2018; Kaboski et al., 2015; McDonald et al., 2019; Syriopoulou-Delli et al., 2018). Special education students usually have less motivation to do well, are more withdrawn, and have a lower frustration level than children who are typically developing (Cheung et al., 2017; Rhoad-Drogalis et al. 2018). Social skills programs that prove to be useful for special education children are ones that include modeling as one of the frameworks in which the social skills are taught (Shepard et al., 2014; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016). The graduates revealed in their interviews that they all graduated high school, so they at least did well enough to earn a high school diploma. As far as being more withdrawn, the majority of the graduates spoke of learning social skills, such as looking someone in the eye when talking to them, how to introduce yourself, how to make a friend, how to be a good friend, how to be nice to others, how to communicate, and how to socialize in general, in their pull-out

program. This study shows that modeling and explicitly teaching special education students social skills may help them in their current and future lives. Technology can also be used in teaching social skills. One way to utilize technology for social skills instruction is for the social skills instructor to use some form of technology to research or create a social skills intervention (Withey, 2017). The graduates' letters encouraging a current student shows that they are capable of being motivated when taught social skills. Some of the graduates revealed through their answers that they have a low frustration level, but they also talked about how they learned to push through to get the job done. One of the best ways to combat all of the social skills deficits is by teaching appropriate social skills to the special education children (Bellini et al., 2007; Bundock & Hewitt, 2017; Doody, 2015; Fisher et al., 2016; Gresham, 2015; Haydon et al., 2017; Hutchins et al., 2017; Laugeson et al., 2014; Ledford et al., 2018; Matson & Wilkins, 2009; McDaniel et al., 2017; Nussli & Oh, 2016; Puckett et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017a; Roberts et al., 2015; Shepherd et al., 2014; Vlachou et al., 2016; Yeo & Teng, 2015). The goal of social skills training is twofold: decreasing the student's negative behaviors, while increasing the student's positive social skills (Bundock & Hewitt, 2017; Cheng et al., 2015; Denault & Déry, 2015; McDaniel et al., 2017; Stichter et al., 2019; Shyuan Ng et al., 2016; Szumski et al., 2016). When students have positive social skills, they are more likely to be accepted in a peer group, they will get along better with their teachers, and have success in the academic arena (Brooks et al., 2014; Caldarella et al., 2017; Cheng et al., 2015; Denault & Déry, 2015; Guivarch et al., 2017; McDaniel et al., 2017; Radley et al., 2017a; Roberts et al., 2015). The graduates in this study have used their voices to share that learning social skills helped them, both when they were still in high school and after they graduated and went on to college, a job, volunteering, or setting goals for college, a job, and/or volunteering. The social skills pull-out program helped the

graduates learn to socialize and have positive relationships with peers and to be accepted into a peer group. Almost all of the graduates mentioned the importance of friends and socializing.

Theoretical Discussion

Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory reports that learning happens through modeling, efficacy, reinforcement, and self-regulation. Behaviors are goal directed and eventually will be self-regulated (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory revolves around the idea that people learn via observation, modeling, and motivation. Motivation was one of the original codes in this study that merged into the self-efficacy theme. Learn is another one of the five themes that emerged. Several of the graduates spoke of learning to be nice to their friends, not bossing people around, and not interrupting when others are talking. These could be considered self-regulation.

There are four components when learning by observation. The first one is attention, which is what people pay attention to when they are observing them. The second component is what people retain after observing someone or something. The third one is behavioral, which means what action do the people show after the observation. The fourth and final component is motivation, which is what are they motivated to do (Wood & Bandura, 1989). It was interesting to hear what each graduate paid attention to during their social skills pull-out program. The graduates were still utilizing many of the social and independent living skills that they were taught in the pull-out program; proving that they retained the information. The graduates spoke of their behavior changing after learning in the pull-out program. For example, they learned to look a person in the eye when speaking to them, they learned to not interrupt when someone is speaking, they learned to cook and clean and said they helped out at home more often than they did before they learned those skills. The graduates spoke of motivation during their interviews.

They were motivated to graduate high school, go to college, set goals, volunteer and/or to get a job.

In social cognitive theory, there is a distinction between performance and acquisition. Students do not repeat every single thing that they see. When modeling begins, the first goal is for the child to learn basic rules and strategies. Next, the child should be given scenarios in which to practice his or her new skills through role playing. Finally, the child needs to be given a chance to practice the skills in a real-life environment, such as the classroom. The child should be set up to succeed on the first few trials so confidence can be built (Wood & Bandura, 1989). The students may be motivated to learn the skills so that they can begin to have meaningful relationships with their peers in the classrooms (Laugeson et al., 2014). The graduates spoke of learning social skills in the pull-out program and then practicing these skills. Many of them spoke of utilizing the social skills that they learned in the pull-out program in their current lives at home, in college, and at their place of business (job or volunteer).

Self-confidence can be built by modeling different responses to several situations (Bandura, 2002). The graduates spoke as though they had self-confidence. Self-esteem was one of the original codes in the study that merged into the self-efficacy theme. In order to master the skills that have been learned, several opportunities to practice will be required. This can be done by utilizing role playing scenarios (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Generalization can occur more easily when a special education student is given opportunities to practice with peers who are similar in age and skills (Laugeson et al., 2014). Receiving feedback regarding their performance is important. Children can gain confidence by utilizing their new skills in real life situations (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Generalization had occurred for the graduates. This was apparent in their demeanor during the interview and their answers regarding what they had learned in the

pull-out program. The proof is in the current life situations of having graduated, set some goals, gone to college, volunteered, or got a job. The graduates continue to utilize the social skills and independent living skills that they learned in the pull-out program in their current lives and these skills help them feel confident in the jobs, volunteer ventures, college, and in personal and professional relationships.

A person's thoughts regarding their capabilities can increase or impede their desire to try new skills (Wood & Bandura, 1989). They will need to be taught to be resilient because it is impossible to always be successful. They must learn how to overcome failures and still be motivated to keep trying (Bandura, 2002). This was apparent for the graduates in the letters that they wrote to a current pull-out program student. Most of the letters were encouraging. For example, they said, "keep pushing for your future," "no matter your disability, power through your classes," "you can get the job done," "try everything, you don't know if you'll like it if you don't try," and "believe in yourself." The graduates expressed confidence and resilience. Lincoln spoke of persevering when speaking about a new job.

Goals can help a person accomplish many things because when a person has goals, he or she has expectations and those expectations will motivate the person to follow through and complete the goals (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Many of the graduates had goals. They had goals to get a specific type of job or volunteer work. Some of them had goals to be able to live on their own someday. Overall, because of the graduates' practicing and learning to generalize the social skills needed to be successful, along with gaining self-efficacy, motivation, and goal setting, this study fit perfectly with Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory.

Implications

The results of this study have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for stakeholders such as the school districts, the special education department, the parents, the students, behavior specialists/counselors, and future employers or colleges of the special education students. The study utilized interviews, artwork, and letters to current students to capture the lived experiences of the special education graduates who participated in a social skills pull-out program while they were in school. According to the findings of this study, the graduates have a positive perception of the social skills pull-out program that they attended while in school.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework guiding this study was Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory to provide a voice to share the perceptions of special education graduates who participated in a social skills pull-out program when they were in school. Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory addresses the role of group, modeling, motivation, goals, self-efficacy, feedback, retention of information, and production of information. This study regarding special education graduates' perception of their social skills pull-out program that they participated in while still in school adds to and validates the literature of Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory. The social skills pull-out programs utilize groups, modeling, motivation, goals, self-efficacy, feedback, retention of information, and production of information. The social skills are taught in a small group setting. Modeling is one of the top means of teaching social skills. There are goals set on the students' IEP. Students begin to get a sense of self-efficacy as they become more competent using social skills. The students are given feedback while they are learning in the group. The graduates in the study showed that retention and production of information occurred. The

graduates reported learning skills in the pull-out program and then using those skills to improve their lives. This study showed that Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory is accurate due to the graduates showing that they learned the skills they needed to become successful and productive adults. A good recommendation would be to teach this way for other school related subjects, not just for a social skills pull-out program class. This way of teaching works and should be utilized more often.

Empirical Implications

The voices of students who have been in a social skills pull-out program are missing from the literature. Most of the studies involving whether or not teaching social skills works, have been quantitative (Bellini et al., 2007; Cappadocia & Weiss, 2010; Goldstein et al., 2014; Gresham, 2015; Halle et al., 2016; Hutchins et al., 2017; Laugeson et al., 2014; Matson & Wilkins, 2009; Smith & Matson, 2010; Vlachou et al., 2016; Yeo & Teng, 2015). Listening to the lived experience of recent special education graduates who participated in a social skills pull-out program in school is one way to address and view the issue. Since this study examined recent special education graduates' perceptions regarding the social skills pull-out program, there are empirical implications for instructors of the social skills pull-out classes.

This study's results are beneficial to social skills pull-out program facilitators, as these findings confirm that teaching social skills explicitly works well for special education students. This study's results confirmed that social skills can be taught to and utilized by special education students. Since special educators and behavior specialists are tasked with facilitating these special education social skills pull-out programs, it is very important that the voices of the students be heard. One recommendation would be to properly train the special educators and

behavior specialists or whoever will be teaching the social skills pull-out program, to teach social skills to special education students.

Practical Implications

The study's participants shared that they learned and use many of the skills that they were taught in their social skills pull-out program. The participants' perception of their high school social skills pull-out program was a positive one. They reported liking the program and having fun in the program while learning social skills. They learned how to make and keep friends and how to socialize. They learned to have a proper conversation with someone while looking them in the eye. The participants learned so many independent living skills that they reported being more helpful at home. Being in the social skills pull-out program also helped them in their academic classes, and they learned the importance of goal setting. Not only did the social skills pull-out program help them while they were still in school, the participants retained the information, and it has affected their current lives. All of the participants have graduated high school, set goals for themselves, have a job, volunteer, and/or go to college. By studying the lived experiences of the twelve participants, the results of the study show that the social skills pull-out program is beneficial for special education students. A recommendation would be to expand the social skills pull-out program to include all or most special education students instead of just certain ones who have social skills listed as a need on their IEP.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations are necessary when doing a research study. Without delimitations, the study will attempt to cover too much and likely never be completed with fidelity. One delimitation of this study using the phenomenological method of research was choosing to answer the research questions based solely on the lived experiences of the recent graduates.

Transcendental phenomenological research methods required me to put my personal biases aside to keep from affecting the data in any way (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Another delimitation was choosing my subjects to be over 18 years of age. This was done so that it could be determined by their graduation status that they had a strong enough cognitive ability to answer the questions. By knowing their graduation status, I did not need to be informed of any I.Q. numbers to determine if the participants could answer my interview questions. This allowed the graduates a little more privacy. Because I wanted to personally interview the graduates, I chose a geographic area near my home, which is another delimitation.

Limitations are shortcomings of the study that the researcher has no control over. The limitations of the study include no diversity amongst the participants. Eleven of the participants were Caucasian and only one was African American. The participants were also all between the ages of 18 through 21. Another limitation was the small scope of the study, using just one facility to gather all of my participants who were all from the same geographical area. A third limitation was a global pandemic hitting right in the middle of my interviews. The reason the global pandemic was a limitation was because some of the participants were feeling sad because they were stuck at home, lost loved ones, and/or could not be around their peers due to quarantine. The sadness appeared to have an effect on some of their answers.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to special education graduates who were over 18 years of age. It would be interesting to see this study replicated using participants who are currently in high school to see if they speak as highly of the pull-out program while they are in it as opposed to using their memory. Researchers could also replicate this study using a larger sample from many geographical locations. Having a more diverse sample would also be very important. Using a

transcendental phenomenological study would still allow for the lived experience of the participants to be shared. The students need to have a voice and this research design allows for that voice to be heard. A quantitative study could include a much larger and diverse group of participants and would produce data that would clearly show if the pull-out program was successful according to the students.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of high school graduates who received special education services, in part, through a pull-out program that focused on the development of social skills in northeast South Carolina. The theory guiding this study was Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory. Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory was a perfect fit for this study as the theory addresses the role of group, modeling, motivation, goals, self-efficacy, feedback, retention of information, and production of information. All of which are part of a social skills group. The theory was used effectively to explain the research.

This study gave a voice to the special education graduates regarding their social skills instruction. There is a lack of qualitative studies looking at social skills. There is a large portion of quantitative studies researching social skills instruction. Hearing the voice of graduates who actually have participated in the social skills instruction is very important for people like myself, who facilitate these social skills instruction pull-out programs. Hearing all of the praise for the groups made me very happy, even though these were not my students, I always hope that I am being helpful to my students. Overall, the participants had positive comments regarding the social skills pull-out program. They spoke of the many skills that they learned and how they still use those skills. They were very encouraging in their letters to a current student. The overarching

perception of the social skills group was a positive one according to the participants. I believe that overall, social skills instruction taught to special education students through a pull-out program is successful. The graduates all spoke of skills they learned that they continue to use in their daily lives. All of the participants are currently holding a job, volunteering, attending college, and/or have goals to do so. The graduates speaking of using the skills they were taught and the fact that they are successful contributing members of society with the motivation to succeed show me that the pull-out program was a positive experience that should be continued for current elementary, middle, and high school students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 2/12/2020 to 2/11/2021
Protocol # 3955.021220

CONSENT FORM

THE EXPERIENCE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION GRADUATES WHO RECEIVED PULL-OUT SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Sharon Diane Flückner

Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of special education graduates who participated in social skills pull-out group while in high school. You were selected as a possible participant because you are 18 years of age or older, have graduated from a northeastern South Carolina high school within the last five years with a regular high school diploma, and you were a special education student who participated in the social skills pull-out group while you were still in high school. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

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

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of high school graduates who received special education services, in part, through a pull-out program that focused on the development of social skills in northeast South Carolina. This study will allow graduates who received social skills instruction to voice their opinion about the social skills program and will also encourage them to explain their thoughts on making the program better.

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

1. Meet with me at a community destination to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be audio recorded and will take approximately 25 minutes to complete.
2. Write/dictate a short letter to a current special education. This will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.
3. Complete a drawing that depicts your feelings toward the social skills pull-out program. This will take approximately 15 minutes.
4. Review the transcript of your interview to make sure everything is correct. This will take approximately 15 minutes.

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

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society may include the social skills pull-out program improving for current and future special education students. The students may be better prepared for life after graduation due to the improvements in the program.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 2/12/2020 to 2/11/2021
Protocol # 3955.021220

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will receive a \$15 gift card for a local eatery at the end of the meeting.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and in a locked filing cabinet and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hard copy data will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Sharon Flücker. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Tracey Pritchard, at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

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

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 2/12/2020 to 2/11/2021
Protocol # 3955.021220

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

Signature of Participant Date

Signature of Investigator Date

APPENDIX B

SOS Healthcare Staff Script-To be used when client comes in for weekly appointment

Sharon Flückler is a graduate student at Liberty University. She is conducting a research study as part of her requirements to graduate with a Doctor of Education degree. She is researching whether or not the social skills groups that you had when you were in high school were useful to you and to see if you have any advice on how to make the groups better. She wants to know your opinion of the social skills pull-out groups.

You could be a possible participant if you are 18 years of age or older, have graduated from a northeastern South Carolina high school in the last five years, and you were a special education student who participated in a social skills pull-out group while you were in high school.

If you choose to participate in her study, she will ask you some questions, ask you to write or dictate a short letter to a current student, and ask you to draw a picture that depicts your feelings toward the social skills pull-out program. She will also ask you to look over the transcript of the meeting to make sure it is accurate. It should take about one hour and ten minutes to complete everything. She will give you a \$15 gift card for a local eatery as a thank you for helping her with her study. Your name or anything that can identify you will not be used in the study. The only way someone would know that you participated in the study is if you tell them yourself. If you ever decide that you do not want to participate any more, you just have to let her know and she will remove your information from the study.

If you are interested in participating, you may contact Sharon at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] and let her know that you would like to participate in her study.

APPENDIX C

11/24/19

[REDACTED]
Coordinator of Adult Services
[REDACTED]

Dear Sharon Flucker:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled THE EXPERIENCE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION GRADUATES WHO RECEIVED PULL-OUT SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY, I/we have decided to grant you permission to have SOS Healthcare staff contact their clients that would be appropriate for this study and give them your contact information.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

I/We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Coordinator of Adult Services

APPENDIX D

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 12, 2020

Sharon Flücker

IRB Approval 3955.021220: The Experience of Special Education Graduates Who Received Pull-Out Social Skills Instruction: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Sharon Flücker,

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

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

Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX E

Sharon Flückler Interview Questions

1. How is your day going?
2. What is your favorite movie or television show?
3. Please tell me three words to describe yourself.
4. What was your favorite class in school?
5. Tell me about your experience in the pull-out program.
6. How did participating in the pull-out program effect your life during school?
7. What did you like about the pull-out program?
8. How has being involved in the pull-out program impacted your current life?
9. What did you work on in the pull-out program that may have influenced your life now?
10. What did you find most helpful about the pull-out program?
11. What did you not like about the pull-out program?
12. What would have made the program more helpful?
13. What advice do you have to improve the pull-out program?
14. If you currently attend school/college, what are you studying and how are your grades/GPA?
15. If you currently have a job or do any volunteer work, what type of work is it?
16. What is your feeling regarding your school/college, job, or volunteer work?

APPENDIX F

Written Letter Prompt

Please write/dictate a short letter to a current special education student who is participating in the social skills pull out program. The letter can be just a few sentences or several pages, whatever is most comfortable for you. What advice can you give this student regarding participating in the social skills program? What advice can you give the student regarding life after graduation? Describe your current life. Is there a certain lesson that you really liked that you could tell the student about? Explain what you learned in social skills group. Describe what the student should do to prepare for high school ending? Explain your favorite part or memory of the social skills group. Explain your opinion of the social skills group. Encourage the student to do well in group. Describe your hopes and dreams. You may choose any of these ideas or you may come up with something of your own to write/dictate.

APPENDIX G

Artwork Instruction

Please draw a picture that shows how you feel or how you felt about attending the social skills pull out group. The picture can be of anything that you believe will show others how you feel/felt about attending social skills when you were in high school.

APPENDIX H

Sample Parts of Interview Transcripts

- Tell me about your experience in group. We learned about hygiene. We learned about, well I learned about how to cook on my own and clean on my own. Did participating in group help you during school, when you were still in high school? Did group help you at all? It helped me focus in class. What did you like about group when you were younger, when you were still in high school? Can you remember that far back and tell me about what you liked? I liked group. What do you remember? What kind of things would you do in groups or what did you learn? How to like look at people in the face and talk to them or how to meet new friends.
- Is there anything that you don't like about group? No. No there wasn't anything. Is there anything that you can think of that might make group more helpful? Something that you haven't learned yet that you think you need to? I don't think so. Okay. Um. Do you have any advice for the group leaders to help them make the program better? Just keep doing what you're doing and hopefully things turn out how they're supposed to. Do you currently go to school or college? I do not. How about do you have a job or volunteer anywhere? I volunteer here on Wednesdays. So, you volunteer at SOS. And what do you do here? I basically just help those that need it. Um there are some kids here that I help. And last question for this part is how do you feel about your volunteer work here at SOS? Um it's going pretty well. Everyone seems pretty nice.
- Your name is only going to be used by me. When I actually write my paper, I'm going to call you something like John or Dave. No one will know it was you that talked to me. Okay? Okay. So, your stuff will remain private. I'll be the only person that reads my study that knows it to you. Unless you read my study. You'll recognize your answers and be like, hey, that was me I said that. Okay? Okay. What did you like about group? Ah Ah how do I describe it, maybe that I got to learn something without having to do homework. Okay. That's a good thing, getting to learn something without homework. Did being in group affect your life today? Uh, I would imagine it did but I can't think of a way of how it did. Okay. What kind of things did you work on in the group that might influence your life today? Uh. What kind of things did you learn that might help you today? Uh. Like, like money management. Okay that's a good one. I'm trying to think of something else. The cooking. All right do you currently attend any kind of school or college? Yes. HGTC. Nice. What are you going to school for? An associate's degree in digital Arts. Digital Arts very nice. I'm going for that since I have a passion for sketching, but I need I need to find a way to apply my art skills to make a job. Right. And Digital Arts is a good way to do that because you could get into gaming or drawing like for animated films or something. Um would you like to see some examples of some designs that I took photos of? I would love to see them. While you look through your drawings, can you continue answering questions? Yes. Do you have a job or do any kind of volunteer work? Volunteer work, uh not much, but I do have a summer job. Okay. What's your summer job? That I work as an as an usher or floor staff at the [REDACTED] Theaters at [REDACTED]. What's the name of the theater? [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], okay. Is that a movie theater? Yes. Okay. Cool. I've been working there since 2015. Very nice.

APPENDIX I

Samples of Memoing

- Participants are calling the pull-out program “group,” so I need to make sure to mention that these words can be used in place of each other.
- Be patient.
- Make sure to explain my questions well as the participants are not all understanding everything I am asking.
- The participants are dictating pretty short letters, but they are mostly positive/encouraging letters to the current students.
- I don’t think he understood the directions for the drawing because he drew himself sad because he misses his nana who recently passed away. Make a note of this in the data analysis.
- Most of the drawings seem to be happy faces.
- Many participants liked the social aspect of the program.
- Seems like some of them have been bullied.
- Ask [REDACTED] about [REDACTED] (snowballing).
- Make sure to explain how their names will be changed to pseudonym for confidentiality purposes.
- Be aware of my facial expressions.
- Be aware of my voice tone.
- Some of the participants had social skills groups in school and private groups outside of school.
- Some of the participants still attend a social skills group as an adult. I need to make sure that they understand which group I am asking about.
- A lot of them have jobs or volunteer.
- They seem to know how to set goals and achieve them.
- There are more college students than I expected.
- A lot of independent living skills were taught.
- Friendship is very important to most participants.