LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CO-TEACHERS INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL

BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Jessica Masters

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of elementary educators in a large suburban district who have engaged in the co-teaching model to support the reintegration of students with or at risk for emotional and behavioral disabilities from self-contained classrooms to the general education classroom. The theories that guided this research were the theory of planned behavior, developed and refined by Ajzen, and the attribution theory, developed by Weiner. Together, these theories support the connection between teacher factors, teacher perspectives, and predictable engagement in the behavior, such as supporting and facilitating inclusion for students with EBD. A sample of 10 participants, comprised of both general and special educators with the unique experience of supporting the inclusion of students previously served in self-contained behavior classrooms, through a reintegration process, from a large suburban school district, provided their perspectives and experiences through individual interviews, journaling, and participation in a focus group. Data were analyzed and coded by hand and underwent a process of phenomenological reduction, horizontalization, and clustering to identify themes and meanings that richly describe the experience of using the co-teaching model to include students with EBD. A triangulation of the data corroborated the identification of themes and subthemes. The results of this study revealed that teacher perspectives are evolving, they would like input on teaching practices, and they value the co-teaching model to support reintegration.

Keywords: emotional behavioral disabilities, inclusion, co-teaching, least restrictive placement, reintegration

Copyright Page

Dedication

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Marvin. You inspired me to start this journey and continuously provided me with unconditional love and support so that I had the strength and motivation to see it through. Your encouragement and dedication to helping me were unwavering, even when hours behind the computer meant my absence from many events and activities. You saw every raw moment. So much of what is good about me is because of how you love and support me. I could not have done this without you. I am lucky to be your wife and am so thankful to experience life with you.

To my family, friends, and co-workers, thank you for always believing that I could do this and for listening as I talked about how hard every step of this journey was. Thank you for your patience and understanding as I dedicated much time to this work. Thank you for forgiving my absence, checking on my progress, and loving me through the hard parts. I could not have done this without your support and understanding. Thank you to my family, especially, for reminding me that being called "Dr. Masters" will be worth it. You were right.

Acknowledgments

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List of Abbreviations

Emotional Behavioral Disabilities (EBD)

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Significant Developmental Delay (SDD)

Students with Disabilities (SWD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders or Disabilities (EBDs) make up less than 1% of the students provided special education services in the U.S. (Mitchell et al., 2019). Since EBD was recognized as a disability in schools in 1975, little growth for increasing successful outcomes of students with EBD has been made; social integration, evidence-based identification of supports, and educational equality continue to be identified as lacking or insufficient (Freeman et al., 2019; Gagnon, 2021; The Peacock Hill Working Group, 1991; Mitchell et al., 2019; Scanlon et al., 2019; Scardamalia et al., 2018). Ongoing research identifying effective supports for students with EBD is critical because students with EBD remain more likely to experience educational segregation (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018) and both in-school and post-school failures (Freeman et al., 2019) despite previous and current legislative and empirical efforts. Some school districts have chosen a co-teaching model that uses the expertise of a special education teacher and a general education teacher collaborating in the general education setting to increase inclusive practice and decrease negative educational experiences for students with disabilities. To understand the attributing factors that lead to an increased ability to predict teacher behaviors when engaged in the co-teaching model, examining the lived experiences and attitudes towards co-teaching to support students with EBD or challenging behaviors (at risk for EBD) through a transcendental phenomenological study is necessary. Chapter One contains a background pertinent to the problem through a historical, social, and theoretical context, a statement of the problem, the significance and purpose of the study, and a list of guiding research questions. A list of relevant terms and definitions concludes Chapter One.

Background

The inclusion of students with disabilities (SWDs), specifically students with EBD, has a long history of various exclusionary practices (Gagnon, 2021; Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018). The debate about a lack of empirical support for strategies and placement decisions has competed with societal beliefs and the protection of students' rights (Gidlund, 2018; Lanterman et al., 2021; Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). However, students with EBD are not the only ones in desperate need of support, as teachers who are responsible for supporting these students continue to vacate the field, leaving school districts in dire straits (Gilmour et al., 2021; Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). The development, or rather a lack of an acceptable solution, of the problem and social and theoretical underpinnings of including students with EBD emphasizes the need for further research. Students are legally entitled to special education services that are educationally beneficial (Hott et el., 2021). Thus, understanding the lived experiences and adding to the available empirical research for proposed supports for students with EBD is critical for future decision-making (Mitchell et al., 2019).

Historical Context

Modern educational practice affords more opportunities for SWDs to be educated alongside typically developing peers; however, a lingering history of exclusion for students with EBD remains. As recent as the 1950s, students with significant behavioral or emotional challenges were left in the care of institutions (Wood, 2001). Large-scale legislation protecting the rights of SWDs began in 1975, creating waves in traditional educational processes and triggering educational reform movements (Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). Legislatures such as the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, later retitled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), laid the

groundwork for inclusionary practices and protective rights for all SWDs (Freeman et al., 2019).

IDEA continues to be the framework school systems operate from regarding the educational

rights of SWDs and their families.

Between the 1980s and 1990s, the term "integration" flooded the educational system

creating a service delivery model focused on resource rooms and pullout services for providing

specialized instruction (Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). As advocacy movements continued and

intensified in the 90s, the term integration was replaced with "inclusion" (Whitlow et al., 2018).

At the time, integration of SWD described the mere presence of a SWD in a general education

setting, however; inclusion is meant to define the full acceptance and support of the whole child

with disabilities, where SWDs make progress both academically and socially (Lanterman et al.,

2021; Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). The push for inclusion has enabled collaboration between

general education and special education teachers through consultative and co-teaching service

models. During this time, and continuing until today, the argument over whether inclusion is best

for students with EBDs largely depends on whether one is arguing based on a perspective formed

by human rights, social opportunity, and context or from scientific evidence of effectiveness or

benefits of inclusionary practices (Lanterman et al., 2021; Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012).

Furthermore, a debate regarding whether certain behaviors do or do not qualify for services

based on societal definitions of abnormal or extreme behaviors under categorical eligibility of

EBD has always been and continues to be a relevant part of the discussion (Scardamalia et al.,

2018; Sheaffer et al., 2021; Wood, 2001). As a result of an ongoing debate on how to best

support students with EBD, students with EBD continue to be educated in exclusionary settings

at higher rates without much change over the past few decades (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018;

Scanlon et al., 2019; Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012).

On the other side of the inclusion debate is the representation of teacher perspectives and the consensus that most general education teachers feel unprepared to meet the diverse needs of students with EBD in the general education setting (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019). Recent court cases such as *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* in 2017 highlight faults in supports for students with challenging behaviors and, as a result, have catapulted new legislative efforts and support models (Freeman et al., 2019). One of the support models offered as a possible solution to unnecessary segregation of SWDs, including students with EBD/challenging behaviors, is co-teaching. The introduction of this model has gained popularity since its onset with several possible benefits but lacks consistent empirical support (Iacono et al., 2021; Jurkowski & Müller, 2018; McDuffie et al., 2008; Friend & Cook, 2010; Salend, 1990; Warger & Pugach, 1996 as cited in Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). Some research has criticized co-teaching as an inefficient use of special education teachers' expertise due to a tendency for the role to take a more consultative position as well as its tendency to introduce added responsibilities and duties or even the possibility of a lack of clear responsibilities (Iacono et al., 2021; Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). Additionally, despite the introduction of such support, current research has highlighted a failure to shift negative teacher perceptions and expectations of students with EBD in inclusive settings (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019; McKenna et al., 2021a). While trends in education have shown a push for more inclusive practices over the last few decades, research on the educational outcomes of students with EBD remains bleak where student placement has and continues to overshadow student progress (Curran et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2021a).

Social Context

The seclusion of students with EBD has often been supported by arguments regarding the

safety of the SWD and their peers' safety in general education settings, as students with EBD

may engage in negative or disruptive externalizing behaviors (Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012;

Weiss et al., 2021; Verret et al., 2019). Current educational statistics indicate that 36.3% of all

students with EBD are educated for more than 60% of the day in specialized or exclusionary

settings (Bettini et al., 2019). Despite the argument that specialized settings cater to student

needs, research has continuously highlighted the extensive responsibilities placed on self-

contained special education teachers and the limited time spent on academic instruction in those

settings (Bettini et al., 2019; O'Brien et al., 2019). The limited instructional time and teachers'

self-reported feelings of overwhelm provide a weak argument for the benefits of the current self-

contained or segregated settings for this fragile student population. Further, the intense demands

of working and supporting greater numbers of students with or at risk for EBD have been linked

to a higher likelihood of teacher turnover, regardless of position type (Gilmour et al., 2021;

Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). There is insufficient support for students with EBD and their teachers,

leading to an inability to fill teaching positions with qualified and experienced educators

prepared to handle the demands of a population of students with EBD, thus placing a significant

financial burden on schools (Gilmour et al., 2021).

     With growing pressure from political initiatives rooted in human and civil rights ideals

rather than teacher-led initiatives (Gidlund, 2018), teachers often report negative perceptions

towards including students with EBD or at risk for EBD in general education settings (Gidlund,

2018; Gilmour et al., 2021; Hind et al., 2019; Kuronja et al., 2019). In some cases, however, the

addition of support, or the presence of a special education teacher, has moderated those feelings

(Gilmour & Wehby, 2019). However, adding a second teacher or co-teacher comes with a unique

set of challenges that are not guaranteed to increase teacher perception of inclusion (Kokko et al.,

2021; Pesonen et al., 2020). A synthesis of the current literature revealed that students with EBD are poorly supported in the current educational system. Furthermore, the teachers who support students with EBD struggle to keep up with the demands, and continued research is desperately needed to explore further the various proposed support models for students with EBDs (Gidlund, 2018).

Understanding how proposed support models, such as co-teaching, work from the viewpoint of those engaging in the practice would offer valuable information capable of shaping future inclusion initiatives. More information is needed because the co-taught model lacks significant or consistent empirical support, specifically recent empirical support across various school settings and the inclusion of disability types (Iacono et al., 2021; Jurkowski & Müller, 2018). With this information, general education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, school district leaders, and other stakeholders can evaluate the current state of co-teaching to support students with EBD in general education settings to increase student success and inclusion rates. Finding the right support benefits students, but it can also help determine the right support levels for struggling teachers to increase teacher retention and lessen the financial burden on school districts (Gilmour et al., 2021).

Theoretical Context

Exploring the lived experiences and subsequent perceptions of co-teachers using the model to support the inclusion of students with EBD is framed by the theory of planned behavior developed and refined by Ajzen (1991; 2020). Ajzen (1991; 2020) reasoned that understanding several personal factors can effectively determine the intention and thus predict engagement in a behavior. Further, the attribution theory developed by Weiner (1972; 2018) factors in similar constructs to predict perceived attributing factors of either the success or failure of a task or

behavior. Therefore, in application, increased and ongoing investigation of attributing factors that shape intention and teacher perception will lead to a greater ability to predict teachers' successful engagement in the co-taught model and thus plan interventions if otherwise needed. Examining foundational beliefs (behavioral, normative, and control) formed from and through lived experiences is foundational to understanding the resulting attitudes toward the inclusion of students with EBD (Ajzen, 1991; Lanterman et al., 2021).

Seminal work first advocating for the rights of students with EBD authored by The Peacock Hill Working Group (1991) outlined the poor student outcomes and legislative and school failures from the onset of the definition of EBD. This work includes the recognition of poor teacher support and increased teacher attrition. Current research remains steady as it points to poor student outcomes despite increased inclusion rates (Mitchell et al., 2019). Researchers have extensively explored teacher perception of students with EBD and the inclusion of students with EBD in the general education setting. The field of special education has experienced stagnancy in providing and preparing for students with EBD (Freeman et al., 2019; Lanterman et al., 2021; Wood, 2001). Therefore, narrowing the focus to a specific support strategy will provide more empirical evidence, which may, as a result, lead to identifying more successful support for this fragile student population.

Problem Statement

The problem is that students with EBD are underrepresented in general education settings (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018; Lanterman et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2021a; Mitchell et al., 2019). Teachers' perceptions and attitudes impact the inclusion of students with the EBD categorical label and other students with behavioral challenges in general education settings (Curran et al., 2021; Scanlon et al., 2020), especially as it relates to reintegration from a more

restrictive to an inclusive setting (Taylor et al., 2018). With steady and growing efforts in

advocacy for SWDs impacting legislation, the inclusion rate for SWD has increased across

disability categories; however, students with EBD are continuously underrepresented in general

education settings compared to other disability categories (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018; Freeman

et al., 2019; Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

(IDEA, 2004, as cited in Westling, 2019) mandates the inclusion of students with disabilities in

settings alongside typically developing peers as appropriate, ensuring education in the least

restrictive environment (LRE). An additional layer of the problem continues as the

understanding of LRE and what is appropriate for students with challenging behaviors is

continuously debated and interpreted differently between the various levels of educational

legislation (Stone, 2019; Westling, 2019).

Furthermore, a link exists between teachers' perceptions, effectiveness, and willingness

to work with and support students' behavioral needs (Hind et al., 2019). Therefore, exploring the

lived experiences and subsequent teacher perceptions and attitudes of teachers supporting

students with EBD or challenging behaviors in general education settings is important to

facilitating a greater reintegration of students with challenging behaviors from previously more

restrictive placements. The addition of a second teacher in the co-taught model exacerbates the

need for continued research on teachers' perceptions. General educator and special educator co-

teaching teams to support SWD in the general education setting are occasionally used to enable

greater access to general education while ensuring the continuation of specialized support for

students with disabilities (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017). However, research on teachers'

effectiveness or perceived effectiveness of the co-taught model is limited and sometimes

conflicting (Cumming & Strnadová, 2017; Jurkowski & Müller, 2018). Additionally, empirical

research on teachers' lived experiences, perceptions, and attitudes using co-teaching models to support the reintegration of students with challenging behaviors in elementary school from self-contained or "unit" environments is lacking.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of elementary educators in a large suburban district who have engaged in the co-teaching model to support the reintegration of students with EBD/at risk for EBD from self-contained classrooms to the general education classroom. At this stage in the research, the inclusion of students with EBD, or students with challenging behaviors, will be generally defined as "attempts to support student access to the curriculum taught in general education classrooms" (Fuchs et al., 2015 as cited in McKenna et al., 2021a, p. 1). Reintegration, a product of inclusive practice, will be generally defined as the movement toward more traditional school placement after exclusionary or alternative settings (Moore et al., 2020). The theories guiding this research are the theory of planned behavior developed and refined by Ajzen (1991; 2020) and the attribution theory developed by Weiner (1972; 2018); together, both theories work to support the connection between teacher factors, teacher perspectives, and the predictable engagement in behavior such as the behavior of supporting and facilitating inclusion for students with EBD.

Significance of the Study

This study aims to explore the lived experiences and subsequent perceptions of general and special elementary educators who have engaged in the co-teaching model to support the inclusion of students with EBD (or identified behavioral challenges considered to be at risk for EBD) reintegrating into the general education setting from a more restrictive placement. The study holds theoretical, empirical, and practical significance. It will serve as part of the emerging

research on using the co-teaching model to increase inclusive practice, specifically providing empirical research on K-5 teachers in a suburban setting. The transcendental phenomenological study will allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and potentially inform future practice and additional research.

Theoretical Significance

This study is theoretically significant because, according to the theory of planned behavior by Ajzen (1991), one's prior experiences impact attitude toward behaviors, drive intention, and ultimately lead to the ability to predict future behaviors. Hind et al. (2019) concluded that previous experience significantly correlates with teacher attitude, even more than teacher age or other variables. Similar findings across research support the link between teacher experience and attitude as factors that influence student and teacher success and evaluative measures (Cumming et al., 2021; Edwards, 2017; Gidlund, 2018). There is a gap in the research that highlights the need to focus on the lived experiences and subsequent perceptions of using the co-teaching model to support the greater inclusion of students with EBD in general education settings, specifically in elementary school. Co-teaching, as a model in general, is still considered to be understudied, misunderstood, and poorly represented in research (Alnasser, 2021; Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016). The perceptions of educators from both the special education and general education positions offer an exploration of perceived successes or barriers and general attitudes towards the model, leading to baselines for future research and a greater ability to predict future behaviors of teachers engaging in the model. Furthermore, exploring teacher perceptions and lived experiences will provide insight into the factors teachers attribute to stated perceptions, attitudes, and experiences, driven by Weiner's (1972) attribution theory.

Empirical Significance

Empirical studies focused on the perceived barriers to and benefits of using the co-teaching model to support students with disabilities, in general, have revealed a spectrum of attitudes, perceptions, and experiences (Alnasser, 2021; Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017; Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016). Current research, however, primarily focuses on secondary levels of education, broad inclusion of disabilities, or specific disability types other than EBD. The research on teacher perceptions and attitudes towards students with EBD and its association with turnover (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020) has led to a greater need to understand the lived experiences of teachers working to support students with EBD. Because co-teaching is a proposed model intended to support both access to general education and assured provision of legally-protected specialized instruction and supports (Hott et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019), empirical research furthering the understanding of the current perspectives is necessary. If added support moderates teacher perceptions and attitudes (Hind et al., 2019), understanding the type of support and subsequent perceptions is necessary. Narrowing the focus to elementary educators, specifically supporting students previously served in self-contained classrooms for behavior support, will add to the available research. The study will incorporate students receiving services for a categorical label of EBD and at risk for EBD under the significant developmental delay (SDD) eligibility due to deficits in emotional or behavioral domains, which may not be formally identified as EBD for up to 20 years (McKenna et al., 2020b). Further, a phenomenological approach will offer a "deeper understanding of the nature" (van Manen, 1990, p. 9) of utilizing the co-taught model in elementary school to include students with significant behavioral challenges. The depth of meaning offered by this approach may lead to findings that inform interventions and the future direction of inclusion efforts at the elementary level.

Practical Significance

The study will involve participants from a large, influential, suburban district in the southeastern United States. The practical significance of ascertaining the lived experiences of elementary educators in this location is the potential for using the findings to inform future proceedings within the district and smaller surrounding districts that typically follow the larger leading district initiatives. Current research shows that teachers struggle to implement behavioral supports with fidelity, with reference to states in the southern U.S. specifically (King et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2017; Sutherland et al., 2018). While the need for greater knowledge, teacher education (Moore et al., 2017), and mindset shifts (King et al., 2021) is argued in some cases, others suggest that specific program implementation is insufficient for varied student needs (Sutherland et al., 2018). The phenomenological study of co-teachers will provide greater insight into the perceived problems and barriers to supporting behaviors in the general education setting, offering unique angles from special and general education perspectives. Locally, the information gleaned from the personal interviews and thematic analysis will serve as useful in finding additional research and programs for supporting co-teachers and the greater inclusion of students with varying needs in the general education setting.

Research Questions

The available research on teacher perceptions toward students with EBD and the inclusion of students with EBD are often negative (Hind et al., 2019; Scanlon et al., 2020; Sheaffer et al., 2021). In some cases, additional support for the classroom teacher has been shown to moderate teachers' negative perceptions (Hind et al., 2019). As a result of a desire to increase positive student outcomes and inclusion rates for SWD, co-teaching models have flourished across certain school districts (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017). The use of co-teaching

and, therefore, additional teacher perspectives and opinions on the inclusion and support of students with challenging behaviors, is thus an area requiring more research.

The following central questions and sub-questions guided this study:

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of elementary educators in a large, suburban district who supported the inclusion, through reintegration, of students with EBD/at risk for EBD from self-contained classrooms using the co-teaching model?

Sub-Question One

What are the perceived roles and responsibilities, respective to position or title, of elementary educators participating in the co-teaching model when reintegrating students with EBD?

Sub-Question Two

What are elementary general education teachers' lived experiences and subsequent perceptions towards using the co-teaching model to support students with EBD access to the general curriculum?

Sub-Question Three

How do co-teaching experiences influence elementary teachers' perception of EBD as a disability?

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Definitions

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1. *Attrition-* otherwise known as turnover, is the teacher's willful departure from the field of education or a certain position in education (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019).

2. *Co-Teaching-* an education service provision defined by the collaboration of two or more certified educators to a diverse group of students (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017).

3. *Emotional Behavioral Disability/Disorder (EBD)-* independently defined by the state, but generally describes an educational recognition of a disability or disorder that directly impacts a person's ability to regulate emotions, behaviors, and interact in socially appropriate ways (Freeman et al., 2019; Gagnon, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019).

4. *Inclusion-* the provision of services to students with disabilities alongside typically developing peers that are educationally and socially beneficial (McKenna et al., 2021a; Lanterman et al., 2021).

5. *Intention-* "capture the motivational factors that influence a behavior; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181)

6. *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)* – loosely defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and is meant to describe the maximum extent of provision of services possible or appropriate alongside typically developing peers (Yell et al., 2020; Lanterman et al., 2021).

7. *Reintegration-* the process of assisting student integration into a traditional or mainstream school setting after experience in disciplinary or alternative placement (Moore et al., 2020).

8. *Specialized Instruction-* planned instruction and interventions designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Mitchell et al., 2019).

9. *Specialized or Self-Contained Setting-* an environment in which there is an intense academic and individual student need focus, specifically on social and emotional skills for students with EBD (Bettini et al., 2019).

Summary

Compared to all students receiving special education services, students with EBD are largely underrepresented in general education settings (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018; Freeman et al., 2019; Lanterman et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2021a). The available research fails to provide enough information to plan for and provide strategies for successfully including students with EBD in general education, despite a legislative push for greater inclusion (Freeman et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2021). Since the onset of service provision for students with EBD, a theme of exclusion and poor outcomes has plagued this population of students (Lanterman et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2021a; Scardamalia et al., 2018; Wood, 2001). As legislature and advocacy groups attempt to close the gap of inclusion for students with EBD (Gidlund, 2018; Freeman et al., 2019), more research is needed to investigate the experiences with proposed support models such as "co-teaching," which adds a second certified teacher to the general education classroom, specifically a special education teacher (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019).

Both previous and current experience often shapes teacher perceptions. The depth of literature demonstrates the significance of teacher perception on teacher effectiveness, attrition, and willingness to support students (Bettini et al., 2019; Gilmour et al., 2021; Gilmour & Wehby, 2019; Kuronja et al., 2019; Sheaffer et al., 2021). Using the co-taught model to support the inclusion of students with EBD or at risk of EBD, specifically as they reintegrate from more restrictive placements, is missing from the literature. The stagnant history of poor student outcomes and the social significance of the problem demonstrates the importance and need for empirical research (Curran et al., 2021; Harrison et al., 2019). Using the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the attribution theory (Weiner, 1972) to guide the study, alongside a comprehensive literature review, a gap in the research was discovered. There is a current need to

explore the lived experiences of elementary teachers using the co-teaching model to support

students with and at risk of EBD reintegrating into the general education setting.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature reveals several factors related to the problem of the underrepresentation of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) in general education settings. This chapter presents a review of the current literature related to the topic of study. In the first section, the theories relevant to behavior prediction and perceived attributing factors are discussed, followed by a synthesis of recent literature regarding students with EBD in the school setting, educational placement for students with EBD, and the perceptions and attitudes impacting the successful inclusion of students with EBD. A gap in the literature is identified, presenting a viable need for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study combines Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior and Weiner's attribution theory (Weiner, 1972). The premise of Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior allows for observable factors of human behavior to lead to the ability to better predict and intervene in human behavior. In education, combining components of the theory of planned behavior with the close observation of perceived attributing factors, as described by Weiner (1972), can provide detailed information about the educator experience and therefore lead to a better understanding of, support, and intervention for the behaviors of educators and their students.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior developed by Ajzen (1991) encompasses the intentions of individuals to explain behaviors and determine the strength of predictability of engaging in specific behaviors. The theory of planned behavior extends the theory of reasoned action

originally proposed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980, as cited in Ajzen, 1991), which relied on the constructs of subjective norms and attitudes towards specific behavior to shape intention. In application, relying solely on the attitudes and subjective norms surrounding co-teaching to support the inclusive practice of students with EBD would lead to an insufficient explanation of teacher behaviors and a low ability to predict or design intervention. However, the theory of planned behavior adds to the theory of reasoned action with the construct of perceived behavioral control. Thus, the constructs that shape intention and motivation in the theory of planned behavior are attitude toward the behavior, social factors or subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. An educator's attitude, social pressure to align with inclusion, and perceived ability to control the enactment of the co-teaching model reveals not only intentionality but a level of predictability that can help shape support or professional development opportunities, as Ajzen (1991) upheld. The attitude toward behavior refers to whether the person thinks favorably or unfavorably towards the behavior in question (i.e., co-teaching or inclusion as a practice to support students with disabilities). Subjective norms refer to the social pressures or opinions of those viewed as important or valuable to the person of interest (i.e., a mentor, teacher, or administrator). The perceived behavioral control is the degree of difficulty one assumes of the task or behavior, often shaped by experience (i.e., self-efficacy related to inclusive practice possibly shaped by previous experiences with co-teaching models or inclusive practice).

The theory of planned behavior proposes that perceived behavioral control, or self-efficacy related to the specific behavior, significantly impacts effort and thus enables predictability (Ajzen, 1991). For instance, if teachers have low perceived behavioral control or low self-efficacy in co-teaching models to support the inclusion of students with EBD, applying the theory of planned behavior can predict low effort and increase the opportunity to intervene

and thus increase success. Spontaneous responses to focused questions are necessary to establish the actor's (person engaging in the behavior) positionality on the constructs of the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2020); thus, interviewing teachers is a necessary next step in increasing the support and success of inclusive efforts for students with EBD. When intentionality is held constant, the theory of planned behavior measures the likelihood of one engaging in a specific behavior according to one's perceived ability or confidence to engage in the behavior successfully. Perceived behavioral control closely relates to Bandura's (1977, 1982, as cited in Ajzen, 1991, 2020) construct of perceived self-efficacy. The theory of planned behavior does not assume to incorporate the level of actual control, measured through available resources and other factors in the intention to perform. Actual control is a factor of the theory of planned behavior but not one that directly impacts intentionality or motivation if perfect volitional control is achievable (Ajzen, 2020).

Ajzen (1991) reveals correlational data to support the impact of intentions and perceived behavioral control constructs on behavioral performance and the theory's validity in his seminal work. With the foundational level of "belief" and perceived behavioral control, Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior allows for a deeper understanding of the intention to engage in behavior; it makes it possible to design and implement appropriate interventions. At the theory's core, perceived behavioral control is, essentially, a moderator for attitude and influence of subjective norms on intentionality (Ajzen, 2020). The theory of planned behavior supplies the appropriate framework for this study because it directly relates to the study's purpose to explore the lived experiences, philosophy, and attitudes towards the co-teaching model to support students with/ at risk for EBD in the general education setting. The constructs within the theory of planned behavior will frame data collection efforts, data analysis, and support theme

identification for possible subsequent intervention for educators supporting inclusive efforts for

students with/ at risk for EBD (Ajzen, 1991, 2020).

Attribution Theory

Similar to Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, Weiner's (1972) attribution theory

rests on the core of human belief or self-confidence but extends further to ask "why." Weiner's

(1972) attribution theory suggests that the perceived causality of an incident (perceived failure,

success, difficulty, or ease of co-teaching to support the inclusion of students with EBD) will

lead to the ability to predict future behavior. According to Weiner's (1972) attribution theory, if

educators endured frustrating or unsuccessful inclusion attempts, they would likely attribute the

adverse event to factors other than those within their control, such as the co-teacher or the

students. Further, the actor would be more invested in determining causation if the outcome or

perception of the behavior were negative than if it were positive (Weiner, 1972, 2018). However,

if the perceived ability to engage in co-teaching to support students with EBD is low, goal

attainment or engagement in behavior is also low (Weiner, 1972). Conversely, the opposite

would be true; if the experiences were pleasant or successful, the educator would likely attribute

that to their abilities (Weiner, 1972, 2018).

In his seminal work, Weiner (1972) examined the influence of causal belief in the

educational process, specifically on student and teacher behaviors. The attribution theory

(Weiner, 1972, 2018) also explains attitude toward behavior or task (i.e., co-teaching to support

students with EBD). Teacher behavior will be influenced if the teacher attributes student

behavior to factors beyond the student's control or imposes the idea that the student's behavior is

a manifestation of choice (Weiner, 1972). The construct of effort plays heavily on causal factors,

where perceived effort is rewarded, and achievement less than expected is more likely to be

punished (Weiner, 1972). Weiner (1972) establishes a difference between one's willingness and the ability to engage in a specific behavior, creating a balance of "try" or "can," where external judgment is more harshly applied in the presence of ability but the lack of effort. In application, the attribution theory can link feelings of pride or shame towards the co-teaching model, the co-teacher, or the SWD in the classroom. This addition of emotionality adds a layer of complexity to the theory when working with human behavior. One's effort to find causality and the subsequent motivation to change the action can be linked to emotion. Another facet of the attribution theory developed by Weiner (2018) is that it factors in controllability or whether the actor controls success or failure. The controllability factor concerning the co-teaching model for the inclusion of students with EBD may present as those factors such as administrative support or lack of planning time.

Components of both the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the attribution theory (Weiner, 1972) serve to frame the guiding research questions surrounding the phenomena of co-teaching to support the inclusion of students with EBD in the general education setting. In examining the lived experiences of co-teachers supporting students with EBD (or challenging behaviors/ at-risk for EBD) in general education classrooms, perceived attributing factors (or lack of agreement regarding attributing factors) will provide a framework for analyzing and interpreting data both toward the co-teaching model and the inclusion of students with EBD. Building a body of literature on understanding this phenomenon will increase the potential to predict and intervene in teacher behaviors in the future.

Related Literature

A review of the literature focused on the problem of underrepresentation of students with EBD in general education settings revealed various related and influential factors. Legislative

definitions, controversies, and current educational statistics are provided in this section, alongside a rich synthesis of available literature on the continuum of services and subsequent decisions made regarding educational placements for students with or at risk for EBD. As they are represented in research, a consideration of possible teacher-related factors is also discussed regarding student placement and support provision.

IDEA and Eligibility for EBD

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), revised in 2004, outlines specific criteria for 13 eligibility categories for students with disabilities for educational purposes. After initial eligibility identification, re-evaluation must occur at least once every three years to determine a need for continued services; if services are no longer required to maintain adequate academic progress, students may undergo de-identification (Curran et al., 2021). IDEA (2004) outlines criteria interpreted to include internal and external behaviors such as aggression (though the term aggression is not used explicitly), relationship-building ability, depression, and schizophrenia for EBD eligibility specifically. EBD, or emotional behavioral disability/disorder, eligibility does not include students who experience social maladjustment unless emotionality is determined (IDEA, 2004). A certified school psychologist identifies emotionality and other characteristics of EBD through a formal evaluation process. Students who qualify for services through EBD eligibility exhibit a general difficulty learning that cannot be explained by non-behavioral impact, struggle to initiate or maintain relationships, and exhibit behaviors deemed inappropriate to the circumstance, which impedes their ability to learn or progress educationally (Gagnon, 2021; Krämer & Zimmermann, 2021; Sheaffer et al., 2021; Zweers et al., 2020). The inability to self-regulate or block impulsive responses has a range of suspected onset sources; however, a growing body of research points to exposure to traumatic or stressful experiences as a

likely cause to consider other than biological reasons (Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Whitlow et al., 2018). IDEA specifies eligibility for services under EBD categorization by listing broad characteristics; however, students under the age of nine with similar characteristics may qualify under the domain of significantly developmentally delayed (SDD) and may not be formally eligible for the categorical label of EBD in younger grades (McKenna et al., 2020b). Therefore, statistical data showing the number of students meeting eligibility criteria for EBD in public schools does not include those receiving services for similar characteristics or needs identified or served through SDD or other eligibility categories (Chitiyo et al., 2021). IDEA (2004) describes SDD eligibility in section 300.8 as the protection of rights for students between ages three and nine who, as measured by the state through appropriate instruments, experience a significant delay in "physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, or adaptive development" (para. 2). Students served with special education services under SDD eligibility for delays in social/emotional domains may also experience placements along the continuum, including excluded placements such as self-contained behavior classrooms.

Currently, controversy over EBD qualification exists throughout literature and legislation regarding definition, criteria, and lack of attention to cultural or ethnic factors (Freeman et al., 2019; Hanchon & Allen, 2018; Lambert et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2021b; Mitchell et al., 2019; Perihan & Bicer, 2021). The definition of EBD has failed to be updated since its inclusion in IDEA, whereas other disability categories have been revised to reflect ongoing research and current practice (Hanchon & Allen, 2018). While the intensity, frequency, and duration of inappropriate behaviors must be significant to qualify for services under EBD eligibility (or SDD for emotional/behavioral domains), the measures and qualifications of each subset establishing

"significance" are nonexistent (Mitchell et al., 2019). Furthermore, the interpretation of the evaluative measures for eligibility has been subjective, resulting in inconsistent understanding and application of the criteria, leading to variability in EBD identification among students (Scardamalia et al., 2018). It is also important to note that the qualification or eligibility for services for EBD does not exclude children from eligibility in other areas, such as speech-language or other health impairments (Hind et al., 2019). According to educational law and protections of SWDs, students with EBD who require additional services or support for other eligibility categories are entitled to them, regardless of how behavior or emotionality impacts the student in the educational setting. Moreover, according to collected research, more students are suspected to be eligible for services under EBD eligibility but are currently served special education services under other disability categories and thus not identified as a student with EBD (Lloyd et al., 2019). Throughout service provision and the identification of needs in general, students with externalizing behaviors typically receive more attention and educational services than those who experience internalizing behaviors aligned with EBD eligibility criteria (Hanchon & Allen, 2018; Hartman et al., 2017). In some cases, students are referred for externalizing behaviors that do not align with the definitions and characteristics outlined in IDEA (Garwood & Adamson, 2021), which creates another level of concern and need for clarification in the literature. Further, an inconsistent understanding of how internalizing and externalizing types of behaviors overlap, much less how to support or intervene, continues to exist (de Leeuw et al., 2018; Lloyd et al., 2019; Scardamalia et al., 2018).

In addition to minimally defining eligibility criteria, IDEA outlines appropriate service provisions to maximize the inclusion of SWD. With the initiation of Education for All Handicapped Children and subsequent revisions in IDEA, provisions for all students have been

framed to include positive behavioral supports and interventions that ultimately support inclusive practice (Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Curran et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019). While IDEA does not lay out Tier 1 supports, it has become common practice to promote social-emotional supports universally within the school to promote competence and build a better system for tracking significant needs in a multitiered system of supports (Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Verret, 2019). IDEA outlines a full continuum of supports ranging from those that are least restrictive to those that are more restrictive, encouraging consideration for the unique needs of individual students (Mitchell et al., 2019; Yell et al., 2020). Even though supports are listed, they are not fully defined. Moreover, there are no specific indicators or criteria to help educators and IEP teams decide when more or less restrictive educational placements or services are appropriate (Hott et al., 2021; Scardamalia et al., 2018; Yell et al., 2020).

Though considerable changes have been made in adjusting services and definitions of qualification for services for students with EBD in legislation since the onset of advocacy, the interpretation of the definition and subsequent service provision is ultimately left to the individual states (Curran et al., 2021; Freeman et al., 2019; Gagnon, 2021; Westling, 2019). Therefore, the variation among states and counties within the same state impacts how educational professionals perceive EBD as a disability. Additionally, the sometimes subjective interpretation of IDEA (2004) dictates how evaluative measures are considered by school psychologists, leading to a concerning level of inconsistency in the identification of EBD eligibility (Hanchon & Allen, 2018; Lambert et al., 2021; Perihan & Bicer, 2021; Scardamalia et al., 2018). This subjectivity ultimately leads to eligibility for special education services under EBD to a school-level decision, leaving even the involvement of a psychologist or psychiatrist up to a committee decision (Gagnon, 2021).

Emotional Behavioral Disorders and Disabilities in Schools

Before inclusionary legislation such as IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), formally known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, students with disabilities were likely to be completely segregated from typical peers and often treated as less than (Freeman et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2019). With the onset of seminal court cases, legislation and advocates for students with disabilities led inclusionary efforts, ultimately laying a foundation of support for students with disabilities, especially for students with EBD (Hott et al., 2021). More recent U.S. educational statistics show approximately 2,700 students aged three to five and over 335,000 students aged six-21 are served under the EBD umbrella category in schools, representing roughly 1% of all students and 5% of students with disabilities receiving services (Mitchell et al., 2019). Approximately half of the students served for EBD are White, and nearly 25% are Black or African American (whereas Black/African American students account for 16% of the total student population), causing significant concerns related to the overrepresentation of students of color in the categorization of EBD (Curran et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Scardamalia et al., 2018). Students receiving special education services for EBD in U.S. public schools are also overwhelmingly male, with only roughly 27.5% of students with EBD identifying as female, according to the U.S. Department of Education in 2018 (as cited in Sheaffer et al., 2021). In addition to gender and race, a link between students recognized and served for EBD from disadvantaged backgrounds and subsequent higher-poverty schools is also noted throughout research (Mitchell et al., 2019; Sheaffer et al., 2021). Despite the potential for bias, students with EBD eligibility are served across community types with unique challenges related to environmental circumstances (Huscroft-D'Angelo et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the recognition and formal identification of students in need of services for EBD is under criticism due to a lack of uniform, unbiased, or available early screeners despite

progress over recent decades (Gagnon, 2021; Lambert et al., 2021; Lloyd et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2019). Research calls for a more concentrated look at assessment tools and measures that reflect changing demographics (Lambert et al., 2021). However, studies revealing the strength of early identification screeners such as the *Student Internalizing Behavior Screener* (SIBS) and the *Student Externalizing Behavior Screener* (SEBS) suggest that universal screeners are reliable and valid in most instances but are not necessarily widely used due to other factors such as cost or available time to implement (Hartman et al., 2017). SAED-3, or Scales for Assessing Emotional Disturbance third edition, is another rating scale with high reliability used to determine eligibility for services for EBD due to its alignment with federal definitions of student characteristics in IDEA that can be used for early or later intervention/identification purposes (Huscroft-D'Angelo et al., 2021; Lambert et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the evaluation and assessment of the measures and scales are ongoing due to the growing concern for the lack of attention to cultural factors (Lambert et al., 2021), which may or may not influence teacher ratings. The concern, therefore, is narrowed to the impact of teacher factors in screeners and identification protocols. Educators refer students to the school psychologist for evaluation based on concern for maladjusted behaviors, most often for aggression (Garwood & Adamson, 2021), which is not defined as a specific characteristic of EBD in IDEA (2004) legislation but is generally included as a manifestation of inappropriate behaviors. Verbal aggression may also be a reason to request a referral to special education, where teachers may describe students as overly disruptive to the class and harmful to peers (Smith et al., 2020; Weiss et al., 2021). Each school psychologist's process and measures may vary after the initial referral, but it generally incorporates rating scales and screeners completed by the child's teacher (Edwards, 2017; Lambert et al., 2021; McLean et al., 2019). The potential

for teacher factors such as bias, self-efficacy, and feelings of burnout, especially depersonalization as a result of burnout, to impact ratings of student behaviors is statistically significant and may account for up to 30% of the variance in teacher ratings (Edwards, 2017; Hartman et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2019). Studies concluding whether the impact of teacher factors on universal screeners or rating scales also account for differences in student behavior across settings are not available at this time (McLean et al., 2019).

Despite the controversy surrounding universal screening, early intervention for challenging behaviors is encouraged throughout research, indicating that a proactive approach to caring for children's affective domains is not only desirable but may lead to a lessening of negative learning outcomes in the future (Huscroft-D'Angelo et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019). Typically, without using reliable screening procedures, students need to exhibit extreme maladjusted behaviors before considering evaluations for EBD, thus limiting the possibility of early intervention (Freeman et al., 2019). Further, the lack of early intervention in schools for students with maladjusted behaviors is associated with subsequent poor academic achievement due to disruptive behaviors and insufficient interventions, creating comorbid problems for students with EBD progressing to older grade levels with increasingly challenging academic demands (Mitchell et al., 2019; Sheaffer et al., 2021).

Learning Outcomes of Students with EBD

Empirical evidence suggests an increased risk of negative social, emotional, and learning outcomes for students with EBD who have negative educational transitions (Garwood et al., 2021; Metzner et al., 2020). Some evidence supports an even greater risk of substance abuse, poor mental health, and adverse academic outcomes ranging from underachievement in specific subjects such as reading to academic dropout (Chitiyo et al., 2021; Metzner et al., 2020). The

significant needs of students with EBD require intense and often immediate intervention, further supporting the level of risk this student population faces (Sheaffer et al., 2021; Zweers et al., 2021).

According to statistics by the U.S. Department of Education (2020), students with EBD tend to have an increased risk of poor learning outcomes. Data shows no less than 30% of students with EBD dropped out of school each year between 2007 and 2017. Furthermore, the dropout rate for students with EBD is consistently larger than any other disability category (Mills & Sabornie, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Compared to other disability categories, students with EBD drop out of high school or fail to graduate by 12% more (U.S. Department of Education et al., 2018, as cited in Garwood et al., 2021). Some argue that the variance in identifying and defining EBD as a disability across states influences statistical data, skewing graduation rates for those states with higher identification rates (Mills & Sabornie, 2021). Students with EBD tend to experience more academic failure, increased risk of exclusionary practices such as suspension or expulsion, and increased incarceration rates, thus creating a cycle that leads to a higher likelihood of dropping out of school, risking student access to FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education) (Freeman et al., 2019; Gagnon, 2021; Hanchon & Allen, 2018; McKenna et al., 2021a; Metzner et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2019; Zweers et al., 2021). Unfortunately, the academic and personal outcomes for students with EBD have been relatively stagnant since the early 1990s, when serious intentions to protect and support students with EBD arose through the Peacock Hill Working Group (PHWG) (Freeman et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2021a; The Peacock Hill Working Group, 1991). In recent years, however, as more research highlights possibly successful strategies and interventions, student

involvement in IEP meetings and time spent in inclusive education settings have been found to moderate graduation rates for students with EBD (Mills & Sabornie, 2021).

A critical member of the IEP team is the parent, and research attests to the importance of supportive parent relationships during educational transitions or in making decisions affecting outcomes for students with EBD (French, 2019; Metzner et al., 2020; Weiss et al., 2021). Parent input is considered during IEP meetings and often influences IEP team decisions; however, parents do not have the final say. The culmination of data collected from all sources, such as teacher input, evaluations, observations, and parents and students, is considered during the IEP process. Knowing the impact of parental support and student involvement on the learning outcomes of students with EBD can aid in providing home support services and parent education for families who require that level of support (Metzner et al., 2020; Mills & Sabornie, 2021).

Educational Placement for Students with EBD or Behavioral Challenges

Current statistical data for education in the United States reveals that less than half of all students served for EBD spend 80% or more time in mainstream or general education settings (Lanterman et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019). More than half of all students with EBD receive most of their provided services and education in self-contained or exclusionary atmospheres alternative to the general education setting. Students with EBD experience lower inclusion rates than students who qualify for services in other disability categories; yet despite the lower rates of inclusion when compared to other disability categories, students with EBD are included in general education settings now more than ever (Lanterman et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2021a). With increasing numbers of students with varying needs joining typical peers in the general education setting, general education teachers are now responsible for instructing and facilitating inclusive practice (Gilmour, 2020). Furthermore, alternative placements are designed to be

temporary interventions for students at-risk, making reintegration a primary goal (Moore et al., 2020). Yet the underrepresentation of students with EBD in general education settings remains despite IDEA regulations mandating the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), or education alongside typical peers to the maximum extent possible, where often externalizing behaviors provide foundational arguments for separate educational settings (Curran et al., 2021; Gottfried & Kirksey, 2018; Lanterman et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2018). Though LRE is mentioned in legislation in the U.S., it is not explicitly defined, nor is there a universal agreement on what that looks like for individual students (Harrison et al., 2019; Yell et al., 2020). LRE and how to determine LRE for students is continuously refined through landmark legislative efforts and disability advocacy (Yell et al., 2020). Additionally, despite legislation, a global agreement on the educational and developmental benefit of inclusive practice for students with EBD is nonexistent (Zweers et al., 2021).

Because of teacher and student-related factors, the rate at which students with EBD are served in exclusionary settings is higher and, most often, necessary to meet the requirements of FAPE (Mitchell et al., 2019). The supports and provisions outlined in a student's IEP serve as a guide for defining FAPE for that student and, as a result, are the responsibility of both the general and special education teacher (Walker et al., 2021). When students are initially identified as requiring services for EBD, they are transitioned into special education programming and, from there, may require additional transitions in and out of restrictive placements (Cumming & Strnadová, 2017). Service location and provision changes create additional transitional phases for students with EBD, making students with EBD (or challenging behaviors) most at risk for transitional educational experiences (Metzner et al., 2020). Placement and service provision decisions are part of the IEP process and are made with IEP member majority agreement and

must align with FAPE. With landmark court cases and ongoing legislative efforts, increased

attention to the construction of IEPs for students with EBD is growing, noting common errors in

present levels and annual goal alignment, which drive placement discussions (Hott et al., 2021).

However, the placement in which services are provided does not attest to the quality of

the education, teacher, or services provided, nor does evidence exist to support access to general

education settings for all students and circumstances (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018; Zweers et al.,

2020). Arguments for inclusive and exclusive education continue to flood the education field,

some making their way to the Supreme Court. The general premise of legislative outcomes for

students with EBD or challenging behaviors stems from the desire to increase educational benefit

and meet individual student needs. Still, a goal of eventual and successful integration is the intent

of individualized educational programming and supports regardless of current or future

educational placement (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018). A landmark case described in many

research articles advocating for the rights of all students is the case of *Endrew F. v. Douglas

County School District* (*Endrew)* (2017 as cited in Freeman et al., 2019; Hott et al., 2021). In the

Endrew court case, the Supreme Court supported the rights of students with challenging

behaviors and further supported the requirement of proof of educational benefit, regardless of

student behavior, as outlined by students' individual educational plans (IEPs) (Freeman et al.,

2019). Along with landmark court cases and educational law, research defends examining

required supports and services to determine the optimal service location rather than determining

the location and later fitting services and supports (Zweers et al., 2020).

Inclusion vs. Exclusion

There is a difference between the true inclusion of SWD and the mere attendance in a

general education setting, which must be understood before addressing placement options for

SWD. The inclusion of SWD establishes an acceptance of presence and all that is required to

support the successful growth and learning of that student; the mere attendance or existence in a

general education setting would ignore the necessary specialized instruction, accommodations, or

supports for student achievement (Freeman et al., 2019; Gidlund, 2018; Lanterman et al., 2021).

Proponents of inclusive education highlight the benefits of access to general education settings,

such as greater access to the general academic curriculum, reduced social stigma, increased

opportunities to build acceptance of differences and strengthened adaptive behavior skills

(Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017; Gagnon, 2021; McKenna et al., 2019). Evidence exists supporting

the greater achievement of students with disabilities in both academic and behavioral skills when

exposed to inclusive settings, yet it is significantly lacking when looking at students with EBD

specifically (Brigham et al., 2016; Harrison et al., 2019; Westling, 2019; Yell & Bateman, 2017,

as cited in McKenna et al., 2019). There has, however, been a link between reduced time in

specialized settings and increased high-school graduation rates for students with EBD (Mills &

Sabornie, 2021). General guidance from previous court cases and experts in deciphering and

applying educational law highlight the importance of determining whether progress can be made

in the location of either a general education setting or an exclusive special education setting for

each student (Yell et al., 2020).

In exclusive educational settings, trained special education teachers can adapt to, and

support student needs at a more individual level, usually with the additional support of a

paraprofessional, and are typically more structured with reduced class sizes to accommodate

complex and often more severe student needs (Zweers et al., 2020, 2021). Because of the level of

expected expertise and classroom design, some studies, such as Zweers et al. (2020), found that

students in exclusive settings performed better academically and socially than peers with similar

characteristics supported in general education settings. The findings of Zweers et al. (2020)

support better academic progress in exclusive settings, which is in contrast to other research

supporting students' success due to more inclusive efforts (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018; Mills &

Sabornie, 2021). Zweers et al.'s (2020) findings are relatively groundbreaking, considering the

lack of valid additional supportive empirical research supporting such claims. The working

conditions for most teachers in self-contained or specialized settings have revealed decreased

planning times and a greater need for curriculum-related resources leading to lowered

instructional quality compared to inclusive settings, moderated slightly by the addition of partner

teachers, ample paraprofessionals, and adequate training (Bettini et al., 2019; Cumming et al.,

2021; Matthews et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2019). Zweers et al. (2020) and similar studies

across disability categories note the significant role of teacher perception and teacher bias in

different settings.

Furthermore, the ability to provide rich academic content in exclusive settings is often

left to the chance of external factors at play. Reliable paraprofessionals, uninterrupted

instructional time, additional responsibilities, and the isolating and unique position of educating

in a self-contained (exclusive) setting impact the ability to engage in and provide academic and

behavioral interventions efficiently, which are further dictated by funding and other school-level

resources and structures as well as classroom diversity (Cumming et al., 2021; Matthews et al.,

2021; O'Brien et al., 2019; Verret et al., 2019). Self-contained classrooms often serve various

student needs and grade levels, exposing students to grade-level curricula and specialized

emotional and behavioral regulation strategies (O'Brien et al., 2019). The demand to plan for and

teach a mix of grade-level standards in addition to supporting behavior needs impacts teacher

self-efficacy and overall perspective and attitude (Cumming et al., 2021). Additionally, the

amount of training and professional development related to academics, rather than behavior-specific interventions, typically provided to general educators is often not extended to teachers in excluded behavior settings, creating an additional barrier for self-contained special education teachers, therefore further negatively impacting student learning (Bettini et al., 2019; Gilmour et al., 2021). In recent studies, the amount of time students with EBD spent in exclusive special education environments was directly and negatively associated with high-school graduation rates (Mills & Sabornie, 2021).

Including children with EBD or challenging behaviors in inclusive settings comes with a unique demand placed on educational professionals. Supports for children with emotional/behavioral needs can range from diversifying opportunities to respond, specifying, and structuring routines (Whitney et al., 2021) to functional communication interventions (Owen & Lo, 2021). Furthermore, children with EBD may present varying degrees of internal and external behaviors and deficits in self-regulation skills, requiring complex support not often found in general education (Hind et al., 2019). The transition from exclusive to inclusive placements, or reintegration, relies heavily on the alignment of belief between special educators advocating for SWDs and other staff within the local school and the resources available to facilitate such transition (Bettini et al., 2021). Special education service provision in the general education setting can take many forms. Students requiring support in the general education setting may receive additional supportive services through paraprofessional, consultative, or collaborative services with a special education teacher or a level of direct specialized instruction from a special educator/general educator co-teaching model described in the continuum of supports. The continuum of supports outlined in IDEA (2004) explains each level of support for educators and parents alike. A perceived benefit of students with EBD receiving services in inclusive settings is

having opportunities to learn appropriate social skills from typical same-age peers (Zweers et al., 2021). However, typical peer models may not always provide social or academic benefits for all students. In general education settings, students with EBD or challenging behaviors are often less socially accepted by typical peers compared to similar developing peers in exclusive settings (Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Weiss et al., 2021; Whitlow et al., 2018; Zweers et al., 2021). In some instances, the disruptive behaviors, in conjunction with the perspective that teachers are more lenient towards students with EBD for such behaviors, prompted feelings of resentment towards both teacher and SWDs for general education students (Weiss et al., 2021). The unacceptance of peers with EBD may contribute to new negative behaviors or intensify current negative behaviors in students with EBD. Additionally, deviant or disruptive behaviors of students with EBD in inclusive settings may derail lessons, causing more reactive classroom and behavioral management approaches than those found in more exclusive special education settings (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020).

Some proposed models available in research support the transition from least restrictive to more restrictive environments and vice versa. One, in particular, is the Flexible Integration Model (FIM), which supports students' transition between exclusive and inclusive placements as the student need arises, mimicking several other models that suggest a slow and systematic transition of students with EBD to less restrictive settings (Cumming, & Strnadová, 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2020). It is suggested that educational placement be considered often based on student readiness and take into account IDEA mandates and the possible beneficial or detrimental outcomes for the student (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2020). The foundation of supporting students with EBD with FIM is a person-centered approach that capitalizes on individual strengths and motivations to increase student success (Cumming &

Strnadová, 2017). Integration models, however, do not solely focus on the student's success.

They focus on the success and accountability of the educators involved in making such a

transition possible (Wilkinson et al., 2020). The FIM and similar models require a high degree of

collaboration, communication, resources, and clear delineation of educator roles for data

collection, monitoring, and evaluation of students across educators in both setting locations

(Cumming & Strnadová, 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2020). When evaluating students for possible

transition to less restrictive environments, it is important to note that "perfect" behavior is not a

requirement for access to the general education setting (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018). Educational

professionals engaged in using FIM recognized the benefit of reduced stigma, increased student

self-esteem, and available opportunities when students transitioned to a less restrictive

environment, even for part of the educational day (Cumming & Strnadová, 2017).

Alternatively, a systematic review of relevant research has revealed greater EBD

indicator characteristics or negative behaviors resulting from educational transitions (Metzner et

al., 2020). A consistent theme across arguments, both for and against restrictive placements, is

the social impact and related social constructs of the perceived appropriateness of behaviors in

specific settings (Gidlund, 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2020). The weight of stigma and social

perception towards students in restrictive placements is an important reoccurring theme,

especially as it impacts IEP team decisions and subsequent strategy and support model

implementation.

Instructional Practice and Supports

A synthesis of the research reports conflicting information regarding the availability of

research-supported best practices for students with EBD in any setting (French, 2019; McKenna

et al., 2021b). Collectively, the research focused on supporting students with EBD in schools

lacks "sufficient empirical evidence" (Harrison et al., 2019, p. 1226) across setting types.

General classroom and school-wide positive approaches to behavior management have been

praised and further suggested for use with students with or at risk of EBD (Downs et al., 2019;

Garwood & Ampuja, 2019; Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Lanterman et al., 2021). However, school-

wide and classroom-wide positive behavior approaches and programs often receive the stamp of

potentially promising when empirically studied (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019; Verret et al., 2019;

Zimmerman et al., 2020), specifically without the support of extensive empirical research

focused on the use with students with EBD (French, 2019; Harrison et al., 2019; McKenna et al.,

2021b). For example, the use of social stories, a visual and textual support tool used to teach

social skills and behavioral expectations, is often highly praised across school practice, but when

examined for their effectiveness in intervening behaviors with students with EBD, they are

largely ineffective (Zimmerman et al., 2020). Alternatively, teacher-driven interventions for

students with or at risk of EBD, such as high rates of positive specific praise and functional

communication and self-advocacy strategies, have been reported to increase student engagement

in social participation and reduce undesired behaviors (Caldarella et al., 2019; de Leeuw et al.,

2018; Downs et al., 2019; Owen & Lo, 2021; Perihan & Bicer, 2021; Whitney et al., 2021).

Specific intervention programs, support models, or structures lack consistent recognition of

being beneficial for students with EBD across research, making it difficult for educators to

implement supports with fidelity and further highlighting the need for continued research,

especially in light of the desire to reduce seclusion and physical restraint as forms of crisis

intervention (Hind et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2021b; Verret et al., 2019; Zimmerman et al.,

2020). To highlight this gap in the research, Garwood et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative

synthesis of research on interventions provided for students with EBD published in "flagship

journals" between the years 2010 and 2019; the synthesis included 55 studies, of which only

60% met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards which provide measures for

methodological quality. Furthermore, in a substantial number of proposed interventions for

students with EBD, there is a significant lack of gender and ethnicity representation (Carrero et

al., 2017). Other factors that may influence students' responses to proposed interventions, such

as socioeconomic status, are also largely unexplored or considered in research studies focused on

interventions for students with EBD (Carrero et al., 2017). While legislative demand calls for

highly effective interventions for students with EBD, consistent support of valid and current

research is not available. Additionally, in the synthesis, Garwood et al. (2021) noted a declining

trend of publications focused on interventions for students with and at risk for EBD.

Research, however, consistently shows that students with EBD require highly specialized

instruction across both academic and affective domains (Chitiyo et al., 2021; McKenna et al.,

2019, 2021a). Even when proposed supports or programs, such as those that encourage

restorative justice practices, receive support for their effectiveness in impacting student

behaviors, they lack a consistent ability to transform teacher perception and increase the fidelity

of support implementation (French, 2019; Lund et al., 2021). The persistent argument against the

ability to streamline intervention resources is the uniqueness of EBD as a disability, and how it

manifests for individuals can be extremely varied (French, 2019). The consensus is that

"specialized instruction" is defined according to the individual. In recognizing the uniqueness of

the "whole child," a blanket approach to intervention for students with EBD is not necessarily

possible (Carrero et al., 2017). This may be partly due to the debate around the definition of EBD

and the wide eligibility criteria variance between states (Mills & Sabornie, 2021). Other support

systems include administrative outreach to parents, mental health resources provided in schools,

and school-to-community outreach (Huscroft-D'Angelo et al., 2018). The level of administrative ability to provide such support varies by community. The community setting, socio-economic status, and general demographics influence what schools consider socially acceptable behaviors expected for academic and social achievement and further influence the considered support approaches (Trinidad, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2019). Factors such as race and economic status often define the difference between urban, rural, and suburban communities where urban communities are more diverse, and thus, the expectations of the community define the context of the educational experience for all students (Curran et al., 2021; Hott et al., 2021; Trinidad, 2020).

To some degree, standards have been set to establish minimum practices to support the inclusion of SWDs in general but are reported to be ignored or left unused in the educational setting (McKenna et al., 2021a; Mitchell et al., 2019). A synthesis of studies exploring the inclusionary practice of SWDs reveals a significant lack of use and knowledge of the most basic instructional practices used to support the inclusion of SWD in general education settings, much less for students with EBD specifically (McKenna et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2019). Even when teachers are provided with intervention supports, when measured against typical peers, students with the label of EBD often receive higher rates of negative feedback and instances of teacher bias in inclusive settings and even more rarely experience a teacher who is willing to alter instruction to address student needs (Curran et al., 2021; Gottfried & Kirksey, 2019; McKenna et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2019). Alternatively, students who previously received services for EBD and have gone through the de-identification process have been found to experience more positive academic and social outcomes (Curran et al., 2021). De-identification, or the removal of services for a specific disability, cannot be definitively linked to the benefits mentioned above.

Students identified as eligible for de-identification are most likely already experiencing

significant academic or social success (Curran et al., 2021).

The main supports used to increase students' success rates with EBD are the Functional

Behavior Assessment (FBA) and the Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) (Gagnon, 2021; Perihan

& Bicer, 2021). The FBA and BIP are supports that, when used with fidelity and by trained

professionals, aim to increase the success of students with EBD across settings and work to

maximize the provision of supports related to students' specific needs (Freeman et al., 2019;

Hanchon & Allen, 2018). The FBA is generally used to collect data regarding a student's

behavior and hypothesize the function or underlying reason for engagement in that behavior'

which is then used to draft a BIP that outlines appropriate behavioral interventions specific to the

student's behaviors and proposed function, meant to be implemented with high fidelity (Johnson

et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2021b). Despite legislation requiring FBAs and BIPs for certain

behavioral circumstances, or at minimum, the consideration of using such supports, there is once

again a general lack of clarity and definition for the components of either support; thus, FBA or

BIP application across school sites is inconsistent and varied at best (Johnson et al., 2019;

McKenna et al., 2021b). Furthermore, study findings have revealed the FBA process to be

arduous and limiting for general education teachers attempting to support students with EBD in

the general education setting (Perihan & Bicer, 2021).

When detailing the success of students with EBD, views are subjective. In some cases,

success means the matriculation of behaviors so that students with EBD "fit in" with typical

peers, wherein the sense of full inclusion and alignment with the requirements of IDEA and

Endrew, success would also include suitable academic progress (Freeman et al., 2019; McKenna

et al., 2021c). The main problem with current empirical research is the exclusive classroom

context. Very little research explores possible evidence-based practice implementation for students with EBD specific to inclusion in general education settings (McKenna et al., 2019, 2021).

Additionally, little research is available on the extent of classroom contexts and how they impact inclusion for students with EBD. Research has touched on how students with EBD impact typical peers and how classroom supports needed for students with EBD may be generally beneficial for all students (Fletcher, 2009; Gottfried and Harven, 2015, as cited in Gottfried & Kirksey, 2018), but substantial evidence for any claims or findings is not available or consistently supported. Gottfried and Kirksey (2018) used a nationally representative dataset to compare classroom math activities in kindergarten classrooms with and without students with EBD to build empirical data for classroom contexts. While the study revealed more traditional math (paper and pencil vs. cognitively more demanding activities) approaches in classrooms with students with EBD, the study also found more inexperienced teachers with fewer certifications and no special education experience in those same classrooms than in classrooms without students with EBD. Gottfried and Kirksey's (2018) findings are supported by other recent research highlighting the inconsistent understandings, supports, and varying degrees of resources available to students with EBD and their respective teachers (Gidlund, 2018; Hartman et al., 207; Mathews et al., 2021; Scardamalia et al., 2018; Van Mieghem et al., 2020). Additionally, teacher factors such as attitude, perceptions, and lack of knowledge regarding special education service provision and behavior management strategies continue to be a consistent theme across research concerning classroom context for students with EBD when considering appropriate classroom placement (Bettini et al., 2017; Caldarella et al., 2019; Gottfried et al., 2019; Leggio & Terras, 2019; Mathews et al., 2021; Pesonen et al., 2021).

Co-teaching to Support Students with EBD

Through co-teaching, students with disabilities receive direct specialized instruction and inclusion in the general education setting through the collaboration between a special education teacher and a general education teacher within the same classroom environment (Bettini et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2021a; Pizana, 2022). Special education teachers generally have more access to professional development and resources for intensive behavioral support for students compared to peers trained for general-education environments, who are considered experts in academic content provision (Alnasser, 2021; Bettini et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2017; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). Because special education teachers are held more accountable for IEP implementation, these educators are more likely to develop stronger relationships with students than general educators and, thus, more likely to seek opportunities to extend support when obstacles arise (Hirsch et al., 2021; Whitlow et al., 2018). There is, however, a greater benefit to increased collaboration between all IEP team members to increase the generalization of support and understanding of why and how they are to be provided to the student across educational settings (Walker et al., 2021). Alternatively, limited research supports a link between academic success for students with EBD and teacher certification type. Current findings indicate little deviation between certification types except for a slight benefit for low-achieving students with EBD when served by a dual-certified educator (Gilmour, 2020).

Co-teaching as an effective method of supporting SWDs is a relatively new concept and continues to be debated in research, receiving more praise in qualitative studies (Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016). The actual collaboration between general educator and special educator varies depending on the specific delivery model within the co-teaching model umbrella (Kokko et al., 2021); however, the least effective delivery model, one teach one assist, is most often utilized and does not reflect suggestions or best practices identified in currently available research

(Bettini et al., 2021; Weiss & Glaser, 2021). The research on general perceptions of co-teaching has revealed both optimistic feelings and patterns of perceived hierarchical dynamics and power struggles between cooperating educators (Kokko et al., 2021; Rabin, 2020). Suggesting co-teaching as a general method to increase inclusion of students with EBD specifically, and further, as a way to increase adherence to LRE mandates in IDEA (2004) raises many questions about teacher perceptions and lived experiences using the co-taught model to facilitate the actual inclusion of students with EBD in the general education elementary classroom. The available research currently lacks information regarding the inclusion of students with EBD and co-teaching to support them. The limited research highlights the complicated emotions and added teacher barriers one may experience when under the pressure of collaborating with colleagues who may differ in teaching philosophy (Pesonen et al., 2021). One of the perceived benefits of co-teaching, as reported by those with shared lived experience, is sharing myriad emotions and experiences with someone (Kokko et al., 2021).

Using a co-teaching model that extends collaboration between a special educator and a general educator in the same classroom allows for increased opportunities to learn from one another, provide for student needs, and increase flexibility in instructional delivery due to the presence of another teacher in the classroom (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017; Edwards, 2017; Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016). However, factors related to school structuring and teacher personality have been observed to reduce the ability to collaborate among some co-teaching teams, leading to unclear expectations, limited shared vision, and ineffective collaboration (Jurkowski & Müller, 2018; Kokko et al., 2021; Pesonen et al., 2021). Co-teachers have reported that the lack of time to collaborate and build relationships greatly impedes their ability to function together and work towards common goals in the classroom (Rabin, 2020). Further, the

typical role of a special education teacher is to provide an individualized approach to education

that offers support unique to student needs that general educators and general education settings

may not allow for due to the structured requirements leading to both special and general

education teachers reporting unmanageable workload expectations (Bettini et al., 2017).

Continuous research unveils growing data attempting to find the most effective strategies for

supporting students with EBD in the general education classroom, such as functional

communication interventions and explicit instruction of replacement behaviors (Owen & Lo,

2021). As the attention surrounding inclusion continues to grow, research assessing the validity

and reliability of surveys aimed at measuring educator knowledge of and readiness for inclusive

instruction for students with EBD is being conducted, allowing for continued research on all

aspects surrounding the problem of underrepresentation of students with EBD in the general

education setting (McKenna et al., 2021c). At this time, the limited identification of what is

currently considered "best practices" is not fully aligned with the co-teaching model and often

neglects to mention the dynamic of having two educators in a setting working to support the

challenging needs of students with EBD. The complications of the model continue to grow when

co-teaching pairs share opposing pedagogical beliefs or when one person has limited experience;

such a dynamic may lead to power struggles that are difficult to navigate on top of the attempt to

meet a variety of student needs (Rabin, 2020).

In general, the model receives positive support from educators, but concerns for lack of

common planning time, lack of resources, training, and administrative support currently exist

(Alnasser, 2021; Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017; Jackson et al., 2017; Jurkowski & Müller, 2018;

Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016). The reoccurring list of concerns surrounding using the co-taught

model and the inability to use it as a consistent and reliable form of inclusion support leads to

another argument over measuring student benefit and effectiveness. Yet another facet of the co-taught model is the perceived benefit vs. the observed benefit of the co-taught model. Strogilos and Avramidis (2016) found that the teacher's perception of the co-taught model to support SWDs significantly differed from the observed benefit. SWDs received more individualized support and attention in the non-co-taught classes in this study which contained 22 co-taught pairs, gaining observational data both in the presence and absence of the special education teacher (Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016). This, and similar studies, lack data on students with EBD and continue to point out inconsistencies in using the co-taught model to support SWDs in general education classrooms. Alternatively, some studies show increased student engagement for students with Autism or specific grade levels but not for others or certain academic content (Iacono et al., 2021). The studies focused on using the co-taught model with the inclusion of students with EBD show some support for its efficacy however, findings are inconclusive and limited, and teacher perceptions are lacking (Conderman & Hedin, 2015). Recent literature emphasizes building a foundation of sound general education instruction and collaborating on incorporating specialized instruction (Weiss & Glaser, 2021). However, the literature on expectations and frameworks for effective co-teaching strategies is consistently being added to as schools increasingly rely on it for inclusionary practice. The current lack of consistency in research on the expected roles of teachers, the perceived benefits, and the observed benefits show a need for more research in the area and a need for research on the perceived and potential benefits of using co-teaching as an inclusion method for students with EBD in elementary school specifically.

Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Students with EBD

A growing body of research exploring teacher perceptions and the various factors contributing to teacher attitudes toward students with EBD in general and special education classrooms is available, though not all of it meets current standards for quality methodology (Harrison et al., 2019). In general, teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of students with disabilities are positive. Conversely, attitudes towards students specifically those with EBD, are overwhelmingly negative, revealing that many teachers think that students with EBD are the hardest population to serve (de Leeuw et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2021; Knowles et al., 2020; Krämer & Zimmermann, 2021; Scanlon et al., 2020; Zolkoski, 2019). Consistent across similar studies, teachers are more likely to increase reprimands and decrease positive praise for students with or at risk of EBD, which is associated with greater disruption levels, specifically at the elementary level (Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Caldarella et al., 2019; Downs et al., 2019; Granger et al., 2021). The cyclical pattern of negative perceptions and associated actions creates a snowball problem that does little to mitigate the negative outcomes for students with or at risk of EBD (Downs et al., 2019). Moreover, teacher attitudes and perceptions have been reported to influence self-efficacy and impact willingness and ability to implement required interventions successfully (Gidlund, 2018; Hind et al., 2019; Knowles et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2017). The need for positive student-teacher relationships for students with EBD has been shown to increase student success, but teachers report this as difficult to facilitate, considering the perceived difficulty of student factors (Van Loan & Garwood, 2020; Zolkoski, 2019).

The pressure to publicly support inclusion (Gidlund, 2018) may be a factor that produces higher rates of support throughout research when teacher perception is studied. Scanlon et al. (2020) conducted a study exploring the implicit reactions toward students with EBD and

involved neutral (non-teacher) participants for comparison. Study findings supported negative biases to be exclusive to teachers; despite claims of support for inclusion, an overwhelming lack of self-efficacy and willingness to adapt classroom practice for the needs of students with EBD was also revealed and remained a consistent theme across other research (Gidlund, 2018; Hind et al., 2019; Knowles et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2017; Scanlon et al., 2020; Zolkoski, 2019). Part of the bias and negativity can be attributed to the lack of exposure to deviant behaviors in different settings. Moreover, special education teachers in exclusive settings may become desensitized to certain behaviors due to increased exposure and experience in behavior interventions.

Furthermore, a teacher's level of experience, or time in the profession, has been found to negatively correlate with teacher attitude and willingness to support the inclusion of students with EBD (Hind et al., 2019). Therefore, teachers with the greatest experience working with children are more likely to hold more negative perceptions and attitudes toward including students with EBD, leaving newer and less experienced teachers to support an increasingly fragile population of students (State et al., 2019). Teachers new to the field may lack the experience required to understand the demand and challenges of including students with EBD in general education settings (Hind et al., 2019).

In comparison, general education teachers without a significant level of exposure to the behaviors and needs of students with EBD would be more tuned into displays of disruptive or unexpected behaviors (Zweers et al., 2020). However, conflicting findings remain across teacher perceptions of students with EBD as well. In some studies, teachers with special education certification were more inclined to view behaviors negatively than their general-education certified counterparts (Smith et al., 2020). The inclination to label behaviors more negatively may be partly due to the training involved in becoming special education certified. Special

education teachers are trained and provided with continuing professional development on normative behaviors and are more likely to describe intentionality accurately (Smith et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, teachers' perceptions and attitudes greatly impact inclusion efforts and maintenance and impact the trajectory of students' academic futures (Hind et al., 2019; Krämer & Zimmermann, 2021). According to Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, it is logical that a teacher's attitude towards the inclusion of students with EBD directly impacts their intention to engage in that practice. Teacher factors such as age, qualifications, received and perceived support levels, and experience contributes to educators' perceptions and attitudes regarding working with children with EBD (Hind et al., 2019). Student factors such as gender may also play a role in teacher perceptions. Compared to males with similar external behaviors, female students with EBD are often more harshly judged or rated by teachers (Sheaffer et al., 2021). Socially constructed gender roles and norms not only impact teacher perceptions but, as a result, also impact intervention availability and equality across genders (Whitlow et al., 2018).

The overwhelmingly positive response towards inclusive practice creates a clearer divide when specifically discussing the inclusion of students with EBD and those who exhibit overtly aggressive behaviors in the classroom (Hind et al., 2019). Attributing factors to teacher perception of including students with EBD in general education settings and of students with EBD themselves appear across research as a general feeling of a lack of training, access to resources, and general guidance in how to meet the complex needs of students with EBD (Hind et al., 2019). Perceptions of disability as either a human deficit or social construct also impact teacher perception of students with EBD and subsequent willingness to include students in general education (Lanterman et al., 2021).

Teacher Reported Barriers

One of the reported barriers to supporting students with EBD in the classroom is the intense level of behavioral and academic support needed and the subsequent level of required implementation fidelity to support improved student outcomes without proper teacher training (Freeman et al., 2019; Gagnon, 2021; Garwood et al., 2021; State et al., 2019). Teachers report difficulty supporting students with behavioral challenges, even with continued professional development, coaching opportunities, and post-graduate education (de Leeuw et al., 2018; Hind et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2019). These barriers may be due to the emphasis on experimental designs and the inability to transfer results to real classrooms or even due to the lack of uniform strategies for students with EBD in general education settings combined with a significant lack of teacher perception of strategies used in the general classroom setting reported in research (Chen et al., 2021; Hind et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2021a). The provision of professional learning and coaching supports are not provided uniformly and thus vary from school to school. Insufficient structures for collaborative efforts across special education teachers and general education teachers are also a perceived barrier to including students with EBD (Bettini et al., 2021; Gidlund, 2018).

Further, the inability to fund or streamline teacher education (Freeman et al., 2019), much less the definition of EBD or clarify eligibility criteria at the federal or state levels, is a constant frustration for educators (Gagnon, 2021). Some experts propose that uniformity and streamlining of interventions are nearly impossible due to the level of individualization and adaptions needed to meet the developmental, academic, emotional, and behavioral needs of students with EBD (Chen et al., 2021). Evidence of this frustration and other negative feelings is littered throughout

qualitative and quantitative studies focused on teacher perceptions of inclusive practice for students with EBD.

Because students with EBD and related behavioral challenges require a unique level of instructional support for emotional regulation, the lack of human and tangible resources in general education settings is a significant barrier (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017; Hind et al., 2019). In some studies, the necessary support for students with EBD is viewed as going against the socially-constructed norms of public education and creating differences among student populations that add to the problems teachers perceive around inclusive education (Gidlund, 2018). The lack of human and material resources is intricately connected to a teacher's level of self-efficacy (Cummimg et al., 2021). A prevalence of a perceived lack of instruction or exposure to the needs of students with EBD, or inclusive educational practices in general, in undergraduate teacher training is also reported (Kuronja et al., 2019). When educators do not feel properly supported or equipped to handle inclusion demands, teachers feel ineffective and disempowered, which ultimately impacts their ability to deliver instruction (Cumming et al., 2021; Gilmour et al., 2021; Hind et al., 2019). Despite a lack of resources attributed to administrative decisions, an overwhelmingly negative perception of administration is not found in research (Matthews et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2019).

Self-Efficacy and Perceived Control

With legislation continuing to support the greater inclusion of students with EBD alongside typically developing peers, research examining the level of teacher self-efficacy has grown to be a global interest. Several studies report a feeling of inadequacy and poor self-efficacy in dealing with students with EBD (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019). Part of the low perceived control is hypothesized to stem from the source of inclusive legislation and efforts.

Inclusive education is a product of legislation and advocacy originating from those other than educational professionals; thus, inclusion may be seen as more of an imposition and out of the control of educational professionals (Gidlund, 2018). The connection between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and willingness to work with students with EBD, or support inclusion, is often the main reason for continued research efforts (Kuronja et al., 2019; Lanterman et al., 2021). Studies have shown that teachers report a lack of confidence in several areas, including service provision, building relationships with this population, and understanding EBD as a disability category in general (Lanterman et al., 2021; Van Loan & Garwood, 2020). Further, teachers report a lack of confidence in organizing classroom instruction and support for an increasingly diverse student population due to inclusive education efforts (Gidlund, 2018). The ability to juggle the many needs of students with various disabilities among the already diverse population of typically developing peers leaves many teachers who facilitate inclusion frustrated and overwhelmed. Another facet of teacher concern is the ability to control the possible detrimental impact that including students with EBD in general education settings will have on typically developing peers (Lanterman et al., 2021). Fear of disruption, aggression, and general lack of control over student behavior is a common concern of teachers reporting their attitude or perception of including students with EBD in the general setting (Smith et al., 2020).

Conversely, special education teachers often experience higher self-efficacy levels working with and understanding students with EBD due to experience and direct engagement in strategies and supports linked to student needs (Kuronja et al., 2019). Self-regulation and the ability to remain in control of oneself during a crisis are foundational to effectively teaching students with EBD and building relationships (Van Loan & Garwood, 2020). However, these higher self-efficacy levels of special education teachers do not necessarily impact special

education teacher retention rates (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019). The consistency of impact across teacher roles or types indicates the significance of student factors on teachers over the impact of certification type (Gilmour et al., 2021).

Resilience and Burnout

Even when teachers feel higher levels of self-efficacy or accomplishment, research reports the possibility of a simultaneous lack of perceived control over personal and emotional exhaustion when facing the challenges of supporting students with EBD (Gilmour et al., 2021; Granger et al., 2021). The combination of self-efficacy and reported barriers from teachers contribute to the concern of teacher attrition. The negative impact of teacher turnover and burnout facing SWDs is evident across research, but the correlation between disability type and teacher turnover unveils more information about the problem. Studies show a direct correlation between teacher turnover and the number of SWDs in the class, especially when students have EBD (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019). Limited studies have shown that negative teacher perception is further exacerbated when adversity from a single student in a generally low-adversity class is experienced over multiple experiences in generally high-adversity settings such as self-contained classrooms (Granger et al., 2021). Alternatively, more empirical evidence supports that despite an expected level of expertise in special education teachers, certifications or qualifications are not found to moderate the negative correlation between teaching students with EBD and teacher turnover (Gilmour, 2020; Gilmour et al., 2021; Gilmour & Wehby, 2019). A cry for increased attention to teacher preparation programs to recruit and retain highly qualified special education teachers for students with EBD has led to technological developments such as virtual reality simulators (Lloyd et al., 2019).

Moreover, a teacher's lack of confidence in working with students with EBD can contribute to an increased risk of burnout and, ultimately, a departure from teaching (Gilmour et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2021). Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of students are often contributing factors to teacher burnout; however, that is not always the case for teachers choosing to leave the profession (Gilmour et al., 2021). While the addition of support, such as paraprofessionals or through the addition of a second certified teacher in the co-teaching model, has been shown to be a slight moderating factor for teacher attrition (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019), the use of co-teaching to provide that support for students with EBD specifically as they transition from more restrictive settings during elementary years and the consequent feelings or teacher attitudes has yet to be discussed in the available research.

Summary

Students with EBD continue to be underrepresented in general education compared to other disability categories and experience greater rates of exclusionary discipline, academic underperformance, academic drop-out, and incarceration (Freeman et al., 2018; McKenna et al., 2021a). The mere physical existence in general education classrooms is insufficient if the general education setting does not fully include the necessary services to support the child's needs (Lanterman et al., 2021). The data reflected throughout research supporting either inclusive or exclusive environments for students with EBD are often conflicting and vary due to teacher-related factors (Zweers et al., 2019). Studies exploring general perceptions and attitudes towards students with EBD often reflect lower teacher self-efficacy, low perceived behavioral control, general feelings of distress, and a greater likelihood of leaving the field (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019; Hind et al., 2019; Kuronja et al., 2019; Scanlon et al., 2020).

The concept of co-teaching and collaborative teaching models has risen in popularity with generally positive views across professionals in education (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017). However, empirical evidence supporting co-teaching or evidence-based practice for students with EBD is lacking (Lloyd et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2021a). In exploring teacher perceptions and attitudes toward using the co-teaching model to support the inclusion of students with EBD, the attribution theory (1972) and theory of planned behavior (1991) can be applied to research to better predict and intervene with future teacher behaviors in inclusive practice with students with EBD. An increased focus on factors attributing to the attitudes towards inclusion and disability, analysis of subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control over inclusive practice involving students with EBD or challenging behaviors in general education settings allow a greater ability to predict teachers' behaviors engaging in inclusive practice. A gap exists in the literature examining elementary teachers' perspectives and lived experiences using co-teaching models to support students with EBD, especially when narrowed to those transitioning from more restrictive settings. Through examining the lived experiences and the related perceptions of co-teachers who have experienced this phenomenon, attention to interventions enabling a greater inclusion of students with EBD can be made possible.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of elementary educators in a large suburban district who have engaged in the co-teaching model to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD from self-contained classrooms to the general education classroom. Research has shown the underrepresentation of students with EBD in general education settings (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018; Lanterman et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2021a; Mitchell et al., 2019), and further, negative teacher perceptions towards the inclusion of students with EBD (Scanlon et al., 2020), but has failed to thoroughly explore the lived experiences of teachers engaged in the co-taught model to support the inclusion of students with behavioral challenges. As the co-taught model gains attention (McKenna et al., 2021a), there is a need to describe the experience as perceived by those living it to understand the experience or phenomenon and thus better inform future educational decisions for students with/at risk of EBD. The study is framed by Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior and Weiner's (1972) attribution theory and focuses on connecting lived experiences with subsequent teacher perceptions. Chapter Three details the design and focus of the study, outlines the participants and setting, and covers the researcher's positionality and role. Further, Chapter Three outlines study procedures, and the detailed data collection plan, defines the analysis plan, and lists the techniques used to secure trustworthiness.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was employed for this study. Qualitative research focuses on gaining understanding and meaning from human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The depth of understanding of experience and perception sought after in this study was not possible through

a quantitative approach. Qualitative research aims to understand the applied value and meaning of an experience over solving a problem (van Manen, 1990). A qualitative approach was appropriate because this study focused on elementary educators' lived experiences and perceptions of using the co-taught model to include students with EBD or behavior challenges in the general education setting. The qualitative research approach allowed for a more detailed description of information perceived and provided by participants.

Phenomenology focuses on the meaning of a phenomenon as defined by human experience and perceptions as documented through in-depth conversations, interviews, and rich data collection methods (Moustakas, 1994). This study richly describes the meaning of inclusion for students with EBD and challenging behaviors as perceived by teachers who have participated in the co-taught model and thus follows a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology specifically seeks the perceived meaning of a lived experience so that understanding, by way of description, allows one to act "more thoughtfully and more tactfully in certain situations" (van Manen, 1990, p. 23). The description and focus on lived experiences through phenomenological designs can follow a hermeneutic or transcendental, psychological, or empirical approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The overall intent of a phenomenological research design is to be able to relay the essence of a mutually-lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018) or, as van Manen (1990) described, "the nature, or true being" (p. 177) of a phenomenon. Phenomenology was appropriate because the research described the lived experiences of co-teachers and the perceived meaning participants apply to the phenomenon of reintegrating students with/at risk for EBD.

To fully describe participants' lived experiences and perceptions, the study followed the transcendental phenomenological approach described by Moustakas (1994). The systematic approach described by Moustakas (1994) begins with the epoché. To engage in transcendental

phenomenology, one must be intentional in their attempt to remove one's bias and aim to describe participants' experiences "in its totality, in a fresh and open way" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). This intention to remove bias and researcher perceptions is done through the epoché and allows a clearer description of participant experiences without researcher conflict. The work of Moustakas is strongly influenced by the work of van Kaam (1996, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) and Colaizzi (1978, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018), as well as the works of Husserl, who effectively defined the transcendental phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The research in this study explored the lived experiences and subsequent perceptions of elementary educators engaging (or who have recently engaged) in the co-taught model to support the inclusion of students with EBD, or challenging behaviors, previously served in a more restrictive setting. A central research question and three sub-questions were formulated to focus and guide the research and allow for a deep exploration of the shared experience. The questions are outlined below.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of elementary educators in a large suburban district who supported the inclusion, through reintegration, of students with EBD/at risk for EBD from self-contained classrooms using the co-teaching model?

Sub-Question One

What are the perceived roles and responsibilities, respective to position or title, of elementary educators participating in the co-teaching model when reintegrating students with EBD?

Sub-Question Two

What are elementary general education teachers' lived experiences and subsequent

perceptions towards using the co-teaching model to support students with EBD access to the

general curriculum?

Sub-Question Three

How do co-teaching experiences influence elementary teachers' perception of EBD as a

disability?

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Setting and Participants

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I chose the setting and participants for this study because they met specific criteria. Both

the setting and the participants must have allowed for the experiences of special and general

education teachers to have engaged in the co-taught model to support the inclusion of students

with/at risk for EBD reintegrating from a more restrictive placement. Without clearance for

questioning, a possible sample pool of roughly 75 to 80 participants met the study criteria across

the Southern Oak school district. I received Liberty University's Institutional Review Board

(IRB) approval (see Appendix A) and local district approval before initial contact for recruitment

(see Appendix F). The criteria and detailed description of both the setting and participants are

outlined below using pseudonyms for confidentiality.

Setting

Southern Oak school district, a pseudonym, is a large suburban school district serving

over 111,000 students ranging from pre-kindergarten to high school. The school district covers a

large geographic region, including urban and suburban settings just north of a major urban city in

the southeast United States. The district student demographics are roughly 37% White, 30%

Black, 23% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 1% Other. Southern Oak has earned several accolades, including a nearly 10% increase in graduation rate within the last five years, and has earned the title of one of the top 20% of the school districts across the state. Southern Oak serves over 76,000 elementary school students across 93 different school sites. Southern Oak offers self-contained or separate settings for students with behavioral challenges from pre-k through middle school grades at select schools that have the space and are centrally located in higher-need areas. Self-contained classrooms for students with EBD are not present at the high school level; thus, the district is designed to support reintegration before high-school enrollment. The school district was chosen for its enrollment size, reintegration expectations, the prevalent use of the co-teaching model, and influence on surrounding districts.

The specific elementary schools chosen for this study serve a suburban geographical location and host self-contained classroom(s) for students with significant behavioral needs. Participants in this study serve schools with populations between 700 and 1,050 students, pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, with an average of 16.57% of students receiving services in special education. The average ratio of students to teachers across the participating schools is 12:1 in general education settings and 6:2 (one special education teacher and one special education paraprofessional) in self-contained behavior support classrooms.

The interviews and data collection sites were chosen based on agreements between myself and the voluntary participants. All virtual interviews were recorded and transcribed via Microsoft Teams. One interview was held in person but was still audio and visually recorded using Microsoft Teams. All participants chose a digital format for document collection and focus group participation.

Participants

This study used purposeful criterion sampling (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Phenomenological studies require participants to experience a named or specific phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants for this study experienced supporting the reintegration of at least one student with behavioral challenges previously served in a more restrictive setting within the last two academic years. Southern Oak has 11 elementary schools that host 18 self-contained behavior support units. All qualifying elementary schools within the Southern Oak district were contacted after IRB (see Appendix A) and local district approval (see Appendix F) to ensure maximum sampling variation and the ability to develop a thematic analysis of many perspectives (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). After the formal Southern Oaks district approval process, of the 11 contacted schools, four principals agreed to further communications and participation in the study, meaning I was granted permission to contact teachers in their buildings. A recruitment email (see Appendix F) was sent to all prospective participants, either special or general education teachers. Those willing to participate answered screening questions through a Microsoft Forms link (see Appendix F) to ensure they met the criteria. I received 12 responses to my initial recruitment email. I chose to include participants who have experienced the phenomenon within two academic years to capitalize on both current perspectives without hindsight bias and possible reflective positions of those who can grasp "the full nature of the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 93).

In addition to having experience with the phenomenon, participants had to be willing to engage in a recorded lengthy interview, participate in journaling, participate in a focus group, and be interested in the investigation (Moustakas, 1994). Data saturation is achieved when major themes have been identified, and no new information is attained through any form of data

collection (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). One participant withdrew consent from the 12 responses gained after my initial recruitment email. Of the remaining 11, I observed data saturation with 10 participants who met the study criteria and provided written consent to participate.

Researcher Positionality

As a seasoned special education teacher with previous experience in the general education setting, I have always been interested in the varied perspectives of educators working collaboratively to serve students with disabilities in the least restrictive setting. I have personally experienced educators with intense desires to include students with varying exceptionalities throughout my career and those who continue to believe in permanent specialized placements passionately. The co-taught model for inclusion is a relatively new concept for me, as my first exposure to the idea was when I moved to a new school district in a new state. As a special education teacher, I served students with EBD as they transitioned from more restrictive settings, and I eventually became the full-time self-contained teacher for students with EBD/behavior challenges in grades K-3. I only served as a co-teacher for six weeks until I was called to a new position due to a school-level need. Therefore, I would consider myself to be an "insider" to the phenomenon (Holmes, 2020, p. 5). The district I serve relies heavily on the co-taught model to support reintegrating students.

As I investigated the lived experiences and subsequent perceptions of educators including students with/at risk for EBD, it was important to recognize the lens through which I view disability (Holmes, 2020). As a special education teacher supporting students with behavioral challenges, I believe in teaching self-regulation skills, so inclusion in mainstream or general education settings is possible and better serves the child. I believe that education should be

accessible to all students and that a greater level of inclusion is possible when educators' actions and beliefs align with it. My view of disability, specifically in the school setting, more closely aligns with social constructivism (Moore et al., 2020; Retief & Letšosa, 2018). I believe the impairment one experiences results from culture and socially-constructed norms and expectations. I understand that the participants in my study may view the concept of disability and inclusion differently, making the epoché process important to the study's validity.

Interpretive Framework

My interpretive framework for this study is social constructivism. I recognize that people gain meaning and understanding of the world in which they live through the experiences they have (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The goal of this study will be to richly describe the experiences and perceptions of educators who have engaged in co-teaching to support the inclusion of students with EBD/behavior challenges from previously being served in more restrictive placements, otherwise noted as reintegration. The views expressed by participants will have been shaped by their experiences and interactions with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I, as the researcher, will interpret how participants construct the meaning of their experience with the phenomenon as they intentionally express it (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Philosophical Assumptions

Three philosophical assumptions must be clear as I conduct my research through a social constructivist framework. My ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions will shape the nature of this study and its central tenets (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My position with each of the assumptions is thus described.

Ontological Assumption

Growing up with Christian values has taught me to recognize a singular truth, God's

truth, as reality. As a researcher, I recognize that individuals may construct or perceive realities

to be different based on their life experiences. I believe that humans can perceive truth

differently and interpret the meaning of reality based on their experiences. Therefore, in

describing the lived experiences of co-teachers, I recognize that reality is socially-constructed

and relative to the individual (Spencer et al., 2014). I believe there is value in investigating the

multiple realities perceived by people who have experienced specific phenomena from different

angles and interactions with those around them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Despite a belief in a

singular truth, I believe in the biblical viewpoint of meeting people where they are and respecting

their perceived realities as they experience their unique paths in life (*New International Bible*,

1978/2011; 1 Corinthians 9:22).

Epistemological Assumption

I conducted this transcendental phenomenological study through the epistemological

assumption that the knowledge of the reality of the phenomenon is co-constructed between the

participants and myself (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The subjective evidence collected on the

reintegration of students with EBD/challenging behaviors was attained through the intentional

building of closeness between myself and the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The

intentional closeness helped build a level of comfortability between myself and the participants,

facilitating greater attainment of data and later helping my interpretation during data analysis.

Interviews were conducted at sites that allowed the attainment of knowledge relative to the

phenomenon, such as existing co-taught classrooms, the use of Microsoft Teams, or other school

sites such as the library, as "all objects of knowledge must conform to experience" (Moustakas,

1994, p. 44). To gain the richness of knowledge I desire, I positioned myself as close to the

participants as possible to better understand the context in which their perceptions were formed

(Spencer et al., 2014). Through the intention of closeness and purposeful setting, the knowledge of the phenomenon is not of the undeniable truth but constructed from the participants' perceptions.

Axiological Assumption

As a special education teacher, I believe that all students deserve opportunities to access meaningful education and not only a feeling of inclusion but full inclusion. These views have been shaped by personal experiences in which I have facilitated the positive transition from more restrictive to less restrictive placements for students with or at risk for EBD. In my current position, I also work closely with teachers to facilitate the instruction of students who require intensive behavioral support in general education settings. I understand the possibility that I could have encountered perceptions and heard of experiences of others that directly conflict with my axiological assumptions. However, my axiological assumptions did not interfere with my description of the lived experiences of my participants because I relied on the process of the epoché where my experiences and perceptions were set aside (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Researcher's Role

Following the systematic methods of Moustakas (1994) for human science research, I took on the role of the human instrument. As a special education teacher who taught in a self-contained behavior classroom and later in my study started transitioning to an instructional support specialist, I am very close to the phenomenon. For some participants, I may have been perceived to be on the opposing side of those who do not align with my beliefs of inclusion. Including the epoché process was important to set aside my personal beliefs, values, and experiences to better describe participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, as a

special education teacher within the Southern Oak school district, I do not have authority over any proposed participants. However, my experience allowed me an advantage in understanding district-specific processes and components of the co-teaching model as it is used locally. I remained neutral and checked personal bias throughout the data collection and analysis process, as Moustakas (1994) describes is required for transcendental phenomenological research designs.

Procedures

This transcendental phenomenological study follows the systematic procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994). Along with consulting the work of Moustakas (1994), I continuously focused on ethical standards and IRB requirements throughout the study. Permission was required from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), Southern Oaks School District, and local administrators before data collection could begin. In the following sections, I describe the process of obtaining permission and recruiting participants and provide a detailed plan for how I collected and analyzed data.

Permissions

Before collecting data, I secured approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). I then contacted the Research Office for the Southern Oak School district. I provided the board with a copy of the approval letter from Liberty University's IRB (see Appendix A) and a completed local district permission packet outlining the proposed study's purpose and procedures. The district required copies of interview protocols and other data collection protocols for the study. The board reviewed the information, granted conditional approval, and allowed me to contact eligible school principals. Local school administrators had to sign permission for me to contact co-teachers in their building before formal Southern Oak board approval was granted and data collection could begin. After contacting the 11 eligible

schools, four principals agreed to allow contact with their staff for participation in the study. I

forwarded the signed principal approvals to Southern Oaks' research department for final and

formal permission to contact potential participants. Once the board received local school

administrator permissions, I was contacted by the district with a formal letter expressing site

approval (see Appendix E) to begin data collection. With all permissions in place, I contacted

participants who potentially met the study criteria and obtained informed consent (see Appendix

B) from those who passed the initial screening questions in the recruitment email (see Appendix

F). Participants were fully informed regarding consent (see Appendix B), and as part of the

recruitment email (see Appendix F), were assured confidentiality and provided detailed

participation responsibilities (Moustakas, 1994).

Recruitment Plan

Southern Oak school district employs roughly 5,976 classroom teachers. The total

number of teachers who have experience with co-teaching to support the reintegration of

students with/at risk for EBD from previous restrictive settings across the 67 elementary schools

is unknown; however, roughly 75-80 minimum participants met the study criteria. From the

sample pool of all elementary educators, I recruited 12 participants across four participating

schools in the suburban area for my criterion sample. A criterion sample is required for

transcendental phenomenological studies because the basis of the study requires that participants

have experienced the phenomenon in some capacity (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To assess study compatibility, I prepared a preliminary statement to prospective participants

outlining criteria (having experience using the co-taught model to support the reintegration of

students with/at risk for EBD in an elementary general education setting who were previously

served in a more restrictive placement) (Moustakas, 1994). The statement was provided through

a recruitment email to participants (see Appendix F) that not only outlined responsibilities and

preliminary instructions to assess participant fit (Moustakas, 1994) but also contained a link to

Microsoft Forms that contained screening questions (see Appendix F) to indicate interest and

assess alignment with the study criteria.

I maintained and collected data on 10 participants to capture the phenomenon's essence

and reach data saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). An attempt to attain

participants from various sites with different student demographics but continue to meet the

criteria outlined increased the likelihood of maximum variation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I

obtained informed consent (see Appendix B) from all proposed participants before any data

collection occurred, and full disclosure regarding participant protections was provided (Creswell

& Poth, 2018).

Data Collection Plan

To capture the essence of the co-teaching experience to support the reintegration of

students with/ at risk for EBD in the general education setting, I used three methods of data

collection: interviews, document analysis, and focus groups. No data collection occurred until all

required permissions were attained, including IRB and local district approval. An external

auditor, my dissertation chair, and the committee reviewed and approved interview questions for

study alignment (see Appendix C), appropriateness, and clarity. The three methods chosen

allowed for data triangulation, thus increasing the validity and accuracy of the study (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). In the set sequence, the data collection was based largely on the interview process

(Moustakas, 1994). After that, protocols were allowed to be modified based on information

gained in individual interviews and document analysis for the final focus group. Modifications to

additional protocols after the initial personal interview were not required due to their open-ended and semi-structured nature.

Individual Interviews

For my first data collection method, I engaged in "purposeful questioning and discussion [through] the carefully designed and piloted semi-structured interviews" (Husband, 2020, p. 1). According to Moustakas (1994), the interview is the informal, open-ended process of questioning that allows for the development of the account of a person's experience with the phenomenon in question. Open-ended analytical questions are thought to impact the future behaviors of participants and thus may allow for greater engagement and interaction in follow-up data collection (Husband, 2020). To establish familiarity with the participant and encourage honesty, I engaged in a relaxed social conversation before formal questioning (Moustakas, 1994). Because of the unpredictable nature, I had to maintain flexible and comfortable conditions for each participant (Husband, 2020). In many instances, this required me to reassure participants of confidentiality and permission to be completely honest without judgment.

I used a list of interview questions (see Appendix C) that guided a discussion between myself and the participant, focused on attaining information about the lived experience and perspective of the co-teacher who has experienced the phenomenon. I allowed the participant to veer into conversations that came naturally to them and pertained to the phenomenon to get a full and rich picture of their experience. Ultimately, the interview questions allowed for a natural conversation to flow, and participants were engaged and willing to divulge relevant information in all instances.

Because the purpose of this phenomenological study was to richly describe the experience of co-teachers supporting inclusion, as a result of the reintegration process, of

students with EBD or behavior challenges in general education classrooms, the interview was

critical. The interview provided the main source of data collection as the participant spoke

personally about the experience of the phenomenon. Each interview lasted, on average, about

one hour per participant. To encourage honesty and secure confidentiality, interviews were held

between myself and only one participant at a time. Interviews were conducted at a mutually

agreed upon time and location and, regardless of location, were audio and video recorded via

Microsoft Teams after gaining signed permission (Moustakas, 1994). All recordings of

interviews and transcriptions are securely stored in password-protected files on a password-

protected computer and will be for the required minimum of three years, after which all digital

files will be permanently deleted.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please provide a little information regarding your educational background and
   experience, specifically up to this point.

2. Describe your teaching philosophy related to the inclusion of students with disabilities.
   CRQ

3. Would you please describe your experience with inclusion, specifically related to
   reintegrating students previously served in self-contained behavior settings? CRQ

4. When working with students included in the general education setting, how do you
   perceive the role of the general and special educator? SQ1

5. What feelings do you associate with inclusion, specifically the process of reintegrating
   students previously served in the self-contained behavior setting? SQ2

6. Reflecting on your experience with reintegrating students with EBD or behavioral challenges from self-contained behavior settings, is there anything you would change? SQ2

7. How do you perceive the reintegration process has impacted you or your relationship with your co-teacher? SQ1

8. Describe any offered professional development or training experiences and their value related to the co-taught model, specifically as it relates, if possible, to students with EBD or behavior challenges. SQ2

9. Please explain or describe how you perceive the disability category of EBD? SQ3

10. What personal thoughts or experiences stand out when discussing reintegration for students with EBD or behavior challenges previously served in self-contained settings? SQ3

11. What else would you like to add regarding the co-teaching experience and facilitating reintegration for students with EBD/at risk for EBD? SQ2

The first question in the semi-structured interview establishes an open forum, builds rapport, and initiates further questioning (Moustakas, 1994). Questions two and three focus on the central research question and situate the participant in the phenomenon. Understanding the participants' teaching philosophy related to the phenomenon is critical to understanding how the participant feels, particularly as a byproduct of the experience (Ajzen, 1991). The participant's immediate reaction to being asked about their experience with co-teaching to include students with EBD or behavioral challenges served as foundational data in describing the participant's experience as a whole.

Questions four and seven focused on answering research sub-question one. Understanding how teachers perceive their relationship and independent roles in the classroom as either the special education teacher or general education teacher in the co-teaching dynamic will capture the foundational components of the experience. Teacher emotions and attitudes are important in capturing the experience (Moustakas, 1994) and understanding the perceived attributing factors (Weiner, 1972); therefore, questions five and six allow the participant to express their perception of the co-taught model when used to include students with/at risk for EBD in a reflective manner. Asking the participant to reflect on their experience allows them to bring into consciousness their ideal experience to share with the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

To capture a rich description of the participants' experience with co-teaching for the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD, question eight targets the context of the experience as perceived by the participant, further gaining information for research sub-question two. Before concluding the interview, I asked the participant how they perceived the disability category of EBD and offered an opportunity to discuss personal thoughts and experiences that stood out to them. Questions nine and 10 target research sub-question three as well as connect to the literature linking teacher perceptions and the problem of underrepresentation of students with EBD in general education settings (Mitchell et al., 2019; McKenna et al., 2021a; Lanterman et al., 2021; Scanlon et al., 2020). The last question allowed the participant to express any thoughts or further information that came to light due to the discussion during the interview or about which I failed to inquire.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Using the analysis methods of Moustakas (1994), which modifies the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data, I first transcribed all participant interviews verbatim. I

provided each participant with a digital copy of their transcript to review for accuracy through

member checking, and changes were made where required. I read each transcript multiple times

to more fully understand the participant's experience with the phenomenon and listed

expressions that are reoccurring and significant to the experience in a process called

horizonalization. Moustakas (1994) then refers to a process in which statements of less

significance are reduced so that clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents can occur.

A mix of in vivo Coding and themeing the data phenomenologically, as described by Saldaña

(2021), was used to code meaningful statements within the interview transcriptions before

analysis. Coding procedures and descriptions were documented in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet

for reference. The research questions regarding teacher perceptions and lived experiences served

as a guiding force in identifying themes during interview analysis. Once hand-coded and the

final identification of invariant constituents was made, I constructed individual textual

descriptions using participant quotes, followed by a textual-structural description to capture the

"meanings and essences of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). In the process, I

organized statements into meaningful groups. After developing a complex description of the

meanings and essence of the phenomenon, I synthesized the interviews and used the identified

themes to triangulate the data collected from other sources.

Document Analysis

Diaries or journals provide "reflective accounts of human experiences that are of

phenomenological value" (van Manen, 1990, p. 73). Because participants may encounter new

experiences while participating in the study or reflect on their experience after the initial

interview, I asked participants to keep a journal. Field issues related to comfortability with

journaling and confusion on what to write (Creswell & Poth, 2018) were lessened with the

provision of journaling options agreed upon between the researcher and participant and a list of optional journaling topics. Participants were able to choose between handwritten journals, video journaling, or a secure electronic journaling method. Participants were given a list of ideas (see Appendix D) on what to write about, including, but not limited to, reflections on collaborations between co-teachers, experiences with students with EBD, sources of training or professional development that may arise, and general reflections related to the phenomenon or sparked by the initial interview. Participants were not limited to the provided journal prompts and were encouraged to write as they wished so long as it pertained to the phenomenon. I asked participants to provide a minimum of two journal entries and a maximum of five journal entries per week for three weeks. I asked participants for three weeks of data to allow plenty of time to reflect on their personal experiences while respecting the amount of time the task will require so as not to burden participants or reduce their motivation to participate. Participants were encouraged to use a mixture of words, pictures, personal illustrations, or other media to add to the depth of meaning and understanding of their experience. I sent an informal reminder email one time each week to remind participants of the value their journaling would bring to the study and again at the end of week three to arrange a collection method (if needed) convenient for them.

Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan

The document data analysis followed the same format as the interview analysis, relying on Moustakas' (1994) methods. After adding to the epoché any additional reductions of personal experiences during the review of the documents, I listed and grouped significant statements across collected documents in the horizonalization (Moustakas, 1994) before reducing and eliminating statements that served the purpose of describing the phenomenon in any capacity, or

that were overlapping. Using the identified themes from the interview analysis, I continued

clustering and thematizing data gained from the documents, noting if new themes surfaced. The

research questions provided a framework and purpose during the analysis phase. I used the same

coding procedures described by Saldaña (2021) during the document analysis as I did during the

interview analysis; In Vivo and Themeing the Data Phenomenologically. I used verbatim quotes

from the documents to support the themes identified. Structural and composite textural

descriptions, as described in the methods of Moustakas (1994), were constructed as part of the

analysis after a final identification of invariant constituents. The document analysis served as one

source of data triangulation and further confirmed identified themes and corroborated participant

experiences as documented in participant interviews.

Focus Groups

I organized two focus groups of participants from the initial interview as my third data

collection method and the final source for triangulation. Focus groups often encourage

participants to be more open or vulnerable with feelings and perceptions because of the level of

collaboration between participants (Gall et al., 2007). The focus groups were designed to include

four to six participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) who previously participated in individual

interviews, expressed interest in the topic of the study, shared extensive experience with the

phenomenon, and volunteered to be part of the focus group. The focus groups contained four

participants each and were organized based on the collected data from individual interviews and

reflected groupings based on perceived experience, current teaching position, or the uniqueness

of given perspectives. The focus group occurred via Microsoft Teams, and all participants agreed

to the audio and video recording with signed consent (see Appendix B). The focus group

questions (see Appendix E) were open-ended and encouraged collaborative conversations among

participants. The questions followed individual interviews, and changes were not required after initial data analysis and preliminary findings.

Focus Group Questions

1. Please briefly explain your experience with co-teaching, specifically to support the reintegration of students with EBD/at risk for EBD. (CRQ)

2. Please describe how you feel about your role and responsibilities in the co-taught model for reintegration support. (SQ1)

3. Please describe the challenges and benefits of using the co-taught model to support students with EBD/behavioral challenges. (SQ2)

4. Please describe or explain the experience of providing specialized instruction or accommodations for behavior in general education. (SQ2)

5. How do you perceive the co-taught model supports the reintegration process? (SQ2)

6. How has the experience of co-teaching influenced your perception of EBD as a disability? (SQ3)

The focus group questions were semi-structured and provided to both focus groups, allowing for a deeper exploration of previously explored concepts in the individual interviews. Question one provides background on participant experiences and opens the group conversation to initial demographic information. Focus group question two targets research sub-question one and prompts conversations regarding co-teacher roles, responsibilities, and relevant perceptions or feelings towards the respective roles and responsibilities. Gaining an understanding of how the co-taught model functions for different co-teachers will help paint the picture of the experiences of individuals and collectively. The question also sparked a collaborative conversation about how the co-taught model was used among different schools in the same district and the resulting

opinions and perspectives of the co-teachers. Further, understanding teachers' perceptions helps

stakeholders understand how they perceive attributing factors (Weiner, 1972) and enables them

to predict teacher behaviors in the future (Ajzen, 1991). Questions three through five sought to

gain further descriptions of the experiences in the co-taught model to support the reintegration of

students with EBD/behavioral challenges, specifically as related to the general education

perspective. Special education teachers and general education teachers can describe how the

setting impacts the co-taught model or students. Finally, question six targets research sub-

question three and seeks to explore educators' perceptions of the disability category of EBD and

whether it has changed as a result of the co-taught model for inclusive practices through

reintegration. I was looking to understand how the inclusion of students with EBD/behavioral

challenges and co-teaching has impacted teachers' attitudes toward inclusion or towards EBD as

an exceptionality. Teacher attitudes and perspectives have been shown to impact students in the

classroom (Scanlon et al., 2020), so understanding teacher perceptions and their perceived

attributing factors (Weiner, 1972) were essential to this phenomenological study.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

The focus groups were transcribed verbatim using the visual recording to determine who

made specific significant statements. After transcription, I provided participants with focus group

transcriptions to ensure accuracy during the member-checking process. My analysis of focus

group transcriptions followed the methods described by Moustakas (1994) and Saldaña (2021)

used in the individual interview and document analysis mentioned above. The research questions

were targeted in the focus group questions and thus helped drive the intent of my analysis during

this stage. From each transcription, I first listed and grouped significant statements through the

process of horizonalization (Moustakas, 1994). After the reduction and elimination process, I

clustered significant statements to thematize, noting if new themes surfaced that did not come up in previous data sources. I finally identified invariant constituents to add to the individual textual description of participants (Moustakas, 1994). I then constructed an individual textural description through the process of imaginative variation as described by Moustakas (1994), which allowed for the synthesis of contexts through the use of imagination to lead to the understanding of "meanings and essences of the experience" (p. 121). Finally, I constructed a textural-structural description using identified themes and invariant constituents, capturing the meaning and essence (Moustakas, 1994) of using the co-taught model to include students, through the reintegration process, with/at risk for EBD in the general education setting.

Data Synthesis

Moustakas (1994) describes the final step in the phenomenological research study as the "integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (p. 100). After hand-coding and deep analysis of each data source framed by the research questions, I triangulated the findings across sources and identified any overlapping or corroborating themes. I created visual diagrams representing relationships between emerging concepts and drafted statements defining patterns in identified themes across data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using a foundation of the individual accounts of the experience, I developed a composite description and thematic analysis of the lived experiences of educators using the co-teaching model to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD in general education classrooms who have previously been served in more restrictive placements.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the data collection and the following analysis was a priority in this study. I maintained trustworthiness as described in the following sections using the terms for qualitative validity and reliability coined by Lincoln and Guba (1985); credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Qualitative research is interpretive (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019); thus, to increase reader confidence and establish authenticity, several measures to build trustworthiness were taken throughout the study phases.

Credibility

The approaches for collecting and analyzing phenomenological data require strategic effort to build credibility. Credibility in qualitative research parallels the internal validity of quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline several techniques for establishing credibility, or trust in the trueness, of qualitative study findings. I used three techniques to establish credibility: member checking, triangulation of multiple data sources, and clarifying researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member Checking

Collected data and subsequent analysis, interpretations, and transcriptions were reviewed by participants in the process of member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to member checking as "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Member checking allows consumers confidence in the accuracy of the portrayal of the experience. Further, through the member-checking process, participants could provide commentary, correct any errors, or air grievances (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition to recording participant approval of data continuously throughout the study, member checking

allowed for the possibility of calling to the participant's mind new information or memories about the phenomenon.

Triangulation

Data collection through three different sources (interviews, diaries, and focus groups) allowed for data triangulation and the identification of themes across sources. Triangulation of data provided corroborating evidence for thematic significance and confidence in the accuracy of the account of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I analyzed three data sources (personal interviews, documents, and focus groups) to find evidence to support themes, thus allowing a more accurate and credible account of the thematic analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Contextual validation and identification of ambiguous information were assessed across three data sources focused on collecting the same information, leading to more credible study findings (Diesing, 1972, as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

External Audit

I obtained a research expert, my chair, to review the various data collection methods and analyses outside the study. External auditors who review and report the strengths and weaknesses of the study allow for a greater level of accuracy (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) removed from researcher bias. The external auditor chosen for the study knows phenomenological research methodology, has a background in the subject matter, and has experience as an auditor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The external auditor reviewed the data for logical inferences, the appropriateness of identified themes, and the level of study credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2019). The auditor evaluation process is referred to as an inquiry audit, where feedback assures an alliance between study design, procedures, and findings.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe transferability as the ability to extend conclusions to other situations, times, or people. To build transferability, or "make transferability judgments possible" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316), I constructed a rich description of the phenomenon (the experience of co-teaching to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD in the general education classroom who have previously been served in a more restrictive placement) through varied data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My semi-structured interview protocol, diary/journal, and focus group sequence allowed data to build and richly describe the participant's experience with the phenomenon. The information gained during the study may impact local decisions and supports and be used in future studies focused on building effective support for students with/at risk for EBD.

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the consistency of findings as supported by the "process of the inquiry" (p. 318). The description of my procedures for the conduction of the study and subsequent analysis is such that it allows for future replication. "Both the dependability and confirmability are established through an auditing of the research process" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 256; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, an external audit conducted by my committee reviewed my study process and subsequent findings to assess its adequacy.

Confirmability

A study's confirmability is measured by the degree to which the researcher remains neutral, and findings are clearly linked to the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As previously stated, Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the auditing process as a main method of confirmability. In addition to using an experienced external auditor, I triangulated data across sources, sought

participant feedback through a member-checking process as described above, and included a

reflexive description through an epoché (Moustakas, 1994).

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study. Before data

collection, I obtained IRB approval and secured further permission from the Southern Oak

district and local school authorities. Obtained permissions are stored electronically in password-

protected files on a password-protected computer for later review or when needed for three years

after collection. Once permissions were secured, as part of recruitment measures, I fully

disclosed the purpose of the proposed study and informed potential participants that engagement

was voluntary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I informed participants of the potential risks and

possible benefits of their voluntary participation. Potential risks for participants included possible

loss of confidentiality, emotional anxiety or pressure to participate, and possible triggering of

previous negative experiences with the phenomenon in question. Possible benefits included

gaining additional information and perspective upon completing the study that may aid in

serving future students more inclusively and building a network of co-teachers in similar

positions. I stored confirmation of participant consent and maintained the confidentiality of the

site and participants electronically in password-protected files on a password-protected computer

and will continue to store the information for three years upon the completion of the study. I used

pseudonyms for all locations and participants where names were required throughout the study,

as true anonymity was unattainable due to the face-to-face nature of the data collection.

I shared the collected data and analysis with participants through the member-checking

process. External auditing reviewed the analysis for potential researcher bias and adherence to

proper research protocols (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Upon completion of the study's data

collection and reporting phases, I will provide copies of the reports to participants, and proof of ethical compliance will be afforded to those interested through written disclosure statements (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of elementary educators in a large suburban district who have engaged in the co-teaching model to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD from self-contained classrooms to the general education classroom. The study used three data collection sources for triangulation (personal interviews, documents, and focus groups) from 10 participants who met the criteria in the Southern Oak school district (a pseudonym), a large suburban school district in a southeastern U.S. state. My philosophical assumptions are outlined and were considered when building the epoché and throughout each stage of the research process. The chosen data collection methods allowed participants to share personal experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon through personal connection and reflective processing and provide the detailed descriptions necessary in a transcendental phenomenological study. The data triangulation, followed by rigorous analysis and synthesis as Moustakas (1994) described, led to a detailed and comprehensive composite description of elementary teachers' experience using the co-taught model to include students with/ at risk for EBD in the general education setting. Throughout the description of methods and overall design of the study in Chapter Three, I carefully noted measures to establish the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study results will provide insight and possible benefits to future decision-making in special education concerning students with/at risk for EBD or future studies on co-teaching.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of elementary educators in a large suburban district who have engaged in the co-teaching model to support the reintegration of students with/ at risk for EBD from self-contained classrooms to the general education classroom. Chapter Four provides a narrative description of each participant, using pseudonyms and a visual representation of participant demographics critical to the study. Chapter Four also describes themes that arose during data analysis and concludes with findings related to the research questions seeking to describe the lived experience of the phenomenon.

Participants

After sending my recruitment email to co-teachers whose principals agreed to be part of my study, 12 participants responded and met the study criteria. Of the 12 potential participants, one participant withdrew consent, and saturation was observed after data collection from 10 participants. All 10 participants were either special or general education teachers in the Southern Oak school district and have engaged in the co-teaching model to reintegrate at least one student from the small group behavior setting within the last two academic years. Brief demographic information is outlined in the table below using pseudonyms for anonymity, and a more detailed description of each participant follows.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Years as a Co-Teacher	Position	Grade Level of inclusion
Alice	21	1	General Educator	1
Anna	15	1	General Educator	K
Cathy	26	6	Special Educator	K
Gwen	13	3	General Educator	4
Jordyn	7	5	General Educator	5
Linda	20	15	Special Educator	K/5
Lucille	16	5	General Educator	2
Sara	17	1	General Educator	3
Susan	16	15	General Educator	K
Teagan	8	8	Special Educator	5

Alice

Alice is a general education teacher with 21 years of teaching experience and is currently serving in a first-grade classroom within the Southern Oaks school district. She has a wide range of teaching experience across the elementary grades, including having taught in kindergarten and fifth grade and as a math instructional specialist. Alice's experience with co-teaching to support students with disabilities is recent and ongoing, with only one year of experiencing this phenomenon, especially when discussing reintegrating students from the small group behavior

support classroom. Alice has her specialist degree in early childhood education and strongly

desires to make all students feel welcome in her classroom. She recognizes the struggle of

inclusion while also protecting the educational experience for typically developing peers, stating,

"I want them included as much as possible as long as it doesn't impact themselves or the other

kids." Furthermore, Alice notes that the reintegration experience can be quite "exciting."

Anna

Anna is a veteran teacher in the Southern Oaks school district with her master's degree

and 15 years of teaching experience, much of which was in a general education kindergarten

classroom. Anna has one year of experience working with students with disabilities in the co-

taught classroom model. During her year of experience, she collaborated with a special education

teacher to support two students with significant behavioral concerns in the general education

setting. Anna noted the benefits of the process for students reintegrating into the general

education setting but made sure to point out that learning to be in a co-taught model for the first

time "was something that was kind of difficult to manage because it was all new" and perceived

to be more so because she "did not receive any training before starting."

Cathy

Cathy is a veteran special education teacher in the Southern Oaks school district with

experience in surrounding counties as a general and special education teacher. With 26 years of

experience and retirement on the horizon, she has been happy in a kindergarten classroom as part

of the same co-teaching team for the last five years. Her experience with reintegrating students

and alternatively documenting the need for more restrictive placement is extensive, noting

experiences that were "ideal" and others that involved instances where she received extensive

physical aggression from children in the classroom, such as being "hit, punched," and "bit."

Because she has been at the same school and the same role for some years, Cathy also expressed

pride in students she previously served in kindergarten but are now doing well and able to

express themselves in older grades.

Gwen

Gwen has taught in a couple of schools in grades pre-k, third, and fourth during her 13-

year career as a general education teacher. For the last two years, Gwen has been the general

education teacher in a co-taught fourth-grade classroom. Gwen sees inclusion as a responsibility

of the general education teacher and an expectation in the public education system, stating, "I

don't even know, like, I'm just like here" when asked about her philosophy related to the

inclusion of students with disabilities. It was evident that opposing viewpoints were not

something she considered. When speaking specifically about students reintegrating into her

classroom, most of her concerns were regarding the frustration around things out of the teacher's

control, such as students being "absent a lot" or "going through a lot of medication changes." In

the big picture of her experience co-teaching to support reintegration, she felt that students with

EBD/at risk for EBD are typically ready for the process, so much so that they are "not our

biggest issue" and that the co-teaching team "have so many more issues" such as other students

who may need more intensive interventions for academic or behavioral deficits.

Jordyn

Jordyn is in her seventh year of teaching and her fifth year as part of a co-teaching team

in the Southern Oaks school district. Jordyn has her specialist degree in early childhood

education and received her ESOL endorsement. Jordyn considers herself an advocate for all

learners and repeatedly reiterated that "just because they are special education does not mean that

they cannot work." She holds high expectations for all of her students and works with her co-

teacher to support the varying needs of students in their classroom. Jordyn spoke of her journey

using the co-taught model, noting that her first year "was my most difficult year teaching

honestly because when I was going to be in co-taught, I didn't really understand that I would get

EBD students, like, that wasn't explained to me very clearly." She feels she has grown to be a

more effective participant in the model and highlights the importance of collaborating with her

co-teacher in increasing her confidence and effectiveness as a teacher.

Linda

Linda is a special education teacher with "over 20 years" of experience in small group

and co-teaching environments. Linda has taught students with varying exceptionalities and in

grades as young as kindergarten up to fifth grade, some high school, and even served as an

adjunct instructor at the college level. Linda believes "that every student deserves the chance to

be successful" and stated, "I choose to do what I do because I feel that every person deserves the

opportunity to learn." As a special educator, Linda has several co-teaching experiences,

including her most recent working to reintegrate students with/at risk for EBD with general

educators who are new to the experience of co-teaching. She noted that the reintegration process

"is certainly a happy, happy thing that they get what they have worked hard to earn, that

opportunity."

Lucille

Lucille has served the last five years, out of her 16-year career, as the general education

teacher on a co-teaching team in second grade in the Southern Oaks school district. She noted

that being with the same co-teacher for so long is a "nice thing" and has been part of what keeps

her happy in the position. Lucille explains the perception of co-teaching to reintegrate students

from the small group behavior setting to be an equal partnership where "things overlap a little

bit" and is "probably the best way to try to enter them back in." While Lucille generally feels positive about the experience, she does not feel like part of the process, noting that "they basically just tell us that they're, you know, looking to push the kid out" and "it's not really like my call or anything, so…" As a general note, it was obvious Lucille felt pride in her co-teaching team and made sure to give acknowledgment to her special educator peer who has extensive experience from whom she has learned.

Sara

Sara presented with an intriguing co-teaching experience, having been new to the co-teaching model as a general educator paired with a relatively new special educator working to reintegrate three students and already serving four other students with/ at risk for EBD who previously exited small group behavior settings or were in the process of placement considerations. Sara is a veteran teacher with extensive experience ranging from serving as a paraprofessional in a special needs preschool and a mild-intellectual disability classroom to a general educator in intermediate elementary grades. Sara expressed having "a big heart from special ed," and that her outlook on inclusion is "really basic and simple, I believe that all children, you know, can grow and learn, you know, whatever kind of circumstances they're given, I've seen, you know, great growth." She saw her role as a co-teacher as one that advocates for students but that without training, the new experience was "incredibly hard" and "challenging in so many different ways." In speaking and reflecting on some of the students she helped reintegrate during the past academic year, Sara became overwhelmed with emotion when recognizing she was "the one to help them" and more so when thinking back to moments "when you see that they're successful."

Susan

In her 16th year of teaching, Susan has served as the general-education side of a co-teaching team in kindergarten for all but three of those years. Susan recognized that in other schools, many teachers prefer not to be part of a co-teaching team but stated, "I love doing it" and "I've done it for so many years, I don't mind doing it at all, I enjoy it." Susan believes in the power of inclusion and that all students can learn. She has been part of the same co-teaching team for the last five years, speaking highly of her co-teacher and saying that reintegration is just a small part of the experience. Susan attributes the success of her co-teaching team to the effectiveness, and collaborative nature of the small group EBD teacher at her school, who she says is "very good about just coming and saying, hey, I think this kid's ready, can we try?" making her feel part of the decision. Despite the increased risk of experiencing aggressive external behaviors from students when co-teaching to support reintegration, she painted the experience as positive, making sure to note that she thinks "it helps them to be more successful like I said, the more hands on deck, I feel like, the better opportunity these kids have."

Teagan

Teagan is in her eighth -year as a special educator and is currently serving in a fifth-grade co-taught classroom. She spokes about how she works hard to establish relationships with her students and even more so to grow as an educator alongside her co-teacher, who she has been paired with for seven years. She referred to her general education co-teacher as "phenomenal" and "open-minded." Teagan's perspective of the co-taught model to support the reintegration of students from the small group behavior setting is optimistic. She is passionate about creating space for co-teachers to receive training together. Hence, the relationship within the co-taught model, she perceives, feels more equally balanced. She noted that special educators receive

repetitive training but also feels that "this is our world, this is what we love, this is what we do, we choose to be here because we love it, please start talking to our gen-ed peers." In her seven-year relationship with her co-teacher, she has developed a deep bond and love of supporting all students and the process of reintegration. She attributes much of her success to the equally weighted dedication both sides of her team contribute.

Results

I collected data on participants' perspectives and lived experiences of engaging in the co-teaching model to support inclusion through the reintegration of students previously served in a self-contained behavior classroom through individual interviews, journal collection, and small focus groups. All interviews and focus groups were audio and video recorded through Microsoft Teams. Though all participants were given options for journaling methods, all participants chose to journal in a digital format, either in email, Word document, Microsoft Forms, or video recording. Files will remain in password-protected files on a password-protected computer for the required minimum of three years.

Once transcriptions were approved through the member-checking process, I familiarized myself with the data and referred to Saldaña (2021) for the first manual cycle of in Vivo coding. All collected data was organized in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and in Vivo codes were pulled and stored in columns left of the participant and focus group transcriptions. From the initial coding, I clustered the invariant constituents in alignment with the methods of Moustakas (1994) and in accordance with the description of "Themeing the data: phenomenologically" by Saldaña (2021). In this process, three themes and eight subthemes were identified and are further discussed in detail in the following sections.

Theme Development

Table 2
Themes, Subthemes, and in Vivo Evidence

Theme	Subtheme	in Vivo Evidence
Flexibility	Roles Responsibilities	Plans the lessons, look at me more, planning, give and take, control, data, communication, blurry, our room, curriculum, specializer, my class, accommodations, standards, rely on, tag-teaming, control, SPED, assistant, balance
	Student Needs	Reach their child's needs, IEP, very challenging, good process, readiness, move backwards, reintegrate slowly, pushing in, great opportunity, removed, overwhelmed, smaller setting, necessary for them socially, they need to be there
	Teacher Knowledge	Learning experience, professional development, difficult to manage, all new, revolving door, did not receive any training, after school, built in time, trying, I had no idea about EBD, learned a lot, unprepared, overwhelming
Relationships	Co-Teachers	More structured, consistency, our classroom, communication, trust, good bond, teaching styles, patience level, learned how to work together, helped me, feedback, collaborate, don't always agree, supportive, team, invested, marriage, grown together, depend on that person
	Student/Teacher Evolution	Excited, connection, proud, inclusive, best relationships, kids that need the most, love, awesome, unique, difficult, great thing to see, happy, intimidation, fear, working so closely, connection
	School Community	I did not know the teacher, parents, seamless, EBD teaching, principal, administration, higher-ups, above our heads, expectations, support system, more hands-on deck, setting up the teachers, breaking up the strong teams, consistency across settings
Advocacy	Self-Preservation	Having to slow down, and that's not fair, throw something, dreaded, heart, safety, draining, chairs being thrown, teaching being hit and kicked, temper tantrums, lost, embarrassed, voice my opinion, it's not easy, crying, cool thing to see, better teacher, survival
	Students with Disabilities	Included as much as possible, excited, those kids, something different about them, tools, frustrated, raising standards, environment, family, feel loved, spectrum, emotions first, medication, medical diagnosis, mad at the system, state, help, level, placing kids, awareness, homes, make a difference, equity, want them to stay, trauma, growth

Flexibility

In describing their lived experiences, teachers repeatedly emphasized components of co-teaching to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD that required flexibility. Teachers described a level of required flexibility regarding the roles and responsibilities of both the general and special education teacher and the ability to be flexible when addressing individual student needs. Additionally, all teacher participants stressed the level of personal flexibly extended when trying to gain teacher knowledge within the co-teaching framework. All teacher participants expressed disappointment with the lack of "professional development directly talking about co-taught" strategies that apply to both certified educators in the same room. While the need for professional flexibility was often referred to as "overwhelming," each teacher expressed a sense of pride in their ability to be flexible.

Roles and Responsibilities

Co-teaching to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD means flexibility in the roles and responsibilities of the collaborating teachers. Regardless of title, all participants discussed the frequent need to be flexible with their roles and responsibilities. Alice and Anna, who have had minimal experience with the phenomenon, spoke about their difficulty navigating their roles and responsibilities as they changed so frequently. Anna spoke about being uncomfortable not knowing her role as a general education teacher in addressing and correcting student behavior for reintegrating students. Alice, a general education teacher, reported focusing on being the content expert and relying on the special educator in the room to identify and "reach their child's needs" according to their IEP. Alice admitted that although she wants an equal balance between teachers in the room, students tend to look more to her as the main teacher in the classroom. This dynamic was common across participants, but a pattern of a more seamless

distribution of roles and responsibilities, regardless of how often they changed daily or moment to moment, was seen in co-teaching pairs that have been together for a few years. Cathy and Susan work together as co-teachers, and both reported that they "teach a lot together," often "interjecting" one another and tag-teaming different subjects. Because of the high need for roles and responsibilities to be flexible, the concept was addressed again in the focus groups. Both focus groups discussed how frequently teachers need to be flexible in the classroom, again bringing up that teachers new to the model find it hard to "trust" their new co-teacher, and the added stress of no common planning for some was "very challenging." Sara reported that her special education co-teacher was both new to her and the profession, and she found it "challenging to trust somebody else" and that the flexibility she had to maintain in her role and responsibilities of the general education side of the co-teaching team was "incredibly overwhelming." Alternatively, Teagan, a special education teacher who has taught with her co-teacher for several years, spoke of her experience and those she has witnessed. Teagan reported that the flexibility of roles and responsibilities was so critical and that both teachers need to be on the same page to avoid what she has witnessed as one teacher taking the lead while the other is treated like an "assistant" or a "guest in [the general education teacher's] room."

Student Needs

The varying level of student needs seen in the classroom among those reintegrating was commonly discussed across all data collections. According to participants, co-teaching to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD means being flexible in addressing student needs. Anna discussed experiences where the student experienced "difficulty regulating." Despite the mutual desire for the student to be "part of [her] classroom," Anna needed to be flexible in how that child's needs were met. In some instances, additional adults were required to

support that student; in others, it was a change of strategy or environment. Cathy, a veteran

teacher, also discussed the flexibility needed when students require medication to support

behavioral or emotional regulation. Several other participants also discussed the flexibility

required in navigating outside forces such as medical diagnosis, family pressures or

relationships, and medications. Cathy further described a time when the student's need was so

great it "took [her] an hour and a half to finally get to the classroom" with a student in crisis. At

that moment, she spoke of the need for flexibility in her strategies to meet that student's need in

a crisis. In another instance, it was truancy that she needed to address or that the student just

needed positive adult attention. When Gwen discussed the flexibility around addressing student

needs, however, she reported that it is not typically the students reintegrating from small group

behavior settings that require the most attention from her. She noted that she needs to stay

prepared for if/when those students require more from her. She was not alone in thinking this;

three other participants stated that after COVID, behavior across all students has been drastically

different than in the past. Post-COVID student needs were also addressed in one of the focus

groups, where the theme of being flexible regarding student needs was further cemented.

Teacher Knowledge

During every individual interview, co-teaching to support reintegration also meant being

flexible in one's attainment of teacher knowledge. No participant in the study reported any

teacher preparation or professional development on either engaging with the co-teaching model

or reintegrating students with/at risk for EBD from a self-contained behavior setting. Lucille, a

general education teacher, reported that she relies on her special education teacher, who has more

years of teacher experience. She is grateful for the knowledge she gained by working closely

with another certified teacher; however, she and several other participants would have welcomed

more focused training and support. When addressing teacher knowledge and the need for flexibility, Teagan responded by saying, "Can I, please get on this soapbox? Here I go, scraappe, [animating sound] stepping up. I am so incredibly tired and please have my voice be heard" to demonstrate how intensely she believes that joint professional learning is a critical step in supporting the co-teaching model. As a special education teacher, Teagan reported how flexible she had to be when working alongside her co-teacher. She and her co-teacher learned how to reintegrate students successfully. Her thoughts are echoed by other participants, such as Jordyn, who reflected on this in her journaling with a profound realization that she had not had any "proper professional development regarding how to handle those students" or for co-teaching in general. Jordyn was required to be flexible, meet with other educators after contract hours, and seek knowledge independently. With her minimal experience with the phenomenon, Sara reported that despite her grasping for more knowledge and her ability to be flexible in where it was attained, she would have welcomed more structured support and teacher training for all components of co-teaching and reintegration.

Relationships

All participants spoke of the varying levels of relationships involved in the facilitation of co-teaching to support the reintegration of students from the small group behavior setting. Therefore, co-teaching for reintegration means forming relationships. Regardless of title, co-teachers spoke of the importance and time it takes to develop a relationship between themselves and the co-teacher in the general education setting. Some participants have had the opportunity to engage consistently in the co-teaching model for several years. Others shared that switching teams each year is an expectation upheld at their local school. Co-teachers share the benefits and concerns of the time it takes to establish the "bond" required to achieve what they consider

successful in the co-teaching model. Additionally, each participant discussed, in detail, specific student/teacher relationships they formed when facilitating reintegration, as well as the expected and unexpected relationships established among the school community, such as EBD teachers, parents, and administrators.

Co-Teachers

One of the many relationships that come with the phenomenon of co-teaching to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD is the one formed between the two certified teachers in the co-teaching model. Unanimously, participants reported that the relationship between co-teachers sets the tone and, to some degree, predicts the success of the reintegration process. Participants new to the phenomenon note the difficulty in getting to know one another's "teaching style" and "patience" in addressing behavioral needs. Still, participants overwhelmingly agreed that they ultimately developed a "deep bond" with their co-teacher over the shared experience. Linda and Anna, who did not report the experience to be overly positive, still emphasized the respect they gained for their co-teacher and the bond they formed. Alice, in reflection, appreciated the relationship formed with the co-teacher even more because "if things do go south, you have someone else in the room," and the comfort that brings her feeds the mutual respect and highlights the importance of the formed relationship.

Further, the participants who have been in co-teaching relationships for five or more years each touched on how critical the relationship has become to their career and position in the co-teaching model to support reintegration. Teagan, Cathy, and Susan reported feeling this so deeply that their continuing engagement with co-teaching hinges on keeping their co-teaching pair together. Part of this deep connection stems from the willingness to "grow together" and accept the flexibility mentioned above required in the distribution of roles and responsibilities.

Student and Teacher

Co-teaching to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD is an evolution

of student and teacher relationships. Except for Gwen, all participants reported an initial

excitement about playing a part in providing an opportunity to students who are reintegrating at

the elementary level. Gwen remained neutral when discussing elements of building relationships,

noting that in the initial stages of reintegration, she felt "nervousness" but that the concept of

including students with disabilities, regardless of disability label, is so natural for her that it was

difficult to speak on it in a way that would shed light on the experience to an outsider, such as

myself. Other participants like Alice, Anna, Jordyn, and Cathy each reported on challenges to the

initial building of student and teacher relationships, such as outward behaviors like physical

aggression from students, but ultimately their dedication and persistence led to a student/teacher

relationship they will always remember. Looking back on some of her experiences, Cathy

reported intense behaviors that she helped a particular student work through that she now sees in

the hallways of her school and lovingly refers to as very bright and a student that she "loves." In

discussing the student/teacher relationships, Sara was brought to tears in her interview. She feels

the relationship "is rewarding, so they may not reach the goal of being, you know, back into a

regular classroom, or gen-ed classroom, but just that relationship is still there, and it's still very

important that they know I cared." Sara further clarified that because of the level of need

demonstrated by the students with/at risk for EBD that were integrating into her classroom,

navigating both the dynamics of the general education classroom and relationships with two

teachers, she worked so "closely with a child who wants it [reintegration] so badly" that the

relationship formed was deep and unlike other student/teacher relationships. Evidence of the

importance of student/teacher relationships was further highlighted in the journals completed,

where specific memories of students were further defined with senses of pride and joy that evoked, in many cases, extreme emotional responses.

School Community

One of the many levels of relationships that come with co-teaching to support the reintegration of students with/at risk of EBD in the general education setting is that of the school community. This particular phenomenon means uniquely engaging in the school community. Participants discussed the greater support and connection to their administration when co-teaching for reintegration. Anna reported that the administration was fully informed of the difficulties she and her co-teacher were facing and often intervened to support the growing relationship between teachers and greater connection to students. Jordyn, Linda, and Teagan also reported a fondness for their administrators and how necessary if was for administrators to be part of the equation for reintegration to work. Outside of administration, another part of the school community essential for this phenomenon is built with the small group EBD or behavior support teacher. Gwen, Jordyn, and Alice reported prior negative experiences with small group EBD/behavior support teachers that they perceived did not respect the process or teachers involved with the reintegration journey. Alternatively, after a change was made in the schools of each of the participants, they each reported the EBD teacher as a prominent resource and a valuable part of what made reintegration possible for students. This feeling was confirmed by other participants like Teagan, who established deeper connections with her co-teacher through the "consistency and communication" and "tips and tricks" she got from the EBD teacher.

Further, a consistent expression of the EBD teacher's attentiveness to the student's readiness for reintegration was highlighted and praised. Alternatively, Lucille and Jordyn sometimes felt overwhelmed and not heard by their school community, where choices in student

placement were made without their input. More than half of the participants reported one or more

negative experiences with school community members such as administrators, co-workers, or the

small group EBD or behavior support teachers that impacted and shaped their perspectives of the

experience.

Advocacy

Teacher participants had varying experiences with co-teaching to support the

reintegration of students from the small group or self-contained behavior setting. However, to

varying degrees, all teachers expressed that co-teaching for reintegration means maintaining a

certain level of advocacy. In some instances, advocacy meant being on one's behalf and voicing

how completely burned out they were to administrators. At other times co-teachers shared the

need to advocate for inclusion and the need for others to understand the "trauma" and "whole

story" of students with the label of with/at risk of EBD. Regardless of the emotions tied to the

experience of co-teaching to support reintegration, all teachers expressed an overwhelming

excitement and joy in advocating for students and seeing growth as a result.

Self-Preservation

Co-teaching to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD means, at times,

advocating for oneself. There is a level of physical risk that can become part of the job for co-

teaching for reintegrating students prone to external expressions of behavior where participants

reported being hit, bitten, physically attacked, and verbally assaulted. Alice reported a moment in

her experience reintegrating students with/at risk for EBD that she "dreaded." Anna also

expanded on the need to advocate for her well-being due to the experience and that her "last year

took a toll on" her, further illustrating that it was "draining" both because of the students but also

because it was challenging to navigate the new relationship with her co-teacher. Sara also

resonated with those feelings and felt exasperated by the daily "list of 20 other things" to do and, at the end of the year, reported feeling "completely burned out." Her feelings were validated by other participants in the focus group who, early in their experience with co-teaching to support reintegration, felt similar feelings but have grown in their ability to self-advocate and rely more on their co-teacher and school community with more experience. Despite the potential of negative emotions or feelings to be cast upon students specifically, all participants were clear in designating any negative feelings or disappointments as part of their self-reflection and desire to become stronger educators. Part of that was recognizing and advocating for themselves.

Student

When asked for each participant's perspective of the disability category of EBD, across all data collection sources, each participant was outspoken about their position in advocating for students. Co-teaching to support reintegration is, in its simplest form, advocacy for students. Regardless of certification type, each participant strongly felt that inclusion was important. When students are ready, reintegration was perceived as a valuable part of the journey for many students with/at risk for EBD in small group behavior support classrooms. Teachers in one focus group bonded and celebrated each other's success in advocating for students. An example of such perceived success was Teagan, who persevered for students and felt pride "when they start leading the social skills," and Anna, who sought many members of the school community when advocating for more support for her students. Advocating for students for Jordyn, Cathy, and Alice goes even further, as they each discussed advocating for their students who were reintegrating by discussing and collaborating with student families. In one of the focus groups, Teagan stated, "We still do what we can to try and get them to the best place that they can be at… we can help them" when discussing their position on student advocacy. Other participants in

the focus group smiled and nodded as she spoke. In more than one of the journal responses, pictures of teachers or students dressed as superheroes were highlighted with personal explanations of how this advocacy they engage in brings pride and is a "treasure" to behold.

Outlier Data and Findings

The unexpected findings from the study that arose during triangulation and analysis are presented below. Across all three sources of data collection, individual interviews, journals, and focus groups, most data aligned with the three major themes and eight subthemes mentioned above. Despite my assumption that participants would report overly negative emotions and perceptions of their experience in alignment with the literature (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019; McKenna et al., 2021a), one true outlier finding emerged with one participant who reported that parental involvement and pressure significantly shaped their perspective and experience of co-teaching to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD into the general education setting.

While other participants reported a strong positive or negative reliance on their school community, starting with their district support supervisors down to their paraprofessionals, Jordyn expressed a significant number of negative experiences with parents of students reintegrating into her general education classroom. Jordyn could not participate in the focus group but was diligent in reporting her experience with parents in her interview and journaling. Jordyn reported that she had experienced parents who "pushed [children] out too early" and were not ready for reintegration. She struggled with feeling responsible for advocating for the struggling students. She did not feel heard by parents who pushed back due to a desire for their student to not be "in that setting anymore" and "go to their home school, so they don't have to ride the bus and like wake up so early and do all those different things." Because students who

often attend a small group or EBD "units," now referred to as programs, are often bussed to

schools with such supports, it can be considered an inconvenience to facilitate transportation. As

highlighted in the themes and subthemes, the relationships, and more specifically, the different

levels of relationships, shaped the experience or phenomenon for many teachers. However,

relationships with parents were not a shared or common thread among other participants. This

was surprising to me because the identification and reintegration process can be an emotional

one for parents, who are critical members of the IEP team.

Research Question Responses

A triangulation of data sources was reviewed and analyzed to address the research

questions that guided this study. A narrative explanation of the central research question and the

following three sub-questions are provided. Evidence from the varying data sources supplied by

participants is provided to support each of the research questions that describe the perspectives

and lived experiences of teachers engaged in the co-teaching model to support the reintegration

of elementary students with/at risk of EBD in a suburban school district.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of elementary educators in a large, suburban district who

supported the inclusion, through reintegration, of students with EBD/at risk for EBD from self-

contained classrooms using the co-teaching model?

The lived experiences of elementary educators in a large, suburban district supporting the

reintegration of students with/ at risk for EBD using the co-teaching model are varied but reveal

prominent themes of flexibility, relationships, and advocacy. In some cases, teachers request to

be part of the phenomenon of co-teaching to support reintegration, whereas, in others, it is a

requirement placed upon them by their administration. A pattern emerged among participants

who have been a part of the same co-teaching team for five or more years. All participants with

extensive experience co-teaching stated that they have requested to continue with their

engagement with the phenomenon because of the relationship with their co-teacher, regardless of

the presenting student challenges. Teagan referred to her co-teaching relationship as a

"marriage," continuously saying, "I love to say I'm in a great marriage, and I joke she's my work

wife." Like the other participants who have been with their co-teachers for many years, Teagan

reports a bond and reliability that keep them motivated in their job and advocacy for students.

Though the focus on the co-teaching model was highlighted, every participant was careful to

note that the phenomenon was not exclusive and often relied on the input of many other

members of a school community and the building of relationships with students. The word

"relationships" was mentioned by participants across all forms of data 59 times and became a

central theme to the discussions in focus groups. Uniformly, all participants felt that the co-

teaching model is a valuable framework for supporting inclusion through reintegration for

students with/at risk for EBD and can be successful for many students who are ready for that

experience. All participants also felt that whether they are currently experiencing the

phenomenon or not, they would engage in it again, which lends to the idea that it is a generally

positive experience even though, at times, it is perceived as "overwhelming."

Sub-Question One

What are the perceived roles and responsibilities, respective to position or title, of

elementary educators participating in the co-teaching model when reintegrating students with

EBD?

The perceived roles and responsibilities changed slightly among participants with

minimal or significant experience with the phenomenon. It was generally understood that general

education teachers are considered content experts and are ultimately the "teacher of record," as Teagan described, otherwise referred to as the homeroom teacher. The study's special and general education teachers reported that special education teachers were mainly responsible for students' IEPs, accommodations, and specialized instruction for academics and behavior. Teachers such as Cathy, Teagan, Lucille, Jordyn, and Susan reported a fluidity in their roles and responsibilities in delivering instruction and support. The term "tag-teaming" or "tapping out" was often used to describe the transition of responsibilities between teachers. Teachers with less experience with co-teaching to support reintegration specifically reported significant levels of confusion, or as Sara described it, "didn't feel like we were on the same page" with roles and responsibilities. Anna described not feeling confident in her role, being new to the experience, stating, "I felt like I couldn't correct his behaviors." Teachers with minimal but recent experience felt that there was more potential for the roles and responsibilities to become clear after speaking to those with more experience during the focus groups. Sara responded with "I'm jealous" after hearing of the extended time a co-teaching team has been together. Teachers also unanimously agreed that professional development concentrated on this area would have been welcomed and potentially lessened their overwhelming feelings during their first year of co-teaching.

Sub-Question Two

What are elementary general education teachers' lived experiences and subsequent perceptions towards using the co-teaching model to support students with EBD access to the general curriculum?

Every participant, regardless of certification type, reported that the co-teaching model was, in their perspective, superior to any other method they have heard of to support students with/at risk of EBD access to the general curriculum. Susan stated having another certified

teacher in the room, rather than a paraprofessional, "helps them to be more successful," and she

reiterated, "the more hands on deck, I feel like, the better opportunity these kids have." Lucille

also highlighted the collaborative nature of co-teaching that allows for more instruction and

scaffolding for students reintegrating who are attempting to establish relationships with their

typically developing peers. The value of the additional certified teacher was further highlighted

when Gwen specifically stated that she would not support reintegration if it were not for the

model and that "there's already way too many expectations, and then to add something else on to

your plate, it's just ridiculous" when entertaining the thought of such models as consultation to

support reintegration. Because perspectives are overwhelmingly positive towards the model, it

does not mean that teachers do not feel the need to advocate for a break or request not to be part

of a co-teaching team in the future. Sara reported feeling "overwhelmed" and "burned out"

across all data sources, and in the focus group, other participants validated her feelings and

experience without any noticeable judgment.

Sub-Question Three

　　　　How do co-teaching experiences influence elementary teachers' perception of EBD as a

disability?

　　　　During individual interviews, all participants reported an unchanged perspective or

perception of EBD as a disability. Cathy pointed out the potential for comorbidity or other

factors such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactive disorder) or autism to play into EBD

eligibility within the school system. She noted having to increase her teacher knowledge of

handling different student needs that come along with those factors, which Linda confirmed to be

her experience over her 20+ year career. In discussing this concept with each participant,

additional outside influences such as trauma or family factors were consistently brought up, but

Teagan was the one to term this "situational EBD," where "the cards are stacked against [students]" that influence their emotional state which is then communicated in their behaviors, but that these students nonetheless represent "hope." The term "trauma" was referenced by participants 14 times across all data sources to describe their perspective of EBD as a disability category. When asked to delineate further how co-teaching specifically influenced perspective, only during the focus group, having had the time and reflection of journaling, did responses shift slightly. Anna reported that co-teaching elevated her respect for the positions held by special education teachers but that her love for students is unconditional and that the experience in co-teaching did not impact her perspective on any student, regardless of label or eligibility for services. When discussing this, Alice carefully noted that it was not co-teaching that influenced her perspective. Rather, the closeness to students allowed her to change her initial perceptions that "kids in that room were horrible" to that of "they're capable of so much more, and they're really a fun group to work with." Alice referenced the work that the small group EBD/behavior support teacher put into helping students before the reintegration process that laid the foundation for such a shift; co-teaching was not a factor in that change. Her thoughts were validated in the focus group with nods and resounding support.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

Co-teaching to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD into the general education classroom is a unique experience that affords teachers who engage with the phenomenon access to an exclusive community of educators. This study explores the lived experiences and subsequent perspectives of general and special educators in a large suburban district that heavily relies on the co-teaching model to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD in the elementary setting. A triangulation of data sources revealed three

main themes and eight subthemes. Co-teaching to support reintegration means being flexible, a theme that connects and is represented in the subthemes of roles and responsibilities, student needs, and teacher knowledge. Additionally, co-teaching to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD in the suburban elementary setting is about relationships. The theme of relationships is illustrated in the subthemes that emerged as teachers reported on the relationships that formed with their co-teachers, the school community, and the evolution of the student and teacher relationship. Finally, co-teaching to support reintegration for this population of students in this specific setting means advocacy. A theme of advocacy emerged as participants explored how they advocated for students with disabilities and the many factors influencing their educational journey. Advocacy for students with disabilities emerged as a subtheme alongside advocacy for oneself or the importance of self-preservation. Teachers' experience with co-teaching influences their engagement with advocating for their personal needs and reporting to controlling entities such as administrators when a break from engagement with the phenomenon is perceived as needed. Further, within the co-teaching model, the subtheme of self-preservation solidified when teachers reported tag-teaming or tapping out of intense moments when supporting students, speaking up for their personal needs, and allowing and "trusting" their co-teacher to take over, keeping the momentum and support in place for the student reintegrating. Overall, teachers reported an overwhelmingly positive perspective of the co-teaching model and its role in supporting reintegration for students with/at risk for EBD in the general education setting. Any memories of negative experiences with a specific co-teacher or student were not reported to cloud the overall perspective of the model. Further, no feelings of adversity towards the model were reported by any participants.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of elementary educators in a large suburban district who have engaged in the co-teaching model to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD from self-contained classrooms to the general education classroom. Districts are using the co-teaching model more in hopes of "meeting the vast range of students' learning needs" (Pizana, 2022, p. 1812), including the needs of students with/at risk of EBD who are reintegrating from high-intensity interventions found in separate or exclusive settings. The research supporting co-teaching models is growing; however, a gap exploring the lived experiences and subsequent perspectives of elementary teachers engaging in the model to support reintegration in a suburban setting was identified. Thus, the findings of my study aim to provide evidence and decrease the gap in the literature. Chapter Five provides an interpretation of the findings, a refinement of the findings as they relate to the theoretical framework, implications for practice, and a discussion of the theoretical and methodological implications. Chapter Five concludes with identified limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and a brief concluding summary.

Discussion

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived experiences and subsequent perceptions of general and special education teachers who have recently engaged in the co-teaching model to support at least one student reintegrating from an exclusive behavior setting in elementary schools across a large suburban school district. Following the transcendental phenomenological design described by Moustakas (1994), I coded collected data and identified themes. I review the main themes and subthemes, followed by my interpretation of

the findings. The theoretical connection of all themes and subthemes will also be discussed and further supported with evidence from the study. Finally, I briefly discuss the limitations, delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

This study, including data analysis, follows the systematic approach for transcendental phenomenological research as described by Moustakas (1994) and is further shaped by Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior and Weiner's (1972) attribution theory. Data was captured using individual interviews, journal collections, and focus groups. Data was triangulated, and three main themes emerged: flexibility, relationships, and advocacy. Within the three main themes, eight additional subthemes were identified. The subthemes were: roles and responsibilities, student needs, teacher knowledge, co-teachers, student/teacher evolution, school community, self-preservation, and students with disabilities. Each identified theme and subtheme were critical components of the participant's experience with the phenomenon. My interpretive framework for this study is social constructivism. Subsequently, my interpretation of the findings will be filtered through a lens that recognizes that people gain meaning and understanding through the experiences they have (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Summary of Thematic Findings

The central research question guiding my study was: What are the lived experiences of elementary educators in a large suburban district who supported the inclusion, through reintegration, of students with EBD/at risk for EBD from self-contained classrooms using the co-teaching model? Three additional sub-questions were posed to focus on the perceived roles and responsibilities of co-teachers, the lived experiences and perceptions of using the co-teaching model, and the influence of the co-teaching experience on teacher perception of EBD as a

disability seen eligible for services in the school setting. Three main themes emerged during my data analysis that were critical to the participants' experience of the phenomenon: flexibility, relationships, and advocacy. Within each theme, additional subthemes were identified.

The flexibility theme was further defined by three subthemes: roles and responsibilities, student needs, and teacher knowledge. All participants repeatedly spoke about the need for increased flexibility when co-teaching, reinforcing a common thread in available research that highlight the demand for flexibility in instructional delivery (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017). Both special and general education teachers felt that specific roles came with standard and unchanging responsibilities that aligned with their different areas of expertise, which affirmed much of the available literature (McKenna et al., 2021b; Pizana, 2022; Weiss & Glaser, 2021). However, all participants further described areas where responsibilities merged and teachers were required to be flexible, often "tag-teaming" lessons or classroom management. Evidence to support a "seamless" transition of responsibilities between teachers emerged when speaking to teacher teams working together in the model for more than five years compared to those with minimal experience. Additionally, teachers focused on the need to remain flexible in addressing student needs in the classroom, often stating that when supporting students with/at risk for EBD, "triggers" can change, and replacement behaviors enforce an evolution of needs. Finally, all participants confirmed a lack of training or professional development for the engagement in co-teaching or for the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD, thus highlighting a need to remain consistently flexible in how and where they attained the knowledge and support to increase success.

The subthemes of co-teachers, student/teacher evolution, and school community further defined the main theme of relationships. A clear divide among participants revealed a spectrum

of feelings and perspectives related to the relationship with their co-teacher. Those engaged with co-teaching for many years with the same co-teacher confirmed the benefits of the shared experience as described by Kokko et al. (2021). Alternatively, teachers with less experience with a co-teacher spoke of the many challenges they faced when navigating the new relationship in the confines of the model in front of students. An additional layer of the evolving relationships with reintegrating students presented when teachers spoke of how feelings of "uncertainty" or "nervousness" changed to hopefulness and "pride" as students became successful in their classrooms. Finally, a sub-theme of school community emerged as teachers repeatedly spoke of the relationships they formed because of the phenomenon across school members, such as the EBD teacher, administration, and paraprofessionals.

The final theme of advocacy revealed two subthemes, self-preservation and students with disabilities. Regardless of years of experience with the phenomenon, all teachers spoke of the needed level of self-advocacy they had to engage in to be what they perceived as effective teachers. For some, this meant limited time in the co-teaching model. For others, this meant shifting responsibilities within the co-teaching team or seeking additional support from the school community. Further, regardless of the length of time with the phenomenon, all participants consistently circled on the idea that they perceived themselves as advocates for students with disabilities, including students with/at risk for EBD.

Teachers' Perceptions Are Evolving. In my study, I spoke to 10 educators in a large suburban district and provided opportunities to speak about their experiences through a confidential journal collection. In each case, participants had several negative experiences with the phenomena but ultimately defined the experience with optimism. Research explores the potential pressure of subjective norms surrounding teachers' public perception of students

with/at risk for EBD and the broader concept of inclusion (Gidlund, 2018); however, my study

revealed a shift in teacher perceptions that was evident across all data sources. Even further than

the broad concept of inclusion, all participants spoke very highly of the students with/at risk for

EBD they supported during reintegration, which was in direct opposition to much of the

available research that supports a generally negative outlook or perception of students with/at

risk of EBD (de Leeuw et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2021; Knowles et al., 2020; Krämer &

Zimmermann, 2021; Scanlon et al., 2020; Zolkoski, 2019). Recent research by McGuire and

Meadan (2022) revealed findings that support those found in my study: a shift in teacher

perceptions of increased support of inclusive action and specifically of students with EBD. In the

focus groups, many teachers confirmed and agreed that they "want them" not only in their

classroom but to be successful in their classroom. Participants in my study spoke of the extent to

which they sought out additional knowledge from school community members or research in

their personal time. This additional knowledge may have impacted their perception and the

positive experiences they spoke of, which provides an additional layer of evidence for Ajzen's

(1991) theory of planned behavior. Participants with extensive experience and more knowledge

of how to support students with/at risk of EBD reintegrating through the support of the co-taught

model experienced a higher volume of positive experiences and were consequently more

optimistic about further engagement with the model.

Teachers Want to Have Input. The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) explains

the joint role motivation and ability play in engagement and behavior prediction. Perceived

behavioral control refers to the participant's "perception of ease or difficulty of performing the

behavior of interest" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 183). No participant explicitly stated that co-teaching to

support the reintegration or inclusion of a student with EBD was "easy;" however, when teachers

expressed a perceived greater level of control over how the model looked for them, they expressed a more neutral rather than negative emotion. Co-teachers who had input on who their co-teacher was or who were more involved in the reintegration process refrained from statements such as "it was way more difficult than I imagined," like other participants said when given little or no control.

Further, all co-teachers in my study that had input on who they would be paired with also had some input in the reintegration process. In all instances where teachers refrained from explicitly negative statements regarding their co-teacher or the reintegration process, they expressed an involvement with the small group EBD teacher and an opportunity to gain background knowledge of the student or "introduce" themselves. Participants explained that this helped them plan how to support the student in the general education classroom before formal reintegration. This greater level of control aligns with the theory of planned behavior in that it increased participants' perceived behavioral control and self-efficacy belief (Ajzen, 1991). The increased collaboration not only benefits teachers but collaboration between IEP members and the school community supports the greater understanding of services provided to students, and ultimately increases consistent and proper engagement of the strategies students need to succeed across settings (Walker et al., 2021). Alternatively, teachers with little or no control or input in their engagement in the co-taught model, the picking of their co-teacher, or any step of the process of reintegration unanimously agreed that the relationship with their co-teacher suffered and impacted their perception of the model and its effectiveness on the students they served.

Teachers Believe the Co-Teaching Model Has Value. This study explored the perspectives of teachers with varying experiences—those who have been with their co-teaching partner for several years and those who taught with their co-teacher for only a year. A perceived

challenge of co-teaching reported in research is the lack of time to collaborate and build

relationships (Rabin, 2020). The challenge was confirmed across all participants but greatly

reduced in co-teaching pairs working together for several years. All participants confirmed they

saw the benefit to the co-teaching model for students because of the increased support and

additional knowledge of having both a curriculum content expert and special education expert in

the room, but those who have had the time to build relationships also spoke of the value the

model had for them personally. The perception of increased value was reiterated and reinforced

when teachers spoke about the ability to plan with their co-teacher. Some participants had the

experience where the special education teacher was not offered a coinciding planning time with

their co-teacher, which they perceived decreased the model's value because the teaching pair

could not "get on the same page." When speaking of the value of the co-teaching model, 90% of

the participants referenced how much they learned from their co-teacher and that several

experiences they perceived were only possible because of the co-teaching model. For example,

Sara spoke of instances where students needed behavior support in unstructured settings. She

heavily relied on her co-teacher to "tag team" and found that the additional certified teacher was

a "huge benefit." Sara struggled greatly to form a relationship with her co-teacher, mentioning

several times that it was "difficult" or "hard" to be on the same page. Sara was a participant who

did not have the same planning time as her co-teacher. Her feelings towards the model were

generally positive but were impacted by the lack of perceived control. Her feelings were

validated by other participants in the focus groups, which reinforced the model's value because it

offered a scaffolded opportunity to reintegrate students. Hence, students were not automatically

transitioned from a small group setting with high support to a full classroom with only one

teacher.

Implications for Policy or Practice

This study's triangulation of data sources revealed practical implications for policy and practice. Southern Oaks school district relies heavily on the co-taught model to support inclusion for students with disabilities and specifically for the reintegration process for students previously served in small groups or excluded behavior settings. Because of the heavy reliance on this service provision, the teachers and other stakeholders in the Southern Oak school district stand to benefit from the findings of this study. The lived experiences and subsequent perspectives revealed in this study increase the available research that may inform future policies or practices in the district, which may subsequently help to guide the policies and practices in surrounding districts in which Southern Oaks has a large influence.

Implications for Policy

A significant implication for policy revealed in the findings supports a need for common or joint professional development for co-teachers. In this study, 100% of the participants revealed that they did not receive any training or support when implementing the co-teaching model, though they would have welcomed it. Co-teachers in this study relied on their ability to be flexible and seek knowledge across various sources without any confirmation of validity. Because of the size of Southern Oak, which serves over 111,000 students, and its reliance on the co-taught model to reintegrate students before entering high school years, the district may benefit from a policy that mandates the provision of initial and ongoing professional development and supports for teachers engaged in the co-taught model. Further, the findings support that additional policy to support teachers with reintegration processes would benefit co-teaching teams and allow them to clarify and streamline the expectations for roles and responsibilities and increase the generalization of behavior support practices across the district. Such policy may

reduce the negative findings in the research that have highlighted the struggle southern U.S. teachers face when implementing behavioral supports and better equip teachers with knowledge (King et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2017; Sutherland et al., 2018).

Implications for Practice

The findings in this study revealed implications for practice that school stakeholders may take into consideration when engaging in the use of the co-teaching model in general and when specifically supporting the reintegration of students from self-contained behavior settings. Because of the intimate nature in which co-teachers must work, administrators should establish a practice for seeking teacher input when pairing co-teachers together so that there is some level of perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991) and increased opportunity to reap the benefits of the shared experience of establishing the co-teaching relationship (Kokko et al., 2021). Difficulties may arise when co-teaching pairs hold opposing pedagogical beliefs or personalities that are hard to overcome (Rabin, 2020); thus, providing a level of input may help to reduce these factors in co-teaching teams. This practice may also remove obstacles related to teacher relationships so that more focus is placed on providing student support rather than teacher factors, increasing student opportunities to succeed. Teachers who are more willing to engage in co-teaching to support the reintegration of students may work to reduce the problem of underrepresentation of students with/at risk of EBD in the general education setting.

Additionally, when establishing a building schedule, educators should consider the practice of creating a shared planning time for co-teachers. Co-teachers require a unique level of collaboration and instructional delivery flexibility (Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017), which requires time to establish within the relationship. Such factors as limited planning time greatly impact teacher ability to function cohesively, which the co-taught model requires (Rabin, 2020). If

paired with ongoing professional development, collaborative planning time may allow teachers

to extend and use what they are learning during the provided training. Four of the participants in

this study have had co-teaching experiences that did not allow for common planning time, stating

they had to rely on "little moments in the day" and that it was "hard to communicate" or have a

"common goal" without the set time to plan together. However, the six participants with

common planning were able to express how the time allowed co-teachers to be "on the same

page." Additionally, common planning also provided time for special education teachers to

educate general education teachers on the accommodations students need and time to explain

how they could "specialize instruction and behavior supports" for those students reintegrating.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This transcendental phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences and

subsequent perspectives of teachers engaging in the co-taught model to support the reintegration

of students with/at risk for EBD previously served in specialized or self-contained settings. The

study presents both theoretical and empirical implications. A discussion of the theoretical

implications is presented first, followed by an exploration of the empirical implications.

Theoretical Implications

This study was shaped by the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and Weiner's

attribution theory (1972). The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) "provides a useful

framework for addressing the relationship between attitude and behavior" (Spektor-Levy&

Yifrach, 2019, p. 743). The teacher participants in this study spoke on their intent to continue

their engagement in the co-teaching model to support reintegration and how it is contingent on

their paired co-teacher. The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen,1991) also incorporates perceived

behavioral control, which teachers in this study affirmed impacted their intent to continue the

behavior (engagement in the model), as continuing with their current co-teacher made

engagement in the model either more enjoyable or easier to handle (attitude). Furthermore, as

Ajzen (1991) described intent as influenced by attitude and subjective norms, the theory is

extended in this study to highlight the possibility that the subjective norms presented by their co-

teacher may also influence intent. Lastly, the theory of planned behavior is often referred to in

studies that explore teacher behaviors and behavioral intentions (Spektor-Levy & Yifrach, 2019),

confirming alignment with my study.

Weiner's attribution theory (1972) was also used to frame this study. The core principle

of Weiner's attribution theory is that perception of the behavior, if negative, is often because of

an outside influence or source. If the outcome is perceived as positive, it is often attributed to

one's abilities or talents. This study could not confirm complete alignment with the foundations

of this theory. Many participants with positive experiences discussed how the relationship

between co-teachers influenced their positive perspective of the model and their willingness to

continue their engagement. Therefore, it wasn't perceived to be their ability or talent that they

attributed success to, but rather the collaborative effort of the co-teaching team. Conversely,

negative experiences within the co-teaching model were expressed in this study as a result of

outside sources, such as the perceived ineffectiveness of the co-teacher, the small group EBD

teacher, or the students themselves. The lack of perceived negative outcomes due to one's

contributions aligns with Weiner's attribution theory (1972).

Empirical Implications

This study was designed to close an existing gap in the literature that explores teachers'

lived experiences and subsequent perceptions of engaging in the co-teaching model to reintegrate

students from self-contained behavior settings in a suburban elementary setting. Much of the

available literature explores teacher perceptions and attitudes toward students with EBD, the co-teaching model, and other influencing teacher factors (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Hind et al., 2019; Hott et al., 2019) but fails to examine the unique position co-teachers face when using the model explicitly for reintegration for students who have or are at risk for EBD. This study's findings extend those found across research and situate them in the context of the phenomenon described. This study narrows the focus to elementary educators in a large suburban setting and reinforces the perceived benefits of the co-teaching model described in some literature (Kokko et al., 2021; Campbell & Jeter-Iles, 2017). Further, this study provides insight into perspectives that may work to influence practices that may reduce the challenges teachers face and are highlighted in the research.

Empirically, this study also offers findings to support changing perspectives and attitudes of teachers towards students with/at risk for EBD. Much of the literature reinforced the concept that teachers have negative attitudes toward students with behavioral challenges (de Leeuw et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2021; Knowles et al., 2020; Krämer & Zimmermann, 2021; Scanlon et al., 2020; Zolkoski, 2019). Only limited research supported the idea that the presence of another certified teacher may mitigate some of those feelings (Gilmour & Wehby, 2019). This study's data triangulation revealed data that increases support for mitigating negative feelings towards students with EBD when collaborating with a co-teaching team. Further, this study offers findings that directly compete with the idea found in research that teacher time in the profession negatively correlates with teacher attitude and willingness to support the inclusion of students with/at risk for EBD (Hind et al., 2019). Teacher perspectives in this study revealed a greater willingness to support inclusive efforts and reintegration for students with/at risk for EBD the longer they were with their co-teaching partner.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations of the study were discovered during the research and analysis. First, to reach teacher participants, I was first required to gain permission from school leadership. The additional safeguard of principal permission reduced my access and influenced my sample size. Of the 11 school principals I contacted, only four provided permission for me to contact teachers in their building. Because my pool of participants was greatly reduced due to the limitation of permissions, I could not seek a more balanced sample with equal general and special educators. My final sample contained 10 participants, and seven were general education teachers; therefore, the perspectives offered are unequally represented. Another limitation of this study is that it solely captures the female experience and perspective, as male teachers in the elementary setting were few and either did not meet the criteria or did not respond to my recruitment attempts. I confirmed participants met inclusion criteria through my series of permissions because school administrators were required to clear my requests. However, there was a limitation to my ability to ensure that participants were honest in relaying their experiences or attitudes throughout any data sources, a common limitation of qualitative studies (Roel & Harland, 2022).

Delimitations are defined as "what a researcher includes and excludes to make a project manageable and focused on the research question" (Coker, 2022, p. 141). I chose not to include an additional participant who agreed to participate due to their extremely limited experience with the phenomenon (>3 months), though it was recent enough to fit the criteria. I felt comfortable with this decision because data already collected at that point showed signs of saturation. I chose to include participants who had experience with the phenomenon within the last two academic years and were currently employed at a Southern Oaks school district school, further limiting

participants. Participants did not have to be currently engaging in the co-teaching model to participate, thus opening the potential to explore reflective perspectives but those still relevant in today's teaching culture. Furthermore, because I chose to explore teachers in a southeast suburban setting, the ability to generalize findings is limited and may not confirm findings across other setting types. Another delimitation of the study is the purposeful decision to follow a transcendental phenomenology methodology rather than a hermeneutic. Because of this choice, despite my experience with many aspects of this phenomenon, I had to bracket my personal bias and refrain from co-constructing meaning, relying only on the meaning provided by the participants and a non-biased interpretation that followed (Moustakas, 1994).

Conclusion

The problem of underrepresentation of students with EBD in the general education setting inspired the purpose of this study. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and subsequent perspectives of general and special elementary teachers in a southeastern suburban setting engaged in the co-teaching model to support the reintegration of students with/at risk for EBD previously served in self-contained behavior settings. The study was framed by the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and Weiner's attribution theory (1972). Before data collection, a series of permissions were attained, and I engaged in the process of the epoché (Moustakas, 1994). I collected data using three sources—individual interviews, journal documents, and focus groups. Data were coded, analyzed, and triangulated, revealing three major themes and eight subthemes. Teachers reported that co-teaching to support reintegration means flexibility, flexibility in roles and responsibilities, student needs, and teacher knowledge. Co-teaching to support reintegration for this study's participants was also about relationships, relationships with their co-teacher, the evolution of the

student/teacher relationship, and the relationship with the school community. Lastly, co-teaching

in this study meant advocacy, advocacy for self, and advocacy for students with disabilities.

Overall, this study provides evidence that teachers' perspectives are evolving as more engage

with this model and support an increasingly diverse student population. Teachers want input

regarding their practices and see value in the co-teaching model. Limitations of this study

involve a limited sample of participants set in a specific population that limited the

generalizability of the findings. Future research across various demographics and subcultures

will continue to close the gap in the literature. This study also revealed that future research

focused on ideals and beliefs on what makes co-teaching teams enjoyable as perceived by those

engaged in it may also glean valuable information.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 14, 2022

Jessica Masters
Rebecca Dilling

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-1111 LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CO-TEACHERS
INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES: A
TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Jessica Masters, Rebecca Dilling,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in
accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug
Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review.
This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your
approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in
which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive,
diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of
public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is
met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the
human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects,
and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found
under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse
IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your
research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents
of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any
modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of
continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification
submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Consent Form

Title of the Project Lived Experiences Co-Teachers Including Students with Emotional
Behavioral Disabilities: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator: Jessica Masters, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University School of
Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of
age, be currently employed by an elementary school in the school district, have participated as
either a special education teacher or general education teacher in a co-teaching partnership, and
have used the co-teaching model to support the inclusion of a student with behavioral challenges
previously served in a more restrictive placement. Taking part in this research project is
voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in
this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the lived experiences and perceptions of K-5 elementary
educators who use the co-teaching model for the inclusion of students with EBD/behavioral
challenges in general education settings, previously served in self-contained behavior classrooms
in a large suburban school district.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in a one-on-one interview that will take between one to two hours to
   complete. The site of the interview will be made at your convenience and may include an
   electronic format. I will be audio recording the interview.
2. Write a minimum of 6 journal entries in a format of your choosing. Journal prompts will
   be provided to you and will ask you to reflect on your experiences co-teaching to support
   the inclusion of students with EBD or behavioral challenges (approximately 1 hour).
3. Possible participation in a final focus group containing between 8 and 12 other
   participants, grouped based upon similarities or differences found during the initial
   interview. The focus group will last between 1-2 hours and be held in a convenient
   location or through a virtual/electronic format. I will plan to audio and video record the
   focus groups for accurate transcription.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a contribution to the available research understanding teacher
experiences of co-teaching, specifically to include students with significant behavioral

challenges. The information gained may benefit future intervention protocols and work to increase student success.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal and equal to the risks you may encounter in everyday life.

Information that warrants mandatory reporting may also be considered a risk if shared information reveals evidence of child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer in password-locked files and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participation in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on 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.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

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

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jessica Masters. You may ask any questions you have - now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Rebecca Dilling, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations.

The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix C

Individual Interview Protocol

Time and date:

Location:

Interviewer: Jessica Masters

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Project:

Questions:

1. Please provide a little information regarding your educational background and experience, specifically up to this point.

2. Describe your teaching philosophy related to the inclusion of students with disabilities. CRQ

3. Would you please describe your experience with inclusion, specifically related to reintegrating students previously served in self-contained behavior settings? CRQ

4. When working with students included in the general education setting, how do you perceive the role of the general and special educator? SQ1

5. What feelings do you associate with inclusion, specifically the process of reintegrating students previously served in the self-contained behavior setting? SQ1

6. Reflecting on your experience with reintegrating students with EBD or behavioral challenges from self-contained behavior settings, is there anything you would change? SQ1

7. How do you perceive the reintegration process has impacted you or your relationship with your co-teacher? SQ1

8. Describe any offered professional development or training experiences and their value related to the co-taught model, specifically as it relates, if possible, to students with EBD or behavior challenges. SQ2

9. Please explain or describe how you perceive the disability category of EBD? SQ3

10. What personal thoughts or experiences stand out when discussing reintegration for students with EBD or behavior challenges previously served in self-contained settings? SQ3

11. What else would you like to add regarding the co-teaching experience and facilitating reintegration for students with EBD/at risk for EBD? SQ2

Conclude with thanking the participant and assuring confidentiality.

Appendix D

Journal Prompts

1. Reflect on collaborations between you and your co-teacher. Describe a specific instance

   that was either positive or negative.

2. Describe experiences you have had working directly with a student with EBD as he/she

   transitioned, or reintegrated, to the general education environment.

3. Describe or list past, current, or ongoing training or professional development related to

   teaching students with EBD, reintegration, or co-teaching, in general, received.

4. Jot down notes, pictures, poems of new or ongoing experiences centered on engaging in

   the co-teaching model to support the reintegration of students with EBD or behavioral

   challenges.

5. Note any reflections that occur after the initial interview related to the phenomenon.

6. List and describe feelings you may have towards co-teaching to support the inclusion or

   reintegration of students with EBD.

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol

Time and date:

Location:

Interviewer: Jessica Masters

Participants and positions:

Questions:

1. Please briefly explain your experience with co-teaching, specifically to support the reintegration of students with EBD/at risk for EBD. (CRQ)

2. Please describe how you feel about your role and responsibilities in the co-taught model for reintegration support. (SQ1)

3. Please describe the challenges and benefits of using the co-taught model to support students with EBD/behavioral challenges. (SQ1)

4. Please describe or explain the experience of providing specialized instruction or accommodations for behavior in general education. (SQ2)

5. How do you perceive the co-taught model supports the reintegration process? (SQ 2)

6. Based on your experience in the co-teaching model, has your perception of EBD changed? (SQ3)

Thank participants and reassure them of confidentiality.

Appendix F

Recruitment Email

[Date]

Dear Educator:

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am researching the lived experiences and perceptions of co-teachers reintegrating students with or at risk for emotional behavioral disabilities (EBD). I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

To participate, you must have experience as a ████████████████████ certified elementary educator (K-5) as either a general education or special education teacher and have participated in the co-teaching model to support the reintegration of at least one student with/at risk for EBD previously served in a more secluded setting within the last two school years (2020/2021 or 2021/2022). If you are willing to participate, I will ask that you participate in an individual interview (1-2 hours), journaling (minimum six entries that will take approximately 1 hour in total), and, if selected, a final focus group (1-2 hours). Participation will be scheduled at your convenience when possible and may include virtual formats. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. To participate, please access the link, complete the initial screening questions, and provide contact information and preferences: https://forms.office.com/r/Mtcfq3bC3H

A consent document is provided as an attachment to this email and will be provided to you at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. If you choose to participate virtually, you may choose to provide

signed consent through printing, signing, and emailing the consent form, using the Microsoft

word draw feature, or I will bring you a hard copy of the consent form prior to our agreed

interview date.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Masters

Doctoral Candidate Researcher

Teacher Screening included in recruitment email:

1. Were you a certified teacher (elementary K-5 or special education) working in ████

    ████████████████████████ during the 2020/2021 or 2021/2022 school year?

2. Have you engaged in co-teaching to reintegrate a student with/at risk for EBD during the

    2020/2021 or 2021/2022 school year?

3. Please select the statement that is true for you during the 2020/2021 or 2021/2022 school

    year.

    a. My role was a special education teacher.

    b. My role was a general education teacher

    c. I have served as both a general education teacher and a special education teacher

        during that time.

4. Name

5. Name of current work location

6. Current teaching assignment

7. What is your preferred method of communication when scheduling future participation?

   Please provide at least one of the following:

   a. Email Address:

   b. Phone Number: _____ Choose: (Text/Call)

Appendix E

District Approval

[REDACTED]

September 8, 2022

Ms. Jessica Masters

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Ms. Masters,

Your research project titled, Lived Experiences of Co-Teachers Including Students with Emotional Behavioral Disabilities: A Transcendental Phenomological Study, has been approved. Listed below is the school where approval to conduct the research is complete. Please work with the school administrator to schedule administration of instruments or conduct interviews.

Schools

[REDACTED] Elementary School

[REDACTED] Elementary School

[REDACTED] Elementary School

[REDACTED] Elementary School

Should modifications or changes in research procedures become necessary during the research project, changes must be submitted in writing to the department of Accountability, Research & Grants prior to implementation. At the conclusion of your research project, you are expected to submit a copy of your results to this office. Results cannot reference the [REDACTED] or any District schools or departments.

Research files are not considered complete until results are received. If you have any questions regarding the process, contact my office at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Assistant Director, Grants & Research

Office of Accountability & Research

[REDACTED]